



ECOWAS NETWORK OF ELECTORAL COMMISSIONS (ECONEC)

Activities in support of credible elections
in West Africa 2017 - 2019



PAUL EJIME



ECOWAS NETWORK OF ELECTORAL COMMISSIONS (ECONEC)

ACTIVITIES IN SUPPORT OF CREDIBLE ELECTIONS
IN WEST AFRICA

2017-2019

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Foreword

One of the major fall-outs from the political transformation that accompanied the wave of democratisation which swept through Africa in the early 1990s was the establishment of Independent National Electoral Commissions by many ECOWAS member States. Starting with Ghana in 1993, Benin Republic, followed in 1994, then Niger 1995; Mali, Senegal and the Gambia 1997, Nigeria 1998, Togo 2000, Burkina Faso and Cote d'Ivoire 2001 and the Guinea, Conakry, 2007.

Emerging from dictatorships, part of the teething problems of the EMBs had to do with funding and their independence and autonomy from the governments, in accordance with international best practices, even though they were “independent” by name.

While some progress was recorded in the conduct and management of elections during that decade, the delivery of credible elections remained a huge challenge. Some of the problems were logistical and operational, as well as the multiple legal frameworks governing elections, coupled with myriad electoral violence/disputes and rejection of election results by political actors.

With elections widely regarded as the most veritable means of accessing power, ECOWAS leaders responded to the challenges of electoral administration with the adoption of some major instruments, including the 2001 Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance. Most importantly, it was realised that individually, the Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) could not cope with the pressure of the electoral processes with most of them lacking the capacity to deliver on their mandate.

Therefore, to close ranks and address their common problems collectively, the EMBs of ECOWAS member States and the ECOWAS Commission decided, at their 5-7 February 2008 meeting in Conakry, Guinea, to set up the ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC). However, the Network never really got off to a bright start due to capacity deficiency and lack of funds.

That gloomy picture changed from 2017 following the election of a new governing board led by Prof Mahmood Yakubu, Chair of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Nigeria. As President of ECONEC, Prof Yakubu brought the benefit of his administrative skills to bear in mobilising member EMBs, ECOWAS member States and development partners to rally support for the Network. The impactful results of the board's proactive leadership and advocacy are well documented in this book.

ECONEC has not only become an indispensable partner in the consolidation of electoral processes in the ECOWAS region in accordance with international best practices, the Network has also contributed to efforts at revolutionising electoral administration and management in the region. That said, we must remain alert to the reality that good elections do not necessarily equal good governance. The former can only contribute to the latter. In this regard, we should recognize and continue to address emerging threats to electoral democracy which represent challenges to all of us, including EMBs. The “personalization of democracy,” the activities of political party

vigilantes, issues of campaign financing and “vote buying”, etc, singularly and collectively create a very difficult environment in which electoral commissions operate.

Going forward, the real task is the consolidation of the gains made by ECONEC and sustainability of its activities. This is only possible through uninterrupted support from members and development partners for accelerated promotion of credible and transparent elections and consolidation of democracy in the ECOWAS region. ECONEC can continue to rest assured of the collaboration of the United Nations in this regard, particularly through its Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS).



Mohamed Ibn Chambas

Special Representative of the Secretary-General
and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel

Acronyms and Abbreviations

CENA	Commission Electorale Nationale Autonome
CENI	Commission Electorale Nationale Independante
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
EAD	Electoral Assistance Division of ECOWAS
ECES	European Centre for Electoral Support
ECOMOG	ECOWAS Peace Monitoring Group
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ECONEC	ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions
ECPF	ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework
EISA	Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa
EMBs	Electoral Management Bodies
EU	European Union
GIZ	German Agency for International Cooperation (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH)
IFES	International Foundation for Electoral Systems
INEC	Independent National Electoral Commission, Nigeria
NAMs	Needs Assessment Missions
NEC	National Electoral Commission
OSIWA	Open Society Initiative for West Africa
PAPS	Political Affairs, Peace and Security Department, ECOWAS Commission
PEFuP	Post-Election Follow-up Mission
SRSG	Special Representative, United Nations Secretary General
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNOWAS	United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WANEP	West Africa Network for Peace building

Acknowledgements

First of all, our sincere gratitude to Almighty God, who made possible the successful implementation of all the activities documented in this book. Accomplishing the tasks involved transportation across countries by land, air and the sea. We are indebted to ECONEC founding fathers for their wisdom and foresight, particularly the ECOWAS Commission under the leadership of Dr Mohamed Ibn Chambas as Executive Secretary/President; Mr Francis Oke, Head of the Electoral Assistance Division and ECONEC Permanent Secretary, and the Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) of ECOWAS member States who set up ECONEC in 2008.

Members of the ECONEC Governing Board deserve special mention for their dedication and approval of the 2017-2019 Action Plan that contained the activities, and for making themselves available to be part of the various ECONEC missions in spite of their national duties. The activities would not have been implemented without the cooperation of member EMBs themselves, and other stakeholders of member countries, who opened their doors to visiting ECONEC teams.

Special thanks to officials of various arms of governments in the countries visited, political parties, police and other security agencies, civil society organisations, the media and other non-state actors for their cooperation. In this regard, the ECOWAS Special Representative to Liberia, Ambassador Babatunde Ajisomo is acknowledged for using his rich contacts to support ECONEC missions to Liberia.

A huge debt of gratitude is owed the Management and Staff of INEC Nigeria for their support and for facilitating ECONEC missions and implementation of the activities. Apart from providing ECONEC with a functional Permanent Secretariat, some INEC officials including Professors Antonia Simbine, Bolade Eyinla and Mohammad Kuna, among others, contributed to enrich the quality of ECONEC's missions or other activities.

Without the financial and technical support of development partners, especially OSIWA, which has been there since ECONEC's inception, there would be no ECONEC, let alone the activities. The other supporting partners include GIZ, EISA, IFES, EU/ECES and of course, the ECOWAS Commission. The ECONEC Secretariat Staff, my colleagues, Chinedu Emeka Chinedu, Raouf Salami and Mariama Toure are also acknowledged for their dedication, hard work, sacrifice and efforts that went into the organisation and implementation of the missions and activities. We are equally grateful to all others who contributed to the success of this publication.

Superintending over election administration in a huge country such as Nigeria is a Herculean task by itself, adding to it the responsibility of coordinating the affairs of 15 EMBs at the regional level only means more demands and pressure. However, the Prof Mahmood Yakubu-led ECONEC Governing Board has not only made a difference, but it has revived and re-positioned ECONEC, making it an indispensable player in the strengthening of electoral management for the promotion of electoral integrity and consolidation of democracy in the ECOWAS region.

Finally, we acknowledge the professionalism of Mr. Patrick Omoneyi and Mr. Solomon Oloniyo for the design and layout of this publication as well as the painstaking effort to supervise the printing.

I

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The wave of democratic transition which hit West Africa in the 1990s led to the creation of independent national electoral commissions in the region. These included (the Electoral Commission (EC) Ghana 1993, Commission Electorale Nationale Autonome (CENA) Benin Republic 1994, Commission électorale nationale indépendante (CENI) Niger 1995, Commission électorale nationale indépendante (CENI) Mali 1997, l'Observatoire national des élections ONEL Senegal 1997- Commission Electorale Nationale Autonome (CENA) Senegal 2005, the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) The Gambia 1997, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Nigeria 1998, Commission électorale nationale indépendante (CENI) Togo 2000, Commission électorale nationale indépendante (CENI) Burkina Faso 2001, la Commission électorale indépendante (CEI) Côte d'Ivoire 2001, and Commission électorale nationale indépendante (CENI) Guinea 2007).

Although some progress was recorded during that decade, there were emerging challenges that put the quality of the electoral management processes and the delivery of credible elections under strain and severe scrutiny. These were especially in the areas related to logistical and operational management, the legal frameworks governing elections, electoral violence/disputes and the frequent rejection of election results by political actors.

Two decades on, there have been tremendous improvements, particularly with the adoption by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) of its 2001 Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance and other mechanisms put in place through the ECOWAS Commission's Electoral Assistance Division (EAD) including logistical/technical and financial support and the electoral observation tool.

Before 2006, electoral observation by ECOWAS was considered "political," with the process involving mainly the Ministry of Foreign Affairs personnel of member States. The Declarations or Reports of the observation missions elicited a lot of criticisms. So, after the 2005 presidential election in Togo, a decision was reached to involve experts and Civil Society Organisations as a step to make election observation by ECOWAS more professional and its declarations credible. Given the urgent need to close ranks and address their common problems collectively, the Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) of ECOWAS member States and the ECOWAS Commission decided to synergise, and at a meeting 5-7 February 2008, in Conakry, Guinea resolved to set up the ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC).

Objectives

All 15 EMBs of the ECOWAS member States belong to ECONEC, which was formed with the following objectives:

- i. To promote free and credible elections in West Africa;
- ii. To promote independent and impartial election organisations and administrators;

- iii. To strengthen public confidence in the electoral process through free and credible electoral procedures;
- iv. To develop professional election officials with integrity, a strong sense of public service and a commitment to democracy;
- v. To ensure predictability of the framework for elections;
- vi. To promote the consolidation of democratic culture to create a conducive environment for the peaceful organization of elections;
- vii. To encourage sharing of experiences, information, technology and election documents;
- viii. To promote cooperation for the improvement of electoral laws and practices;
- ix. To work towards gradual harmonization of electoral laws and practices, as appropriate, capitalizing on good practice in electoral matters;
- x. To promote rationalization and pooling of resources to reduce the cost of conducting elections; and,
- xi. To improve the working conditions of EMBs in the fulfilment of their mandate.

Normative Framework

The ECONEC objectives derive from the provisions of the ECOWAS Protocol relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace keeping and Security of 1999; the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance of 2001 and the Decision of Head of States and Government of Dakar 2003.

Consistent with provisions of the Charter of the Association of African Electoral Authorities (AAEA), of which ECONEC is a member, the Network's general objectives include strengthening cooperation and consultation, and establishing linkages to ensure the development and safe guarding of a vibrant democratic culture and electoral process in the region; under pinning the democratization process in West Africa; minimizing the vulnerability of the democratic process in West Africa; and ensuring that the electoral process and the periodic holding of free and fair elections constitute critical components in the evolution of a democratic culture and democratic systems. It is expected that the realisation of these objectives will necessarily contribute to the consolidation of democratic ideals enshrined in the Universal Declarations of Human Rights.

Membership

ECONEC comprises Electoral Commissions of the fifteen (15) ECOWAS member States (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo).

ECONEC Members, Logos and Chairpersons



Prof. Emmanuel Tiando
Président, CENA Benin
Republic



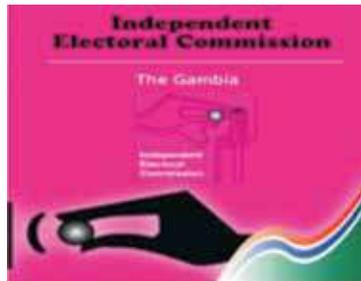
Mr Newton Ahmed Barry
Président, CENI Burkina Faso



Dr. Maria do Rosario
Goncalves
Président, CNE Cabo Verde



Mr Youssouf Bakayoko
Président,
CEI Cote d'Ivoire



Mr Alieu Momarr Njie
Chairman, IEC Gambia



Ms Jean Mensa
Chairperson, EC Ghana



Amadou Salif Kebe
President, CENI Guinea



Dr Jose Pedro Sambu
Président, CNE, Guinée
Bissau



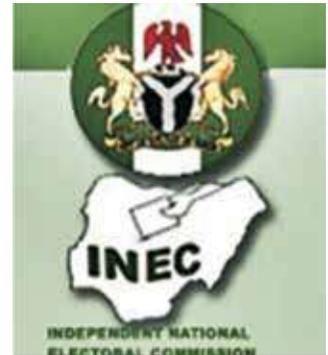
Cllr Jerome George Korkoya
Chairman, NEC Liberia



Mr. Amadou Ba
President, CENI Mali



Mr Souna Issaka
Président, Niger Republic



Prof. Mahmood Yakubu
Chairman, INEC Nigeria



Mr Doudou Ndir
Président, CENA Sénégal



Mohamed Nfah-Alie Conteh
Chairman, NEC Sierra Leone



Mr Tchambakou Ayassor
Président, CENI Togo

Structure/Organisation

ECONEC is organised as follows:

- i. The General Assembly (the highest decision-making body)
- ii. The Steering Committee or Governing Board elected for a two-year mandate
- iii. The Permanent Secretariat

For the management of its affairs, ECONEC since inception has a Steering Committee of five (5) members elected for two years and supported by the Permanent Secretary, the Head of ECOWAS Commission's EAD. Mr Michel Tapsoba of Burkina Faso was elected the first President of the ECONEC Steering Committee from 2008 to 2012 followed by Dr. Christiana Thorpe of Sierra Leone from 2012 to 2015. The planned election of a Steering Committee during the 4th Biennial General Assembly

in Praia, Cape Verde, in July 2015 was postponed, due to lack of quorum with only seven of the 15 EMB members present. Consequently, Gen. Siaka Sangare of Mali who took over from Mrs Thorpe in acting capacity presided over the Committee from 2015 to 2017.

Prof Mahmood Yakubu, Chairman of Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was elected President of the ECONEC five-member Governing Board at the Network's 5th General Assembly held in Cotonou, the Benin Republic in March 2017. The Chairperson of Benin Republic's Electoral Commission Mr Emmanuel Tiando was elected the 1st Vice President; Guinea-Bissau's Dr Jose Pedro Sambu, 2nd Vice President; Burkina Faso's Mr Newton Ahmed Barry as Treasurer and Cabo Verde's Dr Maria do Rosario Goncalves, the Deputy Treasurer.

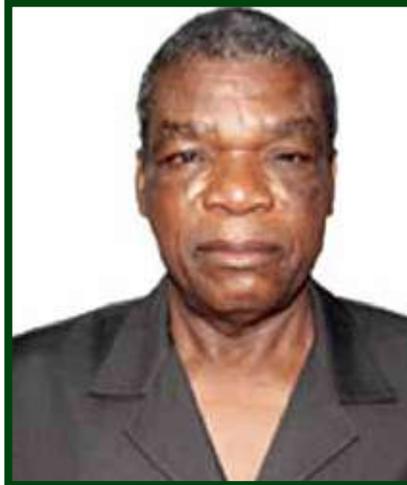
After its inaugural meeting following their election in Cotonou, the ECONEC Board hit the proverbial ground running holding its second meeting in Abuja, Nigeria, in July 2017. At the Abuja meeting, the Committee agreed a robust two-year Action Plan 2017-2019, detailing wide-ranging activities as follows:

- i. Capacity strengthening of members
- ii. Needs Assessment Missions to member EMBs preparing to conduct elections
- iii. Election follow-up/Mid-Term missions on the implementation of recommendations of ECOWAS Election Observation Missions
- iv. Study on the Cost of Elections in West Africa
- v. Regional Media Workshop on professional reporting of elections in West Africa
- vi. Experience and knowledge sharing initiatives
- vii. Solidarity and advocacy missions that resulted in the provision of technical, logistic and financial support to member EMBs from governments and development partners

ECONEC Governing Board Members/Steering Committee, 2017-2019



Prof. Mahmood YAKUBU
President and Chairman
INEC Nigeria



Prof. Emmanuel TIANDO
1st Vice President & President
CENI Benin



Dr. Jose Pedro SAMBU
2nd Vice President & President
CNE Guinea Bissau



Mr Newton Ahmed BARRY
Treasurer & President
CENI Burkina Faso



**Dr Maria do Rosário Lopes
Pereira GONÇALVES**
Deputy Treasurer & President
CNE Cabo Verde



Mr Francis Gabriel OKE
ECONEC Permanent Secretary
& Head, ECOWAS Electoral
Assistance Division

Partnerships

Election is principally a sovereign national responsibility. But it has also been demonstrated that the delivery of credible elections, just like the cultivation of democracy, is a process and not an event involving multiple stakeholders. This fact is not lost on the founding fathers of the ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC), or the contemporary leadership of the Network.

Thus, ECONEC has continued to enjoy very strong and healthy collaborations with an increasing band of partners, including state and non-state actors, the ECOWAS Commission, civil society organisations and development partners.

Major partners that have provided ECONEC with financial and technical support include:

- i. Financial/Technical Support - ECOWAS Commission, which along with regional EMBs set up ECONEC in 2008
- ii. Financial/Technical Support - Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), which is ECONEC's major partner since its inception
- iii. Financial/Technical support - (GIZ)
- iv. Technical Support - Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA).
- v. Financial/Technical support - EU/ECES (European Centre for Electoral Support).
- vi. Technical support - International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES)



II

ACTIVITIES/ACHIEVEMENTS

To appreciate and put in context the modest achievements recorded by the ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC) in the past two years, would require weighing the Network activities and programmes during the period against the core objectives of the organisation.

The 5th General Assembly in Cotonou

As noted by the ECONEC Permanent Secretary Mr Francis Oke, while the Network was formed in Guinea Conakry in February 2008, it could not undertake many concrete activities and therefore lacked visibility. This situation was not for want of trying, but mainly due to poor funding, lack of staff or a permanent and functional Secretariat. The Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) was the key partner while other development partners chipped in support.

But all this changed following the ECONEC 5th Biennial General Assembly Meeting in Cotonou, Benin Republic held on 29th March 2017, which elected Prof Mahmood Yakubu as President of the five-member Governing Board with a two-year mandate. The first post-election board meeting was also attended by the out-going acting board President Gen. Siaka Sangare, who officially handed over to Prof. Yakubu.



The opening session of the 5th Biennial General Assembly in Cotonou

Establishment of a Permanent Secretariat

One of the severe challenges faced by ECONEC from its inception was the lack of a permanent Secretariat. The Governing Board solved this problem with the support of INEC which provides the much-needed Secretariat at the Commission's Electoral Institute in Abuja. OSIWA assisted with additional office equipment for the smooth functioning of the Network's administration.

The Permanent Secretariat was officially unveiled during the Abuja board meeting, which also approved ECONEC's 2017-2019 Work Plan. Board members paid courtesy visits on high-level officials of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, including the Vice President and the President of the Senate. This was followed by another Board meeting and an extra-ordinary General Assembly in Abuja in July 2017. With these meetings, the machinery was put in in motion for an accelerated pace of ECONEC activities.

Creation of ECONEC Website and web presence

For a start, ECONEC enhanced its visibility through the development of a website (www.econoc-resao.org) with the complement of relevant social media tools such as facebook and twitter handles.



Prof Yakubu and other ECONEC governing board members at the commissioning of the ECONEC permanent secretariat in Abuja



Members of the ECONEC Board, Secretariat staff and OSIWA Rep. Catherine Angai



Nigeria's Vice President H.E. Yemi Osinbajo welcomes the ECONEC President Prof Yakubu, the 1st Vice President Prof. Emmanuel Tiando and other members of the Board during a courtesy call in his office



Nigeria's Vice President H.E. Yemi Osinbajo, 4th from left, in a group photograph with members of ECONEC Board



Senate President Dr Bukola Saraki and other Senate leaders after a meeting with ECONEC Board



Members of the ECONEC Governing Board with the Vice President of the ECOWAS Commission Mr. Edward Singhatay and other senior officials after a meeting at the Commission's Headquarters in Abuja



OSIWA's Catherine Angai addressing ECONEC and INEC officials at a meeting in INEC head office Abuja



ECONEC Extra Ordinary General Assembly meeting in Abuja, April 2018

COUNTRIES VISITED FOR NEEDS ASSESSMENT/FOLLOW-UP MISSIONS & SOLIDARITY VISITS



Benin Republic



Togo



Cote D'Ivoire



Liberia



Sierra Leone



Guinea Bissau



Senegal



Guinea Conakry



Mali



Needs Assessment Missions

SIERRA LEONE (10-15 July 2017)

Objective: To assess the level of preparations, including logistics, operational and legal aspects of the electoral process; identify capacity needs and consult with national stakeholders, particularly the EMB; and determine the role that ECONEC, ECOWAS and international partners could play to contribute to the successful conduct of the March 2018 elections.

Outcome: ECONEC took note of the needs in logistics and equipment and facilitated the donation of two boats, two trucks, five pick up vehicles and 5 motor bikes to the National Electoral Commission (NEC) of Sierra Leone by the Federal Government Nigeria.

ECONEC's advocacy contributed to the decision by the Government of Sierra Leone to suspend the proposed constitutional referendum and delimitation of boundaries of constituencies which became contentious issues with some stakeholders insinuating that they were a subtle attempt to once again postpone the elections.



Meeting with officials of the Sierra Leone Electoral Commission led by the Chairman Mohamed Nfah-Alie Conteh



ECONEC delegation at a meeting with Sierra Leone Electoral Commission officials



ECONEC delegation with the Chairman of the Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC), Hon. Justice Patrick Omalade Hamilton



ECONEC delegation with Sierra Leone Chief Justice, Abdulai Hamid Charm, and other Justices of the Supreme Court



ECONEC President Prof Yakubu and the Chief Justice Abdulai Charm



Justice Minister Joseph Kamara receives ECONEC President Prof Yakubu



ECONEC delegation with Sierra Leone's Interior Minister, Alfred Palo Conteh



ECONEC delegation after a meeting with the National Security Coordinator, Mr Ismail Sheriff Tarawali



ECONEC delegation in working session with the Inspector General of Police Francis Alieu Munu and other senior officers at the Police Headquarters in Freetown



ECONEC delegation meets the top hierarchy of Sierra Leone's police on preparations for the country's 2018 General Election



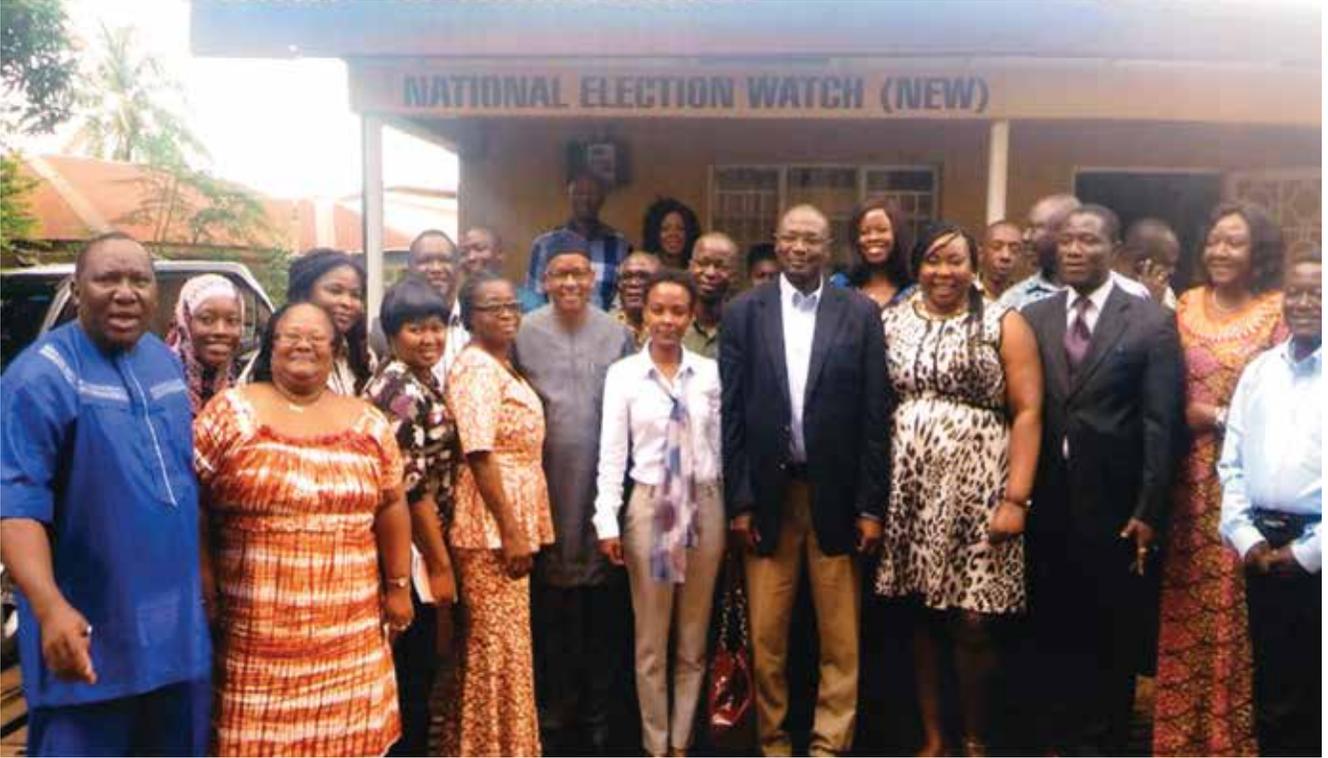
Prof. Yakubu with the Inspector General of Police Francis Alieu Munu



ECONEC delegation meets the Acting Chairman of the Sierra Leone Independent Media Commission (IMC), Mr Sahr Mbayo, and other Commissioners



ECONEC team with the UNDP Resident Representative, Sunil Saigal, and senior staff of the country office in Freetown



ECONEC delegation with the President of the National Election Watch (NEW), Marcella Samba-Sesay, and other members of civil society organisations



ECONEC delegation meets members of the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) led by its President Kelvin Lewis



ECONEC delegation in discussion with officials of Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ)



Election logistics support provided by Nigeria following advocacy by ECONEC



Nigeria donates electoral logistics facilitated by ECONEC



Prof Yakubu and Newton Barry of Burkina Faso in a Lungi-Freetown ferry ride

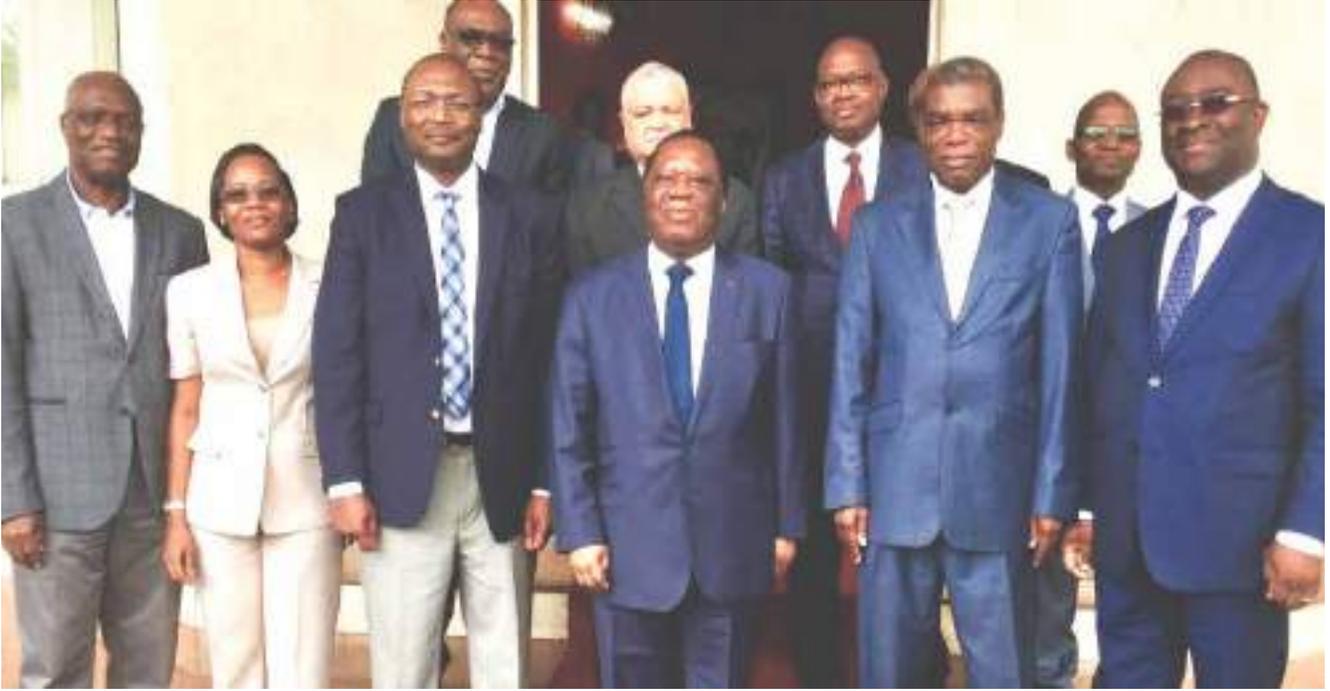
COTE D'IVOIRE (13-16 October 2017)

Objective: To provide peer support to CEI in addressing election administration challenges and capacity reinforcement for political actors and there by contribute to acredible and peaceful electoral processin Côte d'Ivoire.

Outcome: After meeting with local and international stakeholders including the UNDP, ECONEC promised to advocate to relevant local and international partners for support to CEI.



ECONEC delegation at a meeting with the leadership of the Commission Electorale Independante (CEI) led by President Mr. Youssouf Bakayoko



ECONEC and CEI teams at the Commission's Headquarters in Abidjan



ECONEC delegation members after a meeting with leaders of civil society organisations



ECONEC delegation after a meeting with UNDP officials



Prof. Yakubu (right) and President Bakayoko in his Abuja office



Prof. Yakubu (right) with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Resident Representative in Cote d'Ivoire, Mr Babacar Cisse, after a meeting

GUINEA (Conakry, 8 – 13 June 2018)

Objective: To evaluate the measures taken by the relevant actors on the implementation of the recommendations of the ECOWAS Election Observation Mission to Guinea's presidential election in 2015, and to identify possible areas of support to enable full implementation of the recommendations. The mission was conducted by the President of ECONEC accompanied by one member of the Steering Committee (President of CENABenin), two staff members of the ECONEC Secretariat, a technical assistant seconded by EISA and some officials of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) of Nigeria.

Outcome: The mission noted some progress in the implementation of some recommendations such as: Improving the electoral register by placing it in alphabetical order, reducing the number of names per page and adjusting the amount of voting centres. Also noted were, the creation in 2017 of two consultation platforms (Inter party Committee and the Technical Unit for Action and Monitoring of the Electoral Process) with political parties and civil society; and setting the maximum number of voters per polling station at 600 instead of 1,000 previously. The mission, however, regretted the elimination of the 30% quota for women. But ECONEC advocacy probably contributed to the vote for the gender parity law (50/50) adopted in Guinea on 02 May 2019. The mission also identified possible areas of support by ECONEC and ECOWAS to the CENI in the electoral process in Guinea.



Prof. Yakubu being received by the President of Guinea's Commission Electorale Nationale Independante, Mr Amadou Salif Kebe, on arrival at Conakry airport



Prof. Yakubu, Mr Kebe and other officials



Meeting with officials of CENI in Conakry



Meeting with officials of the Legal and Communication Department of CENI in Conakry



ECONEC team in a meeting with members of Guinea's National Assembly in Conakry



ECONEC team with some members of Parliament outside the National Assembly building, Conakry



Meeting with the Secretary General, Ministry of Territorial Administration, DrYamori Conde, and other officials of the Ministry in Conakry



ECONEC team and officials of the Ministry of Territorial Administration after a meeting in Conakry



Meeting with the diplomatic community and development partners in Conakry



Prof. Yakubu with the ECOWAS Resident Representative to Guinea, Mrs Lilliane Alapini, after a meeting in her office in Conakry



ECOWAS Resident Representative to Guinea, Mrs Lilliane Alapini, the diplomatic community and development partners after a meeting in Conakry



Representatives of civil society organisations - Mr. Sekon Kounodouno (PCUD), Mr. Ibrahim Diallo (CNOSCG) and Mr. Gabriel Aaba (Cellule Balai Citoyen) – in a meeting with visiting ECONEC delegation



Representatives of civil society organisations after a meeting in Conakry



Prof. Yakubu being interviewed by the media at CENI headquarters in Conakry

GUINEA BISSAU (1- 4 August 2018)

Objective: To assess the preparedness of the national Electoral Management Body, CNE, in response to the latter's request for support regarding the generation of a voter register with biometric data.

Outcome: After wide-ranging consultations with the stakeholders including state and non-state actors, government officials and CSOs, ECONEC undertook a strong advocacy on behalf of CNE, which facilitated the donation of logistics equipment (vehicles and motor bikes) and 300 biometric registration kits by the Federal Republic of Nigeria for the eventual conduct of Guinea Bissau's legislative elections fixed for November 2018. Following the donation, INEC Nigeria deployed two technical experts to Bissau to assist in configuring the registration kits for their effective utilization. The ECONEC delegation also met with the leadership of the ECOWAS Peace keeping Mission to Guinea Bissau (ECOMIB), which assured that the Mission would provide adequate security for the peaceful elections, which were eventually held in February 2019 after several post ponements.



The ECONEC delegation meets Guinea Bissau Electoral Commission officials



Prof. Yakubu with the President (Speaker) of the National People's Assembly of Guinea Bissau, Mr. Cipriano Cassama



Prof. Yakubu and Prime Minister, Mr Aristides Gomes



Prof. Yakubu with the President of Supreme Court, Justice Paulo Sanha after a meeting in Bissau



The President of Guinea Bissau's Supreme Court Justice Paulo Sanha with the ECONEC delegation



ECONEC team after a meeting with the Interior Minister, Mr Mutaro Djalo (3rd right, white shirt)



Prof. Yakubu, UNDP Deputy Resident Representative, Mr. Gabriel Labao Dava (3rd left) and other ECONEC delegation members after a meeting in Bissau



ECONEC delegation in a meeting with Representatives of civil society organisations in Bissau.



The ECONEC team in a meeting with the Women's Network for Peace and Security (REMPSECAO) led by its President Elisa Tavares Pinto in Bissau



(L-R) Chairman, Electoral Commission of Guinea Bissau, Mr. Jose Pedro Sambu; Nigeria's Ambassador, Mr Adeyemi A. Afolahan, Prof. Yakubu and Burkina Faso's Mr Ahmed Barry Newton at the Nigerian Embassy in Bissau



L-R: Mr Sambu, Prof. Yakubu and Ambassador Afolahan at the Nigerian Ambassador's residence in Bissau



Voter registration machines provided by Nigeria as electoral assistance to Guinea Bissau. Guinea Bissau requested for Nigeria's assistance with the machines for their voter registration



An INEC Nigeria official Mr. Paul Omokore demonstrating the use of the Direct Data Capture Machine (DDCM) in voter registration to civil society organisations in Bissau



ECONEC President Prof Yakubu handing over a voter registration card to President of Guinea Bissau Electoral Commission after a demonstration at the Commission's headquarters



Acting Force Commander, ECOWAS Mission in Guinea Bissau (ECOMIB), Col. Taiye Ahmed, welcoming Prof. Yakubu to the Mission Headquarters



ECONEC team and ECOMIB commanders



Prof. Yakubu with the ECOMIB High Command



ECONEC President Prof Yakubu being interviewed by Guinea Bissau media

Solidarity Visits

LIBERIA (16 -19 July 2017)

Objective: To assess the national EMB's state of preparedness for the elections, provide peer support and share valuable experience to facilitate the holding of peaceful and credible elections in Liberia.

Outcome: ECONEC advocacy during the solidarity visit gave rise to the resolution of the conflict related to the Code of Conduct provisions for the signation of candidates. The ECONEC delegation met local and international stakeholders for support to NEC Liberia, including the UNMIL, which was considering its withdrawal from Liberia.

ECONEC incollaboration with ECOWAS and the UNDP later dispatched a Technical Team, including the Information Technology experts from INEC Nigeria, to assist NEC Liberia clean up its controversial Voter Register. This facilitated the holding of the presidential run-off vote as directed by the Supreme Court of Liberia.



L-R: H.E. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf President of Liberia, Prof Yakubu and Dr Kwadwo Afari Gyan, former Chairman of Electoral Commission of Ghana, during ECONEC solidarity visit to Liberia ahead of the 2017 Presidential election



Meeting with H.E. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf in her office in Monrovia



The ECONEC team with President Johnson-Sirleaf



ECONEC team in a meeting with Liberia's Electoral Commission Chairman, Jerome Korkoya, and other officials



ECONEC delegation observing the candidate nomination process at the Samuel Kanyon Doe Stadium in Monrovia



ECONEC delegation with officials of Liberia's National Electoral Commission



ECONEC delegation with ECOWAS officials, including Commissioner Halima Ahmed, at the office of ECOWAS Special Representative to Liberia, Amb. Babatunde Ajisomo



ECOWAS and ECONEC officials at Ambassador Ajisomo's office in Monrovia



Joint ECONEC and ECOWAS delegation with Representatives of development partners at the ECOWAS Office in Monrovia



ECONEC delegation during a working session with the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL)



Farid Zarif, Special Representative of the UN Secretary General and Coordinator of UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), with the ECONEC team at the Mission HQ in Monrovia



(L-R) H.E. Halima Ahmed ECOWAS Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, Amb. Farid Zarif, Special Representative of the UN Secretary General in Liberia, Prof. Yakubu and Mr Newton Barry at UNMIL Headquarters in Monrovia



Prof. Yakubu with His Honor, Francis S. Korkpor Sr., Chief Justice of the Republic of Liberia, at the Temple of Justice (the Supreme Court) in Monrovia.



Liberian Chief Justice Francis Kporkor receives visiting ECONEC delegation



ECONEC delegation holds working session with the Justices of the Liberian Supreme Court



Prof Yakubu meets H.E. Amos Sawyer, former transition President of Liberia and Chairman of the Governance Commission



Prof. Yakubu (left) with the Head of ECOWAS Observer Mission to Liberia, His Excellency John Mahama, in Monrovia during Liberia's general election, 2017.



ECONEC team with the President Pro Tempore (Senate President) of Liberia, Armah Zolu Jallah (3rd right), in his office in Monrovia



Prof. Yakubu with the House Chairman on Elections and Inauguration, Rep. Gabriel B. Smith, at Capitol Hill, Liberia



Observing balloting on election day in Montserrado County, Liberia



Joint ECONEC and ECOWAS delegation with Liberia's IGP Geoffrey Coleman in his office ahead of the 2018 presidential election



ECONEC President Prof Yakubu and Liberia's Inspector General of Police Geoffrey Coleman

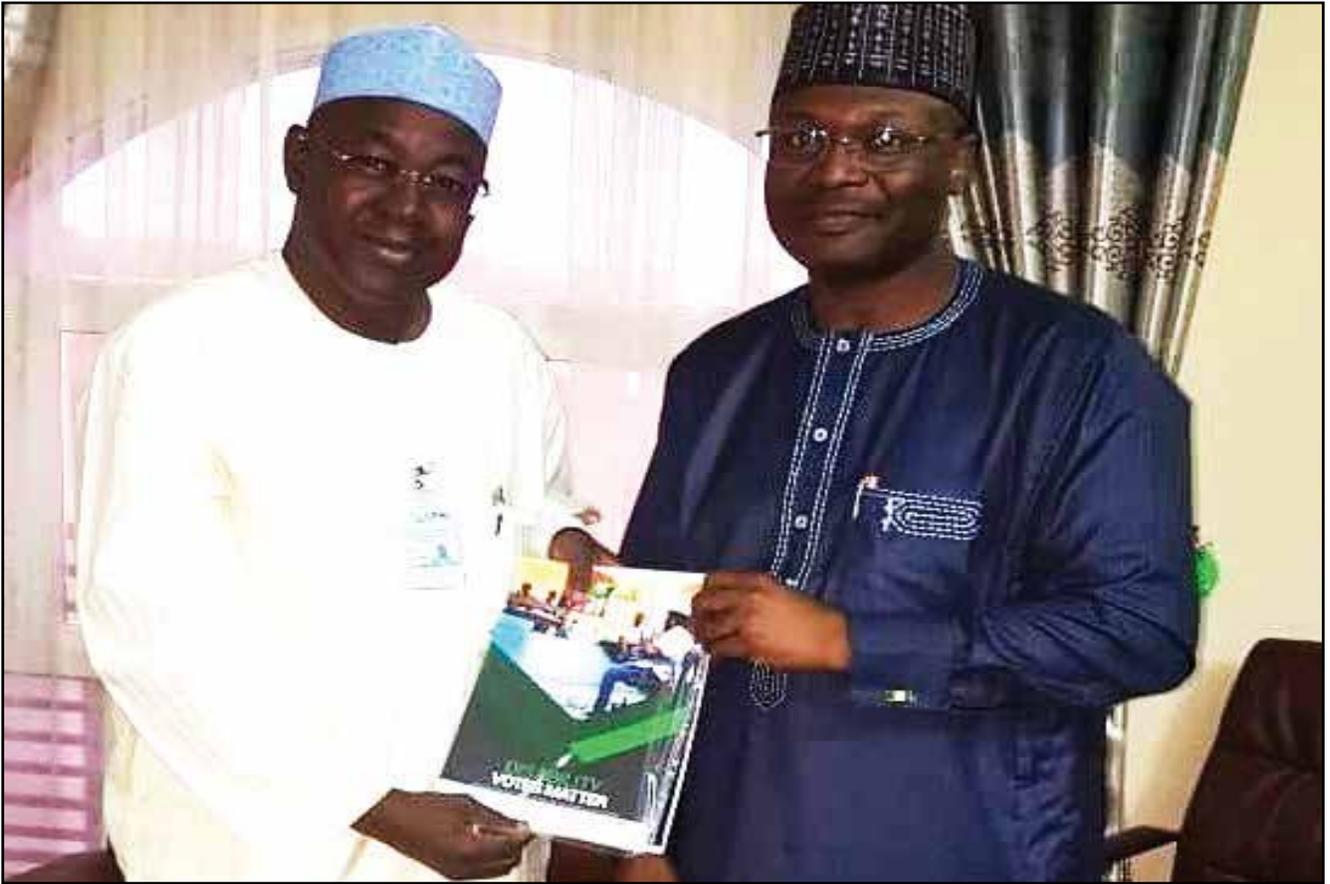
MALI (27 - 30 July 2018)

Objective: The ECONEC President's delegation met with the leadership of Mali's National Electoral Commission, CENI, to provide peer support on the eve of Mali General Election in July 2018.

Outcome: Following the consultation, ECONEC pledged to advocate for support on behalf of CENI, which reiterated its commitment to the Network.



President of Mali's Independent Electoral Commission (CENI), Mr Amadou Ba, with Prof. Yakubu at the CENI headquarters in Bamako



CENI President Mr Amadou Ba and Prof. Yakubu



Prof. Yakubu, CENI President, Amadou Ba, President of the Mali Human Rights Association Mr. Moctar Mariko and other officials after a meeting at CENI headquarters in Bamako



Prof. Yakubu with Head of ECOWAS Election Observation Mission to Mali and former Prime Minister of Burkina-Faso and former President of the ECOWAS Amb. Kadre Desire Ouedraogo at a media briefing in Bamako



Prof. Yakubu with Amb. Ouedraogo after a press briefing in Bamako



Prof. Yakubu (middle) being interviewed by the Aljazeera Tv Network crew in Bamako

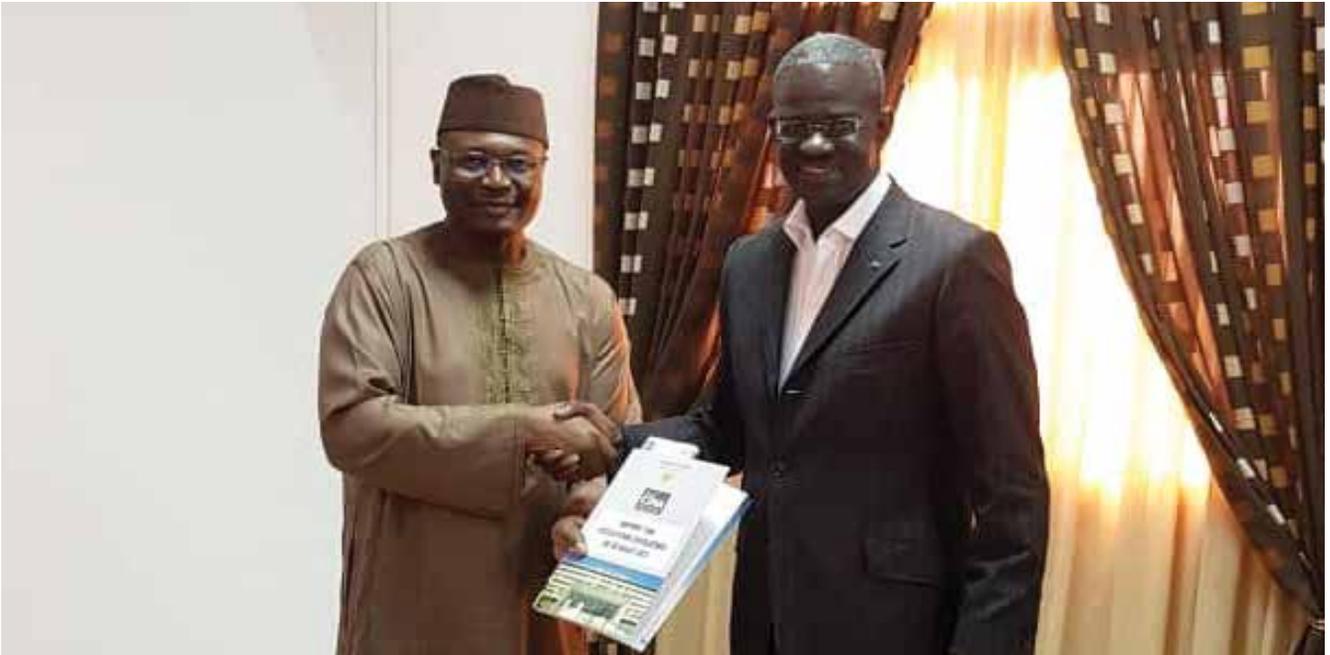
SENEGAL (30 - 31 July 2018)

Objective: From Mali, the ECONEC delegation led by President Yakubu travelled to Senegal for a meeting with the country's electoral commission CENA.

Outcome: Both sides agreed to strengthen peer collaboration, with ECONEC pledging to advocate for support on behalf of CENA.



ECONEC Team with officials of Senegal's Electoral Commission led by its President Doudou Ndir



Professor Yakubu receiving CENA publications from Mr. Ndir



Professor Yakubu and Mr Ndir

TOGO (5 - 6 August 2018)

Objective: To assess preparations and how to address challenges related to the country's 2019 legislative elections.

Outcome: After the briefing by Togo's national election commission, CENI, the ECONEC mission promised to advocate for support, with CENI leadership reaffirming their commitment to ECONEC.



Prof. Yakubu presenting some publications to CENI Togo President Prof. Kodjona Kadanga



Prof. Yakubu with Prof. Kadanga



Prof. Kodjona Kadanga and senior officials of the Commission with the visiting ECONEC team

Study on the Cost of Election

Objective: To identify the main factors influencing the evolution of the cost of elections in the ECOWAS region and make practical recommendations for rationalising the costs of elections in the region. The study and validation activities were supported by OSIWA and GIZ.

Outcome: The study was conducted on a sample of six (6) countries in the ECOWAS region along the three linguistic zones-Nigeria and Liberia (Anglophone); Benin and Senegal (Francophone) and Cape Verde and Guinea Bissau (Lusophone). A consolidated report of 150 pages was produced by the team of three consultants, which visited the countries for interaction with the actors and to collect data needed for the study.

Through the publication and wide dissemination of the Study Report, ECONEC aims to deepen the understanding of the issue of cost of elections and to stimulate discussion among legislators, policy makers, election administrators and other electoral stakeholders on the need to review approach to election financing in the region. The report should also provide ECONEC with a tool to advocate for the rationalization of expenditures and the pooling of electoral resources within the region.

A follow-up meeting to validate the study was held in Abuja (15 – 16 October 2018) with representatives of 15 electoral commissions in attendance. They evaluated and analysed the findings as well as validated the conclusions and recommendations made by the team of consultants who carried out the study.



Group work at the validation workshop



GIZ representative Ludwig Kirchner, Prof. Yakubu and OSIWA representative Joseph Amena Guawon at the workshop



Prof. Yakubu addressing participants at the cost of election study validation meeting



Workshop for regional election experts to validate the outcome of the study on the cost of Elections in West Africa held in Abuja



Participants at the workshop

International Conference on the Use of Technology In Elections

Objective: To review the introduction of technology in the electoral administration in the ECOWAS and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) regions; create a platform for the exchange of experiences and peer learning to generate opportunities for collaboration among EMBs in both regions. Held in Abuja (9 – 11 April 2018), the Conference was supported by the European Union through the European Centre for Electoral Support (ECES).

Outcome: The Conference produced the Abuja Declaration by ECONEC and Election Commissions Forum ECF-SADC on the use of new technologies in elections in the ECOWAS and SADC regions and advocated enhanced cooperation among EMBs in the two regions.



ECONEC President Prof. Yakubu, President of the Electoral Commissions of South Africa and Chair of the Namibia Electoral Commission, Adv. Notemba Tjipueja, and Mrs Miatta French from Sierra Leone at the international conference on the use of technology in elections



(L-R) Amb. Ketil Karlson, Head of EU delegation to Nigeria and ECOWAS, Prof. Yakubu and Ms Monica Frassoni (delivering her speech) at the conference



The Abuja conference on the use of technology in elections



ECES President Ms Frassoni, Prof. Yakubu and Adv. Tjipueja



Participants at the Conference on Elections and Technology

Regional Media Training Workshop on Professional Reporting of Elections

Objective: To generate sustained interest of media professionals in the conduct of credible, transparent and peaceful elections in the ECOWAS region, with the media playing their vital role. The workshop also sought to create a body of knowledgeable media professionals with the necessary skills in electoral reporting and contribute to the creation of an electorate capable of informed choice in the election of leaders; Reduce hate speech or conflict/crisis-inciting reporting during elections. The Workshop was held in Abuja (28 -29 October 2018).

Outcome: The two-day pilot workshop helped to build the capacity of 36 media professionals from the 15 ECOWAS member states. It produced a communiqué, and among others, recommended the setting up of a regional network for journalists on professional reporting of elections; establishment of regional guidelines on media coverage of elections, a code of conduct for media professionals and awards of excellence to acknowledge top talent from the region.



ECONEC media workshop in session



Workshop on professional reporting of elections in West Africa held in Abuja



Participants at the Workshop for journalists on professional reporting of elections in West Africa held in Abuja

Nigeria's General Elections

Objective: To create an opportunity for representatives of EMBs to witness and assess election management by their peers; learn and draw lessons from such elections, support their peers organizing elections; identify best practices, share experience; make recommendations to improve the management and legal framework of elections in ECOWAS member States. The team was in Nigeria from 10 – 28 February 2019. They were joined by other observation missions notably the African Union, the Commonwealth and the European Union. The United Nations also sent high powered missions before and during the elections led by the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General in West Africa and the Sahel, His Excellency Mohamed Ibn Chambas.

Outcome: The ECONEC Mission enabled six chairpersons of EMBs (Sierra Leone, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Niger, Gambia and Cabo Verde) to support their peer organizing elections; interact with the peers and other electoral stakeholders, imbibe good practices and make useful recommendations for improving the management of the electoral process in the region.



ECONEC Peer Support and Learning team and ECONEC President Prof Yakubu after a meeting in his office



ECONEC Peer Support and Learning delegation received by ECONEC President Prof. Yakubu



Prof. Yakubu receives ECOWAS election observation delegation in his office



ECONEC Peer learning and support mission delegation with UNSGSR Dr. Chambas during Nigeria's 2019 election



Prof. Yakubu ECONEC President and INEC chairman receives ECOWAS long-term election observation team during Nigeria's 2019 election



Prof. Yakubu with Liberian's former President Madam Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf Head of ECOWAS election observation mission to Nigeria



Prof. Yakubu speaking with former President of Tanzania and Head of the Commonwealth election observation mission to Nigeria, His Excellency Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete



Former President of Zambia and Head of the EISA Observer Mission, His Excellency Rupiah Banda (R) sitting next to ECONEC President Prof. Yakubu



President Kikwete and Head of the African Union Observer Mission and former Prime Minister of Ethiopia His Excellency Hailemariam Desalegne listening to ECONEC President Prof. Yakubu

III

WHAT LEADERS, PARTNERS AND STAKEHOLDERS SAY ABOUT ECONEC

WHY WE MUST ALL SUPPORT ECONEC

H.E. John Dramani Mahama
Former President of Ghana

It is a fact that the credibility of any election is dependent on the integrity of the electoral administrator, the robust electoral systems put in place and the unhindered participation of political parties and other stakeholders such as local and international observers in the electoral processes before, during and after elections.

To this end, the critical role of Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) in the conduct of transparent and credible national elections, especially in Africa where most countries are still fledgling democracies, cannot be over emphasized. And this is particularly so in our region, West Africa, which has in the last few decades, endured a regrettable history of socio-economic and political instability.

Against the background of the enormous challenges associated with election management in the ECOWAS region and the fact that elections have since become a major source of conflicts in the region, it is to the credit and foresight of ECOWAS leaders and the leadership of EMBs, who set up the ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC) in 2008. This followed the conviction that working together; the EMBs would not only be more effective in delivering their mandate of conducting credible elections in the region by international best practices; resulting in sustainable peace, stability and development in the ECOWAS region, and a better life for our people.

Not with standing its noble purpose, ECONEC since its inception had been bedeviled by the same ailment associated with most voluntary organizations in developing countries—the lack of funding to implement laudable objectives. This lack of financial resources has, not only adversely affected the operations of ECONEC, but has also blunted its visibility.

But the tide is changing. Building upon the efforts of its forebears, the leadership of ECONEC in the last two years, with the support of the ECOWAS Commission and development partners, has chalked up some remarkable achievements in guiding member EMBs along the path of bestpractices in the conduct of credible and transparent elections in the ECOWAS region.

These modest strides have been recorded through ECONEC's impactful needs assessment, technical, solidarity, observation and post-election mid-termmissions. Apart from providing in valuable peer support to its members, including Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire, Senegal, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Togo and Nigeria, the Network has also conducted and validated the findings of a Regional Study on the cost of elections to reduce the spiralling electoral expenses

in the region. Conscious of the critical role of the media in the electoral process, ECONEC has also organized a regional training for journalists on professional reporting of elections and an international conference on the use of technology in elections.

Furthermore, ECONEC's advocacy initiatives have facilitated the donation, by the Federal Government of Nigeria, of logistical support to the Electoral Commissions of Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea Bissau, which assisted the electoral processes in those countries.

Thus, ECONEC in the past two years has demonstrated that with adequate financial resources it can achieve even more. And this makes a strong case for ECOWAS and its development partners to provide adequate and sustained support to the Network to enable it deliver on its mandate, which will enhance the consolidation of democracy and good governance in West Africa.

Our region, ECOWAS, is making progress on election best practices. But there is the need for a redoubling of efforts and advocacy for the mobilization of funds to support and strengthen the capacity of ECONEC and its member Commissions to accomplish even more. The Network on its part should also strengthen its internal mechanism for self-support, information and experience sharing, peer collaboration and the pooling of resources to optimize its impact and relevance.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ECONEC

Dr Mohamed Ibn Chambas

*UN Secretary General's Special Representative to UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel
Former Executive Secretary / President of ECOWAS Commission
Founding Father of ECONEC*

The United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel recognises the imperative role of ECONEC and its members in the democratization process in West Africa, given that elections are widely regarded by political actors in the region as the most means of accessing power. As a result, the stakes are increasingly higher, thus making Election Management Bodies (EMBs) even more relevant in ensuring peaceful, transparent and credible processes that contribute to peace and security in West Africa.

ECONEC has therefore been successful in ensuring that its membership benefits from the rich experience and lessons learnt through regular consultations and experience sharing encounters. The solidarity demonstrated by ECONEC to its members during electoral processes is commendable as was the case in the just-concluded elections in Nigeria. ECONEC is not only a platform but a community of learning for EMBs with civil society organisations being beneficiaries of such knowledge. ECONEC remains the instrument through which the voice of EMBs can be amplified.

Without doubt, the challenges faced by ECONEC, to an extent, mirror those faced by EMBs as they implement their important mandates. These challenges, which are mainly operational and institutional, need concerted action nationally and regionally.

ECONEC will need the political and financial support of ECOWAS member states to enable member of EMBs. This type of support, which is an expression of ownership, will guarantee some level of predictability in the work of ECONEC.

ECONEC should also consider enhancing its relationship at the regional level with other relevant networks such as the Network of National Human Rights Institutions, which play a complementary role in promoting peaceful and credible elections. Similarly, at the national level, ECONEC should encourage its members to deepen ties with National Human Rights Institutions, national peace architectures, security agencies and the civil society organisations which are key to successful elections.

Furthermore, beyond organising platforms for experience sharing, ECONEC could consider documenting and disseminating good practices in the region to lead in standard setting.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ECOWAS-ECONEC PARTNERSHIP

Gen. Francis Béhanzin

*Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace & Security
ECOWAS Commission*

The ECOWAS Commission acknowledges that since its organisation of the International Conference in collaboration with the ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions Network (ECONEC/RESAO), in Cotonou, the Benin Republic on the 27-28 March 2017 on a Decade of electoral assistance, the Network has risen from its lethargy with a new leadership zeal following its General Assembly held on the margin of the International Conference.

After the Cotonou Conference, with Nigeria as the President of the new ECONEC/RESAO Steering Committee, the Network now has a Permanent Secretariat, and after the recruitment of staff, ECONEC has demonstrated a more comprehensive commitment towards the realisation of its mandate.

Working with the ECOWAS Commission's Electoral Assistance Division, ECONEC is promoting the conduct of credible elections and the deepening of democratic culture in the ECOWAS region. Highlights of ECONEC / RESAO achievements include technical and logistic assistance to the National Electoral Commission (NEC) of Liberia, with IT experts from INEC Nigeria assisting in cleaning up the voter register in between that country's two rounds of the presidential election in October 2017. The advocacy by the Network also facilitated the donation by Nigeria of 300 Biometric Registration kits to the National Electoral Commission (CNE) of Guinea Bissau for the legislative elections that took place in March 2019. These all testify to the spirit of mutual assistance and collaboration among electoral commissions of the region thanks to the ECONEC / RESAO.

Furthermore, the conclusions and recommendations of a regional study on the cost of elections in the ECOWAS region undertaken by ECONEC / RESAO with the support of the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) and the German Agency for International Cooperation, GIZ, are consistent with the idea for a regional Depot of electoral materials in Lungi, Sierra Leone, to which ECOWAS is very committed. This will facilitate the pooling of resources and sharing of materials by election management bodies, and contribute to the reduction of cost of elections in the region.

To generate and enhance visibility around elections in the region, ECONEC / RESAO has also started regional training on professional reporting of elections for media professionals. A joint study on gender mainstreaming by the ECOWAS Electoral Management Bodies has also been undertaken by the ECOWAS Gender Department and the Electoral Assistance Division in collaboration with ECONEC / RESAO. As a follow-up, a Symposium on Promoting Inclusiveness in Electoral Processes will signpost the Network's General Assembly planned for July 2019 in Abuja, Nigeria.

These achievements by ECONEC / RESAO suggest the need for synergy and strengthening of collaboration between the Network and the ECOWAS Commission, towards the realisation of the collective objective of promoting credible, transparent, free and inclusive elections for the consolidation of democracy in the region.

The mission deployed by ECONEC / RESAO to the Republic of Guinea (8-13 June 2018) to follow-up on the recommendations of the ECOWAS Observation Mission to that country's 2015 presidential election is a concrete example of complementary action aimed at improving electoral administration in the region.

The Network should also consider, in collaboration with ECOWAS, more Needs Assessment missions to member commissions about six months before their elections to ensure adequate preparations before elections.

In conclusion, the ECOWAS Commission wishes to see more mutually beneficial collaboration and partnerships among Electoral Commissions in the region under the ECONEC leadership. This will be heightened through peer support, and the sharing of experience and knowledge in line with international best practices and towards gradual harmonization of electoral legal frameworks and practices in the ECOWAS space.

ECONEC IN LIBERIA

Ambassador 'Tunde O. Ajisomo

Special Representative of the President of the ECOWAS Commission to Liberia

Within the last two decades, there has been an emerging trend in the electoral democracy in West Africa. This trend has been heralded by the expansion of civil liberties through political liberalization which has created room for multi party elections. While it is true that there has been considerable progress in electoral democracy in West Africa, there are still numerous challenges which Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) are facing both during and after the electoral processes. It is in recognition of this that the ECOWAS Commission and the EMBs in West Africa established the ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC) in February, 2018 to foster cooperation and experience sharing amongst member States as well as to promote credible elections through harmonization of electoral legislations and strengthening of the capacity of EMBs in the region.

ECONEC has undertaken several key electoral activities to establish itself as a major player in the promotion of electoral democracy in West Africa. Following the election of Prof. Mahmood Yakubu, Chair of Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) as President of ECONEC, at the Network's 5th Biennial General Assembly in Cotonou, Republic of Benin, in 2017, ECONEC has transformed itself as a strong and viable partner of ECOWAS Commission and EMBs in West Africa. During his tenure, ECONEC has carried out Needs Assessment Missions and Capacity building programmes in some of the EMBs in the region. The Network has also paid solidarity visits and carried out necessary Post-election follow-up / Mid-Term Reviews for the strengthening of electoral processes, and also undertaken advocacy and sensitization role on behalf of its members with their Governments at the highest level. Some of the commendable interventions that ECONEC carried out included, the supply of voter registration kits to Guinea Bissau from the Nigerian Government, and technical and logistical support to Liberia and Sierra-Leone Electoral Commissions during their Presidential and Legislative Elections in 2017 and 2018 respectively. ECONEC has undertaken Needs Assessment Mission to Guinea Bissau, follow-up mission to Guinea, solidarity visits to Mali, Senegal, Cote-d'Ivoire and Togo, as well as Peer Support and Learning mission to Nigeria.

As part of its mandate, ECONEC has also launched a comprehensive research / study on the prohibitive and unsustainable cost of elections in West Africa. It is hoped that the outcome of this research and its faithful implementation will herald a more cost-effective, participatory, credible and inclusive electoral process in West Africa.

Towards strengthening the capacity of EMBs, ECONEC has continued to provide necessary operational and technical assistance through experience sharing, value addition as well as

advocacy in the areas of Voters Education, Women participation, Equitable representation, including training in both manual and bio-metric Voters Roll. In its efforts to promote and improve the credibility of electoral processes and enhance the integrity of electoral outcomes, ECONEC and its partners also organized an International Conference in Abuja on the importance of leveraging technological innovations in managing and administering the electoral process.

The 2017 Presidential and Legislative Elections in Liberia were held under an atmosphere of uncertainty. This was because the Liberian Government was tasked with the responsibility of providing electoral security for the first time as compared to the 2005 and 2011 Presidential Elections when the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) largely provided both logistics and electoral security for the electoral process.

Secondly, the 2017 Presidential election marked the first time, since 1944, that Executive Authority would be transferred peacefully from one elected President to another as the former President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf was completing her second and final-term and was constitutionally ineligible to contest in 2017. Indeed, the non-participation of the incumbent President in the election made people consider the 2017 contest in Liberia as a “non-seat elections” with 20 candidates vying for the Office.

The third reason for the uncertainty was the high expectations on the part of the populace for a change, especially the youth who constitute more than 65% of the population. There were also the problems of high unemployment, inflationary pressures, declining exports and the state of persistent poverty that shaped the economy. Also, there was a high illiteracy rate, especially amongst women, and challenges of health care facilities, educational system and road infrastructures, which affected participation in the 2017 electoral process.

Against this background, the Needs Assessment Mission / Solidarity of the ECONEC Board members in early 2017 to Liberia provide a very useful platform for engagement with all relevant stakeholders such as the Chairman and the Commissioners of Liberia’s Elections Commission, the Chief Justice and Associate Justices of the Supreme Court, the Chairmen of the Elections Committees of both House of Representatives and the Senate, the Inspector-General of Police and his team, Civil Society Organizations on electoral matters, members of the Diplomatic Corps, UNMIL and other development partners.

ECONEC’s engagements with Liberia’s Elections Commission were very productive touching on issues such as Voter Education, Voter Registration List / Roll, Electoral Administration Procedures, related to the Role of Electoral Magistrates, Presiding Officers, Returning Officers, Counting Procedures, as well as Electoral Security Management. Both sides exchanged ideas on how Liberia could deliver a credible electoral process. The ECONEC mission, which took place shortly after the conclusion of the manually conducted Voter Registration exercise, with attendant complaints, boosted the confidence of the National Elections Commission in the preparations for the October 2017 Presidential Elections in Liberia.

As part of efforts to ensure a credible electoral process, Prof. Yakubu, the President of ECONEC and Chair INEC, Nigeria, led an Observation team to the Presidential and Legislative Elections on October 10, 2017. The delegation observed the elections in various Polling Units and the Situation Room of the National Elections Commission in Montserrado County along with other International Observers. They also observed the counting of the votes in some of the polling Units. The presidential contest did not produce an outright winner with a threshold of 50%+1 vote as required by the Electoral Law.

The presidential run-off vote was scheduled to take place two weeks after the announcement of the results of the first round of balloting, but the non-acceptance of the election results by the Presidential Candidate of the Liberty Party, Counsellor Charles Brumskin, who came third, behind Gorge Weah of the CDC and Joseph Boakai of the Unity Party, resulted in prolonged litigation that went up to the Supreme Court.

At the invitation of the Chairman of NEC Liberia, the President of the ECOWAS Commission and the President of ECONEC graciously approved the visit of an ECOWAS / ECONEC Technical Support Team, which arrived in Monrovia in November 2017 to undertake a comprehensive assessment and analysis of the Voters Register, the Server Room and other IT related operational, electoral and technical issues raised by NEC, Liberia. The Operational and Technical Support Team led by Dr Kwadwa Afari-Gyan, former Chairman of the Electoral Commission of Ghana and which included Engr. Chidi Nwafor, Director ICT (Head, Technical Team); Mrs Abimbola Oladunjoye, Assistant Director (Data Management) and Mr Collins Onyemachi (Database Architect), from INEC Nigeria, was in Liberia from 26th November-6th December 2017.

Following its forensic assessment of the voters register and conclusion of its assignment the Technical Support Team submitted its Report and Recommendations to the Chairman of the Liberia Elections Commission on 6th December, 2017. While receiving the Report, the Chairman of NEC expressed his gratitude to the Presidents of the ECOWAS Commission and ECONEC and promised to implement the recommendations, which he said would go a long way to improve not only Liberia's Electoral System but also build confidence and trust amongst Liberians. As the nation awaited the ruling of Liberia's Supreme Court on the date for the presidential run-off vote, the NEC chair, said he would request the inclusion of members of the Technical Team in the ECOWAS Observation Mission for the election.

As a confidence-building measure, the Technical Team also met with the leadership and chieftains of the two Liberian Political Parties that came first and second, the Unity Party (UP) as well as, the CDC to brief them on their findings and recommendations regarding the contentious voters Roll. Members of the two parties extolled ECOWAS / ECONEC efforts of sending their Technical Team to assist NEC and gave the assurance that they would consider favourably the recommendations of the Team.

The Supreme Court of Liberia later ruled that the Presidential Run-Off Elections should hold on 26th December, 2017, and applauded the efforts of the ECOWAS / ECONEC technical team in

addressing some of the technical problems identified and advised the National Elections Commission to carry out further necessary measures to ensure a credible run-off presidential election.

Despite all its successes, there are still major factors which remain paramount to the sustainability and effectiveness of ECONEC. A comparative analysis of elections management in the sub-regional point to the same issues faced by EMBs before and after elections. To deepen democracy in the sub-region, considerable efforts must be made to ensure that EMBs are independent or autonomous, and the cost of elections significantly reduced.

Another major issue to be addressed within the sub-region relates to the harmonization of legal texts which guide electoral processes. It is also imperative for ECONEC to be well funded to enable the Network to carry out more electoral reforms within the sub-region.

ECONEC should also look into the issue of voter apathy or usually poor turn-out of voters during run-off of presidential and general elections. This could be linked to poor voter education and perceived lack of transparent electoral process and procedures.

In some member states, such as Liberia, there are also problems of electoral dispute hearing process located within the EMBs, which gives the impression of lack of due process and possible denial of justice to litigants. There is no independent elections tribunal and appeal is only available at the Supreme Court from the National Elections Commission to the highest court in the country. There are also allegations of trucking of voters and vote buying in some member States, which must be addressed.

The way forward is for ECONEC to strengthen its advocacy and sensitization for funding to the door steps of development and donor Community. The EU, USAID, the Nordic Countries and European partners that focus their development cooperation on the promotion of good governance, human rights would be willing to provide funding if approached with convincing proposals. ECOWAS member States should also assume ownership and responsibility with improved funding of ECONEC for the sustainability of its laudable activities.

ECONEC should also spear head the building and hosting of regional electoral data bank on Voter Registration to help EMBs as the issue of credible voters' registration, and roll become more contentious and a source of the allegation of vote rigging and electoral violence. Development partners should provide appropriate bio-metric technology that will facilitate hosting of a regional voters registration data bank that would be reviewed regularly along with member States EMBs.

To strengthen its activities, ECONEC should also focus more on knowledge and experience sharing and best international practices among EMBs as well as pooling of electoral materials such as ballot boxes, ink sand registration kits.

ECONEC alone can not solve all the electoral problems of ECOWAS member States. Other electoral stakeholders, including the Government, Legislature, Executive, Judiciary, Security agencies, CSOs, the media and citizens, should play their parts under the relevant laws.

ECONEC should also pay more attention to the structures and operations of political parties and the urgent need to strengthen internal party democracies through adherence to party constitutions, electoral laws and manifestoes.

Finally, the role of technology is with respect to voters registration should be extended to all aspects of the electoral process, such as voting, counting, tallying and transmission of results, instead of the laborious manual process that is susceptible to rigging and manipulation, with concomitant problems of electoral violence and loss of confidence and trust in the electoral process.

THE CONTINUING RELEVANCE OF ECONEC

Dr Kwadwo Afari-Gyan

Chairman, Electoral Commission of Ghana (1993-2015)

Executive Secretary, Association of African Election Authorities (AAEA) 1998-2015

Founding Member of ECONEC

When the Electoral Commissions and the then ECOWAS Executive Secretariat, led by Dr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas, set up the ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC) in 2008, we had in mind the need to nurture the emerging democracy in our region through the conduct of credible elections. Knowing the challenges of election administration in the ECOWAS region, we felt that our Election Management Bodies (EMBs) would benefit from collaboration, the exchange of ideas and learning from one another in our quest to achieve peaceful and credible elections. We deliberated over the name to be given to the Network and its translation into the three ECOWAS official languages of English, French, and Portuguese.

Having agreed on the objectives for setting up ECONEC, the next issue of great concern was funding. Looking back, there is no doubt that the lack of adequate funding has adversely affected the operations and general performance of the Network over the years. However, it is to be noted that in recent times, ECONEC has demonstrated what proactive leadership can do towards the achievement of an organisation's aim. Of late, ECONEC has been able to provide various forms of valuable support to several of its members, including Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire, Senegal, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Togo, and Nigeria.

I find two other factors to be note worthy. First, ECONEC' s advocacy initiative facilitated the donation of logistical support to the Electoral Commissions of Sierra Leone and Guinea Bissau by the Federal Government of Nigeria. Secondly, the ECOWAS Commission, UNDP, and ECONEC collaborated to send a technical team to Liberia to help resolve problems relating to the voters' register that threatened to scuttle the 2018 general elections. Such advocacy initiatives and collaborative efforts are worth pursuing.

Going forward, I dare suggest that ECONEC does two things towards ensuring its sustained relevance. First, it must not over-stretch itself. It must carefully and thoroughly analyse its various activities and concentrate on what it does best and what has proven to be most useful to the members. Secondly, it must institute mandatory membership dues, preferably with sanctions against perennial defaulters, to generate internal funding to, at minimum, maintain a viable permanent secretariat. If the Network is seen to be helping it self, it will make donor agencies and better-endowed ECOWAS countries to feel more comfortable to help the Network.

I believe that through committed and proactive leadership, ECONEC can continue to raise its profile as an indispensable partner in the collective desire to achieve credible elections and consolidate democracy and good governance in West Africa.

EXPERIENCE SHARING, FUNDING CRITICAL FOR SUCCESS

Ambassador Babatunde Nurudeen
Permanent Mission of Nigeria to ECOWAS Commission

The ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC) as the umbrella body for all the Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) in West Africa has done a lot in delivering on its mandate of promoting and consolidating democratic culture in the region through experience-sharing, research, capacity building and election observation, especially in the last two years.

The various missions by ECONEC to assess the capacity of several EMBs in the region has further reinforced its efforts at engendering good governance and contributing to free, fair and credible elections in West Africa.

However, despite these and many other numerous achievements, ECONEC is still being confronted with various challenges that have continued to impede its success.

One of such challenges is the lack of adequate funding. This has slowed down the efforts and activities of ECONEC geared towards the successful conduct of elections in West Africa. In this connection, for ECONEC to thrive and fully achieve its set goals, it is necessary for the ECOWAS Commission, member States and development partners to make necessary funds available for the smooth running of the Network.

Nigeria on its part and as the current Chair of ECONEC's governing board under the leadership of Professor Mahmood Yakubu, Chairman, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Nigeria will continue to provide active leadership that will engender more deliverables from ECONEC across the region.

The need to further strengthen the relationship between INEC and ECONEC cannot be over emphasized.

WE WILL SUPPORT ECONEC TO ACHIEVE MORE

Ms. Ayisha Osori
Executive Director, OSIWA

The ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC) has been a partner of the Open Society Initiative West Africa (OSIWA) for a long time, and this is a testament to the value we place on the capacity of ECONEC to play its role in promoting credible elections across West Africa.

Over time, West Africa has seen a steady improvement in the quality of elections being held in ECOWAS member countries, particularly with regards to regularity and management. ECONEC has contributed to this in several ways.

First, ECONEC helps identify its members' capacity needs, disseminates findings to potential partners and contributes to meeting some of the identified needs. For instance, before the 2018 elections in Sierra Leone, ECONEC conducted a Needs Assessment Mission (NAM) to determine the capacity needs of the National Electoral Commission and the Political Parties Registration Commission. The mission was also able to identify gaps in the legal and operational framework for the 2018 elections and proposed remedial actions needed to address them. Thanks to that assessment, international partners received the necessary information they required on the scope and nature of assistance needed to ensure the successful conduct of elections in Sierra Leone. Similar initiatives were also undertaken in Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Guinea Bissau and Liberia before general elections in those countries.

Second, ECONEC provides support for research on election-related issues such as the exhaustive review of the current state of diaspora voting in West Africa, which focused on legal frameworks and practical implementation. It also conducted a study on the cost of elections; an in-depth assessment of the significant cost-drivers of elections in West Africa and actionable recommendations for controlling/minimizing those costs without impacting on the credibility of the electoral processes. The network also contributed to the reflection around the opportunities and challenges in the use of technology in elections; thanks to the first joint initiative between two Electoral Management Body (EMB) Networks (ECONEC and ECFSADC) in Africa.

Finally, ECONEC has been adept at advocacy on a national and regional level to continually engage stakeholders on the need to continuously improve the electoral process standards and the need for member countries to share best practice through exchange of personnel and innovative processes.

The reward for good work is usually more work and as such, despite its successes, ECONEC has the capacity to do more. The network must continuously engage with EMBs and other stakeholders, including civil society and the media to ensure that West Africa does not suffer

a democratic regression through the electoral process. There are opportunities for ECONEC to take the results of its research to reform specific processes as well as look at recurring challenges around elections in the region such as the independence of the EMBS, voter registration processes which disenfranchise a significant part of the electorate, and opaque results transmission and vote collation. As long-standing partners, we urge ECONOC to jealously guard its gains and continue to innovate, collaborate and work to ensure citizens of West Africa enjoy the benefits of credible, transparent and legitimate elections.

THOUGHTS ON THE ACTIVITIES OF ECONEC

Christopher T. Oyinlola & Phidelia Amey
German Development Cooperation – GIZ

The ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC) has recorded significant achievements since its establishment in 2008 especially over the past two years under the leadership of the Professor Mahmood Yakubu led five-member governing board. The activities and presence of the network has become more prominent across ECOWAS member states and amongst other stakeholders including development partners, and the mandate of the umbrella organization to promote free, fair and credible elections across West Africa remains critically vital in light of the existing and emerging fragilities often associated with electoral grievances and sometimes violence experienced across the region. Thus, the strengthening and harmonization of electoral practices in the region will go a long way to restore public confidence in the conduct of elections across West Africa.

Following the creation of a permanent secretariat in 2017 which was provided by the Independent National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (INEC), ECONEC has evidently experienced stability in the coordination of its operations as a technical arm of the ECOWAS Commission in the administration of electoral affairs across the region. This decision has proven more efficient and sustainable when compared to the previous practise of rotating the secretariat across member states. From 2017 till date, ECONEC has successfully deployed and implemented a series of activities including familiarization and exchange missions to ECOWAS member states to assess the practices of Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs). It has also implemented various activities aimed at the consolidation of democratic practises in the ECOWAS region.

These efforts afford the network first-hand information on the challenges and achievements being experienced by EMBs and other stakeholders across member states. More importantly, the missions provide experience sharing and advocacy opportunities to inform better electoral management across the ECOWAS region. Additionally, ECONEC organised a successful regional Media Workshop in 2018 that emphasized the importance of professional reportage in electioneering and with a specific focus on the ECOWAS region. Recognizing the media as the Fourth Estate of the Realm; media practitioners and electoral administrators across the 15 ECOWAS member states were sensitized and encouraged to stand as gatekeepers of peace by ensuring transparency, accountability and professionalism in shaping the electoral discourse in the region.

The workshop proved both timely and useful in the run-up to the presidential and legislative elections in two key ECOWAS member states of: Nigeria (February 2019) and Senegal (March 2019).

Furthermore, ECONEC commissioned and validated a regional study on the Cost of Elections in West Africa in October 2018. The six-state study that was conducted in Nigeria, Liberia, Benin, Senegal, Guinea Bissau and Cabo Verde with the support of the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), proffered practical recommendations to Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) to significantly cut the cost of elections across the ECOWAS region whilst ensuring the sustainability and credibility of elections in member states. The study is in alignment with ECONEC's mandate to support EMBs with research, experience and information sharing, peer collaboration and the harmonization of electoral processes across the ECOWAS region; and premised on best practices. The German Development Cooperation (GIZ) has since contributed to all the above-mentioned missions and activities undertaken by the network.

In spite of its recorded achievements, ECONEC continues to encounter a myriad of challenges impeding the actualization of its core mandates. The network lacks the required resources to implement valuable initiatives for the promotion of democratic norms across the region. ECONEC must leverage on its 'pulling power' to secure adequate funding from the ECOWAS Commission, Member States, Development Partners and even from relevant Private Sector actors to sustain its conflict prevention and governance initiatives. In order to have an enduring impact, the network needs to develop long-term strategies with clearly defined milestones and expected outcomes.

The strategy should ideally highlight the role and link between the organization's potentials in conflict prevention efforts in the ECOWAS region. This could then form the basis to mobilize the required support and collaboration amongst partners. ECONEC also encounters difficulties with the harmonization of electoral laws across the ECOWAS 15-member states which is arguably linked to a lack of political will from member states. However, this can be addressed through ECONEC's continuous effort to showcase the positive impacts of its initiatives across the region and to continually engage with its members on the benefits of inculcating democratic values. Following a critical review of ECONEC's workplace (if implemented) over the years, the Network stands in good stead to fulfilling its mandate and exemplify good practice in the field of electioneering on the African continent.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PEER LEARNING

EISA

The Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa

Since 2017, the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA) has provided technical assistance to the ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC) within the framework of its Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWAS). EISA has aided ECONEC, specifically, in the area of electoral assistance. In line with the ECOWAS' methodology for full electoral cycle-based election assessment, EISA has provided technical support to ECONEC-led Needs Assessment Missions (NAMs) in Sierra Leone in 2017 and in Guinea Bissau in 2018. Post-Election Follow-up Mission (PEFuM) to Guinea Conakry in 2018 and Peer-Learning Mission in Nigeria in 2019

The following are ECONEC's achievements made through its interventions rolled out during the period under review:

- The deployment of ECONEC-led NAMs introduced a sound technical approach to ECOWAS electoral assistance to Member States.
- Through the NAMs, ECONEC measured levels of accountability of key national electoral stakeholders, specifically the Election Management Body (EMB) and relevant state institutions, to state obligations in the ECOWAS Protocol.
- Through the NAMs, ECONEC was able to pin point specific areas of short-term interventions to support the EMB ahead of the elections, and in extension, to conduct advocacy visits to relevant government institutions that have a role in the electoral process.
- The deployment of the PEFuM in Guinea Conakry enabled ECONEC to track the implementation of the ECOWASEOM recommendations and identify possible areas of support required by the country for the implementation of these recommendations.
- ECONEC was able, through the PEFuM, to further monitor and evaluate the involvement of ECOWAS in Guinea Conakry.
- ECONEC was able to pilot the peer learning methodology during the general elections in Nigeria.

Some challenges were identified during the provision of support for the execution of ECONEC's interventions:

- During the period under review, limited funding remained a challenge as ECONEC was notable to deploy its NAMs timeously nor was the body able to fully deploy the NAM and PEFuM methodology in all the selected countries.
- Late deployment of the NAM to Sierra Leone and Guinea Bissau impacted on the scope

and the delivery of the electoral support efforts. Owing to contextual challenges, countries, like Guinea Bissau, require broader and longer external support from ECONEC.

For increased impact of its interventions in Member States, ECONEC may consider the following recommendations:

- i. Special and flexible funding should be made available to ECONEC as a means of ensuring that the body systematically and timeously undertakes needs assessments and follow-ups in all Member States.
- ii. Due consideration should be given to the timing of deployment of NAMs, especially in Member States, which do not hold presidential and parliamentary elections simultaneously, to ensure that the NAM is deployed at least twelve months ahead of the schedule elections in line with ECOWAS' adopted methodology for needs assessment missions.
- iii. The ECONEC-led NAMs should be kept separate from ECOWAS fact-finding missions to further strengthen ECOWAS in its multi-faceted engagements at technical and political levels.
- iv. In the design of customised strategies for electoral support to Member States, ECONEC should continue to further draw from different country experiences and good practices for increased value addition of its interventions to the administration of elections in Member States.
- v. Drawing from lessons learnt from the pilot mission in Nigeria, ECONEC should review its peer learning methodology in order to develop clear deployment strategies based on specific objectives and criteria.

IV

VIEWS FROM WITHIN

Mr. Newton Ahmed Barry, ECONEC Treasurer, President, CENI Burkina Faso

It is proper to salute the leadership of ECONEC President Mahmood Yakubu. His presidency has improved the visibility and reputation of ECONEC. INEC/Nigeria also deserves commendation for its initiative to provide ECONEC with a Permanent and functional headquarters, coupled with the necessary infrastructure and equipment.

For the sustainability of its activities, there is a need for:

- i. Institutional and collaborative relationship between ECONEC and ECOWAS to effectively contribute to the consolidation of ECONEC
- ii. Improvement in the functioning of the Secretariat, to make ECONEC more effective
- iii. Ownership and commitment around the action plan of Network members, and
- iv. Revision of the operational status

Counsellor José Pedro Sambú, 2nd Vice President ECONEC & President CNE, Guinea-Bissau

The Guinea Bissau National Electoral Commission-Comissão Nacional das Eleições Desejado (CNE), acknowledges the relevance of the creation of ECONEC in 2008, whose activities have gained unprecedented visibility, with the establishment of its Permanent Secretariat in Abuja in 2017. This has been made possible with the support of the Open Society for West Africa (OSIWA), the ECOWAS Commission and development partners, and especially the strong leadership and dynamism of the Chairman of ECONEC Steering Committee, Professor Mahmood Yakubu, Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Nigeria.

During the last two years (2017-2019), ECONEC carried out important activities for the capacity building of Election Management Bodies (EMBs) in the ECOWAS region, and also enhanced the exchange of experiences and knowledge among electoral Commissions. The Network also undertook Needs Assessment, Solidarity and Observation missions to members, including Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea Bissau, in addition to regional conferences and workshops dealing with the reduction of cost of elections, use of technology in elections and professional reporting of elections by the media.

Worth mentioning also is ECONEC's mission to Guinea-Bissau in August 2018, which featured important meetings with various stakeholders and the technical evaluation of the legal and operational processes of the scheduled legislative elections in the country.

The ECONEC mission assessed the material; technical and logistic preparations ahead of the elections and facilitated subsequent donation by the Federal Government of Nigeria, of voter registration kits, to kick-start the process for the successful legislative elections of 10th March

2019. The outcome of the elections was recognized by the international community as free, fair, transparent and credible.

CNE recognizes commitment and determination of the current ECONEC leadership to promote greater visibility for the Network, although financial difficulty remains a principal hindrance.

Dr. Maria do Rosario Goncalves, President, Electoral Commission, Cabo Verde

The ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC) in the last two years, under the leadership of Prof. Mahmood Yakubu, who is also Chair of INEC Nigeria, has made significant progress in the electoral consolidation process, as a regional institution that aggregates electoral authorities and competencies.

The Network has brought demonstrable visibility to its work and has, in collaboration with the ECOWAS Commission and partners, contributed to the strengthening of the capacities of its members in the promotion of credible elections and the consolidation of democracy as a system of government in Africa.

In the past two years, ECONEC has exerted its influence, facilitated and given visibility to ECOWAS' interventions in the conduct of elections in the member States, by international best practices, particularly in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea Bissau.

However, despite its laudable achievements, ECONEC still faces major challenges, especially in the area of funding of its activities.

The Network also needs to broaden engagements with stakeholders on electoral administration and should strengthen collaboration with the ECOWAS Commission to forge a robust partnership on electoral matters, towards the consolidation of democracy through transparent electoral processes and the conduct of credible elections in ECOWAS member States.

Alain Dogou, Vice President, CEI, Coted'Ivoire

On the eve of the 6th General Assembly of the ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC/RESAO), the Electoral Commission of Côte d'Ivoire, CEI, wishes to reaffirm its commitment to the Network.

CEI Cote d'Ivoire participated actively in the 5th General Assembly held in Cotonou, the Benin Republic in 2017 and subsequently received a delegation of the ECONEC Steering Committee on a Needs Assessment Mission to Cote d'Ivoire in 2018.

The ECONEC delegation met with CEI officials and other stakeholders including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), on CEI's logistics and operational needs for the conduct of the next elections.

Several CEI Côte d'Ivoire members have also participated in various electoral capacity building trainings organized by the ECONEC in collaboration with the ECOWAS Commission and development partners.

Despite these activities and achievements, ECONEC has a lot of ground to cover to improve inter-Network exchanges to sharpen its advocacy initiatives to development partners and election stakeholders.

Each member EMB should develop/strengthen an internal communication policy for effective liaison with ECONEC to ensure that activities and programmes of the Network are adequately publicised.

Madame Djenabou Touré CAMARA (for President CENI-GUINEA)

Guinea's Independent Electoral Commission, CENI has benefited from ECONEC/RESAO's activities, particularly the post-election monitoring and evaluation mission undertaken by the Network in 2018 on the recommendations by ECOWAS Observation Mission to Guinea's 2015 presidential election

We also appreciate ECONEC's interest in strengthening and enhancing the capacities of its member Election Management Bodies (EMBs). CENI Guinea would like to see the intensification of efforts on:

- i. Identifying and consolidating potential technical and financial partnership to implement all Network activities;
- ii. Investing in the strengthening programmes of ECONEC members
- iii. Pooling human resources and electoral materials for the mutual benefit of member EMBs
- iv. Strengthening of the Permanent Secretariat with full powers for the sustainability of ECONEC programmes and activities, and,
- v. Expanding the structure for effective information and experience sharing

Furthermore, CENI-Guinea would like to remind the ECONEC Steering Committee of its requests for electoral equipment including computers, motorcycles for supervision of the operations, and 4X4 all-terrain vehicles for the liaison between the administrative commissions of establishments and revision of the electoral lists.

The other requests include motorized boats, with which to cover the hinter lands, trucks for the transportation of electoral materials, office printers, scanners, desktop and laptop computers.

The acquisition of these equipment and materials would facilitates operations for the next elections in Guinea and the consolidation of democracy.

Mr Mohamed N’Fah-Alie Conteh, Chief Electoral Commissioner and Chairman NEC, Sierra Leone

Networking by Election Management Bodies (EMBs) is fast becoming a global phenomenon, given the complexity and specialist’s skills required in the management of transparent and credible elections. This is compounded by the rapid development in technology, communications and other electoral initiatives. The consensus is that EMBs can no longer operate in isolation from each other or without external support and since cooperation can only improve their capacity. This resonates with the aim for the establishment of the ECOWAS NETWORK OF ELECTORAL COMMISSIONS (ECONEC) in 2008, whose over arching objective is “to provide value addition and strengthen the capacity of EMBs in the region to deliver credible elections with outcomes that meet international standards.”

ECONEC in the past two years under the able leadership of Professor Mahmood Yakubu, the Chair of Nigeria’s Electoral Commission, as the Network’s governing board President, has made remarkable strides in strengthening the human and technical capacities of EMBs to enhance their ability to deliver elections with integrity.

Key among these achievements are:

- i. Impactful technical support to member EMBs in the form of experience-sharing and peer-learning
- ii. The conduct and validation of the findings of a Study on the reduction of the cost of elections in West Africa
- iii. Joint ECOWAS/ECONEC Needs Assessment missions to Liberia in 2017 and other Network members
- iv. Advocacy Mission to Sierra Leone in 2017, which, among others, led to the provision of logistical support by the Federal Republic of Nigeria to Sierra Leone for the conduct of its 2018 Presidential, Parliamentary and Local Council elections.
- v. Organization of a regional workshop to train journalists on professional reporting of elections in West Africa

ECONEC also deployed a Peer Support and Learning Mission to Nigeria, comprising EMB Chairpersons or their representatives during the county’s 2019 Presidential elections. This was a first of its kind mission, with the objective of enhancing collaboration among member electoral Commissions, to promote best practices, experience sharing and enhance adherence to regional and international standards in the conduct of elections.

However, the major challenge faced by ECONEC is funding. Membership dues have been instituted, but this has proved inadequate as source of income for the Network's many programmes and activities. While ECONEC members are grateful for the support so far received, ECOWAS and Development partners are encouraged to do more to enable the Network to deliver on its mandate.

Tchambakou Ayassor, President, CENI, Togo

The Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI), Togo, acknowledges the proactive leadership of the ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC/RESAO) in the past two years, especially in the area of capacity building of member Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) and the promotion of the rule of law, through the conduct of transparent, credible and peaceful elections in the region.

CENI Togo is also pleased to be associated with the ECONEC project to publish a book on the relevant activities of the Network, whose impact on the institutional visibility of ECONEC in election management in the region is more than apparent.

Interms of the achievements, ECONEC has provided opportunities for interactions and information and experience sharing among EMBs. These include the International Conference held 08 to 12 April 2018 in Abuja, Nigeria on "Challenges and Opportunities related to the use of new technologies in the management of elections."

Our country, Togo, which at the time was organizing legislative elections, participated at the meeting and made a presentation on the technological device that enabled the electronic transmission of the results during the 2013 legislative elections in our country.

Also, EMBs in the region have benefited from the Needs Assessment and technical support missions undertaken by ECONEC to Network members, including Togo.

Such missions assist countries preparing for elections to stay focused in adherence to national and regional electoral legal instruments and international best practices. These efforts should be sustained to deepen the conduct of credible elections and the consolidation of democracy and good governance in the ECOWAS region.

Interms of challenges faced by ECONEC, especially in relation to resource mobilization, we would like to urge members of the Network; the ECOWAS Commission and development partners to rally behind the Network to enable it to deliver on its mandate.

We believe that the strengthening of strategic partnerships and proactive leadership already shown by ECONEC will enable it to reinforce its effectiveness and enhance its visibility.

Cllr. Jerome G. Korkoya J. D., Chairman, NEC Liberia

ECONEC, in the past two years, under the leadership of Prof. Mahmood Yakubu, has witnessed the support of the Network to member electoral commissions in handling challenges that could potentially have threatened public confidence in the electoral management bodies (EMBs) and significantly marred the credibility of electoral outcomes. A case in point was the timely intervention of ECONEC in 2017 when the National Elections Commission of Liberia (NEC-Liberia) faced challenges with its voter roll. ECONEC, in collaboration with the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) of Nigeria, ECOWAS Commission and the UNDP, sent a technical team to work with NEC-Liberia Data Center team to clean up the voters' roll and avert a potential threat to the electoral process. ECONEC Chairman, Prof. Yakubu himself came to Liberia and provided moral and advisory support during that critical period in Liberia's electoral process.

Another example of ECONEC's impactful intervention is the Peer Review and the advisory mechanism where by at a critical period during an election in a member State, chairpersons of electoral commissions in the Network converge as guests of the commission organizing the election to provide support and counsel based on their own experiences. This was the case when ECONEC invited chairpersons of regional EMBs to Nigeria during that country's recently-concluded general elections.

In addition to the challenge of funding its activities, ECONEC had not been given ample publicity until the past two years. I believe, however, that this trend is changing, especially with the proactive nature of the current leadership of the Network.

Going forward, I believe that ECONEC can project itself even more robustly by being more proactive in using the Peer Review mechanism to provide technical support, in pre-emptive ways, to EMBs facing challenges in the Network. There is also the need for the Network to work with the ECOWAS commission, member States and partners, to promulgate relevant instruments and protocols to harmonize electoral administration in the ECOWAS region.

Mr Doudou Ndir, President, CENA, Senegal

The Independent National Electoral Commission, CENA, Senegal appreciates the benefits of the creation in 2008 of the ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC) or RESAO in French. Indeed, the Network has distinguished itself in electoral assistance initiatives in the region.

The election of a new five-member Steering Committee for ECONEC on the side-lines of an International Conference organized by the ECOWAS Commission in Cotonou, Benin Republic from 27 to 29 March, 2017, under the theme "Ten years of electoral experience in West Africa: Challenges and Lessons Learned," injected a new impetus to the work of ECONEC.

The conference itself was an opportunity for member countries to assess not only the electoral processes and the electoral administration in West Africa over the last decade, but also enabled in-depth discussions and fruitful exchanges on progress made particularly in the administration and management of electoral processes by Election Management Bodies (EMBs) in the region.

These include adopting proactive electoral legal frameworks, promoting participation and representative of women, youth and persons with a disability, to ensure political inclusiveness, and also ensuring a fool-proof voter registration, civil registration systems, financial planning and mobilization of resources.

Other issues are the collation and transmission of election results, logistics, electoral security, and the assessment of the contribution of political parties to the enforcement of good electoral practices in the ECOWAS region.

ECONEC continues to present a veritable platform for information and experience sharing and learning by EMBs, electoral experts, national and regional parliamentarians and representatives of governments of ECOWAS member states.

The outcomes of these initiatives continue to contribute to the conduct of credible elections and consolidation of democracy and good governance in the ECOWAS region.

The major concerns or challenges of Member States include:

- i. Domestication of the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance;
- ii. Voter registration and civil registration systems and making electoral register more credible
- iii. Capacity building in human resources and training for effective electoral operation;
- iv. Resource mobilization and Election financing system so that EMBs could compare notes to maximise lessons learnt;
- v. Management of electoral and logistical operations;
- vi. New technologies and electoral process;
- vii. Structured and regular stakeholder engagements coupled with effective and voter engagement and civic education;
- viii. Political parties and democratic consolidation, with emphasis on internal democracy and the financing of electoral campaigns.
- ix. Critical analysis of the Network's historical path, challenges and prospects, particularly the sourcing of funds for the conduct of credible, peaceful and transparent elections.

CENA Senegal would like to urge members and development partners to rally behind ECONEC with more technical and financial support. This will ensure that the EMBs deliver on their mandate of ensuring regularity, transparency and fairness of the elections in the ECOWAS member countries by international best practices.

Mr Francis Oke, ECONEC Permanent Secretary & Head Electoral Assistance Division, ECOWAS Commission

The ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC) was formed in February 2008 in Conakry, Guinea, with among other objectives, the aim of serving as a platform for the promotion of credible elections in the region according to international best practices. The Network is indeed the technical arm of ECOWAS in election matters.

The first President of ECONEC's Steering Committee or Governing Board was Mr Michel Moussa Tapsoba, the late former Chair of Burkina Faso's Electoral Commission. He was followed by Madam Christiana Thorpe, former Chair of Sierra Leone's Electoral Commission, who set up the first temporary ECONEC Secretariat in Freetown. She was replaced by Gen. Siaka Sangare, a Delegate General of elections in Mali, who was the acting President until March 2017, when ECONEC's 5th biennial General Assembly elected Nigeria's Prof Mahmood Yakubu as the new President of the ECONEC board, in Cotonou, Benin Republic.

ECONEC was without many concrete activities and visibility until 2017. It now has a Permanent Secretariat in Abuja, close to the ECOWAS Commission headquarters, with Head of the ECOWAS Commission's Electoral Assistance Division, as its Permanent Secretary. Under the leadership of the new President, the Network has undertaken a series of measures/activities:

These include:

- i. Technical assistance to Liberia's electoral commission to clean up its voter register
- ii. Post-election follow-up mission to Guinea to review the implementation of recommendations of ECOWAS observation mission to the country's 2015 elections
- iii. Solidarity missions to Mali, Senegal, Cote d'Ivoire, Togo etc.
- iv. Advocacy that facilitated Nigeria's donation of logistic equipment and registration kits that assisted Guinea Bissau's electoral Commission to conduct that country's February 2019 Legislative elections
- v. Creation and equipment of ECONEC's Permanent Secretariat in Abuja and recruitment of Secretariat staff
- vi. Study on the cost of elections in West Africa
- vii. Regional Media Workshop on Professional Reporting of Elections
- viii. Peer-Support and Learning mission to Nigeria's 2019 election

These activities were implemented with the support of partners such as GIZ, EU, ECES, IFES, ECOWAS and INEC Nigeria.

But despite its best efforts and achievements, ECONEC still faces major challenges, which include:

- i. Inadequate funding of activities
- ii. Regular payment of annual dues by members

The way forward is for the Secretariat to intensify efforts on capacity building for members and to put in place the mechanism for funds mobilization and sustainability of ECONEC's programmes towards the realization of its objectives. ECOWAS should also support ECONEC to sustain its activities and deliver on its mandate, while ECONEC members on their part, should pay their contributions regularly and assume ownership and responsibility of the Network.

V

CHALLENGES

There is no doubt that after two decades of the creation of independent electoral commissions in West African countries and the formation of the ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC) in 2008, some progress has been recorded in the electoral management processes in the region.

Today, despite their imperfections, all the 15 ECOWAS member States operate the democratic system of government. Most remarkably, the peaceful transmission of power from one elected leader to another is now a reality in most countries in the region, although some difficulties still remain in the quest for a faultless electoral management system.

The region owes the incremental achievements in the promotion of credible elections according to international best practices and consolidation of democracy and governance to the efforts of all political stakeholders including governments and non-state actors, especially the EMBs, civil society organisations, media and the electorate.

In this regard, the centrality and critical role of ECONEC in electoral processes in the ECOWAS region can not be over-emphasized. The Network, particularly in the past two years has demonstrated its position as an indispensable partner in the electoral process and therefore the entrenchment and sustainability of democracy in the region. But in delivering its delicate, complex and difficult mandate, the EMBs and ECONEC as their umbrella body, face a myriad of challenges:

Funding

From its inception and until recently, ECONEC had survived only thanks to the support of development partners, particularly the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA). To address this critical funding problem, the Network's Steering Committee under the leadership of Prof. Yakubu, the INEC Chair, rallied members to agree on the payment of an annual due. This might seem like a drop in the ocean, but represents a major step and demonstration of political will and commitment by members to ECONEC.

The ECOWAS Commission has started the release by instalment of the grant it pledged to ECONEC in 2013, and this is expected to contribute to an improvement of the Network's financial situation. But apart from funding, ECONEC and its members still face serious structural, logistical and operations challenges. Some of these are cross-cutting, while others are peculiar to individual EMBs. These include:

Structure and Independence of EMBs

EMBs are regularly criticized or even condemned, especially by the opposition for their structure/ composition and recruitment process, which are considered biased in favour of the government in power.

Since EMBs decide who wields political power, and perhaps, by extension, economic power, their composition and remit will remain a controversial topic, even though these all derive from the electoral laws and the political context of each country, which vary from country to country. Some EMBs by their composition tend to be political or semi-political, whereas others are said to be apolitical or neutral.

In some cases, the electoral commission is responsible for the entire electoral chain, from the establishment of the voters' list to the proclamation of results and the management of part of the electoral dispute (Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone and Liberia). In other cases, the Constitutional Court and other state institutions play imperative roles in election administration despite the existence of an independent electoral commission in charge of elections, and these other institutions announce or ratify the final results of elections (Benin, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Niger, and Togo).

Still, in some other countries, the role of the autonomous/independent electoral commission is restricted to control and supervision, while the electoral operations are carried out by an electoral Directorate often placed under the Ministry of the Interior (Senegal and Mali).

Many EMBs also suffer from internal crisis among its members. This distracts the internal functioning of the Commission and affects its ability or capacity to deliver on its mandate.

Electoral Fraud and Irregularities

Allegations of bias, fraud and corruption are also rampant regarding the functions of EMBs and these coupled with constant political interference disputes that trail elections tend to tarnish the image and integrity of EMBs and therefore, the credibility of elections they conduct.

There is also the nagging question of whether the independent electoral commissions are truly autonomous institutions, independent of the State administration, impartial, and therefore capable of guaranteeing free, transparent and fair elections to earn them the trust of political actors?

The answer to this question is critical, given that the credibility of an election is dependent on the credibility of the electoral administrator.

Cost of Elections

Another critical factor in election management is the cost of elections, which is constantly increasing with the attendant complaints from some stakeholders, especially the opposition. For instance, the government in power is accused in some cases of introducing a hike in the candidate's nomination fees, to shut off the opposition in an election (Benin2019).

To address this and similar issues, ECONEC in 2018 commissioned a regional study on the cost of elections in West Africa. The Network plans to use the findings of the study as an advocacy tool to canvas for the reduction of electoral expenses, to make elections and by extension democracy,

more cost-effective, participatory and inclusive. Another recommendation for the reduction of electoral expenses is the pooling of resources and electoral materials along the line planned by the ECOWAS Commission for a regional Depot.

Electoral Security and Vote-buying

Securing the vote, EMBs officials and electoral materials, voters and election observers is a major factor that could impact the outcome of an election. This is beyond the control of EMBs, but the relevant authorities should be made to live up to their responsibilities through advocacy.

There is also the threat of vote-selling or vote-buying which requires the cooperation of all stakeholders to address, and urgently too, to ensure the delivery of credible elections, which outcomes reflect the will of the electorate in West Africa.

Use of Technology in Elections

The introduction of technology has unleashed both positive and negative impacts on elections' management, not only in West Africa but across the world. In some cases, this is related to biometric registration of voters, use of biometric verification machines during voting and or digital transmission of election results. Kenya is a case in point, where the country's Supreme Court had to nullify the results of the 2017 presidential election and ordered a rerun because of issues related to procedure and technology. It is no surprise that ECONEC, in collaboration with partners, organised an international conference in Abuja in 2018 for serious conversations on the use of technology in elections. The meeting's Abuja Declaration provides concrete recommendations on the way forward.

Gender Main streaming and Political Inclusivity

Gender main streaming both by EMBs and in the general political space remains a challenge. The fact that there is only one woman among the ECONEC five-member governing board is a reflection of the composition of EMBs that make up ECONEC. Gender Units are either non-existent or not functioning effectively in several EMBs. The fact that women constitute more than 50% of the voting populations in many of the ECOWAS countries is not reflected in the political representation of women across the board. The same situation also applies to youth and Persons with Disability (PWDs).

Elections and Media–Hate speech/Crisis inciting Reporting and Fake News

It is never in doubt that the media plays a critical role during elections and the consolidation of democracy in a country. This role could be negative or positive, depending on the context. The emergence of digital technology and New or Social Media has added a new twist to the communication equation, with the destabilising effects of hate speech and fake news.

To address this issue, ECONEC in collaboration with partners has started a series of regional workshops to sensitise the media to their role before, during and the post-election periods, and how to leverage the benefits of social media for improved conduct of credible elections and consolidation of democracy in the ECOWAS region.

Multiple Electoral Legal Texts

Even at the national level, countries deal with different legal texts on the election, and the challenge is escalated at the regional level. Part of ECONEC's mandate is the gradual harmonization of the electoral processes if not the texts. This will facilitate regional integration in the area of electoral management and ensure that ECOWAS member States move in tandem on the democratic path.

External Influence

Studies have shown that many countries in West Africa rely heavily on development partners to cover the cost of their elections. While mutually beneficial bilateral or multilateral partnerships and collaborations should be encouraged, recipient countries of electoral support must ensure that such assistance does not lead to subterranean interference.

VI

THE WAY FORWARD

In spite of the enumerated challenges, ECONEC, especially in the last two years, has made tremendous progress as a significant influencer that has revolutionised issues around electoral management in West Africa. Still, the Network and other political stakeholders have a lot of ground to cover in the delivery of its mandate of promoting credible elections according to international best practices for the consolidation of democracy and good governance across the region.

ECONEC Funding

ECONEC should be adequately funded. The Secretariat should redouble efforts on funds mobilization, and to reaffirm their commitment to ownership and responsibility towards the Network, member EMBs and governments should go beyond prompt and regular payment of dues to ensuring adequate funding of ECONEC activities. Since 2017, members of ECONEC have agreed to pay the sum of Five Thousand US Dollars (\$5,000) annually. This is not even enough to pay for staff salaries for a year, let alone funding other activities. Even so, many members are yet to pay. The support from ECOWAS commission can only be used to augment salaries. The real work of ECONEC in the field cannot be supported from these sources.

Development partners are commended for their support. They should ensure that the momentum of achievement by ECONEC is sustained through continued support. However, the Governments of members States should assist ECONEC. This may not necessarily be in cash but in terms of electoral assistance to EMBs based on need. Nigeria has been playing a key role in this regard but other countries need to contribute as well.

Capacity Building for EMBs

ECONEC should continue the capacity building of its member EMBs since an organisation is as strong as its weakest member. The Network should intensify the support of members through technical Needs Assessment, Post-election / Mid-term, Solidarity, Peer learning and support Missions and Advocacy initiatives.

Pooling of Resources

Given the ever rising prohibitive cost of elections, ECONEC should encourage its members to embrace the pooling of resources and electoral materials. The plan by the ECOWAS Commission to set up a depot for electoral materials at Lungi, Sierra Leone could be a starting point.

Political Inclusivity

The initiative by ECONEC in collaboration with the ECOWAS Commission and development partners on gender mainstreaming with a recent workshop in Accra, Ghana should be sustained to ensure that a large percentage of the electorate in the region—women, youth and Persons with Disability—are not marginalised.

It is also heart-warming that a Symposium on political inclusivity will signpost the ECONEC 6th General Assembly scheduled for August 2019 in Abuja, Nigeria.

Harmonisation of Electoral Processes

ECONEC might not have the power to dictate to sovereign countries on the funding of individual EMBs, their composition, recruitment or remit, but subtle advocacy is known to be useful as demonstrated in the logistical support by the Federal Government of Nigeria to Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea Bissau in the last two years, which were facilitated by ECONEC.

Similarly, and in line with its mandate, the Network should intensify efforts towards the gradual harmonisation of the diverse texts and the electoral process according to international best practices.

The risk for an ineffectual ECONEC or EMBs could be a recipe for flawed elections, with the attendant disputations, violence and destabilisation of the ECOWAS region.

As the Prof. Mahmood Yakubu, the ECONEC President and Chair of Nigeria's INEC often says: "It is better and more cost-effective to deploy ECONEC during peace time instead of deploying ECOMOG (the regional military force) after failed or flawed elections."

Appendices

Appendix I

REPORT & RECOMMENDATIONS OF COST OF ELECTIONS IN THE ECOWAS REGION COUNTRY STUDY OF BENIN REPUBLIC, CAPE VERDE, GUINEA BISSAU, LIBERIA, NIGERIA & SENEGAL

Commissioned by ECONEC with support of OSIWA and GIZ

Consultants: Adele L. Jinadu, Francis A. Laleye and José A. Cabral Sanches

SUMMARY

I. Background of the Study

The country study of the cost of elections in each of the six countries was commissioned by ECONEC. Founded in February 2008, ECONEC has the primary objective of “promoting credible elections and advancing democracy in the ECOWAS Region.” To this end, ECONEC’s mission includes the following:

- i. Supporting the ECOWAS Commission in the pursuit and realization of the mandate of promoting regional integration, strengthening the electoral process, deepening of and advancement of democracy and good governance practices in West Africa, premised on provisions of the 1999 ECOWAS Protocol relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace keeping and Security, and the 2001 Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance;
- ii. Sharing of experience, information, technology and election documents; and
- iii. Rationalization and pooling of resources to reduce the cost of conducting elections¹.

The period since the adoption of the 2001 ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance and, before it, the ECOWAS Protocol relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Resolution etc., and after it, the African Union’s 2007 Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, has witnessed steady if fragile and faltering progress in the use of elections as a mechanism for resolving the crisis of political succession, which was endemic in the region in the immediate post-independence years between the 1960s and 1980s. Not only have general (legislative and presidential) elections been held regularly, and presidential term limits respected in most ECOWAS member states, there have also been alternations of power from one party to another, such as in Benin Republic, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Nigeria and Senegal.

III. Major Findings

The six country studies show the impact of each country’s history and political economy on the development of its competitive party and electoral politics, and into which its EMB is embedded. In all six countries, constitutional and political reform, impelled by popular struggle for constitutional and political reform to make the political and socio economic environment reflect requirements for electoral integrity and for protecting the peoples’ vote, as articulated in various African and international codes and standards, such as the 2001 ECOWAS 2001 Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, and the African Union’s Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, to

¹ Concept Note: ECOWAS, SADC, ECF Conference, Opportunities and Challenges in Use of Technology in Elections: Experiences from West and Southern Africa, p.6, Abuja, 9-11, 2018.

which the countries have acceded or had them oral responsibility to conform with because of their membership of the ECOWAS and the AU. The codes and standards provide accelerators and bench marks for determining the democratic character of competitive and electoral politics, and electoral integrity in the countries.

Structure, Power and Functions of EMBs

The post-1980s constitutional and political reform in the six countries reflected the driving objectives of the democratic struggles of the mid-1970s 1980s in Africa to insulate EMBs in Africa from partisan, especially executive branch or ruling party control, as was typically the case earlier. The insulation is demonstrated by the fact that both the colonially-inherited models of a “fully government controlled EMB,” and the government-controlled but decentralized EMB have virtually disappeared in Africa. [SeeTable III below].

In defining the power and functions of EMBs, as democracy-promoting institutions, the new democratic governance architecture provides for their autonomy/independence, although the nature, characterization, and extent of the insulation, revolving around the administrative and financial of its EMB varies from country to country. In Nigeria, to a large extent, as the country study shows, the financial autonomy of INEC has been considerably enhanced by the constitutional provision that makes its budget a first line charge on the consolidated revenue fund. What is clear, however, is that, no matter how defined, the embeddedness of the EMBs in competitive party and electoral politics, especially the politics of presidential succession, as well as in the bureaucratic politics of the national budgetary and procurement politics means that their independence or autonomy is constrained by the very fact of political embeddedness that is significantly driven by a zero-sum, winner-takes-all and rent-seeking political culture that tends to define the politics of succession in the typical African state.

Another factor impairing the administrative and financial independence of the EMB is due mainly to human, financial and logistic capacity deficits that are rooted significantly in the material structure of state power and politics. This situation derives from the fact of underdevelopment and a general political culture that breaches the essence of the separation of politics from administration. These deficits and cultural orientations also contribute significantly to impairing the efficient and effective pursuit and performance of the EMBs’ mandates. For example in the case of Nigeria, the Nigeria country study recounts how two former chairpersons of the country’s electoral commission lamented undue limits placed on the administrative and financial independence of the commission by its budgetary and procurement processes being tied to and guided by the rules of the country’s civil service.

The other country studies make similar points about limits to the autonomy of EMBs in the countries. Having noted that the CNE, under the provisions of Law No.56/VII/2010 of 9 March 2010, is an independent body “that is endowed with administrative and financial autonomy, [and] not hierarchically subject to any organ of political power,” the Cape Verde study observes that the CNE’s “financial autonomy is limited because its operational costs are supported by the budget approved and allocated by the State, through the country’s Ministry of Finance.”

The findings in the country case studies suggest that the autonomy of the EMBs is better viewed in terms of partnership and cooperation between them and the large body of institutions in state and society that also have mandates that are election-related. A good model of such partnership, based on mutuality and recognition between an EMB and critical state and non-state election stakeholders, is Nigeria’s INEC Election Security Strategy, which draws on its “Knowledge-Based Election Management.” The strategy emphasizes knowledge learning, including training and production. It provides a partnership framework for establishing an Inter agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES), the Election Operations Support Centre, and the Situation Room, as well as linkages to political parties and election observers². The aggressive and painstaking effort of INEC since 2011 to build confidence in its determination to conduct credible elections in partnership with critical stakeholders has paid off well. Unrelenting political pressures from pro-democracy forces in state and society also contributed to INEC’s securing significant exemptions from civil service budgetary and procurements rules.

What the country studies also bring out is the fact that national constitutions or electoral laws differ between, on the one hand, Benin, Nigeria, and Liberia, where there is only a single EMB in each country,³ and, on the other hand, Cape

² Okechukwu Ibeanu, Knowledge Production, Strategic Planning and Election Management, mimeo, n.d., especially pp.5-11.

³ Because of Nigeria’s federal system, the 1999 Constitution provides for an EMB, the State Independent Electoral Commission (SIEC) at the state (i.e. sub-/unit) that is empowered to conduct elections to only local government councils only in the state. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) conducts elections for president and the national assembly (House of Representatives and Senate), and the Governor and House of Assembly at the state level

Verde, Guinea-Bissau, and Senegal, where there are hybrid EMBs, in each country.

To sum up, the following provides an overview of the major highlights of the six-country study on the cost of elections:

- (i) The rise in elections costs is due to the increasing integrity cost of elections, as reflected in the escalation in the technology and administrative costs of elections. Drivers of the rise must be set in the broader context of the general cost of governance, lack of trust among the political class, fed by the underlying anti-democratic political culture and related ethics and accountability deficits that constrain and sully political and electoral competition, diverting it from its public interest objectives.
- (ii) Delayed releases or deep cuts in releases of approved funds in the election

budget are major factors in the rising cost of elections.

- (iii) Access to information on election budget is not easy and is due either to poor record keeping or to are silent bureaucratic reluctance to provide access. Even when records are made available, there are inconsistencies, lack of clarity and duplication in the records, reflecting what can be characterized as a “weak” or flawed expenditure monitoring system within the EMBs.
- (iv) There is increasing awareness among the EMB son the need for strategic planning, focused on/targeted at internal administrative reform and investment in resource capacity building as measures to reduce or stabilize election cost in the medium-to long-term, and reduce the integrity cost of elections.
- (v) The politics of the election budgetary and election procurement processes is a major encumbrance on the ability of the EMBs to pursue its mandate effectively and efficiently. In most cases, it results indelays and “emergency” purchases, giving the impression that the EMBs lack the sufficient administrative and financial independence to engender confidence and credibility in their activities.
- (vi) Reliance on donor support of, or contribution to the election budget is progressively decreasing over election cycles, but this needs to be situated against the high dependence of some of the countries on donor support for their national budget—a development, which offsets the advantage of national ownership brought about reduced donor funding of elections.
- (vii) Donor support, particularly from the international development partners, is generally not under the control of, and disbursement by the EMBs.
- (viii) ECOWAS support of and monitoring of election-related activities points to the potential positive democracy-promotion role that regional economic communities can and should playindemocratic consolidation in their respective regions.
- (ix) Although the private sector (national and multinational) benefits hugely from election procurements, there is an equal need for the sector to invest indemocratic institutions regularly and particularly to democracy-promoting institutions such as EMBs.
- (x) The capacity of, and opportunity for the EMBs to explore sources of their internally-generated revenue to strengthen their financial independence, reduce cost, and provide a safety net against the delayed release of, or cuts in approved election budget line items, are constrained by legislation.

IV. Recommendations

The major recommendations from each of the country study, categorized into sets of recommendations for each of the following:

- (a) National Government;
- (b) The national EMB; and
- (c) ECONEC and ECOWAS

A. The National Government

Each National Government to:

1. Amend the constitution or electoral law to strengthen the administrative and financial independence of EMB, to provide for:
 - i. Reservation of a percent of the national budget for elections, as a charge on the country’s consolidated

revenue fund, deposited into a nescrow account or TrustFund, managed by the EMB but with strict accountability and transparency over sight exercised by a board of trustees of eminent citizens outside of the public bureaucracy, put in place.

- ii. A three-year election rolling plan for the election-budget, passed three-years before the general elections, with twice-yearly releases and disbursement in January and June of each of the two years before the elections.
- iii. Establishment of an EMB TrustFund, if none currently exists, under the control of the country's EMB, but subject to transparency and accountability requirements, for which grants to NEC and internally generated revenue of NEC can be deposited for use by the EMB.
- iv. EMB to source for internally generated revenue, if no such provision currently exists, deposited into an escrow account or an Election TrustFund, for use by and under control of the EMB, with accountability guarantees.
- v. Exemption from the provisions of the national procurement laws for the procurement of sensitive security election materials, such as ballot papers and results forms, under specified conditions, such as approval by the country's President or national cabinet.
- vi. Holding of elections as applicable or relevant, outside of the rainy season in the country.
- vii. Coordination and integration of the budget line items of the different bodies and institutions involved in the administration and management of elections, in countries with more than one EMB, to avoid duplication of similar activities and parallel spending.
- viii. Holding all elections simultaneously, where feasible, on the same day or closely following each other.

2. Consider imposing an Election Tax, to be administered by eminent national citizens outside government or the public service, under an Election Trust Fund, in line with the logic of the binding AU-wide levy of 0.2 percent on eligible imports adopted at the first AU Heads of State and Government Retreat, towards commitment to self-reliance, and the earlier imposition of Education Trust Fund in some ECOWAS member states on the private sector, as an investment by the private sector in elections as a mechanism for democracy, development, peace and security in the ECOWAS region.

B. **EMBs**

Each EMB to consider the following as measures, designed around adopting, or strengthening current strategic planning and capacity-building, and streamlining administration, financial planning and training on which to anchor their activities:

- i.. Prepare and submit the election budget for consideration timeously, by statutorily designated public authorities, as provided in national constitutions and relevant national legislation.
- ii.. Strengthen its internal mechanisms by plugging and constraining leakages and rent-seeking activities in its procurement activities.
- iii. Initiate d initiatives:
 - (a). Partner with the relevant stakeholder stounder take a five-to seven-year Strategic Planning, to rationalize its activities; envision futures scenarios, build and enhance capacity, especially in critical financial management, logistics and ICT areas through research and training; trim waste, undertake a management audit to avoid duplication of activities and its departments; decentralize its operations, particularly those relating to contract award, procurement of election materials, and the recruitment of adhoc staff at lower levels, such as the centrally deployment of staff and election materials from its headquarters field offices.
 - (b). Establish an in-house think tank for applied comparative policy research on trends in West African regional and African continently electoral and political behavior that can help the EMB adopt and implement cost-saving strategies in planning for elections, especially related to the high technology and integrity costs of elections.
 - (c). Carry out regular and, especially post-election audit of election materials and resources, emphasizing avoiding theft and wastage, especially by identifying and taking measures for the safe storage of re-usable election materials, to save on replacement cost of procuring them every

election year.

- (d) Pursue on-going efforts, or begin, to integrate its voter registration exercise into the country's national identity card program. If the National ID card is yet to take off firmly or there are problems with effecting the integration in the short-term, explore the cost/benefit implications of gradually introducing biometric data registration, using direct data capture or other credible options to replace the current whole sale voter registration exercise before every election, with continuous voter registration.
- (e) Embark on or strengthen on-going confidence-building out reach to political parties and civilsociety. Poor relations with the two critical stakeholders often can, and often add to the cost of elections.
- (f) Explore, using the instrumentality provided by ECONEC, election cost-saving strategies, such as the importation of electoral materials from ECOWAS member states, and else where in Africa, from countries that have a comparative advantage in the production of election materials.

C. **ECONEC & ECOWAS**

1. ECONEC and, through it, ECOWAS should consider the following to help reduce or stabilize the cost of elections, in the medium-to long-term, in ECOWAS member-states, in line with their obligations under the 2001 ECOWAS Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance; and the 2007 African Union Charter on Democracy, Elections and Government:
 - i. Deploy their power of moral suasion to encourage the ECOWAS member states to take a proactive interest in helping to strengthen the independence of their EMBs, in line with the recommendations in this study
 - ii. Encourage ECOWAS member countries to impose an Election Tax, to be administered by eminent national citizens outside government or the public service, under an Election Trust Fund, in line with not only the logic of the binding AU-wide levy of 0.2 percent on eligible imports adopted at the first retreat of the AU Heads of State and Government Retreat, towards commitment to self-reliance, but also the earlier imposition of Education Trust Fund in some ECOWAS member states on the private sector, as an investment by the private sector in elections as a mechanism for democracy, development, peace and security in the ECOWAS region.

Appendix II

Abuja Declaration by International Conference on the Use of Technology in Elections



OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES IN THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN ELECTIONS

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC-RESAO) in collaboration with the Electoral Commissions Forum of Southern Africa Development Countries (ECF/SADC) with the support of the European Centre for Electoral Support (ECES), managers of the Component 1 of European Union Support for Democratic Governance in Nigeria (EU-SDGN) held an International Conference, on Opportunities and Challenges in the Use of Technology in Elections: Experiences from West and Southern Africa at the Transcorp Hilton Hotel, Abuja, Nigeria from 9 to 11 April 2018.

The Conference reviewed, assessed and shared experiences based on lessons learnt by Election Management Bodies (EMBs) in the ECOWAS and SADC countries and others on the introduction, trend, impact and potentials of the use of election technologies in the last three decades.

The Conference was attended by Chairpersons, Vice-Chairpersons and Members of Election Management Bodies of the ECOWAS and SADC countries, Representatives of the Ministries and Agencies in charge of elections in some ECOWAS member states, as well as the Chairman of the Election Commission of Jordan and of the Independent Electoral and Boundary Commission of Kenya, who gave the Keynote Address. Also in attendance were the EU Ambassador to Nigeria and ECOWAS, members of the Diplomatic Corps in Nigeria and representatives of the ECOWAS and African Union Commission. Other participants include election and election technology experts, staff of INEC, ECONEC and ECF-SADC Secretariat, leaders and representatives of political parties and Civil Society Organisations, the media, EU-SDGN project implementing partners and development partners, including the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) and other stakeholders.

Participants at the Conference:

ACKNOWLEDGE the benefits of the use of technology to boost public confidence in the electoral process and for the protection of the sanctity and integrity of the ballot in ensuring that leaders in the ECOWAS and ECF-SADC regions now obtain their mandate and legitimacy solely through the ballot box, based on the rule of law and will of the people; **SALUTE** the courage, determination and resilience of citizens and managers of elections in the ECOWAS and SADC regions in promoting and defending democracy through the deployment of ICT in elections to enhance the credibility, integrity and transparency of the electoral process to the extent that power now alternates between the ruling and opposition parties through largely peaceful electoral and democratic transition processes;

RECOGNISE the role of international and regional organisations, development partners, governments and state institutions, political parties, traditional and religious leaders, Civil Society Organisations, the Media and the citizenry in facilitating and supporting the use of technology in the conduct of credible electoral processes and peaceful transitions, thereby deepening democracy and good governance and promoting national and regional peace, stability and development in the ECOWAS and SADC regions;

NOTE the progressive adherence of ECOWAS and ECF-SADC member States to the various international, continental and regional protocols and principles, including the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, the ECOWAS Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance and the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections, furthering the enhancement of electoral processes and the deepening of democratic culture in both regions;

TAKE a critical and holistic look at the adoption, deployment and use of technology in elections, over the last three decades. Having reviewed the impact of such deployment and drawing appropriate lessons with a view to strengthening the sanctity, integrity and credibility of current and future elections and consolidating democracy and good governance in the ECOWAS and ECF-SADC regions, hereby declare as follows:

1. EMBs of ECONEC and ECF-SADC regions bear the burden of discharging the sacred national duty of organizing and conducting free, fair, credible and transparent elections, bearing in mind that the outcome of a well-conducted and generally acceptable election is the basis of good governance, peace, stability and development. On the other hand, a badly conducted election with a disputed outcome is always a trigger for conflict, sometimes resulting in a civil war with negative consequences, not only on the affected state but on neighbouring states in particular and the region and the continent in general.
2. EMBs of ECONEC and ECF-SADC regions are aware that sustaining the usage of technology in elections is an expensive undertaking. This requires the mobilization of adequate resources, which sometimes may be beyond the capacity of the state to bear as a sovereign responsibility. Therefore, the Private Sector, which requires a stable and peaceful political and socio-economic environment to operate and thrive, should contribute to meeting the cost of elections;
3. EMBs of ECONEC and ECF-SADC regions are willing to take advantage of the opportunities offered by technological innovations to improve the credibility of the electoral processes and to enhance the sanctity of the ballot and integrity of electoral outcomes. In doing so, EMBs should view the application of technological innovations in the electoral process as a facilitator, rather than a “magic bullet” for the delivery of good and credible elections by utilising simple, appropriate, cost-effective and sustainable technologies. The deployment of such technological equipment and applications should be secured in law, protected against intrusion and accompanied by appropriate training of electoral officials and effective civic and voter education to engender trust, confidence and ownership by all stakeholders;
4. EMBs of ECONEC and ECF-SADC regions are conscious of the numerous challenges associated with the adoption, deployment and usage of electoral technology, including the deficit of infrastructure and expertise, cost, choice and effectiveness of technology, as well as the twin issues of communication platforms and the security of sensitive election data in a world characterised by cyber warfare and election interference through the use of technology on a global scale by State and non-State actors;
5. EMBs of ECONEC and ECF-SADC regions recognize that while the use of technology is a welcome innovation in the electoral process, elections are governed by law. Consequently, efforts must be made to address the gaps between the technological innovations and the provisions of the legal framework to these innovations by enacting clear and unambiguous provisions in the electoral guidelines and regulations which permit their deployment in good time before elections. In enacting such “fit for purpose” provisions and regulations, EMBs must take into consideration such obligations under international and regional protocols and best practices governing elections;
6. EMBs of ECONEC and ECF-SADC regions are committed to strengthening capacity development and training of their electoral officials to promote efficiency, effectiveness and performance in the use of electoral technology in the delivery of free, fair, credible, transparent and peaceful elections and provision of better electoral services to the people. Efforts should be made towards the establishment of an African Technical Institute to drive home-grown research and innovation in electoral technology;

7. EMBs of ECONEC and ECF-SADC regions are committed to deploying appropriate technology to pool election resources, materials and experts for common use across both regions, based on the principle of mutual assistance, burden sharing and comparative advantage;
8. EMBs of ECONEC and ECF-SADC regions will continue to expedite action on the use of technology to provide access to information and promote political inclusivity and full participation and representation of women, youth, People Living with Disabilities and all other marginalized groups, including IDPs and the Diaspora in the political process; and
9. EMBs of ECONEC and ECF-SADC regions are fully cognizant that for technology to be an enabler in promoting electoral trust and integrity, it must be simple, accurate, verifiable, secure, and transparent and under stood by all stakeholders.

While care must be taken that the use of technology is not over-regulated interms of legal provisions, such usage must be well-grounded in law as technology can not operate in a vacuum or with itself.

10. EMBs of ECONEC and ECF-SADC regions pledge to further collaboration and to use the Abuja Conference as a turning point in a collective effort to deepen the deployment of technology for credible elections and building of stable democracies in Africa.

Adopted in Abuja, Nigeria on Wednesday, 11 April 2018



Appendix III

Communique of ECONEC Media Workshop on Professional Reporting of Elections



COMMUNIQUE

Two-day ECONEC Media Training Workshop on Professional Reporting of Elections in the ECOWAS Region, 29-30 October 2018, in Abuja, Federal Republic of Nigeria.

PREAMBLE

Cognizant of the critical role of the media in the promotion of credible elections and consolidation of democracy, the ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC) in collaboration with the German Agency for International Cooperation, GIZ, organized a two-day media training workshop in Abuja, the Federal Republic of Nigeria on the Theme: “Professional Reporting of Elections in the ECOWAS Region, with the following objectives:

- a) To develop sustained media interest in the delivery of credible, transparent and peaceful elections in the ECOWAS region, with the media playing their key functions as a medium for public information, education and dissemination of useful and factual reports for political inclusivity
- b) Assist political stakeholders in ensuring that citizens live up to their civic responsibilities and can make knowledge-based decisions in the choice of their leaders.
- c) Engage with journalists in the conventional and social media sectors focusing on their constitutional and social responsibilities for the protection of national security and promotion of democracy and good governance in the region;
 - a) Create a corps of well-informed media professionals with requisite skills in election reporting;
 - b) Contribute to the creation of an enlightened electorate, who can make informed choices in the election of their leaders for the promotion of credible, transparent and peaceful elections, democracy and good governance in the ECOWAS region;
 - c) Reduce conflict / crisis inciting reporting and hate speech during election periods, and thus promote peaceful electoral process across the region;
- d) Minimize the risks posed by social media and harnessing the advantages of media diversity and pluralism to boost credible and peaceful elections and consolidation of Democracy in the region; and,
- e) Build mutually beneficial relationship between the media and other stakeholders including political leadership, security agencies, Election Management Bodies (EMBs), civil society and development partners to promote credible elections and good governance in the region.

Thirty- six (36) journalists from ECOWAS member States participated in the workshop, which was coordinated by three Resource Persons—a Media expert, an Electoral expert and the Facilitator.

The workshop was declared open by Prof Mahmood Yakubu, ECONEC governing board President and INEC Chair, who was represented by the INEC Acting Chair, Dr Mustapha Lecky. The INEC boss called for trust, openness and cooperation between election management bodies and the media to ensure the delivery of credible, transparent and peaceful elections in West Africa. While noting that meeting was coming several months before major elections in the region, with campaigns by political parties for the 2019 general elections in Nigeria starting in less than three weeks, he urged the media always to discharge its social responsibility function of “gatekeeper in ensuring transparency and accountability in the electoral process.”

In conclusion, the INEC boss enjoined election administrators and journalists to carry out their responsibilities with a high sense of duty and professionalism, to avoid a repeat of the “havoc poorly conducted elections and provocative reportage have caused in our region.”

In his address of welcome, Mr Francis Oke, Head ECOWAS Electoral Assistance Division and ECONEC Permanent Secretary, acknowledged the support which ECONEC has received from the ECOWAS Commission and development partners, including GIZ and the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), since its formation in 2008. He stressed that such collaborative partnership should be sustained to enable ECONEC, which is a technical arm of ECOWAS, to deliver on its mandate of promoting credible elections and consolidation of democracy in the region.

In her good will message, the GIZ representative, Mrs Phidelia Amey, assured that the GIZ remained committed to working with ECOWAS to ensure the delivery of the Commission’s peace and security mandate.

Since the media plays a key role in shaping the narrative of political conversation, she said the workshop would encourage media professionals to be more informative and educative of the electorate on electoral matters and called on the participants to come up with recommendations that would assist ECOWAS and ECONEC in the promotion of democracy and good governance in the region.

INEC senior officials, including National Commissioners, were among dignitaries that graced the Opening ceremony of the workshop, part of activities under the ECONEC 20 16-18 Action Plan.

Day One: Four presentations were made on Introduction to normative instruments governing democratic elections (Global, continental, and regional); Understanding elections as a process with different phases; the social responsibility of the Media during elections; and sourcing of credible information on the electoral process.

Day Two featured presentations on Strict adherence to the Media Code of Conduct in Election Reporting; Leveraging the benefits of new / social media in election reporting; Role Play by the participants on how to Break Barriers to access information during elections; a Panel Discussion Building effective, collaborative partnerships with the Media to ensure credible electoral processes in West Africa; Recommendations of best practices for constructive reporting of election-related events (Avoiding sensationalism etc.); Summary of Workshop discussions and the way forward; and Presentation of Certificates to the Participants.

Based on the presentations, the role play and discussions, the following recommendations were made:

1. A Media Network to be set up to foster information / experience sharing and coordination of professional reporting of elections for the entrenchment of democracy in West Africa. The network should be supported using various media platforms, including Whatsapp.
2. ECOWAS Commission and development partners should as a matter of urgency, intensify efforts for capacity building / strengthening of journalists
3. (traditional and new/social media) to enable them to play their widely acknowledged roles of information, education and sensitisation of citizens on their civic responsibilities, in support of credible elections and consolidation of democracy in the ECOWAS region.

4. There should be synergy and collaboration between traditional media and social media professionals to further the electoral process and ensure national integration. Election reporters should also work to avoid, identify and eliminate the negative impacts of social media, especially fake news.
5. An environment to foster freedom and good working conditions should be created for the media to perform its role effectively as gatekeepers and critical stakeholders in the delivery of credible elections, the Communiqué stressed.
6. Regional Guidelines or Code of Conduct should be created to ensure effective media self-regulation for professional reporting of elections in the ECOWAS region.
7. Participants expressed total support for an ECONEC initiative to institute regional Awards to recognize/acknowledge Best Election Reporters in various media categories—print, electronic, online and new/social media platforms.
8. Media workers should keep abreast with relevant instruments governing electoral processes at the national, regional and international levels, and ensure that citizens are adequately and adequately informed for them to make informed decisions in the choice of their leaders, who must be held accountable.
9. Election reporters should be guided by professional ethics and code of conduct related to crisis inciting reporting, to ensure balance, neutrality and peace building in their reportage.
10. Election reporters should avoid sensationalism or reports that could undermine the rights of individuals or national and regional security.
11. Journalists should diversify and ensure the authenticity of their sources of information.
12. The media should structurally engage with political stakeholders, including election management bodies (EMBs), political parties, security agencies, civil society and the electorate to ensure that everyone played by the rules and also to hold each stakeholder to account.
13. The media should take into account, in electoral reporting, issues and data on political inclusivity, gender balance, participation and representation of women, youth, persons with disability and minorities.

Journalists from the traditional or conventional media should leverage the benefits of the new/social media, and work to avoid, identify and eliminate the negative impacts of social media, especially fake news.

Appendix IV

IMPORTANT QUOTES

1. Building upon the efforts of its forebears, the leadership of ECONEC in the last two years, with the support of the ECOWAS Commission and development partners, has chalked up some remarkable achievements in guiding member EMBs along the path of best practices in the conduct of credible and transparent elections in the ECOWAS region

Ghana's former President H.E. John Dramani Mahama, who is well known for his commitment to democracy in Africa, has led several Observation Missions to major elections on the continent.

2. A well-run election will promote peace and stability, but a badly run election is a recipe for chaos, violence and instability
3. It is better and more cost-effective to deploy ECONEC during peace time instead of Deploying ECOMOG (the regional military force) after failed or flawed elections

Prof Mahmood Yakubu, ECONEC President and Chair, INEC Nigeria

4. ECONEC will need the political and financial support of (ECOWAS) member states to enable it to provide the requisite support to its members. This type of support which is an expression of ownership will guarantee some level of predictability in the work of ECONEC

Dr Mohamed Ibn Chambas, UN Secretary General's Special Representative and Head, UN Office For West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), and one of the founding fathers of ECONEC.

5. These achievements by ECONEC / RESAO suggest the need for synergy and strengthening of collaboration between the Network and the ECOWAS Commission, towards the realization of the collective objectives of promoting credible, transparent, free and inclusive elections for the consolidation of democracy in the region

Gen. Francis Béhanzin, ECOWAS Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace & Security

6. ECONEC has been adept at advocacy on a national and regional level to continuously engage stake holders on the need to continuously improve the electoral process standards and the need for member countries to share best practice through exchange of personnel and innovative processes. The reward for good work is usually more work, and as such, despite its successes, ECONEC can do more.

Ms Ayisha Osori, Executive Director of OSISA, ECONEC's major financier

7. A case in point was the timely intervention of ECONEC in 2017 when the National Elections Commission of Liberia (NEC-Liberia) faced challenges with its voter roll. ECONEC, in collaboration with the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) of Nigeria, ECOWAS Commission and the UNDP, sent a technical team to work with NEC-Liberia Data Center team to clean up the voters' roll and avert a potential threat to the electoral process. ECONEC Chairman, Prof. Yakubu himself came to Liberia and provided moral and advisory support during that critical period in Liberia's electoral process.

Counsellor Jerome Korkoya, Chair of Liberia's National Electoral Commission

8. The ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC) with its mandate to promote democracy and good governance provides the bridge for the institutionalization of credible democracy in the ECOWAS region

Appendix V



Selected Press Releases on ECONEC Activities



PRESS RELEASE

NIGERIA HEADS NEW BOARD OF ECOWAS ELECTION MANAGEMENT NETWORK

Professor Mahmood Yakubu, Chair of Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has been elected President of the new five-member Board of the 15-nation ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC) for the next two years.

In a poll held during ECONEC's 5th biennial General Assembly meeting in Cotonou, the economic capital Benin Republic on Wednesday, 29 March, 2017, the Chair of Benin Republic's Electoral Commission Mr. Emmanuel Tiando also emerged 1st Vice President. His Guinea-Bissau counterpart, Mr. Jose Pedro Sambu, was elected 2nd Vice President, while Mr. Newton Barry of Burkina Faso clinched the position of ECONEC Treasurer, with his counterpart from Cabo Verde Ms Maria do Rosario Goncalves elected deputy Treasurer.

The new board takes over from the outgoing one headed by Mali's Gen. Siaka Sangare.

In his post-election speech, Prof Yakubu thanked his colleagues for their support and pledged his and INEC's commitment to reposition ECONEC, in the ECOWAS spirit of solidarity and cooperation among the Network member States.

In accordance with its constitutive statute, ECONEC's headquarters is hosted by the ECOWAS Electoral Assistance Division (EAD), within the Department of Political Affairs Peace and Security in Abuja, with Mr. Francis Oke, Head of EAD as its Executive Secretary.

The Network was set up in 2008 to foster cooperation and experience sharing among member States and to support ECOWAS in the realisation of its mandate of regional integration and the promotion of electoral processes with integrity for the deepening of democracy in the region.

In handing over the mantle of leadership, Gen. Sangare, who had headed ECONEC in an acting capacity, thanked ECOWAS and development partners, especially the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) for their invaluable support.

He underlined financial constraint as the Network's major challenge and called for measures to address the problem and make the institution effective and efficient, and its activities sustainable. The President of ECONEC's pioneer board, Burkina Faso's Michel Tapsoba, was succeeded by Sierra Leone's Christiana Thope (2012-2015), and then Mali's Gen. Sangare.

The election of the new board, observed by the ECOWAS Commissioner of Political Affairs, Peace and Security, Mrs. Halima Ahmed, was on the margin of the just-ended International Workshop on ***A Decade of ECOWAS Electoral Assistance and Promotion of Democracy in West Africa: Lessons Learned and Challenges***, which was attended by all the ECOWAS Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs), except Ghana.

The workshop produced a ***Cotonou Declaration*** on the improvement of electoral processes and entrenchment of democracy in West Africa, at the behest of the ECOWAS Commission's President H.E. Marcel de Souza, who officially opened the Conference on Monday.



PRESS RELEASE

ABUJA, NIGERIA 5, JULY 2017

BOARD OF ECOWAS ELECTORAL BODIES MEETS IN ABUJA

The Governing Board of the ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC), headed by Chair of Nigeria's Independent Electoral Commission (INEC), Prof. Mahmood Yakubu holds a two-day session in Abuja from Thursday 6th July 2017 ahead of its Needs Assessment and Solidarity Missions to Sierra Leone and Liberia which are due to hold crucial elections.

The Abuja meeting, the first by the five-member board since its election at the ECONEC 5th biennial General Assembly meeting in Cotonou, Benin Republic last April, will adopt the body's Action Plan and activities for 2017-2019 and discuss details of the missions to Sierra Leone and Liberia.

Liberia holds key presidential election in October 2017 and the ECONEC Solidarity mission is in support of the electoral management body to deliver a credible and peaceful election in that country, where ECOWAS played a leading role in the restoration of peace and democracy after more than a decade of civil war.

Similarly, post-conflict Sierra Leone holds its presidential election in March 2018. The ECONEC Needs Assessment mission is to determine in what areas the Network could assist.

During their stay in Abuja the ECONEC board members, heads of electoral bodies from Benin, Burkina Faso, Guinea-Bissau, Cabo Verde and Nigeria, are also expected to meet with the leadership of the ECOWAS Commission and Nigerian authorities.

The ECONEC Secretariat is hosted by the Electoral Assistance Division (EAD), within the Department of Political Affairs Peace and Security of the ECOWAS Commission in Abuja.

The Network, made up of electoral bodies of the 15 ECOWAS member States, was established in 2008 to foster cooperation and experience sharing among member States. It also supports ECOWAS in the realisation of its mandate of regional integration and the strengthening of electoral processes with integrity for the deepening of democracy and good governance in the region.

The head of ECONEC's pioneer board, Burkina Faso's Michel Tapsoba, was succeeded by Sierra Leone's Christiana Thorpe (2012-2015), and then Mali's Gen. Siaka Sangare, who handed over to Nigeria's Prof. Yakubu at the Cotonou General Assembly meeting.



PRESS RELEASE

ABUJA, NIGERIA 6, JULY 2017

NIGERIAN SENATE PRESIDENT CHARGES ECOWAS ELECTORAL BODIES ON CREDIBLE POLLS

Senator Bukola Saraki, President of the Nigerian Senate on Thursday, 6 July 2017 in Abuja charged heads of election management bodies in the ECOWAS region to always deliver credible elections that will deepen democracy and good governance in West Africa.

“You should collectively work for an electoral process that we can be proud of and even export to other regions,” the Senate president told members of the governing board of the ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC), who paid him a courtesy visit led by Prof. Mahmood Yakubu, President of the ECONEC board and Chair of Nigeria’s Independent Electoral Commission (INEC).

The Senate president observed that some years ago a number of countries in the region were under military rule or authoritarian governments. The fact that all ECOWAS countries are now under democracy is a credit to the efforts put in by the electoral management bodies, he added. Senator Saraki, chair of Nigeria’s two-chamber National Assembly explained that the country’s lawmakers would continue to support election administrators to deliver credible elections in Nigeria. He cited the prompt passage of a bill for the amendment of Nigeria’s electoral law as a demonstration of this support.

Speaking earlier, Prof. Yakubu underscored the importance of credible elections to the entrenchment of democracy and good governance in the ECOWAS region and the commitment of ECONEC to the realisation of this objective.

“The goal is to have an effective ECONEC that supports democracy rather than an ECOWAS military force as a result of election related conflicts,” the President of the ECONEC board said. The courtesy visit to the Nigerian Senate was part of the activities organised for the ECONEC governing board members on the first of their two-day meeting in Abuja.

Welcoming his colleagues earlier at INEC Headquarters, Prof Yakubu said the conduct of regular and periodic elections was the first step towards the development of democracy and democratic governance.

“However, the contestation for power and the outcome of elections, especially the perception of citizens as to whether elections are free, fair and credible can either enhance or disrupt the democratic process,” he stressed.

The ECONEC board chief said that given that the conduct of “elections has been a trigger for violent conflicts as well as a panacea for post-conflict peace building,” the “impartiality of the election management body in the conduct of elections plays a critical role in determining whether the outcome of elections is accepted or not.”

He told the gathering which included INEC Commissioners that the board meeting would among others, review the ECONEC 2017-2018 Work Plan, the Statute of the Network and details of the planned Solidarity and Needs Assessment Missions to Liberia and Sierra Leone, which are holding crucial elections in October 2017 and March 2018 respectively.

Mrs Catherine Angai, representative of the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), which has been supporting ECONEC since its inception in 2008, reiterated the commitment of the NGO to good governance and credible elections in the region.

She commended EMBs in the region for working to secure their independence in the delivery of elections with integrity.

Prof. Yakubu in company of the other ECONEC governing board members also commissioned the ECONEC Secretariat provided by INEC to the regional network, within the complex of the Nigerian Electoral Institute, Abuja.

Other members of the five-nation board attending the Abuja meeting, the first since the board's election last March at the Network's 5th biennial General Assembly in Cotonou, are Mr. Emmanuel Tiando from Benin Republic, Ahmed Newton Barry of Burkina Faso, Jose Sambu from Guinea-Bissau and Maria do Rosario Goncalves from Cabo Verde. Some of them would proceed on the ECONEC missions to Liberia and Sierra Leone from Abuja.



PRESS RELEASE

ABUJA, NIGERIA 7, JULY 2017

NIGERIA PLEDGES SUPPORT TO ECOWAS ELECTORAL MANAGEMENT BODIES

Nigeria's Acting President, Prof. Yemi Osinbajo has pledged the country's continued support to the ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC) in its efforts to deliver credible elections and advance democracy and good governance in the region.

Receiving members of the ECONEC Governing board at the Aso Rock Presidential Villa on Friday, 7th July 2017, he congratulated Prof. Mahmood Yakubu, Chair of the Nigerian Independent Electoral Commission (INEC), on his election as President of the ECONEC governing board last March at Cotonou, Benin Republic.

He said Nigeria was honoured to host the Network's Permanent Secretariat in Abuja, which was commissioned on Thursday, and promised that Nigeria would support the effective functioning of the Secretariat.

Prof. Yakubu had earlier briefed the Vice president on the mandate of ECONEC, set up by the ECOWAS Commission in 2008 to promote credible elections in member States by encouraging the gradual harmonization of electoral legislations and best practices through experience-sharing and peer learning of good practices in electoral matters.

The audience was on the margins of the ECONEC governing board's two-day meeting in Abuja. The board members were also received by the Nigerian Senate President Dr. Bukola Saraki on Thursday and are due to travel from Abuja on Support and Needs Assessment Missions to Liberia and Sierra Leone, which are holding crucial elections in October 2017 and March 2018 respectively.

The five-member ECONEC board comprises heads of electoral commissions of Nigeria, Benin Republic, Burkina Faso, Guinea-Bissau and Cabo Verde.



PRESS RELEASE

ABUJA, NIGERIA 10, JULY 2017

ECONEC DELEGATION MEETS SIERRA LEONE POLITICAL STAKEHOLDERS

A delegation of the ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC) governing board led by its President Prof Mahmood Yakubu has appealed to Sierra Leone's political stakeholders to see elections as a sovereign responsibility and democracy as a collective sacrifice for the wellbeing of the people and national development.

The delegation, which is on a News Assessment and Solidarity Missions to Sierra Leone and Liberia, which are holding crucial elections in March 2018 and October 2017 respectively gave the advice in Freetown on Monday 10th July 2017, during separate meetings with the leaderships of Sierra Leone's National Electoral Commission (NEC), the Political Party Registration Commission (PPRC) and political parties.

"For the first time, all 15 member States of ECOWAS are democracies and ECONEC as a collective of election management bodies is determined to consolidate credible elections in our region through experience sharing on best practices, working together, helping each other and also working with partners," Prof. Yakubu, chair of Nigeria's Electoral Commission (INEC) told the gatherings.

Continuing, he said "We are here to listen to you and also learn from you, not to teach or dictate to you."

Mr. Mohamed N'fah-Alie Conteh, chair of the five-member NEC, briefed the ECONEC team and made a presentation on the general preparation by the Commission for the March 2018 elections, covering issues related to voter registration, boundary delimitation, legal reforms, logistics, election security, electoral calendar and funding.

He thanked ECONEC for the visit and ECOWAS and member States, especially Nigeria for their assistance in the restoration of peace and deepening of democracy in Sierra Leone, which went through a decade of civil war and the Ebola virus devastation of 2014.

The NEC chairman mentioned the assistance and technical support from development partners particularly the UN Development Programme (UNDP), but said there was still a shortfall to be addressed for a successful electoral process.

Prof Yakubu promised that ECONEC would assist with advocacy to various stakeholders in support of the Commission, stressing that the credibility of any election depended on the credibility of the election administrators and the integrity of the process, including the voter registration.

The chair of Sierra Leone's PPRC, Justice Patrick Hamilton briefed the ECONEC delegation on the functions of the Political Party Registration Commission and expressed his optimism about progress of the electoral process and the level of cooperation from the political parties and other stakeholders.

For their part, the leaders of the political parties expressed their concerns especially in relation to voter registration, boundary delimitation and security.

In his response, Prof Yakubu urged cooperation of all the stakeholders reiterating his now familiar exhortation that "It is better to deploy ECONEC for credible and peace election than to deploy ECOMOG," (the regional military peacekeeping force) after a flawed electoral process.

"All eyes are on Sierra Leone," he said, adding that "the failure of Sierra Leone will be the failure of not just West Africa, but the whole of Africa."

The ECONEC delegation, which includes heads of electoral commissions of Burkina Faso and Cabo Verde and Secretariat staff of ECONEC, its permanent Secretary Mr. Francis Oke, head of ECOWAS Electoral Assistance Division, would meet with other Sierra Leone stakeholders, including those in the security, judiciary, Civil society, media and development partners.

The team will later proceed on its mission to Liberia, which is holding a crucial presidential election next October.

The ECOWAS Commission and electoral management bodies in West Africa set up ECONEC in 2008 to promote credible elections in member States by encouraging the gradual harmonization of electoral legislations and best practices through experience-sharing and peer learning of good practices in electoral matters.



PRESS RELEASE

FREETOWN, SIERRA LEONE, 11, JULY 2017

SIERRA LEONE AUTHORITIES COMMIT TO MARCH 2018 ELECTIONS

Sierra Leone authorities have reaffirmed to the visiting delegation of the ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC) governing board their readiness to hold the March 2018 general elections. It would be the first elections without the United Nations-led peace mission in the country following a decade of a devastating civil war.

As part of its Needs Assessment and Solidarity Mission to Sierra Leone, the ECONEC board team led by its President Prof Mahmood Yakubu continued engagements with major stakeholders who gave the assurance on the preparations for the polls.

The visiting delegation met in Freetown on Tuesday, 11th July 2017 with Sierra Leone's Police Inspector General Francis Ali Munu, National Security Coordinator Ismail Tarawali, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Abdulai Cham, and the Attorney General and Justice Minister Joseph Kamara.

The Minister assured the ECONEC delegation that the legal issues related to the elections, such as boundary delimitation and public elections bills would be expedited to enable the elections proceed smoothly. He also expressed the hope that the issue of constitutional referendum would also be resolved.

For their part, the IG and the National Security Coordinator gave a detailed briefing on the preparedness for election security. They also mentioned some challenges, including on capacity building, staffing, logistics, and funding gaps, but expressed the hope that the electoral process would go well.

"We are willing, able and ready," the Justice Minister affirmed, adding: "As a Ministry we are adequately prepared," for the elections.

Similarly, Chief Justice Cham and other Justices of the Supreme Court, who received the ECONEC delegation, equally assured that the Apex court was ready.

Prof Yakubu took time to explain the objectives of the ECONEC mission to the different stakeholders, reiterating that the team was in Sierra Leone, to listen, learn and not to dictate.

“We are here for experience sharing on best practices, and also to see in what ways we can assist one another in the delivery of credible and peaceful elections in our region,” he stressed.

He also promised that ECONEC would advocate for support for the stakeholders in addressing identified challenges to ensure a successful electoral process.

The March 2018 elections would involve five voting processes for the office of the President, 132 Parliamentarians, 511 Councillors, 15 District Chairpersons, and seven Mayors, in the country with a population of slightly over six million, and some three million registered voters.

The ECONEC team, which met on Monday with the Chair and members of Sierra Leone’s National Electoral Commission (NEC) and the leaderships of the Political Party Registration Commission (PPRC), and political parties, would continue its consultations with other stakeholders including the Civil Society Organisations, the Media, lawmakers and development partners.

The delegation would later proceed on a similarly mission to Liberia, which holds its elections next October.

ECONEC is the umbrella body of electoral commissions in West Africa, set up by the ECOWAS Commission in 2008 to promote credible elections in member States by encouraging the gradual harmonization of electoral legislations and best practices through experience-sharing and peer learning of good practices in electoral matters.



PRESS RELEASE

FREETOWN, SIERRA LEONE, 12, JULY 2017

ECONEC TASKS SIERRA LEONE MEDIA, CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS ON DEMOCRACY

The ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC's) delegation has tasked the Sierra Leonean media and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), to play a positive role towards the consolidation of democracy and good governance in their post-conflict nation.

The Prof Mahood Yakubu-led ECONEC governing board team, which is in Sierra Leone on a Needs Assessment and Solidarity mission, gave the advice during meetings in Freetown on Wednesday, 12th July 2017, with representatives of the CSOs, and the leaderships of the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) and the Independent Media Commission (IMC).

The visit is ahead of Sierra Leone's crucial general elections in March 2018, the second to be conducted without the presence of the United Nations peace mission following a decade of the disruptive civil war in that country.

"Election is a critical sovereign issue and democracy, a collective responsibility," said Prof Yakubu, who is also Chair of Nigeria's Independent Electoral Commission (INEC). "You cannot have a credible or peace election without the involvement of civil society organisations, journalists or the media."

During the meeting with CSOs, including representatives of the National Election Watch (New), Campaign for Good Governance and the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) Sierra Leone, the NEW President Marcella Samba-Sesay, articulated the concerns of CSOs in the run-up to the March 2018 polls.

These include uncertainty about the election date, the level of official commitment, public perception, boundary delimitation, voter registration, election security and police conduct, "shrinking space for alternative voices and options," and funding gap. The other concerns are related to intra-party and the electoral court.

During the ECONEC team's meeting with the Acting Chair of the Independent Media Commission, Commissioner Sahr Mbayo and his colleagues, issues related to funding and capacity building; media conduct during elections and the influence of social media were also discussed.

Similarly, at the SLAJ Secretariat, the Association's President Kelvin Lewis, mentioned the need for professional training for journalists, lack of a structured engagement of the media in the electoral process and activities, and threats of intimidation and censorship.

In his response, Prof Yakubu reiterated the assurances by Sierra Leone authorities that the elections would be held as scheduled and that most of the outstanding issues including the boundary delimitation and public elections bills and planned referendum would be addressed in line with the ECOWAS Protocol which stipulates that no new laws would be introduced six months before an election.

He also promised that ECONEC would advocate on behalf of the stakeholders for support in specific areas such as capacity building, and in contacting development partners for assistance.

The ECONEC delegation leader particularly appealed to the media to eschew conflict inciting reportage so as not to jeopardise Sierra Leone's young democracy.

On the ECONEC team, which would proceed on a similar mission to Liberia from Freetown, includes the chair of Burkina Faso's electoral Commission Mr Ahmed Barry, his Cabo Verde counterpart Mrs Maria do Rosario Goncalves, officials of the ECONEC Secretariat and a representative of the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA).

The missions are supported by OSIWA, Nigeria's Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) chaired by Prof. Yakubu and EISA.

The ECOWAS Commission set up ECONEC in 2008 to promote credible elections in member States to encourage the gradual harmonization of electoral laws and best practices through experience-sharing and peer-learning in electoral matters.



PRESS RELEASE

FREETOWN, SIERRA LEONE 13, JULY 2017

ECONEC, UNDP REAFFIRM SUPPORT FOR SIERRA LEONE ELECTIONS

The ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC) and the UN Development Programme (UNDP) have agreed to lend their full support to the conduct of credible and peaceful March 2018 elections in Sierra Leone.

This was the outcome of the meeting in Freetown on Thursday, 13th July 2017 between the ECONEC governing board delegation led by its President Prof Mahmood Yakubu and the UNDP Resident Representative Sunil Saigal and senior staff of the Country Office.

In his introductory remarks, Prof. Yakubu outlined the objectives of the ECONEC's Needs Assessment and Solidarity mission to Sierra Leone and the issues raised by various stakeholders around the conduct of the elections, especially funding gap, capacity strengthening for agencies and personnel, logistics support, security and the legal architecture.

"It is an important election for Sierra Leone, the first without the supervision or UN peace mission and we at the UNDP welcome the interest of the region (ECOWAS and ECONEC)," Mr. Saigal said. We support the elections and want to see that they are peaceful, free and fair."

On the concerns about political will, funding, planned referendum, boundary delimitation and voter registration, the UN official said the UNDP had received the commitment and assurances of the Sierra Leone authorities that the elections would be held.

"We have in our messages also made it clear that nothing should distract from the elections as promised by the government," he affirmed.

Sierra Leone is among the top ten recipients of UNDP assistance and Mr Saigal assured that the UN agency would continue to support the country, adding however, that "election is a sovereign responsibility."

In conclusion, ECONEC and the UNDP agreed to work together in advocating for support in targeted areas, including training for the media, personnel involved in election-related duties, and on a longer term basis, intensify efforts to promote gender parity, to raise women's participation and representation in the political process in the region.

The ECOWAS Commission set up ECONEC in 2008 to promote credible elections in member States and also to encourage gradual convergence of electoral laws and best practices through experience-sharing and peer-learning of good practices in electoral matters



PRESS RELEASE

FREETOWN, SIERRA LEONE 15, JULY 2017

ECONEC LAUDED FOR SUPPORTING CONSOLIDATION OF DEMOCRACY IN SIERRA LEONE

The ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC) governing board's delegation has concluded its Needs Assessment and Solidarity mission to Sierra Leone with a pat on the back from the country's authorities, non-state actors and donor agencies, for boosting confidence in and supporting efforts to make the March 2018 elections in the country credible and peaceful.

In their assessments, the stakeholders praised ECONEC for its solidarity with Sierra Leone, the interest and genuine efforts to support democracy in the country.

"Your visit sends a strong message and has boosted confidence that the elections would be held," declared Commissioner Mohamed Conteh, Chair of Sierra Leone National Electoral Commission (NEC), at the debriefing session between the ECONEC team and officials of the Commission in Freetown on Friday, 14th July 2017.

During its five-day stay, the mission led by Prof. Mahmood Yakubu, the ECONEC board President and Chair of Nigeria's Independent Electoral Commission (INEC), held consultations with various stakeholders – official establishments including the National Electoral Commission (NEC), Political parties and the Political Party Registration Commission (PPRC), Sierra Leone's Chief Justice, the Attorney-General and Justice Minister, Internal Affairs Minister, the Inspector General of Police (IG), and the National Security Coordinator.

Others were representatives Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), the Independent Media Commission (IMC), the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) and the UN Development Programme (UNDP), which coordinates donor agencies in support of the electoral process.

Echoing the general sentiment of appreciation, Sierra Leone's Internal Affairs Minister Palo Conteh, had in a meeting with the ECONEC's team earlier in the day, praised the Network for the solidarity and support.

He said this was consistent with the sacrifice by ECOWAS and member States for the peace being enjoyed in Sierra Leone after the nation's devastating civil war.

In his remarks, Prof Yakubu, commended all the stakeholders for their cooperation and willingness to share their concerns and listen to ECONEC's suggestions on the way forward.

He thanked the authorities for their commitment to address issues which could impact the electoral process, such as the boundary delimitation and public elections bills, electoral security and the setting up of electoral courts, funding gaps, logistics, capacity building and voter cards procurement and distribution.

While reiterating his now popular message that "it is better to deploy ECONEC to conduct credible and peace elections, rather than deploy ECOMOG (regional peacekeeping force after flawed elections)," Prof Yakubu promised that the Network would advocate for support on behalf of the stakeholders to ensure a successful electoral process in Sierra Leone.

ECONEC members and the donor community would also be approached to support the electoral process, he added.

The mission, supported by the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), INEC and the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA), proceeds from Freetown to Liberia on Sunday on a similar Solidarity visit. Liberia is holding its own elections next October.

The delegation includes heads of Electoral Commissions of Burkina Faso and Cabo Verde, an EISA Representative and ECONEC Secretariat staff.

The ECOWAS Commission set up ECONEC in 2008 to promote credible elections in member States and also encourage gradual harmonisation of electoral laws and best practices through experience-sharing and peer-learning of good practices in electoral matters.



PRESS RELEASE

Monrovia, Liberia, 17 JULY 2017

ECONEC DELEGATION ENGAGES LIBERIA'S STAKEHOLDERS AHEAD OCTOBER ELECTIONS

After a successful pre-election Needs Assessment and Solidarity Mission to Sierra Leone, the delegation of the ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC) has started consultations with stakeholders in neighbouring Liberia ahead of the country's crucial October 2017 legislative and presidential elections.

The team led by Prof Mahmood Yakubu, the ECONEC board President and chair of Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), was first received on Monday, 17 July, 2017, by the ECOWAS Special Representative in Liberia, Ambassador Babatunde Ajisomo, for a detailed briefing on the political situation, preparations and other issues related to the electoral process.

After the briefing session, which was also attended by the ECOWAS Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security Mrs. Halima Ahmed, and her team, on a Fact-finding mission to Liberia, the ECONEC delegation proceeded to the National Electoral Commission (NEC) Liberia Headquarters.

NEC Chairman Jerome Korkoya and other Commissioners expressed their happiness at the ECONEC solidarity visit, which they described as encouraging.

He briefed the team on NEC's preparations for the elections and mentioned issues related to voter registration, Code of Conduct for candidates, electoral security and resolution of electoral disputes.

On funding, he reiterated the commitment and assurance by the government and support by development partners, expressing the hope that funds would be released expeditiously to speed up the electoral process.

Mr Korkoya also talked about the Commission's good relations with the political parties noting that on their own initiative, the parties had signed up to a Memorandum of Understanding for non-violence during the elections.

Prof Yakubu encouraged the Commission to do its best and pledged to advocate for support on its behalf, assuring that the Network or its members also assist where possible towards ensuing credible and peaceful elections to deepen democracy, not just in Liberia but in the region and Africa as a whole

The ECONEC delegation also visited the Samuel Doe National Stadium to observe the procedure for Candidate Nomination Exercise started by NEC on Monday.

Later, the ECONEC and the ECOWAS Commission delegations paid a courtesy visit on Liberia's former Interim President Prof Amos Sawyer, who now chairs the National Governance Commission, promoting elections with integrity, democracy and good governance.

Prof. Yakubu paid tribute to the elder statesman, who has led ECOWAS electoral observations to several countries, explaining that the ECONEC team could not visit Liberia and fail to pay him homage.

He urged him to lend his moral voice and support to ensure that the Liberian elections were credible and peaceful.

Prof Sawyer for his part commended ECONEC for the confidence-boosting mission, after a similar visit to Sierra Leone, and promised to take up the challenge.

He described the ECONEC initiative as positive and unique, noting that such efforts would mitigate electoral disputations, encourage political actors and stakeholders to play by the rule, to facilitate credible, peaceful elections, development and progress in the region.

Liberia, with some 4.2 million population has an estimated 2.1 million registered voters and more than 26 political parties. Some 818 candidates including 131 women are vying for the 73 parliamentary seats and the positions of the country's president and Vice president at the October elections.



PRESS RELEASE

Monrovia, Liberia, 18 JULY 2017

LIBERIA'S PARLIAMENT, JUDICIARY AND UN AFFIRM SUPPORT FOR OCTOBER ELECTIONS

The leadership of Liberia's Parliament, Judiciary and the United Nations Mission, UNMIL have restated their support to ensure credible, fair, participatory and peaceful October elections in the country.

They gave the pledge during separate meetings in Monrovia on Tuesday with visiting delegations of the ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC) and the ECOWAS Commission. Farid Zarif, Special Representative of the UN Secretary General and Coordinator of UN operations in Liberia, assured that in spite of the transfer of security to Liberian authorities by the UN after 14 years of peace keeping operations in Liberia, UNMIL will continue to support the country in whatever form possible and especially for the success of the October Elections.

"The UN and partners will do their best, but the Liberian Government must now step up and assume its responsibility," he said, adding that the UN Mission, UNMIL would finally wind down in March 2018.

On their part, the Chief Justice of Liberia Francis Kporkpor Sr., and other Justices of the Supreme Court promised expeditious treatment of election-related cases, particularly the Code of Conduct of candidates, to ensure a level playing field and smooth electoral process.

The President Pro tempore of the Senate, Senator Armah Jallah, the House of Representatives Speaker Emmanuel Nuquay and Chair of the House Committee on Elections MP Gabriel Smith, all gave their commitment to ensure the quick passage of the pending national Budget and release of funds for the elections.

Prof Yakubu, President of the ECONEC governing board had conveyed to these institutions, some of the challenges raised by other stakeholders, particularly the National Electoral Commission (NEC) Liberia, noting that there could be no credible and peaceful elections without the strong support of the Judiciary and Parliament.

He pledged ECONEC assistance where possible and also to advocate to the UN and the development partners on the need to support the upcoming elections so as to consolidate democracy and good governance, not only in Liberia, which had endured a decade of civil war and the 2014 Ebola outbreak, but in West Africa and the continent as a whole.

The ECONEC team flew into Monrovia on Sunday on a Needs Assessment and Solidarity mission to Liberia after a similar mission to neighbouring Sierra Leone, which is holding its own elections in March 2018.

The missions are in line with the Network's objectives to promote credible elections through experience shearing, peer review and gradual harmonisation of electoral administration across the 15 ECOWAS member states.



PRESS RELEASE

Monrovia, Liberia, 20 JULY 2017

PRESIDENT JOHNSON-SIRLEAF REASSURES ECONEC, ECOWAS DELEGATIONS ON LIBERIA'S OCTOBER VOTE

Liberia's President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf has reassured visiting delegations of the ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC) and the ECOWAS Commission of her government's unwavering commitment to delivering credible and peaceful elections in the country next October to end her two-term tenure.

"For us, this election is Liberia's defining moment," she told both delegations at the Executive Mansion, Monrovia on Wednesday, 19th July 2017. "It is an important test of our move to political maturity and we are hopeful of a successful and peaceful transition."

President Johnson-Sirleaf, the immediate past Chair of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government, promised that the government would resolve all outstanding issues related to the elections for the country's parliamentarians and President, such as the passage of the national budget and prompt release of funds to facilitate the electoral process.

She solicited ECOWAS' continued solidarity and assistance from development partners in support for the consolidation of democracy and good governance in the country, which has witnessed a devastating decade of civil war and the Ebola virus epidemic of 2014.

Speaking on behalf of the delegations, Prof Mahmood Yakubu, President of the ECONEC governing board and Chair of Nigeria's Independent Electoral Commission (INEC), congratulated the Liberian leader; Africa's first elected female President, her government and the people of Liberia for their commitment to shaking off the effects of a dark past and marching forward with great determination.

He outlined the concerns raised by some stakeholders around preparations for the October elections and reiterated ECONEC's pledge to assist in whatever way it could and to also advocate for assistance on behalf of the stakeholders to facilitate the electoral process.

Prof Yakubu mentioned ECONEC's fruitful engagements with the National Electoral Commission (NEC) of Liberia, the Judiciary, the Inspector-General of Police Gregory Coleman, the leadership of the two-chamber parliament, the Chief Justice and other Justices of the Supreme Court.

Others were Liberia's former Interim President Prof Amos Sawyer, who now chairs the national Governance Commission, the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), foreign envoys and representatives of donor agencies and the West African Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP).

In his introductory remarks, the ECOWAS Special Representative in Liberia, Ambassador Babatunde Ajisomo, had reiterated to the Liberian President, ECOWAS' continued support to the country, recalling the leading role played by the regional organisation in ending Liberia's civil war.

The ECOWAS delegation, which is on a fact-finding mission ahead of Liberia's October vote included Dr Kwadwo Afari-Gyan, former Chair of Ghana's Electoral Commission, the ECOWAS Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, Mrs Halima Ahmed, the Director of Political Affairs, Dr. Remi Ajibewa, and Head of the ECOWAS Electoral Assistance Division, Mr Francis Oke.

The ECONEC team, which included the Chairpersons of Burkina Faso Electoral Commission Mr. Ahmed Barry and Mrs Maria do Rosaria Goncalves of Cabo Verde, INEC Commissioner Prof Antonia Simbine and staff of the ECONEC Secretariat, flew into Liberia on Sunday after a Needs Assessment and Solidarity mission to Sierra Leone, which is holding its own crucial elections in March 2018.

The missions are consistent with the Network's objectives of solidarity and mutual assistance, experience sharing, and peer-review, for the promotion of credible and peaceful elections, harmonisation of electoral best practices and the consolidation of democracy and good governance in the ECOWAS region.



PRESS RELEASE

Abuja, Nigeria 11th August 2017

ECONEC LAUNCHES TOOLS FOR VISIBILITY

As part of its determined effort to generate greater awareness about its mandate of promoting fair and credible elections in West Africa, the ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC), RESAO in French and Portuguese, has launched its new website along with other social media outreach tools. The tools are:

Website: www.econec-resao.org Twitter: @econec_resao Facebook: Econec-Resao

According to Professor Mahmood Yakubu, President of the ECONEC Governing Board and Chairman of Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), "the launch of these communication and visibility tools is consistent with our avowed commitment to position ECONEC as a robust organisation with the conscious involvement and participation of our regional Election Management Bodies (EMBs) and a platform to reach out and engage with ECOWAS community citizens."

He posited that elections are a sovereign and collective responsibility that requires the active participation of all stakeholders – EMBs, political parties and candidates, security agencies, civil society organisations and the media, adding that external support by development partners is only meant to add value to the electoral process.

ECONEC is now operating from its new Secretariat in Abuja provided by INEC Nigeria following the official inauguration of the Secretariat during the meeting of the Governing Board in Abuja in July. The meeting also approved the 2017-2019 Work Plan of the Network.

Following, the Abuja meeting, Professor Yakubu, who was elected president of the five-member ECONEC governing board at the biannual General Assembly in Cotonou, Benin Republic in March 2017, led a delegation of the board on a Needs Assessment and Solidarity Missions to Liberia and Sierra, which are preparing for crucial elections in October 2017 and March 2018 respectively.

ECONEC was set up in 2008 with the main objective of promoting credible elections through experience sharing and peer-review amongst the EMBs of the 15 ECOWAS member States and also to facilitate gradual harmonisation of electoral administration, based on best practices, across the region.



PRESS RELEASE

Monrovia, Liberia, 07 Oct. 2017

ECOWAS, ECONEC PLEDGE UNFLINCHING SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRATIC LIBERIA

ECOWAS and its network for electoral Commissions, ECONEC have reiterated their total commitment to peaceful and credible elections in Liberia on October 10 towards consolidating democracy in the country and the region.

The Head of ECOWAS Election Observation Mission to Liberia John Mahama and Prof. Mahmood Yakubu, President of the ECONEC governing board made the pledge during a meeting in Monrovia on 6th October.

Mahama, Ghana's immediate-past president leading a 71-member regional observation Mission, told Yakubu, who is also chair of Nigeria's National Independent Electoral Commission (INEC), that Liberia required all necessary support from ECOWAS and the international community at this critical juncture of his political history.

"It is the first time that an elected government will be transferring power to another since the country's devastating civil war that lasted for more than a decade," and only ended with ECOWAS-led international intervention, affirmed the former president, who also led the Commonwealth observation mission to Kenya's August presidential polls.

He described Kenya, where the Supreme overturned the results of the elections as a lesson and a useful experience for the strengthening of evolving electoral systems in Africa, especially with the introduction of technology.

The head of mission, however warned about entrenching a precedent whereby "elections are now settled by the judiciary, instead of at the polling booths."

He expressed his happiness at the commitment of ECONEC, saying "we have to work together to consolidate democracy in our region and continent."

Prof. Yakubu, who led an ECONEC Needs Assessment and Solidarity Missions to Sierra Leone and Liberia last July said, the “integrity and moral force,” which the former president and his colleagues brought to electoral processes facilitated the work of election management bodies on continent, noting that all 15 ECOWAS countries are running a democratic government.

He restated his now familiar phrase that “it is cheaper to deploy ECONEC for credible and peaceful elections than to deploy, ECOMOG,” the regional military force after flawed elections.

Specifically on Liberia, the ECONEC boss mentioned the “huge challenge of delivering electoral logistics to the rural areas of the country during a rainy season,” and the impact of the electoral process.

He expressed the hope that Liberian stakeholders would take another look at the electoral timetable for easy delivery of materials and reduction of the cost of election in the country.

In a separate meeting with the Chair of Liberia’s National Elections Commission (NEC) in Monrovia 7th October, Prof Yakubu reiterated ECONEC’s support to Liberia and other network members to the consolidation of democracy in the region. The ECONEC boss was accompanied at the meetings by some INEC election observation team, including some Commissioners.

Chairman Korkoya thanked ECOWAS and ECONEC for their solidarity, and reaffirmed the commitment of NEC to deliver credible elections.

From Liberia Prof Yakubu will lead an ECONEC delegation to Abidjan for talks on capacity building for Cote d’Ivoire’s elections Commission, at the behest of the Commission



PRESS RELEASE

Abuja, Nigeria 14th December 2017

ECONEC MOVES TO REDUCE COST OF ELECTIONS IN WEST AFRICA

The ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC) is taking steps to encourage reduction of the cost of elections, and professional reporting of electoral processes through regional media training to improve the coverage of elections with integrity in the region.

“Elections are not only very expensive to run, but have also become a source of avoidable political conflicts in our region, so ECONEC is taking steps to address these challenges in a proactive manner,” said Prof Mahmood Yakubu, President of ECONEC governing board and Chair of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Nigeria.

He spoke while presiding over a meeting of ECONEC Secretariat staff in Abuja on 13th December 2017, which was also attended by other senior INEC officials.

The ECONEC strategy, discussed during the meeting, includes a planned launch of a Study on the Cost of Elections in West Africa. The findings would be used to sensitise and mobilise stakeholders on the need to scale down the spiralling cost of election administration; encourage pooling of resources by Election Management Bodies (EMBs), and strengthening transparency and prudent use of available resources.

ECONEC also plans a series of regional training workshops for the media to build a critical mass of journalists equipped with the requisite knowledge and skills for reporting elections according to internationally accepted standards. This is with a view to establishing guidelines for reporting elections to maximize the contributions of the media to democracy; eliminating hate speech and violence-inciting reporting, which are major triggers of conflict in the region.

The Abuja meeting also reviewed ECONEC’s activities in the out-going year, which included the establishment of the Network’s permanent Secretariat in Nigeria, with the support of INEC, and Needs Assessment and Solidarity missions to Sierra Leone, Liberia and Cote d’Ivoire, among others.

The ECOWAS Election Observation Mission to Liberia for the country's first round presidential and legislative elections on 10th October included officials from the ECONEC secretariat, while Prof. Yakubu led the INEC observation team to that country. The presidential run-off is now scheduled for 26 December.

In the coming year, ECONEC plans more Needs Assessment and Solidarity missions to other member countries planning elections, and follow-up missions for the implementation of ECOWAS Election Observation missions' reports/recommendations.

These activities are consistent with ECONEC's mandate of providing support and advocacy for its members, promotion of credible elections and good governance, and the encouragement of gradual harmonisation of electoral laws and best practices through experience-sharing, and peer-learning of good practices in electoral



PRESS RELEASE

Abuja, Nigeria 22nd January 2018

ECONEC SALUTES LIBERIA ELECTIONS COMMISSION FOR SUCCESSFUL POLL

The ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC), the umbrella body of Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) in West Africa has congratulated the National Elections Commission (NEC) Liberia for delivering successful and credible elections and paving way for the peaceful transfer of political power in the country.

The elections marked the first time since the end of Liberia's civil war that Liberian authorities were wholly in charge of the electoral process, without the support of the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), which has been maintaining peace in the country for the past 14 years.

Prof. Mahmood Yakubu, President of ECONEC governing board and Chair of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Nigeria, said in Abuja on Monday, 22nd January 2018 that: "There are no easy elections, and for NEC Liberia, the October/December 2017 elections were a critical moment in the country's political history."

He noted that there were useful lessons for EMBs from the electoral success in Liberia and urged NEC Liberia and other stakeholders to consolidate the gains of the elections.

Senator George Weah, who emerged victorious in the polls, was inaugurated as Liberia's 25th President in Monrovia on Monday.

Prof. Yakubu had led an ECONEC delegation on Needs Assessment and Solidarity Missions to Sierra Leone and Liberia in July 2017, in line with the mandate of the Network to assist members with capacity building, peer-review and experience sharing, towards delivering elections with integrity and strengthening of democracy in the region. He also led a delegation of ECONEC and INEC officials as part of international observation groups that observed the 10 October elections in Liberia.

Following the disputation over the register of voters in the aftermath of the first round elections, the ECONEC President facilitated the deployment of INEC personnel for the ECOWAS Technical Team that assisted NEC Liberia in cleaning up the voter's Register. The Technical Team made crucial recommendations, the implementation of which enabled the conduct of the presidential run-off vote of 26 December 2017.

Prof Yakubu stressed that EMBs require the support and cooperation of all stakeholders to succeed, adding that the Network will continue to work with stakeholders to promote credible elections in the ECOWAS region. Accordingly, ECONEC will continue to encourage its members to share information and experiences on best practices, pool resources and build their capacities.

He also reiterated the commitment of the Network to its members in delivering on their mandate towards advancing democratic governance in the ECOWAS region.



PRESS RELEASE

Abuja, Nigeria 1st February 2018

ECONEC LAUNCHES STUDY ON COST OF ELECTIONS IN WEST AFRICA

The ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC) in Abuja on Thursday, 1st February 2018 launched a regional study on Cost of Elections as part of its initiative to encourage reduction of electoral expenses in West Africa.

Adele Jinadu, a professor of political science and a former Commissioner of Nigeria's Electoral Commission is the Lead Consultant of the three-member expert team, which will conduct the study in the three language zones (English, French and Portuguese) of ECOWAS. The two other consultants are Mr Francis Laleye from Benin Republic and Mr Jose Sanches from Cabo Verde.

"Elections are not only very expensive to run, but have also become a source of avoidable political conflicts in our region, so ECONEC is taking steps to address these challenges in a proactive manner," Prof Mahmood Yakubu, President of ECONEC governing board and Chair of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Nigeria, said recently.

The findings of the study are expected to be presented at a Conference of Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) from Western and Southern Africa taking place in Abuja in April 2018. The outcome will provide a strong advocacy tool for the sensitisation and mobilisation of stakeholders on the need to scale down the spiralling cost of election administration.

It will also encourage pooling of resources by EMBs, and strengthening of transparency and prudent use of resources, to make democracy more cost-effective, participatory and inclusive. The study is supported by the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), ECONEC's key partner.

ECONEC is also to undertake Needs Assessment and Solidarity missions to its members planning elections, and follow-up missions for the implementation of ECOWAS Election Observation missions' recommendations. These activities are consistent with ECONEC's mandate of providing support and advocacy for its members, promotion of credible elections and good governance, and the encouragement of gradual harmonisation of electoral laws and best practices through experience-sharing, and peer-learning of good practices in electoral matters in the region.



PRESS RELEASE

Freetown, Sierra Leone, 16th March 2018

NEC SIERRA LEONE ISSUES CAMPAIGN GUIDELINES FOR MARCH 27 PRESIDENTIAL RUN-OFF VOTE

The National Electoral Commission (NEC) Sierra Leone has released a campaign calendar and guidelines for the March 27 presidential run-off election involving the candidates of the main opposition rtd Brig. Julius Maada Bio of Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) and Dr Samura Kamara of the ruling All People's Congress (APC).

Bio, a former junta leader who returned power to elected civilians and Kamara, outgoing Foreign Minister and former Central Bank Governor, were frontrunners in the March 7 first round vote with 43.33% and 42.7% scores respectively.

NEC said the two political parties and their candidates could campaign across the 16 Administrative Districts from 15th to 25th March, with each party granted exclusive permit on specific days in designated Districts to avoid clashes.

Following the inconclusive first round vote, political horse trading and realignment of forces are reportedly going on among the 17 registered political parties.

As part of preparations for the run-off vote NEC is procuring new ballot papers bearing the photographs of the two candidates as against the previous design with 16 candidates. The Commission is also expected to retrain polling officials and ready the electoral machinery for hitch-free voting.

The March 7 vote recorded some 84% voter turn-out and the run-off is expected to be even more fiercely contested. The winner will replace out-going President Ernest Bai Koroma of the APC who has completed his constitutionally allowed two mandates of five years each in a country where the APC and the SLPP have dominated political power since independence from Britain in 1961.

The Core Team of ECOWAS Long-Term Observers, including Secretariat staff of the ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC), is on ground monitoring the electoral processes.

The ECOWAS Observation Mission supported by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), European Union and the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA).

Meanwhile, from the 24 parliamentary results released Thursday by NEC, the APC has 13 seats, SLPP 10, and the Coalition for Change (C4C) one seat.

The country has 144-seat unicameral parliament, including 132 contested seats complemented by 12 seats for Paramount Chiefs.



PRESS RELEASE

Freetown, Sierra Leone, 18th March 2018

ECONEC LAUDS SIERRA LEONE ON SUCCESSFUL VOTE

The ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC) has lauded the National Electoral Commission (NEC), Sierra Leone, for its professionalism during the 7 March general elections and urged it to sustain the exemplary conduct through the completion of the presidential run-off vote scheduled for March 27.

“Conducting four elections in one day (presidential, parliamentary, district and local council) is not a mean feat. In spite of minor hitches reported by election observers, Sierra Leone’s political stakeholders - the electorate, government and security agencies, civil society and NEC, deserve commendation for the responsible conduct and patriotism exhibited during the first phase of the electoral process,” said Prof. Mahmood Yakubu, President of the ECONEC governing board and Chair of Nigeria’s Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).

In his goodwill message to NEC on 18 March, the ECONEC President expressed his optimism that NEC will live up to the high expectations of Sierra Leoneans and the international community in its determination to deliver peaceful and credible elections.

This will contribute to the consolidation of stability and democracy in the country and the ECOWAS region as a whole.

Prof. Yakubu further reiterated ECONEC’s commitment to continued support for NEC Sierra Leone in line with the Network’s mandate of assisting its members, including through information and experience sharing, peer collaboration, pooling of resources and advocacy for technical and logistic support.

Last July, Prof. Yakubu led an ECONEC delegation on a Needs Assessment Mission to Sierra Leone. This was followed by an advocacy that resulted in the donation of logistics items by the Nigerian government to NEC Sierra Leone.

The support includes five 4Wd pick-up vehicles, two trucks, two speed boats and five motorcycles. Some of the items have already arrived in Sierra Leone.

Also, members of the ECOWAS Election Observation Mission to Sierra Leone monitoring the electoral process in the country include ECONEC secretariat staff.



PRESS RELEASE

Abuja, Nigeria, 25th April 2018

LESOTHO ELECTORAL COMMISSION TEAM VISITS ECONEC

A delegation of the Kingdom of Lesotho's Independent Electoral Commission, led by Dr Letholetseny Austeria Ntsike, Director of Elections, visited the Abuja Secretariat of the ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC) on Wednesday, 25th April.

It was part of the six-member delegation's tour of The Electoral Institute, an arm of Nigeria's Independent Electoral Commission (INEC), where ECONEC Secretariat is located.

Conducted on the tour by the Institute's Acting Director General Dr Sa'ad Umar Idris and the Administrative Secretary Mr John Irem, the visitors were briefed on the mandate and programmes of ECONEC, by its spokesman Paul Ejime, who also presented Dr Ntsike with copies of A Decade of ECOWAS Electoral Assistance in West Africa, a new publication by ECOWAS with the support of the German International Development Agency, GIZ.

Dr Ntsike expressed her desire to see greater cooperation among Election Management Bodies (EMBs) in Africa.

The Lesotho team had earlier visited the INEC Headquarters where it was received by the INEC Chairman Prof Mahmood Yakubu, who is also President of the ECONEC governing board.

The visit is on the heels of the recent Abuja International Conference on the Challenges and Opportunities in the use of Technology in Elections, organised by INEC and ECONEC in collaboration with the Electoral Commissions Forum of Southern African Development Community (ECF-SADC), with the support of the European Centre for Electoral Support (ECES).

More than 150 participants from over 30 EMBs, including from Lesotho, attended the Conference, during which EMBs from Western and Southern Africa, committed to deepening cooperation and optimising the benefits of technology in elections for the consolidation of democracy on the continent.



PRESS RELEASE

Abuja, Nigeria, 6th June 2018

ECONEC UNDERTAKES ELECTORAL FOLLOW-UP MISSION TO GUINEA

Prof. Mahmood Yakubu, President of the ECONEC governing board and Chair of Nigeria's Independent Electoral Commission (INEC), is leading an eight-member delegation on a Post-election Follow-up Mission (PEFM) to Guinea from Thursday, 7th June, part of election assessment and early warning strategy instituted by ECOWAS to track and address risk factors that could negatively impact the credibility and peaceful conduct of elections in member States.

Guinea will hold a crucial presidential election in 2020, following the last poll in 2015, which was observed by ECOWAS.

Usually, in the post-election phase, the ECOWAS Commission organises biennial electoral process reviews, bringing together Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) from across the region under the umbrella of the ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC), to contribute to peer-learning and the dissemination of best practices.

PEFM is one of the innovations to ECOWAS' election assessment methodology, which enables cycle-wide engagement with the electoral process in member States.

The main objective of the PEFM is to assess measures being taken by Member State actors to implement the recommendations of the ECOWAS Election Observation Mission (EOM) and identify possible areas of support required to enable full implementation of the recommendations ahead of the next electoral cycle.

From 2014, there has been a shift in the ECOWAS election assessment methodology, with a focus on cycle-wide approach, involving the deployment of Long-Term Election Observation Missions (LTEOMs) to complement and reinforce the Short-term Election Missions (STEOMs).

The current methodology also entails the deployment of Pre-election Fact-finding Missions, which enable the collection of first-hand information about the pre-election context.

In addition to the conduct of technical assessment of elections as an integral part of its wider democratic governance and conflict mitigation mandate, the ECOWAS Commission also supports electoral processes in Member States and the promotion of electoral integrity and democratic consolidation in the region.

During their four-day stay in Conakry, the Prof Yakubu-led delegation, which includes Prof Emmanuel Tiando, ECONEC first Vice-president and Chair of Benin Republic's Electoral Commission, ECONEC Secretariat and INEC officials, will meet with Guinea's political stakeholders including, the EMB; Political Parties; Parliamentary Committees on electoral matters; Civil Society Organisations involved in the electoral process, and other institutions mentioned in the EOM's recommendations. The Mission is supported by the German International Development Agency, GIZ, Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA), and INEC.

As part of their remits, PEFMs generate reports identifying challenges and areas of support required to ensure effective implementation of recommendations by EOMs. The reports, to be submitted to the ECOWAS authorities, will serve as basis for planning and adjusting ECOWAS Electoral Assistance Division's future electoral support to the specific needs of Member State.

ECONEC was set up in 2008 with the main objective of promoting credible elections through experience sharing and peer-review amongst the EMBs of the 15 ECOWAS member States, and also to facilitate gradual harmonisation of electoral administration, based on best practices, across the region.

Under Prof. Yakubu's leadership from March 2017, the Network has among other activities, undertaken Needs Assessment and Solidarity Missions to Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone. It has also carried out a study on the cost of elections and co-organised an International Conference in Abuja on the challenges and opportunities in the use of technology in elections. ECONEC's advocacy has also resulted in the provision of technical and logistical support to Liberia and Sierra Leone during their recent national elections.



PRESS RELEASE

Conakry, Guinea, 8th June 2018

GUINEA ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMENDS ECONEC, SEEKS MORE ELECTORAL SUPPORT

A delegation of the ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC) began talks on Friday, 8th June, with the leadership of Guinea's Electoral Commission, CENI, on wide-ranging issues, including capacity strengthening, technical and logistics support to the electoral body, and the implementation of recommendations by the ECOWAS observation mission to the country's last general elections in 2015.

The team led by Prof. Mahmood Yakubu, ECONEC governing board President and Chair of Nigeria's Independent Electoral Commission (INEC), is on a Post-election follow-up Mission (PEFM), part of an assessment and early warning strategy instituted by ECOWAS to track and address risk factors that could negatively impact the credibility and peaceful conduct of elections in member States.

Guinea holds its national parliamentary vote in January 2019, to be followed by a crucial presidential election in 2020. There are also unresolved issues from the country's last February Municipal elections, whose results are being contested by some political actors.

At two separate meetings with CENI, involving the Commission's President Barr Amadou Salif Kebe, Vice president Bakary Mansare, and Commissioners in charge of Operations and Training, the officials commended ECOWAS and ECONEC for their contributions to the consolidation of democracy through support for credible elections in the region.

They also applauded the excellent bilateral relations between Nigeria and Guinea and the sustained support to CENI by INEC.

In his remarks, Prof Yakubu explained that ECONEC and INEC were building bridges for peer-learning and mutually beneficial cooperation among election management bodies in order to consolidate best practices in the conduct of credible and peaceful elections in the ECOWAS region.

Noting that all 15 ECOWAS member States were now democracies, he said: “we should ensure that elections do not lead to conflicts by using the instrumentality of ECONEC to ensure peaceful elections, instead of having to deploy ECOMOG (the regional peace keeping force), because of disputed elections.”

The ECONEC president urged CENI and other political stakeholders in Guinea to ensure the implementation of the recommendations by the ECOWAS election observation mission (EOM), and also to be specific on the areas of assistance required to ensure an improvement in the conduct of future elections in the country.

Some of the EOM's recommendations include the need for legal and political reforms to strengthen the technical and professional capacity of CENI to make it more transparent and truly independent, and the strengthening of dialogue among political actors to ensure peaceful socio-political climate.

PEFM is one of the innovations to ECOWAS' election assessment methodology, which enables cycle-wide engagement with the electoral process in member States.

The main objective is to assess measures being taken by Member State actors to implement the recommendations of EOMs and identify possible areas of support required to enable full implementation of the recommendations ahead of the next electoral cycle.

During their four-day stay in Conakry, the Prof Yakubu-led delegation, which includes Prof Emmanuel Tiando, ECONEC first Vice-president and Chair of Benin Republic's Electoral Commission, ECONEC Secretariat and INEC officials, will also meet with other political stakeholders in Guinea including, Political Parties; MPs, Civil Society Organisations and other institutions mentioned in the EOM's recommendations.

The Mission, which is supported by the German International Development Agency, GIZ, Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA), and INEC, is expected to generate a report identifying challenges and areas of support required to ensure effective implementation of recommendations by the EOM. This will be submitted to the ECOWAS authorities, and serve as basis for planning and adjusting ECOWAS Electoral Assistance Division's future electoral support.



PRESS RELEASE

Conakry, Guinea, 11th June 2018

ECONEC ADVOCATES STRUCTURED ENGAGEMENTS BETWEEN GUINEA ELECTORAL COMMISSION, OTHER POLITICAL STAKEHOLDERS

In continuation of its electoral mid-term follow-up Mission to Guinea, the Prof Mahmood Yakubu-led ECONEC delegation met on Monday 11 June with the ECOWAS Special Representative in the country, Ambassador Liliane Alapini, and representatives of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and development partners.

At the talks with the interlocutors including representatives of the EU, USAID, US, German and Japanese embassies, the American National Democratic Institute (NDI), Guinea's Independent Electoral Commission, CENI, and three CSOs, Cellule Balai Citoyen, PCUD and CNOSCG, Prof Yakubu, ECONEC governing board President and Chair of Nigeria's Independent Electoral Commission (INEC), called for sustained political dialogue, effective communication and structured engagements between CENI and Guinea's other political stakeholders including the development partners.

Ambassador Alapini commended ECONEC for working hand in hand with the ECOWAS Commission towards deepening democracy in the region by supporting credible and peaceful polls.

On the agenda of the consultations were issues from the disputed results of Guinea's last February's municipal elections and areas of further support by ECOWAS, ECONEC, and the development partners.

Also discussed was the implementation of recommendations of ECOWAS Observation Mission (EOM) to Guinea's 2015 presidential poll and those in the October 2016 Political Accord, including the restructuring of CENI and other legal and political reforms ahead of the country's 2019 parliamentary vote and the 2020 presidential election.

Prof Yakubu said that structured engagements would enable the articulation of needs, political inclusivity and focused support for the entrenchment of best practices in the electoral process that will contribute to sustained credible elections and consolidation of democracy in the country.

The development partners and CSO representatives had harped on the need for the implementation of the recommendations of the ECOWAS EOM's in the aftermath of the 2015 presidential vote and those contained in the 2016 Political Accord signed by the ruling and opposition parties with ECOWAS, UN, EU, Francophonie organisation, and the US and French envoys as observers.

Some of the recommendations include reform of CENI to make it more technical and professional, as well as legal and political reforms for a level playing field and socio-political climate.

Prof. Yakubu pledged that the Mission will reflect in its report to the relevant authorities, areas of support to address the identified needs and strengthen the capacity of CENI Guinea in line with ECONEC's mandate to empower its members to deliver credible and peaceful elections and contribute to the consolidation of democracy in the ECOWAS region.



PRESS RELEASE

Bissau, Guinea Bissau 2nd August 2018

GUINEA BISSAU APPEALS FOR ELECTORAL SUPPORT

Guinea Bissau's Interior Minister Mutaro Djalo has appealed to development partners and friendly nations for support to enable the country conduct a success legislative election next November and mitigate the country's political fragility.

Receiving visiting delegation of the ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commission (ECONEC) led by Prof. Mahmood Yakubu in Bissau, on Wednesday, the minister thanked Nigeria and other countries which contributed to the success of Guinea Bissau's 2012 presidential poll, adding that similar support is required to address the funding gap of the parliamentary poll ahead of the presidential in 2019.

He expressed appreciation to ECOWAS, UNDP and UEOMA for their latest financial support to Guinea Bissau, noting however, that to ensure electoral security in November; at least two security personnel would be required to man each of the nation's 4,000 polling stations, while the police force could only boast only 5,000 officers for the assignment.

The minister thanked Prof. Yakubu, the ECONEC governing board President and Chair of Nigeria's Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) for the fraternal visit, saying that the Bissau government's efforts should be complemented to deliver peaceful and credible elections and launch the country on the path for stability and socio-economic development.

The ECONEC boss said "it is in the interest of ECOWAS that there is peace in Guinea Bissau," where the regional organisation has maintained a military force, ECOMIB, since 2012.

He also disclosed the Nigerian government was considering the request by Bissau for logistics support, while INEC was also working with the electoral Commission of Guinea Bissau, CNE, on possible assistance on voter cards registration kits.

At a separate meeting with CNE officials, an INEC IT expert on Prof. Yakubu's delegation demonstrated the functioning of the INEC registration kit up to the stage of printing a sample registration card.

Prof Yakubu said CNE should study the workings of the kit, and if it meant their requirement INEC could advocate for support by the Nigerian government since he did not see any difficulty in CNE adapting the technology with easy hard or software modifications to address Guinea Bissau's current voter registration challenge.

A similar demonstration was also carried out by the ECONEC delegation during its meeting with Guinea Bissau civil society organisations' representatives and the Women's network for peace and security, REMSECAO.



PRESS RELEASE

Bissau, Guinea Bissau 3rd August 2018

ECONEC, NIGERIA MOBILISE SUPPORT FOR GUINEA BISSAU'S NOVEMBER PARLIAMENTARY POLLS

At the request of the Guinea Bissau government and facilitation by the ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC), the Nigerian government is to provide crucial logistics and voter registration support to facilitate the holding of Guinea Bissau's November legislative elections.

With less than four months to the polls, voter registration is yet to commence in the country due to disagreements among the main political actors, and lack of positive response from countries and development partners approached by the Bissau government for assistance.

But a consensus has emerged with a sigh of relief following Nigeria's positive response. This followed separate meetings between the delegation led by Prof Mahmood Yakubu, President of ECONEC governing board and Chair of Nigeria's National Electoral Commission (INEC) and Guinea Bissau's key stakeholders, including Prime Minister Aristides Gomes, his deputy Agnelo Regala, National Assembly Speaker Cipriano Cassama, two Ministers, and representatives of civil society and the ruling and opposition parties.

Thanking Nigeria for its continued assistance to Guinea Bissau, Speaker Cassama, who is also president of the African Parliamentary Union, said: "of all the countries and partners approached to assist us with the registration of voters, only Nigeria has responded with a concrete and positive proposal."

Prime Minister Gomes expressed the same sentiments after witnessing a demonstration of the functioning of the voter registration kit by an INEC IT expert on the Yakubu-led ECONEC delegation, which is on a Needs Assessment Mission to Guinea Bissau.

He expressed government's appreciation to Nigeria for always assisting Guinea Bissau in times of need, including during the 2014 elections, and for contributing troops to the ECOWAS Mission in Guinea Bissau, ECOMIB.

The Prime Minister also praised ECONEC, which responded to the request by the Guinea Bissau National Electoral Commission, CNE, to facilitate the delivery of the assistance.

Also, during meetings with the ECONEC delegation, civil society groups, officials of the ruling Guinea Bissau PAIGC and the opposition parties PND and PRS, also agreed that what the country required now was a registration kit that can deliver a voter's card at the point of registration.

The logistics support requested by Guinea Bissau from Nigeria, include vehicles and motorcycles. Prof Yakubu explained that details on the delivery of the logistics and voter registration assistance would be worked out between the governments of both countries, adding that ECONEC was only playing an advocacy and facilitation role in line with the Network's mandate.

"Peace in Guinea Bissau means is peace in the ECOWAS region, that is why ECONEC is supporting the conduct of peaceful and credible elections in this country and in all our memb

er States," he added.

His delegation has also met with the UNDP office in Bissau, the President of the Supreme Court, Justice Paulo Sanha, the Minister of Interior Mutaro Djalo and his counterpart Ester Fernandes of the Ministry of Territorial Administration, which is in charge of voter registration.

The delegation, which includes other ECONEC board members, Ahmed Barry Newton, Chair of the national electoral commission of Burkina Faso, his counterpart from Cabo Verde Maria Rosario Goncalves, and some senior INEC officials, has also met with representatives of Guinea Bissau's Women's network for peace and security, REMSECAO.



PRESS RELEASE

Bissau, Guinea Bissau 4rd August 2018

ECOWAS MISSION REASSURES ECONEC ON SECURITY FOR GUINEA BISSAU'S NOVEMBER POLLS

The ECOWAS peace Mission in Guinea Bissau, ECOMIB, has reassured visiting delegation of the ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC) of its total commitment to complementing the national security agencies in securing Guinea Bissau's parliamentary elections slated for November 18.

Receiving the delegation led by Prof Mahmood Yakubu, ECONEC board President and Chair of Nigeria's Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) at the Mission Headquarters in Bissau on Friday 3rd August, the Acting Force Commander Col. Taiye Ahmed, said while ECOMIB has provided stability and restored constitutional order in the country, the security situation remained fragile.

However, he said the Force was working with the relevant national authorities, the UN and AU Missions to secure the country before, during and post-election period in line with its mandate. The visiting delegation listened to a presentation on the structure and operations of ECOMIB, which ECOWAS leaders deployed to Guinea Bissau in 2012 following a military coup and breakdown of constitutional order in the country.

The presentation also mentioned challenges facing the Mission, including requirement for more troops and vehicles, lack of maritime and air assets and translation facilities, the mission being a three-language post (Portuguese, English and French).

At its full strength in 2014, when it provided security for Guinea Bissau's presidential polls, ECOMIB had 825 personnel, but this has gone down to 683. The Mission comprises troops and police contingents from Nigeria, Senegal, Togo, Cote d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso.

In his response, Prof Yakubu said although the ECONEC remit relates to election management, he would relate the Mission's concerns to the appropriate authorities, because according to him, "credible elections can only take place in an secured environment."

He also reiterated his now famous mantra that “it is more cost-effective to deploy ECONEC in peace time for peaceful and credible elections instead of deploying military missions (such as ECOMOG or ECOMIG) to keep peace after flawed elections.”

Prof Yakubu’s delegation, which ends its Needs Assessment Mission to Guinea Bissau on Saturday, following a solidarity visit to Senegal, was later hosted by Nigeria’s Ambassador to Guinea Bissau Ambassador Adeyemi Afolahan.

En route to Abuja, the team will stop over in Lome on a solidarity mission to Togo’s National Electoral Commission.



PRESS RELEASE

Lome, Togo, 5th August 2018

ECONEC DELEGATION ENDS FOUR-NATION MISSION, PLEDGES SUPPORT FOR TOGO'S DECEMBER PARLIAMENTARY VOTE

The delegation of the ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC) led by governing board President Mahmood Yakubu has ended a four-nation Needs Assessment and Solidarity Mission, pledging support for Togo's 20 December parliamentary elections endorsed by the Lome Summit of ECOWAS Heads of State and Government.

The delegation met on Saturday in Lome with Togo's national electoral Commission, CENI, rounding up a tour that took it first to Mali, which held an inconclusive presidential election on 31st July, and Senegal, and Guinea Bissau, on the heels of the latest decision by the ECOWAS Summit endorsing Togo's parliamentary polls for 20 December.

CENI President, Prof. Kodjona Kadanga and senior officials of the Commission discussed with the visiting delegation, preparations for the December polls, and how ECONEC and its members could assist to deliver a credible electoral process.

After summarising the outcome of his delegation's mission to the three other countries, Prof Yakubu, who is also Chair of Nigeria's independent National Electoral (INEC), explained that ECONEC usually visits its members preparing for elections to ascertain their needs, general readiness, challenges, and how ECONEC could support the process.

"This is because well-conducted elections lead to peace, while badly-conducted polls precipitate conflicts," he said, adding that ECONEC's support to its members is to enable them deliver peaceful and credible elections for the consolidation of peace, stability and democratic governance in the ECOWAS region.

Prof Kadanga told the delegation, which includes senior INEC officials that the Togo parliamentary elections were to have taken place in July, but had to be postponed due to disagreements among

the stakeholders over constitutional issues including presidential term limit and the Inter-Togolese Political Dialogue to resolve the political impasse.

He thanked the team for the solidarity visit and assured that CENI would work to deliver a credible poll in December within the framework agreed by Togolese stakeholders and endorsed by the ECOWAS summit, beginning with the national registration of voters.

Professors Yakubu and Kadanga, later exchanged presentations of copies of a recent INEC study on electoral participation and observation by Persons with Disability (PWD), and the Report of a 2015 International Colloquium held in Lome on Politics and violence in Black Africa, challenges, and the way forward.

Togo, with an estimated seven million population had by its 2015 presidential election, registered some 3.5 million voters.



PRESS RELEASE

Abuja, Nigeria 5th October 2018

ECONEC, OSIWA TO STRENGTHEN COOPERATION ON CONSOLIDATION OF DEMOCRACY IN WEST AFRICA

The ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC) and the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) have reaffirmed their commitment to the pursuit of credible elections towards consolidation of democracy in the region.

This was the focus of a meeting in Abuja on Thursday, 4th October between Prof Mahmood Yakubu, President of the ECONEC governing board and the newly appointed Senegal-based OSIWA Executive Director Ms. Ayisha Osori.

After formally congratulating the new Director on her appointment, Prof Yakubu, who is also Chair of Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), briefed the OSIWA delegation on ECONEC's programme of activities since he assumed office in March 2017.

He expressed ECONEC's gratitude to OSIWA for being a major provider of financial and technical support to the Network since its formation in 2008, as the umbrella organisation of election management bodies, promoting free, fair and credible elections in the region.

Ms Osori, who assumed office last month and was accompanied on the visit by Mrs Catherine Angai, Programme and Advocacy Coordinator at the OSIWA National office, gave an assurance of OSIWA's commitment to continued partnership with ECONEC.

She commended ECONEC for its work and contribution to improving the electoral processes, noting that electoral assistance is a positive step towards the consolidation of democracy in the region.

ECONEC activities under Prof Yakubu's leadership include Needs Assessment, election Follow-up/Mid-term Review and Solidarity Missions to many of the 15 ECONEC members, and impactful advocacy that has resulted in critical support to members holding elections.

The latest outcome is the Nigerian Government's provision of voter registration kits to Guinea Bissau at the request of the country's National Electoral Commission, and facilitated by ECONEC following a recent visit by Prof Yakubu-led delegation to Bissau. The kits were officially handed over by Nigeria's Foreign Minister Ambassador Geoffrey Onyeama to Guinea Bissau's Prime Minister Aristides Gomes, in Bissau.

Also, with ECONEC's advocacy and at the behest of their electoral commissions, technical and logistics supports were provided to Liberia and Sierra Leone during their recent national elections. There has also been enhanced bilateral cooperation among ECONEC members, and in pursuit of its mandate to support its members through experience and information sharing, peer collation and research, ECONEC has undertaken a study on the Cost of Elections in West Africa, which is expected result in the spiralling electoral expenses to make elections and democracy more cost effective, participatory and inclusive.

In response to emerging challenges to the conduct of credible elections, ECONEC in collaboration with INEC and the European Centre for Electoral Support (ECES), also organised in Abuja last April, an International Conference on the use of Technology in Elections.



PRESS RELEASE

Abuja, Nigeria 13th October 2018

ECOWAS, INEC DISCUSS PREPARATIONS FOR NIGERIA'S 2019 POLLS, SUSTAINED SUPPORT FOR ECONEC

A delegation of the ECOWAS Commission has met with the leadership of Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to discuss preparations for the country's 2019 general elections and how to step up support to the ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC), the umbrella organisation of election management bodies in the region.

The ECOWAS delegation led by the Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, Gen. Francis Behanzin was received by the INEC team led by the Chairman Prof Mahmood Yakubu, who is also President of the ECONEC governing board.

The Commissioner commended INEC for its work, noting that organising elections in a big country such as Nigeria involved challenges, especially security.

He reaffirmed ECOWAS' support to INEC and Nigeria in accordance with the Commission's mandate for assistance to member States organising elections.

On the activities of ECONEC, which was set up by ECOWAS in 2008 to promote credible elections in the region, Gen. Behanzin, reiterated the Commission's commitment to redeem the financial support pledged to the Network.

Prof Yakubu, who was accompanied by other senior INEC officials, including Commissioners, reiterated INEC's readiness to deliver credible elections in 2019 with the support of the Federal Government of Nigeria and with other stakeholders playing their part.

Underscoring the huge task of organising elections in Nigeria with large population, the INEC Chair noted that the more than 84.2 million registered voters in the country were more than those of several African countries combined.

To this end, he said the success of such a task required collective efforts and cooperation of all stakeholders, since INEC could not do it alone.

Prof Yakubu briefed the ECOWAS delegation on the activities of ECONEC since he assumed the presidency in March 2017, including Needs Assessment, Mid-term review/electoral follow-up and solidarity missions to member States, and the launch of a regional study on the cost of elections.

Consistent with its mandate, he said, ECONEC has also continued to assist and advocate for support to its members, adding that last April in Abuja, the Network co-organised with INEC and the European Centre for Electoral Support (ECES) an international conference on the use of technology in elections.

The ECOWAS Commission's delegation at the meeting on Thursday, 10th October, included Brig.-Gen. Usman Abdulmumuni Yusuf, the Chief of Staff of ECOWAS Standby Force, Dr. Remi Ajibewa, Director of Political Affairs, Mrs Onyinye Onwuka, Head of Political and International Affairs Division, and Mr Francis Oke, Head of Electoral Assistance Division, who is also the ECONEC Permanent Secretary.



PRESS RELEASE

Abuja, Nigeria 15th October 2018

ECONEC ADVOCATES COST-EFFECTIVE ELECTION MANAGEMENT IN WEST AFRICA

The ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC) has called on electoral management bodies (EMBs) in the region to reappraise election funding towards making the electoral process more cost-effective but at the same time, free, fair and credible.

In his remarks at the opening of an experts workshop in Abuja on Monday 15th October, to validate the Cost of Election Study commissioned by ECONEC, Prof Mahmood Yakubu, President of the ECONEC governing board said the spiralling cost of elections had become a serious cause of concern to the electoral commissions.

“This is more so because an expensive election that ushers in a government that lacks the resources to meet the needs of citizens, erodes confidence in elections in particular and the democratic process in general,” declared Prof. Yakubu, who is also chair of the National Independent Electoral Commission (INEC), Nigeria.

He said the study funded by the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), was informed by the need to interrogate the factors driving up electoral expenses, with a view to coming up with workable recommendations to make the cost more manageable and the electoral process more inclusive and sustainable.

Underscoring the need for the pooling of resources by EMBs on the basis of need, Prof Yakubu expressed ECONEC’s full support for an election materials Depot at Lungi in Sierra Leone, under consideration by ECOWAS in line with its mandate on electoral assistance to member States.

He thanked the ECOWAS Commission and management for their support and development partners such as the Open Society Initiative for West Africa, which has been providing financial and technical support to ECONEC since its formation in 2008.

The ECONEC President also expressed appreciation to other development partners for supporting ECONEC's activities. These include the German International Development Agency, GIZ, sponsors of the validation workshop, and the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA), adding that the European Centre for Electoral Support (ECES), also co-organized with ECONEC and INEC, a successful International Workshop on the use of technology in elections, in Abuja last April.

Speaking on behalf of the ECOWAS Commission's management, Dr. Remi Ajibewa, the Director of Political Affairs, said that while elections should be a matter of national sovereignty, "the reality is that in most of our countries, election budgets are largely funded by development partners." "This situation often gives rise to accusations of foreign interference in the selection of our leaders," he said, adding: "For this reason, the time has come to pause and carefully reflect on viable ways of self-financing our elections without jeopardizing the financial stability of future generations."

In his goodwill message, the GIZ representative Ludwig Kirchner, noted that while there might be "different ways of distributing political power, election may not be the best way, but has been found to be democratic and more cost-effective."

He noted that the German government has always supported ECOWAS in the area of peace and security, and assured that the partnership would continue.

Mr Kirchner expressed the hope that the outcome of the study would be useful to ECOWAS, in the strengthening of the electoral processes and consolidation of democracy in the region.

Speaking in the same vein, OSIWA representative Joseph Amenaghawon, said the organisation's interventions in West Africa cut across political and economic governance and advancements, as well as justice, equality and human rights.

He expressed OSIWA's commitment to continued partnership with ECOWAS and ECONEC in the delivery of programmes with positive impact on the community citizens.

Setting the tone for the deliberations, the ECONEC Permanent Secretary and Head of ECOWAS Electoral Assistance Division, Mr. Francis Oke, reminded the participants, including the three consultants that stakeholders within and outside Africa were waiting for the outcome of the study as a guide on election expenses management.

The study was carried out in ECOWAS' three official linguistic zones: Anglophone (Nigeria and Liberia), Francophone (Benin Republic and Senegal) and Lusophone (Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau). The published result of the study is expected to be launched by the end of this year.



PRESS RELEASE

Abuja, Nigeria, 18th February 2019

ECONEC EXPRESSES SOLIDARITY WITH NIGERIANS, URGES PERSEVERANCE FOR SUCCESSFUL ELECTIONS

The ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC) has expressed its solidarity with the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the people of Nigeria calling for perseverance to ensure the success of the country's rescheduled general elections.

"We salute the patience and patriotism of Nigerians and the courage and forthrightness of INEC and its leadership," Mohamed N'fah-Alie Conteh, Sierra Leone's Chief Electoral Commissioner and head of the ECONEC Peer Support and Learning Mission, said during a meeting with Prof Mahmood Yakubu, INEC Chair and President of ECONEC's governing board in his office on Monday 18th February, 2019.

INEC last Saturday, postponed by one week Nigeria's presidential and National Assembly elections from February 16th to 23rd, while State Houses of Assembly polls were also moved from 2nd to 9th March, due to logistical and operational challenges.

"As senior officials of Election Management Bodies (EMBs) in our region, we appreciate what INEC and its leadership are going through at this critical stage of the electoral process, Conteh said, adding: "we are convinced that INEC under your (Prof Yakubu's) able leadership and the Commission's dedicated team will acquit yourselves creditably in delivering elections with integrity to Nigerians."

Given Nigeria's leadership role in the region, he added: "We are at your disposal for any possible assistance to make the electoral process a success for the consolidation of democracy in the country and across our region."

Prof Yakubu thanked the ECONEC team, which includes the leadership of EMBs of Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Ghana, Niger and The Gambia, for the solidarity visit.

He pledged that in spite of the postponement, INEC would redouble its efforts to deliver free, fair, transparent and credible elections based on international best practices.

“It is good to know that in times like this, you have friends who understand that elections are always difficult issues to manage because they have to do with the control of political power.”

“We will do our best with very clear conscience and we will never be distracted,” he affirmed, explaining that “when we accepted this job, we also accepted to be abused and it is not about knowing it all, because nobody has a monopoly of knowledge.”

The INEC chief reiterated the determination and commitment of the Commission to consult widely with stakeholders, and to remain open and transparent in adherence to the process.

Prof Yakubu also received the Core Team of the ECOWAS Election Observation Mission, which is coordinating the 200 Long- and Short-term observers deployed across Nigeria for the general elections.

Fifteen of the regional observers are supported by the European Union under the EU Support to ECOWAS Regional Peace, Security and Stability Mandate (EU-ECOWAS PSS) Project. Five of the 80-member ECOWAS Observation Mission to Senegal, which is holding its own presidential election on 24th February, are also supported under the EU-ECOWAS Project.

The ECONEC Mission also met on Monday with Dr Mohamed Ibn Chambas, United Nations Special Representative and Head of UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel to discuss electoral issues in the region.

It is the first time that the Network is deploying such a mission to a member holding key elections as part of its mandate to promote credible elections in the region in line with international best practices through peer collaboration and support, as well as experience and information sharing.



PRESS RELEASE

Accra, Ghana, 5th May, 2019

ELECTION MANAGEMENT BODIES IN WEST AFRICA URGED TO SET UP FUNCTIONAL GENDER UNITS TO BOOST POLITICAL INCLUSIVENESS

A three-day workshop to Validate Report on the Assessment of Gender Mainstreaming and Election Management Bodies (EMBs) in the ECOWAS region, ended in Accra, Ghana on the 4th of May 2019, with the validation of the Report and wide ranging recommendations, including a call on all EMBs to set up Gender Units.

The workshop, officially opened by the ECOWAS Commissioner for Social Affairs and Gender, Dr Siga Fatima Jagne represented by the Director for Social and Humanitarian Affairs, Dr Sintiki Ugbe, advocated that Gender Desks of EMBs should be well-resourced and possibly elevated to a department with sub-units to cater for issues related to youth and persons with disability.

“Each Gender Unit (should) start the process of developing long-term strategic plans for the purpose of advocacy within the leadership of the EMB and key electoral stakeholders,” recommended the workshop, attended by Focal Persons of EMBs.

The participants further called EMBs to develop an effective gender policy to assist in addressing the barriers faced by women in the electoral process.

EMBs should also work on providing during every election, gender disaggregated data of registered males and females, the voting pattern, and elected candidates, to allow for proper analysis, the workshop recommended. It also called on EMBs to work with political parties, civil society, the media and other stakeholders to promote women’s participation and representation in politics.

Declaring the meeting closed on behalf of the Commissioner, Dr Ugbe urged the participants to return as strong advocates of gender mainstreaming in the political process of their respective countries.

She noted that the aggregation of positive actions at the national level would ensure the adoption of international best practices in gender mainstreaming and political inclusiveness at the regional level.

In her opening remarks, Commissioner Jagne had called on EMBs in West Africa to take concrete measures to enhance women's political participation and representation and to make electoral processes more inclusive in the region.

"Election Management Bodies (EMBs) play an important and unique role in the consolidation of democracy and the promotion of human rights in our countries. They are therefore, the bodies through which women's rights can be effectively promoted," she added.

ECOWAS has a Gender and Elections Strategic Framework and Action Plan, which was validated by regional experts and endorsed by regional Ministers in charge of women affairs in February 2017, and by the ECOWAS Council of Ministers, in June the same year.

The 10 thematic areas of the Framework or its strategic pillars have been designed into a 5-year Action Plan (2017-2022), outlining some specific actions, including a mapping study on the Assessment of Gender Mainstreaming and EMBs in Electoral Processes in West Africa, which Report has now been validated by the Accra workshop.

The report highlights major impediments to gender mainstreaming in politics in West Africa, including women's low literacy level, as well as financial and socio-cultural barriers. It also recommends key actions to scale up the participation and representation of women and other vulnerable groups to ensure inclusiveness in the electoral process, such as adequate representation of women at EMBs and political parties, and proper funding of Gender Units at EMBs.

This validated report will be finalised by ECOWAS and ECONEC will form the basis for an Action Plan for the enhancement of gender mainstreaming within EMBs in the ECOWAS region.

Among the workshop attendees were Madam Maria do Rosario Goncalves, Chair of Cabo Verde's National Electoral Commission, who is also deputy Treasurer of the ECONEC governing board, Mr Amada Aladoua, Vice-Chair of Niger Republic's National Electoral Commission and Staff of the ECONEC Secretariat.



PRESS RELEASE

Accra, Ghana, 8th May, 2019

REGIONAL EXPERTS URGE ECOWAS TO REDOUBLE EFFORTS ON GENDER MAINSTREAMING

Regional experts on gender and elections have called on the ECOWAS Commission to intensify efforts towards gender mainstreaming across its operations, structures and systems, and to ensure equitable participation and representation of women in elections in the region.

In their recommendations at the end of a two-day workshop in Accra, Ghana, 6-7 May 2019, the experts, who validated a Baseline Assessment Report on Gender Mainstreaming in Elections by the ECOWAS Commission, and urged the Commission to “develop, disseminate and implement its Gender Policy, as it relates to various ECOWAS normative frameworks, including the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance of 2001.

The Commission is further urged to adequately resource and strengthen the Department of Social Affairs and Gender and the ECOWAS Gender and Development Centre with financial and human capacity for effective tracking and/or monitoring of gender responsive actions within the Commission and in member States.

The Commission, through its Electoral Assistance Division (EAD), should also create and use Gender and Election Experts’ database, to enhance gender equity in the deployment of Short- and Long-Term Observation Missions, the workshop recommended.

In addition, the experts urged the Commission to work with gender focused Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to support ECOWAS political party development initiatives on gender mainstreaming.

Capacity should also be built around the ECOWAS Gender and Elections Strategic Framework (GESF), to secure the necessary buy-in and effective implementation.

The assessment Report, validated by the experts, was commissioned in January, 2018 with inputs from the ECOWAS Departments of Social Affairs and Gender, and Political Affairs, Peace

and Security, specifically, the Electoral Assistance Division, and other ECOWAS Commission Institutions, national structures and stakeholders. These include the ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC), and with the financial support by the European Union, under the EU-ECOWAS Peace, Security and Stability Mandate (EU-ECOWAS PSS) Project.

In her address to the workshop, the ECOWAS Commissioner for Social Affairs and Gender, ECOWAS Commission, Dr Siga Fatima Jagne, said the meeting was part of efforts to “introduce a gender monitoring and evaluation mechanism for consistency in the implementation of the Action Plan of the ECOWAS Gender and Election Strategic Framework,” which was endorsed in 2017 by regional Ministers in charge of Women Affairs and the ECOWAS Council of Ministers.

In the address read by the ECOWAS Director of Social and Humanitarian Affairs, Dr Sintiki Ugbe, the Commissioner said: “The purpose of the report is to increase ECOWAS’ accountability to integrating gender in key Peace, Security and Stability (PSS) Project result areas, in this case: Elections,” adding that “The rationale is that integrating gender... will strengthen the effectiveness of ECOWAS Conflict Prevention and Response at Regional and National levels.”

She thanked the EU for its support, adding that the assessment “is to identify gaps, challenges and best practices relating to gender and election issues in the region,” and to also “define in a systematic way a Work Plan that can further strengthen the work of the Electoral Assistance Division, and which can be used for advocacy to mobilise the needed resources.”

In his remarks, a representative of the EU-ECOWAS PSS Project, Mr Juvenal Turatsinze described the workshop as timely, coming at a time of advanced conversation for the extension of the implementation period of the PSS Project.

“Gender is not only about democracy but also development,” he said, noting that this was part of the first steps in the enormous work required towards the realisation of gender mainstreaming and political inclusiveness in the ECOWAS region. He noted that gender mainstreaming and electoral assistance remain a priority of the PSS Project.

The workshop attendees included Madam Maria do Rosario Goncalves, Chair of Cabo Verde’s National Electoral Commission, who is also deputy Treasurer of the ECONEC governing board, Madam Genevieve Boko Nadjo, Vice-Chair of Benin Republic’s National Electoral Commission, Madam Amlan Victoire Alley, a Commissioner at Cote d’Ivoire’s National Electoral Commission, and Staff of the ECONEC Secretariat.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Paul Ejime is a media and communications strategist with vast professional experience. He has worked as a Diplomatic Correspondent, War Reporter, Bureau Chief and Senior Editor for national and international news organizations including the French News Agency (AFP), News Agency of Nigeria (NAN), and the Pan-African News Agency (PANA), as well as a Stringer for the British Broadcasting (BBC) and Voice of America (VOA).

A Chevening Fellow with an MA degree in Journalism Studies from the University of Wales, Cardiff, UK, on British and Commonwealth Office Scholarship, Ejime began his journalism career in 1983 as the Lagos Correspondent/Deputy Bureau Chief of AFP after emerging as the Best Graduating Student of the Nigerian Institute of Journalism in 1982. He later moved to NAN as a Senior Diplomatic Correspondent and worked with colleagues from other media organisations to establish the Nigerian Association of Foreign Affairs Correspondents (NAFACOR). He was elected the pioneer President of the Association in 1989.

In the last decade, Ejime has been involved in election reporting and observation projects and has written and published several works including, 'A Decade of ECOWAS Electoral Assistance in West Africa (2006-2016)', sponsored by GIZ. From 2017, he has been providing technical support to ECONEC as its pioneer Senior Adviser on Communications and Advocacy, developing and leading the implementation of proactive communications initiatives that have repositioned and raised the visibility profile of West Africa's umbrella body of electoral commissions.

Ejime has led corporate communication strategies for international organisations such as the ECOWAS Commission and the Burkina Faso-based World Health Organisation's African Programme for Onchocerciasis (River-blindness) Control (WHO/APOC). He was among the 10 Nigerian journalists that accompanied the ECOWAS Military Monitoring Group, ECOMOG, on its maiden mission (in 1990) to Monrovia, as part of the regional initiative to end the bloody civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone. He also covered the Nigeria - Cameroon conflict in 1994 and has undertaken several professional study tours including to West and East Germany in 1991 before the Berlin Wall was brought down, and to the USA on the US Information Agency-sponsored Project in 1993 themed: "Decision Making in US Foreign Policy."

Ejime was part of the Nigerian Government Delegation led by former Foreign Minister Gen. Ike Nwachukwu that toured Commonwealth countries on the campaign that culminated in the election in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia of Chief Emeka Anyaoku as Africa's first and only Commonwealth Secretary General in 1989.

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