

A Decade of ECOWAS Electoral Assistance in West Africa, 2006–2016



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Foreword

The ECOWAS Commission has been undertaking election observation missions in Member States since 2001 at both the presidential and parliamentary levels. The initial deployments were largely conducted in an ad hoc fashion and on several occasions, the outcomes thereof were contested by the concerned Member States. The establishment of the ECOWAS Electoral Assistance Division in 2006 was an attempt to better organise and coordinate ECOWAS' electoral support as well as to further professionalise electoral assistance processes within the region.

In this regard, over the years, a number of interventions have been implemented, targeted at strengthening legal and institutional frameworks for elections, including, the development of the capacity of electoral administrators and Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) and the improvement of electoral governance through the establishment of an ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC).

Despite numerous challenges and lessons learned over the past decade, notable achievements have been recorded including the fact that today, all 15 ECOWAS Member States are running democratic systems of government. In addition, through its support, the ECOWAS EAD has provided financial assistance to the tune of approximately USD 25 million between 2011 and 2016 in support of elections related activities. Going forward, there still remains much scope and opportunity for critical reflections and evaluation. There are numerous critical gaps that need to be addressed, including especially as relates to funding. ECOWAS Member States need to make greater efforts towards assuming ownership and responsibility for the sustainability of the electoral assistance initiatives, given especially that elections are at the heart of national sovereignty and given how integral electoral processes are to conflict prevention within our region. These issues are only but a glimpse of what this publication aims to look at and it brings us great pleasure to be able to share with you a decade of electoral observation experience and practise in West Africa.

On a final but important note, we would like to thank the numerous partners and friends who have supported us over the years, both financially and technically. Such partners include especially, the Open Society

Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), the European Union (EU), the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, as well as the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA). A special thanks is further expressed to the GIZ Support Programme to the ECOWAS Commission for their support and contributions in putting together this anniversary publication.

May we together keep working towards ensuring free and fair elections in West Africa that are a true reflection of the sovereign will of all ECOWAS citizens.



Halima Ahmed

Commissioner, Political Affairs Peace and Security

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

CBOs	Community-based Organisations
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
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
ECOWARN	ECOWAS Early Warning Mechanism
ECPF	ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework
EISA	Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa
EMBs	Election Management Bodies
EOM	Election Observation Mission
EU	European Union
FBOs	Faith-based Organisations
GIZ	German Agency for International Cooperation (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH)
INEC	Independent National Electoral Commission, Nigeria
LTEOs	Long-Term Election Observers
LTEOM	Long-Term Election Observation Mission
LTOs	Long-term Observers
NAMs	Needs Assessment Missions
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
OSIWA	Open Society Initiative for West Africa
PAPS	Political Affairs, Peace and Security Department, ECOWAS Commission
PPP	Public Private Partnership
RECs	Regional Economic Communities
SRSG	Special Representative of the Secretary General (United Nations)
STEOs	Short-Term Election Observers
STEOM	Short-Term Election Observation Mission
STOs	Short-Term Observers
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNOWAS	United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel
WANEP	West Africa Network for Peacebuilding

The Genesis of ECOWAS' Electoral Assistance in West Africa

With the end of colonisation, many African countries gained political independence in the 1960s and 70s, resulting in the creation of several sovereign nation-States and the adoption of various political systems for the pursuit and actualisation of democracy and good governance.



Eric Kandstein

Voters inspecting ballots papers on election day, in Montserrado, Liberia (11 October 2005).

However, the political systems in most of the newly independent countries were generally flawed, with the attitude and conduct of the political class producing several instances of one-party authoritarianism and military dictatorships in many African countries in the late 1970s and 1980s.

No region of the globe has been spared the “wave of democratisation,” which hit the world following the end of the Cold War in 1989. From that period on, many African countries began reform processes that resulted in multi-party political systems and the termination of military regimes. This was particularly so in the West African region.

However, the adoption and practice of multi-party democracy has not been without its challenges. Fierce contestations for political power have created new

types of tensions and conflicts have arisen from flawed and disputed electoral processes. By 2002, the West African sub-region had recorded four full-blown civil wars (in Liberia, from 1989; Sierra Leone from 1991; Guinea Bissau from 1998; and Cote d'Ivoire from 2002).

These disruptive and devastating conflicts underlined the need to take into account the nexus between peace and security, and economic development. Created in 1975 to foster economic integration among its Member States, in the 1990s the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) became acutely conscious of the fact that economic integration could not be achieved in a politically unstable environment. ECOWAS was now obliged to broaden its focus from economic integration to include the pursuit of political integration. Consequently, the organisation began

to deploy significant efforts and resources towards conflict mitigation, including election-related conflicts.

The ECOWAS Commission began the deployment of election observation missions to Member States holding elections in 2001, albeit on an ad-hoc basis. This was aimed at ensuring that the outcome of elections truly reflected the will of the citizens and by so doing reduce election-related violence.

Dr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas

“*In the last two years, of the 10 elections held in the region the opposition has won six without serious disputations, or political instability, resulting in peaceful transfer of political power and generally well-managed change of governments. The credit should go to ECOWAS as a regional body involved in serious efforts working with its member states and partners to deepen democracy and regional integration.*”

Dr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas, former Executive Secretary/President of ECOWAS Commission and now Special Representative of the UN Secretary General and Head of the UN Office in West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS)

After a review of electoral processes in the region in 2006, the Commission created an Electoral Assistance Division (EAD) to organise and coordinate electoral support to Member States.

Prior to this, ECOWAS' electoral assistance was haphazard and its regional electoral observation missions and declarations were criticised as “political.” ECOWAS carried out various actions to professionalise the process, improving electoral governance in the region by strengthening the legal and institutional frameworks for organising elections, and building the capacity of electoral administrators. It is in this light that the ECOWAS Commission initiated the creation of the ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC) in February 2008.

ECONEC promoted credible elections by encouraging the harmonization of electoral legislation and best practices across the region through experience-sharing and peer learning.

It has now been 10 years since the creation of the EAD and the formalisation of ECOWAS' electoral assistance to Member States. This calls for a review of the electoral assistance initiative within the context of the evolving electoral environment in the region in order to assess

the achievements, challenges, and lessons learned by the initiative, and formulate improvements going forward.

The EAD and ECOWAS' Electoral Assistance Mandate

The EAD is one of the divisions within the Political Affairs Directorate of the ECOWAS Commission's Department of Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS). The division's specific objectives are to provide support for the conduct of credible elections, harmonize election administration procedures across the ECOWAS region, and build the capacity of Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs).

The EAD executes the ECOWAS Commission's mandate on electoral assistance guided by three key legal instruments: the 2001 Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, Supplementary to the 1999 Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace keeping and Security; the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF 2008); and the ECOWAS Handbook on Election Observation.

Specifically, the provisions of Article 12 of the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance 2001 and the Decision of Heads of States and Government in Dakar 2003 mandate ECOWAS to assist Member States in conducting elections. The same protocol enunciates the Community's zero-tolerance for obtaining political power through any means other than constitutional and democratic processes.

The ECOWAS Commission's engagement with Member States on electoral assistance is carried out through the following activities:

- a. Fact-finding missions
- b. Election observation missions
- c. Situation Room mechanisms
- d. Provision of financial assistance
- e. Provision of logistical assistance
- f. Provision of technical assistance

Before the advent of the EAD, there were many demands from ECOWAS Member States for assistance in organising credible elections. There was also a need to establish a division within the Commission to plan and coordinate its electoral assistance activities. Matters came to a head with the 2005 presidential election in Togo, when the ECOWAS' election observation mission, coordinated by the Council of Elders and sponsored by Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA),

validated and declared the elections as free and fair while other observers felt otherwise.

With financial and logistics support from OSIWA and other development partners, the EAD has created comprehensive methodologies and conditions for the observation of elections. Over the years, the EAD has contributed to building the capacity of Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) in West Africa, provided technical and financial support to Member States in the organization of their elections, and deployed a number of election observation missions to ensure compliance with international standards.

These efforts have not only contributed to credible and peaceful elections across the region, but are also assisting in the deepening and consolidation of democracy and good governance in the region.

The EAD is also working towards harmonizing electoral administration in West Africa and the creation of ECONEC as a platform for sharing experiences and best practices among ECOWAS member countries has contributed to this.

Types of Observation Missions

Short-Term Election Observation Missions

Short-term Election Observations Missions (STEOMs) to Member States have been “the most widely publicised and visible activity in ECOWAS electoral assistance” noted the ECOWAS Commission’s President, Marcel de Souza, in his address to an International Workshop on Electoral Processes in West Africa held in Cotonou, Benin Republic, in March 2017.

Since 2006, ECOWAS STEOMs have been systemically deployed to every presidential election in the region, with the exception of The Gambia in 2011 and 2016. In its statement, the ECOWAS Commission said it

“ For me, a Needs Assessment is usually a prerequisite for giving any form of assistance. ... How does the recipient assess the benefit of the assistance? How does ECOWAS, the donor, independently assess the benefit of the assistance? In the absence of follow-up actions, fact-finding and election observation missions are of little benefit where shortfalls have been noted.”

Dr. Kwadwo Afari-Gyan, former Chair of Ghana's Electoral Commission

could not dispatch election observers to the 2011 presidential election in The Gambia because, based on the recommendations of its pre-electoral fact-finding missions, “the preparations and political environment for the said election” were not “conducive for the conduct of free, fair and transparent polls.” The frosty relationship between the country and the regional organisation persisted for several years and resulted in the Commission’s refusal to send observers for the December 2016 presidential vote, relying instead on its Regional Bureau in Banjul and reports by its Early Warning system.

ECOWAS observers have also been deployed to sensitive legislative elections. These included Benin Republic and Sierra Leone in 2008, Togo in 2013, Guinea Bissau in 2014, and The Gambia in 2017.

Table 1: ECOWAS STEOM Deployments between January 2006 and April 2017

YEAR	COUNTRIES
2006	The Gambia
2007	Senegal, Nigeria, Mali, Sierra Leone
2008	Benin, Ghana, Guinea Bissau
2009	Guinea Bissau
2010	Togo, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire
2011	Niger, Benin, Nigeria, Cabo Verde, Liberia
2012	Senegal, Mali, Sierra Leone, Ghana
2013	Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Mali
2014	Guinea Bissau
2015	Nigeria, Togo, Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso
2016	Niger, Benin, Cabo Verde, Ghana
2017	The Gambia, Liberia

Table 2: ECOWAS LTEOM Deployments between January 2014 and October 2017

ELECTION DATE	NATURE OF ELECTION	HOST COUNTRY	DURATION (days)	TOTAL LTOs
13 April 2014	Presidential	Guinea Bissau	30	10
28 March 2015	General	Nigeria	54	18
25 April 2015	Presidential	Togo	30	11
11 October 2015	Presidential	Guinea	30	12
25 October 2015	Presidential	Cote d'Ivoire	30	12
29 November 2015	Presidential and Parliamentary	Burkina Faso	30	12
21 February, 20 March 2016	Presidential and Parliamentary	Niger	30	13
06, 20 March 2016	Presidential	Benin	30	14
02 October 2016	Presidential	Cape Verde	30	10
07 December 2016	Presidential and Parliamentary	Ghana	30	14
10 October 2017	Presidential and Parliamentary	Liberia	50	18

STEOMs have a two-fold objective, namely: to ensure that international standards of free, fair and credible elections are adhered to and guarantee that the citizens' rights to freely select their leaders are respected; and to ascertain the credibility of the results declared by local electoral management bodies. However, STEOMS concentrated solely on Election Day activities and excluded pre- and post-election activities.

Long-Term Electoral Observation (LTO) Missions

In 2014, the EAD, with the support of the German Agency for International Cooperation, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH (GIZ), introduced the Long-term Election Observation (LTEO) approach to complement its short-term missions.

“ We have seen a high level of participation by women in the political process across the ECOWAS region, where they constitute more than 50 percent of the population in most of the countries. However, women's participation has not been commensurate with their representation. So, we would like to see an improvement in the representation of women, especially an increase in number in the parliaments and in the decision-making positions.”

Halima Ahmed, ECOWAS Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security

Halima Ahmed



Paulo Figueras

Kadré Désiré Ouedraogo (left), President of the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), speaks to correspondents following the Security Council's meeting on the situation in Mali. To his left is Tété António, Permanent Observer of the African Union to the UN. (Permanent Observer of the African Union to the UN. (05 December 2012).

By covering pre-election, election, and post-election periods, LTEOMs allow observers more time for a detailed and comprehensive assessment of various stages in the electoral process, helping to better identify and nip potential election-related conflicts in the bud.

Security Observation Missions

The Security Observation mission brings together high-ranking military officials from across the region to observe the role of their peers in countries with high-tension and volatile electoral processes. Such missions were deployed to Togo in 2007 and Guinea Bissau in 2009.

Fact-Finding Missions

Before it conducts any electoral observation, the EAD carries out pre-election fact-finding missions to Member States to gather first-hand information on the context within which elections are held. These provide ECOWAS with the information required for the success of its observation missions, both long- and short-term. Fact-finding missions also permit the early detection of potential conflicts and thus serve as the basis for

preventive diplomacy and mediation efforts. Notable examples of such missions were in Sierra Leone and Ghana in 2012 and Nigeria in 2015.

Upon request, the Commission can provide financial and technical support for Member States to ensure successful elections. It has also assisted in building and strengthening the capacity of EMBs in managing and resolving conflicts arising from elections, and followed

“ It is better and more cost-effective to deploy ECONEC for credible elections than to deploy ECOMOG [the regional peacekeeping force] because of flawed elections. ...Election is a sovereign national responsibility of government. Development partners can only add value to the delivery of credible and peaceful elections. ”

Prof. Mahmood Yakubu, President of the board of ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC) and Chair of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Nigeria.

Prof. Mahmood Yakubu

up with Member States to ensure the implementation of observation mission reports and recommendations.

Success Stories

The Commission's electoral assistance has come a long way, noted Francis Oke, Head of the ECOWAS Electoral Division. Speaking in an interview in his Abuja office on 22 June, 2017, he said:

“There has been a tremendous improvement in ECOWAS' electoral assistance, including in electoral observation, especially with the adoption of the 2001 Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance. Before 2006, electoral observation by ECOWAS was considered political, with the process involving mainly Ministry of Foreign Affairs personnel. The Declarations and Reports of the observation missions elicited a lot of criticisms. So, after the 2005 presidential election in Togo, a decision was taken to involve experts and civil society organisations (CSOs) so as to make election observation by ECOWAS more professional and its declarations and reports credible.”

A notable example was the successful intervention that resolved what could have become an election-related catastrophe in The Gambia in 2016. The then incumbent president, Yahya Jammeh, lost the December 2016 presidential election to the opposition candidate but wanted to thwart the wishes of the electorate and remain in power. However, the ECOWAS Commission helped carefully ease Jammeh out to allow for a peaceful transfer of power with the rightful winner of the election, Adama Barrow, assuming office in January 2017.


Some of the key benefits of the successful evolution of electoral assistance by ECOWAS the last decade include the maturity now exhibited by political actors in various Member States. The acceptance of, and strict adherence to, the provisions of various ECOWAS protocols and normative frameworks has resulted in a zero-tolerance approach to leaders obtaining power through undemocratic means, according to Dr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas, former Executive Secretary and President of the ECOWAS Commission.

Dr. Chambas is currently Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) and the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General, and in a telephone interview on 12 July, 2017, he said:

“In the last two years, of the 10 elections held in the region, the opposition has won six without serious

disputations or political instability, resulting in peaceful transfer of political power and generally well-managed change of governments. The credit for this achievement should go to ECOWAS as a regional body involved in serious efforts working with its Member States and partners to deepen democracy and regional integration.”

Halima Ahmed, the ECOWAS Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, agreed with Dr. Chambas' assessment, saying in an interview in her Abuja office on 23 June, 2017:

“By and large, the ECOWAS electoral assistance is a huge success, but – as with every human process – we can do with some improvements, especially by making sure that our Member States own the process and commit to its sustainability to entrench the democratic process in our region.” 

∴ a zero-tolerance approach to leaders obtaining power through undemocratic means ...



Halima Ahmed, the ECOWAS Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security.

Interview with Dr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas¹

It was under the leadership of Dr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas that the ECOWAS Electoral Assistance Division (EAD) was established in 2006. He also played a pivotal role in the creation of ECONEC in 2008. Below are excerpts from his thoughts on the last 10 years of ECOWAS' electoral assistance in West Africa.

How would you assess a decade of ECOWAS Electoral Assistance in West Africa?

There is no question that one area where ECOWAS's impact has been greatly felt is in the conduct of credible elections. In comparison to other regional economic communities (RECs), it is widely acknowledged that by its interventions: through recommendations, putting pressure on Member States, offering technical support, and having significant presence during elections, ECOWAS is contributing to the entrenchment of democracy in the region. On that score, ECOWAS' efforts are commendable and exemplary in Africa.

The evidence of this success is that in every subsequent electoral cycle there is an improvement. There is also the benefit of the early warning preventive diplomacy which accrues from this intervention when ECOWAS works with partners such as the United Nations and the African Union.

You are described as the "Father" of ECONEC, the ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions which was set up in 2008 by the ECOWAS Commission to support Member States holding elections and ensure credible elections and for the deepening of democratic process in the region. Has this objective been realised?

In the setting up ECONEC, we were guided by dynamic global trends and the need to respond to the emerging challenges of democracy and good governance. Since organisations are judged by the strength of their membership, ECONEC members must live up to their responsibilities to the network so as to encourage greater solidarity, information and experience-sharing among themselves.

Our EMBs must ensure that ECONEC functions properly to be able to fulfil its mandate. They should also be strengthened in terms of human and



Prof Yakubu and other ECONEC governing board members commissioning the ECONEC Secretariat in Abuja in July 2017.

¹ Conducted 22 June 2017.

technical capacities to deliver elections with integrity. ECONEC should also be in a position to pursue mutually beneficial networking and collaboration between it and organisations with similar objectives outside the ECOWAS region. This will enrich the body of knowledge on electoral management and ensure improved performance by EMBs in the delivery of credible elections and the promotion of democracy and good governance across Africa.

Elections are a complex and expensive enterprise. What should be the role of partners?

Partners such as the African Union (AU), United Nations (UN) and other international organisations should coordinate their efforts in assisting countries, with each partner identifying its areas of comparative advantage. There should be a complementarity of roles so that ECOWAS, which has the comparative advantage as a regional organisation with grassroots impact, is not overwhelmed. Partners should all work together and maximise what they each bring to the table for improvement in terms of electoral assistance so that the demand/workload is not too heavy on any one partner.

What would be your recommendation for the sustainability of ECOWAS' Electoral Assistance?

The way forward towards sustainability for ECOWAS' electoral assistance in West Africa is for efforts to be concentrated on the development of national expertise, the building of national capacity, and working with CSOs.

The ultimate objective is for the electoral system to become a natural process where everyone works for transparency and credible elections with the support of sub-regional organisations such as ECOWAS and continental bodies such as the AU and of course, international support, including from the UN.

Of course, the democratic process is still evolving in West Africa, but we should create a national environment for these necessary competencies to grow and make the compulsory monitoring by outsiders, as happens now, unnecessary. Going forward, the electoral system should develop to a level where it is no longer necessary to pay for people from outside a particular country or the region to come and monitor elections, thereby making the entire process very expensive. The focus therefore, is to build local/national capacities in this area.

What about follow-up on the implementation of observers' reports and recommendations?

Election observation should not be a routine exercise of just deploying people without plans for the implementation of their reports and recommendations.

When reports or recommendations are made, ECOWAS should look at them and determine the areas it can help countries to address. And where there are gaps, it should determine which partners to approach for assistance to help improve systems.

For instance, although the UN does not observe or monitor elections, it has an Elections Unit within the Department of Political Affairs (DPA). My Office [UNOWAS] works closely with the Unit and with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on issues such as Needs Assessment Missions prior to the holding of elections. This enables the UN, through the UNDP, to identify the constraints, key issues to be addressed and/or assistance to be rendered. In this vein, we can all collaborate with ECOWAS in addressing shortcomings identified by their own observation missions, where necessary. 🌐



Esther Debebe

Dr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas.

Regional Leaders' Commitment

The commitment of ECOWAS leaders to the consolidation of democracy in the region through the conduct of credible elections is not in doubt. But matching this commitment with concrete actions, such as adequate funding for elections and proactive implementation of policy decisions, remain a big challenge.



Acting President Osinbajo, Prof Yakubu and other ECONEC board members.

Speaking in Monrovia on 19 July, 2017, Liberia's President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf reassured a joint delegation of ECONEC and ECOWAS fact-finding mission members of her government's unwavering commitment to delivering credible and peaceful elections in the country next October at the end of her two-term tenure.

"For us, this election is Liberia's defining moment. It is an important test of our move to political maturity and we are hopeful of a successful and peaceful transition."

The Liberian leader further acknowledged the key role played by ECOWAS in ending a decade of devastating civil war in her country, noting that Liberians owed the peace and democratic progress in the country to the ECOWAS-led international support.

She therefore promised that her government would resolve all outstanding issues related to the October parliamentary elections and establishing her successor in office, such as the passage of the national budget

to prompt the disbursement of funds to facilitate the electoral process.

Earlier that month, Nigeria's Acting President, Yemi Osinbajo also pledged the government's full support in partnering with ECOWAS and the ECONEC in the conduct of credible elections to ensure socio-political stability in the West African sub-region. While receiving an ECONEC board delegation at the Aso Rock Villa on 7 July 2017, he said:

"We have supported several of our brothers in the sub-region in the past, and we intend to continue to do so because we believe in the fundamental principles of free elections. We believe that the only way to ensure stability in the society is to ensure that people have a right to elect their leadership. Not just a right on paper, but a right in practice. The only way by which that right can be manifested in practice is by free and fair elections."



Dr Amos Sawyer, ECOWAS Commissioner Halima Ahmed and Vice President Edward.

Ghana's former President, John Kufuor, has led ECOWAS election observation missions to Nigeria, Mali and Cote d'Ivoire and he also believes that ECOWAS has done well in terms of electoral assistance. In a recent interview, he noted that the organisations' observation missions have contributed to the standardization of electoral processes and democratic values in West Africa.

“ECOWAS observation strengthens the pursuit of the unification of the sub-region and also underpins the aspiration of democratization of West Africa as a whole ... I would like to see a West African sub-region where the electoral authorities will be transparent and completely independent of political authorities within their countries, and where their declarations of election results will be exactly the people's choice as exercised on the ballots.”

However, he pointed out that ECOWAS' the guarantee of the integrity of elections by should not be limited to observation alone.

“Presently, by their mandate, ECOWAS observers can only observe and report, and cannot get involved in the process, even if they find things going wrong. I look forward to a time when ECOWAS' EAD will be given the mandate of election monitoring which will empower them to take action and get involved in the process when things are going wrong. This can only be possible if the Member States cede part of their sovereignty to the Commission in a way that empowers the Commission to take action in ensuring compliance to guiding principles of democracy in the conduct of elections by Member States.”

Liberia's former Interim President Prof. Amos Sawyer, who has also led several ECOWAS electoral missions and now chairs the National Governance Commission that promotes elections with integrity, democracy and good governance, has also commended ECOWAS for its solidarity and support as part of the electoral assistance mechanism.

When Receiving an ECONEC board delegation, which paid him a courtesy visit in Monrovia on 17 July, 2017, he noted that electoral support by ECOWAS helps to mitigate election-related disputes. By encouraging political actors and stakeholders to play by the rules, the ECOWAS promotes credible and peaceful elections and the broader stability and development of the region.

However, beyond these assurances, the governments and political leadership in ECOWAS member States still need to see elections as a sovereign responsibility and national priority. Elections are not an event, but a process with a life cycle and each stage is critical to the success or failure of democracy in a region.

“There is no price you can put on democracy or the freedom of our people.”

In Monrovia on 10 July, 2017, in an address to Liberian political stakeholders Prof. Mahmood Yakubu, President of the ECONEC governing board, and Chair of Nigeria's Independent Electoral Commission (INEC), put it more eloquently, saying:

“It is better, and more cost-effective to deploy ECONEC in peacetime than to deploy ECOMOG [the regional peacekeeping force], after flawed elections.”

“Elections are a process not an event. Elections have become a litmus test for peace, security and stability in West Africa, given the enormous threats and challenges that come with organizing free, fair, and credible polls in the region.”

Chukwuemeka Eze, Executive Director, West Africa Network for Peace building (WANEP)

Contributions of Development Partners

Partnerships with Positive Results

ECOWAS' electoral assistance to its Member States has been largely facilitated over the past decade by strong partnerships between the ECOWAS Commission and a growing list of development organisations and donors. For instance, the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) has been a key financial supporter of ECONEC since its inception in February 2008.



Partners during the 2017 elections in Liberia.

This view was echoed by Francis Oke, the Head of the ECOWAS EAD and Permanent Secretary of the ECONEC, who stated in an interview on 22 June, 2017, that:

“ECOWAS’ electoral assistance could not have recorded much success without the contributions of development partners.”

The ECOWAS Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, Halima Ahmed, corroborated this assertion, noting:

“We [ECOWAS] have witnessed generally credible elections with peaceful transitions of political power

in the past decade. This has been achieved with the cooperation and support of development partners and various stakeholders.”

Other ECOWAS partners include: the German Agency for International Cooperation (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH (GIZ)), the European Union (EU), The Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) offices in Togo and Nigeria, the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA), the United Kingdom’s High Commission in Ghana, the Norwegian Embassy in Cote

d'Ivoire and the European Centre for Electoral Support (ECES).

The areas of intervention as well as the financial, technical and logistical support provided by these partners have covered:

- Capacity-building for ECOWAS election observers and training of core teams (EISA)
- Election Observation Missions (GIZ - LTOMs since 2014, UNDP - Togo and Nigeria, ECES, Norwegian Embassy)
- Security Observation Mission to Togo (EU)
- Financial and technical support to ECONEC since inception (OSIWA)
- Development of election observers' database (GIZ)
- Experts Meeting in Abidjan to review 10 years of LTO Missions in March 2017 (GIZ)
- International Workshop in Cotonou on a decade of ECOWAS Electoral Assistance in April 2017 (OSIWA, GIZ, DANIDA)
- Participation of EAD officials at US 2016 presidential election (GIZ)
- Publication of *A Decade of ECOWAS Electoral Assistance in West Africa, 2017* (GIZ)

While the partnership between ECOWAS and its various regional and international partners is positive, it raises concerns about issues of sustainability. It is important that ECOWAS and its Member States, working with all other relevant stakeholders, ultimately own its electoral assistance processes and grow a critical mass of local expertise. In this way, the organisation could best strengthen democratic governance across the region.

ECOWAS' Engagement with CSOs

In its desire to ensure effective citizen participation in the electoral process, ECOWAS makes great efforts to regularly engage and collaborate with CSOs, which are closer to the grassroots than the political leadership. This philosophy, which drives the regional integration agenda, informed organisation's shift from "an ECOWAS of States to an ECOWAS of people," as encapsulated in its ECOWAS Vision 2020 document.

In its various normative frameworks and regional legal instruments, especially the *2001 ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, supplementary to the Protocol relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security (1999)*, several provisions have been made to engage citizens in the formulation of policy and the delivery of democracy and good governance.



Members of ECOWAS LTEOM to the 2015 Presidential election in Guinea at a meeting with Civil Society Organisations in Conakry.

Since no credible electoral process without the participation of the people, the active participation and involvement of non-state actors, particularly civil society organisations to sensitize and mobilize the electorate is a priority.

It is in line with this that ECOWAS evolved a strong strategic partnership with CSOs such as the Ghana-based West Africa Network for Peace-building (WANEP) in 2004. Established in 1998, the WANEP is a household name in the region, with national offices all 15 ECOWAS Member States and over 520 member organisations.

WANEP became the organisation's CSO implementation partner to help operate the ECOWAS Early Warning Mechanism (ECOWARN) and, according to its Executive Director, Chukwuemeka Eze, it has been monitoring and analysing elections and electoral processes for over a decade. Through its national networks and country reports, WANEP actively participates in ECOWAS' election observation missions, providing analyses of election trends and dynamics in Member States.

WANEP believes that collaborative approaches to peace-building can create an enabling electoral environment before, during, and after elections. This is consistent with ECOWAS' overarching objective. Both parties are also in agreement on the need for capacity-building for local EMBs and

other strategic stakeholders in the areas of credible election observation, strategic partnerships in conflict prevention, and the mediation of electoral disputes. Speaking in a telephone interview on 28 June, 2017, WANEP's Eze noted that:

“Elections have become a litmus test for peace, security and stability in West Africa, given the enormous threats and challenges that come with organizing fair and credible polls in the region. Election disputes are inherent [to] elections; they cannot be totally eliminated - even in advanced democracies - and must therefore be dealt with... Challenging an election or its conduct, should not be perceived as a reflection of the weakness of the political system, but as a proof of its strength, vitality, and openness.”

Ensuring Peaceful Elections

The West African sub-region has had more than its fair share of flawed or disputed elections, but it is to the credit of ECOWAS and its strategic partners, including CSOs, that elections in the region in the past decade have been largely credible. Through the organisation's electoral assistance mandate, where disputes have arisen they have been resolved, ensuring the peaceful transfer of political power in many Member States. To consolidate this effort, WANEP has created an Election Dispute Management Practice Guide to assist



Members of ECOWAS LTEOM to the 2015 Presidential election in Guinea at a meeting with Civil Society Organisations in Conakry.

West African practitioners and EMBs in the peaceful management of electoral processes. The guide provides relevant stakeholders, including government, donors and CSOs, with basic information on how to respond to conflicts arising from the conduct of elections. The Network also mobilises and coordinates local or “citizen election observers,” who can cover more ground than the limited number of international observers. According to WANEP’s Eze:

“CSOs in ECOWAS Member States boast a depth of knowledge and understanding at the grassroots. The legal and political system, and the first set of useful information available on political/election trends, is usually provided by the CSOs.”

During the 2015 presidential election in Nigeria, ECOWAS could not deploy observers to the country’s North-East region because of security concerns and so WANEP’s Nigeria Country Report came in very handy. WANEP’s collaboration proved similarly, useful during The Gambia’s 2016 presidential election for which ECOWAS could not deploy observers. However with WANEP’s assistance, ECOWAS was able to play a role in the resolution of the dispute over the presidential polls and effect the eventual peaceful transfer of political power in the country.

The CSO members who serve in ECOWAS’ election observation missions or in citizen observation teams usually include experts in election operations, gender and vulnerable groups, conflict prevention, security, legal and constitutional affairs, and media.

One example of this is Amie Joof, a Gambian activist, who was forced into political exile in Senegal for 10 years and only returned to her country in 2017 following the change of government and a member of WANEP, Joof has participated in a number of ECOWAS’ short- and long-term election observation missions. Joof works with FAMEDEV, an Inter-Africa Network for Women, Media, Gender and Development, and has served in ECOWAS observation missions to Liberia, Nigeria, Mali, Togo, Cote d’Ivoire, Niger and Ghana.

Joof believes that ECOWAS observers’ impactful engagement with political stakeholders before, during, and after elections, including political parties, EMBs, CSOs, security personnel, women and youth groups, has added value to the democratic process in the region. She noted that:

“These interactions help to build confidence and facilitate conflict prevention, management and resolution.”


ECOWAS-CSO partnerships are also important to the Election Situation Room mechanism, which permits a timely analysis of field reports on the prevailing situations during elections. WANEP is recognised as a critical player supporting the region’s peace and security architecture.

Further Improvements Possible

However, it is generally agreed that the ECOWAS-CSO partnership could further be strengthened. For instance, Eze recommended that both partners should address the time lag between the reporting of a potential conflict situation and the activation of the response process. Governments, who are active participants in the electoral process, might be reluctant to implement what they consider negative or difficult recommendations, which, nevertheless, might be critical to improving their electoral process. CSOs and EMBs should also strive to work in harmony and not as adversaries.

There should be a focus on capacity-strengthening for non-state actors to encourage specialisation in election reporting, a strict adherence to best practices and professional ethics, the avoidance of hate speech, a respect for electoral laws, and the publication of poll results, among others. The media, in particular, should be cultivated as a key partner in the democratic process, by encouraging factual reporting of electoral processes and situations.

In general, non-state actors can do more in mobilising and sensitising the citizenry to their civic duties in order to promote a culture of peace and to address the issues of voter apathy and low turn-out.

Most importantly, the governments of ECOWAS Member States should be sensitized to see elections as a process and not an event. The election cycle operates in three phases: pre-election, Election Day, and post-election, and each of these phases are critical to the success or failure of the democratic process. 

Interview with Prof. Attahiru Jega

Prof. Attahiru Jega was the former Chair of Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) who oversaw the 2015 presidential election that resulted in the peaceful transfer of power from a ruling party to the opposition for the first time in the country's history. He shared his views on ECOWAS' electoral assistance initiatives in a questionnaire-administered interview on 22 June, 2017.

Given your experience in election management, how would you assess ECOWAS' initiative in assisting its Member States in the conduct of elections?

I give ECOWAS high marks in its initiatives and assistance to Member States in the conduct of elections. ECOWAS has done commendably well in this regard in my view, by far better than any other sub-regional organisation in Africa. The pre-election assessment missions, the short- and long-term observer missions - which ECOWAS now deploys - and the rich reports which they generate and share with the EMBs and other stakeholders, add tremendous value to the preparations and conduct of elections with integrity. This is complemented by other material assistance where necessary.

I believe that ECOWAS is a trailblazer on the African continent in terms of the support and assistance it gives to Member States on electoral matters. This needs to be sustained and enhanced.

In your view, are there benefits to the Member States, and the region as a whole, in deepening democracy through this process?

No doubt, there are many benefits to Member States in the region, which [in turn] contribute to peace, stability and the deepening of democracy. Ensuring that elections are conducted professionally and with integrity paves the way for legitimacy, stability and good democratic governance. ECOWAS' assistance to Member States in this regard is contributing to deepening democracy all over West Africa.

What particular incidents/events would you recall to buttress your point?

There are many, but ECOWAS' assistance to the post-conflict states of Liberia and Sierra Leone, as well as Mali, is noteworthy. Not to mention countries such as Nigeria and Ghana in their more recent elections.

Indeed, the firm stand taken by ECOWAS against Yahya Jammeh's attempts to truncate a fair electoral outcome in The Gambia is exemplary and widely acclaimed.



Creative Commons

Professor Attahiru Muhammadu Jega, Chairman, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Nigeria (2010-15).

ECOWAS' assistance comes in various forms, including equipment supply, capacity-building for EMBs and short- and long-term election observation as well as pre-election fact-finding missions. Have these initiatives been effective?

The various forms of assistance given to Member States by ECOWAS, in my view, have been effective in not only being indicative of sub-regional concerns and solidarity for free, fair and credible elections, but especially in strengthening the capacity of EMBs to deliver elections in professional, competent and efficient manner. These various forms of support need to be sustained and increased remarkably given their positive impact.

Are the EMBs under the umbrella of ECONEC maximizing the potential benefits of solidarity, information and experience-sharing well enough?

I believe that ECONEC is a commendable initiative and offers EMBs in the sub-region a wonderful platform for sharing ideas, experiences and good practices, which will improve the integrity of elections and deepen democracy. At the moment, the full potential benefits of ECONEC have not been fully tapped by the EMBs.

But the constant attempt and striving to reposition it, especially the recent election of INEC Chairman, Professor Mahmood Yakubu [as ECONEC governing board president], should be an opportunity to galvanise EMBs in the sub-region to maximise the derivable benefits from ECONEC. The ECOWAS should lend greater support to the actualisation of the objectives for which ECONEC was established.

What do you consider as the key lessons learnt from ECOWAS electoral assistance endeavours?

I believe the key lessons include sharing experiences and best practices, and a sort of peer review on electoral integrity. Bonds of relationships are strengthened, unity of purpose and solidarity are displayed, and all are focused on getting things right – ensuring free, fair and credible elections. These are great lessons for democratic development in the sub-region.

Elections are very expensive and one of the major challenges to effective electoral assistance and/or the conduct of elections with integrity in West Africa is funding, with external partners providing much of the financial assistance for ECOWAS election observation missions. What is the solution to enable Member States to own and sustain the process?

Elections are indeed relatively expensive undertakings. EMBs have to strive harder to reduce the cost of conducting elections. However, if a cost-benefit analysis were to be done, the actual benefits of conducting elections with integrity, paving the way for a government's legitimacy, stability and democratic development, far outweigh the material cost of conducting elections in our sub-region.

To paraphrase the saying that those who think education is expensive should try ignorance, I would say that those who think elections to pave way for democratic development are expensive should try authoritarian dictatorship! I urge Member States to increase their contributions and assistance on elections in the sub-region. Support by other partners and donors should really be complementary. Total or even significant reliance on donations by partners and international organisations, rather than on contribution of the Member States, in my view, would be an abnegation of responsibility and a misplacement of priorities.

What should be the role of governments, CSOs, and non-state actors such as the media in supporting electoral assistance and the conduct of credible elections in West Africa? Also, can the issue of inclusiveness in the political process be addressed as it relates to youth, women, and persons with disabilities?

On elections in particular, and democratic development generally, all hands must be on deck. As I often said when I was in INEC, the business of conducting elections freely, fairly and with integrity is not the business of the election management body alone; it is the business of everybody. All stakeholders have significant roles to play and must play them appropriately.

Inclusiveness is also a precondition for electoral integrity and democratic development. The legal framework must create and guarantee avenues for inclusion, and institutions such as EMBs, must act in such a manner that promotes inclusiveness. This point cannot be over-emphasised.

Do you support the argument that there is a need for follow-up actions to implement the recommendations of fact-finding and electoral observation missions, as well as for Needs Assessment Missions to make EMBs and other stakeholders more effective and efficient?


I support doing whatever it takes to ensure free, fair and credible elections in our countries. Follow-up actions to ensure the implementation of recommendations, if handled properly, would add value. Also, it would be good for organisations like ECOWAS to do needs assessments of the EMBs of Member States, with a view to providing more targeted and focused support in need areas. If needs assessments are done, they must be backed with support to mitigate and address established needs.

What are your recommendations regarding best practices and the way forward to ensure impactful electoral assistance as a tool for conflict prevention, the delivery of credible elections and the strengthening of democracy in West Africa?

First, I recommend that Member States take seriously the need to effect changes to electoral legal frameworks in good time – at least six months before scheduled dates of elections, as provided for in signed Protocols – to enable EMBs sufficient time to prepare well.

Second, I recommend that EMBs strive to be non-partisan, impartial and facilitative of a level playing field for all parties and contestants.

Third, all the electoral processes and procedures must be made very transparent and accountable.

Fourth, EMBs must have the capacity and strength to conduct elections efficiently, effectively, and with integrity. Assistance by ECOWAS or indeed by any other organisation should be tailored towards actualising these recommendations. 

Boosting ECOWAS' Electoral Assistance

It is a truism that the credibility of any election depends on the credibility of the electoral administrator. Put differently, a discredited, poorly-funded, under-staffed, ill-equipped, or dysfunctional electoral commission can never guarantee a national election with integrity. Any efforts by ECOWAS to provide electoral assistance to its Member States for the of conduct credible and peaceful elections will come to naught if local EMBs are not adequately funded or lack the requisite technical and human capacity.



Voters queue up to vote at a polling station, in Tubmanburg, Liberia.

EMBs and Political Stakeholders

While ECOWAS and its development partners can be proud of their achievements after ten years of electoral assistance, the initiative has also brought to light some major challenges, especially around the capacity and readiness of many EMBs and political stakeholders to conduct credible and peaceful elections in their countries.

In many cases, the government's budget allocation towards elections are either grossly inadequate or are not passed or released in time for the implementation

of electoral processes. One case in point was Liberia, which had its general elections in October 2017. However, by the second half of July 2017, the country's Parliament had not yet passed the national budget to enable the release of funds to the National Electoral Commission (NEC).

Another challenge is the lack of adequate technical and logistics systems for the movement and security of electoral personnel and materials, given the difficult-to-access terrains of many West African countries. A number of EMBs lack enough skilled personnel to deliver credible and seamless elections.

There is also the need for legal clarity, as well as a regularity of the dates and schedule of activities when planning national elections. Electoral security is another a serious issue that requires the sensitisation and mobilisation of all security systems in a country, including the police, and military and para-military services. However, these personnel have to be available in adequate numbers and trained for electoral duties, and such training requires a lot of resources.

Prof. Mahmood Yakubu, President of ECONEC governing board and Chair of Nigeria's Independent Electoral Commission (INEC), suggested that nations should be more willing to bear these costs. Speaking to a delegation of the ECONEC board on Needs Assessment and Solidarity Missions to Sierra Leone and Liberia in July 2017, Prof. Yakubu said: "Elections [are] a sovereign national responsibility of government, external support can only add value to the delivery of credible and peaceful elections."

All arms of government – from the legislature, to the executive and the judiciary – must play their part, in line with the provisions of their electoral laws and national constitutions to ensure credible and peaceful elections. For instance, respect for the ECOWAS protocol advocating a time limit of six months before an election for any legal amendments is imperative. Similarly, election-related disputes must be dispensed promptly to avoid delays and an escalation to protracted electoral disputes, as this will only undermine the credibility and integrity of the electoral process.

Marcel Alain De Souza

“The extent to which an election impacts positively or negatively on the democratisation process depends on its integrity. Cognisant of this fact, the ECOWAS' founding fathers in their wisdom have laid a great emphasis on electoral assistance to its Member States as a way of strengthening electoral integrity in our region. ... Elections by themselves do not equate to functional democracy, but they do constitute one of the major barometers for the measurement of a democratic process.”

Marcel Alain De Souza, President of ECOWAS Commission.

To foster this necessary unity, members of national EMBs must work in unison and speak with one voice noted Dr. Maria do Rosario Goncalves, Chair of Cape Verde's NEC, during an ECONEC pre-election Needs Assessment Mission to Sierra Leone in July 2017. Speaking in reference to the covert and overt disunity observed within some EMBs in the region, she said:

“There must be unity among members of the National Electoral Commission, because lack of harmony within the EMB is a recipe for disaster, which could undermine a credible or peaceful election in a country.”

All stakeholders, including official and non-state actors should be adequately sensitised and mobilised to play their roles in support of a successful electoral process noted Chukwuemeka Eze, Executive Director of WANEP.

“Elections [are] a process not an event. Elections have become a litmus test for peace, security and stability in West Africa given the enormous threats and challenges that come with organizing free, fair and credible polls.”

This means that elections must be given priority instead of the current practice whereby some governments regard the organisation of polls as a periodic pastime.

Governments need to pay serious attention to every stage of the electoral cycle, including voter registration. Ignoring this could be a recipe for flawed elections, with disputes that could unleash political instability and derail the democratic process in a nation. In its June 2017 publication, *Introducing Biometric Technology to Elections*, international NGO, IDEA International, affirmed that:

“A credible voter register gives legitimacy to the electoral process and helps prevent electoral fraud.”

The importance of Non-State Actors

This brings us to the important role of non-state actors, especially civil society, in the electoral process. Governments and government agencies/institutions alone cannot deliver credible elections without the support of non-state actors. For instance, NGOs/CSOs are known to play a key role in the sensitisation and mobilisation of citizens to fulfil their civic and electoral duties.



ECOWAS Long Term Observers to the 2016 Presidential elections in Cape Verde at a meeting with the Cape Verdean media regulator.

Effective civic and voter education undertaken autonomously by NGOs/CSOs, or in partnership with EMBs and other government agencies, will galvanise the electorate to ensure mass participation and prevent voter apathy and low voter turnout during national elections. Citizens with sound voter education will also be able to defend their civic and electoral rights and serve as watchdogs to prevent electoral fraud. However, this requires a collaborative effort on the part of the government and non-state actors.

The private sector too, has a key role to play to ensure that corporate organisations live up to their social responsibility and support the electoral processes of the countries where they are operating.

Also, according to Dr. Goncalves proper sensitisation of Civil Society Organisations is critical to the attainment of credible and peaceful votes. Her counterpart from Burkina Faso, former journalist Ahmed Newton Barry, agreed. In his remarks during the ECONEC delegation's consultations with political stakeholders in Sierra Leone in July 2017, Barry noted that non-state actors, especially the media, have a major role to play towards the delivery of credible and peaceful elections in any country:

“Both the conventional media and the social media, which thrives on anonymity, must be engaged in a structured manner to prevent the consequences of hate speech and any unethical conduct that could undermine the democratic process.”

However, Prof. Yakubu of INEC noted that media censorship was not the answer. Instead, the media, along with politicians and political parties, should be sensitised to play by the rules, eschewing insensitive, inflammatory or inciting statements. Kwadwo Afari-Gyan, the former Chair of Ghana's Electoral Commission, also emphasised the place of the media, civil society

“*The role of the media is critical to credible and peaceful elections, and we cannot ignore the impact of the social media and concerns about its anonymity. But the solution is not to clamp down on the media, but proactive engagement to eschew hate speech during elections.*”

Ahmed Newton Barry, former journalist and Chair of Burkina Faso's Independent Electoral Commission (CENI)

Ahmed Newton Barry



Election materials waiting for distribution.

organisations (CSOs) and other non-state actors in the sustenance of electoral assistance.

“The way to arouse their active interest and gear them into meaningful action is to engage and dialogue with them about their relevance to achieving credible elections. In other words, give them a platform to indicate, as it were, in their own words, the ways in which they can assist in achieving credible elections, so that they could be held accountable.”

Result management is another sensitive issue which EMBs and the media must handle with care.

As demonstrated by Kenya’s August 2017 presidential election, the result of which was overturned by the Supreme Court over vote tally and result transmission issues, the deployment of technology has the potential of enhancing efficiency in the electoral process. However, experts have recommended caution to ensure sufficient testing of electoral equipment before deployment.

The Role of Member States

The time is ripe for ECOWAS Member States, their governments, and other stakeholders, including civil society, the private sector, the media, and the electorate, to assume responsibility and ownership

of the electoral assistance initiative to ensure its sustainability.

Member States must also live up to their regional obligations, such as by paying their financial dues promptly, to enable ECOWAS to deliver its electoral assistance mandate.

Efforts should also be made to reduce the high cost of elections in the region, through the sharing of electoral materials by EMBs in various member states and the creation of effective procurement and audit systems to reduce waste and ensure prudent and transparent use of available resources.

For now, a substantial portion of the support for ECOWAS’ electoral assistance initiative comes from development partners such as OSIWA, the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), the EU, the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA) and the Danish Agency for International Cooperation (DANIDA), to name a few.

While it has been recommended that development partners channel their support for the enhancement of democracy and good governance towards the needs of EMBs in beneficiary countries, beneficiary governments, institutions and agencies also should demonstrate their commitment to supporting for the advancement of democracy and good governance in the region. 🌍

Key Challenges

Between 2011 and 2016, the ECOWAS Commission provided financial assistance estimated at USD \$25 million to support elections across West Africa through the EAD. However, the EAD faces serious challenges toward the realization of its electoral assistance mandate.



A visionally challenged Gambian voter is assisted in casting her vote.

Funding Constraints

As one of the Divisions within the Commission's Department of Political Affairs, Peace and Security, the EAD relies on funding from the Commission's regular budget. It also sources for funds and technical support from donor agencies such as OSIWA, the EU, GIZ and DANISA. However, there is a concern that losing these sources of external funding could undermine or jeopardise the EAD's initiatives in the long term.

To potentially address this challenge, the President of the ECOWAS Commission has recommended the establishment of a dedicated fund for the support of

“
There is no price you can put on
democracy or the freedom of our people.”

Edward Singhatey, Vice President, ECOWAS Commission

Edward Singhatey

elections and electoral observation assistance in the region. This will ensure that even when donor funds dry up, ECOWAS Member States will be able to assume responsibility for the EAD.

Staffing Constraints

Since its inception, the EAD has been operating with only two staff members and this has placed a significant strain on the ability for the division to be effective in meeting its core mandate.

Logistical Constraints

Several observers have cited logistical constraints as another key challenge for long-term election observation in the region. Some of these challenges include the inhospitable terrains in which observers are deployed, difficulties in communication and access to information, language barriers, and administrative support issues.

Poor Implementation of ECOWAS Protocols

ECOWAS has not been able to implement all the relevant protocols and mechanisms that underpin its electoral assistance agenda. It will be important going forward that the different national electoral processes are harmonised so as to strengthen democracy and good governance in the region.

Poor Inclusion of Women and Vulnerable Groups

Several observers feel that a lot more needs to be done to ensure that women and vulnerable groups actively participate in the electoral process, and with adequate representation. One observer commented that:

“The low level of women’s representation in politics in the ECOWAS region, when compared with their high levels of participation, is disappointing. The first-past-the-post electoral system used by many countries in the region, and the huge financial demand of politics often puts women, youth and people with disabilities at a serious disadvantage... This has to be corrected for improved inclusivity in the political process, including by reserving some seats for women and minority groups in decision-making positions.”

It has also been suggested that ECOWAS Member States should work with partners to ensure more women and persons from the minority groups head political parties and national EMBs.

Technological Challenges

Though the use of information technology in electoral processes brings with it several advantages, its use is often a potential cause of political dispute. For instance, technology was deployed in the electoral processes in Nigeria 2015, and Ghana and Cape Verde in 2016 with limited success. Given the cautious optimism around

the issue of information technology, the EMBs should strive to generate consensus around the choice and deployment of these systems for elections.

Other Challenges

In addition to the above, other challenges remain. These include: the prompt release of funding by Member States for election processes, electoral security, the sustainability of political processes, the weaknesses of national EMBs, the inadequate sensitisation and mobilisation of citizens ahead of elections, unstructured engagements with civil society and media organisations, and the promulgation of hate speech. There is also a lot more room for improvement when it comes to proactive follow-up and implementation of observation mission reports and recommendations.

Lastly, political will remains a key challenge for the EAD and, as summed up by Francis Oke, Head of the ECOWAS EAD:

“There is lack of appreciation by some Member States of the critical importance of elections and electoral observation for democracy and good governance.”

As such, there has to be a change of attitude and orientation amongst key stakeholders, with each playing their part in the delivery of credible and peaceful elections. 🌍

Dr. Maria de Rosario Goncalves

“There must be unity among members of the National Electoral Commission because a lack of harmony within the EMB is a recipe for disaster which could undermine credible or peaceful election in a country.”

Dr. Maria de Rosario Goncalves, Chair of the National Electoral Commission, Cabo Verde

Looking Forward

In the last decade, ECOWAS' electoral assistance to Member States has yielded many benefits, especially as a tool for conflict prevention and ensuring that leaders are elected to power through democratic means. For the first time since its inception, all Member States have elected leaders and governments, in some cases sitting presidents have called the winners from opposition parties to concede defeat and congratulate their opponents. However, a lot more needs to be done to build on its successes.



Participants at ECOWAS-EISA Training for Long-term Election Observers in Accra, Ghana, 13 August 2017.

Maximising the LTOMs

For instance, Raouf Salami, an election expert from Togo who has participated in several of ECOWAS' short- and long-term observation missions supports the introduction of more long-term observation initiatives.

Election observation is a key element of ECOWAS' electoral assistance. In fact, the reports/recommendations of such missions, and the outcomes of fact-finding missions and early warning mechanisms, form the basis for many initiatives and interventions. It should also be prioritised as an indispensable aspect of the electoral process and a tool for conflict prevention.

In an interview during an electoral workshop in Abidjan in February 2017 Salami noted that not only was the reporting and analytical content of long-term

reports of higher quality, approach adopted by the observers in stakeholder engagements was often more comprehensive.

“The observers are able to work longer, access more areas which enable more detailed assessment of various stages of the electoral process for relevant recommendations that helps to trigger solutions to challenges in the management of the election process.”

Salami cited the example of Benin Republic, where the intervention of an ECOWAS LTEOM facilitated the resolution of an issue around voter cards which had threatened to disenfranchise thousands of voters. Many voters, some of them voting for the first time, were eventually allowed to cast their ballots upon the presentation of their valid national ID cards.

Similarly, in Nigeria in 2015, the leadership of INEC accepted the recommendation of an ECOWAS long-term mission to allow the manual verification and accreditation of voters after field tests had revealed that the electronic card readers purchased for the exercise had failed in some parts of the country.

Salami and other observers recommended an extension of the time allotted to LTEOMs, from the current 30 days to about 45 days, to enable a more comprehensive observation and assessment of critical stages of the electoral processes in countries holding elections. According to him, this will improve the quality of work and reduce the workload on the mission, which often has the responsibility of preparing the ground for short-term observers.

Salami also believed there should be regular training for long-term observers (LTOs), in addition to having a core team for proper coordination and reporting. Francis Adebola Laleye, one of ECOWAS' pioneer election observers, agreed. He recommended that EAD core teams should be supported to promote the capacity of poll observers and improve the quality of their analysis in drafting reports and recommendations. The language competence of LTOs, making sure that they can communicate in local languages, should also be taken into consideration during deployment in order to get the best from them.

Increased Funding

However, deploying LTEOMs requires funding, which is scarce. As a solution, governments of ECOWAS member States should work with the private sector to ensure the sustainability of ECOWAS' electoral assistance initiatives. Adequate funding will also ensure the timely deployment of the right numbers of LTOs for a longer time to ensure that potential conflicts are nipped in the bud.

Kwadwo Afari-Gyan, former Chair of Ghana's Electoral Commission, and known as "an electoral encyclopaedia" for more than 20 years, noted in a questionnaire-administered interview that there is an umbilical cord between funding and the ownership and sustenance of the electoral efforts that ECOWAS promotes.

"Once the cord is cut off, the efforts cannot continue. So, it is critical that ECOWAS governments show tangible commitment to the efforts. With regard to the ECONEC, it may be feasible to exact contributions/dues from each member Commission to be included annually in the respective

Commission's budget. Once the budget is approved, the amount could be transmitted to a designated ECONEC account to be used and accounted for by the organization."

Halima Ahmed, ECOWAS Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, suggested that, given the importance and contribution of credible elections to democracy and good governance, it would be pertinent to include electoral assistance in the ECOWAS' annual budget.

She added that Member States should also demonstrate unwavering commitment to the EAD's mission by paying their dues and community levy promptly as this will engender ownership and sustainability of the process.

More Women's Participation

Ahmed, who was involved in the diplomatic interventions in Liberia and Sierra Leone and The Gambia, also stressed the need for an improvement in women's participation and representation in the electoral processes in West Africa.

"There has been high-level participation by women in the political process across the ECOWAS region, where they constitute more than 50% of the population in most of the countries. However, women's participation has not been commensurate with their representation. So, we would like to see an improvement in the representation of women, especially an increase in number in the parliaments and in the decision-making positions,"

Better Reporting and Implementation

One of the key lessons learnt from the electoral assistance initiative is that it is not enough to deploy election observation missions and write reports and recommendations. Equally important, is the need for follow-up and implementation of LTEOM reports and recommendations. As Commissioner Ahmed said:

"We are now laying much emphasis on continuous, strategic engagement with our member States throughout the election cycle - before, during, and after elections - through needs assessments, fact-finding, and then election observation missions, and most importantly, accompanying the countries on effective follow-ups and the implementation of the reports and recommendations of these missions. Coupled with our early-warning mechanism, this strategic approach to electoral assistance will produce the greatest benefits and contribute



Cross-section of ECOWAS Observers at a pre-deployment briefing in Cotonou ahead of the 2016 Presidential elections in Benin.

immensely to electoral integrity, deepening democracy and good governance for the realisation of the ECOWAS mandate of regional integration and development.”

This sentiment was echoed during ECOWAS’ Long-Term Election Observation Review Workshop held in February 2017 in Abidjan, Cote d’Ivoire. Participants were emphatic that the sustainability ECOWAS’ electoral assistance would depend largely on the implementation of electoral observation missions’ report and recommendations.


Among the workshop participants’ recommendations was the suggestion that electoral observation reports be timely and evidence-based to prompt more immediate and impactful responses from ECOWAS. The reports, particularly the recommendations, should also be shared with the Member State after every mission in order to prompt remedial actions by national EMBs and governments.

They further recommended that a technical situation room should be set up for every mission, enhancing real time analysis and intervention, and linkages between the ECOWAS’ early warning system and the LTEOM to mitigate the risks of election-related conflicts.

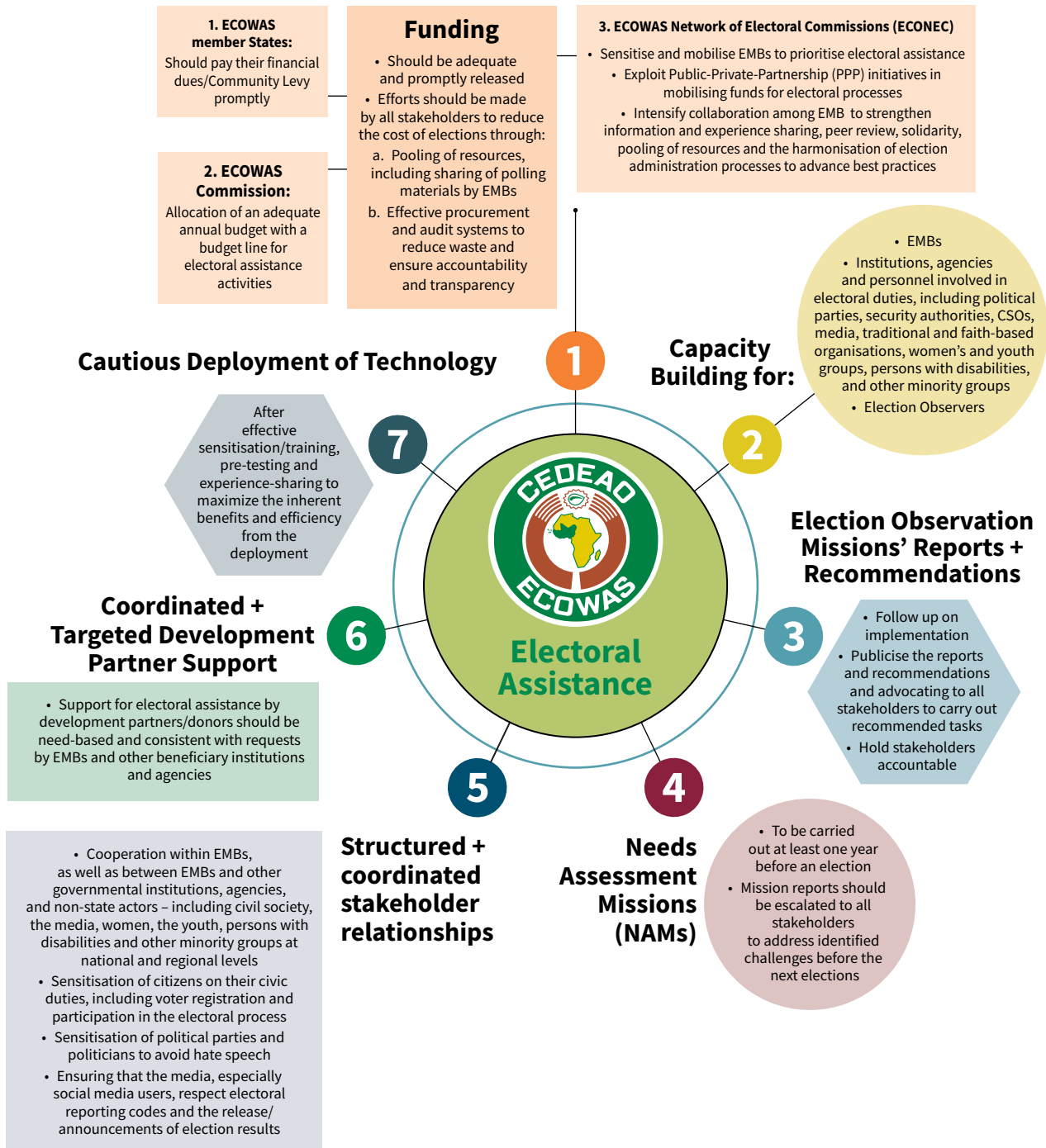
Participants also said ECOWAS should more closely observe LTOs’ adherence to the organisation’s code of conduct and apply sanctions when necessary.

Building National Capacities

While ECOWAS’ electoral assistance has been a huge success, the process can do with some improvements, especially by making sure that each Member State commits to the sustainability of the initiative. As noted by Dr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas:

“The way forward towards sustainability for ECOWAS’ electoral assistance in West Africa is for efforts to be concentrated on development of national expertise, building of national capacity and working with civil society organisations (CSOs). The ultimate objective is for the electoral system to become a natural process where everyone works for transparency and credible elections with the support of sub-regional organisations such as ECOWAS and continental bodies such as the African Union, and of course, international support, including from the United Nation.” 

How to Improve and Sustain ECOWAS' Electoral Assistance (At a Glance)



Regional Experts' Assessment of ECOWAS Long-term Election Observation

ECOWAS LONG-TERM ELECTION OBSERVATION REVIEW WORKSHOP

27–28 February 2017, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire

Conclusions and Recommendations

A workshop on the review of the ECOWAS Long-Term Election Observation Missions (LTEOMs) was organized by the Electoral Assistance Division in partnership with the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) from 27–28 February, 2017, in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire. The main objective of the workshop was to assess the impact of the long-term observation approach on the quality of ECOWAS election observation. The outcome of the workshop will enable ECOWAS Management and development partners to gain greater understanding of the rationale for, and critical role of, long-term election observation.

The meeting had in attendance 20 experts from Member States who have served as ECOWAS Long-Term Observers (LTOs) as well as participants from the ECOWAS Commission, the ECONEC Secretariat, GIZ, and EISA.

Following the opening session, the facilitator presented the objectives and expected outcomes of the workshop, after which experts were given the opportunity to discuss on thematic areas as per the agenda.

After exhaustive deliberations, inputs, comments and observations during the two-day sessions, the participants were of the view that the LTEOM have effectively contributed to decision-making of key electoral stakeholders during all phases of the electoral process helping to mitigate conflicts in a number of Member States.

Participants agreed that in order to build on the achievements recorded so far:

- Reports should be timely and evidence-based to enhance more immediate and impactful responses from ECOWAS;
- A technical and functional situation room for real-time analysis and intervention should be systematically set up for every mission;
- Linkages between the ECOWAS early warning system and the LTEOM should be enhanced for the mitigation of risks of election related conflict;
- Reports, particularly the recommendations, should be shared with the Member State after every mission in order to prompt remedial actions by EMB/Government and other relevant stakeholders;
- ECOWAS should take up the initiatives aimed at following-up the implementation

of recommendations contained in electoral observer missions (EOM) reports;

- Reports should be made accessible online for civil society and other stakeholders to follow up on recommendations;
- ECOWAS to strictly observe LTOs' adherence to their code of conduct and adequately apply sanctions when necessary;
- EAD to further review the LTEOM Guide, especially Section 16 and 17, and harmonise the template for final reporting;
- LTEOM to be composed of experts and deployed for a period of not less than 45 days;
- Set up a core team of experts for ECOWAS LTEOM;
- Training, capacity development and professionalization of the core team of experts for ECOWAS LTEOM;
- Formalise the practise of issuance of LTEOM Arrival Statements.

Participants expressed gratitude to the ECOWAS Commission and GIZ for their commitment to peace and security in the region and extended their sincere gratitude to the government and people of the Republic of Cote d'Ivoire for providing an environment conducive to holding the workshop.

Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire.

28 February 2017

International Workshop Recommends Way forward for Electoral Processes in West Africa

THE COTONOU DECLARATION ON ELECTORAL PROCESSES IN THE ECOWAS REGION



From 27 – 28 March 2017, the ECOWAS Commission, in partnership with the ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC), held an international conference on *A Decade of ECOWAS Experiences and Promotion of Democracy: Challenges and Lessons Learned*, at the Benin Royal Hotel in Cotonou, Republic of Benin.

The Conference undertook an objective assessment and analysis of electoral administration, processes, procedures and outcomes within the ECOWAS region in the last decade. The Conference was attended by chairpersons, vice chairpersons and members of electoral management bodies, representatives of ECOWAS and national parliaments, as well as representatives of the ministries in charge of elections of Member States.

Also in attendance was the President of the ECOWAS Commission, the ECOWAS Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, the Head of ECOWAS' Electoral Assistance Division and the Permanent Secretary of ECONEC, as well as staff of the ECOWAS Commission, ECONEC Secretariat and African Union Commission.

Other participants included election experts and development partners such as the International Federation for Electoral Systems (IFES), European Centre for Electoral Support (ECES), the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA), and the West African Network for Peace-building (WANEP). The conference was supported by the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), the

Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) and the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ).

PARTICIPANTS AT THE CONFERENCE:

ACKNOWLEDGED the evolving democratic culture of regular, periodic and largely credible and non-violent elections within the ECOWAS region over the last decade. In seven of these elections, the ruling party was voted out of power and replaced by the opposition party through mostly peaceful electoral and democratic transition processes

SALUTED the courage, determination, and resilience of the citizenry and various national institutions in the ECOWAS region in promoting and defending democracy and the democratic space to ensure that most of the leaders in the region now obtain their mandate and legitimacy solely through the ballot box

RECOGNIZED the positive and concerted role of the ECOWAS Commission in facilitating and supporting these largely credible electoral processes and peaceful transitions, thereby deepening democracy and good governance, especially through the systematic deployment of Election Observation Missions in the ECOWAS Member States

NOTED the progressive adherence of ECOWAS Member States to the 1999 Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security, and the 2001 Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, furthering the enhancement of electoral process and deepening of democratic culture in the ECOWAS region

TOOK a critical and retrospective look at the ECOWAS' electoral assistance and support over the past decade and, having reviewed the current state of democracy and democratic governance, peace and security, drew the appropriate lessons from these achievements with a view to strengthening current and future elections and consolidating democracy and good governance in the ECOWAS region.

AND HEREBY DECLARE AS FOLLOWS:

1. ECOWAS Member States that are yet to ratify the Principles contained in the Supplementary and the Revised Protocols on Democracy and Good Governance should ratify, domesticate and ensure the enforcement of the normative norms in these Protocols in order to enhance peaceful elections and democratic culture. Attention should be given to the respect of the principle of "two-term limit" for Presidents and Heads of State.
2. ECOWAS Commission and ECOWAS Member States should prioritize the production of reliable, up-to-date, and credible registers of voters that is acceptable to all electoral stakeholders, taking into consideration the opportunities offered by technological innovations and the challenges of infrastructural deficits.
3. ECOWAS Commission and ECOWAS Member States should strengthen the capacity development and training of electoral officials to promote efficiency, effectiveness and performance in the delivery of free, fair, credible, transparent, and peaceful elections.
4. ECOWAS Commission and ECOWAS Member States should recognize the positive contribution of national peace councils, civil society organisations (CSOs), faith and community based organisations (FBOs/CBOs), the media, including social media, traditional rulers, and religious leaders in promoting violence-free elections. EMBs should constructively engage with relevant stakeholders in a timely and transparent manner to disseminate information on organizational and operational processes to enhance confidence and trust in the electoral process.
5. ECOWAS Commission should accelerate the establishment and activation of the regional logistics depot in Lungi, Sierra Leone, and encourage the pooling of election resources and materials for common use across the ECOWAS region, based on the principle of mutual assistance and burden sharing.
6. ECOWAS Member States should see elections as a sovereign matter with respect to the electoral environment, resource mobilisation, efficient and optimal deployment of resources, as well as the standardisation and timely adoption of constitutional and legal electoral frameworks.
7. ECOWAS Member States should view the application of technological innovations in the electoral process as a facilitator, rather than a panacea for delivery of good and credible elections. 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.
8. ECOWAS Commission and Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) in ECOWAS Member States should enhance their support for political parties through regular trainings and workshops to strengthen their capacity to manage diversity and to promote participation, internal party democracy, accountability and transparency in party and campaign financing and alternate dispute resolution through the Intra/Inter Party Advisory Councils.
9. ECOWAS Commission should assist ECOWAS Member States to expedite action on the implementation and amendment of existing instruments, as well as the enactment of emerging normative frameworks to promote political inclusivity, women and youth empowerment, as well as access of women, youth and people living with disabilities to full participation and representation in the political process.

Cotonou, Benin. 28 March 2017