

**WACSO PEOPLE'S FORUM
SIXTH (6TH) BIENNIAL SESSION
AUGUST 15 -16, 2016
REIZ CONTINENTAL HOTEL, ABUJA - NIGERIA**

CONCEPT NOTE

'The WACSO Revival'

1.0 Background

The West African Civil Society Forum (WACSO) is a platform for the aggregation of civil society agency, interests, and interventions across the fifteen (15) states of West Africa. It was founded with the sole purpose of channelling civil society energies towards complimenting the regional integration and development agenda of ECOWAS.

The overall objective of WACSO is to provide a CSO complement for ECOWAS' efforts towards deepening regional integration and fostering stability and development in West Africa. Since its endorsement by the Authority of ECOWAS Heads of State and Government in 2003, WACSO has served as an umbrella for CSOs seeking to partner with the ECOWAS, promoting a system of dialogue and discussion, encouraging the sharing of ideas and perspectives and facilitating the building of collaborative relationships and linkages to ensure quality inputs of the civil society in to the agenda of ECOWAS. WACSO has served as the pivot for networking between and among CSOs on the one hand, and between CSOs and the ECOWAS on the other hand.

The current implementation plan for the ECOWAS Regional Integration Agenda (Vision 2020) is the Community Strategic Framework (CSF) 2016-2020. In April 2016 the ECOWAS Strategic Planning Directorate, following a directive from the ECOWAS Council of Ministers and with the support of GIZ, held a meeting with civil society, on the CSF and its implementation, with particular emphasis on the role of civil society. The meeting resolutions were emphatic on the importance of WACSO as the recognized umbrella body for civil society in the region, particularly in engagement with ECOWAS, and reiterated the need to ensure that it was strengthened to play its role effectively.

A West Africa Regional Civil Society Networks and Organisations' meeting which took place in Lome, Togo, in June 2016, reiterated this call for the revival of WACSO and called for the holding of a participatory WACSO Peoples' Forum as soon as possible.

The main decision making body of WACSO which can ensure that this needed revival takes place, is the People's Forum. This proposal is to request support for the organization and holding of the Sixth WACSO People's Forum; one which is critically needed to enable civil society take up their space in their engagement with ECOWAS and in the implementation of ECOWAS Vision 2020.

1.1 Justification

The Peoples' Forum is the supreme organ of WACSO which is composed of all representatives of CSOs registered with WACSO, mostly through delegation. Article 6.3 of WACSO Charter provides that the People's Forum shall be convened on an annual basis, prior to the statutory meetings of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government in order to review the activities of the Regional Secretariat, induct new members, appoint new leadership, review the activities of ECOWAS Member States, and make recommendations to the annual ECOWAS Heads of State and Government summit. However, due to paucity of funding, this has been amended and it was agreed that the Forum would hold every 2 years with a mini forum held in between. In compliance with this, WACSO has been able to convene five (5) full blown People's Forum in Accra (2003), (2005), (2010); in Niamey (January 2006); in Ouagadougou (December 2006) and a Mini Forum in Accra (2007).

Since then, the organization has been confronted with funding challenges and the many attempts to address this has been ineffective. The People's Forum remains the only space where the necessary critical decisions needed to revive the organization, can be taken.

It is against this background that WACSO is proposing to hold the Sixth People's Forum to critically address current institutional challenges it is facing and strengthen its capacities to better play its supervisory role of CSOs across the West Africa particularly as they seek to play their part in the implementation and monitoring of the CSF, and meet the expectations from its members and partners.

2. Objectives

The overall objective of the sixth bi-annual people's Forum is to gather representatives of Civil Society Organizations from across the fifteen (15) ECOWAS Member States to provide key updated information on the ECOWAS Regional Integration Agenda, particularly the CSF, critically discuss challenges facing WACSO and strategically address them in order to reinforce its institutional and operational capacities for an increased delivery on its mandate. Specifically, the Forum seeks to :

1. Update participants about the developments on the CSF and remind them of civil society's role
2. Renew the governance structures of WACSOF;
3. Discuss and creatively address the major institutional and operational challenges facing the organization;
4. Rebuild the trust of members and partners in the organization;
5. Redefine the strategy of engagement with ECOWAS;
6. Anticipate some of the challenges that may hamper the efficiency of the organization;
7. Explore new approaches of positioning the organization to efficiently play its institutional role.

3. Expected Outcomes

At the end of the Forum, the following outcomes are expected:

1. Updated information on CSF and the role of civil society
2. Renewed and strengthened governance structures of WACSOF;
3. Shared understanding of the challenges facing the organization and identified solutions and implementation methodologies to address them;
4. Restored trust and confidence of members and partners in the organization;
5. Strengthened relationship with ECOWAS;
6. Anticipated strategy of addressing challenges that weaken the organization;
7. Existing workable recommendations of repositioning the organization in the region.

4. Tentative Issues to be discussed

1. WACSOF Governance structures

- 1.1. Election of the new Executive Committee Members;
- 1.2. Recruitment of a new General Secretary;
- 1.3. Role and functioning of the organs (Executive Committee; Secretariat; National Platforms; Thematic Groups).

2. WACSOF engagement with ECOWAS

- 2.1. Contribution of WACSOF to the implementation of ECOWAS vision 2020 through the Community Strategic Framework (CSF) implementation;
- 2.2. ECOWAS' institutional support to WACSOF;
- 2.3. WACSOF working relationship with ECOWAS 'system' agencies.

3. WACSO's position in the region and relationship with Partners

- 3.1. WACSO's relationship with member organizations;
- 3.2. WACSO's engagement with CSO networks across the region;
- 3.3. Exploring new partnership opportunities.

5. Methodology and meeting format

The Forum is designed to promote the interaction between participants. As such, it will take the form of discussions and presentations around the above issues in order to harness best approaches to strategize for the effectiveness and efficiency of the services provided by WACSO.

7. Participants

The meeting will gather about one hundred (100) participants mainly from West Africa region comprising of delegates of Civil Society Organizations, representatives of ECOWAS, representatives of Civil Society umbrella organizations at a continental level and the media.

8. Dates and Venue

The Forum will hold on August 15 and 16, 2016 in Abuja-NIGERIA

9. Working Languages

The working language of the Forum shall be English and French and simultaneous interpretation will be provided.

