



2018 - 2022
STRATEGY

ENABLING SOCIAL
TRANSFORMATION
THROUGH A ROBUST
AND VIBRANT
CIVIL SOCIETY

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CSO	Civil Society Organisation
FBO	Faith Based Organisation
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
WACSI	West Africa Civil Society Institute

WACSI STRATEGY - 2018-2022

Enabling Social Transformation through a Robust and Vibrant Civil Society

1. Introduction

The West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI) was established in 2005, and became operational in 2007. Our core mandate is to strengthen the capacity of civil society in West Africa. Ten years since we became operational, the organisation has grown into one of the leading capacity builders of civil society in West Africa and one of the strongest advocates for government policies and donor practices that enable the growth of a robust civil society in the region. This is WACSI's third strategic plan and covers the five-year period from 2018-2022.

The narrative of West Africa that WACSI subscribes to is one of optimism. While we are not blind to the challenges of the region¹, we strongly believe that its citizens, acting as part of a robust civil society, can play a powerful role in transforming the region. This strategy reflects how we, as WACSI, aim to contribute to make this happen.

The strategy begins with our understanding of West Africa today, the rapid changes, the emerging opportunities and the civil society ecosystem within this context. Based on the assessment of our environment, we present our vision for West Africa, our unique mission in contributing to that vision and equally important, our theory of change, which is centred on civil society as a powerful driver of transformation in West Africa. The rest of the strategy is dedicated to describing what we plan to do in the next five years to fulfil this mission, namely the ambition for our programmes and how we will organize ourselves to deliver on this agenda. We conclude with a summary of how we intend to fund our ambition with a focus on projected income and expenditure from 2018-2022.

As with any strong strategy, the value is derived not simply from the words on paper but from the consultation and reflection process that led to development of the document. The preparation of this strategy involved rich discussions, a survey and feedback from WACSI's staff, Board members, civil society groups and funding partners. This strategy is a reflection of collective thinking.

2. West Africa: An Evolving Society

West Africa is a diverse and complex region with many contradictions. Events in the last ten years vividly illustrate this. For example, the region has achieved an average GDP

¹ WACSI works in 15 ECOWAS countries in addition to Mauritania, Cameroon and Chad.

growth rate ranging from 4% - 6% in the last decade. Yet inequality has grown within with high levels of poverty and unemployment of groups such as the youth.² The outbreak of Ebola in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea between 2014-2016 led to over 10,000 deaths and destroyed the livelihoods of millions. Yet, the Ebola crises also reflected the courage and resilience of West African people when faced with such a pandemic.

Peace and security has also been varied. In the last decade, there has been the emergence of two radical Islamic fundamentalist groups; AQIM (Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb) in Northern Mali and Boko Haram in North-eastern Nigeria, which has led to significant loss of life and insecurity in the affected areas. Yet, in the past two decades, the region experienced the end to protracted conflicts in Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone. Many actors have played a critical role in peace building in these and other conflicts in the region.

Democracy and governance in the region has also had its highs and lows. Military coups aborted preparations for democratic elections in Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea-Bissau. There has been shrinking and closing civic space constraining the freedom of groups to associate and organise. More recently in Togo, the Government has come down heavily on citizens protesting to institute Presidential Term Limits. In addition, Governments have put in place laws and policies to limit the operations of civil society, often under the guise of regulation or ant-terrorist and security measures. For example, in 2014, two restrictive bills were introduced in Nigeria, the Foreign Contributions (Regulation) Bill, which imposes restrictions on foreign funding of CSOs and the NGO Regulatory Agency Bill, which requires project-level approval by government authorities for all CSO operations. More recently, the Government of Cameroon shut down Internet in the English-speaking regions of the country to prevent the use of social media as a platform for organizing protests. In addition, a motion has been tabled in Parliament to introduce an anti-terrorism bill that would further curtail the space for CSO engagement and media expression. However, the region has also experienced gains in democratic dividends. Many countries in the region such as Ghana, Liberia and Sierra Leone had credible elections with high levels of voter turnout. In addition, the leaders of ECOWAS took a firm stand with President Yahya Jammeh, when he refused to step down after his electoral loss in 2016.

This mixed and rapidly changing context presents important emerging trends and opportunities for growth and social transformation of the region, particularly for civil society. The region is experiencing the increased engagement of citizens in governance of their countries, particularly, the youth and the middle class. Closely linked to this is the

² UNECA (2016): *Socio-Economic Profile of West Africa in 2015 and Prospects for 2016*. ECA-WA/ICE.19/2016/03

increased use of social media as a tool to give people voice. Social media is thus providing a greater space for civic engagement. It has also provided a mechanism for increased solidarity among citizens' groups in the region in the face of Government repression. A vivid example is the hashtag #GambiaHasDecided started by a group of young Gambian professionals that quickly became a framework for West Africans and others to stand in solidarity with the Gambian people.

In all of this, civil society in West Africa has also been evolving and changing. Even though NGOs are still a dominant form of civil society association within the region, their influence as a vehicle for transformation has decreased. Citizens have begun to question the legitimacy of these organisations as a number have showed themselves to be politically partisan, disconnected from their constituents or have failed to abide with expected standards of financial management and accountability. The NGOs, themselves, have also been hampered in their activities and drive for financial sustainability by significant reduction in funding from Western donors whose constituencies prefer they redirect their funding to priority issues at home.

Despite the apparent diminishment of NGOs, civic engagement is growing and taking different forms depending on the context and the issues involved. In the Gambia, it took the form of youth protests on the streets and a social media campaign in 2017. In Ghana, it took the form of a non-partisan pressure group movement, #OccupyGhana, promoting increased accountability and good governance in the country. In Senegal, it took the form of young rappers and journalists who formed a group called *Y'en a marre*, ('We've had enough' or 'Fed up'), revolting against frequent power cuts, which rapidly grew into a stronger social movement against government ineffectiveness and active youth participation in the elections that ousted the then President Abdoulaye Wade. Likewise, in Burkina Faso, the group '*Le Balai Citoyen*' (Citizen's Broom) founded by two young musician artists became a vital force of social activists who organised several street protests with opposition movements against President Compaore's attempt to modify the constitution and seek another presidential term. In this respect, civil society in West Africa is growing and evolving into a diverse space with different forms of groups, methods of engaging and objectives.

The growth and diversity of civil society in this region is a potential strength that could enable it to become a powerful force for change. The challenge, however, is the failure of the different types of groups to work together effectively, learn from each other and leverage their unique strengths. Many organizations belong to networks but just as many question the effectiveness of these networks. Despite this, we believe civil society, with support from WACSI and other actors, can overcome its challenges and leverage the emerging opportunities. Our 'Theory of Change', explains, how we believe this can happen.

3. Who we are

Vision

A peaceful and prosperous West Africa where development is driven by its people.

Mission

We strengthen civil society in West Africa to be responsive, collaborative, representative, resilient and influential through knowledge sharing, learning, connecting and influencing.

Values

- **Leadership:** We practice what we preach. We model our work to empower CSOs by setting exemplary leadership and standards of organisational management and governance.
- **Diversity:** We are the hub of an efficient, effective, influential and sustainable civil society community in West Africa that reflects the region's rich socio-cultural diversity.
- **Excellence:** In all our activities and relations with partners, we strive for excellence as the minimum standard in the quality of our work.
- **Ethics:** We abide by the highest ethical standards of transparency, accountability, mutual respect and integrity.
- **Collaboration:** Our strategic partnership approach is one of our key assets. We value and foster partnerships, networks and strategic mutual relationships with relevant development stakeholders.
- **People-Centered:** We value the people we work with; we recognise that our staff, interns, volunteers, resource persons, beneficiaries and partners are the backbone of our operations.
- **Innovation:** We constantly explore creative ways to strengthen civil society. We are agile and responsive to the changing needs of our stakeholders.
- **Non-discrimination:** We believe in and respect the principles of equity, inclusion and non-discrimination. We are committed to working with all persons, without discrimination, to promote open, democratic and developed societies in West Africa.

Our Strengths and Limitations

We are aware that our strength lies in the quality of programmes we provide to civil society in West Africa. Feedback from civil society partners who have worked with us indicates a high level of satisfaction and this has earned us a strong reputation and brand even beyond the West African region.³ We are able to achieve this because of the approach we use, our highly qualified and diverse team and strong internal systems and policies. To leverage these strengths, during this strategic period, we will continue to improve the quality of our programming, invest in our human resources and build our organisation to be the Institute of choice for civil society in the region.

We also acknowledge our limitations. We recognize, for example, that we have limited human and financial resources to meet all the demands from civil society. We are under enormous pressure to work with many actors on a wide range of issues. We recognize we cannot do it all alone. We are thus trying to get better at prioritizing and focusing on our core mandate: strengthening civil society. We also strive to strengthen our collaboration with key partners to effectively deliver services in response to demand from civil society constituents. Another limitation is that we are yet to harness adequate capacity to deepen our engagement in Portuguese-speaking countries. We are thus, constrained in responding to the demands from civil society in Cape Verde and Guinea Bissau. We intend, therefore, during this strategic period, to seek innovative ways to increase our capacity to strengthen our engagement in those countries.

4. Our Theory of Change

Our theory of change is that if civil society is strengthened to become responsive, collaborative, representative, resilient and influential then it will be a powerful driver of the transformation of West Africa into a peaceful region where development is driven by its people.

We appreciate that it is not civil society alone that will contribute to this vision for West Africa. Equally important will be accountable and responsive governments, strong institutions both within and outside government, a conducive global environment and a job creating private sector. Our focus, however, as WACSI, is strengthening civil society to be a strong driver of change within the region and enable it to better engage with governments, the private sector and other actors.

For civil society to play this role, it must **be** and **do** a number of things. It must be responsive to the needs of its diverse constituencies and be accountable to these citizens on whose behalf it speaks and acts. The different actors within civil society, whether

³ WACSI Strategy Survey (March 2017) Respondents Feedback.

organized as NGOs or as organic social movements, need to be able to work together and leverage each other's strengths to provide a strong collective force for change. Civil society will also have to be resilient and able to adapt to rapidly changing contexts and find innovative means to sustain their work. This is about civil society that is influential in setting the agenda and holding governments and non-state actors accountable for transforming the region.

WACSI's purpose is to contribute to the growth and continued existence of this type of civil society West Africa.

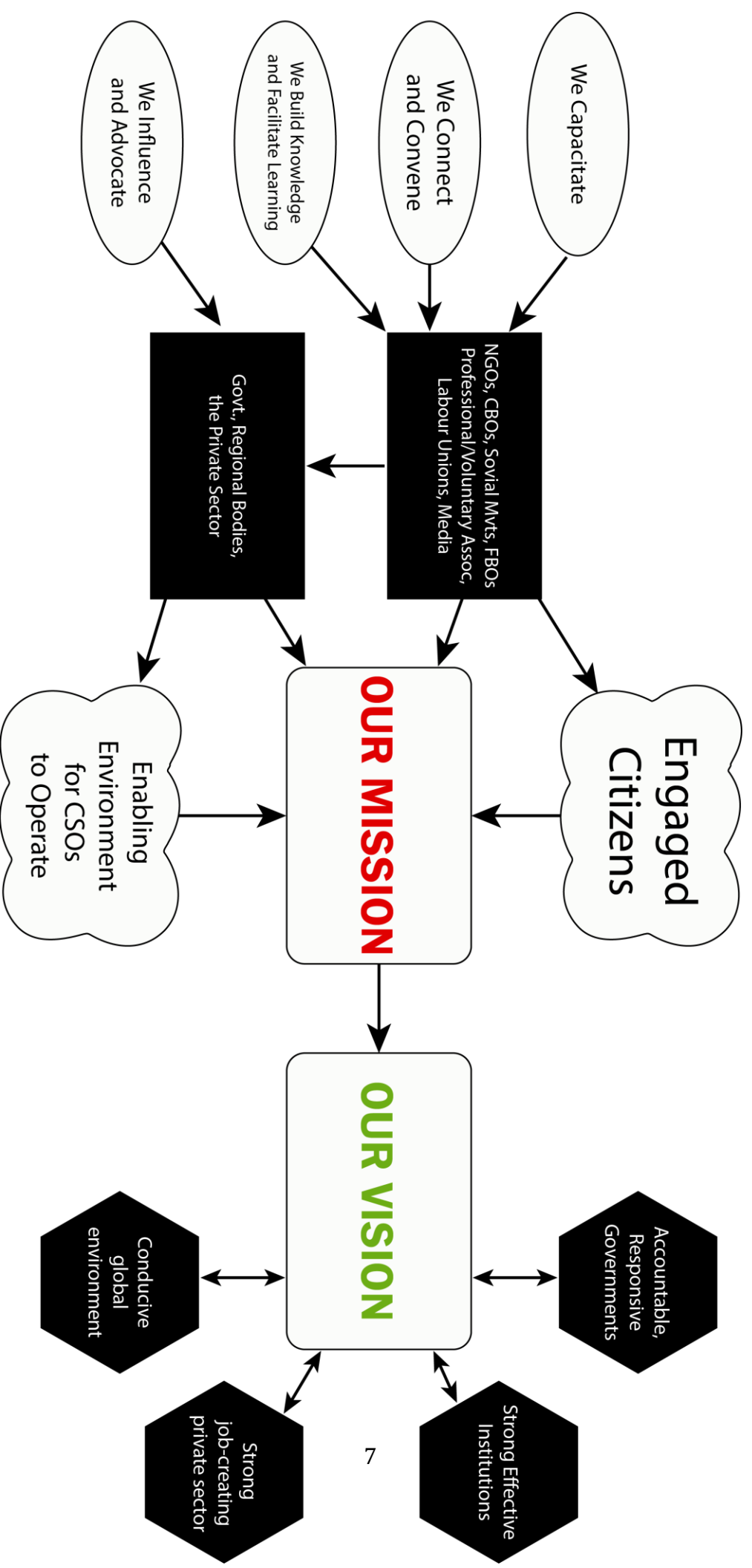
For civil society in West Africa to grow into this role, we believe two things must be in place. **The first is engaged citizens** who are conscientised, recognise the value of organising to effect change and therefore participate and take ownership of the various forms of civic organizing. Without the engagement of citizens, civil society's legitimacy and credibility will continue to be challenged and its organisations run the risk of being captured by narrow parochial interests. **The second is an enabling environment** for CSOs to operate which includes appropriate laws and policies, political space which allows free association and participation, availability of resources (financial and human) and access to technology.

Our entry point, as WACSI in this transformational process is at **two levels**. On one level, **we will work with a range of civil society actors** such as Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Community-Based Organisations (CBOs), Academia, Social Movements, Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs), Professional/Voluntary Association, Labour Unions and Media, to strengthen their ability to play a powerful role as agents of change. Social Accountability and Human Rights will be critical in this respect. On another level, **we will work with Governments, Regional Bodies such as ECOWAS, the Private Sector and Donors** to create an enabling environment for civil society to thrive and grow.

In our work with civil society actors, we will use three key strategies:

- **We will capacitate;**
- **We will connect and convene; and**
- **We will curate knowledge and facilitate learning.**

In our work with governments, regional bodies, the private sector and donors, **we will influence and advocate.**



5. What is New in this Strategy

As the nature of civil society in West Africa evolves and changes, we too have to shift and adapt. We have also listened carefully to the feedback from our civil society partners about which of our approaches are more effective than others. Based on this, there are some things we will continue to do and there are some new things we will start to do in this strategy.

- ❖ We will continue to use a long-term approach to strengthening capacity;
- ❖ We will continue to facilitate rather than dominate the work of civil society; and
- ❖ We will continue to convene diverse range of civil society actors.

What is new is that we will go beyond our traditional NGO partners to engage more with emerging organic groups and social movements. We will strengthen their capacity while building knowledge about what are the most effective approaches to work with them. We will also connect these groups with more formal organisations and encourage them to leverage their comparative strengths. In addition to reaching these new actors within civil society, this strategy will include a concerted effort to reach smaller, rural and less-resourced organisations through Training of Trainers (ToT). We will roll out programmes locally or through innovative e-learning approaches. We will also begin to engage more with the private sector as key partners in the sustainability of CSOs. This strategy, therefore, includes a much more diverse range of partners for WACSI than in previous strategies.

In this strategy, our policy influencing and advocacy agenda will be more informed by political economy analysis. This will be reflected in more focused policy dialogues and follow-up actions after the convenings. We will build on where there is ownership, energy and momentum within civil society and where we can be of added value. This ensures that we continue to facilitate rather than take over civil society engagement. In practice, this may mean that we may focus on a limited number of countries during the strategy rather than seeking to achieve impact in all eighteen (18) countries⁴ of the region. The aim ultimately will be to be more strategic and focused to achieve our desired objectives.

Engagement with civil society is more effective when it is informed by an understanding of this complex and vibrant sector. For this reason, this strategy includes our intention to conduct research and analysis about civil society in the region and share this regularly with a wide range of stakeholders. This is to ensure that efforts to strengthen and transform civil society in the region are driven by knowledge production and sharing.

⁴ Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo.

6. Our Ambition

WACSI has prioritised **four ambitions** to enable Civil Society in West Africa become a powerful driver of change in the region. In implementing all these strategies, we will give particular attention to strengthening the agency of women and youth in recognition of the central role they should play in the transformation of this region. We will also seize the opportunities that technology is offering in opening up the space for civic engagement in the region.

These are our ambitions:

Ambition 1: We will capacitate

We will seek to enhance the effectiveness and performance of organised and organic civil society groups. Our aim will be to strengthen the legitimacy, transparency, accountability and resilience of these groups through training, mentoring and coaching programmes among others. We will continue to take a long-term approach to capacity development and will focus on shared learning rather than teaching. To reach out to a broader number of CSOs we may also use Training of Trainers and appropriate e-learning approaches.

We expect to see:

- Enhanced capacity of organised and organic civil society groups to be more effective in their work.
- Increased ability of civil society to mobilize domestic resources to sustain their activities.
- Strengthened capacity of civil society actors to demonstrate exemplary leadership to foster change in their communities through the Next Generation Leadership programme⁵ and other interventions.

Ambition 2: We will connect and convene

We will create spaces and platforms for diverse groups of civil society to connect, share and learn from each other and with non-civil society actors. Our approach will focus on facilitating multi-stakeholder engagement on critical issues, strengthening civic voices, and linking networks and alliances.

⁵ The Next Generation Leadership programme includes: (i) an internship programme, (ii) A fellowship programme and (iii) the Civil Society Leadership Institute. It aims to empower and capacitate young people to be more influential leaders.

We expect to see:

- Increased collaboration and partnership among civil society and with the public and private sectors.
- Improved engagement, networking and solidarity between organised and organic civil society groups on relevant development issues.⁶
- Inclusive and engaged civic voices that shape public agenda, proffer policy alternatives, monitor performance and demand accountability.

Ambition 3: We will facilitate learning and knowledge sharing

We will curate knowledge and facilitate learning and participatory knowledge sharing within civil society and between CSOs and other actors.

We expect to see:

- The knowledge and practice of civil society captured through documentation and creation of accessible knowledge repositories.
- Increased use and adoption of research resources by civil society and development actors to inform their work, their development initiatives, further research, and policymaking.
- Increased recognition and visibility of WACSI as a thought leader and knowledge hub for civil society in the region.

Ambition 4: We will influence and advocate

We will influence institutions, policies, legislation and funding practices to ensure civil society in West Africa has an enabling environment in which to operate. We will do this through continuous engagement with policy actors and policy institutions and in collaboration with a diverse group of civil society and development partners

We expect to see:

- Increased civic engagement on laws, policies and regulations that foster open association and growth of civil society in the respective countries of the region.
- Increased awareness on and the adoption of innovative and sustainable strategies for resourcing civil society for development in West Africa.
- Increased education and awareness of CSOs on the need to operate in line with established norms and standards to promote accountability.

⁶ For example: civil society development effectiveness, democracy, good governance, social justice, accountability

7. Funding our Ambition

In the next five years, we will seek a sustainable and diverse revenue stream to fund planned programmes and organisational development. Given the ambition of our programme, we will aim to increase our revenues and ensure that they are flexible enough to fund our priorities and grow our reserves. The sustainability of our income will be contingent on us growing our internally generated revenue and decreasing our dependence on donor funding. During the strategy period, therefore, significant attention will be given to developing these alternative sources of income.

Our expenditure during the strategy period will reflect our programme priorities and where we hope to achieve the maximum impact. Out of our total expenditure on programmes: 34% will go to capacity development as a reflection of the main approach by which we strengthen civil society in West Africa. This is followed by 31% for knowledge management, 25% for convening and connecting and 10% for policy influencing and advocacy.

During the strategy period, we will ensure that our percentage of programme to support expenditure does not go beyond 85%⁷ as we find innovative ways to minimize our operating costs. All our expenditure will be governed by a commitment to achieving value for money where we maximise the impact of each dollar spent. In addition, we will continue to comply with established practices for effective financial management at all times employing highest standards of transparency and accountability.

⁷ Ratio of Expenditure to Revenue estimated in percentage