

**CHARTER OF THE WEST AFRICAN CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM  
(WACSOF)**

**DECEMBER 12, 2003  
Accra, Ghana**

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## Preamble

The West African Civil Society Organisations/Social Movements assembled in Accra,

- **Mindful** of the fact that the main objective for the creation of ECOWAS is for economic development and regional integration;
- **Noting** with regret that the challenge of bad governance, human rights violations and conflicts and overall human insecurity has contributed in delaying the achievement of these original objectives;
- **Recalling** ECOWAS Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping, and Security;
- **Recalling further** ECOWAS Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, A/SP/1/12/01;
- **Stressing** the necessity to enhance the involvement of the West African Civil Society Organisations engaged in diverse sectors in the process of strengthening ECOWAS;
- **Stressing further** the imperative to mainstream gender in all sectors of our work for a more sustainable development;
- **Cognisant** of the efforts made by West African people and civil society organizations to participate in the edification of a united, peaceful and prosperous West Africa;
- **Convinced** of the need to establish an effective partnership between ECOWAS Member States, ECOWAS Secretariat, and all the different sectors of civil society organisations;
- **Determined** to involve representatives of civil society organizations in the process of elaboration, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of political, security, economic, social and cultural programmes of ECOWAS;
- **Convinced** that popular participation in the implementation of relevant ECOWAS treaties and protocols are necessary for its success;
- **Determined** to pursue and share a common vision of a strong and prosperous West Africa with all concerned people, particularly people of West African descent in the Diaspora.

Agrees on the following:

## Article 1 Definitions

In this Charter:

“AU” means African Union;

“CSO” means Civil Society Organizations in West Africa;



“**Council of Elders**” means the Council of Elders as defined in article 20 of the ECOWAS Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution Peace-Keeping and Security;

“**Diaspora**” means citizens of West Africa States who live outside their national boundaries;

“**ECOWAS**” means the Economic Community of West African States;

“**Executive Committee**” means the Executive Committee of WACSOF;

“**Member State**” means Member State of ECOWAS;

“**NEPAD**” means the New Partnership for Africa’s Development;

“**Observers**” means any member who is not a member or associate member of WACSOF;

“**Peoples’ Forum**” means the People’s Forum of WACSOF;

“**Summit**” means ECOWAS Heads of States Summit;

“**WACSOF**” means West African Civil Society Forum;

“**Zone**” means zonal offices as determined by ECOWAS, which are four in number as at 12/12/03.

## **Article 2 Composition**

1. WACSOF is a civil society membership organization, which is a partner and advisor of ECOWAS and includes the ECOWAS Council of Elders.
2. CSOs include but are not limited to the following:
  - a. Social groups such as those representing women, children, youth, workers, farmers, the elderly, disabled persons, faith group leaders, traditional rulers, distinguished individuals;
  - b. Professional groups such as associations of artists, engineers, medical doctors, media, teachers, lawyers, economists, business organizations (Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture);
  - c. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and Volunteers Organizations;
  - d. Trade unions, Organizations of Workers, and Employers organizations;
  - e. Academia and research institutions;
  - f. Market women, retail traders, and artisans;

Except Organizations that discriminate on the basis of religion, ethnicity, race, gender, or political affiliation





### **Article 3 Objectives**

The WACSOFF shall:

1. Promote permanent dialogue between West African Civil Society and the ECOWAS Secretariat on vital issues concerning West Africa and its future;
2. Promote a strong partnership between governments and all segments of civil society, in particular women, youth, children, the diaspora and the private sector;
3. Support the political and socio-economic development and integration of the sub region and Africa;
4. Promote democratic principles and institutions, popular participation and empowerment of the people, good governance, human rights and freedoms, and social justice;
5. Establish and sustain relationships with ECOWAS Secretariat, ECOWAS organs, and ECOWAS zonal offices;
6. Ensure that ECOWAS's activities effectively meet the aspirations of the West African peoples;
7. Contribute to building and sustaining the institutional, human and operational capacities of West African Civil Society;
8. Popularize ECOWAS in the consciousness of West African people in order to strengthen the relationship between ECOWAS and all segments of West African Civil Society, in particular women, youth, children, farmers, workers, the Diaspora and the private sector;
9. Promote peace, unity, human security and stability in the sub region and Africa.

### **Article 4 Eligibility requirements for membership of WACSOFF and membership obligations**

#### **Eligibility Requirements:**

The minimum requirements to be fulfilled by CSOs seeking membership to WACSOFF are as follows:

1. Be a local, national, a transnational or an African Diaspora CSO;
2. Have aims and objectives that are in harmony with the aims and objectives of WACSOFF.
3. Registration and status:
  - a) Be registered in Member State of ECOWAS unless the requirement of registration is excused for want of formality by the Executive Committee of WACSOFF;



- b) Should have been in operation for a minimum of three (3) years before the date of application to membership;
4. Provide annual audit statements by an independent auditing company, registered as such within that country, when the nature and activities of the CSO require such audits;
5. Must have its ownership and management comprising at least fifty per cent (50%) of persons of West Africa or African origin;
6. Provide information on funding sources for the preceding three years;
7. Transnational CSOs must provide proof of activities in at least three Member States of ECOWAS;
8. Diaspora CSOs must provide proof of their West African origin and activities that is in the interest of WACSOF's objectives as contained in this Charter;
9. CSO outside ECOWAS member states and eminent individuals can apply for associate membership and shall be determined by the People's Forum upon the recommendation of Executive Committee;
10. A request for membership to WACSOF shall be submitted to WACSOF secretariat;

#### **Membership Obligations**

11. Membership to WACSOF shall be subject to renewal every four (4) years, according to modalities specified in the Rules of Procedure of WACSOF;
12. Adhere to a Code of Conduct and Ethics to be developed by the Executive Committee of WACSOF and approved by the Peoples' Forum;
13. Agrees to pay membership dues as stipulated in the rules of procedures.

### **Article 5 Functions and Powers**

To ensure that West African people effectively contribute in policy formulation processes, WACSOF shall assume the following functions:

1. Contribute to the effective translation of the objectives, principles and policies of ECOWAS into concrete programs;
2. Undertake such studies as may be requested and recommended by any other organ of ECOWAS and submit its recommendations accordingly;
3. Initiate and carry out any other study deemed necessary for ECOWAS and submit recommendations thereof;



4. Promote and sustain popular participation and peoples' empowerment towards the realization of the vision and objectives of ECOWAS;
5. Promote democracy, human rights, the rule of law, good governance, gender equality, and the sharing of best practices;
6. Work closely with all organs and departments of ECOWAS, and participate in their activities when necessary;
7. Promote, across the sub region and the West African Diaspora, strong reflection groups on West Africa, to develop region-wide values, and promote an authentic West African social model;
8. Build and sustain trust and confidence in ECOWAS among the West African people at all levels;
9. Participate actively in the efforts taken by ECOWAS to promote peace, security, stability, unity, and development in West Africa;
10. Liaise between ECOWAS, other sub regional, regional, global institutions and West African civil society;
11. Develop and keep data of civil society organizations working in the region;
12. Serve as a meeting point for West African civil society organizations;
13. Develop peer assessment mechanism for West African civil society organizations;
14. Develop and strength the capacity of West African Civil Societies;
15. Assume any other function as decided upon by WACSOF Peoples' Forum;
16. Select its members and give advise on the process and modalities through which civil society organizations discharge their duties in relations to WACSOF;
17. The application of internal democratic processes, and sanctions as stated in the code of conduct;
18. Approve and revise its Rules of Procedure;
19. Represent West African Civil Society Organization at various meetings of ECOWAS.





**Article 6**  
**Structure of WACSOF**

1. The structure of WACSOF is as follows:
  - a) Peoples' Forum;
  - b) Executive Committee;
  - c) Working Committees;
  - d) Secretariat
  
2. The Peoples' Forum shall be the supreme organ of WACSOF and be composed of:
  - a) All the representatives of CSOs registered as members of WACSOF;
  - b) All associate members;
  
3. Meetings of the People's Forum:
  - a) The People's Forum shall meet annually prior to ECOWAS Council of Ministers and Heads of States Summit;
  - b) The People's Forum may meet in Extraordinary Sessions under conditions to be specified in the rules of procedure of WACSOF;
  - c) At its annual meeting the Peoples' Forum shall review the activities of WACSOF, ECOWAS, and ECOWAS member states, and to propose appropriate recommendations;
  - d) The People's Forum of WACSOF shall review the membership structure;
  - e) The annual and extraordinary meetings of the Peoples' Forum shall be attended by representatives of CSO, associate members and observers who have been accredited by the Executive Committee, and for the avoidance of doubt; Observers shall include:
    - i. Representatives of other organs and departments of ECOWAS;
    - ii. CSOs, UN Agencies, and other inter-governmental institutions with an observer status at ECOWAS.
  - f) The People's Forum approves the appointment of senior executives of the secretariat upon the recommendation of the Executive committee;
  - g) The People's Forum shall consider the report of the General Secretary as submitted to it by the Executive Committee;





- h) Appoints annually a civil society focal point in each country, which liaises between WACSOF secretariat, WACSOF members in the country, and ECOWAS organs based in the country.

## **Article 7**

### **Executive Committee**

1. The Executive Committee shall be elected by the People's Forum and be composed of the following members:
  - a) Four persons from Anglophone countries
  - b) Four persons from Francophone countries
  - c) Two persons from Lusophone countries
  - d) One person from the West African Diaspora
  - e) The General Secretary of WACSOF shall be an ex officio member
  - f) One Youth delegate shall be elected Ex-officio member of the Executive Committee.
  
2. A fifty percent (50%) gender equality principle shall apply in the membership of the Executive committee;

## **Article 8**

### **Functions and Powers of the Executive Committee**

1. The Executive Committee shall be responsible for the functioning of WACSOF in between the Sessions of the People's Forum and in this regard, it shall perform the following functions:
  - a) Coordinate and integrate the work of WACSOF;
  - b) Network with organs and components of ECOWAS as deemed necessary;
  - c) Supervise the implementation of the policy by the secretariat;
  - d) Appoint the General Secretary and other staff of WACSOF secretariat;
  - e) Receive and consider the report/s of the General Secretary;
  - f) Enforce a Code of Conduct and Ethics of the civil society organizations in West Africa and in the West African Diaspora;
  - g) The Executive Committee recommends qualified CSO to WACSOF's Peoples' Forum for membership;



- h) The Executive Committee, in consultation with the People's Forum, shall determine the criteria and modalities for granting observer status to Peoples' Forum;
  - i) Shall consider applications and issue accreditation for observer status to meetings of the Peoples' Forum.
2. The term of office of the Executive Committee members shall be two years renewable once;
  3. Members of the Executive Committee shall attend the meetings of the organs and components of ECOWAS.

### **Article 9 Working Committees**

The following working Committees are established as key operational sectors for CSO Members of WACSO

1. ECOWAS and CSO Relations
  2. Food, agriculture and Environment
  3. Gender Issues
  4. Governance, democracy, and human rights
  5. Health, HIV/AIDS and education
  6. Media, telecommunications, and information technology
  7. Peace and Security
  8. Policy Research and database
  9. Regional integration, economic development, trade, and investment
  10. Youth
1. WACSOF's Peoples' Forum elects members of the working committee for a period of two years.
  2. The Executive Committee determines the frequency and time of meetings of the working Committees.

### **Article 10 The Secretariat**

1. The secretariat of WACSOF shall be located in Abuja, Nigeria.
2. The secretariat is composed of a General Secretary and all other members of staff.
3. The secretariat shall keep record and documents of WACSOF, the Executive Committee, and all working committees.
4. The secretariat will provide secretarial services to all working committees.
5. The General Secretary is an ex-officio member of the executive committee and all other working committees.
6. The secretariat administers and manages properties of WACSOF.
7. Establish the programmatic thrust of working Committees.



8. Prepare, and present reports and advisory opinions as necessary to the various structures of WACSOF.

### **Article 15**

9. Prepare the budget for the activities of WACSOF and submit to the Executive Committee

### **Entry into Force**

The present Charter having been adopted on this day of 12 December 2003, by the People's Forum of the WACSOF assembled in Accra, Ghana, is submitted to the ECOWAS Heads of States Summit for it to enter into force at the close of their session on this day of 19 December 2003. sustain WACSOF.

10. In consultation with the Executive Committee, raise funds, establish endowments, to
11. Plan and Prepare the meetings of the Peoples' Forum in accordance with the relevant provisions of this Charter;
12. The secretariat shall encourage applications for membership to WACSOF and make recommendations to the Executive Committee.

### **Article 11**

### **Rules of Procedure**

To ensure its smooth functioning, WACSOF's a Rules of Procedure shall be adopted by the Peoples' forum.

### **Article 12**

### **Settlement of Disputes**

Modalities of resolving dispute arising from the interpretation of this current Charter and the functioning (work) of WACSOF shall be provided for in its Rules of Procedure.

### **Article 13**

### **Amendments**

The present Charter may be amended by the People's Forum of WACSOF, then shall be submitted to ECOWAS Heads of States for information and due note.

### **Article 14**

### **Transitional Provision**

For the purpose of sustainability, continuity, and creating a better institutional memory, this article provides a transitional arrangement of two years after which period this particular article will be inoperative:

1. The ad hoc committee shall serve as the executive committee
2. ECOWAS, International Alert, and Centre for Democracy and Development with close cooperation with the ad hoc committee shall develop the structure, and the secretariat that liaises between ECOWAS and West African Civil Society.

