WEST AFRICA CIVIL SOCIETY INSTITUTE

SITUATION REPORT

CIVIL SOCIETY IN WEST AFRICA,

incl. CAMEROON & CHAD

01—31 March 2019

15 Countries

The CIVICUS Monitor Tool is a research tool built by civil society. It aims to share reliable, up-to-date data on the state of civil society freedoms in all countries. Based on a constant analysis of multiple streams of data on civic space, each country is assigned a rating ranging between 0 - 100, as follows:

OPEN (81—100) : The state both enables and safeguards the enjoyment of civic space for all people

NARROWED (61 –80) : While individuals and Civil Society Organizations are generally allowed to express their rights, violations occur.

OBSTRUCTED (41—60) : Civic space is heavily contested by power holders, who impose a combination of legal and practical constraints on the full enjoyment of fundamental rights.

REPRESSED (21—40) : Civic space is heavily constrained. Active individuals and civil society members who criticize power holders risk surveillance, harassment, intimidation, imprisonment, injury and death

CLOSED (0—20) : There is complete closure - in law and in practice - of civic space. An atmosphere of fear and violence prevails, where state and powerful non-state actors are routinely allowed to imprison, seriously injure and kill people with impunity for attempting to exercise

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HIGHLIGHTS

In the last few months, the Civicus Monitor Update has reported on series of protests and strikes against austerity measures in West Africa. Guinea is currently at the bottom of the ratings whereas Cape Verde is the only country in the 'Open' category followed by Senegal and Ghana in the second position. Nevertheless, in all countries, Most countries are however in the 'Obstructed' category with a couple of 'Repressed' outliers such as Cameroon, Mauritania and Chad. Issues regarding this trend has been identified as criminal defamation (and press offenses being criminalised), with excessive violence towards protesters in (Togo, Guinea, Niger and Mali).

GOVERNANCE

West Africans have continued to demand transparency, accountability and good governance from their governments.

- On 5 March, the Ministry of Public Works in collaboration with the Ministry of Cooperation and African Integration announced the start of a rehabilitation work on the **Guechedou-Kondebadou** road as part of the development of road infrastructure in **Guinea Conakry**. This asphalting project will be financed by the Arab Bank for Development in Africa (BADEA) for a sum of US$16 million to improve transport conditions for the free movement of passengers and their goods in neighboring countries, particularly Cote d'Ivoire and Liberia, which will contribute to strengthening peace. According to one of the residents, it was of great joy to the people and the role government is playing a key role in implementing this project.

SOURCE

- On 20 March 2019, Patrice Talon, President of Benin met with civil society organizations at Marina (**Benin**) to clarify and reassure the actions and objectives to rationalize the partisan landscape in order to have real political parties with competent officials to influence the nation. During this assembly, the delegations of civil society actors welcomed the Head of State's approach of seeking legislative exclusivity. For civil society actors, questioning the reforms could have a negative impact on the country's stability. However, they expressed their opposition to proposals to extend the terms of office of deputies and the revision of the constitution. They insisted on the constitutional deadline of 15 May for the installation of the 8th legislature.

SOURCE

- The National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) has applauded the Parliament of **Ghana** for its efforts in passing the Right to Information (RTI) Bill into law. The Commission declared it was happy that the Bill had finally been passed after two decades and, therefore, congratulated the Seventh Parliament of the Fourth Republic for the law. In a press release signed by Madam Josie Affuto, the Director of NCCE's Public Affairs, commended all civil society organisations and civic bodies that were strategic role in persistently advocating for the passage of the Bill, which is a key element to better democracy in Ghana.

SOURCE

ELECTION

One of the main pillars of democracy, elections, is a constant cause for tension in West Africa.

- More than 761,000 voters are set to vote on March 10 to elect the 102 National Assembly deputies for the next four years. With the hope that these elections will help lift the country out of political crisis as it has been going through for nearly four years. **Guinea-Bissau**, with an official Portuguese language, has for years been plagued by political crises, coups and counter-coups, with several military personnel involved in international drug trafficking. The preliminary results are however set to be announced.

SOURCE

- The Social Renewal Party has announced its acceptance of results in the March 10 legislative elections, despite alleged irregularities during the electoral process, notably in the counting of votes. In a statement read to journalists at the party's former headquarters in **Bissau**, Bairro da Ajuda, Vitor Pereira highlighted the denunciations made by the party of "several irregularities that accompanied operations" the entire electoral process with a "partial and selective" census, provoking that "many citizens voters were unjustly deprived of their right to vote".

SOURCE

ADVOCACY

Civil society across the region engages in various advocacy efforts both directed towards policy changes as well as for the direct benefits of citizens.

- On 2 March 2019, Concerned **Nigerians**, a civil society organisation (CSO), rolled out drums to welcome their coordinator Comrade Evi Ajakaiye, who regained freedom after 78 days in Kano Prison. The women, youths and other activists gathered at the Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport, Abuja, bearing placards with different inscriptions to welcome the activist. Adeyanju, while addressing newsmen, expressed gratitude to all Nigerians and Nigerians, adding that the gesture was a relief he most needed in his struggle for good society. He, however, grieved that he was seeing as an enemy by the public authorities while activism is a part of every democratic society.

SOURCE

- On 11 March, the twenty-six people who were arrested in the January protests organised by **Cameroon's** major opposition leader, Maurice Kamto of the Cameroon Renaissance Movement, were each sentenced to one year in jail by a court in Yaounde. The sentences for illegal demonstrations and gatherings meted on them have been described as scandalous by their lawyers who have filed an appeal going against the rule of law. Other leaders like the European Union and Amnesty International have criticised this politically driven move by the government to crack-down opposition.

SOURCE

- Members of a group known as Occupy **Nigeria** has protested at the Unity Fountain, Abuja demanding that the independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) reverse the issuance of a certificate of return to President Muhammadu Buhari who was declared the winner of the recent presidential election. The protesters alleged that assessment by observers on ground during the election revealed that card readers were not used at all in some states. The coalition of over 50 civil society organisations and citizens said the observers' report showed that votes were allocated without any party parts of the Northwest and Northeast. According to the convener of the group, Idris Usman, it is an insult to the Nigerian people that INEC would allow an election in which voters were intimidated, harassed and even killed to stand.

SOURCE

- Amnesty International has urged **Cameroonian** authorities to free Baba Hamidou Michele Nolaki, describing her arrest as the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment. She has been detained for after being charged with rebellion, hostility against the homeland, incitement to insurrection, offence against the President of the Republic, and disorder in public gathering and group. Amnesty described her detention as a violation of the fundamental right to life, wounded by security forces and fearing for her life. Michele Nolaki, a Cameroonian lawyer and political activist, was arrested on 30 January 2019 and has been detained for over 6 months.

SOURCE

- The Association of Women Heads of Family (AFCF), headed by Aminetou El Moctar, is spearheading the struggle for the criminalization of sexual violence. Considered as a form of torture, criminalisation of sexual harassment and the creation of specific courts to handle sexual violence. The bill has however been rejected by parliament twice though written within the confines of Sharia law. Women's rights activists continue to push for the rights of women.

SOURCE

CIVIL SOCIETY SUSTAINABILITY

To continuously respond to regulatory policies through coherent and deliberate strategies, civil society effectively utilize diversified resources to strengthen its operations.

- On 16 March 2019, le Mouvement des entreprises du Sénégal (MEDS) held its 19th General Assembly at the Radisson Blue Hotel in Dakar,**Senegal**. This Assembly was an opportunity for the organisation to review its activities in 2018 and identify its projects for 2019. At the opening of the session, the president of the employers' organisation, Mbagnick Diop, stated that "the ambition of MEDS is to become more creative, more dynamic and more committed to the path of rational emergence and distinctive competence in the promotion and management of entrepreneurship". To this end, he called for Senegalese companies to have more access to the national market and an increase in the level of financing for medium and small enterprises (PME/I). He also suggested revising the private sector support mechanism to better meet the current needs of the national enterprise through the promotion of partnerships between national companies and foreign investors. Finally, he noted the importance of continuing to reduce the tax burden on companies not eligible for special schemes.

SOURCE

CIVIL SOCIETY ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

Spaces for group action, citizen engagement and organization are fundamental to good governance and ensuring democracy. The ability of citizens and organizations to actively engage with government depends on the availability of such spaces for engagement both online and offline.

- Between 15 to 16 March 2019 in **Lomé**, the Forces Vives movement, "Hope for Togo" organised a national conference on the theme "Paths of convergence to federate energies and strategies". This forum was attended by several civil society organisations and all citizens committed to the well-being of the **Togolese** people according to the organizers. This forum was initiated to encourage the country's sons and daughters to reflect unanimously on the strategies to be put in place to have a united Togo that is prosperous, in solidarity with justice and for the development of each citizen where they can live with dignity. Where human rights are respected and where democracy and the rule of law are a reality. At the end of this forum, the leaders of the movement made recommendations to the actors of social and political life with firm commitments to allow all Togolese to live in peace and happiness. They called on the government to create a climate of social peace in the country by freeing those who are still unjustly detained and the police to remain within the legal frameworks of their efforts to protect public order and citizens.

SOURCE

WOMEN AND YOUTH LEADERSHIP

Leadership initiatives continues to play a pivotal role in the activities of women and youth across the region.

- Taking stock of 25 years of achievements in women's empowerment, governments, members of civil society, private sector and the media, gathered in **Sierra Leone** to discuss challenges and progress made in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, in the third day of the Commission on the Status of Women. Conducting many high-level interactive dialogues, the Commission focused on steps and measures taken to empower women and girls, titled 'Accelerating implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action: Exchange of best practices in preparation for the Beijing+25 review and appraisal' and 'Women's empowerment and the link to sustainable development". The Commission is however set to undertake a review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 2020.

SOURCE

- The First Lady of **Liberia**, Clar Marie Weah, has disclosed plans to launch 'She's You Movement', a national initiative aimed at advocating for gender equality across the country. The gender advocacy program, which is expected to be launched in April this year, will highlight advocacy for women's economic empowerment and increased participation in key positions of leadership as well as quality education, and reproductive health, among others. According to her, the Movement is her way of responding to the increasingly alarming violations of women and girls' rights involving sexual and gender-based violence, especially rape, among other challenges.

SOURCE

- 46-year-old Aissa Doumara Ngatansou, has been awarded the inaugural Simone Veil Prize of the French Republic for her organisation that helps victims of rape and forced marriage in her home country **Cameroon**. The French president, Emmanuel Macron, presented the prize to Ngatansou on International Women's Day at a ceremony at the Elysée Palace in France. Macron commended Ngatansou for her dedicated service of over 20 years for women, carried out in silence, sometimes in disapproval.

SOURCE

TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT

Civil societies in West Africa embark on scientific methods and materials to achieve their organizational objective for the implementation of skills for development.

- The Organisation of Young Patrons of Mali (OJEP) hosted the 3rd edition of the economic forum of young entrepreneurs of **Mali** at the Hotel de l'Amitié from 22 to 23 March 2019 under the theme "the place of digital in the development of agribusiness". This third edition aimed to capitalize the achievements of the first two editions and above all to show that technology is an essential component for growth and added value for companies that evolve in agribusiness.

SOURCE

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West Africa Civil Society E-Directory

Register on the online directory created to map out all Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in the region.

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