SITUATION REPORT

CIVIL SOCIETY IN WEST AFRICA,

Incl. CAMEROON & CHAD

01—30 November 2020

409 Million | 18 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 5 - 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 (5—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 their rights

CIVIC SPACE STATUS IN WEST AFRICA

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HIGHLIGHTS

In West Africa, the state of civic space continue to shrink over the years. Recent Update on CIVICUS Monitor shows an increasing occurrence of civic space restrictions surrounding presidential elections in West Africa. Civic right violations which include killing of peaceful protesters and use of restrictive laws has become rampant in West Africa. According to CIVICUS, the top five civic space violations within the region are, journalist detainment, protest disruption, censorship, intimidation and protestors detainment. Five West African countries' – Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Niger, Togo and Benin – rating on the CIVICUS monitor dropped from 'obstructed' to 'repressed'. These recent downgrades of West African countries are indicating a worrying trend of closing civic space in West Africa.

GOVERNANCE

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

- **Mauritania** takes a step away from the draconian laws established under Ould Abdel Aziz. However, the new draft law requires to some rigid legislations that will allow for the smooth operation of civil society in the country. It is for this reason that the Human Rights Watch on November 20, called for the Mauritanian Parliament to review the draft law on association. According to the Human Rights Watch, the current draft still allows for excessive interference and control over the right to form or join association. For their fear of abusing such legislation, the former calls for a revision of the draft to meet international standards.
  source
- **Liberia** CSOs WASH Network has involved the WASH Legislative Caucus as part of its activities to mark the observation of the Global Handwashing Day. This engagement reflected on issues of the WASH sector concerning sustainable hand hygiene behavior and practice, role of the National WASH Commission, the issue of disintegration, funding from the national government, and donor partners among others. This collaborative engagement of WASH CSOs with the Legislative Caucus climaxed the Global Handwashing Day activities by Liberia CSOs WASH Network. This happened in Montserrado County in five populated communities.
  source
- A coalition of 32 CSOs including Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD); Enough is Enough (EIE) **Nigeria**, Partners for Electoral Reform a few to mention leaders have signed a statement on Tuesday, 10 November 2020 charging the government with violence, abuse of human rights, and intimidation of EndSARS promoters and activists. The statement further indicated that the government has moved its focus from tackling demands of EndSARS protesters to hunting down rights activists, pro-democracy campaigners, and other voices calling for systemic reforms.
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ELECTION

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

- To ensure a peaceful and fair election in **Ivory Coast,** the President of the NGO Election without Contestation (ESC), Konaté Nouhou, called for the establishment of a network of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). They will be mandated to take actions to prepare the minds of the people through sensitisation in order to avoid the violence of the last elections of 2018. Their mission will be to promote the culture of peace and social dialogue with the objective of "Zero violence".
  source
- The NGO Peace International, has created a group of individuals, "Bastions of Peace" to pursuit, promote, and preserve peace in Abuja, before, during, and after the presidential election that will be held on 7 December. All the stakeholders are mandated to play their roles to achieve this objective.
  source
- To add their quota to the good management of the upcoming election in **Ghana**, STAR Ghana Foundation in collaboration with the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Center (KAIPTC) organised on 18 November 2020 an Election Colloquium at the KAIPTC auditorium in Accra. The theme of the Colloquium was 'Entrenching Ghana's Democracy in the Context of Credible, Safe and Peaceful Election 2020, and Beyond'. It was an occasion for discussants to share experiences and lessons learned from previous elections. This lessons that have to be taken into consideration to achieve a peaceful, transparent and inclusive election on 7 December 2020,
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ADVOCACY

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

- A coalition of civil society and non-governmental organisations called Oil Watch Nigerian (OWN) has asked the Federal Government to declare ecological emergency because of the continual oil exploration and pollution in Niger Delta. In the statement, it was added that there was a need for the emergency due to the devastating effects of oil and gas extraction on the environment and people of state hence the Federal government should pay more courtesy to environmental redress and livelihood restoration in the region and declare the region an ecological emergency zone.
  source
- Civil society advocacy in the "Stop Daesh in **#Mauritania"** pays off as the Islamic Republic of Mauritania becomes the 83rd member of the Global Coalition Against Daesh. This forms a part of the country's bold step to fight against Islamic extremism. According to the initiators of this petition campaign, political financial lobbying has gone on for many years trying to lure country into attacking state administration and religion. This has led to the Criminal court prosecuting prison sentences on some persons believed to have had hand in setting up Daesh bases in the country.
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CIVIL SOCIETY SUSTAINABILITY

The issue of sustainability of civil society in West Africa is becoming increasingly important with the gradual but significant decline of funding from donors over the years. CSOs are continuously employing strategies to strengthen their organisational sustainability.

- The *Forum National des Organisations de Droits Humains* (FONADH), also known as The National Forum for Human Rights Orgnisations in English, celebrates its 20th anniversary. The Forum which brings together 20 **Mauritanian** NGOs celebrates 20years after its creation to promote civil society synergy in the fight for human rights and the promotion of peace and justice. FONADH came at a time when human right abuse, illegal confiscation of property, genocide and other inhumane conditions were at their peak. It came to draw international and regional attention to the situation.
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CIVIL SOCIETY ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

Civil society organisations (CSOs) are increasingly recognised as key players in promoting democratic governance, equitable development and inclusive growth. To be able to play their role in society to their full potential, CSOs need an operating environment that gives them the space to act freely.

- The Republic of **Chad** faces fundamental freedom challenge as police surround the offices of opposition parties, civil society associations and the homes of some opposition leaders. This follows the announcement of the organisation of a citizens' forum by a coalition of civil society and the opposition in the country. The initiators of this citizen forum had boycotted the national forum on institutional reforms organised last week by the government. Describing it as a retrogression in democracy, Barrister Max Loalngar who is the president of the Chadian League for Human Rights is among those who have been living in hiding for about a week now.
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WOMEN AND YOUTH LEADERSHIP

Women and Youth Leadership initiatives continues to play a pivotal role in promoting civil society activities in the region.

- The NGO Voice of Women and the EU sign an agreement for the implementation of the project dubbed "16 days of activism against violence against women". Envisioned to start in the city of **N'Djamena**, in the province of Mandoul as well as in the Lake region from November 25 to December 10 this year, the project would contribute to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in Chad. For Amina Tidjani, the national coordinator of the NGO, this funding agreement will aid in mobilising and sensitising the Chadian population on Gender based violence.
  source
- AHYIAN with funding from the UNFPA and SWEED is launching a campaign to get young girls back to school. The Republic of **Chad** as part of its National COVID-19 Response Plan has eased restrictions allowing schools to reopen. This campaign, which is scheduled to start on November 25 and end on December 5 this same year, aims at sensitising households and the youth with priority on girls about getting back to school. AHYIAN also envisions to distribute relief kits to ensure the smooth and safe return to the classroom.
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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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