WEST AFRICA CIVIL SOCIETY INSTITUTE

E-NEWSLETTER

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PRESS RELEASE - DIGITAL INSECURITY CONSTITUTES A SERIOUS MENACE TO CSOS IN WEST AFRICA: NEW REPORT REVEALS

It has been uncovered that 31% of civil society organisations (CSOs) in West Africa experienced a digital security attack in the last 12 months. 25% of attacks happened multiple times. From these statistics, Nigeria had the highest percentage of attacks at 10.75%, with Ghana following closely behind.

The West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI) shared this discovery on Wednesday April 19, 2023, during the launch of a recent groundbreaking research report “Landscape Mapping of Civil Society Digital Security in West Africa.” The study further revealed that, while 45% of CSOs were unaware of national laws and regulations on digital security, CSOs in the region faced a multitude of digital security challenges that threatened their efforts in pursuing their mandates.

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LEVERAGING ONLINE CROWDFUNDING FOR RESOURCE MOBILISATION: A NOVEL APPROACH FOR CSOS

Following the Covid-19 outbreak, civil society organisations (CSOs) in Ghana have been faced with a considerable decline in donor funding due to donors shifting their philanthropy efforts to countries which classify as low-income earning. This is not peculiar to Ghana alone, but same with most CSOs that operate within the global south. Although traditional sources of funding including those from bilateral and multilateral donors remain important, finding alternative sources of funding for CSOs has become increasingly important.

Online crowdfunding is one of the innovative and very effective ways CSOs can leverage to raise funds for their work.

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In theory, internships are supposed to serve as a platform for career growth for young graduates. Unfortunately, not all interns are able to see this theory become a reality. This is partly because many organisations struggle with inadequate resources to design and implement successful internship programmes.

The inspiring story of our 2023 Next Generation interns: Abdoul Wahab from Niger, Anthonette Quayee from Liberia and Paco Lethicia Gnada from Burkina Faso, is no different from that of many young ambitious graduates who have a burning desire to invest in their career growth.

The three who constitute the first cohort of 2023, are a step ahead in career growth having interned with the West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI) for more than three months. They have gained valuable experience and knowledge working on myriad of projects on various thematic areas the Institute works.

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From 20 – 22 March 2023, a training on digital safety and security was held in Thinker Village-Monrovia, Liberia for 12 participants from 4 organisations. The training was organised by the West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI) and TechSoup. The aim of the training was to equip participants with the knowledge and skills to protect themselves and their organisations from online attacks.

Participants were from Youth Alliance for Rural Development (YARD), Institute for Democratic Action and Development, Africa Youth Peer Review Committee (AYPRC) and Youth United for Community Development Association (YUCDA).

Hellen Sackie, focal person for the African Youth Peer Review Committee (AYPRC), one of the participants, shared her thoughts on the training.

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AVAILING SUFFICIENT **FINANCIAL** RESOURCES TO CSOS: FROM RHETORIC TO ACTION

There have been resounding calls to make financial resources available to civil society organisations (CSOs) in West Africa. Embraced within the overall concept of 'localisation of aid', this remains an indispensable missing component within the development equation.

Localisation of aid has been widely preached and considered as a panacea to the myriad of problems plaguing the advancement of the humanitarian and development aid sectors of our society. However, it seems this is not quite the case. This is partly because frontline actors have decried the alarming rate at which resources at their disposal to respond to the gruesome humanitarian and developmental challenges are grossly inadequate.

It can also be attributed to the fact that many international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) overtly (but predominantly rhetorically) championing the course towards localisation of aid are not sufficiently taking practical measures to ensure that the localisation of aid agenda is a living reality.

Hence, one can confidently assert that localisation of aid seems to be another scheme designed to meet the expectations of the initiators of the scheme.

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Is there more African non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can do to be more resourceful and less dependent on foreign philanthropists?

Decades of inequitable development, colonialism and political uprising have made the continent a global destination for charitable funding from philanthropists. Initially, most funding was focused on government institutions, but times have changed, and these resources are being shifted toward sustainable social and economic reforms. International humanitarian organisations like the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) have spent millions of dollars engaging the continent on shared interests and values.

In early 2022, the agency donated nearly $1.3 billion to assist people on the brink of starvation from drought in Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia. The agency works with African countries on several projects that aim at building resilience to climate change, supporting democracy, strengthening health systems, and boosting agricultural productivity. Similarly, the Australian government runs projects across the continent. Between 2020-2021, approximately 2.5 million Africans benefited from the work of 26 Australian non-governmental organisations. These initiatives make it easy to applaud philanthropists’ support to the continent and ignore the challenges they pose to the continent’s independence.

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John Hailey and Mark Salway defined Social Impact Investment (SII) model as the use of repayable finance to deliver social impact as well as financial return. In their paper on New Routes to CSO Sustainability, they described how SII brings new sources of funds to civil society organisations. In this Op-Ed, the writer explores how CSOs can adopt and benefit from the SII Model.

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WACSI LAUNCHES NEW REPORT ON THE STATE OF DIGITAL SECURITY IN WEST AFRICA’S CIVIC SPACE

The West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI) on 19 April 2023, launched a groundbreaking research report which uncovered the state of digital security among civil society organisations (CSOs) in West Africa. The report titled “Landscape Mapping of Civil Society Digital Security in West Africa” among other key findings revealed that 31% of CSOs in the region experienced a digital security attack in the last 12 months.

Twenty-five per cent (25%) of attacks happened multiple times. From these statistics, Nigeria had the highest percentage of attacks at 10.75%, with Ghana following closely behind with a percentage of 5.38%.

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Between #2030 and #2050, climate change is expected to cause approximately 250,000 additional deaths per year, from malnutrition, malaria, diarrhoea and heat stress, according to the World Health Organisation.

Developing countries with weak health infrastructure will be the most affected.

In this research report, our 2022 Research Fellow, Anna Batsa provides CSOs with a comprehensive approach to tackling climate change in Ghana.

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Imagine an Africa where civil society is allowed to drive development and social change without any hindrances or impediments.

In this report, our 2022 research fellow Ruwadzano Makumbe explores how governments are using the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) Recommendation 8 to stifle civil society and restrict their contributions to development in Africa.

The report boldly sets the records straight and offer some key recommendations on how we can salvage the situation.

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As the world continues to embrace the full possibilities of digital technologies, cybersecurity has become a non-negotiable prerequisite for investment in any organisation. However, effective cybersecurity remains a challenge across Africa, with many organisations unprepared for cyberattacks. In Ghana, despite the critical role Civil Society Organisations play, many struggle to effectively leverage digital technology and are also not giving cybersecurity the priority it deserves. This inadequate security, if not addressed, will have dire consequences for CSO operations, such as data loss, theft of intellectual property and financial and/or personal information, and damage to brand and reputation.

Africa Business reports that 90% of African businesses are operating without cybersecurity protocols in place, making them vulnerable to cyber threats such as hacking, phishing, and malware attacks. The economic consequences of digital insecurity are already substantial. According to data from the Cybercrime Unit of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of Ghana, Ghanaians lost over USD $19 million to cybercrime and recorded 1,097 cybercrime cases in 2020.

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Social media over the past few years has become an invaluable resource, especially for Africans and African organisations to tell their own diverse and dignified stories. At other times in history, narratives about the continent were dominated by denigrating and essential stereotypes that furthered the notion of a savage and dark continent. However, since the inception and popularisation of social media, Africans and African organisations have found a voice to share their own dignified experiences and stories.

Throughout recent history, several movements and advocacy efforts such as the #BlackLivesMatter and the #MeToo movement have widely gained global recognition, acceptance and to some extent, results through the power of social media.

It is important, therefore, that civil society organisations (CSOs) in Africa fully utilise the power of social media in their advocacy efforts. This article outlines four social media techniques CSOs can leverage to amplify their advocacy and outreach initiatives.

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Civil society organisations (CSOs) play a vital role in promoting social, economic, and political change in Africa through advocacy. While they continue to impact the world, research has shown that they can do even more with technology. Technology provides enormous added value to CSOs’ relevance when it comes to advocacy and dissemination of information. In this Op-Ed, the writer explores how CSOs can leverage technology to amplify and augment their advocacy impact.

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Volunteerism has been increasingly recognised as a valuable approach to involve young people in promoting global peace and sustainable development. It serves as a catalyst for positive change in society, making it an essential tool for young individuals. Volunteerism has the potential to empower young people to serve their communities and enhance their participation in civic activities.

Over the years, civil society organisations (CSOs) have provided volunteering opportunities to young people as an avenue to groom the next generation of development agents. In this issue paper, the author underscores the crucial role CSOs play in actively fostering volunteerism among the youth.

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PRESS RELEASE: STATEMENT ON THE CURRENT POLITICAL AND SECURITY DEVELOPMENTS IN SENEGAL

We, the underlisted civil society organisations in West Africa, note with deep concern recent political and security developments in Senegal, following the verdict against leader of the opposition Patriots of Senegal for Work, Ethics, and Fraternity (PASTEF) party, Ousmane Sonko, who was sentenced to two years in prison for “corrupting youth” on 01 June 2023. The scenes of ongoing violent clashes between protesters and security forces as well as the several regrettable civilian casualties that we have witnessed over the past few days are not only troubling but also highlight the risks that the ongoing political crisis portends for Senegal’s democracy and for peace and stability in the entire West African sub-region.

We are alarmed by the increasing repeated crackdowns on dissidents and protesters by law enforcement officers in Senegal, as the country inches closer to its presidential elections scheduled for February 2024. We note in particular that the heavy handed responses by law enforcement, including the disproportionate use of force; digital restrictions by the state, among others constitute flagrant violation of fundamental human rights and are inconsistent with democratic commitments enshrined in the Senegalese constitution and other international norms and frameworks that Senegal subscribes to, including, the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and Human Rights Council resolutions 22/6, 27/5 and 27/31, and the African Charter On Human And Peoples’ Rights. We are further concerned that the ongoing political crisis is likely to result in the reversal of the democratic gains chalked by Senegal over the years.

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There is no doubt that the over-reliance on the global north for funding social change is the primary reason that restoring the balance between the global north and south seems unfeasible if not impossible. Indeed, many argue that so long as the global south cannot generate its own resources to fund its development agenda, the fight for equality will always remain a mirage. In response to this daunting challenge, civil society organisations (CSOs) in the global south are seeking to diversify their funding and strengthen their local support base. A growing number of international organisations and funders are supporting global south CSOs to do this. Domestic resource mobilisation and community giving therefore continue to gain prominence.

Many actors in the African civic space have taken note of this and have begun experimenting, testing, innovating, and investing in alternative ways of working with communities and resourcing their activities.

This paper clearly highlights a robust and seasoned argument for leveraging social capital to nurture and cultivate domestic resource mobilisation and community giving as a mechanism for addressing the sustainability, credibility and legitimacy crises faced by African CSOs in these uncertain times.

Read the full article and understand how African CSOs can leverage social capital to support development of their communities.

Click here to read more
Sierra Leone’s government says the West African country is ready to hold peaceful, free and fair elections come June 24, a news report by Ghana News Agency, said on May 30.

In the report, Bockarie Albert Kalokoh, a Deputy Minister of Finance of the country, said in an interview with the news agency, that the country was all set to go to the polls to decide on who becomes the next President, Members of Parliament, Mayors and local councillors this month.

Despite all assurances on the country’s preparedness, some Sierra Leoneans youth activists say there has not been enough public education and awareness about the electoral processes which they fear can affect the outcome of the elections. According to the activists, Philip Kanu who works with the Sierra Leone Autistic Society (SLAS) and Yorpoi Matilda from OTC Kenema Opportunity Training Centre, the country needs more public education and awareness regarding the electoral processes.

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REIMAGINING CITIZEN-DRIVEN CONFLICT PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT MECHANISMS IN AFRICA

The role of community citizens in conflict prevention and management cannot be overstated. Because when there is peace in a nation, growth and development are critical catalysts that drive progress and prosperity.

Over the past years, citizen groups have been instrumental in preventing conflicts and sustaining peace in conflict-prone countries in Africa. They leverage a number of conflict-prevention mechanisms. However, the continent is yet to be free from conflicts and their adverse impact on its development.

In this issue paper, the authors critically look into these conflict-prevention mechanisms and offer recommendations on how we can effectively implement them for improved results. Download the full article here.
Sierra Leone’s 2023 Elections: The COVID-19 Pandemic and Civic Space

WACSI hosted an insightful webinar where we delved into the impact of the pandemic on Sierra Leone’s upcoming elections and civic space.

Access the research report here

Watch webinar here
ALTERNATIVE FUNDING MODEL COURSE

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