Background
The West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI) was established in 2005 and became operational in 2007. The purpose of WACSI is to build the capacity of civil society in West Africa.

Over the years, WACSI has built a track record as a prime capacity enabler, convener, thought leader and influencer within the civil society sector in West Africa. The Institute has made significant contributions to the development of civil society, and has thereby enhanced its clout and visibility across the West Africa region, and also attracted recognition from local, regional and international partners. WACSI plays a lead role in relevant discourses at regional and global levels that influence shifts in the funding and partnership policy dynamics relevant to the civil society sector.

Vision
The Vision of WACSI is: “A peaceful and prosperous West Africa where development is driven by its people”

Mission
WACSI’s mission is to strengthen civil society in West Africa to be responsive, collaborative, representative, resilient and influential through knowledge sharing, learning, connecting and influencing.

The goal of WACSI is to strengthen civil society to be a driver of change within the region, enabling civil society to better engage with governments, the private sector, and other actors for the purpose of creating accountable and responsive governments; strong institutions in and outside government; a conducive and sustainable global environment; and an equitable international development system.

WACSI further seeks to support citizens of West Africa to actively participate in, and drive the development agenda of the region. Towards these ends, WACSI partners with States and State institutions, private sector organisations, community groups, as well as national and regional bodies to jointly enable the realisation of its vision for West Africa.
Context of the 2023-2027 Strategic Plan

This strategic plan is based on insights and recommendations from an evaluation of the design and implementation of the 2018-2022 WACSI strategic plan. It also responds to trends and emerging realities in the civil society space in West Africa, especially with regard to the changing dynamics in the political, social, economic, and natural resource governance mechanisms in the region, and the increasing call on civil society to be the voice of reason, influence, and change.

In recent times, the West Africa region is experiencing a backsliding of democratic governance, an increase in unconstitutional changes in government, a spread and deepening of violent extremism, and criminality, a disturbing increase in the displacement of populations, and a general decline in socio-economic growth indicators. In the milieu, civil society space and the voice for policy dialogue seems to shrink, in spite of available instruments and mechanisms to harness civil society engagements with States and State Institutions and other key actors of governance and development in the region. These trends are happening in spite of, and parallel to, significant gains that have been made through capacity building of civil society to influence policy, legislation, programmes and practices related to youth, children and women’s rights, citizen participation in policy discourse, legislative reviews, and international donor funding regimes, among other achievements.

These dilemmas have informed the formulation of the 2023-2027 WACSI strategic plan to focus on building the capacity of civil society and citizens to be more proactive and resourceful in influencing desired change at the national and regional levels. The point of departure for this strategy, therefore, is the mapping of the perceptible changes or outcomes that WACSI seeks to achieve in governance and socio-economic transformation in West Africa, and how (and in which specific areas) the current capacity of civil society needs to be strengthened to drive the change.

This is a significant departure from merely focusing on a set of capacity strengthening packages for civil society. The starting point for this strategy is a conversation to specify the desired impact/outcomes in governance and socioeconomic transformation for which civil society capacity in West Africa is to be strengthened in the next five years (2023-2027). Two other critical considerations are relevant at the point of departure into this new strategy: the need to build on knowledge within the sub-region and continent and amplifying that knowledge; and a stronger engagement in enabling more equitable partnerships within international development globally.
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM EVALUATION OF 2018-2022 STRATEGIC PLAN

In early 2022, the WACSI Strategic and Action Plans 2018-2022 were evaluated. The objective was to identify achievements, challenges and recommendations to inform the formulation of the next strategic plan for the period 2023-2027. Below are highlights of the findings and recommendations of the evaluation, packaged in three thematic areas to serve as pointers to what the 2023-2027 strategy needs to address:

1. FOCUS ON OUTCOMES, DIRECT & INDIRECT IMPACT
   - Impact on SDG Progress Indicators (especially Goals 16 and 17)
   - Ability or increased capacity of civil society to raise resources and mobilise partnerships for sustainability
   - Shaping public agenda and providing policy alternatives for consideration
   - Increased solidarity between organised and organic civil society
   - Changes and/or improvements in CSOs practice, approaches and competence
   - Change in civil society norms and practices
   - Improved civil society accountability to its constituencies
   - Improvements in the enabling environment due to enhanced civil society capacity
   - Collaboration with policy makers vis-à-vis activism

2. RATIONALE FOR SELECTING CAPACITY BUILDING INTERVENTIONS/APPROACHES
   - Technical capacity gaps and operational challenges to both CSOs and organic civil society groups.
   - Needs to link the evidence of change more closely to specific intervention and the corresponding strategic objectives or intents.
   - Needs to present clearly what is needed in the civil society space against what WACSI can achieve.
   - Enhancing access to economic opportunities and resources for citizens, by influencing policy and practice.
   - Clarify what informs their relative focus on individuals as agents of change, and/or organisations as the focus of change in civil society empowerment.
   - Paid service delivery options and/or the setting up of an endowment fund with private sector and philanthropy.

3. ADJUSTING PLAN IMPLEMENTATION TO EMERGING REALITIES IN OPERATIONAL CONTEXT
   - Critical success factors/risks and assumptions underpinning the plan implementation process were not consciously tracked as lessons learnt
   - Strategy did not adequately highlight its significance in the context of civil society capacity.
   - No clarity to what extent the backsliding of democracy in West Africa is a further challenge.
   - Little reference to the use of technology for advancing civil society agenda, besides e-learning.
ORGANISATIONAL ASSESSMENT (SWOT)

With WACSI’s work it is important that a thorough assessment is carried out, especially given the fact that we are moving into a new strategic phase. Below are key highlights derived from an external and internal analysis of the organisation.

**STRENGTHS**
- International recognition
- Robust governance system
- Capacity to achieve results
- Successful mentorship

**OPPORTUNITIES**
- Worsening economic situation affecting the youth, women & rural poor.
- Deteriorating governance structures.
- Growing penetration of technology and social media.
- Global awakening to address institutionalised inequalities in development discourse and development funding mechanisms.

**WEAKNESS**
- Relative inability to package & communicate
- Lack of clear distribution of roles & functions
- Low focus on influencing economic governance

**THREATS**
- The growing appetite of its partners/donors to offer capacity building themselves directly to CSOs in West Africa
- The prevailing dependence on donor-initiated and donor-funded programmes

2023-2027 Strategic Plan
EMERGING TRENDS & CHALLENGES

In the past few years, some West Africa Member States have made commendable progress in the pursuit of democratic governance, conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and human security, such as successful elections in Ghana, The Gambia, and Liberia, as well as some marginal economic growth in public and private sector, leading up to new opportunities.

Increasing fragility and escalations in human insecurity especially in the areas of terrorism, crime and criminality, kidnapping, humanitarian crises and displacements, communal conflicts, farmer-herder clashes, sexual and gender-based violence.

Intergenerational gap arising from weaknesses in leadership and democratic structures to address issues facing the youth.

Persistent exclusion or inadequate inclusion of women in leadership and social-economic development initiatives.

Impact of climate change in West Africa is getting worse with more frequent flooding in the coastal areas, and longer spells of drought in the Sahel regions.

Significant socio-economic decline as part of the global recession post-Covid19 pandemic and rising cost of living.

Low penetration of technology, and its linkages with production, business, trade and communication.
HIGHLIGHTS OF INSIGHTS FROM ENVIRONMENTAL AND INTERNAL SCAN

The findings and recommendations from the evaluation of WACSI’s 2018-2022 strategic plan, and the analyses of current and emerging realities in the West African civil society space have informed the identification of capacity needs of civil society.

- **WACSI’s vision and mission remain relevant in the context of current and emerging realities**
- **WACSI’s domain of engagement is focused on strengthening the capacity of civil society as a sector or ecosystem, encompassing all actors in the civil society space – organised and/or organic.**
- **WACSI needs to enhance its internal digitalisation capacity and also support civil society to strengthen their access to, and the use of technology to influence policy and enhance citizen participation in governance and socio-economic development processes in the region.**
- **WACSI needs to credibly demonstrate its impact in terms of SDG Progress Indicators that require civic participation, including and especially Goals 16 and 17.**

Impact of climate change in West Africa is getting worse with more frequent flooding in the coastal areas, and longer spells of drought in the Sahel regions.

- **WACSI needs to revamp, integrate, and digitize its M&E, Learning, Knowledge Management and Communications architecture/systems.**
- **WACSI’s scope of influence needs to go beyond political/social governance, to include supporting civil society groups that focus on economic and natural resource governance, including climate change and resilience.**
- **WACSI’s capacity building approach will continue to focus on stakeholder-groups and organisations, capacitating a set of strategically identified CSOs, civil society coalitions or networks in the West Africa.**
- **WACSI will continue to be driven by a search for alternative, African, indigenous knowledge, philosophy, and approaches, and function as a thought leader and a knowledge hub on African and context-relevant approaches to civil society.**

2023-2027 Strategic Plan
OUR THEORY OF CHANGE

**Civil Society sector in West Africa is equipped representative, responsive, resilient, collaborative and influential in the pursuit of inclusive and sustainable development.**

- Supported and sustained an enabling environment for civil society in West Africa.
- Organisational, Technical and Technological Capacity of CSOs, civil society groups, coalitions and networks strengthened.
- Influenced the shift in power dynamics and access to development financing, funds, technical and technological resources for West African civil society.
- Increase in democratic, accountable and responsive states and governments in West Africa.
- Increased participation of all segments of society in governance, socio-economic transformation and development agenda of West African states.
- A peaceful and prosperous West Africa where development is driven by its citizens.
- Improved socio-economic life of all citizens of West Africa.

2023-2027 Strategic Plan
**STRATEGIC PRIORITIES**

Based on the theory of change, the strategic priorities and objectives that WACSI chooses to pursue in order to achieve its overall goal for 2023-2027 will include:

- **Enhance its own capacity, and leverage partnerships and resources to undertake research to benchmark the current capacity gaps in the West African civil society ecosystem.**
- **Strengthen its technical and digital capacity and that of the civil society sector to leverage the use of technology.**
- **Collate research to map out and benchmark the changes needed and the capacity gaps to be addressed in the civil society sector of West Africa.**
- **Increase its engagements with international actors in the field of development financing and international development cooperation to shift the balance of power and access to funding and technology for civil society.**
- **Enhance the quality, focus and delivery of its capacity development programmes.**
- **Work with the state to improve the “enabling environment” in which civil society functions, while deepening its engagements with the private sector and local philanthropists to leverage core funds.**
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES (SO)

Based on the theory of change, the strategic objectives that WACSI chooses to pursue in order to achieve its overall goal for 2023-2027 will include:

**SO1**
Strongening the organisational, technical and technological capacity of the civil society ecosystem

- Strengthening the organisational and technical capacity of civil society to be more transparent and accountable to their constituencies, and become attractive, strategic and critical partners to the State, private sector, as well as local and international donors and philanthropists, through the lens of Shift-the-Power and locally-led development.
- Strengthening the resource mobilisation capacity of civil society, with a focus on improving access to core and sustainable funding and other resources, such as technical assistance, partnerships, logistics/infrastructure and technological support. This could be through enhanced competence in partnerships with foundations, private sector and philanthropists, including individual donors.
- Strengthening capacity of civil society on private sector engagement strategies for civil society resource and to enhance the impact of their work.
- Strengthening capacity on networking, collaboration and alliance building among civil society groups, including organised and organic.
- Strengthening the technological capacity of civil society, including digital capacity and use of relevant fourth industrial revolution technologies (such as artificial intelligence, etc.) to gather and analyse data to generate evidence and enhance civil society effectiveness.
- Strengthening the knowledge capacity of civil society, including African and other local knowledge systems on organisational, technical and technological capacity of civil society groups.

**SO2**
Creating and nurturing an enabling environment for civil society

- Actively influence the Shift-the-Power dynamics and access to development financing, thereby, easing civil society access to financial, technical and technological resources.
- Influencing the legal, policy and regulatory environment for civil society to thrive and access technology, governance and economic opportunities.
- Strengthening partnerships with the private sector through programmes that address the environment related to the cost of doing business, local contents and the promotion of local socio-economic and inclusive development.
- Deepening and extending partnerships and collaboration among the different formations of civil society, including organised and organic civil society.
- Supporting an open civic space, including the digital rights, access and use of technology to strengthen civil society’s effectiveness and social impact.
- Creating tactical spaces for civil society’s engagements on issues affecting access to opportunities for the Youth, Women, and the marginalised.
- Generating and disseminating evidence to support and substantiate the effectiveness of policy influencing and engagements with the State, private sector and development partners.

**SO3**
Strengthening the institutional capacity of WACSI

- Governance by instituting a strong governance system that enhances corporate administration;
- Leadership and succession strategy that enables internal leadership development
- Human resource and technical capacity
- Organisational administrative and operational processes
- Technology and digitalisation, including skills, capacity and infrastructure to operate and engage internally and with civil society;
- Resource mobilisation and sustainability/financial management, including internal capacity to engage with donors, mobilise resources and contribute to the organisational sustainability and the creation of a business development unit.
- M&E, learning through leading, facilitating and nurturing an organisation impact orientation and learning culture, and strengthen internal capacity and that of civil society in relevant monitoring, evaluation and learning skill areas;
- Knowledge management through strengthening internal knowledge systems, learning, sharing and building of institutional memory;
- Communications and information, including strategic communication for improved institutional visibility and recognition as a thought leader in the sector; and
- The leveraging and management of strategic partnerships to keep WACSI at the cutting edge of civil society capacity development.
RISK & ASSUMPTIONS

In choosing these pathways, strategic focal areas of action, and modus operandi, WACSI is cognisant of its assumptions and the critical factors it needs to monitor to ensure the success of its strategy. These critical success factors are:

1. **Donor capture**
   - An improved management of the subtle challenges that WACSI continues to face in its efforts to leverage deeper cooperation with Regional Bodies and multilaterals.

2. **Resistance to localisation**

3. Tendencies for international development partners to deal directly with grassroots organisations.

4. **The persistent insecurity in the sub-region**

5. **The worsening global and regional economic**

6. **Globally institutionalised inequalities in access to technology**
**KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

**SO1**
To strengthen the institutional, technical and technological capacity of the civil society sector in West Africa

**SO2**
To create, enrich, and expand an enabling environment for civil society to operate in West Africa

**SO3**
To strengthen the institutional capacity of WACSI

**INDICATOR 1**
Organised and organic civil society in West Africa deploy more effective approaches in their engagements with governments and the private sector to improve/influence policy and legislative framework

**INDICATOR 2**
Spaces for civil society participation and influence in governance and socio-economic development processes in West Africa are more expansive, safe and guaranteed

**INDICATOR 3**
WACSI functions as a knowledge hub, thought leader and the premier port of call on civil society issues in West Africa

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2023-2027 Strategic Plan
CONCLUSION

WACSI’s 2023-2027 Strategic Plan defines clear objectives that the organisation will pursue and the outcomes or improvements in the civil society sector it seeks to achieve together with its partners and key stakeholders. These changes will be measured in terms of the extent to which civil society organisations (NGOs, CSOs and CBOs), civil society coalitions and networks and other stakeholder groups who participate in WACSI initiatives deploy improved capacity and approaches to manage their institutions and also engage among themselves, with the State, and private sector actors. Changes that are induced in individuals and organisational leaders will be assessed in terms of the extent to which these individuals influence or enable improvements in their respective organisations and in the civil society sector.

These changes will be driven through the various initiatives in the 2023-2027 strategic plan, which will be implemented through WACSI’s well-known business model of: direct or hands-on implementation of programmes; convening and connecting civil society actors with one another and with the State and private sector actors; facilitating learning and knowledge sharing as a thought leader; influencing and advocacy; and internal organisation development and an enhanced culture of delivery, including digitalisation and appropriate use of technology for the various civil society actors.
INITIATIVES

Civic Space Resource Hub (CSR-HUB) - SCAN FOR MORE

Electoral Integrity in West Africa (ELIWA) - SCAN FOR MORE

CSOs IN WEST AFRICA (E-DIRECTORY) - SCAN FOR MORE

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