



West Africa Election Observers' Network (WAEON)

Press release

WAEON hosts conference on the increasing role of technology in election administration

15th May, 2019

Scores of citizens' election observer groups and election experts in West Africa have gathered at the West African Election Observers Network (WAEON) Conference in Accra to strategize on how to navigate challenges associated with technology-driven elections in a bid to inject credibility into electoral processes.

Themed "The increasing role of technology in election administration: Implications for election observer groups in West Africa," the two-day conference is aimed at bringing together election observer groups and other electoral stakeholders in the West-Africa sub-region to deliberate on emerging issues from technology-driven elections and election observation. The conference also serves as a platform for WAEON members to discuss pragmatic strategies to guide the work of election observers in contributing to transparent, credible and peaceful elections.

Several Elections Management Bodies (EMBs) in West Africa are increasingly utilizing technology to address challenges in their electoral processes. These include the adoption of biometric technology in registering and authenticating voters to address problems of impersonation, multiple registrations and multiple voting. Electronic voting and electronic transmission of vote/ballots count have also been considerably discussed in some of these countries as mechanisms for addressing various electoral issues. The increasing application of appropriate technology in election management aims at addressing mistrust in electoral process, and thereby enhancing integrity of election outcomes.

However, these technological adoptions have been associated with challenges, such as equipment breakdown, unreliability of some technological equipment, the poor human capacity to operate the technological devices, unfair weather conditions as well as mistrust from political parties and other stakeholders in the procurement processes and application of such technology. On the back of these challenges, the crucial work of election observer groups, particularly domestic election observer groups who have also incorporated technological innovations into their observation efforts, have come under challenge. Many observer groups in recent years rely on technology to transmit/report observation findings, including verifying election results. At the same time, however, observer groups have no access to the back-end of technologies adopted by EMBs to transmit election results from polling stations to central locations, and observer findings come under serious scrutiny when elections are faulted for technological reasons.

Considering the increasing role that technology would continue to play in election management in West Africa, the conference affords WAEON members the opportunity to explore strategies that enables them to respond to the changing (technological) trends in election administration. At the end of the two-day conference, participants are expected to craft a guide on how observer groups can navigate the challenges of elections and technology, throwing light on what observers should consider through the electoral cycle in their observation efforts. This will serve as a guide document for WAEON member organizations and other election observer groups outside of the sub-region.

About WAEON

The West Africa Election Observers Network (WAEON) was formed in 2010 under the auspices of the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana) and the US-based National Democratic Institute (NDI). It is an independent, non-partisan, non-governmental, and non-religious network of election observation/monitoring citizen organizations in West Africa dedicated to the promotion of free, fair, transparent and peaceful elections in the sub-region. The Network currently consists of 13 member organizations respectively representing Burkina Faso, Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, Guinea, Ghana, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo. WAEON has its headquarters in Accra, Ghana, at CDD-Ghana which serves as the Secretariat and manages its operations.