

ELECTIONS IN WEST AFRICA **BEST PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNED**



UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS
WEST AFRICA REGIONAL OFFICE



FOREWORD

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Genuine, inclusive, free and fair elections are an indispensable component of democratic governance, rule of law and respect for human rights alike. While it is true that West African States have achieved great strides of progress in the last decades, challenges still remain and cases of human rights violations leading to violence and potentially destabilizing tensions make the headlines on a regular basis. Furthermore, entrenched discrimination based on gender or origin, social marginalization of numerous minority groups and economic inequality are major obstacles that lie in the way full respect for human rights in the context of elections.

In this context, the United Nations Human Rights Office for West Africa (OHCHR WARO) is engaged to fulfill its mission in promoting and protecting human rights in the context of elections across the 15 States of West Africa. In close partnership with governments, State institutions, independent institutions in charge of organizing elections and protecting human rights, supra national organizations and civil society actors, WARO has been endeavouring to promote and protect human rights in elections since its opening in 2008. Throughout its engagement in the field, the OHCHR has acquired valuable experience and knowledge on human rights engagement in the context of elections stemming from its own practice and that of its partners many on the ground.

This Booklet on **“Elections in West Africa: Best Practices and Lessons Learned”** presents in a succinct form the lessons drawn from this invaluable experience as well as the best practices of WARO and its partners in terms of awareness raising, technical assistance, early warning and capacity building of relevant actors for the protection of human rights in the context of elections. The booklet aims at making this precious experience available to the reader in order to allow her/him to draw inspiration from other experiences and apply its conclusions and recommendations to another context.

Among the best practices contained in this Booklet, there is the organizations of a Women’s Platform uniting dozens of women’s associations for peaceful elections in Senegal, the training and deployment of over 100 human rights monitors across the regions of Guinea, capacity building and awareness raising work with the security and law enforcement personnel in Togo, as well as on site missions in Burkina Faso. Among the lessons drawn from its experience, WARO highlights the crucial importance of mobilization by civil society, the potential of advocacy and mediation with institutions and governments as a means of preventing escalation, as well as capacity building and awareness raising of all relevant actors in order to bridge the knowledge gap and prevent violations.

There are many challenges that lie in the way of full compliance with human rights standards in the context of elections, including the shrinking democratic space, excessive use of force, violence and entrenched discrimination leading limited representation of minorities in institutions and major political organizations. This booklet elaborates on the best practices and lessons learned, and elaborates concrete recommendations that can be used to ensure that human rights are fully respected, protected and fulfilled in the context of elections.

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ABBREVIATIONS & ACRONYMS

ACHPR	African Charter on Human and People's Rights
AU	African Union
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CPRD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

CPRW	Convention on the Civil and Political Rights of Women
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
ECONEC	ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EMBs	Elections Management Bodies
HR	Human Rights
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IDEA	International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
IFES	International Foundation for Electoral Systems
INEC	Independent National Electoral Commission
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
OHCHR	United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SRSg	Special Representative of the Secretary-General
TSMs	Temporary Special Measures
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UEMOA	West African Economic and Monetary Union
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNOWAS	United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UN WOMEN	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
WARO	West African Regional Office of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

INTRODUCTION

Context

Genuinely free and fair elections are indispensable in a democratic society. They are the means through which eligible voters determine their head(s) of State and representatives in parliament and local government, to pass laws and make policies that impact on the quality of life of all citizens and residents of a State. “Only when institutions are democratic and representative of all groups in society, women as well as men, minorities as well as majorities, the dispossessed as well as the affluent, are stable peace and national prosperity likely to be achieved”¹.

¹ OSAGI, Women and elections (2005), <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/publication/WomenAndElections.pdf>

All citizens have the right to participate in public affairs through the casting of votes, or by being elected through free and fair elections held periodically, while in many States, political participation can also take the form of plebiscites or referenda in which people express their choice of laws or policies directly.

The transparency and credibility of elections are largely dependent on the level of respect for people to fully exercise their fundamental rights to participate freely in the life and management of political affairs of their respective country. In spite of the recent achievements in democratization, elections in some West African States remains a recurrent source of human rights violations, causing deep social instability, leading to numerous post-election crises. Even when the process is free and transparent, elections can be marred by the under-representation of minorities: whether it results from discrimination or other barriers, the limited participation by a group in elections is bound to result in the group's under-representation in the policy and law-making processes, which will thereby undermine the group's ability to protect and promote its interests.

Unfortunately, in spite of their critical mass, women continue to be under-represented in politics, not only in Africa but across the world. Remarkable progress has been made over the last two decades to increase women's participation and representation in politics. Evidence shows that globally, as of February 2016, 11 women served as Heads of State, and 10 as Heads of Government². Furthermore, women represented 22% of all national parliamentarians, compared to less than 12% in 1995³. However, the number falls far below the target of "gender balance" as stipulated in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action to which 189 states parties pledged commitment more than 20 years ago. Despite all the progress in the normative framework, there is more work to be done to reach the target of 30%. "There are many remaining obstacles to women's equal participation in elections, including gender stereotypes ... volatile security situations [and] gender-based violence ... traditional barriers, and inequalities in education, training and resources. Political parties, ethnic groups or clans can be dominated by a single, strong leader, usually a male, leaving little opportunity for women to enter the political process through established political groups"⁴. Meanwhile, the under-representation of women continues to infringe on their political rights and restricts their ability to influence decision-making process in their respective countries. Despite the remarkable progress in some African States, significant variations between and within regions still remain: in Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, The Gambia, Mali and Nigeria, there are less than 11% of women in Parliament as of February 2016⁵. In the 2015 legislative elections, women's representation was merely 7.2% in Benin, 9.4% in Burkina Faso and 5.6% in Nigeria, while Senegal is the only West African State which has more than 30% of women representatives owing to a gender parity law.

The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) is the United Nations agency entrusted with the mission to promote and protect human rights in all contexts, including the electoral period. In West Africa, the Regional Office of the OHCHR (WARO) is highly committed to supporting stakeholders during the electoral process, including governments, National Human rights Institutions and Civil society Organizations by providing tools for the effective protection, respect for and fulfillment of human rights in the electoral contexts.

OHCHR's engagement in the electoral context was strengthened following the adoption of General Assembly Resolution A/RES/64/155 of March 8th, 2010 "**Strengthening the role of the United Nations in enhancing periodic and genuine elections and the promotion of democratization**", requesting the Secretary General "to continue to ensure that the [OHCHR] is able to respond, within its mandate and is in close coordination with the (Electoral Assistant) Division, to the numerous and increasingly complex and comprehensive requests from

² UN Women, <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures>

³ IPU, <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>

⁴ OSAGI, Women and elections (2005), <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/publication/WomenAndElections.pdf>

⁵ IPU, <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>

Member States for advisory services”. The resolution also encourages further engagement of OHCHR in the context of United Nations coordination efforts on electoral assistance. In line with the General Assembly Resolution and in accordance with its mandate, WARO and OHCHR field presences in the West African region have been supporting the electoral processes which took place across the sub-region, in particular in Togo (2010, 2015); Guinea (2010-2015); Niger (2011-2015); Cabo Verde; Côte d'Ivoire (2010-2015); Senegal (2012, 2016); Burkina Faso (2015); Nigeria (2015); Liberia (2011); Sierra Leone (2012); Benin (2011-2016); and Mali (2012, 2015)⁶.

With the support of OHCHR WARO, other UN agencies and partners, a number of good practices were developed, a valuable experience which needs to be shared and built upon in countries of the West African region and beyond with the aim of protecting and promoting human rights for all men and women who are taking part in elections. Using the best practices process, the Office promotes the exchange of experiences, including sharing between individual experts and Technical Resource Networks (TRNs); pilot testing, including operations research, and other projects and programmes; and documentation. Without full access to the existing knowledge and experience projects and programmes that proved to be successful, whether fully or in part, mistakes may be repeated and valuable time may be lost.

For this reason, throughout its engagement in the electoral context, the Office constantly endeavours to develop and disseminate the lessons learned and the best practices in terms of projects, programmes or policies which have proved to work for the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of elections.

Methodology and Technical Approach

One of the main tasks of OHCHR WARO is to identify best practices which have proved to work for the promotion and protection of human rights in the electoral context of West African States and to examine how and why they work and the partnerships that made it possible. Once these practices are identified, WARO promotes the sharing of these practices, including through such means as documentation and widespread distribution of the lessons learned, challenges and recommendations for further improvement. This Booklet on **“Elections in West Africa: Best Practices and Lessons Learned”** is part of that effort. Good practice is not meant to imply “perfection”, or “absolute truth”. Rather, it entails the accumulation and application of knowledge on what is working - and what is not - in a given situation or context. In other words, it encompasses the lessons learned and the continuing process of learning, feedback, and analysis (what works, how and why, with whom, etc.) in a given domain and leads to a reflection on the challenges and opportunities with a set of recommendations that can be practically applied in another context. At its simplest, good practice suggests to learn from existing experiences in order to improve policy and adapt best practices to one's context with the ultimate goal of guaranteeing elections that are in full conformity with human rights standards.

⁶ Idem

This booklet is primarily based on information collected from all the human rights field presences in West Africa – including WARO as well as the country offices in Guinea and Nigeria and the human rights components of peacekeeping missions in Sierra Leone, Mali and Côte d'Ivoire – regarding their elections-related activities. Another source of information is the Regional Workshop on “**Gender, Human Rights and Women’s Participation in Elections in West and Central Africa**” which was co-organized by WARO, UN WOMEN and ECOWAS in May 2016. The workshop contributed to capture information from various actors through plenary debates, and more importantly, from bilateral interviews conducted with representatives from Civil Society Organizations (CSO), National Human Rights Institutions (NHRI), Election management Bodies (EMBs), and political parties from West Africa to share experiences, good practices and challenges to the promotion and protection of human rights in elections⁷.



I OHCHR'S MANDATE IN THE ELECTORAL CONTEXT

I.1 Legal Framework: Key Human Rights Standards in the Context of Elections

Electoral processes are particularly crucial moments in political and civil life and concern the respect of human rights most directly. The right to vote and to be elected is at the core of democratic governance based on the consent of the people. Free and fair elections are critical conditions for a full exercise of the rights of political participation. In this regard, the UN has adopted core international instruments to promote and protect human rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) stands as a foundation of a set of standards intended to promote human dignity in all contexts, including in elections. Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) goes further and provides a legally binding entitlement for all citizens to take part in the conduct of public affairs:

“Every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity, without any of the distinctions mentioned in article 2 and without unreasonable restrictions:

(a) To take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives;

(b) To vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors;

(c) To have access, on general terms of equality, to public service in his country”. - Article 25, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

As mentioned in OHCHR's Manual on Monitoring Human Rights, the right to participate in free and fair elections is intrinsically linked to a number of fundamental human rights, the enjoyment of which is crucial to a meaningful electoral process⁸. These rights include:

- **The right to freedom from discrimination:** the right to political participation must be enjoyed equally by all and without distinction or discrimination of any kind (e.g., based on race, color, sex, sexual orientation and gender identity, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, birth or other status). An environment in which discrimination is tolerated facilitates intimidation and manipulation of the electorate, which is incompatible with free and fair elections. The authorities have both a positive obligation to prevent discrimination and a negative one to refrain from discriminating. Certain types of positive discrimination measures are, however, permissible if they are of a remedial nature in view of correcting past discrimination (for example, setting a quota for women candidates or other TSMs) and do not amount to discrimination.
- **The right to freedom of expression:** the electoral process is a mechanism whose very purpose is the expression of the political will of the people. The right to express political ideas must, therefore, be firmly safeguarded during electoral periods. The exercise of this right carries with it special duties and responsibilities, and it can be subject to restrictions based on specific grounds (e.g., respect of the rights or reputations of others, or the protection of national security, public order, public health or morals). Incitement to war, violence or hatred must also be restricted. However, these restrictions must be clearly provided by law and must comply with the strict test of necessity and proportionality in order to be acceptable.
- **The right to freedom of opinion:** the unconditional freedom to hold a political opinion is imperative in the context of elections, since the true assertion of popular will is impossible in an environment where such freedom is absent or restricted in any way. The right to freedom of opinion is absolute and cannot be derogated from, restricted or interfered with in any manner.
- **The right to freedom of peaceful assembly:** public demonstrations and political rallies are an integral part of the electoral process and provide an effective mechanism for the public dissemination of political information. In order to be protected by law, an assembly must be peaceful. Any restriction on this right must be in conformity with the law, provided that it is necessary in a democratic society, pursuing legitimate aims (e.g., national security or public safety, public order, the protection of public health or morals or of the rights and freedoms of others) and employing the least restrictive means.
- **The right to freedom of association:** this right has a broad scope and includes the right to form and participate in political organizations. Respect for this right is vital during the electoral process as the ability to form and join political parties is one of the most important means by which people can participate in a democratic process. This right is very closely related to the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and permits limitations on the same grounds (e.g., in the legitimate aims of national security or public safety, public order, the protection of public health or morals or of the rights and freedoms of others). International law permits the imposition of lawful restrictions on members of the armed forces and the police in the exercise of these rights (for example, banning them from joining political parties).

⁸ OHCHR, Monitoring Human Rights in the Context of Elections, <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/Chapter23-MHRM.pdf>

Furthermore, participants in the electoral process may face a variety of challenges depending on the circumstances in which the elections are held. For example, in situations of conflict or civil strife, individuals may be unable to move freely because of poor security or ongoing clashes between warring parties. Other concerns may include a real fear of harm by rival groups participating in the electoral process. In other situations, certain groups may face discrimination, preventing them from fully and freely participating in the electoral process. In such contexts, additional rights may also be relevant, such as:

- **The right to freedom of movement:** it is essential that all those participating in the electoral process are able to move without restriction and fear, and have access to all electoral events and related venues (e.g., voter registration, political rallies, and polling stations). This applies not only to members of political organizations and their supporters, but also to voters and the general population. Restrictions are permitted only if provided by law and insofar as these are necessary to protect national security, public order, public health or morals or the rights and freedoms of others, and are consistent with the enjoyment of other civil and political rights.
- **Freedom from fear and intimidation:** participation in the electoral process must be conducted in an atmosphere characterized by an absence of intimidation and by respect for human rights. All persons taking part in elections, including candidates, electoral staff and voters, must have the confidence that they will not be targeted, threatened or intimidated in any way as a result of their participation. This principle is linked to the enjoyment of the right to life, the right to personal integrity as well as the right to liberty and security of person.

Voter education, registration of voters and candidates, political meetings, rallies and media reporting are all common elements of an electoral process, and each must operate without unreasonable interference for the conduct of elections to be considered free and fair.

The right to participate in free and fair elections is intrinsically linked to a number of other fundamental rights that are crucial to a meaningful electoral process. On the international and regional perspective, many conventions have been adopted in order to ensure effective participation of all citizens without discrimination in the management of public affairs. The International Charter of human rights, namely the UDHR and its two Covenants (ICCPR and ICESCR, 1966) stand as the basis of human rights in the electoral context. These are further developed in other core international conventions.

In its Articles 19, 21 and 25, the ICCPR guarantees the right of all people to participate in public affairs, freedom of expression and freedom of peaceful assembly. These universal rights are further developed in a number of other instruments that promote and protect the rights of specific groups, including women and people with disabilities. This includes the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, art 7); the Protocol of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, (Maputo Protocol, art. 9); the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, art. 29); the Convention on the Rights of the Child (art.23).

Furthermore, the Solemn Declaration of the African Union on Gender Equality in Africa as well as the ECOWAS Gender Policy, adopted in 2004 advocate for the expansion and promotion of the gender parity principle are relevant documents in the West African sub-region. The ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (A/SP1/12/01) of 2001 accompanied with its supplementary Protocol on the Mechanism of Prevention, Management and Resolution of Conflict, Peace and Security (A/SP1/12/01) provide a good base and a valuable source for human rights-compliant electoral policies in West Africa.

Much has been done across the West African sub-region to domesticate and operationalize the above-mentioned international conventions on human rights guaranteeing general participation, and promoting the rights of specific and marginalized groups to fully take part on public life. However, the implementation of the rights and obligations contained therein is often lacking, which is why continued vigilance and mobilization by civil society and national and supranational institutions is of the essence if the rights enshrined in international conventions are to be reflected in reality.

I.2 Institutional Framework

National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs)

The relationship between human rights and election is fundamental. Considering that without full respect for human rights, there can be no free, fair and transparent elections, OHCHR has developed a core and comprehensive policy on elections. In this context, National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) can play a significant role as a national body empowered to monitor and review human rights abuses by any other institution in collaboration with the State on any issue concerned with human rights. Working in close partnership with WARO, the Network of African National Human Rights Institutions has recognized the significant role that NHRIs can play in elections and in democratic governance more broadly, promoting democracy and development and supporting judicial independence.

National Human Rights Institutions are conceived as independent institutions set up by law with the mandate to protect and promote human rights at the national level and to advise the government and general society on human rights issues. They play a crucial role in promoting and monitoring the effective implementation of international standards of human rights at the national level and are important in the promotion of people's rights to participate in public life, being within reach of the rights holders, plaintiffs and CSOs working in human rights. Accordingly to its mandate, OHCHR contributes in strengthening the capacity of NHRIs across all of West Africa.

OHCHR's Guidance Note defines the conceptual framework and the normative basis, announces the principles and conditions, expresses the forms and procedures, and highlights the human rights work that has been carried out by the Office in its engagement in the context of electoral processes⁹.

Accordingly, OHCHR WARO's engagement in the context of electoral processes stands in line with the mandate of the field presences, taking into account local contexts and conditions on the ground, as well as a number of other parameters, including: available capacity in terms human and financial resources, and existing and potential partnerships.

Election Management Bodies (EMBs)

In West Africa, electoral processes are administered by National Independent Electoral Commissions or National Autonomous Electoral Commissions. These commissions, referred to as Election Management Bodies (EMBs), are the primary actors responsible for preparing, organizing and conducting elections in accordance with the electoral calendar, exercising the authority provided in national legislation. EMBs are also responsible for supervising the work of all levels of the election administration, ranging from polling station boards and regional bodies up to decision-making and overall coordination. All election management body staff are meant to be provided with clear

⁹ OHCHR, National Human Rights Institutions and Transitional Justice, http://nhri.ohchr.org/EN/Themes/Portuguese/DocumentsPage/NHRIs_Guidance%20Note%20TJ_Oct%2008.pdf

instructions and training with regard to their role and responsibilities, including their duty to act fairly and impartially for the achievement of genuine, free and fair elections. As key actors and an important source of information with regard to the electoral process, as well as target for advocacy especially if they make decisions, take action or fail to take action that result in individual or specific groups not being able to exercise their political rights, EMBs support is a key priority. Across West Africa, the Office intends core activities aiming at supporting EMBs in the electoral context.

OHCHR and other Institutional Partners in the Electoral Context

Elections are a special period of time in which many diverse institutional partners intervene in the electoral context. In the United Nations System, agencies such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Electoral Assistance Division of the Department of Political Affairs (DPA) or components of Peacekeeping Operations provide technical advice and other assistance to the electoral process. Other Technical and Financial Partners (TFPs) may be key actors in the process and develop a range of activities for genuine elections. When appropriate, OHCHR sets up groups of discussion for election-related human rights violations, in which the field presences serve as the focal point for investigation and follow-up. In this regard, field presences in the region actively work to establish information flow and briefings for better sharing with partners. Furthermore, OHCHR's Field presences take an active role in thematic groups and clusters to promote and protect human rights in the context of elections.

II WARO'S ENGAGEMENT IN THE ELECTORAL CONTEXT IN WEST AFRICA

II.1 Strategy

Faced with numerous challenges in the sub-region, OHCHR WARO works in close partnership with national, supranational and civil society organizations engaged on presidential, legislative, local elections and referenda aiming at building the capacity of all relevant actors to ensure human rights compliant elections.

In its engagement for human rights in the context of elections, OHCHR WARO works systematically with relevant United Nations entities, in particular, UNOWAS, the DPA/Electoral Assistance Division (EAD), the Executive Office of the Secretary General (EOSG), the Resident Coordinator (RC), and other relevant counterparts (including regional organizations such as ECOWAS and the AU) as well as other Member States (including the Heads of State and high-ranking representatives of governments): experience shows that such a combined effort is most conducive to successful outcomes and ensures synergy, coordination, consistency and coherence in statements and approaches.

In the implementation strategy of its mandate, WARO attaches great importance to technical assistance for partners, for States, institutions and civil society organizations alike. In the electoral context of West Africa, WARO's assistance includes specific technical support and advice linked to the legal framework, peace and transitional justice processes, constitutional legislation, institution-building, and technical consultations with the media. The Office aims to raise the capacities of governmental partners, NHRIs, CSOs, the media, the legislature, the judiciary, law enforcement personnel and security forces in order to ensure that they all do their part in delivering an environment that guarantees peaceful, free, fair, inclusive and transparent elections in full compliance with human rights standards.

WARO's strategy in elections aims to create such an enabling environment for peaceful and inclusive elections and to prevent human rights violations in close partnership with all relevant stakeholders. Working in collaboration with national partners, UN agencies and regional organizations, the Office brings its unique technical expertise as an added value and combines monitoring, advocacy, capacity building, technical assistance protection and reporting activities for the achievement of genuine elections as core elements of its strategy¹⁰.

II.2 Monitoring

As a proactive approach that stands out from mere observation, human rights monitoring is essentially concerned with early warning and prevention of human rights violations. In the electoral period, some rights may be more restricted or threatened, particularly as regards freedom of association, freedom of expression, assembly and association. At times, this may lead to a number of serious human rights violations such as arbitrary arrests and detention, ill-treatment, torture, extrajudicial killings, and enforced disappearances. Monitoring activities include paying attention to economic, social and cultural rights as well, as disregard for these rights can also give rise to tensions and insecurity in the context of elections. Monitoring in this context is also concerned with the media and assesses the participation of specific and marginalized groups. In its monitoring strategy, WARO pays attention to groups who may be at risk – or increase risks – of being subjected to various forms of intimidation, marginalization, exclusion or violence (members of the opposition and other activists, media workers, NGO representatives, human rights defenders, but also women, members of ethnic or religious communities, indigenous people, persons with disabilities, refugees, IDPs or migrants), or may have difficulties in or be prevented from accessing polling sites.

Monitoring human rights during elections serves a number of purposes:

- Strengthens the integrity of and promote public confidence in the electoral process
- Serves as a deterrent for violations before, during and after the elections
- Plays an important role in responding to human rights violations and intervene for corrective action to ensure greater participation and non-discrimination.

In Burkina Faso, in the 2015 presidential election, WARO organized a training session on “Elections and Human Rights” that intended to build the capacities of the NHRI. At the end of the training, a monitoring framework was developed with the technical support of the “light team” deployed by the United Nations.

The monitoring strategy consisted in:

- the establishment of six teams in four regions;
- The establishment of a head office team responsible for compiling reports and managing the logistical problems;
- Collaborating with the EMB;
- Analyzing the legal framework;
- Analyzing political speeches and candidate programmes.

¹⁰ OHCHR WARO, Widening democratic space, <http://www.westafrica.ohchr.org/Elargir-l-espace-democratique.html>

The monitoring highlighted the role of the National Human Rights Commission, political parties and the population in fulfilling human rights. The presence of the members of the Commission on the ground revealed the positive impact of their engagement during the elections, which remained largely peaceful in spite of the ongoing political crisis.



Burkina Faso has also adopted legislation to promote women's political participation. A quota system was established in Burkina Faso in 2009 providing for quotas for women's representation in legislative and municipal elections, although more work is needed to ensure the enforcement of the quota in practice. Under the National Transitional Council, a preliminary draft law was drafted by the Ministry of Women and Gender in consultation with civil society. It states that every list of candidates presented at legislative or municipal elections by a political party, a coalition of political parties, or a coalition of independent candidates in an electoral district should have an equal representation of men and women. Women's associations in Burkina Faso have been mobilizing to support this reform which demands that candidates' lists present women and men in succession (referred to a "zipped" list) rather than having all women in the bottom: much hope is placed for better representation by drawing inspiration from the success this practice has had in other regions.

The NHRI played a crucial role in promoting and defending human rights provisions in the constitution and electoral laws during the presidential elections. The contributions of the NHRI in the last elections included a thorough scrutiny of the legal framework, organization of training sessions on elections and human rights and deployment of human rights monitoring teams in four out of the 13 regions. According to the NHRI, there were largely equal conditions for eligibility in the elections and non-discrimination in the registration of citizens of both sexes on electoral lists. Certain freedoms, especially the freedom of expression and assembly, were exercised without any constraints. Publicity and campaign speeches were devoid of hate speeches, promoting a relatively violent-free election environment that was conducive to women's participation. However, it was noted that the decision to bar all candidates who have previously supported President Campaoré from running was a human rights concern – as it

prevented a number of politicians from exercising their right to take part in the elections – an issue which was pointed out by OHCHR WARO during the crisis.

In Guinea, in the 2015 presidential election, a **"Situation room of electoral observers"** was established by civil society with the support of OHCHR, UN WOMEN and international CSOs. The Platform has provided pre-election monitoring, monitoring of violence, and speeches of politicians. The Platform has also established an important mechanism for proper observation of elections by the deployment of 2'000 observers throughout the country. The Platform has also set up a post-election monitoring team in charge of the risk of post-electoral violence.

At the end of the process, the Platform has published a report with recommendations to all political actors including the political parties, the EMBs, as well as authorities at the highest level to improve the electoral process in Guinea.

In Togo, OHCHR carried out a monitoring mission of the human rights situation during and immediately after the 2012 elections. A number of initiatives were taken by the EMB, the Government and the *"Force de sécurisation des élections législatives et locales"* (FOSEL) in order to ensure the respect for the rights of voters and political parties, often with financial support and/or technical assistance from OHCHR. Among other activities, FOSEL deployed a special force to secure parliamentary elections with 6'500 gendarmes, police and other law-enforcement personnel trained in human rights and coordination meetings between officials of the FOSEL and the media to promote better cooperation in the field.

OHCHR has developed a multi-pronged strategy designed to ensure early warning of human rights violations in the electoral context while facilitating corrective measures as soon as possible by government authorities or institutions in charge of the electoral process. The strategy included:

- Coordination by the OHCHR team with prefects, regional and prefectural officials of FOSEL;
- A communication plan to mobilize the population for the respect for human rights;
- The provision of free tools for early warning (including two green lines and a website);
- The training and deployment of 600 "observers of human rights for peace" throughout the territory;
- The production and distribution of 6'500 copies of a handbook entitled **"Holding free and fair elections is to respect human rights"** and other documents on the keeping of law and order by security forces. Both documents have contributed to raising the awareness of stakeholders in elections and the security forces on the principles of maintaining public order.

The set of actions taken by OHCHR in Togo, together with those of other stakeholders has contributed to the protection of human rights during elections. Unlike previous elections, the 2012 elections witnessed greater respect for freedom of expression and a significant fall in electoral violence. During the pre-election phase, OHCHR initiated an awareness programme on non-violence in partnership with UNDP and the EMB. Shows and sketches were produced and broadcasted regularly on forty radio and televisions in Togo. A dozen radio stations were targeted to animate live shows on non-violence and freedom of expression; a particular emphasis was placed on individual responsibility in cases of incitement to violence and/or hatred. In the provinces, the Office has repeatedly questioned the candidates who have made statements amounting to hate speech and tribalism.

The behaviour of FOSEL had a positive impact for the respect for human rights. OHCHR has noted a change in the attitude of the security forces through the implementation of its programme to strengthen security forces

capabilities, particularly with regard to the supervision of public events. In a number of communities, it was noted that FOSEL managed tense situations and avoided escalation¹¹.

During the 2015 presidential elections in Togo, local women's CSOs set up a **"Platform of women for election monitoring"** in partnership with UNDP. This platform has worked before, during and after the elections to ensure a peaceful electoral process. Its major innovation was the use of information and communication technologies to ensure effective monitoring even in the remotest areas. Using cell phones, the NGO provided phone credit to several neighborhood leaders to ensure the monitoring of electoral violence. Thus, when a case of violence was detected in the area, a message was immediately sent to the technical team of the Platform. The team would forward the message to the political division of the same platform, which would quickly make a decision to alert either the EMB, the authorities of the security forces, the National Human Rights Commission, the territorial Department, depending on the nature of the event, allowing the authorities to take the most appropriate decision to respond timely and effectively. At the end of the elections, the Platform organized a press conference with the media to congratulate the authorities, political parties and all citizens for the success of the process. This was an opportunity to call the people to remain calm and encourage political parties to seek judicial remedies in court in order to resolve electoral disputes. The Platform has forged a fruitful partnership with the EMB to share information in collaboration with other CSOs.

As part of its work in the electoral process, the Platform initiated **"Les Internauts de la Paix"** project during the elections. The NGO GF2D trained 10 boys and 10 girls on monitoring and civic education of the population. These youths were significantly involved in the social media (Facebook, Twitter ...) to identify messages inciting to violence and hatred in order to neutralize them with positive comments and calls for non-violence. The impact of this work was visible among populations who were well informed about the electoral process.

II.3 Technical Assistance

Technical assistance and capacity building are essential components of the Office's strategy. In the electoral context, specific technical assistance and advice are provided, including during the pre-polling period, with regards to relevant legislation, peace and transitional justice processes, constitutional legislation, institution-building, and support to pertinent technical consultation. Technical assistance for increased participation of women in political life is a good example. Capacity building in the form of training, mentoring, study tours, exchange visits and technical support are highlighted as good practice to target active and aspiring politicians from under-represented groups.

Empowerment of women is critical to ensure there is a significant pool of competent women candidates that can compete with men, and make meaningful contributions when elected. Gaining experience, being active and visible in a political party makes it more likely for women to run as candidates for election. Women's empowerment at the broader societal level requires awareness-raising at the community level about political rights and the importance of women holding office and contributing to policy development. Capacity building targets other entities as well, such as political parties and EMBs. For instance, technical support can be provided for the creation of a gender unit or division within EMBs to facilitate the collection of disaggregated data in every aspect of the electoral process.

Technical assistance can also include advising the EMB regarding gender-sensitive budget and planning. The leaders of political parties can be trained about the importance and benefit of selecting women to hold leadership positions. Political parties accessing government finance can be trained on developing gender-sensitive programmes and gender-mainstreaming into the work of the parties. Relevant CSOs can also benefit from capacity

¹¹ <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Countries/AfricaRegion/Pages/TGSummary20142017.aspx>

building activities to be able to design and develop lobbying and campaign programmes targeting key entities and political leaders, in order to ensure gender issues remain a national priority.

II.4 Advocacy

Lesson learned and best practices have highlighted the fundamental importance of engaging in advocacy before, during and after the electoral period and produces a number of reports – both public and internal – on human rights concerns that arise in the electoral context. As a preventive tool, advocacy includes more frequent dialogue with all relevant stakeholders with a view to preventing violence and human rights violations, mitigating them or addressing them, depending on the situation. The efforts of the Office aim at facilitating dialogue and understanding between parties and bridging gaps, with a view to ensuring awareness of and compliance with human rights obligations as a precondition for a peaceful and fair electoral process.

It was also reported how advocacy aims at ensuring access and participation for under-represented or vulnerable groups throughout the electoral process and how OHCHR has played an important role in establishing dialogue with the authorities concerned as well as with other relevant stakeholders (which includes members of parliament, political parties, non-governmental organizations, and the media) in partnership with the organizations representing the rights of the marginalized group concerned. For instance, field presences have sent information to OHCHR headquarters for the preparation of press statements by the High Commissioner, or press briefings by the High Commissioner's spokesperson, drawing public attention to human rights issues or to human rights violation perpetrated in the electoral process. In addition, the Offices have contributed to relevant interventions by the Secretary-General or other United Nations officials and entities (e.g. Special representative or Special or Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General, Special Procedures mandate-holders, or Resident Coordinators of the UN system in a given State). The Office holds regular consultations and discussions with relevant UN stakeholders (DPA/EAD, EOSG, RC, UNDP) to raise concerns about possible human rights issues or violations in the context of elections (e.g. in the context of Policy Committee discussions).

II.5 Protection and Reporting

In the most volatile contexts, OHCHR introduces protection strategies with a focus on the most vulnerable segments of the population. In case of serious incidents in the context of election-related violence, fact-finding missions can be conducted with a view to ensuring accountability and to preventing reoccurrence. These strategies are combined with internal and public reporting on human rights violations in order to provide an accurate account of the compliance of the electoral process with human rights, which allows to assess whether the elections were free and fair. Regular reporting aims at informing all relevant stakeholders as an early warning or advocacy tool (depending on the stage and evolution of the situation) and encouraging appropriate comprehensive and coordinated action to prevent or address a deterioration of the overall political and security situation. The Office has made use of public reporting in the most critical situations to alert the international community and global civil society on worrying trends of human rights violations ahead of elections, reporting serious incidents and advocating for investigations and accountability. Beyond monitoring efforts, OHCHR meets with individuals and representatives of groups and organizations who claim that their rights have been infringed in order to gather information and explore follow-up options for protection.

II.6 Capacity Building and Mobilization

In Guinea, in the context of the 2013 legislative elections, OHCHR raised the capacity of 120 human rights monitors and deployed them across the country. The Office was seeking to ensure effective monitoring of the human rights situation before, during and after the elections and to enhance Guinea's early warning and response capacity in the event of potential human rights violations. This allowed the Office to cover the whole territory, to be informed of the field situation in real time and to initiate the necessary actions in due time.

The presence of the human rights monitors aimed to dissuade potential human rights violations. The duty of the monitoring team was to monitor and report all cases of human rights violations. They remained in permanent contact with three international monitoring coordinators deployed from OHCHR Headquarters in Geneva as part of the Mission support and Rapid Response System from Geneva and two human rights officers from Conakry and N'Zérékoré. The three colleagues monitored and reported human rights violations before, during and after the electoral process, met with administrative, judiciary and political authorities, interviewed witnesses and victims of alleged victims of human rights violations, which included threats, intimidation and reprisals based on political activities during the electoral process. In addition, they followed up cases of human rights violations not directly related to the elections.

The Office has also launched a hotline through which individuals could report any cases of human rights violations. The Office managing team kept continuous contact with the coordinators on the ground. Situation reports were submitted on a daily basis, allowing the managing team to initiate actions. Furthermore, OHCHR organized a number of media conferences prior to the launching of the electoral process, briefing the journalists on all that were to be carried out by the Office. As part of communication strategy, OHCHR met with the diplomatic corps and the civil society organizations involved in human rights activities.

OHCHR maintained and increased its cooperation with the authorities at all levels during the electoral process. Various contacts with political, administrative and security authorities, as well as international and local partners contributed to prevent escalation of tensions, which could have led to human rights violations, violence and instability. In order to contribute to the organization of the legislative elections, in compliance with its mandate, OHCHR has participated in the sensitization of 1500 security officers in charge of securing the election (FOSSEL) on human rights, maintaining and restoring order in the framework of the pilot project on Security and Defense Forces (SDF) reform approved by the government.

In Niger, ahead of the presidential and legislative elections of February 2016, OHCHR supported the National Human Rights Commission in developing a number of activities of awareness-raising through local radio, trainings and conference-debates on human rights issues in elections.

The NHRI created a human rights monitoring centre with the aim to enable each citizen to exercise their right to vote freely, to avoid violence in all its forms throughout the electoral process, to strengthen the capacity of all the actors involved in the electoral process and to ensure that security forces respect human rights in their mission of keeping order. To achieve these objectives, the NHRI carried out working sessions with the EMB; monitored the voter cards distribution process in the regions to ensure inclusiveness and non-discrimination; awareness raising campaigns and dissemination of messages of peace; the development of practical guidance on election observation; recruitment of observers on the basis of pre-established criteria such as level of education and proven experience; training of trainers on (16 and 17 February 2016) in Kollo; training and accreditation of the 500 observers from eight regions of Niger (on February 20, 2016); monitoring of compliance with human rights during polls (on 21 and 22 February 2016); and referred cases of violations to the EMB.

These activities had a significantly positive effect on the electoral process. In the report published at the end of the elections, the NHRI declared having not found any cases of intimidation or incentives that hinder free exercise of the right to vote. After the release of the results, the winner gave a short statement calling for a large front for the Niger renaissance for peace, security and development, declaring that “The 20 March victory is not only for one side but for the whole of Niger”.

In **Senegal**, WARO endeavoured to build the capacity of local CSOs to allow them to fully play their role in the elections. During the 2012 elections, OHCHR WARO supported women's organizations in their initiative in creating a **“Women Situation room for peace and security including peaceful elections in Senegal”**. In partnership with WARO, UN WOMEN, and UNDP, the Platform brought together more than 60 women's organizations involved in areas as varied as gender-based violence, the fight against drugs, and women's economic empowerment. The Platform's intervention focused on mobilization, mediation and monitoring as it brought together thousands of rural women from all regions of Senegal. Youth, as targets and actors of electoral violence were also mobilized and sensitized through radio programmes developed in collaboration with the media.

In its mobilizing approach, the Platform succeeded in creating a space of dialogue between key actors of the



electoral process and managed to advocate effectively before major political leaders, religious leaders as well as EMBs to make them aware of their role in ensuring the elections are peaceful and fair.

As a result, women and youth contributed effectively to a peaceful electoral process. The Platform enabled women to "dare to speak" and to fully assume their right to freedom of expression. This initiative also allowed them to be more aware of their capacity to mobilize actors and influence them to take better account of women's concerns, to promote women's rights for greater participation in public life and to play a significant role for peacebuilding in the political and social space. Furthermore, the activities of the Platform significantly contributed to strengthening women's political leadership in Senegal.

As a preventive action before the Senegalese referendum of 20 March 2016, the Platform has issued a press release broadcasted by the press to call the political parties and the population to exercise their right of participation in the national consultation in an atmosphere of calm and serenity. The Platform continues to work for the pacification of the public space and diversified its interventions to other domains, including in the rural areas where tensions related to land ownership are running high; school and the university area, with the issue of student union demands; and in the family space, where gender-based violence remains an issue of concern. The issue of the peace process in Casamance in southern Senegal, plagued by a rebellion for more than 30 years, is also one of the priorities of the Platform. The platform is working in partnership with networks consisting of 77 organizations for the definitive return of peace in Casamance.

III LESSONS LEARNED

III.1 Participation: a Guarantee for an Inclusive Process

Participation of all actors of the electoral process is a guarantee for an electoral process which is both successful and inclusive. Involving key actors, including the administrative authorities at the local and central levels, CSOs, religious and traditional community leaders is a key to create a climate of confidence and a framework for dialogue among stakeholders. These spaces for discussion and exchanges between actors are the ideal framework to take human rights issues into account in the electoral process.

Participation of all actors in the electoral contexts in Senegal, Benin, Mali, Guinea and elsewhere enabled the Office to make a meaningful contribution for the appeasement of the process and the building of trust between the actors involved in elections. Participation and inclusion are indispensable for promoting human rights in the electoral context, which has been reiterated again and again during the regional workshop and noted in all the cases studied above: when all the actors of the process are mobilized in due time, appropriation is enhanced and favours an inclusive and successful electoral process.

III.2 Advocacy and Mediation: a Catalyst for the Prevention of Violence

Advocacy and mediation are essential tools for the promotion of human rights. In the electoral context, it opens the dialogue with the institutions in order to prevent or neutralize potential violence, which often results from the violation of fundamental rights. In its various interventions in advocacy and mediation in West Africa in the electoral context, WARO learned that the authorities in charge of organizing the electoral process are often receptive enough to make the necessary corrections to the smooth running of the process. This was the case, for instance, in Benin in 2015 when mediation with judicial actors made it possible for thousands of young people to vote with their identity cards instead of voter cards that were not available until the eve of the elections.

This mediation action prevented the escalation violence that was threatening to arise among the discontented youth, which could have been a major blow to the smooth running of the process. Advocacy and mediation with the authorities can resolve a significant number of difficulties linked to the electoral register and the registration of voters. However, to be effective, these activities must be carried out at the very beginning of the process, such as the period of revision of the electoral laws to take into account the cases raised.

III.3 Capacity Building: Bridging the Knowledge Gap

Strengthening the capacities of actors in the electoral process reinforces the quality of the interventions. The extensive experience of OHCHR Field presences and WARO shows that lack of knowledge of the role of each actor in the electoral process often leads to a dysfunctional process. Because of the complexity of the interventions, each actor must know their role in order to be able to fulfill it correctly.

Security forces are often targeted for training on their role in protecting human rights while fulfilling their task of ensuring order during the electoral period, whereas the media are trained on professional and non-discriminatory coverage of electoral processes. This “decompartmentalization” of training constitutes a good methodology of capacity building to reach each key actor on specific themes in relation to the respective roles. Such interventions often lead to better effectiveness in capacity building in order to address the lack of knowledge of the rights of populations and the conditions for a free, fair and credible electoral process. This is the case in various West African States, such as Guinea, where the capacity-building of 1500 defense and security forces has helped to improve the quality of the intervention of these actors and contributed to avoid dangerous escalation into violence and human rights violations.

It is then the common understanding that if all players in the electoral process are trained effectively and each in their role, the quality of the electoral process improves leading to an electoral process which is more peaceful, credible and fair.

III.4 Reporting and protection: addressing the Challenge of Insecurity

Reporting on the situation of people at risk is an effective means of protecting them from violations of their rights in an electoral context. These groups can find themselves in situations of insecurity where threats and possible attacks lead to gross violations of their rights and place their lives at risk. In its various interventions in West Africa, WARO has learned that numerous situations of insecurity affecting people at risk during an election period can find solutions by reporting and making it known to the public. Publishing reports and complaining to international human rights bodies such as the Human Rights Committee, the Human Rights Council and Special Procedures can be a means of promptly alerting the authorities on the basis of well-documented information. In many cases, these reports are shared with decision makers and the wider international community to raise awareness and encourage mobilization. Experience shows that reporting and filing individual communications on human rights violations can be an effective tool for protecting groups at risk, especially if the cases raised are well documented and the reports shared in a timely fashion.

IV OBSTACLES AND CHALLENGES

Much has been achieved in favour of peaceful, free and fair elections in West Africa during the last two decades: with the mobilization of a growing and dedicated civil society, the gradual disappearance of one-party rule, the universal condemnation of coups d'états and the development of public institutions aspiring to make human rights a reality, the peaceful handover of power from one government to the other is becoming the norm rather than an exception in West Africa. However, despite these strides forward, much remains to be done in order to achieve full compliance with human rights obligations in the context of elections. Moreover, experience shows that we cannot rest on our laurels: continuous vigilance and engagement is required if we are to avoid dangerous setbacks.

Obstacles to human rights compliant elections include the shrinking democratic space, civil strife, violence and instability: the recent events in Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea and The Gambia give cause for concern. Although the timely action of national, sub-regional and international institutions – including the combined intervention of OHCHR, UNOWAS and ECOWAS – allowed to prevent a descent into full blown political crisis in most of the cases cited above. This was achieved through prompt mediation, consultations with opposition forces and by finding common ground to prevent human rights violations in elections, which can lead to violent confrontation, instability and loss of lives. Restrictive laws on participation and persecution of opposition figures, human rights defenders and protestors – in the form of harassment, arbitrary detention, torture and enforced disappearance – in The Gambia led to a dangerous surge in tensions in 2016, resulting in a political crisis of regional concern. The independence of judicial and electoral institutions is another cause for concern, the fact that most NHRIs in charge of monitoring the respect for human rights in the context of elections lack in independence and financial autonomy – as stipulated by the Paris Principles relating to the status of NHRIs – does not allow these institutions to play their part for a peaceful, free and fair electoral process and for the prevention of escalation to violence and instability. All too frequently the lack of awareness of law enforcement and military personnel deployed to manage protestors results in cases of abuse and deaths of demonstrators: when people exercising their right to peaceful assembly are met with live bullets and disproportionate use of force by State agents in charge of restoring law and order, escalation of violence and civil strife is the likely outcome.

Even when elections are peaceful and seemingly free and fair, obstacles to human rights compliant elections still remain in the form of discrimination, social stigma and lack of access to economic, social and cultural rights limiting the representation of minorities in institutions and major political organizations, including women, members of ethnic or religious communities, indigenous people and persons with disabilities. In this context, the under-representation of women remains a top challenge to free and fair elections. Over the years, women's political participation has witnessed some gains. However, women in West Africa still face multiple obstacles to participating in politics: structural and socio-political barriers contained in discriminatory laws, electoral arrangements, gender-defined roles, traditional and religious systems and structures, limited finances available for women, violence and conflict as well as a limited awareness of international human rights standards are all factors limiting women's political participation. Moreover, in many West African States, women are less likely to have education as well as the business and political capital that are needed to compete in politics on an equal footing with men. For women, male domination of politics in general, as well as political parties and State institutions – not to mention the patriarchal and sometimes violent nature of elections – can limit or discourage participation, which hampers opportunities for women to participate actively in the political development of their respective countries. For this reason, the media have a decisive role to play to promote an inclusive and respectful image of women and minority groups, and more importantly, to withstand from hateful, denigrating, or stigmatizing portrayals of women and minorities: sadly, such occurrences continue to take place throughout the 15 States of West Africa.

The main challenge for States lies in the operationalization, application and enforcement of international and regional instruments – such as the ICCPR, ICESCR, CEDAW, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) and the Maputo Protocol – to guarantee the safeguards and respect of these essential rights to be enjoyed by every citizen. There have been some efforts at the national level through the introduction of quotas and TSMs for more inclusiveness.

In practice, however, the implementation of these laws is often found to be wanting: such was the case in the Senegalese regional elections of 2016, where parties who presented lists which did not comply with the parity law were allowed to run and win in full impunity. Existing deep-seated prejudice and stereotypes are still deeply rooted in many communities, including among the underrepresented groups themselves. Prejudice effectively denies minority groups equal chances to be elected, and increase their vulnerability to harassment, intimidation and other forms of violence when they do, which in turn acts as a deterrent to their participation. As a result, minority groups have limited representation in politics and governance to influence legislation and policy-making to put an end to these violations.



The challenges facing women are innumerable and include limited influence within party politics and inadequate gender-responsiveness of parties' internal mechanisms, such as the use of quota systems for elective positions to support women candidates. Moreover, where parity laws exist, it is noted that the women put forward by the overwhelmingly male leadership are chosen from those who are most likely to comply with the party leadership.

Nevertheless, it was recognized that women had made significant strides in politics and political parties. In Senegal, influential and ambitious women are inspiring and helping a new generation of daring women to take part in elections. In Niger, a robust quota law requires political parties to include a certain number of women candidates on their lists, with sanctions in place for failure to comply. The candidates list of a defaulting political party will be rejected until they are compliant. This law led to a significant increase in the number of women parliamentarians from 14 women in 2011 to 25 in the last elections. Unlike Niger and Senegal, Cabo Verde's electoral law rewards political parties that include 25% or more women on their lists of candidates but does not provide sanction mechanisms if a political party fails to comply, which is yet another effective option for increasing the participation of minorities and marginalized groups.

V CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While much has been achieved in favour of free and fair elections in West Africa during the last two decades, much remains to be done in order to ensure that human rights are fully respected, protected and fulfilled in the context of elections. This is the purpose of WARO's engagement in the electoral context. OHCHR will continue to endeavour with all its partners to provide capacity building programmes to CSOs, women associations and minority groups' organizations to enhance their work in promoting free, fair and inclusive elections; provide awareness raising, capacity building, training and technical assistance for States institutions; and will continue accompany West African States in their commitment to bring their national legislation in full compliance with applicable human rights standards, including the principles of equal participation and non-discrimination.

What follows is a list of concrete recommendation that stem from the best practices and lessons learned presented above:

For States

- Implement the recommendations of the UPR process the UN human rights Treaty Bodies;
- Raise the awareness of all relevant State institutions – including the EMBs, law enforcement and military forces – on the necessity of respecting human rights – including the principle of participation and non-discrimination – throughout the electoral process;
- Reinforce human rights protection measures in the electoral period;
- Introduce temporary special measures to improve women's political participation, or ensure full implementation of existing TSMs, including through the adoption of alternating (or "zipped") candidates' lists, presenting men and women in a succession;
- Ensure that all institutions promote a positive image of women and minority groups in politics;
- Demonstrate greater commitment to implementing the international legal provisions which call for the equal representation of women in electoral processes at all levels;
- Ensure that the media and community leaders do not cultivate hate, stigma and violence against minorities, and promote a positive and inclusive approach instead;
- Provide the NHRI with the resources and autonomy that are necessary to carry out their tasks.

For ECOWAS and the AU

- Expand support to the promotion of human rights and political equal participation for all;
- Support the development and application of minimum standards for the integration of gender considerations into the work of EMBs;
- Provide capacity building programmes to human rights organizations and other CSOs to enhance their work in promoting human rights and equal participation in political life for all.

For Civil Society Organizations

- Hold government, political parties and the media accountable for human rights violations;
- Advocate for an inclusive electoral policy;
- Advocate for the adoption and/or implementation of laws on parity or TSMs;
- Develop mentorship projects for aspiring politicians from minority groups, including women;
- Work in solidarity and synergy with other organizations, UN agencies and institutions to create both national and regional partnership networks;

- Publicize examples of good practice to sensitize society to steps that could enhance the participation of women minority groups.

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