END OF INTERNSHIP REPORT

NEXT GENERATION INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am grateful to the almighty Allah for His gift of life and the opportunity to work with the West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI) as an intern with the Policy Influencing and Advocacy Unit. It is a rare privilege to be accepted by the West Africa Civil Society Institute for the prestigious Next Generation Internship Programme. The Next Generation Internship Programme has widened, improved, and enhanced my understanding of the activities and operations of civil society in the West African region. I am immensely grateful to WACSI for instituting this initiative that has become a platform for nurturing future leaders.

I am eternally grateful to the entire WACSI staff for dedicating time to support and contribute to my professional growth and development throughout the internship period. I am particularly grateful to the unit heads and programme officers for the assistance and guidance offered me.

I would also like to extend my deepest gratitude to the help and useful guidance provided by Omolara Balogun, the Head of Unit, Policy Influencing and Advocacy (PIA), for her valuable and constructive criticisms and willingness to offer her time so generously. Finally, I am grateful to Nana Ekua Awotwi and John P. Frinjuah, programme officers (PIA), for their patient guidance and enthusiastic encouragement.
INTRODUCTION
The West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI) as part of its commitment to youth leadership in the sub-region instituted the 'Next Generation Internship' program to train the next generation of responsible civil society actors in West Africa. The program offers a 6-month internship to young West Africans at the start of their professional careers seeking work experience in WACSI's focus areas. It aims to build the intern's capacity in leadership, proposal and report writing, and training and facilitation. Interns are also exposed to developmental issues in the sub-region.

As part of the 6-month internship, interns get the opportunity to spend a month working at another organization, usually one that operates in the thematic area of interest to the intern. The purpose of the one-month externship is to enhance their knowledge and skills that will help advance their careers. The current COVID-19 situation has affected the externship opportunity for interns. To make up for this lost opportunity, a virtual mentoring session was organized for interns. Interns were paired with seasoned practitioners in areas of their interest. I was privileged to be mentored by Ms. Farida Nabourema.

I was selected as one of three interns for the period January to June 2020. My internship placement was within the Policy Influencing and Advocacy Unit headed by Omolara Balogun. As a result of the synergistic relationship of the institute, I was privileged to get some working experiences in the other units which enhanced my knowledge and skills. My key responsibilities during the internship included writing reports, concept notes; representing the institution at policy dialogues; assisting the coordination of training programs; and writing the situation report of civil society in Cape Verde and Nigeria; reception support among others.

The internship has not only enhanced my professional growth, but also afforded me the opportunity of building new and invaluable networks of civil society friends. This social capital will enhance my personal growth and future career goals. I have also developed useful skills in report writing, writing concept notes and grant proposals, coordinating events, research, and effective communication, among others.

This report seeks to share my experience as a NGIP benefactor, including details of my key responsibilities, knowledge and skills acquired, and recommendations for consideration.

ABOUT WACSI
WACSI is a non-profit regional organisation that seeks to strengthen the institutional and operational capacities of civil society organisations for increased and effective policy engagements and the promotion of development, good governance, and democratic values in West Africa. WACSI was established by the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) in 2005. The Institute in April 2018 launched its 2018-2024 strategy with a mission to strengthen civil society in West Africa to be more responsive, collaborative, representative, resilient, and influential through knowledge sharing, learning, and influencing. The new strategy envisions a peaceful and prosperous West Africa where development is driven by its people. WACSI has three (3) programmatic areas: Capacity development Unit, Knowledge Management Unit and Policy Influencing and Advocacy Unit.

MY EXPERIENCE
My responsibilities were mainly within the Policy Influencing and Advocacy (PIA) Unit. I was under the immediate supervision of Omolara Balogun, Head of the Unit and with support from Nana Ekua Awotwi and John P. Frinjuah, Program Officers for the Unit, with Katherine Adarkwa providing administrative support.
I have categorised my main responsibilities and activities under General Orientation, Internship Training, Proposal writing, Report writing, facilitation support, Minute writing and other cross unit work.

**GENERAL ORIENTATION**
My colleagues and I were introduced to the various unit heads and program managers in the second week of reporting. We had training sessions on administration and finance procedures and situation report writing. We also met heads of the various units for orientation. This exercise gave us an understanding of the structure and interdependent nature of the Institute.

**INTERNSHIP TRAININGS**
In order to build interns capacity and skills, trainings were conducted over the internship period. We had trainings on proposal writing, report writing and Excel for Project management. We were also taught Training and facilitation skills, research methodology, writing commentaries and blogs and finally Job search, CV writing and interview skills. The training sessions were important in sharpening our skills and readying us for the task ahead.

**PROPOSAL WRITING**
Proposal writing forms an important part of the activities of the Institute. For this reason, we were trained on the skills of writing proposals. Consequently, we were involved and actively participated in the writing of proposals. I have been involved in the writing of three proposals and two concept notes. Writing of proposals and concept notes have markedly improved my research and writing skills.

**REPORT WRITING**
Writing reports is a constant feature of the work of an intern at WACSI. The main output from such opportunities is a report. I have been delegated to represent the Institute in two meetings. The first was on Thursday 20 February 2020. I participated in a roundtable discussion on “Parliamentary openness and the draft standing orders of Parliament” at Miklin Hotel. The theme for the discussion was strengthening transparency and social inclusiveness. The second was on 13 March 2020 on a presentation on “Early Warning systems and National Early Warning Mechanisms at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration, Ghana”. In both meetings, I wrote and submitted the report which was a great learning curve for me.

**LOGISTICS/FACILITATION SUPPORT**
I actively participated in the organisation of a validation workshop to “Assess the Legal Environment for Civil Society and Philanthropy in Ghana” held on the 27 February 2020 at Mensvic Hotel. Key among the tasks I did include compilation of the list of participating organisation; send out emails and made phone calls to organisations; Assist in the compilation of the workshop materials; Organised the conference hall.

**NOTE-TAKING/MINUTE WRITING FOR MEETINGS**
I have participated in virtual meetings, which are usually held within the unit. I have also attended Staff meetings, usually held on Mondays. Writing minutes of the weekly staff meeting is the responsibility of interns and volunteers. Over this period, I have written five virtual unit minutes and three minutes for staff meeting. This exercise has strengthened my writing skills.

**SITUATION REPORTING**
Situation report gives the general situation of civil society across the West African sub-region. Interns and volunteers are expected to present monthly situation reports to the knowledge management team.
for overall compilation and publication. I have written the situation reports for Nigeria, Cape Verde and Ghana over the six months period.

**RESEARCH SUPPORT**
Over the internship period, I have provided research support for my unit and other units. I have researched and compiled resources for a Financial Action Task Force (FATF) handbook that was been developed by my unit. I also took part in the writing of a concept note on Education Out loud submitted to OXFAM. I have also provided research support to Nana Ekua for the development of a concept note on the International civil society Week (ICSW) to CIVICUS. Added to this, I have researched and compiled resources on a paper on the intergenerational gap in African feminist’s movement. Also, I have compiled lists of legislations enacted by West African governments in the light of COVID-19. Additionally, I assembled a list of opinion pieces on COVID-19 in West Africa for the institute as well as providing research support to John Frinjah for an article he intends to write on the European Union blacklisting of Ghana. Together with other interns, I participated in the research and compilation of materials for the development of an electoral integrity portal.

**COURSE/TRAINING COORDINATOR**
I served as the coordinator of the institutes’ fee-paying training on Parliamentary Advocacy and Engagement. The training is designed to respond to the gap identified in the ability of civil society organisations (CSOs) to effectively engage with their national parliaments. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the training has been changed from a face to face interaction to a virtual training. I was also in charge of the coordination of the virtual training.

**VIRTUAL TRAINING ON INTERNATIONAL AND HUMAN RIGHTS MECHANISM, ADVOCACY AND NETWORKING FOR CSOS IN WEST AFRICA**
The Institute in collaboration with CIVICUS organised a two-day training workshop for CSOs across the West African region. The training was geared towards enhancing the knowledge and skills of CSOs in international and human rights, advocacy, and networking. I assisted in the planning and organisation of the training. I was particularly responsible for managing email correspondence and writing the report of the training. It was the first virtual training of the Institute to be held in English, French and Portuguese. The training was an exciting experience as I was opportune to interact with participants from across all the West African countries.

**FRONT DESK SUPPORT**
I also had the opportunity to work at the reception as part of the internship training to learn useful skills in phone etiquette, how to receive visitors and other basic front desk duties.

**MENTORING CIRCLE**
The current COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the planned activities of the ‘Next Generation Internship’ program. The pandemic has especially affected the externship activity which places interns in another organization for a month. To make up for this lost opportunity, interns were paired with seasoned practitioners in areas of their interest for a two-week virtual mentorship. I was privileged to be mentored by Ms. Farida Nabourema.

Ms. Nabourema is the engagement and collaboration coordinator of ‘Africans Rising’, a pan-African movement that fights for justice, peace and dignity through grassroots organizing, civic education and advocacy. She cofounded and is the executive director of the Togolese Civil League, an NGO that promotes democracy through civil resistance. In 2001, at age 20, Nabourema founded the "Faure Must Go" movement, where she supported and organized with Togolese youths to stand against the dictatorial regime of Faure Gnassingbé. "Faure Must Go" has become the slogan for the civil
resistance movement in Togo, of which Nabourema is one of the most well-known leaders. Nabourema was awarded the "Young Advocate of the Year" and the "Female African Youth of the Year" in 2018 by Africa Youth Award for her contribution to raising awareness on the oldest military regime in Africa.

VIRTUAL MENTORING SESSION
My interest in African democracy and youth activism made Nabourema the ideal mentor. We had our first introductory interaction by email in which I shared with her topics for our mentoring session. I wanted to know how democracy can be made to work in Africa, advocacy strategies in an intolerant democratic space and what it takes to be a successful female activist.

After exchanging correspondences and proposing topics for our mentoring session, we had our virtual session on May 18 2020. It was an exciting session. She highlighted some of the successes and trouble with democracy in Africa and cautioned against the often generalisation of the African condition. She added that Africa should not be treated as one country but as a continent made of diverse countries.

She also shared with me the struggles of activism in a dictatorial State. She revealed that there have been many attempts at her life as a result of her opposition to the Faure government. She also pointed out that one does not require formal education to be involved in activism and that the struggles they undergo is enough motivation.

Following from this, I asked her the challenges she faces as a female activist. She revealed that she faces the same challenges male activist encounter. She added that it has been quite a challenge as female activist in a patriarchal society.

For her, one thing she would like to change about Africa is the way Africans perceive themselves. She wished that Africans recognised their self-worth and build confidence around that. Overall, it was a worthwhile mentoring session that enlightened me on the challenges of development in Africa.

KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS ACQUIRED
The internship has been an immense eye-opener for me. It has helped me bridge the gap between theory and practice. I have acquired and developed useful competencies that are going to boost my career growth I have developed many knowledge and skills among which are:

- I have acquired a set of competencies in the areas of report and proposal writing.
- I have developed the skill of working in teams. Working in a group comes with an immense amount of patience and understanding. The Internship programme has imbibed me with that spirit.
- More significantly, my knowledge in Microsoft office and desktop research has increased tremendously.
- It has also helped me to learn how to network and connect with people and getting used to a professional working environment
- The internship has built my confidence and communication skills
- I have also learnt useful skills in phone etiquette, how to receive visitors and other basic front desk duties

The knowledge and skills developed over the internship period will enhance my job prospects.

RECOMMENDATIONS
Based on my experience on the program, I recommend the following:
1. Networking as a skill should be included as part of the trainings for interns.
2. There should be more cross-units’ activities for interns. This will ensure that interns gain more skills from each of the units; thereby enriching their professional experience and prepare them for future opportunities in the development sector.
3. The mentoring circle initiative should be incorporated as part of the activities of the Next Generation Internship programme. More time and preparations should be committed to the mentorship as it will be very useful in the personal growth of interns.

4. The Institute should leverage on its goodwill to introduce interns to organisations for possible opportunities.

CONCLUSION
The Next Generation Internship Programme has hugely impacted my professional life and has increased my knowledge and understanding of civil society activities. I am eternally grateful for this opportunity granted to me by the institute and I hope that WACSI continues to implement such programs to position and strengthen civil society to play a much more robust strategic role in the development of West Africa and the continent at large.