



Next Generation Internship Programme

About WACSI

The West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI) was established by the Open Society Initiative for West Africa and the Soros Foundation Network to enhance the capacity of civil society in the region. The Institute was set up in an attempt to bridge the institutional and operational gaps identified in civil society.

WACSI's vision is a commitment to develop CSOs as strategic partners in the pursuit of democracy, good governance and national development in the sub-region. The mission thereof is to strengthen the institutional and technical capacity of CSOs to engage in policy formulation, implementation, and the promotion of democratic values and principles in West Africa.

WACSI's role is to serve as a resource centre engaged in training, research, documentation, and policy dialogue for CSOs in West Africa. The advocacy work of the Institute is conducted through its policy dialogue process, which brings together different stakeholders to deliberate on topical issues that affect West African States. Position papers will be published by the Institute and disseminated to policy makers.

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1.0 Introduction

The West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI) was established by the Open Society Initiative of West Africa (OSIWA) to enhance the capacity of civil society organisations (CSOs) through training, research, documentation, and policy dialogue. The Institute also offers training to a pool of regional civil society actors in policy analysis and advocacy. An important additional core activity of the Institute is an extension of its training programme for the youth under the “Next Generation Internship” programme. Under this programme, youth who do not have work experience in civil society work and, are prepared to gain experience in the focus areas of WACSI are given internship opportunities.

WACSI believes that by offering this opportunity to the youth, a major mandate of strengthening civil society is achieved. The rationale for strengthening civil society lies in the fact that civil society in West Africa is an important partner in the promotion of good governance, democracy, peace building and participatory development processes. WACSI, through the next generation internship programme seeks to build the capacity of young professional aspiring to work with civil society organisations (CSOs).

2.0 Background

West Africa comprises 16 out of the 53 countries in Africa. With a population of about 300 million in 2006, the sub region accounts for two out of every four Africans living in the continent and 4.6% of the world’s population.¹ This population can loosely be described as youthful. The population growth in the region is juxtaposed against a number of social and political challenges that threaten the overall peace, security and development of the region.

Prominent among these problems include intra-country civil wars, political dictatorship, adverse terms of trade, environmental degradation, weak infrastructural and industrial base, and unemployment. For instance, in the last two decades the region has seen some of the most atrocious civil wars in countries like Liberia, Sierra Leone and Cote D’Ivoire. Even where there are no civil wars, the peace that the citizens are enjoying can only be described as fragile and fragmentary. For example, communal violence is common in countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, Togo and Guinea.

These fragile situations have exacerbated the unemployment levels within the sub region. Specifically, youth unemployment is a common social problem facing governments in the region. The youth face dismal job prospects even in countries that are relatively stable. The high incidence of youth unemployment has provided the recipe for the easy recruitment of the youth for insurgencies.

¹ http://www.oecd.org/document/19/0,3343,en_38233741_38246806_38283987_1_1_1_1,00.html

This phenomenon has fuelled civil unrest in countries such as Liberia, Guinea, Sierra Leone and Cote D'Ivoire. Therefore, the issue of youth unemployment and the lack of employable skills among the youth have gained prominence within national and sub-regional debates and discussions. Three major players have been identified who can remedy the youth unemployment situation, governments, the private sector and civil society organisations (CSOs). CSOs have a crucial and strategic role to play in the rebuilding effort of fragile states and subsequently providing avenues for the attainment of employable skills, however, they need institutional support to effectively discharge their mandate. Often CSOs in West Africa are staffed with expatriates who do not understand the complexities of development challenges in the region. Arguably, when local people are employed they often lack the capacity to stimulate and influence policy agenda in their respective countries.

In recognition of these teething challenges, WACSI has come up with a number of programmes aimed at building the capacity of CSOs in the region to enable them function effectively. One of such programmes is the Next Generation Internship Programme. This programme has been specifically designed to train the youth from war torn West African countries who want to gain experience in WACSI's focus areas in order for them to become responsible civil society actors. WACSI believes that investments in productive activities, such as the next generation internship, provide the most sustainable opportunity to produce dedicated and highly motivated civil society actors, thus enhancing the role of CSOs in entrenching democratic values and principles in the body politic of the sub region and, also promoting socio-economic advancement of the citizens.

3.0 Next Generation Internship Programme

WACSI is dedicated to building the next generation of responsible civil society actors in West Africa, especially in fragile countries. In pursuit of this mandate the Institute's Next Generation Internship Programme (NGI) offers a 6 – 12 months internship to young West Africans at the start of their professional careers seeking work experience in WACSI's focus areas.

3.1 Objectives of the Next Generation Internship Programme

The overall goal of this programme is to build the capacity of young potential civil society professionals from war torn West African countries.

Specifically the programme aims at building interns' capacity in the following areas:-

- Leadership skills
- Proposal writing
- Report writing
- Training and facilitation skills

Leadership Skills: Generally speaking, poor leadership has been the hallmark of some institutions in the sub region and, this when it goes on unchecked leads to problems of governance. The effect of poor leadership is one of the major factors causing political and civil disturbances as well as institutional failure, thereby precluding developmental objectives from being achieved. With strong leadership qualities, West African CSOs will be able to effectively carry out their mandate of influencing and advocating development policies.

Proposal and Report Writing: A strong civil society organisation requires the presence of strong research units to facilitate a scientific and an informed policy advocacy role. To enhance the capacity of the interns to obtain strong research background, interns will be exposed to the area of research proposal formulation and report writing.

Training and Facilitation Skills: Achieving responsible civil society actors for West Africa cannot be accomplished without enhanced training and facilitation skills. Interns' skills in presentation, workshop and seminar organisation and facilitation, and policy dialogue will be enhanced.

In addition to the above, the next generation internship programme will expose interns to research on the following subjects:-

- HIV/AIDS,
- Governance,
- Human rights,
- Peace and security,
- Africa's current development initiatives (NEPAD, APRM), sub-regional trends (ECOWAS), and
- Gender issues.

Each of the above has a special bearing on the development need of the region hence the need to expose the young civil society actors to these thematic areas.

3.2 Criteria for the Next Generation Interns

The Institute's seeks organised individuals with creative minds and a hunger to make a positive impact in an industry that continuously changes. The interns should have the following qualities:

- Preferably, an academic background in law or social sciences
- Strong interpersonal skills
- Ability to multi-task
- Capacity to take constructive criticism well
- Strong writing skills
- Punctuality
- Effective communication skills
- Initiative and drive
- Effective time management skills

4.0 Conclusion

WACSI is committed to sustaining the Next Generation Internship programme as well as increase the number of beneficiaries. In conclusion, this programme provides an opportunity to the youth, who will have otherwise been recruited for insurgencies, to gain experience in the focus areas of WACSI which will make them responsible civil society actors in the sub region.