



# SVNP WEST AFRICA REGIONAL CONFERENCE

“Progress and Retrogression on Electoral Processes in West Africa –  
Concerns & Consequences for Peace and Security”

February 6 – 7, 2020 | Tomreik Hotel, Accra-Ghana



## 1.0. INTRODUCTION

The West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) in its capacity as member of the Southern Voices Network for Peacebuilding (SVNP) in collaboration with other West Africa members of SVNP viz; Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD), Initiative for Public Policy Analysis (IPPA), the African Center for Economic Transformation (ACET) and supported by the Woodrow Wilson Center (Secretariat of the SVNP) convened the Maiden SVNP Regional Policy Conference from February 6 to 7, 2020 at the Tomreik Hotel, Accra-Ghana. The conference under the theme **Progress and Retrogression on Electoral Processes and Transitions in West Africa: Peace and Security Concerns and Consequences** brought together high-level representatives from Election Management Bodies (EMBs), political parties, Embassies, ECOWAS and other CSOs including SVNP members from the region. The conference was imperative coming at a period when seven West African countries will be holding presidential and parliamentary elections in 2020.

The conference was a platform to share knowledge on the current state and status of electoral processes and transition in West Africa, as well as analyze capacities and gaps of existing mechanisms, institutions and structures for the management of electoral processes and transitions in West Africa. Specifically, it aimed to interrogate the progress and retrogression in the conduct of elections and transitions in West Africa with a view to informing policy options for an improved process. Furthermore, the conference was an avenue to harmonize stakeholders perspectives on strategies and policy options for effective election management.

## 2.0. SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS

### 2.1. OPENING SESSION

This session was facilitated by Mrs. Levinia Addae-Mensah, WANEP Deputy Executive Director/Program Director. In her opening remarks, Mrs. Addae-Mensah reiterated the significance of the conference coming at a time when seven out of the 15 West African countries will be holding various levels of elections. She expressed confidence that discussions at the conference would contribute to guiding civil society interventions towards ensuring peaceful elections in the sub-region.

#### 2.1.1. Welcome Address by Dr. Chukwuemeka Eze – WANEP Executive Director

In his welcome address, Dr. Chukwuemeka Eze, described this period ‘as another defining moment for democracy in West Africa as within the next eleven months elections would be held in seven countries in the sub-region.’ He added that as a result of this, the region would be faced with issues of stability and the task of deepening democracy with an antecedent of recent political violence. He stated that elections in the region are becoming dynamic while the exclusion of citizens from democratic processes is contributing to violence and threatening stability in the region. He however asserted that more citizens are calling for accountability in governance even at the peril of their lives adding, “Citizens are no longer a passive recipient of information. They pose questions and demand answers. Citizens make informed assessments

and define as well as apply repercussions.” According to Dr. Eze, credible elections in Africa are no longer the responsibility of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union (AU) and member states alone; Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), citizens and willing partners are making concerted efforts to ensure credible, fair, transparent and peaceful elections. “The best advocate for democracy is an engaged citizen,” he opined!

### **2.1.2. Opening Remarks – Dr. Monde Muyangwa, Director, Africa Program Woodrow Wilson Centre**

Dr. Monde Muyangwa gave a brief overview of the Southern Voices Network for Peacebuilding (SVNP), which is a member network of 23 organisations spread across the continent. She said the goal of SVNP was to bring Africa knowledge and analysis of key issues related to peacebuilding in Africa to policymakers in Africa and the international level. The key reason for its formation in 2011 was to draw on the knowledge and commitment to the issues of peace that resides on the continent to inform policy-making processes related to peacebuilding in Africa. Also, the fact that international voice was dominant in peacemaking and peacebuilding in Africa, it was important to form the SVNP to allow African knowledge and commitment to inform peacebuilding from an African perspective. Commenting on the theme of the conference, Dr. Monde affirmed that electoral processes and the consequences for peace and security are key issues on the African continent. She expressed hope that the outcome of the Conference would inform similar processes in other parts of the continent. Further, she was optimistic that outcomes of the conference would deepen understanding of the context and analysis on the progress and retrogression made and how the international community could add value to the African priorities on elections. She expressed appreciation to the WANEP team and the rest of the SVNP members in the region for putting the conference together.

### **2.1.3. Keynote Address: PROGRESS AND RETROGRESSION ON ELECTORAL PROCESSES IN WEST AFRICA – CONCERNS & CONSEQUENCES FOR PEACE AND SECURITY** by Dr. Emmanuel Akwetey, Executive Director of the Institute for Democratic Governance (IDEG) Ghana.

Dr. Emmanuel Akwetey, an academic and practitioner with vast knowledge in elections at national and global levels, raised relevant issues in his keynote address that helped to shape the discussions for the two-day meeting. Following the theme of the conference, his remarks dealt extensively with the progress and retrogression in election and transition processes in West Africa and added the revival component, which he said is vital for sustaining democracy. Attention is given to electoral processes because of the linkage between elections and violence as well as the existential threats that violence posed to democracy in the region. He noted that elections-related challenges are not peculiar to Africa, but also a challenge in advanced democracies.

According to Dr. Akwetey, considerable progress has been made in democratic governance with the institutionalization of multi-party democracy in 14 countries in the region. There also exist infrastructures for transition such as laws and constitutions that protect citizens fundamental human rights and ECOWAS and AU Commission’s zero tolerance for unconstitutional change of governments. As a result, presidential term limits have also become

a part of the norms. Other barometers of success, he said, include increased civil society interventions in the electoral processes in the form of active engagement, advocacy and public information through citizen-led election observation missions, among others. The active participation and involvement of the media, leading to increased coverage of elections, is also a measure of progress. He advised that for citizens to benefit from democratization, the progress made has to be sustained by informed experiences, aspirations and innovative solutions to some of the electoral challenges.

Despite these gains, Dr. Akwetey enumerated some of the retrogressive factors threatening electoral process in the region, including youth unemployment and underemployment; increased violence against women, particularly within political parties which, in turn, is undermining all the efforts at promoting women's – participation; the damning effects of social media; inaccuracy of media reportage as well as use of media outlets as a propaganda machine – all of which have serious implications to the electoral environment. Others include problems with decentralization – weak local governments and issues of real or perceived corruption. He further identified the huge funding challenges and secrecy associated with funding political parties; surging violent extremism, terrorism, organized crimes, especially in Mali, Burkina Faso, Nigeria and Niger; and flawed electoral processes characterized by conflict over the voters' register and the registration process, digital breaches, suppression of voters, as challenges to elections in the region. He submitted that the growth of formal democracy, national cohesion and development is threatened by increased –use? of identity, ethnicity and religiosity in the body politics.

In the face of these threats, he advocated for the revival of democracy and electoral processes in Africa as imperative. A key strategy for achieving this is to look beyond elections into the broader governance space because elections alone are not enough. Hence the need for strengthening local governments, responsive leaderships, and aligning elections to the development agenda (AUC Agenda 2063 “political and governance” Goals are linked to SDG 16. (Sustainable Development Goals 2030).

#### **2.1.4. Key points and Recommendations**

- The key progress that has been made needs to be consolidated by finding innovative solutions to the current challenges confronting West Africa's democratic processes.
- Understanding and acknowledging of the insecure environment in which elections take place, and the of the insecurity created by the elections themselves is key Although the region has not really retrogressed to military rule, the military remains a serious threat to democracy in some countries?.
- Elections are a means to an end and not the end in itself. There is need to focus on what happens in between elections. Freedom must be complemented by development where the citizens benefit from the dividends of democracy
- Election financing is a key challenge in many countries in the region as it is not always clear where the money funding political parties and candidates is coming from. In addition, the international role in influencing, or sometimes driving key

aspects of the elections, affects the credibility of elections. Therefore, mechanisms should be put in place to check campaign financing and illicit financial flows.

- Women face a lot of challenges in participating in politics. More must be done to assure gender consideration as it is key to achieving true representation of the population
- Concerns of sustainability as most funding is tailored towards the donors' agenda – not sure what you mean here. You might want to expand on this.
- National level action is not sufficient to address problems associated with electoral processes in West Africa. There is need for regional intervention Lack of political party regulation and compliance with existing laws endangers the democratic process. Political parties should be regulated to ensure that they are playing within the law and that they respond to the needs and aspirations of the citizenry
- Continuous capacity building of relevant stakeholders on electoral processes is key – some examples here would be useful
- Over dependency of the Judiciary on the government in power deepens the lack of credibility in the electoral process – there is a perception in some countries that judiciary has been co-opted by the ruling party and its government, and therefore cannot rule independently
- Empower the youth through inclusive participation and education
- Restore confidence in the political system by respecting the social contract between the governed and the government

### 3.0. SUMMARY OF PANEL DISCUSSIONS

#### 3.1. DYNAMICS OF ELECTORAL PROCESSES IN WEST AFRICA: A 2020 OUTLOOK

The first session of the day provided opportunity for framing the issues to be discussed. This session was moderated by Dr. Monde Muyangwa with three discussants comprised of Mr. Edward Jombla of WANEP, Mr. Raouf Salami of ECOWAS and Dr. Kojo Asante, CDD Director, Advocacy and Policy Engagement. Edward made a presentation of the peace and security outlook in the region with evidenced-based indicators captured by the WANEP National Early Warning System (NEWS) platform. The outlook painted a gloomy picture of security threats in the region that are capable of increasing insecurity and impact negatively on the electoral process. Some of these threats included frequency of terrorists' attacks and rise in violent extremism, political demonstrations, proliferation of arms and light weapons, youth bulge with its attendant issues of poverty, unemployment and under-employment, militancy etc. Added to these are effects of natural and man-made disasters, illegal mining and conflicts associated with natural resources. Concerns over constitutional amendment and presidential tenure elongation, voter apathy, frequent boycotts by opposition were some of the factors identified as impacting negatively on the conduct of free and fair elections. Edward surmised that this scenario has proven that the regional is already volatile, and in this context, elections can serve to exacerbate an already difficult security situation.

Mr. Raouf Salami of ECOWAS continued the discourse by acknowledging that electoral democracy is the accepted system of governance in West Africa. He enumerated some of the gains of democracy such as the existence of laws, policies and constitutions to check human right abuses, growing platform for citizen-led election observation including in some cases reserving a few political seats for women and youth involvement in elections. He also lauded increased media coverage of elections, and the measures taken to ensure that internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees and the diaspora could vote in elections. Despite these laudable achievements, he noted that negative trends also impede free and fair elections and the electoral process. Such trends include elections often take place in insecure environments exacerbated by the die-hard attitude of politicians, increased hate speech, frequent attempts at constitutional amendments, financial inducements to sway the electoral outcomes among others. He posited that the electoral process should be a wholistic process involving all stakeholders to enable citizens to decide their future and agree on how to attain that future.

Dr. Kojo Asante commenced his intervention by drawing attention to ‘new threats on the horizon!’ These threats he categorized as the failure of Africa to imbibe democratic norms, citizens failure to identify their role in the democratic process, and political leaders’ continuous efforts to extend their tenure through constitutional amendments. He re-emphasized the damning effects of social media and gross misinformation, which impacts on citizens’ inability to make informed decisions. Added to these is the high judicial impartiality, campaign financing and illicit financial flows and the lack of measures to check them. Dr. Asante further lamented the lure of extending term limits, voter apathy and fatigue, which if not addressed may affect legitimacy of governance.

Discussions in plenary dwelt extensively on recommendations to check some of the identified threats and the way forward. One major issue of discourse centered on ways to check illicit funding of elections. This has become imperative as it was noted that outside resources come with conditions that may impact negatively on the region. In this wise, participants agreed that African countries should take charge of their affairs and stop the over-reliance on foreign aid; “you cannot build sustainable peace with someone else’s purse,” seemed to be the consensus.

### **3.1.2. Key Points and Recommendations**

- Management of the environment within which elections are conducted and the implications of insecurity on elections
- High dependence on technology and its attendant impact on human/social? cohesiveness should be checked
- Efforts to address the proliferation of political parties should be inclusive (you might want to explain what you mean here)
- Civil society to support EMBs in dealing with dialogue and organizational development
- Establish mechanisms to manage external actors and their role in influencing, or sometimes driving key aspects of the elections at all levels.
- Politicians should restore confidence in the political system by respecting the social contract between government and the governed

- Allow for more inclusive development by decentralizing power and ensuring community ownership in order for democracy to thrive

## 3.2. MANAGING COMPLEX ELECTIONS

This session was moderated by Ms. Levinia Addae-Mensah, Program Director/Deputy Executive Director of WANEP. The key discussants were: Mr. Alex Poku-Akubia, Director Ghana Election Commission and Professor Anthonia Okoosie-Simbine, INEC Commissioner, Nigeria. The two seasoned professionals shared insights and perspectives on the workings of the EMB in the context of their respective countries. Alex set the ball rolling by reiterating the challenges and successes of democratic transitions in the region and elections, which he aptly described as ‘a powerful force for growing democracy and reducing conflict in West Africa,’ but cautioned that the quality of the elections should be interrogated. Following on the heels of previous speakers, Alex acknowledged that managing complex elections involves diverse stakeholders because interactions between these key players in the electoral process is vital to the success of elections and the growth of democracy. He said it is critical for state actors to respect the ECOWAS protocol on democracy and good governance and abide by its tenets. Some of the solutions he proffered as a panacea for managing complex elections included the need to instill confidence in the electorate by addressing issues of human right abuses and the challenge of insecurity across the region.

Professor Okoosie-Simbine painted a vivid picture of the electoral process in Nigeria, a period she described as characterized by persistent social trust deficit, conflict structure, insurgency/militant conflicts, all of which lead to high security presence during elections. She also dwelt on the role of election management bodies and their challenges in managing complex elections. One major challenge according to her is the denigration of the EMBs compounded by the huge expenses of running elections. She said election management bodies are often constrained with inadequate infrastructure, which often makes them to rely on affiliates in executing their duties. This can also be problematic as political parties often infiltrate some of these groups. One area that generated much discussions during this session was on the autonomy of the election bodies and the constraints of fulfilling their mandate. Issues of ‘idolization’ of the EMB leaders, politicization of EMBs and personalization of the office leading to lack of sustainability were flagged as some of the factors hampering the independence of the bodies.

### 3.2.1. Key Points and Recommendations

- Centrality of the role of EMBs is not in doubt but we need to include other stakeholders for a wholistic process (open spaces for collective dialogue) (for consistency use holistic or wholistic; you previously used wholistic – either one is fine.
- Open space for interaction between election bodies and other actors for dialogue in order to bridge the increasing trust deficit between and among citizens and elected officials
- Levels of complexities in managing complex elections are real but we should appreciate the critical role of EMBs in election management – what do you mean here?

- There is need to institutionalize a succession plan in the EMB for continuity and sustainability
- Proliferation of political parties should be checked – a think a little more context should be provided in the main part of the text. I think this is where Prof. Simbine was talking about briefcase political parties or parties that were created as affiliates to larger political parties in order to serve as spoilers. If so, I would suggest you add a line in the main part of Prof. Simbine’s remarks so that the key point has context and background.
- Political parties need to be audited and sanctions against erring political parties in terms of submitting audit reports should be enforced

### 3.3. SUPPORT TO CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS IN ORGANIZING CREDIBLE ELECTIONS IN WEST AFRICA

Ms. Nana Asantewa Afadzinu, Executive Director of WACSI, moderated this session, which was dedicated to sharing experiences and lessons learnt from civil society and partners’ perspectives on their engagements. Discussions also focused on the impact of these engagements, as well as gaps and opportunities for deeper collaboration. Speakers were Ms. Tove Degnbol, the Danish Ambassador to Ghana, Mr. Ifeanyi Okechukwu, WANEP Regional Coordinator, Early Warning and Mr. Amidu Tanko of STAR-Ghana. Flagging off discussions, Mr. Tanko speaking from the donor point of view, espoused the critical role of civil society in complementing developmental efforts but also gave insights on how this role can be improved because political? leaders do not believe in the contribution of CSOs and the impact they make. He said there is a dichotomy between community-based and national non-governmental organizations and advised CSOs to identify one relevant organization or a mix of organizations at the community level, according to their context, to partner with during elections for maximum impact. He said this was necessary because a joint approach is critical towards addressing electoral issues. One key issue was the fact that support to CSOs is often focused on technical issues whereas elections are not linear but come with many variants. In this wise, Tanko called for a proactive support to CSOs due to the changing context of conflict and urged CSOs to seek donor support on time and well ahead of election year.

The Danish Ambassador, in her submission enumerated areas of Denmark’s support to civil society organizations in Ghana. These areas covered the provision of core funding to selected CSOs, provision of equipment as well as support to advocacy and media campaigns on specific issues. Arising from these interactions, the Ambassador identified the lack of coordination and focus on individual interest and pocket intervention as some of the gaps impeding sustainable progress by CSOs. Drawing lessons from Denmark where CSOs are forming alliances with international organizations, the Ambassador encouraged West African CSOs to work together as individual campaign efforts donot achieve much. She also called on CSOs to keep a clean record on financial management for the purpose of credibility because lack of credibility can destroy an organization.

Mr. Okechukwu in his submission used WANEP as his point of reference on the positive contributions of CSOs towards the attainment of credible elections in West Africa. He said



through the WANEP project on Election Monitoring, Analysis and Management (EMAM), the organization has been able to influence policy, hone its capacity to engage in preventive diplomacy through data gathering and analysis, established peace architectures to create linkages between state and non-state actors and garnered acceptability at national and regional levels. This platform has enabled WANEP to lead successful campaigns that impacted the country, facilitate collaboration between respective organizations and collaborate with the media regularly for effective results. Further buttressing the impact of CSO interventions, he said ECOWAS observation mission relies on citizens collaboration and have been involving CSOs in its mission. Through CSOs, ECOWAS developed homegrown applications to address peculiar issues in the context of West Africa.

### **3.3.1. Key Points and Recommendations**

- CSOs should look inwards for sustainability as most funding is tailored towards the donors' agenda. In this wise, business for peace initiatives should be further developed and implemented to support funding of CSOs in peace and security
- Improve database of CSOs accredited to ECOWAS on its <sup>1</sup>areas of focus
- Develop new approaches to engage with the state in order to build trust – don't criticize without offering solutions
- Engage with international networks that are inter dependent for knowledge sharing
- WANEP to lead in organising CSOs to work with ECOWAS in assessing the peace fund and the community levy
- Timeliness of the support to civil society for election on short- and long-term basis is imperative.
- Enhancing collaboration and coordination among CSOs by investing in building alliances with international organizations and linkages with relevant partners.
- Partnerships and relationships with donor partners and grant-making institution should not be a patronizing relationship but one that ensures cooperation and benefits to achieve collective objectives

## **3.4. AN X-RAY OF INSTITUTIONAL STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING ELECTORAL PROCESSES IN WEST AFRICA: STRENGTHS AND GAPS**

This session moderated by Sulemana Braimah, Executive Director, Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) with Ms. Claudine Ahiany-Kpondzo – Rapporteur, High Commission for Reconciliation and Strengthening of National Unity (HCRRUN) and Mr. Albert Arhin – Executive Director, CODEO as discussants. In his introductory comments, the moderator highlighted that elections are not just a process to elect leaders who manage legislations on behalf of the masses, but also about ensuring peace, security and stability of the environment emphasizing that election issues are crucial for peace and stability.

---

<sup>1</sup> ECOWAS has five thematic areas of focus viz; Terrorism and Violent Extremism, Governance and Human Right, Environment, Health and Climate Change

Mr. Albert Arhin said his organization CODEO serves as a watchdog of democracy focused on ensuring the achievement of free and fair elections. He commenced his intervention with a brief overview of the context of governance in West Africa by highlighting issues of autocratic and military regimes in the post-independence period in the region. He acknowledged that multi-party elections and more open democratic systems have become routine as illustrated by many elections conducted in the region in recent times. He said though the electoral environment has been improved, some challenges needed to be addressed to ensure smooth and transparent elections to avoid conflict. Areas for improvement according to him included: elections and crisis prevention, mediation, sensitivity to early warning signs and electoral assistance. In this wise, Mr. Arhin called for greater collaboration and coordination among election stakeholders including Election Management Bodies (EMBs), the security apparatus, electorates, CSOs, the media, regional, continental and other international partners.

In her submissions, Ms. Claudine Ahianyo-Kpondzo gave an insight into Togo's preparations for the 22 February 2020 Presidential elections, which she said political campaigns across the country have so far been peaceful. In keeping with the topic of discussion, Claudine stated that the key strategies employ by her organization HCRRUN for managing electoral processes in Togo is through national reconciliation and social cohesion. She explained that HCRRUN works in collaboration with the Truth Commission to re-establish truth in the country and clarify some controversial matters in the country's political history and, although it plays no official role with the EMBs, it has established mechanisms for preventive diplomacy through working with local peace councils. HCRRUN has been mandated to enhance national dialogue to prevent electoral violence in Togo. HCRRUN has also established and trained local peace committees to build local consensus and engage in insider facilitated mediation to resolve community-based conflicts in the 39 Prefectures of the country. Additionally, they also have an understanding with the media for peaceful coverage, communication and education of the electorate.

Another germane area of focus here was on the role of media in the electoral process and its implications for peace. Session moderator, Mr. Braimah, who is a media expert, brought his expertise to bear as he took participants through the workings of the media, the challenges and constraints and how their role impacts on peace and security particularly during elections. He said media ownership sometimes hamper independence of the media and may result in open bias and propaganda by the media in political reporting. This is because some media outlets are owned by politicians or party sympathizers and this results to increased propaganda and bias in their reportage. Also, government patronage of media houses impacts on their credibility. According to Braimah, media independence is seriously hampered by concerns of sustainability due to a lack of resources and this crisis of sustainability is a major issue for the media in carrying out their duties creditably. He further stated that the media lack the requisite capacity to do high quality election reporting and this is further compounded by open repression of the media that is deemed critical of the government. The expert added that the increasing proliferation of fake news are sometimes sponsored by foreign interest. He therefore advocated for the establishment of fact-checking houses to identify and curb fake news as well as naming and shaming those that propagate fake news and propaganda.

### **3.4.1. Key Points and Recommendations**

#### ***Election Management Bodies***

- Non-political interference in the work of the EMBs and providing them with sustained financial and other support for them to implement planned electoral activities
- Establish electoral courts or systems for speedy trial and resolution of election-related disputes
- Build capacity of EMBs, the media and CSOs on election management and conflict prevention
- Encourage regular exchanges between EMBs for lessons learned and experience sharing to check untoward electoral practices
- EMBs should develop regional frameworks on management of the electoral process

#### ***Civil Society***

- Civil society need to strategize and collaborate with each other in a coordinated manner. Working in silos would not achieve much and will amount to duplication of efforts
- Political parties should consult more on gender inclusion while CSOs should push for affirmative action in parliament
- There should be clear guidelines and harmonization of the security task force in elections to avoid culture of impunity
- Put mechanisms in place to address citizens mistrust of political parties

#### ***ECOWAS***

- Long term observation is very crucial throughout the electoral period; before, during and after elections to prepare the environment, identify early warning signals and threats that could escalate into violence
- ECOWAS should develop mechanisms for enforcing sanctions because the inability of sanctioning erring member states on election violation due to the principle of non-interference in the sovereignty of member states exacerbates the situation
- Regional support should go beyond materials. ECONEC can be used to cover areas of serious contestations and perceptions

#### ***National Government***

- Respect for human rights, norms and gender inclusion for peaceful elections
- Establish mechanisms to regulate national security forces to standardize their role
- Develop or enforce legislation to sanction the excesses of the media such as violent instigation etc.
- Strengthen the institutions that conduct elections including the security forces
- EMBs should be included in the normal legislative budgets of the country and in the long term, they should be able to entirely fund their budgets
- Reduce the high cost of elections through regional sharing of electoral materials and other assets

### 3.5. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING THE ELECTORAL ENVIRONMENT IN WEST AFRICA

Mrs. Josephine Nkrumah, Chairperson, National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) moderated this session with two representatives from the two rival (opposition?) political parties in Ghana; Mr. Evans Nimako – Head of Elections and Research, of the ruling party – the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and Mr. Edem Agbana, Deputy Youth Organizer, from the opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC). With the presence of two rival parties, the session promised to be very interesting and participants were not disappointed! In her opening statements, Ms. Nkrumah sued for decorum and mutual respect from the party representatives who magnanimously shook hands as a symbol of peace. Giving a brief background of the topic, the moderator said challenges of the electoral systems in Africa is the non-responsiveness to the perception of unfairness and corruption. She said that most often the political legitimacy of electoral systems is compromised and stakeholders, including political parties, have also gone outside the established norms to achieve their political interest and objectives. Given that context, the moderator underscored that the discussion should center on raising appropriate policy recommendations for action to improve the election and political landscape in the region.

Speaking on the responsibility of political parties to ensure a cordial environment for elections to be conducted, Evans Nimako of the NPP stressed that security in an election was very important in the pre-, during and post-election period. In respect of that, he called for the sanitization of the election environment and the establishment of policies to address issues of physical violence, hate utterances and ethnic rhetoric, especially in the mainstream and social media. In addition, he said the credibility of the stakeholders is key towards ensuring consistencies and timeliness in information dissemination of the electoral activities. Another critical factor for improving the electoral environment according to Nimako is the issue of accountability within political parties and he urged political parties to conduct annual audits of their finances and make the audit report public. This, he said could be enforced through the provision of a strong legislation and a designated establishment to ensure compliance. On the part of the EMBs, he recommended that EMBs should set clear timelines on the electoral calendar for electoral activities including the nomination and filing of candidates, and undertake a comprehensive review of elections and publish the outcome and lessons learnt to inform stakeholders of actual developments and progress ahead of elections. On a final note, he advocated for equal representation in the elections citing that Ghana with 275 constituencies has fewer women representatives even though they constitute majority of the population. He therefore suggested that some seats be reserved for women in political parties' strongholds.

Edem Agbana of the NPC in his interventions, alluded to the fact that although progress has been made in each electoral cycle, there are still challenges in conducting elections in the sub-region. Some of these issues he identified as lack of independence of the electoral commissions, insecurity of the election environment particularly issues of vigilantism and

thuggery as in the case of Ghana; lopsided media reportage and use of media outlets as a propaganda machine. He also lamented the slow pace of the judiciary in tackling election-related matters. All these issues according to him, suggests that there is a need for broader consensus on critical issues ahead of and after elections. In proffering solutions to the identified threats, he said the ECs must be independent in their conduct and consultative processes to contribute to a conducive electoral environment. He further urged political parties to strive for accountability and compliance of reporting of election financing and implore the media to imbibe self-regulation in their reportage to ensure professionalism and ethical reporting, while election offences tribunal should fast-track the resolution of election-related disputes. Putting all these measures in place will contribute significantly to boost election security, address the underlying issues of trust deficits and the negative perception of the populace.

### **3.5.1. Key Points and Recommendations**

- Gender consideration is key to achieving true representation of the population therefore, political parties should open spaces for effective women and youth participation in politics.
- Changing mindsets about women leadership - research conducted by NCCE in 2016, revealed that about 60 per cent of the Ghanaian population was in support of having a woman as president or serving as a member of parliament.
- Violence in politics should be collectively and consciously addressed as it discourages the increased representation and participation of women in politics.
- The role of civic and political education is critical in-between elections. Therefore, democracy should not be linked only to elections but also to monitoring what happens in the space after an election cycle.
- Building citizens capacity for governance to ensure democratic development as the citizens need to own and drive the agenda of democratic governance in the region.
- Political patronage deepens corruption and undermines the essence of democracy
- Changing perceptions of political intrusions vis-à-vis the independence of electoral bodies
- We must have a clear roadmap and code of conduct in relation to eradicating vigilantism
- Security of tenure of Electoral Commission chairpersons must be guaranteed in order to ensure independence of the agency

## **4.0. CLOSING REMARKS/WAY FORWARD**

The two-day conference ended on a satisfactory note as reflected in the closing remarks of the two Directors; Dr. Chukwuemeka Eze and Dr. Monde Muyangwa. Expressing appreciation to the participants for the open and passionate discussions, Dr. Eze noted the election management challenges identified during the sessions and stated that his assurance was that the capacity to address them resides in the region. Therefore, in order to change the narrative, there must be collective willingness and commitments within and with external accompaniments, he added. Dr. Eze thereafter paid special tribute to representatives from Embassies and High

Commissions, Heads/representatives of civil society, government institutions, political parties and the Media. He expressed utmost appreciation to the Woodrow Wilson Centre and SVNP members for 'not just allowing us space to freely discuss the challenges and prospects of elections on the continent, but also for believing in Pan-Africanism!' He reassured SVNP leadership that more members would be encouraged to join such a productive and purposeful platform that was locally owned and managed for Africans by Africans.

Speaking in the same vein, Dr. Monde Muyangwa said, "I am a big fan of WANEP. I call them warriors of peace. Peace cannot be sustainable in Africa unless it is driven by Africans. WANEP's interventions and contributions show that peacebuilding is a mission worth pursuing and worth investing in." Dr. Muyangwa affirmed that regional approach and building partnership for peace was of great importance. She promised to take back the high points from the conference to policy-makers in Washington and engage with those institutions with interest in elections, peacebuilding and development of the continent. As a way forward, the rich perspectives and recommendations garnered in this forum are expected to inform further interventions in the electoral and transition processes towards ensuring the attainment of free, fair and credible elections especially in the upcoming elections taking place in the region within this period.