

AHEAD Africa launch event

On July 20, 2024, the **AHEAD Africa** project held an official launch event. Co-hosted by consortium members, the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), in its role as the Secretariat of the West African Election Observation Network (WAEON), and the European Partnership for Democracy, the event took place alongside the African Union ECOSOCC 20th anniversary celebrations. The gathering focused on the critical role of civil society in bolstering electoral integrity, with a special emphasis on the upcoming 2024 Ghana elections.



Youth

Building on youth engagement strategies and reflecting on lessons learned from the 2021 Zambia elections, Melissa Sarah Hamalambo, Executive Director at the Centre for Young Leaders In Africa (CYLA) shares that young independent candidates can achieve success by maintaining close ties with their communities, valuable advice in anticipation of the 2024 Ghana elections. Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that young people continue to face substantial challenges, particularly financial barriers as Fabian Kobby, Founder of Youth Leadership Parliament, stated. High financial costs not only restrict young candidates from running for office but also limits their capacity for manoeuvre if they get elected, as they often find themselves indebted to financial backers who supported their campaigns, which can limit their ability to act independently once in office.



No EU EOM for Ghana's 2024 elections

Significant updates regarding the European Union's role were provided by Anna Lixi, Head of Operations on Governance and Civil Society at the European Union Delegation to Ghana: "In 2024, there will be no EU Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) in Ghana. Instead, an Election Expert Mission will be deployed for a two-month period to offer technical support to institutions and produce a technical report rather than a political assessment."



Technology

Technology emerged as a major topic throughout the event, particularly concerning best practices for citizen observation and youth engagement strategies. Sheikh Armiwayo, the former Chair of the Coalition Of Domestic Elections Observers (CODEO), discussed the advanced Process and Results Verification for Transparency (PRVT) system. This sophisticated system enhances observation efforts by allowing observers to report data in near real-time directly to a central data centre. Conversely, reflecting on the recent elections in Senegal in March, Abdou Aziz Cisse, Programmes Officer at Africivistes, emphasised the significant potential of technology in engaging young people given the unique capacity to reach and mobilise youth on a large scale, surpassing any other government and civil society initiatives.



Beyond election day

William Carew, Head of the African Union ECOSOCC Secretariat, highlighted the importance of citizen involvement not just on the election day, but throughout all phases of the electoral process, to which Andrew Songa, Regional Advisor for AU Engagement at the European Partnership for Democracy, pointed out the special role of citizen observers in enhancing the quality and implementation of election observation recommendations, which are often overlooked and can result in insufficient improvements between elections.

The event also provided a platform to launch and present the AHEAD Africa project to key stakeholders in Ghana. As outlined, AHEAD Africa—a project co-funded by the EU—will specifically target the barriers to civil society observation and electoral integrity in Ghana and throughout Africa, while identifying and seizing opportunities to enhance observation efforts, thereby promoting greater electoral integrity. This will involve building the capacity of citizen observers to conduct comprehensive election observations and research, thus strengthening the evidence base for our advocacy efforts aimed at electoral reforms across AU member states, at the regional level, and the African continent at large.

For more information on the event or the AHEAD Africa project, please contact sarahurtadomeseguer@epd.eu.

AU-ECOSOCC 20th anniversary