2025 Experiential Learning Seminar

Outcome Document

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List of acronyms

ACDEG	African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance
ACFIM	Alliance for Finance Monitoring
AfEONet	African Election Observers Network
AHEAD	Action for a Holistic Electoral Approach for Democracy
AU	African Union
CSOs	Civil society organisations
DEAU	Democracy and Electoral Assistance Unit
DRI	Democracy Reporting International
EAC	East Africa Community
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
E-HORN	East and Horn of Africa Election Observation Network
EISA	Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa
ELS	Experiential Learning Seminar
EMBs	Election Management Bodies
EPD	European Partnership for Democracy
EPDE	European Platform for Democratic Elections
ESN-SA	Election Support Network for Southern Africa
EU	European Union
ODIHR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
PRVT	Process and Results Verification for Transparency
RECs	Regional Economic Communities
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SEAC	SADC Electoral Advisory Council
WAEON	West African Election Observers Network

01. Executive summary

The inaugural **Experiential Learning Seminar** (ELS) on Electoral Integrity and Advocacy, held in Nairobi from 24–25 March 2025, brought together over 50 strategic actors from African regional networks of citizen observers, policy makers, international partners, and national civil society organizations. Notably present were representatives from the African Union (AU), the East African Community (EAC) and the European Union (EU). The seminar served as a platform for cultivating reflections, analysis, and inspiring action on citizen election observation as a proactive force for electoral integrity, democratic resilience, and policy reform.

Experiential learning was derived from case studies on **Africa's 2024 elections**, reflective discussions in plenary sessions, co-created strategies for future elections and actionable recommendations for regional networks and AU engagement. The seminar explored how citizen observers can play a central role in reforming electoral systems, mediating conflict, and safeguarding civic space – especially in contexts of democratic regression. Participants co-developed innovative tools and shared lessons on how to adapt observation methodologies to shifting political, technological, and funding environments.

This outcome document consolidates the **key insights, best practices, and strategic commitments** that emerged from the seminar. It provides a forward-facing advocacy tool designed to engage AU organs, Regional Economic Communities (RECs), Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs), and donors. It outlines specific recommendations for institutionalising citizen observation, funding electoral transparency, leveraging civic technology, and anchoring reform advocacy in legal frameworks like the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG).

The ELS establishes an essential benchmark for collective, cross-regional learning and action. It underscored the principle that citizen observers – when empowered, resourced, and coordinated – are indispensable actors in protecting electoral integrity and building democratic futures across Africa.

About AfEONet

The African Election Observers Network (AfEONet) is a continental platform for citizen election observers and observer organisations committed to defending and promoting democracy. The network aims at mobilising, organising, coordinating, and enhancing citizen observation activities in the continent. AfEONet currently brings together the following regional networks of election observers:

- **East and Horn of Africa Election Observation Network (E-HORN)**
- **West African Election Observers Network (WAEON)**
- **Election Support Network for Southern Africa (ESN-SA)**

AfEONet's intervention is guided by the overarching need to promote electoral integrity in Africa by advancing professional standards, building the capacity of domestic election observers, fostering collaboration, and generating knowledge to enhance the effectiveness and credibility of citizen-led election observation in Africa.

About AHEAD Africa

The AHEAD Africa project—is an EU co-funded pan-African project coordinated by European Partnership for Democracy (EPD) and implemented in a consortium of 6 members.[1] The project focuses on multiple facets of the electoral cycle with the aim of **empowering civil society across Africa, including citizen observers, in strengthening electoral systems and processes, to contribute to higher levels of electoral integrity in African Union member states.**

The underlying methodology of the Action is the **AHEAD approach** – Action for a Holistic Electoral Approach for Democracy – which emphasises that follow-up to election observation recommendations can be a key driver for more inclusive electoral systems, building public trust and preventing conflicts. By focusing on 'electoral follow-up', civil society can effectively advocate for democratic accountability and play a significant role in fostering transparent and accountable electoral processes.

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1 African Election Observers Network (AfEONet), Africtivistes, Democracy Reporting International (DRI), East and Horn of Africa Election Observers Network (E-HORN), Electoral Support Network of Southern Africa (ESN-SA), and West Africa Election Observers Network (WAEON).

02. Introduction and background

The ELS is a flagship capacity-building initiative of the AHEAD Africa project. It is purposefully designed to **strengthen the capacity of citizen observers to confront systemic and emerging challenges faced by citizen election observers on the continent.** These include persistent weak legal and institutional frameworks, the erosion of civic space for citizen observers, limited and inconsistent engagement with EMBs, and a lack of structured coordination with continental and regional bodies such as the AU and the RECs.

The inaugural seminar launched a long-term, continent-wide effort to foster a resilient network of electoral practitioners equipped with adaptive tools, shared strategies, and enhanced solidarity to sustain electoral integrity and democratic accountability in Africa. In recognition of the highly political nature of election observation, the seminar underscored the urgency of equipping observers not just as watchdogs, but as empowered civic actors advancing reforms and defending democratic values.

Held in the wake of the 2024 "Year of Elections" in Africa - a period marked by significant electoral activity, both gains and setbacks – the seminar provided an opportunity to learn from lived experiences across African regions. Participants, some drawn from countries that had just held elections, brought direct experiences into a collective analysis space. This experiential learning format encouraged reflection on electoral practices, power dynamics, reform pathways, and effective civic engagement.

The seminar's structure was grounded in experiential learning theory, emphasising reflection, action, adaptation, and co-creation. It leveraged peer exchange and case-based learning in diagnosing entrenched problems and innovating practical solutions for electoral integrity. This unique format brought together not only election observers but also representatives from the AU, EU, RECs, civil society, civic tech institutions, and global democracy networks—allowing cross-pollination of ideas and reinforcement of continental and international solidarity around electoral reforms.

03. Purpose and objectives

The seminar sought to:

- Enhance the **skills, knowledge, and flexibility of observer groups** to navigate evolving political and technological electoral environments.

- Facilitate **cross-country exchange** of lessons, innovations, and experiences while building solidarity among observer groups across Africa's regions.

- Develop **innovative and locally tailored approaches to citizen observation and post-election accountability** using data-driven and participatory methodologies.

- Diagnose **structural weaknesses in electoral systems and civil society networks**, and recommend actionable solutions for strategic reform advocacy and engagement with AU, RECs, and national governments.

04. Methodology and participants

The two-day event adopted a highly participatory approach combining:

- Case study presentations and data sharing.
- Facilitated thematic discussions and panel presentations.
- Plenary synthesis of issues to inform recommendations and action planning.

A total of **55 participants** were in attendance, drawn from a wide range of institutions, including implementers of the AHEAD project: AfEONet, Africtivistes, DRI, E-HORN, ESN-SA, EPD and WAEON.

Other participants included AU Commission's Democracy and Electoral Assistance Unit (DEAU), the European Union- the Ambassador to Kenya and the European Union Commission, Directorate General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA), Civic tech innovators like Penplusbytes-Ghana, International actors such as European Platform for Democratic Elections (EPDE), Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA) and International IDEA, AfEONet members like Yiaga Africa, Christian Church Monitoring Group (CCMG) - Zambia and select organisations working on democracy and elections based in Kenya.

05. Lessons learnt

Opening remarks

The inaugural ELS was opened by the EU Ambassador to Kenya, Her Excellency Henriette Geiger. The Ambassador in her remarks urged all stakeholders to prioritise timely reforms, invest in institutional strengthening, and empower civil society and media to play an active role in promoting credible elections and democratic resilience in the region.

A summary of her remarks:

- **Democracy in Decline**: Recent global studies indicate that a majority of the world's population now lives under authoritarian regimes. This troubling reality reinforces the shared responsibility of all stakeholders to protect, promote, and nurture democracy.
- **Fundamental Freedoms are Essential:** Citizens everywhere seek to live in societies where freedoms of speech, association, and political participation are protected. These are not abstract ideals they are prerequisites for dignity and democratic legitimacy.
- **Democracy Must Deliver Tangibly**: Democracy is increasingly evaluated not only by electoral processes but by its ability to improve livelihoods and uphold social and economic rights. People demand visible, equitable outcomes alongside institutional reforms.
- **The Role of Legitimacy and Credibility**: Democratic legitimacy lies in outcomes and delivery. Electoral observers and development partners play a crucial role in assessing transparency and advancing credible reforms.
- **Full Electoral Cycle Approach:** The EU promotes a comprehensive approach to electoral integrity spanning pre-election, election-day, and post-election periods. Closing the persistent implementation gap in observation recommendations is essential to credibility.
- **Support for Civil Society and Local Observation:** The EU reaffirmed its commitment to supporting African-led election observation and empowering civil society to advocate for reforms and accountability.
- **Kenya Case Study and Reform Imperatives**: Kenya's peaceful 2022 elections still revealed persistent structural gaps. There is an urgent need to address recurring issues such as voter registration delays and weak EMB readiness before the next polls.

Lessons from the provocateur

The seminar commenced with a provocateur address delivered by the Executive Director of Yiaga Africa, Mr. Samson Itodo, who offered a compelling **diagnosis of the state of citizen observation in Africa**, as well as strategic provocations to reimagine its role in advancing democratic accountability and good governance. In a context where democratic erosion is met with shrinking civic space and electoral malpractice, the address challenged observers to move beyond technical exercises toward more politically engaged, strategic, and sustainable forms of electoral oversight. Highlights included:

- **Observation as a Political and Reform-Driving Tool:** Observation is not neutral- it legitimises electoral outcomes, deters fraud, and influences institutional reforms. Through methods like Process and Results Verification for Transparency (PRVT) and sample-based observation, groups in Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, and Malawi have enhanced transparency and driven adoption of reforms such as biometric voter registration and result management systems.
- **Strengthening Legitimacy and Civic Education:** Observation must build a democratic culture. When citizen observers engage communities beyond elections – especially the marginalised groups like youth and women – they help foster civic awareness and grassroots legitimacy. Overcoming elitism and deepening local relationships are essential.
- **Expanding Mandates Beyond Election Day:** Observation should not end with the vote. Observer groups must monitor governance performance, follow up on electoral reforms, and integrate accountability frameworks into their long-term programming.
- **Innovative and Sustainable Resourcing:** Shrinking donor support requires new funding models. These include: Crowdfunding via mobile platforms; Service-for-fee offerings (e.g., training, data analysis); Local philanthropy and private-sector engagement; Social impact bonds for democratic development; Budgetary allocations from AU and RECs for citizen observation.
- **Leveraging Technology and Cross-Sector Alliances:** Tech tools such as open-source data platforms, AI-powered early warning systems, virtual training rooms, and voter education bots improve reach, efficiency, and safety. Observer groups must also forge alliances with universities, unions, media, faith groups, and private actors to diversify influence and resources.

Reflections on Elections held in 2024 and Opportunities for Advocacy

In 2024, **13 of the 17 scheduled elections across Africa were conducted** in Algeria, Chad, Comoros, Mauritania, Rwanda, South Africa, Tunisia, Botswana, Ghana, Mauritius, Senegal, Mozambique, and Namibia. Drawing on these experiences, AfEONet members identified five core lessons to guide future interventions and these include:

- **Inclusive Electoral Practices Drive Participation:** Namibia's inclusive strategies such as deploying youth ambassadors and using disability-friendly materials led to a 16% increase in voter turnout (from 60% in 2019 to 76% in 2024). These results reaffirm the importance of affirmative policies, including gender quotas, campaign finance caps, and voter education targeting underrepresented groups.
- **EMB Preparedness Is Foundational to Credibility:** Logistical delays and material shortages in Namibia, Botswana, and Mozambique revealed capacity gaps in election planning and execution.
- **Civic Education and Media Partnerships Enhance Engagement:** Namibia's media-driven voter education and televised public debates boosted public understanding and participation.
- **Technology Strengthens Accountability:** In South Africa and Ghana, citizen observation leveraged tech — such as dashboards and calls for electronic result transmission — to improve transparency and tackle misinformation.
- **Civil Society is a Pillar of Democratic Resilience:** Senegal showcased how organised, grassroots-led coalitions can peacefully resist anti-constitutional actions. Civil society defended constitutional timelines and averted political instability.

Strengthening Electoral Reforms Through Effective Follow-Up Mechanisms

Participants highlighted five critical strategies for strengthening electoral reform through robust follow-up mechanisms:

- **Full-Cycle Reporting for Coherent Advocacy:** Consolidating pre-election, election day, and post-election findings into integrated reports enables comprehensive analysis and more strategic reform advocacy. This approach facilitates evidence-informed engagement with stakeholders such as parliaments, courts, EMBs, and civil society.
- **Bridging Legal, Technical, and Political Dimensions:** Effective reform advocacy requires civil society to combine legal insight, technical data, and political acumen. Translating complex issues into accessible, actionable messages helps mobilise public support and policy uptake as demonstrated in Zambia and Madagascar.
- **Localising Reform Recommendations:** While international frameworks lend legitimacy, embedding reforms in national values and institutions enhances sustainability. Successful models like Sampana Anarahamaso ny Fifidianana, Ivon'ny Demokrasia Ifarimbonana (SAFIDY) and EISA show that partnering with local actors, EMBs, traditional leaders, and grassroots civil society orrganisations (CSOs) builds reform credibility and resilience.
- **Safeguarding EMB Independence:** Political interference through arbitrary dismissals or budget manipulation weakens reform gains. Advocacy efforts should focus on protecting EMBs autonomy through legal safeguards, tenure clauses, and transparent appointment procedures. Lessons from Malawi and Madagascar affirm the power of strategic litigation and sustained public pressure.
- **Sustaining Reform Amid Restricted Civic Space:** In polarised or restrictive contexts, CSOs must rely on alternative strategies, trusted local networks, credible reporting and adaptive communication to preserve legitimacy and advocate effectively. Positioning CSOs as non-partisan, community-anchored and evidence-based entities help maintain influence.

Lessons from African Union and like-minded organisations on making citizen observation effective

Drawing from the experiences of the African Union Commission and allied electoral organisations such as the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe – Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIR), and EPDE, the following key learnings were distilled:

- **Legal and Normative Anchoring Elevates Influence:** The AU's electoral missions derive authority from legal frameworks like the ACDEG, enhancing their credibility. Citizen observer groups should align their findings with such instruments to amplify the legal and political weight of their recommendations.
- **Long-Term, Localised Observation Enhances Impact:** Unlike short-term continental missions, citizen observers offer continuous, grassroots-level monitoring across the full electoral cycle. These insights enrich continental advocacy when routine data-sharing mechanisms exist between CSOs and AU bodies.
- **Coordinated Methodologies, Complementary Messaging:** While AU and CSOs often use similar observation tools, their reporting tone and emphasis differ. Harmonising messaging especially through pre-deployment coordination can balance diplomatic language with reform-oriented advocacy.
- **Structured Follow-Up Enhances Reform Uptake:** AU and RECs observer missions often conclude with report publication, lacking mechanisms for follow-through. Establishing multi-stakeholder platforms—including EMBs, CSOs, parliaments, and courts can ensure observation recommendations translate into actual reforms.
- **Context-Sensitive Tools and Alliances Improve Effectiveness:** In restrictive or militarised environments, remote observation, social media monitoring, and local informant networks help circumvent obstacles. Observer groups must develop adaptive toolkits and broaden their coalitions to include academic, religious, media, and private sector actors.

Conflict Prevention and Electoral Peace: Approaches to defusing tensions during electoral periods

Lessons from the seminar reinforced the value of proactive and structured approaches to defusing electoral tensions. Six key takeaways emerged:

- **Observation as a Conflict Prevention Tool:** Credible, multi-phase observation covering pre-election, election day, and post-election periods serves as a critical early warning mechanism. In Zambia's 2022 elections, rapid updates from observers helped counter misinformation and de-escalate tensions.
- **Regional Bodies as Stabilisers:** Institutions like AU, SADC, ECOWAS, and networks such as ESN-SA and E-HORN play pivotal roles in election crisis response. In Mozambique (2024), the AU Peace and Security Council's emergency intervention exemplified timely regional mediation.
- **Shuttle Diplomacy and Multi-Track Mediation:** Sustained, context-specific diplomacy by trusted mediators—such as the AU-led efforts in Kenya (2007–08) proves effective in managing high-stakes disputes and facilitating inclusive political settlements.
- **Structured CSO-Security Engagement:** Military deployment during elections often heightens risk. Ghana's 2020 reforms, championed by CSOs like CDD-Ghana, resulted in reduced military presence at polling stations, lowering violence and restoring public trust.
- **Early Warning Systems and Risk Monitoring:** Tools like SEAC's pre-election assessments help detect triggers in advance, enabling preventive action. Embedding early warning into electoral calendars is essential for timely response.
- **Community-Led Mediation Platforms:** Elders' forums and peace councils led by civil society provide culturally grounded spaces for de-escalation. In Sierra Leone (2018), such forums prevented escalation by brokering post-election understanding between parties.

Civic Technology and Electoral Transparency

Civic technology, when properly deployed to augment existing processes, emerged as an important enabler of transparency, engagement, and responsiveness in electoral processes. Five key learnings were identified:

- **Digital Civic Education Builds Electoral Trust:** Continuous digital literacy campaigns are essential to counter disinformation and strengthen confidence in electoral outcomes. Initiatives like <u>Penplusbytes DisinformShield</u> taregted online outreach demonstrate that equipping citizens, observers, and journalists with verification skills fosters informed participation. Investment in modular toolkits, interactive training, and demographic-specific infographics is recommended.
- **Integrated Digital Tools Enhance Observation and Engagement:** Tools such as mobile apps, dashboards, and real-time reporting platforms improve data collection, transparency, and public engagement. AfricTivistes' hybrid engagement model highlighted how blending online and offline tools creates a responsive monitoring ecosystem. Embedding such tools into observation missions enhances operational efficiency.
- **Agile Design Responds to Political and Technological Disruption:** In volatile contexts, adaptive civic tech is essential. Democracy Reporting International emphasised modular designs and contingency planning to mitigate censorship or tech failures. Observer groups must anticipate disruptions and regularly update their platforms.
- **Local Capacity Drives Sustainable Civic Tech:** Effective platforms rely on local developers, analysts, and designers who understand the political landscape. Partnering with tech hubs, universities, and incubators builds a pipeline of context-aware, civic-minded technologists essential for maintaining relevance and scalability.
- **Post-Election Utility Ensures Sustainability:** Civic tech tools should extend beyond election day. Platforms that also monitor governance and corruption as seen with Penplusbytes remain relevant year-round. Developers should prioritise multi-use design, allowing tools to support broader democratic accountability and citizen engagement.

Cross-Continental Learning: Drawing from European experiences

Representatives from the EPDE shared their experiences on "fake observation" and other challenges. The following lessons were drawn from EPDE:

- **Peer Learning Strengthens Observer Resilience:** The EPDE–AfEONet exchange demonstrated the value of cross-regional cooperation in enhancing observer strategies, training, and reform advocacy. African and European networks stand to gain from joint innovation and solidarity in the face of shrinking civic space.
- **Hybrid Threats Require Shared Countermeasures:** Both African and European observers face disinformation, cyber manipulation, and authoritarian pushback. Addressing these threats demands adaptive monitoring tools and coordinated strategies to protect electoral integrity.
- **Domestic Observers are Central to Electoral Protection:** With international observation increasingly restricted, domestic observers remain the most effective guardians of democratic processes. Their safety, digital protection, and legal support must be prioritised in fragile contexts.
- **Follow-Up Advocacy is Critical to Reform Impact:** Lack of implementation of observer recommendations is a shared weakness. Institutionalising AU-CSO platforms and African-European advocacy coalitions can bridge this gap and ensure sustained reform engagement.
- **Whole-of-Society Alliances are Essential:** Robust election observation depends on strategic partnerships with media, EMBs, judiciary, and civil society to counter fake observers, amplify impact, and restore public trust in electoral processes.

06. Best practices

The seminar surfaced a series of tested and replicable best practices from across the continent, reflecting what works in enhancing electoral integrity, citizen engagement, and institutional reform. These practices stand as benchmarks for national and regional election observer networks:

- **Sample-Based Observation for Result Verification:** Observer groups in Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, and Malawi successfully employed methodologies like Parallel Vote Tabulation (PVT) to detect inconsistencies and validate official election outcomes. This data-driven approach not only bolstered public confidence but also served as a check against manipulation.
- **Consolidated Electoral Cycle Reporting:** Integrating observations from pre-election, election day, and post-election phases into a single report proved effective in identifying systemic issues. This holistic methodology strengthens advocacy by offering a continuous, evidence-based narrative to drive legal and institutional reforms.
- **Inclusive Participation Strategies:** Namibia's 2024 elections showcased the value of targeted inclusion, with disability-friendly materials and youth ambassador programs increasing turnout by 16%. Embedding such approaches into national policies can sustainably boost participation of marginalised groups.
- **Technology-Enabled Monitoring and Multi-Use Platforms:** AfricTivistes and Penplusbytes demonstrated the power of civic tech—from real-time dashboards and voter education bots to post-election repurposing of platforms for governance tracking. Designing tech tools for multi-phase use increases both impact and sustainability.
- **Civil Society-Led Conflict Mitigation:** Senegal and Sierra Leone offered powerful examples of grassroots interventions preventing electoral crises. Community-led mediation forums and early warning systems supported by regional networks proved crucial in managing pre- and post-election tensions.
- **Legal Anchoring of Observer Recommendations:** Grounding electoral observations and reform recommendations in normative frameworks like ACDEG, ICCPR, and national constitutions significantly increased their legitimacy and policy traction. Legal referencing also enhances the basis for strategic litigation and international advocacy.

07. Gaps and challenges

Despite promising innovations and practices, citizen election observers in Africa continue to face substantial structural and operational challenges that undermine their effectiveness and long-term sustainability. The seminar identified the following priority gaps:

- **Overdependence on Donor Funding:** Many observer groups face financial precarity due to shrinking external support, exemplified by the suspension of USAID funding. This overreliance limits strategic autonomy and undermines long-term planning.
- **Weak Grassroots Legitimacy:** Limited community engagement outside electoral cycles has created a perception of observer groups as elite-driven. This undermines their credibility and reduces their capacity to mobilise public support for reforms.
- **Limited Civic Tech Capacity:** While digital tools are increasingly critical, many observer groups lack the technical expertise and infrastructure to deploy dashboards, electronic result tracking, or AI-enabled analysis effectively.
- **Absence of Structured Follow-Up Mechanisms:** Observation findings are often published without robust frameworks for tracking or enforcing their implementation, reducing their impact on policy and institutional reform.
- **Insufficient Advocacy Translation Skills:** Many CSOs struggle to convert complex legal or technical observations into accessible, persuasive advocacy that resonates with policymakers and the public.
- **Restricted Access and Security Risks:** In authoritarian or fragile contexts, the work of citizen observers has become a dangerous affair. Observers face arrests, detention and intimidation, surveillance, and limited access to critical electoral processes and information. These risks undermine their safety and ability to report impartially.
- **Fragmented Coordination Across Observer Networks:** Domestic and regional observer missions often operate in silos, resulting in inconsistent methodologies, disjointed messaging, and missed opportunities for synergy.

08. Recommendations and advocacy

These recommendations form the foundation for high-level engagement with the African Union, Regional Economic Communities, and national stakeholders. They are designed to advance democratic reform, institutionalise citizen observation, and secure policy traction across the continent. They include:

- **Institutionalise AU and REC Budget Allocations for Citizen Observation:** Advocate for the formal recognition of citizen observation as a continental public good by securing dedicated funding lines within AU and REC budgets. This institutional commitment will ensure sustainability and legitimacy of civic engagement in electoral processes.
- **Operationalise Post-Election Follow-Up Mechanisms:** Push for the establishment of formal, multi-stakeholder platforms at AU, REC, and national levels to track and report on implementation of observation recommendations. Leverage digital tools such as public reform dashboards to enhance visibility, transparency, and pressure for accountability.
- **Embed Citizen Observation in Electoral Legal Frameworks:** Call for the legal recognition of citizen observers through binding instruments and accreditation protocols embedded in electoral laws and regional standards. This will strengthen the role of observers as key actors in electoral reform and democratic oversight.
- **Co-Create Locally Rooted Civic Tech Tools:** Scale up investment in civic tech innovation by promoting partnerships with African universities, tech incubators, and grassroots digital innovators. Focus on tools for real-time reporting, misinformation detection, and results verification, anchored in local languages and user contexts.
- **Advance Inclusive, Volunteer-Driven Observation Networks:** Expand community-based election observation structures led by youth, women, and marginalised groups. Prioritise continuous civic education and build a permanent local presence to overcome the elite-centered critique of observation.
- **Equip Observer Networks with Strategic Advocacy Capacities:** Build cross-disciplinary teams that can translate technical reports into political influence. Equip networks with accessible advocacy toolkits, messaging frameworks, and storytelling tools that resonate with policymakers, media, and the public.

- **Promote Joint Methodology Development and Strategic Coordination:** Establish a continental coordination platform for regional and domestic observers to harmonise tools, synchronise timelines, and adopt complementary messaging—balancing reform-oriented advocacy with institutional diplomacy.

09. Commitments and next steps

The ELS participants agreed on a series of forward-looking commitments to ensure the seminar's outputs translate into sustained reform, targeted advocacy, and systemic impact across the continent. These next steps emphasise structured follow-up, inter-institutional collaboration, and strategic engagement at AU and REC levels:

- **Fast Track the Implementation of Election Observation Recommendations:** Coordinated engagements with the AU and RECs on uptake and implementation electoral reforms should be pursued targeting their available engagement spaces.
- **Submit an Advocacy Memorandum to the AU and RECs:** AfEONet and the Regional Election Observation groups (WEAON, EHORN and ESN-SA) under the AHEAD project consider developing and submitting a consolidated policy brief, anchored on key learnings and policy recommendations from the seminar. This will push for formal recognition and resourcing of citizen observation in AU and REC frameworks. It should target spaces like the AU's Economic, Social and Cultural Council (AU-ECOSOCC), AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) Consultations, ECOWAS Civil Society Engagement,SADC Civil Society Forums and EAC Consultative Dialogues among others.
- **Institutionalise an Annual Follow-Up Forum:** AfEONet through her mandate coordinates an annual continental review platform to assess implementation of observer recommendations, build solidarity, and update stakeholders on policy shifts. This will serve as a feedback loop for citizens, EMBs, and continental bodies.

- **Strengthen Advocacy Coalitions for Civic Space Protection:** Engage AU's Peace and Security Council through the Department of Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS), and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights on safeguarding the civic space for citizen election observers.
- **Leveraging Civic Tech for transparency.** Observer groups and partners committed to investing in civic tech infrastructure, including real-time dashboards and digital civic education tools. There was emphasis on utilising open-source tools and locally developed innovations.

10. Conclusion

The ELS reaffirmed the indispensable role of citizen observation in strengthening electoral integrity and safeguarding democratic norms in Africa. As electoral environments become more complex—marked by shrinking civic space, politicised electoral commissions, and disinformation—citizen observers stand at the frontlines of democratic defence.

By convening diverse electoral actors across the continent, the seminar elevated **practical innovations, grounded strategies, and tested solutions** to support meaningful reform. It also reinforced that citizen observation must move beyond technical reporting to become a sustained engine for political accountability, legal reform, and institutional resilience.

Most importantly, the seminar catalysed renewed momentum for collective advocacy at both the African Union and Regional Economic Community levels. From pushing for dedicated AU budget allocations for citizen observation, to embedding post-election reform mechanisms in AU and REC instruments, the ELS generated an actionable, continent-wide advocacy agenda.

AfEONet and its partners reaffirm their long-term commitment to protecting democratic processes, institutionalising reform monitoring, and advancing people-centered governance. As citizen observation evolves, its core mission remains unchanged: to ensure that the will of the people is respected, and that democracy in Africa is both credible and accountable.

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