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**FOURTH ZONAL WORKSHOP FOR THE
MASS MEDIA IN THE
WEST AFRICAN MONETARY ZONE**

FINAL REPORT

CONAKRY, REPUBLIC OF GUINEA

JUNE 8, 2004

**REPORT OF THE ZONAL WORKSHOP FOR THE MASS MEDIA
IN THE WEST AFRICAN MONETARY ZONE ON
“THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN PROMOTING THE
WEST AFRICAN MONETARY ZONE PROGRAMME”**

1. INTRODUCTION

1. The Fourth Zonal Workshop of the West African Monetary Zone (WAMZ) on the theme “The Role of The Media in Promoting the West African Monetary Zone Programme” organized by the West African Monetary Institute (WAMI) in collaboration with the National Sensitisation Committee (NSC) of Guinea, was held at the Conference Room of the Central Bank of the Republic of Guinea, Conakry, Republic of Guinea on June 8, 2004. The main objective of the workshop was to educate the media on the WAMZ Programme so that, it can disseminate information to the general public in member countries in a professional manner on the subject.

II. ATTENDANCE

2. The workshop was attended by officials from Radio and Television services, the Newsprint, as well as local and international Journalists from The Gambia, Guinea, Ghana, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone, the Coordinators of National Sensitisation Committees and WAMI staff. The list of participants at the Workshop is annexed to this report.

III. OPENING SESSION

3. The opening ceremony was attended by important dignitaries including Honourable Minister of Finance, Hon. Minister of Information, the Governor and Deputy Governor, of the Central Bank of the Republic of Guinea, the Director General of WAMI and Media practitioners from member countries of the WAMZ. Mrs Hadja Bella Diallo, Honourable Minister of Information of the Republic of Guinea chaired the session.

The Governor of the Central Bank of the Republic of Guinea welcomed the Honourable Ministers of Finance, and Information of the Republic of Guinea, the Director General of WAMI and delegates to the meeting. He welcomed delegates on behalf of the President and people of the Republic of Guinea to the Workshop. He alluded to the importance of the Workshop for the mass media as an avenue for ensuring effective sensitisation of the people. According to him, the mass media was well placed to pass the message of the WAMZ on to the populace, once it is well informed on the programme. He congratulated WAMI for its excellent performance at the last WAMZ meetings in Sierra Leone and the Director General for the frankness with which he handled his assignment.

The Honourable Minister of Information of Guinea and Chairperson of the occasion welcomed the Minister of Finance, the Director General of WAMI and delegates to the opening ceremony. She noted that the workshop for the media was critical for effective sensitisation of the populace of the WAMZ. The workshop for media practitioners was ideal as it would ensure that the message of WAMZ was passed through the professionals. The holding of the workshop was an important event which highlighted the role of the media in attaining the goals of the WAMZ. She urged participants to apply themselves to deliberations at the workshop so as to come up with useful recommendations. She indicated that she would be ready to sponsor media participants on sensitisation to the rural areas of the Republic of Guinea. She thereafter declared the workshop open.

1V. FIRST PLENARY SESSION

Mr. Cheick Sylla, Director General, Credit and Exchange, Central Bank of Guinea who chaired the first plenary session, thanked participants for accepting the invitation to the Workshop. He reminded participants that a monetary union, which is often one of the aims of an economic integration process could assist in creating economic benefits through economic stability which is conducive to foreign investment and the enhancement of financial transactions. He remarked that the Guinean franc would soon be replaced by the Eco and that it was important for the challenges to be well explained. Furthermore, he urged the media to assist in sensitising the public on the Eco.

Dr. M. O. Ojo, Director General, West African Monetary Institute presented the first paper at the session on "The Challenges of Introducing the Eco Currency". Dr. Ojo recalled the objective of the West African Monetary Zone, which is to establish a monetary union characterised by a common central bank and a single currency to replace the existing five national currencies. To this end, the West African Monetary Institute was set up to supervise a policy harmonisation programme and take up the day-to-day responsibility for implementing the action plan for monetary unification and eventual establishment of the common central bank for the WAMZ.

Dr. Ojo observed that progress had been made in building the technical frameworks for monetary union, but the macroeconomic performance in the member countries was generally mixed during 2003. The status of compliance with the primary convergence criteria showed that at the end of 2003, all the countries moved down on the convergence scale, except Ghana that improved on its 2002 performance. Inflation remained a major problem in all the WAMZ countries including Guinea that hitherto had low inflation record.

The Director General noted that the macroeconomic performance of the WAMZ was negatively influenced by fiscal dominance, which has remained the main constraint on macroeconomic convergence in the zone. It was in the drive to address this problem that the Forum of Finance Ministers was established. The zone was yet to

benefit fully from the Forum because member countries have not systematically implemented its policy recommendations.

The challenges facing the Authorities on the WAMZ programme were outlined by Dr. Ojo as follows:

- i) Expediting the convergence process through member states' implementation of policies that would enable them achieve a high degree of economic convergence;
- ii) Implementing national sensitisation programme so that the general public and various stakeholders would be adequately informed for ownership and acceptability;
- iii) Discharging financial obligations to ensure speedy implementation of the WAMZ programme;
- iv) Ratification of Legal Instruments to back up agreements among the member countries; and
- v) Determining Final Eligibility and Sustainability of Monetary Union to ensure that countries are eligible for the take-off of the monetary union.

Dr. Ojo also observed that arrangements for introducing the WAMZ common currency, the Eco would necessitate activities that would revolve around piloting national currencies into the common currency. These include: exchange rate mechanism; a unit of account; external value of the Eco and phased introduction of the Eco; payments system development and currency management, among others.

In conclusion, Dr. Ojo noted that the preparation of the zone for the monetary union has received considerable support from all member countries. However, the coming year presents the most challenging phase that will border on: the compliance with the convergence criteria; the implementation of the operational and technical architecture; and the implementation of the national sensitisation programme, among others. These, together with political commitment, the discharge of financial obligations as well as ratification of legal instruments of WAMZ are key factors in the successful introduction of the Eco.

Issues Raised on the Director General's Presentation

1. The paper noted that monetary union may be difficult without convergence. With current problems, how do we attain monetary union on July 1 2005?
2. Guinea did not satisfy all four primary convergence criteria in 2003. What are these criteria that Guinea failed to satisfy?

3. When you go through the convergence criteria, it appears that WAMZ does not need the criteria. Will it not be feasible to review these criteria? For example, can't inflation be limited to single digit of say 8 percent?
4. Capacity building in the various states to strengthen the various national organisations was not mentioned in the paper. Efforts to be deployed by member states to speed up convergence has not been indicated in the paper.
5. The possible ways of meeting the challenges of the Eco was not brought out in the paper.
6. WAMI could initiate actions on having Eco unit or desks in member countries to monitor activities relating to sensitisation on the Eco.
7. The issue of counterfeiting the Eco on its initial introduction was not addressed in the paper.
8. We have a lot of convergence criteria. Is there any way WAMI can intervene to prop up the member countries towards July 1 2005?
9. Why did we choose dollar as our anchor instead of euro? If all five countries did not meet the criteria at the end of June 2005, are we going to proceed with the Union?
10. There are economic and political problems confronting the WAMZ countries. Are we not glossing over these problems by going ahead with monetary union?
11. What mechanism do we have to monitor the performance of WAMZ? Is July 2005 not too ambitious?
12. Is it not better for Guinea to join UEMOA instead of WAMZ since she has more trade relations with the UEMOA?
13. The value of a currency is determined by the quality of production. Many people have moved out of agriculture to the urban areas. Is there a strategy to ensure that the drift is moderated to raise productivity?
14. Capacity building is important to prepare for the management of the common currency. Trade should also be promoted to support the common currency.
15. We have tackled economic issues only and failed to mention political will. In order to satisfy the criteria, we have to exercise discipline and political will.

Responses to the Issues Raised

1. Necessity of Convergence before Monetary Union

The framework of convergence includes a number of issues, macroeconomic convergence, architecture of the monetary union, contributions to the WAMZ programme and policy harmonisation. The convergence issue should be treated in a holistic manner. What is required is the determination to apply the right policy measures. The example of Ghana that moved from zero compliance in 2002 to compliance with 2 criteria in 2003 following disciplined economic management was cited as a good example of consistent commitment to the pursuit of appropriate macroeconomic policies

2. Performance of Guinea

The problems are well diagnosed. The inflation rate has been rising. The fiscal deficit has also been rising with large financing from the Central Bank. These create macroeconomic instability. Guinea has a programme on how to tackle the problems.

3. Review of the Convergence Criteria

WAMI is interested in member countries applying the appropriate policy measures to achieve convergence. This would be the basis for a sound monetary union. The minimum conditions would have to be met.

4. Capacity Building

A lot has been done since the beginning of the WAMZ programme. A number of development partners have offered technical assistance to WAMI. The European Central Bank (ECB) is currently training staff of WAMI and National Central Banks of WAMZ on various issues on monetary policy and central banking.

5. Challenges

The challenges are enormous but they are not insurmountable. The problem of counterfeiting is real but measures are underway to check its occurrence. We have to do a lot before July 1 2005. WAMI undertakes missions to member countries and prepare reports on their economies. This is a critical monitoring avenue available to WAMI.

The inability of member countries to fully pay up the first tranche of the SCF has prevented its operationalisation. The SCF will soon be operationalised as some funding is realised from member countries.

6. Anchor of the ERM

The dollar is used as anchor by the WAMZ because most of the transactions of the WAMZ are denominated in dollar. However, the euro could be considered.

7. Take off of the Monetary Union

According to the decision by the WAMZ authorities, once two or more countries satisfy the convergence criteria, the union would take off. July 2005 would not

be too ambitious if member countries apply themselves to the programme and undertake the right policy measures to attain convergence.

8. Guinea joining the UEMOA

The issue of Guinea joining the UEMOA is political but Guinea has rightly chosen to join the WAMZ.

9. Getting People back to agriculture

This is a structural problem and countries should tackle the problem in their national development programmes.

10. Governance Issues

These are monitored under the other areas of the convergence process in respect of observance of international financial standards.

11. Political will for convergence

Political will is important and critical for undertaking the correct policy measures to achieve convergence. Political commitment is there but it should be fully backed up with concrete actions on the ground.

SECOND PLENARY SESSION

The session on "Promoting the WAMZ Programme. The Role of the Mass Media" was chaired by Mrs. Olubunmi Badejo, Chief Press Secretary, Nigeria Ministry of Cooperation and Integration in Africa. The speaker was Mr. Seydouba Sylla, Coordinator of Guinea's National Sensitisation Committee. Mrs Badejo noted the important role the mass media could play in promoting the WAMZ programme through sensitisation.

Highlights of Presentation

Mr. Sylla reviewed the events leading to the establishment of WAMI to nurture the West African Central Bank. He mentioned that there was need to distinguish among the different media for effective sensitisation. For example, the print media could be useful in sensitisation, but with the high illiteracy rate, a large portion of the population may not be catered for. It is therefore through traditional media that most of the citizens can be sensitised, especially in places where tradition is deeply rooted. To facilitate the traditional media, free movement of people should be facilitated throughout the WAMZ. The electronic media could also be useful. The media could make use of drama on radio or television. Indeed, the radio would have a wider audience and reach the general populace faster. Community based radio could also be important in passing on the WAMZ message. The paper concluded that the media should play its role properly in deploying all facilities within their reach to help in the WAMZ sensitisation programme.

Issues Raised on the Presentation

1. Does WAMI have a comprehensive communication policy for its sensitisation Programme? This is important to ensure that the same message is being carried across the WAMZ.
2. If we continue sensitisation and on July 1 2005, the monetary union is not launched? What will the people feel about the mass media.
3. The work of a Journalist is to inform and entertain. The Journalist should be well motivated to be well disposed to inform the public on the WAMZ programme. WAMI should extend capacity building schemes, if possible, to journalists, in furtherance of the WAMZ programme.
4. Adequate information should be given to Journalists to assist them in information dissemination to the public.
5. Journalists should be trained in other languages to make the sensitisation programme less difficult to implement.
6. It will be more appropriate to adopt a multi-media approach to National Sensitisation.
7. The technical language in WAMI materials should be watered down to enable the masses understand the issues
8. How is the Eco likely to look like?
9. How do we assess the effectiveness of the particular media we are using? What is the feedback mechanism.

Response

1. Incentives for Sensitisation

This could be dealt with at the level of the National Sensitisation Committees (NSCs). The NSCs have budgets, part of which could be deployed for the purpose of giving incentives to Journalists.

WAMI has done its best to ensure that Journalists are carried along. WAMI was able to get some funding to sponsor Journalists to this workshop. WAMI would continue to explore ways and means of motivating Journalists to continue to support WAMI on the WAMZ programme. On information, a lot of publications of WAMI could be assessed on WAMI's website. WAMI's publications could also be obtained from WAMI directly.

2. Language Problem

What is required at the moment is to use the official language in the cities and local languages in the rural areas. Language capacity building is not feasible at the moment.

3. Communication Strategy

Sensitisation is the responsibility of the National Sensitisation Committees (NSCs). It is the NSCs that should design their respective communication strategies to get to all the stakeholders.

4. Sensitisation in the Context of Poor Convergence

We should be optimistic and hope that July 1 2005 would be possible for WAMZ monetary union. It is not only the media that would lose credibility if the union is not launched on July 1 2005 but more significantly the Authority of WAMZ. What is required at the moment was effective sensitisation of the people based on available information.

5. Watering down technical language

This was an issue for the NSCs to handle. The whole purpose of the WAMZ programme should be explained in simple language while leaving out the technicalities.

6. The Look of the Eco

It will be premature to disclose the design of the Eco at the moment in order to starve off the activities of counterfeiters.

7. Feedback Mechanism

There should be a monitoring mechanism at the national level to determine what impact was being made by the NSCs. Each media has a peculiar feedback mechanism.

V. THIRD PLENARY SESSION

Three groups were constituted to handle specific topics. The conclusions and recommendations of the groups were presented at the third plenary session.

The Chairman of the session was Mr. Serign Fye from The Gambia Radio and Television Services. Highlights of group presentations were as follows:

GROUP A: BENEFITS AND COSTS OF THE WAMZ PROGRAMME

Group A examined the topic from three perspectives, namely, Policymakers (Government), Businesses and Grassroots. It was observed that the compliance of member countries with the convergence criteria was not without costs and it was emphasized that the public should be sensitised about the sacrifices ahead before

the benefits will start to accrue. The Group observed that the independence of the Central Bank was critical to curtailing the unimpeded borrowing by the Governments from the Central Bank.

The following recommendations were made:

- i) Governments should operate within national budgets. The success of the WAMZ programme will help member countries to exercise greater discipline in the execution of monetary and fiscal policies.
- ii) Governments should move towards removal of barriers to intra-zone trade and facilitate the implementation of the ECOWAS Trade Liberalisation Scheme (ETLS).
- iii) Member countries were urged to support the Stabilisation and Cooperation Fund, which would help provide assistance to member states who may experience difficulties in achieving and maintaining the convergence criteria.
- iv) Governments were urged to have a healthy operating environment to attract foreign direct investment, which usually brings with it important benefits such as access to markets and transfers of technology and skills.
- v) The general public should be adequately sensitised to ensure that they are in a position to adapt to the psychological and social implications of the new currency.
- vi) The sensitisation message should allay the fears of the public who are thinking of the bigger member countries dominating the smaller ones.
- vii) Member countries should bolster coordination of economic policies against the backdrop of stability.

GROUP B: DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION TO THE GRASSROOTS: CONSTRAINTS AND CHALLENGES

The Group defined the "Grassroots" which they agreed were "individuals in rural and urban areas that lack some social amenities for growth and development". The Group deliberated on the constraints and challenges in disseminating information to the grassroots and highlighted access to information, method and costs of transmission as factors that could impede information dissemination. The Group made the following recommendations after exhaustive deliberations:

- i) All costs relating to production and transmission of publicity campaign materials should be borne by national governments. However to reduce the burden on Governments, private sector participation, particularly

financial institutions should be encouraged through sponsorship programmes.

- ii) NSCs and the Media should effectively use the following avenues for transmitting the messages:
 - Festival activities and traditional ceremonies (Initiation, baptism);
 - Religious platforms (Pastors, Imams, shrines);
 - Meetings (market days, parent/teachers meetings);
 - Theatre shows, local artists and musicians;
 - Opinion Leaders, parliamentarians, local government councillors;
 - Civil societies;
 - Sporting events, and
 - Town criers
- iii) For cost effective messages, NSCs and media practitioners should focus on effective publicity materials and take advantage of the fast growing telecommunications modes of transmission.
- iv) Border guards should be sensitised about the common currency and the contents of the protocol on free movement of persons across borders.
- v) NSCs and Media practitioners should come down to the level of the grassroots for acceptance of the message. The UNICEF strategy of “each one teach one” should be borrowed.
- vi) NSCs and the Media should convey clear and concise messages, for example, the introduction of the common currency is not meant to impose additional taxes, nor to investigate the resources of individuals;
- vii) National Governments should demonstrate political will in order to instil confidence in the grassroots.

GROUP C: MODALITIES FOR ENSURING EFFECTIVE REPORTING ON THE ECO

Group C deliberated on their topic by examining the means by which media practitioners could reach out to themselves before effectively reporting on the Eco. They agreed on the use of the Internet and update of WAMI's website to capture current information. The group also agreed that news can be categorized as I) news worthy for publication as news, and news sent as a press release that will take the form of advertorial. It was agreed that media practitioners should go beyond the surface to get more information to make a press release. The Group's

intervention touched on medium of reporting, sources of information, as well as the provision of human and financial resources to achieve effective reporting.

The recommendation of Group C were as follows:

- i) Empowerment of the NSCs in human and financial resources to ensure that they carry out their activities professionally.
- ii) Media practitioners are to be the focal persons on the NSCs. For continuity, the group was of the view that the same set of journalists be retained and updated with information to keep the flow of information consistent.
- iii) WAMI should have a media unit to facilitate the consistent flow of information. Furthermore the unit could play an effective role by analysing current activities undertaken by WAMI before and after the event;
- iv) Adequate funding should be made available for advertisements and publications;
- v) There should be convergence of language and technical terms should be simplified to allow the grassroots to appreciate the sense of the message;
- vi) Survey methods should be used by NSCs to evaluate the impact of the message to the public;
- vii) Member countries should adopt a common theme song to convey the Eco message, which should be translated into local languages. The theme of such a song could be adopted through competition.

The Chairman thanked the groups for the good reports and other participants for their useful contributions.

VOTE OF THANKS

Mr. Ahmed Oumanu Halid, Media Relations Officer, Ministry of Regional Cooperation and NEPAD moved the vote of thanks on behalf of participants. He expressed appreciation to the Government and people of Guinea, in particular, the National Sensitisation Committee of Guinea for the warm reception accorded delegates, as well as the excellent facilities put at their disposal for the Workshop. He thanked delegates for their fruitful deliberations and expressed the hope that as they return to their various countries, there will be consistent reporting about the progress of the WAMZ programme. Mr Halid also expressed appreciation to the West African Monetary Institute for sponsoring the participation of delegates to the workshop and for the smooth conduct of the Workshop.

VII. CLOSING REMARKS

The Chairman of the closing session, Mr. Sering Fye thanked delegates for their support and meaningful contributions to the proceedings of the Workshop. He noted that the forum provided a platform for fruitful and insightful deliberations. He expressed appreciation to WAMI and the National Sensitisation Committee of Guinea for the quality of presentations, and interactions, which he hoped would be sustained. The Chairman advised the media practitioners to apply the most effective channel to keep the people interested on issues relating to the Eco. The Chairman wished delegates safe journey back to their various destinations, and thereafter, declared the proceedings of the Workshop closed.