Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) 2014-2017 Strategy
1. SUMMARY

West Africa is a region of more than 300 million people. Its relatively short history has been tumultuous, driven in large part by poor and undemocratic leadership and little political will. However, a democratic wave began in the ‘90s and ushered in a new era of democratic gains, propelled by citizens’ demands for accountability and transparency. In spite of these positives, critical institutions remain weak and dysfunctional; citizens’ participation in public affairs continues to face bureaucratic challenges; corruption is pervasive; and human rights violations persist.

During the 2014 to 2017 strategic period, the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) will strategically invest its resources, using its ability to work with both civil society organizations and governmental institutions. The Foundation has designed its fields around the three interdependent pillars of political governance; economic governance; and law, justice and human rights with the following objectives:

a) Strong governance institutions and strengthened civil societies that are democratic, transparent, accountable, and intolerant of impunity;

b) Equitably distributed gains from natural resource exploitation and an effective delivery of public services and;

c) Robust support for and protection of the rule of law, fundamental rights, citizenship and groups exposed to discrimination.

Under political governance, OSIWA will seek to improve the quality and conduct of elections; increase the effectiveness of parliaments; reduce the impact of drug trafficking on governance; strengthen prevention and early warning information systems to reduce militancy and violence; and ensure inclusive constitutional review processes.

Within economic governance, OSIWA will work to increase the effectiveness of natural resource management frameworks; support alternative, ICT and arts-based means for anti-corruption enforcement; and enhance citizens’ social demands for accountability and effectiveness in public service delivery, especially in the health and education sectors.

In law, justice and human rights, OSIWA will work to improve the administration of criminal justice; promote transitional justice mechanisms; increase freedom of and access to information; enhance citizenship rights; and advance the inclusion and legal empowerment of women, youth and persons with disabilities.

In addition to these fields, OSIWA will pursue concepts and initiatives that will standardize the election situation room model; enhance citizens’ participation in local governance and decentralization processes; trigger a renewed focus on regional economic integration; strengthen civil society in West Africa; and provide an avenue for networking and a channel for dialogue among community radios.

After more than a decade of working in West Africa, the present challenges require not only increased effort from OSIWA, but also innovative tools and appropriate interventions. OSIWA will seek to consolidate existing partnerships and stimulate innovative interventions that respond to the broader deep-seated political, socio-
economic factors that manifest as “vested interests” and roadblocks to open society, seize new opportunities and deploy novel methods, including technology, to address open society challenges. OSIWA will employ a multi-pronged approach to trigger and kinetize action and create a culture of anti-impunity in West Africa where democracy is consolidated, accountability is internalized, human security is ensured and rule of law is protected. This strategy outlines in broad detail OSIWA’s strategic plan for the next four years, the rationale for those strategic choices, and the initiatives that OSIWA plans to carry out to meet those objectives.

**OSIWA’s Theory of Change**

![Theory of Change Diagram]

**Ultimately, OSIWA believes that IF citizens are able to participate substantively in decision-making processes, AND governance structures, processes and regional integration mechanisms are strengthened while human rights are protected, THEN West Africa will become a freer, safer, more integrated and more equitable region.**

## 2. FOUNDATION HISTORY AND CONTEXT

OSIWA was established in 2000 to create more vibrant, tolerant and stable democracies in West Africa. It is presently active in ten countries (Benin, Cote d’Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Sierra Leone) with regional headquarters in Dakar, Senegal and country offices in Abuja (Nigeria), Conakry (Republic of Guinea), Freetown (Sierra Leone) and Monrovia (Liberia). OSIWA’s staff includes specialists in areas of political and economic governance and human rights and law, alongside personnel skilled in grants management, finance, monitoring, advocacy, human resource and administration.
Since its founding, OSIWA has supported and advocated for the promotion of open society values in West Africa. OSIWA’s goal is to promote open societies in West Africa, societies where democracy, good governance, the rule of law, basic freedoms, and widespread civic participation prevail. Initially, OSIWA worked in 18 countries comprising the fifteen members of the Economic Community for West African States (ECOWAS), and three additional countries (Cameroon, Chad and Mauritania).

After nearly a decade of work, OSIWA underwent an assessment commissioned by OSF on the areas of strategy development, operational capacities, and governance. The assessment recommended that OSIWA strengthen its relationship with OSF; sharpen its strategy and programming; align structures with strategy; manage growth and change; build strong partnerships within the OSF network; and create space for dialogue between Foundation structures. As a result, OSIWA developed an organizational strategy, narrowed its focus to nine countries and developed a tailored plan for region-wide programs.

Capacities and tools within OSIWA to help seize these opportunities are reflected in the strong partnerships already built with civil society organizations (CSOs) including the media and State institutions. Two key examples of these capacities and tools include the creation of the West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI) and the Election Situation Room (ESR) model. Since its inception in 2005, WACSI, a pioneering institution has built the human, organizational and institutional capacity of civil organizations in the region. OSIWA’s design and implementation of the ESR, an activity that brings together CSOs to monitor elections and address issues or discrepancies in real time, has become a highly sought-after model by actors working on elections in the sub-region and beyond.

**Challenges and Opportunities to Securing an Open Society in West Africa**

West Africa continues to face great democratic and developmental challenges as a consequence of weak governance, poor leadership and, in some case, lack of public institutions capable of performing necessary checks and balances. Security developments continue to cause grave concern, fuelled by persistent corruption and impunity. Widespread poverty and hunger, youth unemployment, lack of access to essential public services, non-inclusive political processes, and mismanagement of resource revenues all pose serious threats to the stability of a sub-region in a seemingly permanent state of volatility and conflict.

However, West Africa has made remarkable progress on democratic and economic development as well as regional integration such that even with these challenges, there are clear opportunities and indicators of ways to improve and expand the governance spaces nationally and sub-regionally. In spite of its limitations, CSOs in many countries have emerged as a structure capable of popular mobilization to promote better governance and check government excesses. There is an increasing appetite for reform by some West African governments, providing an entry point for CSO involvement. These reforms include the creation of watchdog...
institutions and mechanisms of accountability such as anti-corruption commissions, independent electoral commissions, human rights commissions, media regulation authorities, which despite their limitations are increasingly open to civil society engagement. ECOWAS has also increased its influence in member States’ internal democratic processes, which has provided space for civil society participation in national standards-setting, litigation, and institutional reforms.

3. STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE FIELD

As both grant-maker and advocate, OSIWA is keenly aware that our dual role enables us to be agenda-setters both with and of other organizations. In this capacity we can help support, guide and amplify other voices from the field. OSIWA will continue to help direct and collaborate with other actors and work towards designing and building relevant partnerships that help move our programmatic goals and objectives forward. OSIWA will furthermore continue to pursue its role as a “facilitating institution”; one that brings people together in the community and coordinates efforts with key constituents – individuals and organizations who have demonstrated shared commitment to open society values, either through past successes, common values, or likeminded future goals.

Opportunities in the field
There are several opportunities for OSIWA to advance its objectives and help engender a stronger and more open society at both the national and sub-regional levels. Many of these prospects can be facilitated through a complementary partnership with both CSO’s and government institutions and may include such examples as the creation of watchdog institutes and accountability mechanisms (i.e. anti-corruption, electoral and human rights commissions) or even through media regulation authorities. OSIWA realizes that civil society is a particularly key driver for reforms in West Africa and offers great potential to strengthen the demand for greater transparency and social accountability. Thus, our interventions emphasize engaging, connecting and building solidarity with local groups persuaded by our belief that change and innovation comes from citizens. OSIWA further acknowledges the strategic importance and role of governments and their respective institutions. Hence, our support to citizens’ groups as they demand for accountability is complemented by our strategic assistance to government institutions to improve their ability to respond to such demands. We recognize their interdependence is vital for a well-functioning democratic system.

While these opportunities exist for OSIWA’s work to advance, we remain alert to the real complexity of the needs and issues that confront West Africa and the degree to which they require improved response-mobilization across sectors. We work with partners who have either shown successes in the past, are proven to share the same values as OSIWA, or have indicated they can add distinct and strategic value to our work in the region.

1. POLITICAL GOVERNANCE

Political governance in West Africa has known considerable progress in recent decades, but these gains are not irreversible and the new democracies are, at varying degrees, still far from the shore of the established and consolidated democracies. The sub-region is confronted with disputed elections, weak oversight institutions, and inadequate citizens’ participation in public affairs.

The overall goal is to promote inclusive governance processes through support for citizens, especially women, youth and vulnerable groups’ participation in decision-making to ensure transparency and
accountability at the national and local levels. In order to achieve this goal, OSIWA works with established national organizations such as the Centre for Democratic Development in Ghana and Nigeria, the Campaign for Good Governance in Sierra Leone and Forum Civil in Senegal. To increase the chances of impact in tackling the governance challenge at the regional level, strategic alliances has been formed with ECOWAS (Electoral Assistance Unit and ECONEC), the Mano River Union and the West African Civil Society Forum. Think Tanks and research and advocacy groups – such as International Crisis Group (ICG), CODESRIA – are also partners in this endeavor. OSIWA’s work in political governance will be characterized by the following work areas.

a) Improve the quality and conduct of elections
Elections continue to be a reason for contention and instability in the sub-region. Those charged with managing them are often ill-equipped and insufficiently prepared for the task. Those seeking to be elected – often with weak campaign platforms – toe party lines and exacerbate tensions by urging supporters to vote along ethnic lines. Furthermore, recent studies and experiences in the sub-region have revealed that some of the major threats to elections management include the cost of elections, validity of elections equipment, voters’ registries, Diaspora votes, security forces’ roles and responsibilities in elections, and accessibility for marginalized groups and persons with disabilities. OSIWA will improve the quality and conduct of elections in West Africa and address electoral issues through the following:

- **Increase the effectiveness of Election Management Bodies (EMBs):** Increase cooperation between national and regional institutions charged with the management of elections.
- **Heighten citizens’ participation and monitoring of elections:** Proliferate the use of the Election Situation Room (ESR) model and support innovative interventions aimed at increasing citizens’ awareness and knowledge of the electoral process (i.e. how it works, who the candidates are, what their platforms are, how much they’ve fulfilled their campaign promises, etc).
- **Work to reduce major threats on elections management in the sub-region** including but not limited to, electoral dispute resolution, security forces’ roles and responsibility in electoral management, and the inclusion of vulnerable groups (women, persons with disabilities, etc.). OSIWA will work with EMBs and users of the ESR model to develop mechanisms to address violence in the electoral process.

b) Increase the effectiveness of Parliaments
The democratization process of the ‘90s has resulted in the legislature of a number of West African countries playing a more assertive role of representation, law-making, and oversight on the activities of the executive. In many situations however, absence of independence, lack of capacity, and pervasive corruption have been obstacles to a more effective legislature. OSIWA’s contribution to the improvement of the effectiveness of Parliaments within the sub-region will seek to:

- **Strengthen Parliaments’ capacities** while accounting for specific country’s parliament’s needs.
- **Improve citizens’ participation** in the work of Parliaments through support for CSO-MP consultations and advocacy for reforms.

c) Reduce the impact of drug trafficking on governance
In recent years, financial flows from the illicit drug trade have been invested in the political sphere with the aim of eroding the rule of law. OSIWA’s contribution to the fight against this phenomenon in the sub-region will support initiatives that draw connections between drug policy reform and human rights, on the one hand, and between drug policy reform and good governance, on the other hand. To address the drug trafficking issue, OSIWA will:
Generate greater understanding about the impact of drug trafficking on governance and work with civil society to produce recommendations to address the issue.

Support CSOs to mobilize actors, facilitate public debate and educate the public on the impact of drugs in the sub-region particularly as related to governance, health and human rights.

d) **Strengthen prevention and early warning information systems to reduce militancy and violence**

Militancy and insurgency is on the rise in West Africa as groups such as Boko Haram threaten to destabilize countries and the entire region. Another major concern is recent crisis in Mali which has refocused attention on the issue of militancy and insurgency as well as amplified the need for constant monitoring and analysis of security trends. Such conflicts in the region have also resulted in serious human rights abuses against civilians and CSOs and national human rights institutions lack the necessary skills to advance accountability and justice for the victims. Working with specialized organizations like ICG, KAF, and other human rights organizations, OSIWA will seek to address security and peace challenges by supporting initiatives that will:

- Deepen understanding of the ongoing crisis and potential threats to peace and security in the sub-region, especially in Mali and the Sahel region.
- Disseminate available information to key stakeholders and advocate for reforms both within countries or at regional or sub-regional levels.
- Work with government and civil society to develop and/or monitor progressive rules of engagement for security agencies involved in tackling militancy.
- Push for effective civilian and judicial oversight on security operations especially in areas where there are credible cases of abuse, such as in Nigeria.

e) **Ensure inclusive constitutional review processes**

A large number of countries in the sub-region are presently undertaking (or are about to undertake) comprehensive constitutional reviews, while others are expected to make sectorial amendments. OSIWA will use this opportunity to support greater civil society involvement in the constitutional reform processes. A specific focus will be placed on Mali where OSIWA will support the Constitutional reform process and conduct advocacy to ensure that the real issues are debated, and that the Constitution contains provisions to keep Mali a secular, open, and democratic state where the rule of law prevails.

2. **ECONOMIC GOVERNANCE**

Governance of West Africa’s economy is intricately connected to the future of democracy, peace and stability in the sub-region. Natural resources play a major role as an economic mainstay in many countries. However, corruption and lack of accountability constitute major bottlenecks to accruing benefits from the resource revenue flows to a majority of the citizens. Government - especially the executive arm - uses its enormous powers and authority to control and influence its other arms. For example, it uses the ‘allocative’ powers to control oversight functions of the Legislature/Parliament and ‘appointive’ powers over the functioning of the Judiciary.

The overall goal is to support participatory, transparent and accountable management of natural and public resources to ensure equitable distribution of national wealth, sustainable and environmentally-friendly development. This pillar will also seek to address systemic and procedural deficiencies and inefficiencies in States’ management of economic affairs, by ensuring that citizens play an active role in shaping and monitoring the actions and results of Government. Achieving this requires innovative multi-stakeholder interventions to strengthen resource management and allocation to respond to citizens’ needs. Additional interventions will link accountability to efficiency and service delivery in critical sectors for empowering
citizens (e.g. education and health) and strengthening human security – especially food security both in the context of governance of agricultural sector and climate change. Strategic alliance has been developed with established networks such as Publish What You Pay (PWYP) and Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), national litigation, advocacy and policy research organizations such as the Integrated Social Development Centre (ISODEC) and Centre for Public Interest Law (CEPIL) in Ghana, Rice and Rights Foundation (Liberia) Coalition for Transparency and Accountability in Education (COTAE) (Liberia), Citizen Budget Information Technology Network (BudgIT) in Nigeria. Existing partnerships with ECOWAS, development and monitoring agencies such as OXFAM and Transparency International will be further nurtured in advancing social accountability and economic governance. More specifically, OSIWA will achieve its goal under this pillar through the following work areas.

a) Increase the effectiveness of Natural Resource Management frameworks
As much of the rest of the continent, West Africa is endowed with numerous natural resources: Nigeria is the largest producer of crude oil, Guinea is the largest producer of bauxite, Niger is the largest producer of uranium, while Ghana is the second largest producer (after South Africa) of gold. The exploitation of these resources contributes significantly to the export earnings of these countries, although the net earnings may not be as significant after considering the generous incentives given to mining firms (i.e. permission to retain at least 75% of earnings in offshore accounts for the purchase of equipment, machinery, etc.). Thus, improving the management of natural resources must not only look at the redistribution of the gains earned, but also at maximizing those gains through contractual terms that benefit the population. Implicit here is the management of the adverse effects of the exploitation, i.e. on local communities and on the environment. To improve management of natural and mining resources so that they become a catalyst for sustainable growth in the sub-region, OSIWA will pursue interventions that will ensure the effective implementation of international, regional and national frameworks on natural resource management. OSIWA will assess the implementation of the Extractives Industries Transparency Index (EITI) and the Publish What You Pay (PWYP) frameworks in Guinea, Ghana, Liberia, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Senegal to determine compliance, particularly in those countries where implementation has proved difficult. The Foundation will also work for the adoption and implementation of other regional and international frameworks and initiatives such as the Africa Mining Vision and the ECOWAS mineral development policy – soon to be a code- and then use them as a platform for engagement with diverse stakeholders on resource governance. Finally, OSIWA will engage mining communities and support CSOs in Ghana, Nigeria and Senegal to demand effective management of resources, monitor this management, and mobilize them to pay attention to how the gains from these resources are redistributed.

b) Support alternative means for Anti-Corruption enforcement
Corruption is a phenomenon that has proven a bottleneck to the achievement of inclusive economic growth in West Africa and that continues to deny the majority of the sub-region’s populations from accessing basic public services. Governments (in their capacity), CSOs and activists have tried to tackle, including the adoption of some of the most comprehensive anti-corruption frameworks. However, the implementation of these frameworks remains limited, and corruption continues to grow. The phenomenon has become even more complex and more deeply rooted in regional and international networks. While OSIWA will continue to utilize more traditional methods to fight corruption such as working through governments and within international frameworks, the Foundation will henceforth also focus its efforts against impunity and corruption through the agency of citizens. In this vein, it will prioritize the provision of targeted support to the creation and strengthening of citizens’ movements and credible opinion leaders to amplify demand for accountability. We will promote partnerships between the media and civil society to improve the quality of information available for advocacy and engagement with government institutions. Additionally, special attention will be
paid to using media and the arts (documentary films, drama, folklore, music, and reality radio programs) to advance anti-corruption and anti-impunity messages. During the 2014-2017 strategic period, OSIWA will:

- **Strengthen government practices and anti-corruption institutions** including regional frameworks and national anti-corruption institutions (ACIs), and bridge gaps with international standards
- **Support the development of ICT and culture-based** tools for social action against corruption
- **Support peer learning and information-sharing** across countries on anti-corruption efforts.

c) **Enhance citizens’ social demands for accountability and effectiveness in public service delivery, especially in the health and education sectors**

Effective delivery of public services is critical to the realization of economic and social rights. Limited and poor delivery of public services has contributed to poverty and underdevelopment in the sub-region. To respond to the socio-economic needs of West African citizens, an effective and efficient delivery of public services is necessary. For this strategy period, OSIWA will work to address the quality gap in public service delivery in the health and education sectors. To do this OSIWA will:

- **Develop and strengthen** collaboration among stakeholders (citizens groups, consumers associations, regulatory bodies) to effectively regulate, monitor and demand accountability from service providers and respond to challenges impeding service delivery.
- **Reform and develop national and regional policies** and framework on public service delivery.

3. **LAW, JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

The political and economic governance arrangements in West Africa affect the enjoyment, promotion and protection of basic rights, freedoms and liberties of its citizens. The need for the rule of law (citizen-centered laws, access to justice, human rights, respect, etc.) could not be more urgent, given the current instability in the Sahel and the resultant immeasurable suffering and tragic human fallout. The equitable dispensation of justice throughout West Africa remains an unattained aspiration. The limited capacity of national justice and human rights institutions; insufficient implementation and enforcement of legal norms and decisions; limited awareness and access of citizens are all factors which account for this unrealized aspiration.

The **overall goal** is to promote equal access to fair and independent justice in order to ensure adequate protection and enforcement of human rights of the populations and in particular the rights of women, youth and persons with disabilities. The struggle for greater transparency and accountability for human rights abuses and justice needs to occur at multiple, inter-penetrating levels: local, national, and international. A key element in doing this is a vigorous civil society and independent national institutions with the knowledge and training needed to call governments to account. OSIWA focuses its work in this field on building the capacity of these local and national organizations (such as the Ligue Ivorienne des Droits de l'Homme in Cote d’Ivoire, Mêmes Droits pour Tous in Guinea, Actions for Genuine Democratic Alternatives in Liberia and Center for Accountability and Rule of Law in Sierra Leone) to pressure their own governments for accountability and reform. At the regional level, OSIWA will continue its constructive engagement with the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, and at the sub-regional level, the ECOWAS Community Court of Justice, the West African Network of National Human Rights Institutions to address rule of law and human rights - key to better governance, long-term stability, and peace. OSIWA will achieve the goal of the Law, Justice and Human Rights pillar through the following work areas.

a) **Improve administration of justice, with emphasis on criminal justice**
Redress, in all its forms, is a core agenda for a just and equitable society. Lack of access to justice undermines the possibility of equality in society, which is a key tenet of human rights and indeed that of the rule of law. However, the administration of justice faces a myriad of challenges. These challenges imply that many citizens - and mainly the poor, vulnerable and marginalized majority - are unable to access justice. OSIWA, together with OSJI, will work to improve pre-trial justice and advocate for penal reforms in selected countries through:

- Support pro bono initiatives, legal aid, and police duty solicitor schemes to improve the quality of legal representation and protection of accused persons.
- Support the use of cutting-edge information technology software to aid coordination amongst various institutions working on criminal justice issues.

b) Promote transitional justice mechanisms and address challenges posed by international criminal justice

Two seemingly contradictory tendencies currently define the challenges for transitional justice in Africa. On one hand, struggles for democratic, legitimate governance reveal a deep-seated yearning for justice and accountability. On the other hand, the deployment of international justice mechanisms - especially the ICC - confronts a mixture of suspicion, indifference and resistance from different stakeholders. These tendencies necessitate careful thinking about how to restart constructive work, particularly in West Africa where many countries remain in an early post-conflict stage and are undergoing truth and reconciliation processes to render justice where it is deserved and to reunite divided populations. To address these challenges, OSIWA will

- Support innovative interventions that address present challenges on the ground and include new realities of international justice to contribute to these efforts.
- Contribute to ongoing transitional justice processes and truth and reconciliation initiatives and oversee effective CSO engagement in promoting reconciliation in Cote d’Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia and Mali.

c) Increase freedom of and access to information as well as media freedom

Access to Information (ATI) and Freedom of Information (FOI) are two of the most fundamental values in a democratic system. In addition to allowing for an environment where transparency and accountability thrive, they allow for a multiplicity of perspectives and encourage debate. Relentless advocacy by OSIWA has already proven successful: a number of focus countries (Guinea, Liberia, Niger and Nigeria) have adopted FOI laws. Similarly, Liberia and Nigeria have adopted ATI laws. However, adoption is only a means to an end and work remains to be done on adopting these laws in other countries of focus. We must also remain vigorous in our efforts to ensure that those countries who have adopted actually adhere to these laws.

In the 2014-2017 strategic period, OSIWA will advocate for the passage of FOI laws in Benin, Cote d’Ivoire, Ghana, Senegal and the adoption of ATI laws in the same countries plus Guinea and Niger. Furthermore, we will monitor adherence to and implementation of the FOI laws in Liberia, Niger, Guinea, Sierra Leone and Nigeria, where they have already been adopted. And finally, we will develop the capacity of journalists and media representatives while promoting initiatives on press freedom and media pluralism.

d) Enhance citizenship rights and social cohesion

Citizenship is at the center of instability across many West African countries. OSIWA will trigger national dialogues across countries such as Cote d’Ivoire, Guinea, Mali and Nigeria. In Sierra Leone and Liberia, OSIWA will advocate for the inclusion of citizenship rights in their respective constitutions and in other
countries, support the review of citizenship laws to enhance inclusiveness and protection of rights. Litigation will be used to test and reform retrogressive laws that impinge on citizenship.

e) **Advance the inclusion and legal empowerment of women, youth and persons with disabilities**

Despite being signatories to a number of international conventions and treaties, countries in the sub-region continue to report limited progress in promoting the rights of various groups. OSIWA will advance the rights of youth and persons with disabilities, ensuring that they are included and that their voices are represented in the public and political spaces. OSIWA will further build, strengthen and sustain the capacity of human rights groups to effectively and consistently monitor, report, document and advocate for the rights of women, youth and other vulnerable groups.

**2014 will present an opportunity** for OSIWA to deepen these partnerships to help achieve our goals. Of particular emphasis will be the questions, “*What have we learned?*” “*What are we learning?*” and “*How can we use these lessons, be they failures or successes, to improve our results and maximize our impact?*” Collaborations among our partners will also be encouraged while support from OSF Network programs, such as the Justice Initiative, International Women’s Program, Right to Information and OSF Youth Initiative will be critical to achieving the objectives of these partnerships/interventions.

### 4. OSIWA’S INITIATIVES

In the 2014-2017 strategic period OSIWA will further pursue five of its own initiatives. They will be promoted through the use of technology (especially new media), evidence-based interventions and a gender and youth-focused approach, whenever possible. OSIWA will rely on five main tools to carry out its projects, including grant-making, advocacy, litigation, strategic research, and partnership-building. OSIWA’s 2014-2017 initiatives include the following:

a) **Standardize the Election Situation Room Model**

OSIWA will build the institutional capacity of the ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC) to fulfill its mandates, those being to assist member states in managing their elections (both in the pre-election management period and in the prevention and response to post-electoral violence), and to become a platform of best practices and experience-sharing among the sub-regions’ Election Management Bodies (EMBs). OSIWA will engender ownership of the Elections Situation Room (ESR) model by ECONEC such that it is employed as a tool and as the standard for elections monitoring in the sub-region. ECONEC and OSIWA have been working closely together and ECONEC’s ownership of the ESR will heighten the credibility of the tool and propagate its ‘automatic’ deployment in ECOWAS member countries undergoing an election. In contrast to traditional election observation missions which largely document elections-related events and, at the end of elections, draft reports, the ESR provides a platform for CSOs to deploy a rapid response to issues and weaknesses as they emerge during the elections. It is designed to ensure that beyond observation, civil society is able to play a more significant role in crisis early warning, crisis management, and the constructive engagement of relevant stakeholders in the electoral process in order to ensure credible elections. So far, the model has been implemented in Nigeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Senegal, Mali and beyond. In 2015, there will be key elections in a number of West African states including Guinea, Nigeria and Cote d’Ivoire. These elections will make or break not only the respective countries but the entire sub-region. It is important that democratic gains are not allowed to retrogress. 2014 will be a crucial year to plan and prepare for these elections. OSIWA will lay the foundation that will enable it to operationalize the ESR in Guinea, Cote d’Ivoire and Nigeria for the 2015 elections. OSIWA staff have provided technical expertise in a number of countries
not just in West Africa but also in East and Southern Africa. In 2014 and 2015, we seek to provide technical support for the conduct of the ESR within and without the sub-region. Along the same lines, OSIWA will promote innovative efforts, such as the Mackymeter, that allow citizens to monitor the campaign promises of their elected authorities. It is important that we ensure that CSOs continue to monitor the campaign promises of elected officials and make them accountable for their actions. In 2014, our key progress objective will be to ensure that ECONEC adopts the ESR and we will work with them to ensure we are prepared for the 2015 elections.

b) Enhance citizens’ participation in Local Governance and Decentralization processes in select countries

Many West African countries are characterized by an over-centralization of power at the national level. Legal frameworks and policies for decentralization are lacking and, where they do exist, are poorly implemented. Where some semblance of governance exists at the local level, there are few mechanisms to ensure the actual delivery of services and even fewer mechanisms to monitor, evaluate and report (i.e. maintain checks and balances) the performance of local leaders. Often, citizens have little awareness about the responsibilities and duties of their local government – this and the consistent lack of performance or delivery of public services has resulted in apathy and weak citizens’ participation. OSIWA will advance and deploy strategies and tools aimed at boosting citizens’ participation in governance processes at the local level by strengthening the functionality of local governance structures and processes for effective service delivery. OSIWA will also work to bring about greater awareness and greater compliance with these structures and processes. More specifically in 2014, we will work to ensure effective citizen engagement in public service delivery, especially in education and health at the local level in Senegal; push for greater understanding and effective implementation of the Local Government Act in Sierra Leone and improved local development plans in Niger; and increase involvement and quality of participation of persons with disability in district assemblies and decentralized structures in Ghana. These activities have already been commenced and in 2014 we hope to build on the on-going activities.

c) Trigger a renewed focus on regional economic integration

Presently, West Africa is experiencing two regional economic integration projects: ECOWAS and WAEMU, which are meant to foster regional structural interdependence by harmonizing economic policies and laws; promoting joint investment in common projects; and increasing exchanges of goods, capital and labor. The region is experiencing a renewed impetus by civil society, academics and institutions demanding for a new, endogenous and people-centered economic growth model. Regional integration will be a key factor in the necessary transformation of West Africa’s economies and will provide the opportunity to integrate global value chain systems, and address the crucial issues of job creation, infrastructure development, economic diversification, economic equality and justice, service industry development, the green economy and others. It will also bequeath, unto West African governments, stronger bargaining power so as to tilt the global economic playing field in favor of local economies, and reduce the ability of large corporations or IFIs to exert undue influence on national development priorities and decisions. This concept will allow OSIWA to capitalize on the opportunity to support progressive civil society voices and economic thought-leaders in order to initiate dialogues focused on rethinking West Africa’s economic growth models, the outcome of which will be the proposal of alternative and endogenous pathways that are reliant not only on regional markets but also on West African competencies, ambitions, and people. ECOWAS was set up as a regional organization to push for economic integration but in recent years its focus has shifted largely to political matters to the extent that it has neglected the issue of economic integration. Through a series of meetings, research, articles, etc. we seek to help refocus ECOWAS. Economic issues are the root causes of many of the conflicts in West Africa.
Unless and until ECOWAS begins to deals with the issue of economic integration these conflicts will continue to fester and will simply be moving from one country to another. We have already held discussions with ECOWAS and with a number of leading CSOs in the sub-region. There is immense appetite for this project. OSIWA will act as a catalyst to trigger this process. Our Economic Governance team has the capacity not only to convene such a meeting but also to write op-eds and commission and use research for advocacy. In 2014, we will seek to commission and make available substantive research on regional economic integration, organize a high level multi-stakeholders conference and follow up on the recommendations and outcomes of the conference. Our staff and partners will publish a number of op-eds in leading West African magazines to help highlight the issue.

d) Enable the West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI) to strengthen the institutional and operational capacities of civil society organizations

In the West African sub-region, civil society has played a significant role in ensuring good governance, transparency and accountability, widespread civic participation, respect for fundamental human rights, social equity and the empowerment of marginalized groups. Civil society in the region has served as a counterweight and has provided some checks and balances to State power. But many civil society organizations, particularly those nascent and or birthed out of citizens’ movements, are ill-prepared. OSIWA will facilitate the ability of WACSI to meet the capacity development needs of civil society organizations through the development of in-house and outreach training programs and other demand-driven services. WACSI was established by OSIWA as a “spin off” with the mandate to strengthen the institutional and technical capacities of CSOs in West Africa to engage in policy analysis, formulation and influencing, and enhancing their effectiveness, efficiency and professionalism. WACSI is the only Institute of its kind in the region and the demand for its services are high. Thus, it is essential to maintain its ability to continue to provide, effective, efficient and high-quality services in order to meet the critical institutional development needs of civil society in the region. We have included this as a concept and not fealty because we work very closely with WACSI. Our staff act as resource persons for the various courses that WACSI organizes. Our advocacy, grant, finance and monitoring & evaluation staff have regularly served as facilitators for WACSI. Whilst WACSI generally provides training, mentoring and internships for the entire region, in 2014 we will seek to focus in a number of countries where civil society remains particular weak. These countries include Guinea, Benin, Cote d’Ivoire, Niger and Mali. We will seek to increase the number of CSOs in these countries undergoing training and mentoring. We will also help WACSI by assisting them to identify some of the leading CSO actors who can provide first-hand practical help to train other CSOs. OSIWA is also helping WACSI generate funds and become more autonomous.

e) Develop a hub for networking among radio stations and provide a channel for dialogue in the sub-region

‘S/he who tells your story owns you,’ the saying goes. In a sub-region where the transmission of information is dominated by non-West African interests, OSIWA will operationalize the West Africa Democracy Radio (WADR) to tell the story of West African peoples, as can only be told by the West Africans who live those stories. Stories told will not only speak of the challenges of the region, but will speak of the hopes of its people in a balanced, relevant and appropriate way. WADR will also serve as a hub for public, private and community radios which would facilitate the exchange of information as well as defend the ideals of open, transparent and accountable governance across the sub-region. WADR would further present and analyze development-related information from a plurality of perspectives and encourage the sharing and exchange of ideas and experiences. WADR is a trans-territorial radio station set up to facilitate the exchange of development information between and among countries in West Africa, including Mauritania, Chad and Cameroon. In recent years, the station has faced a number of challenges primarily relating to its management. OSIWA has
been working closely with the radio station. With help from the Media program, we have developed a plan of action for the next two years. A new management has been recruited. In 2014, we seek to increase and broaden the audience of WADR in the sub-region and strengthen its relationship with various community radio stations. We intend to use WADR and its various community radio partners as a key vehicle to disseminate messaging on issues such as climate change and food security. OSIWA staff and partners are regular contributors to the programs of WADR.

**Food Security**

OSIWA will focus on the issue of food security in West Africa. Challenges in this area have evolved in Africa. According to the 2012 *State of Food Insecurity in the World*, jointly published by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP), Africa was the only region where the number of hungry persons grew over the period between 2010 and 2012, from 175 million to 239 million. In West Africa particularly, it is one of the only areas in the world where agricultural yields are actually declining, resulting in external dependency, vulnerability to market shocks, adverse environmental conditions, rising food prices, chronic food shortages, and even famine. Other challenges include the continuing impact of climate change; the persistence of conflicts; the growth of bio-fuels and global agri-businesses; the existence of challenges in access to markets; the tenuity of land tenures; the degradation and infertility of soils; the scarcity of financing; the stagnancy of technology; and the inadequacy of existing policies that address the issue.

Cognizant of these challenges, OSF has embarked upon a Food Security and Climate Change Framework which aims to strengthen food security in Africa in the face of climate change in ways that advances the participation and protects the interests of farmers and marginalized constituencies, particularly smallholders, women, pastoralists, the urban poor, rural youth and the elderly.

For its part, OSIWA recognizes that it can realistically only address few of the challenges and thus, will look to leverage other OSF programs including the Soros Economic Development Fund (SEDF), the Media and Documentary Programme, and the Higher Education Support Programme (HESP) to capitalize on the various opportunities to engage in this issue.

However, the uniqueness of the OSIWA approach in supporting grounded, evidence-driven projects will ensure OSIWA’s contribution to the food security and climate change framework, outlined as follows:

**A. STRENGTHEN AGRICULTURAL AND FOOD SYSTEMS**

To strengthen agricultural and food systems, OSIWA will first build knowledge and support research with smallholders and marginalized communities. The Foundation will promote participatory applied research and knowledge sharing between academics on the one hand, and smallholder and marginalized communities on the other hand, with a focus on women and youth. This will be done by supporting initiatives such as the Including Smallholders in Agricultural Research for Development (INSARD), or partnering with university programs to review academic curricula agricultural training and research. OSIWA will support collaboration among research centres of selected public tertiary institutions to undertake prioritized/specific research to document and raise awareness about existing community/local expertise. Such research will reduce knowledge gaps and will be used to advocate for improved policies on climate change adaptation and sustainable land management at the local, national, regional and global levels. Finally, OSIWA will support
scientific and action-research that will develop, communicate and implement climate change adaptation strategies.

Second, OSIWA will support initiatives that will increase the **production of value chains and the participation of smallholders in those value chains**. Higher food demands will require increased yields but perhaps more importantly, reduced wastage resulting from inefficient storage and processing facilities. OSIWA will also invest in community-based innovation incubation centres that will design efficient production tools which will assist farmers in the production, processing and (if desired) transformation of primary agricultural produce.

**B. SHAPE LAWS, POLICIES AND GOVERNANCE**

To shape laws, policies and governance systems, OSIWA will join forces with stakeholders working in relevant sectors of the economy. Our interventions will **support citizen action for transparency, and accountability in land and food policies** by supporting the mobilization of small-holding farmers and their communities to advocate for greater accountability in agricultural policy development and land tenure systems, particularly in the context of land acquisitions. In the Sahel region, OSIWA will support advocacy for sustainable land management practices as well as improved protection of pastoralist farmers.

This requires the development of a regional and harmonized market in which countries are able to leverage their comparative advantage and increase the regional trade of commodities and processed foods. To contribute to this, OSIWA will advocate for the adoption and implementation of relevant and appropriate provisions, in national contexts, of the **ECOWAS Regional Agricultural Investment Plans and the West African Agricultural Policy (ECOWAP)**.

To amplify the voice of vulnerable or marginalized constituencies, thus legitimizing and increasing the effectiveness of their advocacy and policy reform agendas, OSIWA will support initiatives that will **reframe perceptions and build the agency of smallholder farmers and marginalized communities**. Using documentaries, news, social media, ICTs, investigative journalism to give voice to civil society, communities and smallholder farmers, OSIWA will help highlight the impact of poor governance on food security and push for a “paradigm shift” in rural and agricultural development policies.

**5. CONCLUSION**

The next four years (2014-17) in West Africa offers an important opportunity for political and economic development. As several countries move further towards building more democratic, peaceful and accountable states, OSIWA will continue to work alongside its partners, supporting the citizens, governments and institutions they are aligned with, to ensure our role as advocate and grant-maker is helping advance the concept of open society in West Africa.

OSIWA works in a complex region. There are fragile states, corruption, impunity, unemployment, insecurity, and drug-trafficking, just to name a few, that will continue to pose serious threats to West Africa’s stability. OSIWA is aware of these risks, but not discouraged by them. We know that fighting against these dangers requires a dedicated and creative approach and a forging of strategic alliances. By collaborating with key partners on the ground and engaging with specialized international organizations, we can take a more focused and effective approach to our programming efforts. It is our hope, mission and intent that by
supporting like-minded institutions and projects in the field and by pursuing our own specific institutional objectives – ones that ensure greater electoral management, enhanced citizens’ participation, better accountability and improved awareness of citizens’ rights and the rule of law – we can move even closer towards building the freer, safer, more integrated, democratic and equitable West Africa we envision in our future.