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Final Report: Cost of Politics Regional Conference

The Case of West Africa: Making Politics Affordable

Research Programme: The Cost of Politics

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2. Foreword

From 31 January to 1 February 2017 at the Sheraton Hotel in Abuja, Nigeria, Westminster Foundation for Democracy hosted 66 experts, academics and politicians from four countries in West Africa – Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, and Senegal – for WFD’s first Regional Cost of Politics Conference. Together they addressed a major challenge in the region: how to stem the rising costs of engaging in politics in West Africa. With the express goal of developing a platform for making politics more affordable, the conference provided an important forum to identify common trends in the region and develop a regional framework for tackling persistent challenges that candidates face, from securing their nomination to campaigning and maintaining a parliamentary seat – and their associated costs.

In this report, we present a summary of key themes and findings discussed throughout the conference. The report also includes a comprehensive set of recommendations that were agreed upon by all participants to address the regional challenges related to the cost of politics. The recommendations do not serve as a template for tackling the rising costs of politics in the region, but instead provide a set of general guidelines that can be utilised by experts throughout the region, who would then determine what areas and issues to focus on in line with their country’s unique circumstances, as well as its political, legal and regulatory system. This guide also opens the door to cross-regional communication and cooperation in attempting to solve common problems in the region.



3. List of Acronyms

AD – Alliance for Democracy

APC – All People’s Congress

APP – All People’s Party

APR – Alliance for the Republic

CERAG – Centre for Research Action on Governance

CoP – Cost of Politics

CSOs – Civil Society Organisations

DFID – Department for International Development

ECOWAS – Economic Community of West African States

EMB – Election Management Body

FIRS – Federal Inland Revenue Service

IGR – Institute for Governance Reform

INEC – Independent National Electoral Commission

IPAC – Inter-Party Advisory Council

MP – Member of Parliament

N - Naira

NDC – National Democratic Congress

NPP – New Patriotic Party

PDP – People’s Democratic Party

PDS – Senegalese Democratic Party

PNC – Peoples National Convention

PS – Socialist Party

PWD – Person Living with Disabilities

SLPP – Sierra Leone People’s Party

UK – United Kingdom

USD - United States Dollar

WFD - Westminster Foundation for Democracy

4. Background & Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that politics and democracy cost money. States must set aside budgets to run elections. Political parties must nominate candidates for elected office, facilitate governance through orderly policy-making and serve as watchdogs over other parties and the government. More generally, the process of establishing democratic political institutions requires adequate funds.

To cope with this need while ensuring transparency and accountability, most countries have adopted legislative acts that regulate the funding of political parties and candidates running for public office. This includes establishing auditing and anti-corruption agencies that are tasked with monitoring political expenditures and holding political actors to account for any transgressions. The purpose is to provide a level playing field that will guarantee equal access to all those who seek public office.

In principle, this system should work. The reality, however, highlights an alarming situation.

The monetisation of the political process has made the cost of politics so high in most countries that the means to secure election has excluded most from the decision-making process, has encouraged corruptive practices, and has undermined the capacities of regulatory regimes.

In response to this, WFD initiated a research programme that seeks to characterise the concept of “the cost of politics” by analysing the critical issues that underpin it and identifying solutions and best practices with the express goal of developing strategic frameworks to tackle the issue and mitigate its effects.

In March 2016, WFD commissioned a policy-focused research project on the cost of parliamentary politics in Nigeria, Uganda, Ghana, Kyrgyzstan, Macedonia, and Ukraine. The outcome of the research pointed to increasing high cost of politics; described by a respondent as a root cause of corruption in governance. On July 18, 2016, WFD convened a conference in London, during which the findings of the policy research were presented, with specific emphasis on the cost of getting on the ballot; campaign costs; the cost of sitting in parliament, as well as, good practices. In addition to generating data on the cost of politics, the outcome of the policy research necessitated the need to bring critical stakeholders together to objectively discuss the cost of politics and proffer feasible best practices to address this concern.

For this reason, WFD convened a regional cost of politics conference which would enable stakeholders from the West African sub-region to discuss the problem and proffer solutions to this rising phenomenon. The participating countries (Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone and Senegal) were expected to identify common challenges to build a regional framework for tackling the cost of politics.

5. Current Status of Regulation of Political Party Financing in West Africa

Mr George Kunnath, WFD's Regional Director for Africa and Europe opened the conference with a presentation focused on the characteristics of an affordable political system and how it can reduce drivers of the rising cost of politics while increasing legitimate and regulated sources of political party financing.

In this context, the issue of political financing is not about regulation but rather how to establish an affordable political system, i.e. the democratic culture that is developed. Though reasonable costs are necessary to maintain and develop the work of political parties and politicians, the pertinent question is whether citizens are content with the quality, skills and desires of Members of Parliament (MPs).

Chief among the main characteristics of an affordable political system are the need to: limit the costs associated with elections; reinforce the capacities of independent institutions that can monitor, oversee and enforce regulations; and ensure equal and affordable access to the media. By contrast, the key drivers that increase the cost of politics are costs associated with securing the nomination ticket during party primaries, the costs of running campaigns, and the available opportunities to take advantage of poor regulatory systems, which enable the abuse of state resources and the use of illicit money.

To tackle this, political parties should focus on strengthening the collection of membership fees, and states should implement public funding schemes that encourage positive behaviour from political parties. Such schemes can take the shape of direct public funding, either through annual support or support during the electoral cycle, or indirect measures, such as free media access and tax deductions. It is important to note, however, that direct financing for political parties in Africa is not a popular measure, and thus indirect support might be the best option for West Africa.

When it comes to regulation, limitations or bans on political party financing are comprehensive across West Africa, but the same cannot be said for the financing of candidates. Part of the reason for this is that candidates are expected to draw money wherever they can. Moreover, although annual reporting is quite common in West Africa, follow-up investigations are sparsely made.

Two fundamental questions for the conference to address are:

- What are the risks and impact if the system is unaffordable?
- What should we be doing to make political systems more affordable?

Professor Samuel Egwu of the Department of Political Science, University of Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria, provided a keynote address which focused on enhancing effective regulation of the cost of politics to ensure the dual-focus of what he termed 'integrity governance and national security' by comparing the experiences of three types of states: established democracies, emerging democracies and post-conflict democracies.

Though costs are highest per capita in post-conflict countries, most democracies are experiencing rising costs associated with politics. Some states have taken extensive measures to mitigate this phenomenon - notably in established democracies - whereas several

post-conflict and emerging democracies have opted for a 'laissez-faire' approach at the expense of effective democratic processes.

In turn, post-conflict and emerging democracies are confronted with political parties that are institutionally weak and lack policy platforms. Elected officials are less concerned with adopting a reform agenda, and instead push their own self-serving agenda focused on shoring up funds to maintain their position. This trend becomes entrenched in the democratic process when the role of money is unchecked.

How elected representatives are selected directly affects how they discharge their constitutional mandate and are held accountable. Thus, countries with unregulated flows of money in politics tend to undermine democratic governance and accountability, which Professor Egwu argues is the greatest threat to national security.¹

In this regard, national security cannot be advanced in neo-patrimonial 'democracies' where the purpose of politics is to capture state power and the citizenry is divorced from the decision-making process in selecting its leadership. In these cases, internal democracy is weakened by the political elite who dictate political outcomes, most often with the use of large 'money bags'.

Thus, democratic accountability withers and the social contract between state and citizenry is subverted, with the latter unable to transform itself from mere voters to an effective electorate.

The first casualty of money in politics is diversity in representation. Prohibitive costs prevent most segments in society - notably marginalised groups – from participating in the political process. Likewise, smaller opposition parties cannot compete on a level playing field.

Equally, money in politics undermines the independence of the legislature who, pressured by the need to recoup their investments, defer their legislative duties to position themselves for the next election. This weakens their ability to curb the dominance of the executive branch in the policy-making process. More pressingly, the culture of 'selection over election' enables the political elite to place candidates that will be beholden to them once elected.

However, the rising cost in politics is not always detrimental to democratic accountability. For instance, costs associated with the automation of voter lists, the creation of voter information services and the expansion of postal voting, can reduce the cost of politics in the longer term and improve the credibility of democratic institutions.

To that end, broad-based reform in the existing legal framework is required. This should focus on four areas: (1) developing disclosure requirements around campaigns and political party financing, (2) putting limits on spending for both political parties and candidates, (3) implementing public funding schemes, and (4) empowering mandated authorities to enforce existing rules and oversights.

- Four suggestions on what should be done moving forward: (1) creating a national context-specific platform to drive the national agenda for improved tracking and

¹ National security is defined by domestic imperatives such as social welfare and larger issues of development and the redistribution of wealth, which require strong democratic institutions that ensure free and fair elections, work towards poverty eradication, and promote human rights as well as civil and political liberties.

reporting of political financing, (2) establishing a platform for dialogue and experience-sharing at the regional level, (3) investing heavily in civic and voter education, and (4) researching the behaviour of political parties and candidates to better understand their needs and the faults in the existing legal framework.

6. Enhancing Existing Regulation of Cost of Politics

A panel discussion moderated by **Professor Bolade Eyinla, Chief Technical Adviser to the INEC Chairman, Nigeria** and featuring contributions from **Emmanuel Okorodudu, ECOWAS' Head of Division of Democracy & Governance** and **Dr. Festus Aubyn, a Research Fellow at the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre, Ghana** deliberated on the key issues from the keynote address. Key points included:

- The costs of running elections in Nigeria, Guinea and Ghana are rapidly rising,² which has transformed politics into the struggle for power and resources, and thus aspiring politicians will give whatever amount they think will bring victory for them.
- Most states in West Africa rely too heavily on international support because the rising costs of running elections are fast outstripping the means of states to meet their own “sovereign costs”.³
- Public funding schemes are a highly contested issue in states with budgets that are already constrained, as political parties often lack legitimacy in the eyes of the public. There is a need to mobilise resources to assist the development of political party manifestos that will incorporate the national security perspective.
- ECOWAS looks at the issue of the rising costs of politics as primarily an issue of corruption and is currently working on creating an institutional framework that will enforce existing anti-corruption measures.
- ECOWAS' [Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance \(2001\)](#) determined that many leaders see the voting public as a “price to buy” and noted that only when the public becomes an electorate will it have a voice in the political process. Future revisions of the Protocol will look at the convergence of integrity governance and national security.
- In some West African states, there are no disclosure laws on party financing, nor limits on funding or on campaign expenditures. Furthermore, the nature of cash-based economies makes it incredibly difficult to monitor, track and control political financing. In turn, political parties in power take advantage of this by abusing state resources for their own gain.
- EMBs lack the enforcement capacities necessary to investigate possible offences, and many are not entirely independent from the government. CSOs also lack the capacity to monitor and report questionable sources of campaign funding to the relevant regulatory authorities

² In Nigeria's 2015 elections, the core cost amounted to \$547 million USD, or \$8.3 USD per voter; in the Republic of Guinea's 2015 elections, the core cost amounted to \$75 million USD or \$12.5 USD per voter; in Ghana's 2016 elections, the core cost was \$206.5 million USD or \$12.5 USD per voter. (Discussant's presentation)

³ Sovereign costs refer to the costs that a state needs to cover to ensure the effective functioning of its responsibilities.

- Recommendations focused on: building public disclosure rules; implementing public funding schemes for political parties with realistic limits and stringent auditing procedures; and applying enforceable sanctions on transgressors.

Pertinent points from the discussion that followed:

- The case of Cape Verde was highlighted, where measures were taken to minimise the importance of money in politics by preventing incumbent leaders from running campaigns while in office and ensuring equal access to the media.
- State and administrative resources are usually not factored into the costs of campaigning and the security apparatus is often working against democratic governance.

7. Case studies – Cost of Politics at the National Level

As part of research projects that were commissioned by WFD, four case studies in the region - Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone and Senegal – presented general challenges associated with the cost of politics and provided general recommendations to mitigate its effects. This approach sought to identify common threads across the case studies while comparing each country’s political, regulatory and legal system.

The first case study, entitled ‘*Getting on the Ballot: Intra-Party Dynamics and the Cost of Politics in Nigeria*’, was presented by **Mr Adebowale Olorunmola, WFD’s Country Representative for Nigeria**.

Nigeria’s political space was initially dominated by three parties – the People’s Democratic Party (PDP), Alliance for Democracy (AD), and the All People’s Party (APP). Over time, a political ‘release valve’ led to the rapid expansion of Nigeria’s political space and the number of registered political parties. This measure was taken to reduce tensions among competing parties, but it also enabled the constitution to oblige citizens to hold membership of a political party to vote. Many of the new parties, however, simply serve as platforms for contesting elections. This has led to a political culture that is highly competitive, undermining ethics and principles as candidates seek to win at all costs.

Despite a progressive Electoral Act and the establishment of an Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), aspiring candidates face enormous impediments and disadvantages at all stages of the political process. They must pay high fees for their expression of interest forms and nomination forms, and they must secure the support of ‘godfathers’ - local elders with great influence on political outcomes – to secure a spot in the primaries.

The highly ‘monetised’ nature of the political process has led to an exponential increase in the cost of politics. To compete effectively, candidates and political parties often spend well above the legal ceilings for election expenses. In turn, they become morally corrupt in their search for funds and are less disposed to good governance instead focusing on recouping their funds.

To counter this trend, Mr Olorunmola recommended promoting compliance and enforcement, creating further awareness among voters, building the capacities of stakeholders and implementing reforms to change the nature of political party activities.

Dr Franklin Oduro, Deputy Director and Head of Research and Programmes at the Ghana Centre for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), expanded on the expenses that politicians must consider when engaging in politics, using Ghana as his case study.

Ghana's multiparty political space has become increasingly dominated by two political parties: The National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP). Though they have their strongholds, up to 50% of all parliamentary seats are highly competitive. Regardless, patronage politics and corruption remain pervasive, which have debilitated Ghana's democratic institutions. Much like Nigeria, the parties have become "election machines" that focus on dispersing 'spoils' to mobilise loyalists instead of developing programmatic activities.

Aspiring candidates must primarily rely on their personal income to finance up to 50% of their political campaigns, which places immediate barriers on marginalised groups. They spend a lot of their funds on rallies and meetings, mainly by providing allowances to party workers. Transportation remains a significant expenditure burden for candidates because they often have to supply themselves with their own vehicles and travel long distances. Other expenditures include advertising through radio and print media, billboards and vote-buying, among others.

Large expenditures do not end after the election. Elected officials are then bound by social customs and courtesies, focusing much of their time and money on several activities, including covering funeral processions, contributing and attending festivals, providing in-kind contributions to gain the support of traditional authorities and providing local public goods for the constituency. Such exorbitant costs put money at the centre of the political process, increasing the level of corruption at the expense of core parliamentary work.

Dr Oduro recommended pushing for a renewed discussion on party and campaign financing, which would focus on starting in-kind funding for political parties and the use of the MPs' Common Fund. He also noted the need to strengthen the regulatory and legal frameworks underpinning party and candidate financing.

Mr Andrew Lavali, a Researcher from the Institute for Governance Reform, then presented his research findings on Sierra Leone's political landscape.

Much like Ghana, Sierra Leone's political space is dominated by two political parties: the All People's Congress (APC), entrenched in the North, and the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) in the South.

Similarly, Sierra Leone suffers from a client-based political system wherein most costs are relegated to weekly transfers to constituents, entrenching a culture of "vote-for-money". Moreover, Sierra Leone's aspiring candidates face exorbitant nomination fees, and opposition candidates face higher costs than incumbents. For elected MPs, financial support from friends and family decrease, forcing them to depend on powerful donors.

Mr Lavali called for better training schemes to assist existing and aspiring MPs, likely through public education on their roles and the expectations of citizens. Moreover, he recommended strengthening local council delivery and oversight and making candidature fees more inclusive.

Dr Abdoul Wahab Cisse, an Associate Researcher at the Centre for Research Action on Governance (CERAG) in Senegal, then gave his presentation entitled, *'Pathways to Senegal's National Assembly: The Cost of Locking a Seat'*.

Senegal's political landscape is dominated by three political parties: the Alliance for the Republic (APR), the Socialist Party (PS) and the Senegalese Democratic Party (PDS). Notwithstanding, Senegal has over 250 registered political parties – most without platforms or agendas. Many see political parties as venues to access positions in government. This ties into the reality where parties do not represent candidates, but rather candidates, who are often the party founders and sole funders, represent political parties.

Senegalese politicians have a patron-client relationship with their voters, where the latter expects the former to provide gifts, money and secure positions in government for youths. Politicians share a similar relationship dynamic with traditional authorities.

Moreover, incumbent party members give 'electoral targets' to their appointees, warning them that if they lose they will be relieved of their position in the party. This adds to the sense of desperation that aspiring candidates have to face in the political process.

Dr Cisse argued that parliamentary assistants should be properly trained to empower MPs to do core parliamentary work. He also suggested that a change in the voting system and the enforcement of existing laws on financing are necessary to mitigate the effects of the cost of politics.

8. Political Parties, Candidates and Cost of Politics

This session provided insights on the personal experiences of elected officials and candidates on their campaign trail and the cost of engaging in politics.

According to **Hon. Peter Ohiozogh Akpatason, a Member of the House of Representatives in Nigeria**, public perception in West Africa is that the prohibitive costs associated with being in politics make elected offices the "exclusive preserve of 'money-bags'", which deprives many well-intended citizens from engaging fairly in politics. In turn, this has affected the output of 'quality' leaders.

Political parties in Nigeria, lacking internal democratic practices, simply adopt strategies that will enhance their chances of winning elections, even if it means not developing a policy agenda. They source funds from anywhere and from whoever to influence officials and the electorate.

The Electoral Act (2010) sought to stem this behaviour by specifying how much candidates can spend for their election campaigns and by requiring parties to submit a statement of account to INEC to determine whether they are adhering to the law. However, its weak enforcement has enabled a culture of impunity.

Consequently, politicians face enormous costs for running campaigns, ranging from exorbitant fees for nominations and expression of interest forms to transportation, publicity, legal and security expenses. In turn, many politicians utilise ‘stomach infrastructure’⁴ to gain popularity from their voters and key stakeholders without as much effort.

Hon. Akpatason urged the government to clearly define spending limits, possibly reviewing them upwards to reflect realities on the ground, and reinforce strict monitoring of political party spending including on cash withdrawals and movement prior to and during elections. He also suggested that INEC and security agencies deal directly with security personnel and push them to do frequent random checks to ensure compliance. He also recommended building the capacities of institutions responsible for monitoring and creating a special court to persecute against election offences.

Mr Bernard Mornah, the National Chairman and parliamentary candidate for the Peoples National Convention party in Ghana, discussed in detail both about explicit costs and implicit costs that are incurred in an election campaign. Explicit costs include costs related to the primary process within a political party, from picking the ticket to becoming the party’s candidate. Implicit costs include the cost of ‘political engineering’, which refers to the tactics used by a politician to calculate political moves that are necessary to attain power based on the levels of social awareness of voters. In other words, a politician who uses this strategy will seek the optimal situation that minimises cost and effort for them while maximising their chances of getting elected.

Ghana has had to contend with normal increases in the cost of politics due to a growing population, which requires more polling stations and staff to run elections. Nonetheless, the exponential increase of the elections budget - from 23.5 million Ghana Cedis to 826 million in 2016 - is indicative of an unsustainable trend. Moreover, the filing fees stipulated by the EMB have had arbitrary increases over the last decade - from 20 Ghana Cedis in 2004 to 10,000 Cedis in 2016. In essence, the EMB is auctioning participation to the highest bidders, alienating smaller parties in the process.

Mr Mornah’s failed electoral campaign cost him a hefty sum of about \$250,000 USD. He had to spend money on 40 vehicles, billboards, banners, t-shirts, a sound system, fuel, events, courtesy visits, social investments, and payments at spiritual houses. Mornah admitted that he himself could not specify with absolute certainty how his funds were sourced, and he admonished the fact that it cost that amount of money for him to simply lose his bid for public office.

To that end, he warned against the rising cost of elections, deeming it a threat to democratic participation and an impediment to the maturation of democracies. He asserted that these costs may lead to the democratic process being hijacked by questionable elements, which would open opportunities for illicit activities and lead to insecurity. In this regard, politics would become a “trade of aggression” instead of an exchange of ideas.

He recommended implementing public funding schemes, passing new legislation that limits political activities and expenditures, establishing compulsory reporting and auditing

⁴ Stomach infrastructure refers to a system by which political patronage is dispensed to groups in society.

mechanisms to identify the sources of funding for political parties, and enhancing civic and voter education.

Chief Sam Eke (PhD), the Secretary-General of the Inter-Party Advisory Council (IPAC) in Nigeria, began his presentation by stating that the cost of politics remains high for the sole objective of gaining power and accessing state resources.

He warned against unregulated public funding schemes, which he deemed ‘anti-democratic’. In the case of Nigeria, INEC would distribute 6 million Naira to political parties based on their representation in Parliament, which inevitably enabled the PDP to get the lion’s share of the funds. When court cases sought to change this setup, the PDP simply pressured Parliament into cancelling that public funding scheme.

Chief Eke asserted that INEC has been burdened with too many responsibilities and has been rendered ineffective as a result. He suggested that it should be unbundled, i.e. that some of its functions be assigned to existing or new agencies.

He recommended that political parties should differentiate voters from members, emphasising on the need to push for payment dues from the party’s membership, as well as the need to reinforce the supremacy of parties to prevent elected officials from dictating terms to the political party. He also suggested adopting electronic systems to enhance oversight over the whole electioneering process.

The general discussion at the end of the session highlighted some salient points and comments regarding the role of political parties. Notably, the issue of unchecked third-party funding was flagged. This refers to the process wherein politicians channel money to their friends and family to spend on their behalf for the electoral campaign.

Ms Antoinette Grant, Governance Advisor of the Department of International Development (DFID) in Nigeria, concluded the session by highlighting that the conference’s participants focused mostly on the supply side, namely on regulation and legislation. However, she noted that any strategy to decrease the cost of politics needs to address both supply and demand – in this case referring to the “general public”.

9. Growing Influence of Media on the Cost of Politics

Leading this session’s Panel Discussion, **Dr Shola Adeyanju, Deputy Chief Operating Officer of the National Institute for Political & Strategic Studies in Nigeria**, asserted that the media has become a central player in the conduct of democracy and elections, and it has great influence on the cost of politics. The bulk of campaign budgets is spent on the media, and the media, in turn, has become directly involved in the activities of politicians, leading to the ‘mediatization’ of elections campaigns. The two predominant parties in Nigeria, for instance, expended on the media alone more than the legal ceiling allows for campaign expenditures.

Nigeria’s media industry is one of the most vibrant in the world because of its level of plurality and privatisation. However, many of these media houses are owned by wealthy financiers who push their own agenda and interests. This directly affects the objectivity of media coverage and, in many cases, media houses act as extensions of the government. In some cases, media

houses closely associated or owned by the ruling party either charge more to the opposition or simply deny them access.

Moreover, media can be used to exacerbate political tensions and sometimes may lead to political violence. In many cases, billboards or branded vehicles are violently defaced or destroyed by political opponents; the government often ignores such incidents if it benefits them. In fact, non-compliance with the code of ethics in media coverage is pervasive.

The unbridled commercialisation of media content has led to a sharp increase in the cost of politics. Putting content out on media is quite expensive. For instance, a wrap-around advert on The Guardian newspaper is N25 million (\$82,000 USD). Prices increase exponentially when you consider how much it costs to put content on broadcast media. New online and social media have added to this. This commercialisation also brings with it a level of exclusivity to those who can afford it, excluding smaller parties, youths and marginalised groups.

Indeed, there are two factors at play here. Firstly, politicians spend more on media because they do not have the skills to effectively use the funds available to them. They rarely hire media experts to help their campaigns. Secondly, a high level of corruption in the media is coupled with unethical practices, where media content can do more damage than good by disseminating sensationalist content, ultimately substituting policy agendas with inflammatory rhetoric.

Dr Adeyanju recommended that the media monitor and analyse the sources of contributions and donations to political parties, and focus on issues of public interest instead of its own commercial interests. He also called for equal and affordable media access to all groups and a non-violence approach when it comes to disseminating media content. Lastly, he argued that training tools on the use of media would improve the skills of politicians and drive down the cost of politics.

Mr Jide Ojo, Director of OJA Development Consult in Nigeria, concurred with Dr Adeyanju that the media is increasingly playing a major role in the conduct of politics. To that end, he warned against the rising use of media to promote what he termed the “governance by boxes”, where the media is used to magnify positive initiatives that elected officials have done while ignoring any negative coverage.

The government has consistently tried to impede the opposition’s access to media in contravention to the Electoral Act (2010). This denial of access to mainstream media is a recurring major issue, which forces many to source for large funds in order to establish their own media organisations.

The lack of enforcement despite existing regulation has led to pervasive corruption in the media, and in turn, has led to arbitrary increases in the charges to play political adverts.

Mr Ojo argued that Nigeria should adopt models that are in place in the UK or Cape Verde, which places limitations on media expenditures and media coverage for candidates, no matter how much money a candidate has. He also recommended that regulatory bodies enforce the code of ethics related to media activities.

He also wanted to revisit the legal framework regarding the role of media in the Electoral Act. Specifically, he wanted to look at ways that private media can be held accountable for their activities and face the same penalties as public media for transgressions.

Mr Andrew Lavali of the Institute for Governance Reform in Sierra Leone then discussed the issue of hate messages in media which incites political violence. He looked at the content of seven newspapers in Sierra Leone over the course of eight years to understand the relationship between media financing, media messaging and political violence.

He asserted that adverts have “become gifts of political interest”, offered to those who support the government and denied to those who are critical or seek to be independent. This has led to media wars that often demonise opponents, putting into question the media’s role in reporting news.

In turn, media outlets’ revenue stream increases sharply around election season.

Mr Lavali reiterated the consensus that the media should be part of broader political reforms because it drives the cost of politics.

In the general discussion, a few points were made to respond to the presentations. Some suggested looking specifically at journalists and encourage them to commit to ethical journalism. Media houses fail to train reporters to generate original content and few sponsor reporters to go on location. It was also noted that social media is not a content generator but depend on media houses. Others pointed to the fact most regulators are appointed by the government and are expected to protect the interests of the political elite. Lastly, one participant asked if it was possible for journalists to resist the temptation of being fed ‘free’ news from the government.

10. Cost of Politics, Society and Marginalised Groups

Professor Abubakar Momoh, Director-General of The Electoral Institute in Nigeria, admonished the narrow frame by which the cost of politics is defined. He asserted that looking at the cost of politics strictly through a financial lens overlooks the other less tangible dimensions that negatively affect democracies. He urged that our conceptualisation of the term needs to move beyond simple arithmetic tabulation.

Professor Momoh explained that there are other inherent costs that stem from the cost of politics. These can range from the moral costs associated with the use of political office to gather resources for politicians; the political costs associated with the emergence of oligarchies and rigged systems; the social costs associated with citizenship; and the impact of elections on the electorate.

Professor Momoh then sought to grapple with the conceptualisation of marginality. The perception of victimhood is ‘fabricated’ by the victim. Nevertheless, its impact on the individual or community can be profound and shape their relations with the rest of society. Marginalisation can take the form of disempowerment, where power relations dictate how a group can dominate over another. This can lead to exclusion, wherein a group is systematically blocked or denied its rights. Underlying all this is the discrimination of certain groups, where it becomes permissible to use specific criteria in order to treat other groups with contempt.

The political class have long understood the power of marginality, and have utilised it to politicise and mobilise communities under certain pretences to pursue their own agenda. In this regard, politics becomes a vehicle or tool for self-enrichment, which ignores the negative costs it places on society and democracy.

Marginality is then the result of a state that does not carry out its responsibility to protect citizens' rights. Lack of social safety nets and social welfare provisioning, coupled with the complete disregard for public good enables the state to encourage what Professor Momoh terms "hegemonic politics".

Professor Momoh explains that countering this phenomenon is ultimately a political choice. We should historicize the idea of the welfare state, change the parameters of social access and give agency to the voiceless instead of speaking on their behalf. Affirmative action, he argues, is not an unfair policy but rather a recognition and acceptance of the injustices that have been committed against a group.

He concluded that our political future lies with the youth, but we must ask ourselves how we can turn their demographic majority into a political majority.

Tying into this last point, **Mr Seth Oteng, Executive Director of the Youth Bridge Foundation, Ghana**, discussed the role of youth in the cost of politics.

Youth are the demographic majority in all states considered in this study, yet they consistently find themselves excluded from the political process because of social norms that undervalue them. As such, there is a lack of political investment in youth, which undermines their capacity to have their political voices heard. In turn, youth become disinterested in politics which leads to voter apathy.

Mr Oteng argues, however, that the lack of investment in youth has created missed opportunities. The youth vote can essentially make or break an election, and the group represents the future of the political space. Not investing in them would have enormous costs on the state and on democracy.

Mr Oteng emphasised that the strategic re-focus on youth needs and priorities should be demand-driven. Youth should be encouraged to participate in the political process and be represented at the political party level, and a lot more investment needs to be made to groom young politicians to represent their demographic group. A prime example of this is the African Youth and Governance Conference Initiative which seeks to secure Africa's democracy by mentoring and providing experience to young politicians.

Barrister Omowumi Asubiaro-Dada, Output Lead for Political and Governance Processes at Voices for Change, then looked at marginality in politics from a women's rights perspective.

The general perception of political power and leadership is a patriarchal one, where men are perceived as inherently strong - the 'breadwinner' capable of making tough decisions. Though research has shown that people believe men and women can be equally good leaders, most surveyed still think that women should tend to children and households. It was noted that many respondents think that women are too emotional to be leaders. This has made it incredibly

difficult for women to network with male politicians, who treat them with casual indifference or even contempt.

The last discussant of the session, **Mrs Ekaete Judith Umoh, President of the Joint National Association of Persons with Disabilities (JONAPWD)**, analysed how the cost of politics affect people living with disabilities (PWDs).

Mrs Umoh asserted that social perceptions of PWDs have excluded them from the political process. PWDs are dealing with barriers that hinder their ability to deliver democratic dividends. For instance, electoral authorities in the last general election in Nigeria refused to give registration forms to people living with disabilities. This perception is worse for women living with disabilities.

Mrs Umoh recommended that initiatives of affirmative action be extended to PWDs, and urged EMBs to work with persons with disabilities to close some of the noticeable gaps in the electoral process.

11. Strategies for Regulating the Cost of Politics

In the last thematic session of the conference, the panel deliberated on strategies to regulate the cost of politics. The panel was moderated by **Professor Antonia Taiye Okoosi-Simbine, National Commissioner of Election and Political Party Monitoring at INEC**. Professor Okoosi-Simbine took the opportunity to provide some responses to the enquiries by participants during previous sessions on the work of INEC.

The first discussant, **Barrister Eze Onyekpere, Executive Director of the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ)**, provided an overview of financial regulations in Nigeria. He pointed to a series of conflicting trends that undermines the entire regulatory regime. This includes unrealistic financial ceilings that are arbitrary and push candidates to circumvent them by illicit means, as well as inchoate regulatory provisions that require candidates and political parties to report on expenses without any means of verification. These shortcomings are exacerbated in the absence of clear paper trails.

Barrister Onyekpere further notes that INEC and law enforcement agencies lack the capacity to track political financing and punish transgressors, and some simply lack the will to enforce the law. Moreover, anti-corruption agencies do not collaborate effectively and do not empower civil society to support them on this issue.

Political parties lack the internal democracy when it comes to regulating themselves, each seeking to better their chances for electoral success. This is where 'monetisation' of the political space begins, notably with the competitive nomination process.

Lastly, Barrister Onyekpere notes the role that pervasive poverty plays in the country, where the average Nigerian thinks that he/she can take advantage of the system to get something from candidates and the government.

Among his key recommendations, he asserted that the arbitrary ceilings on political financing need to be reviewed upwards based on empirical evidence to reflect the increasing cost of running campaigns. He added that punitive measures for transgressors need to be more

severe, calling for a fine of fifty per cent of the value of the excess expenditure, two-years' imprisonment and two years debarment from engaging in politics. He also argued that the definition of campaign expenditure should be expanded to include the value of state resources and money spent prior to campaigning. Lastly, he called for a 'reinforced' INEC or the establishment of a new agency that would provide oversight on campaign financing.

The second discussant, **Mr Jide Ojo**, warned against the corrosive influence of money in politics. He noted a Commission of Inquiry report following post-electoral violence in Nigeria in 2011, which concluded that politics should be made financially unattractive to mitigate tensions.

Alluding to Professor Egwu's keynote speech, Ojo stated that any strategy on regulating the cost of politics must be clear and broad-based to make an impact. Key among his recommendations, he called for an attitudinal change in politics. This entails pushing more for political education, forcing political parties to mobilise their members, and boosting synergy between auditing and anti-corruption agencies.

To round up the panel discussion, **Mr George Kunnath** took to the stage once more to build upon his introductory speech. He argued that there is no shortage of solutions to fix the high cost of politics, but rather there is simply a lack of political will. In this regard, a national dialogue and national vision are required to fix the issue.

Mr Kunnath provided a long list of recommendations, which included: educating citizens on why political parties are necessary and tempering their expectations of politicians; supporting marginalised groups – including women, youth and PWDs – to have their political voice heard in Parliament; establishing transparent systems of accountability; empowering regulatory agencies to enforce and verify reporting of financial expenditures; establishing smart public funding schemes; pushing political parties to procure money from their membership; publishing government contracts online; training media and independent monitors to investigate political party spending; setting criteria on party registration, etc.

Mr Kunnath concluded his presentation by alluding to a new phenomenon, where new parties in Europe are building their entire platform on full transparency and gaining more public support. This has prompted other traditional parties to start looking at transparency initiatives to win back the electorate.

12. Recommendations

Ms Olutobi Ayeni, WFD's Programme Officer for Africa, kicked off the last session of the conference with a recap of the key highlights.

Dr David Appiah, WFD's Regional Representative for West Africa, then took to the stage to ask participants and discussants to draw a comprehensive list of recommendations, including Nigeria-specific recommendations, based on the thematic issues and political actors discussed throughout the conference:

In the general discussion, several key recommendations were made:

- Strengthen the independence of Election Management Bodies (EMBs);
- Strengthen Parliaments to promulgate good laws that regulate political financing, particularly to improve public disclosure rules and introduce a stringent system of enforceable sanctions;
- Explore the benefits of public funding for political parties in an equal and accountable manner;
- Strengthen the internal structures of political parties to ensure transparency and accountability for their financing sources and expenditures;
- Capacitate CSOs to build coalitions for monitoring and reporting on political financing and media coverage during elections;
- Advocate against marginalisation, shifting the concept away from “equal opportunity” to “equal access” – for instance, the Emily List example in the United States could serve as a benchmark for promoting women candidature funding;
- Combine safe seat allocations with affirmative action initiatives to make them more potent;
- Encourage more platforms for grooming youth in politics, in the same vein as the African Youth and Governance Conference (AYGC);
- Tie public funding to specific benchmarks, notably a percentage of PWDs as candidates for parties;
- Promote national dialogue on strategies and action plans to manage the cost of politics.

The full list of the recommendations made in this final session - including Nigeria-specific ones – is included in Annexe A of this report.

13. Conclusions

The discourse on the Cost of Politics in West Africa proves that the situation is getting much worse in all countries in the region and there is an urgent need for attention to address the issues. The conference's candid presentations and discussions attest to the availability of human resources to advocate for changes in the subject area. However, it is evident that cognate institutions have been weakened by this phenomenon and regulations are either not fully implemented or are simply inadequate.

The two-day conference on Cost of Politics in the West Africa sub-region has undoubtedly been an 'eye-opener' in directing a professional focus to address the challenges associated with this issue. Good platforms for networking have also been established to promote coordinated advocacy at both the national and regional level. The high calibre of presentations rendered at the meeting has provided much fodder for further analysis and discourse on the subject matter. Thus, there is much more work to be executed on improving the 'cost of politics platform' at both the national and regional levels.

To this end, WFD intends to disseminate the report and its recommendations to relevant stakeholders and will follow-up with monitoring mechanisms to promote improvement in country-specific cases.

14. Annexes

Annex A: Full List of Recommendations from the Regional Conference

CATEGORY		SUB CATEGORY	RECOMMENDATIONS
EMBs & REGULATORY BODIES		General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen the independence of Election Management Bodies (EMBs). • Strengthen state agencies to fully regulate political party financing and enforce compliance. • Conduct capacity development programs to build the capacity and knowledge of EMBs on issues of party financing. • Promote the sustainable funding of EMBs. • Strengthen Inter-Party Advisory Councils/Committees (IPACs) at the national level. • Introduce independent regulatory bodies to augment the work of EMBs.
		Nigeria Specific	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should be responsible for fixing uniform limits for all party nomination forms, while government should increase party subventions. • INEC must be unbundled. • Third-party expenses need to have limits and tracked by INEC. • INEC needs to partner with the Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS) and other institutions to monitor political expenditures. • Review the ceilings on electoral expenses. • Ceilings should not be contained in the body of the Electoral Act and the power to determine the ceiling across all the elections should be given to INEC. • Ceilings to be based on empirical evidence including the number of voters to be reached, land area, cost of media, transport, venues and others reasonable expenses needed to mount a reasonable campaign.

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The reviewed ceilings should be universal and cover expenses from candidates to political parties. • Third party expenditures for candidates should also be guided by the expenditure ceiling on individual donations to candidates. • The proper definition of campaign expenditures should include expenditures made before the notice of poll. • A new agency should be established to provide oversight in campaign financing.
LEGAL FRAMEWORK		General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review legal frameworks regulating political party financing to reflect current realities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Improve public disclosure rules; ○ Introduce a more stringent system of enforceable sanctions. • Explore the benefits of public funding for political parties in an equal and accountable manner. • Reduce/streamline the number of political parties per country through proper regulation. • Pre-election and post-election assets declaration laws should be introduced and properly enforced. • Need for a better accountability framework and audit processes; the government and NGOs should work in tandem. • Need for open access and demand for accountability, using e.g. Freedom of Information Act. • Need to work out principles undergirding whistleblowing. • Need for banking sector reforms. • Frequent random checks by security to ensure compliance. • Need to make laws to reduce the influence of incumbency. • Explore the concept of running a single bank account for candidates' and parties' campaign finances to permit proper tracking of political financing. • In counties where applicable, corporate donations to political parties should attract tax discounts.
		Nigeria Specific	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spending ceilings in the Nigerian 2010 Electoral Act should be reviewed upwards to reflect current realities. • The Electoral Act should be reviewed to allow the EMB to periodically review ceilings.

JUDICIARY			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Office of the Attorney-General needs to be separated from the Minister of Justice to ensure its independence in prosecuting infractions. • The Judiciary should be empowered to adjudicate speedily on electoral cases. • The Judiciary including bar associations needs to be more educated on electoral regulation. • Special courts for the prosecution of election offences should be established.
GOVERNMENTS			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governments must explore indirect means of funding elections and political party. • Public financing should be implemented fairly by governments. • Governments must be transparent with government contracts, including publishing its procurement transactions.
PARLIAMENTS			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for strengthening Parliaments to promulgate good laws that regulate political financing. • These reforms should be expedited to be undertaken before the next general elections in all countries.
POLITICAL PARTIES			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen the internal structures of the Political Parties to ensure transparency and accountability of their financing sources and expenditures. • Initiate a dialogue on the question of political will in reforming individual candidates and members to the ideology of the parties and the public good. • Conduct capacity development programs to build the capacity and knowledge of political parties on issues of party financing. • Political parties should encourage the habit of publishing their finances to help rebuild public confidence in them, which can have a positive impact on party members' contribution to the parties.
CSOs			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empower CSOs to participate in monitoring and reporting on political financing. • Support civil society advocacy campaigns on political party financing issues. • Build CSOs' capacities to monitor, track and report political party financing to assist in investigations and prosecuting offenders. • Need for increased civic and political education on the rules of political participation including political financing. • CSOs should be empowered to monitor the media's adherence to a code of ethics.

MARGINALISED GROUPS		General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce affirmative action initiatives as recognition of historical injustice. • Explore ways of turning the youth and women demographic majority into a political majority. • Need to establish partnerships between marginalised groups and NGOs based on mutual respect and justice. • Need for marginalised groups to organise as both a social and political force. • Advocacy for overcoming marginalisation should move away from the concept of 'equal opportunity' to 'equal access'. • Political parties and CSOs must create funds to support the political participation of marginalised groups.
		Women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electoral laws should be amended to encourage more women candidates to participate. • The 'Emily List' example in the United States could serve as a benchmark promoting women candidature funding. • Safe seat allocations could be combined with affirmative action initiatives to make them more potent.
		Youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth inclusiveness must be improved to emphasise positive participation and representation. • The national/political strategic focus on youth must be improved to make it demand-driven. • More platforms for grooming youth in politics such as the African Youth and Governance Conference (AYGC) need to be encouraged.
		PWD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PWDs should be encouraged to undertake social action to secure fair representation. • Public funding should be tied to specific benchmarks, notably a percentage of PWDs as candidates of parties. • Encourage the political participation of PWDs in political parties.

<p>MEDIA ORGANISATIONS</p>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Push for more capacity-building of the media on reporting (constant training and re-training). • Explore a more scientific way of calculating media costs related to political financing. • Public interests should be encouraged over private interests. • Special media access and a media fund should be provided for marginalised groups. • The media should concentrate on promoting violence-free politics. • Media personnel should adhere to the codes of ethics and codes of conduct. • State-owned media should move away from the direct control by governing parties. • State media should be encouraged to provide equal access to political actors, particularly during the campaign period. • Print and electronic media houses should be under obligation to report the cost of all campaign advertisements to regulatory institutions. • Countries can explore placing limits on media airtime for political party campaigning.
<p>REGIONAL LEVEL</p>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articles 1C, 1F, 1K of ECOWAS Protocols need to be revised to ensure transparency and accountability in political regulation in its Member States. • ECOWAS should engage more with CSOs in its Member States.
<p>REDEFINING COP</p>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a need to capture administrative expenses in the definition of CoP, such as the use of civil servants in campaigns; the costs of passing 'last-minute' laws that favour the incumbents; and the use of state infrastructure for political campaigning. • Define CoP from the sources of political financing and political expenditures. • Categorise the definition of CoP under 'financial costs', 'social costs', 'moral costs', and 'political cost'. • Need to balance the scale between tangible and intangible costs. • The CoP needs to cover the costs before, during and after elections.
<p>MISCELLANEOUS</p>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to promote a national dialogue on strategies and action plans to manage CoP. • Create national coalitions or platforms for deliberating, tracking and reporting political financing. • Create a sustainable platform for regional learning on CoP. • Invest in citizens in terms of voter and civic education. • Study and adapt Cape Verde's example of reducing political party/ candidature elections costs.

Annex B: Full Agenda for the West Africa Cost of Politics Conference

AGENDA: Day 1	
8:30am – 9:00am	Arrival and Registration of participants
Opening formalities	
09:00 - 10:00am	Introduction of Head Table
	<p>Welcome: <i>Current Observations on the Regulations of Political Party Financing in West Africa</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mr George Kunnath, WFD Regional Director, Africa & Europe
	<p>Keynote Address: <i>Enhancing Existing Regulation of Cost of Politics to Achieve Integrity Governance and National Security</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Professor Samuel Egwu, Department of Political Science, University of Jos, Plateau State.
Group Photo Session	
10:00 - 10:30am	TEA BREAK
10:30 - 12:00pm	<p>Session 2: <i>Enhancing Existing Regulation of Cost of politics to achieve Integrity governance and national security</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Moderator: Professor Bolade Eyinla, Chief Technical Adviser, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) ▪ Discussants: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mr Emmanuel Okorodudu, Head of Division, Democracy & Governance, ECOWAS - Dr Festus Aubyin, Research Fellow, Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre, Ghana

12:00pm - 1:00pm	<p>Regional case studies (10 Minutes Each)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Moderator: Dr David Ekow Appiah, WFD-Ghana ▪ Nigeria: Mr Adebowale Olorunmola, WFD-Nigeria ▪ Ghana: Dr Franklin Oduro, Ghana Centre for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana) ▪ Sierra Leone: Mr Andrew Lavali, Institute for Governance Reform, Sierra Leone ▪ Senegal: Dr Abdoul Wahab Cissé, Centre d’Etudes et de Recherche Action sur la Gouvernance <p>Questions & Answer / Discussion (20 minutes)</p>
1:00 - 2:00pm	LUNCH BREAK
2:00 – 3:45pm	<p>Session 3: <i>Political Parties, Candidates and Cost of Politics</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Moderator: Dr David Ekow Appiah, WFD-Ghana ▪ Speaker: Hon. Peter Ohiozogh Akpatason, Member of Parliament, House of Representatives, National Assembly, Nigeria ▪ Discussants: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mr Bernard Mornah, National Chairman and Parliamentary Candidate, Peoples National Convention (PNC), Ghana ▪ Chief Sam Eke (PhD), Secretary General, Inter-Party Advisory Council (IPAC) Nigeria.
3:45 – 4:00pm	<p>Remarks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ms Antoinette Grant, Governance Advisor of the Department of International Development (DFID)
4:00 – 4:30pm	WRAP-UP/CLOSE

AGENDA: Day 2	
9:00am- 9:15am	Recap of Previous Day
9:15am- 10:45am	<p>Session 4: <i>Growing Influence of Media on Cost of Politics</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Moderator: Mr Graeme Ramshaw, Research and Evaluation Director, WFD. ▪ Speaker: Dr Shola Adeyanju, National Institute for Political & Strategic Studies, Kuru, Plateau State, Nigeria. ▪ Discussants: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mr Jide Ojo, Director, OJA Development Consult, Abuja, Nigeria - Mr Andrew Laval, Institute for Governance Reform, Sierra Leone
10:45- 11:15am	TEA BREAK
11:15am -1pm	<p>Session 5: <i>Cost of Politics, Society and Marginalised Groups</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Moderator: Majda El Bied, WFD Senior Programme Manager for Africa. ▪ Speaker: Professor Abubakar Momoh, Director General, The Electoral Institute, Abuja, Nigeria. ▪ Discussants: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mr Seth Oteng, Executive Director, Youth Bridge Foundation, Ghana - Barrister Omowumi Asubiaro-Dada, Output Lead- Political and Governance Processes, Voice for Change, Nigeria - Mrs Ekaete Judith Umoh, President, Joint National Association of Persons with Disabilities (JONAPWD), Nigeria
1:00-2:00pm	LUNCH BREAK
2:00-3:30pm	<p>Session 6: <i>Strategies for Regulating the Cost of Politics</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Moderator: Professor Antonia Taiye Okoosi-Simbine, National Commissioner, Election and Political Party Monitoring, INEC, Nigeria ▪ Speaker: Barrister Eze Onyekpere, Executive Director, Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), Abuja, Nigeria ▪ Discussant:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mr Jide Ojo, Director OJA Development Consult, Abuja, Nigeria. - Mr George Kunnath, WFD Regional Director, Africa & Europe
3:30 – 3:45pm	TEA BREAK
3:45 - 4:45pm	<p>Consolidation of Key Highlights and Resolutions/ Recommendations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ms Olutobi Ayeni, Programme Officer, WFD, Africa ▪ Dr David Appiah, West Africa Regional Representative, WFD
4:40 – 4:45pm	<p>Closing Remark:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mr Graeme Ramshaw, Research and Evaluation Director, WFD.
4:45-5:00pm	CLOSE