WAPIS NEWSLETTER

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IN THIS ISSUE

EDITORIAL

Dear readers,

The whole world is living unprecedented times since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in December 2019. This situation was declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern by the World Health Organization (WHO); it has put health infrastructures in our countries under severe strain and resulted in millions of people contracting or even dying from the disease throughout the world.

Unfortunately, Togo has not been spared: the first COVID-19 case was recorded in March 2020, and 40 deaths have been recorded in the country to date.

I would like to pay tribute to those who have died all over the world, and to pass on to their families, the condolences of our Government and people.

Nevertheless, and it is important for us to take this on board, this emergency health situation must not make us lose sight of the numerous security threats facing our region.

In recent years, Western Africa has been confronted, not only by traditional transnational crime, but by a surge in violent, extremist armed groups. As we all know, these groups seek to operate beyond their initial zones of action in order to take control of almost all of the West African sub-region.

In the face of this worrying situation, each State has developed a strategy to counter the threat, but despite the steps taken, it is only too clear that this scourge remains and extremist groups are still active in the area. Consequently, new ways must to be found to deal with this problem more effectively.

To my mind, the only effective weapon to prevent and combat these far-reaching security threats remains international police cooperation in all its forms, pivotal to which is the sharing of criminal intelligence.

The Togolese Government is actively engaged in this process. Togo has therefore given its full commitment to the initiative launched by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to create a digital platform for sharing police information, the WAPIS Programme, and has signed the Memorandum of Understanding with the International Criminal Police Organization (ICPO-INTERPOL) to implement this Programme in Togo.

Similarly, I personally took part in the launch of the Programme's third phase in Abidjan in June 2018. It was also my honour to chair the second meeting of the Programme's Steering Committee which lay the foundations for implementing the Programme in the new participating countries.

In Togo, more particularly, a number of other steps have been taken to facilitate the proper implementation of WAPIS, including:

- the designation of a Single Point of Contact (SPOC), a technical expert and a legal expert;

- provision of premises to host the Data Collection and Registration Centre (DACORE) in Togo;

- exemption of customs duty and tax on the equipment delivered by the programme, granted by the Government;

- availability of the e-government network and a Data Centre to host the servers;

- involvement of all national law enforcement bodies (Justice, Police, Gendarmerie, Customs and Water and Forest services) in the Programme's implementation.

In short, the process to implement the WAPIS Programme in Togo is irreversible.

I would like take this opportunity to express our heartfelt gratitude to the European Union for its financial support in helping us complete this ECOWAS project. I would also like to congratulate the Programme's dynamic team for the remarkable work accomplished and urge them to continue their efforts to deploy this platform.

Lastly, I would urge all the West African States that are part of the Programme to work diligently to bring it to fruition so that police information can be more readily exchanged between national and regional law enforcement bodies. The success of our collective war on organized transnational crime and terrorism depends on it.
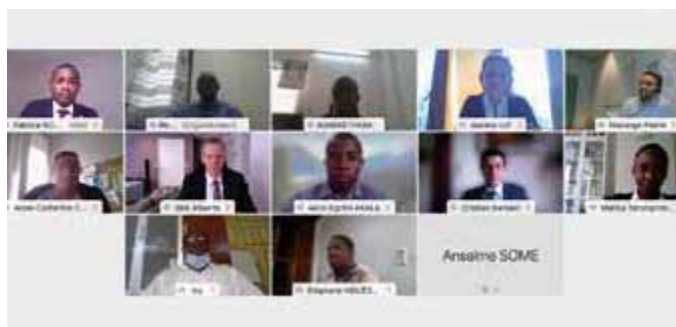
HIGHLIGHTS

INTERPOL and its partners from ECOWAS, WAEMU (West African Economic and Monetary Union) and the European Union provide an update status on the WAPIS programme's activities.

On 14 October 2020, a meeting was held via videoconference between the European Union, ECOWAS, WAEMU and INTERPOL to monitor the implementation of the West African Police Information System (WAPIS). An analysis of the programme's implementation in these countries enabled participants to draw on lessons and to take initiatives to encourage the various stakeholders to

Meeting between INTERPOL, ECOWAS, and the EU on 9 june 2020

honour their commitments. The meeting was moderated by Ms Daniela Rofi, Deputy Head of the Unit D1 for West Africa of the Directorate General of International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO) of the European Commission.

Mr Dirk Allaerts, Director of Planning and Development at INTERPOL, and Mr Cyriaque Agnekethomol, Director for Peacekeeping and Regional Security at ECOWAS, also participated in this meeting.

The programme's progress report put particular emphasis on struggling countries, with the completion of activities falling behind schedule. Strategic missions would be organized before the end of the year in the countries "under observation" to boost implementation of the programme in these countries. Moreover, the 5th Steering Committee meeting would be held in January 2021, at the latest, attended by the Security Ministers of the West African countries.

This meeting was the second of its type, the first having been held on 9 June 2020.

HIGHLIGHTS

The WAPIS programme and ECOWAS examine the progress of the project to establish a regional police data-exchange platform.

During a virtual meeting held on 18 June 2020, ECOWAS and the WAPIS Programme team discussed the status of the regional police data-exchange platform in West Africa, created under the auspices of ECOWAS. It should be recalled that a meeting was held on the same subject in March 2018 in Abidjan, where the ECOWAS Expert Committee recommended establishing a centralized data-exchange system, as being the most suitable the WAPIS regional platform. However, due to the administrative, technical and financial implications of this option, the Committee agreed to use, as a transition measure, until 2022, a decentralized system involving the direct and comprehensive sharing of data.

The meeting, chaired by Mr Cyriaque Agnekethom, ECOWAS Director for Peacekeeping and Regional Security, was an opportunity to discuss the steps to be taken to launch this project for a regional system, which had fallen behind schedule for various reasons.

Following the fruitful discussions on the technical and, in particular, legal aspects of establishing the system, and its implications, the participants met again on 23 September 2020 to talk in depth about the data types and data-sharing methods. Bipartisan discussions between legal and IT teams from both organizations will be continued with a view to speeding up the deployment of this crucial tool for building the capacity of countries in the fight against transnational crime and terrorism.

WAPIS Programme Single Points of Contact commit to pursuing the implementation of activities despite COVID-19.

Confronted by the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic in West Africa, and the appearance of the first cases in March 2020, the WAPIS programme decided to introduce a framework to remotely continue its activities with the national Single Points of Contact in the various countries participating in the Programme.

Four videoconference meetings were duly held on 22 May, 30 June, 30 July and 30 September 2020 to bring together the WAPIS team and national Single Points of Contact (SPOCs) to discuss the progress of various ongoing activities in these countries. This new method of holding discussions via videoconference was set up by the WAPIS team to ensure business continuity in these countries despite the problems related to the COVID-19 situation.

During the meetings, the SPOCs reassured the WAPIS team that they were committed to continuing the programme activities. In turn, the WAPIS team reiterated its availability to help wherever it could, despite the situation, and to make the system operational in each country. Satisfied with the effectiveness of this new method of holding discussions, the various parties agreed to repeat this exercise in order to enhance the effectiveness of the programme's activities in the participating countries.

Meeting between the WAPIS Programme team and Single Points of Contact held on 22 May 2020

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES

WAPIS takes shape in West Africa: Several renovation projects of the premises intended to host the Data Collection and Registration Centres (DACOREs) almost complete.

The WAPIS Programme has reached cruising speed and is becoming a reality in several participating countries: the Programme has begun renovating the premises which will host the future DACOREs in several countries, and the finishing touches are being put to a number of them. The countries concerned include Senegal, Sierra Leone, Nigeria and Mauritania. Inauguration ceremonies of these buildings will be organized with the EU, ECOWAS and national authorities in these countries to mark this crucial phase of implementation of the programme.

The creation of a DACORE is a major event that which will condition and have a considerable impact on the rollout of activities to implement the WAPIS system in the participating country, and especially for the administration responsible for its implementation. The DACORE is the body which will regulate and manage the system, and must therefore be set up with particular care by the national authority.

The renovation work was directed by the WAPIS team and local companies, along with the authorities of the participating countries which supplied suitable premises that met the criteria laid down by the programme.

Renovation work on the future DACORE premises in Nigeria

Renovation work has begun in several other countries, namely Togo, Guinea and Gambia, and will finish in early 2021.

Liberia

Sierra Leone

Mauritania

The WAPIS Programme provides participating countries with a model budget and communications plan in the context of its sustainability strategy.

The sustainability of WAPIS beyond 2022 and the end of the Programme is a major challenge for INTERPOL and its ECOWAS and EU partners. At the meeting of the Programme's Steering Committee held in November 2019, it was recommended that INTERPOL assist countries in setting up a model budget and a model communications plan for this purpose.

To ensure the viability of WAPIS at country level once the programme has ended, each national entity must have a separate budget line to ensure its permanent (sustainable) operation and development, and that of the system as a whole. The WAPIS Programme therefore presented a model budget to the various participating countries covering the investment and operating expenses linked to the national

system. Countries must adapt this model budget and submit it to their governments by June 2022 at the latest in order to integrate a budget line to cover WAPIS. In July and August, several meetings were organized between the Programme team and various Single Points of Contact (SPOCs) to present the model budget and to task the SPOCs with bringing it before their governments in order to achieve this objective.

Similarly, following another recommendation made at the November 2019 Steering Committee meeting, a Communications Plan was presented to the SPOCs in order to promote WAPIS in their countries and raise the awareness of governments and law enforcement agencies of the need for greater commitment and practical involvement in WAPIS's implementation.

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES

The WAPIS Programme trains up law enforcement officers and hands over preliminary equipment in Nigeria.

Training of law enforcement officers in Abuja, Nigeria, 7 June 2020

As part of the implementation of WAPIS, the Programme organized two training courses for lawenforcement officers in Nigeria. The first, designed for two senior Nigerian police officers, was held from 1 to 5 June 2020 at the ECOWAS Commission. The second, which took place from 3 to 7 June 2020 was a theoretical and practical course on WAPIS, targeting 12 officers from the following law enforcement agencies: Nigerian Police, Immigration Service, Customs Services, Navy, National Drug Law Enforcement Agency and National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP).

The closing ceremony of the training courses was attended by Mr Cyriaque Agnekethom, ECOWAS Director for Peacekeeping and Regional Security (DPKRS), Colonel Abdourahmane Dieng, Head of the Regional Security Division (RSD) of the ECOWAS Commission, and Police Commissioner Garba Baba Umar, Head of the NCB in Abuja. Certificates were issued to the participants at the end of the training.

After the training courses, WAPIS equipment was deployed to the agencies whose officers had attended the training. The aim of this deployment is to collect and record criminal data from respective law enforcement agencies in WAPIS's databases.

It should be noted that training on the use of WAPIS was also delivered in Senegal and Togo in October 2020. Other training courses will take place in Chad, Guinea, Gambia and Liberia by the end of 2020.

Training of law enforcement officers in Lomé, Togo, 16 October 2020

THE MEN AND WOMEN BEHIND THE SYSTEM

Guinea joined the Programme in November 2017 during the third phase funded by the European Development Fund (EDF). The country has signed the Memorandum Of Understanding and taken the necessary steps to implement the system at national level. The involvement of the local authorities is an example that needs to be shared with other countries to ensure WAPIS's success in the region. To shed light on this important cooperation, Commissaire de Police Yaya Camara, who is serving at the INTERPOL National Central Bureau in Conakry, shared his thoughts with us during an interview for this newsletter:

1. Can you introduce yourself? Since when have you been working on the implementation of WAPIS?

Before this official appointment, I had been working as a contact officer at NCB Conakry since 2018, and was in charge of steering the WAPIS programme's launch in Guinea. I was officially appointed as the WAPIS Single Point of Contact for Guinea under Ministerial order No. 270/MSPC/DGPN/DRH/SGG/2019 on 7 February 2019.

Commissioner of Police Yaya Camara, National Central Bureau (NCB), Conakry Guinea.

2. What was the starting point for WAPIS Programme implementation in Guinea? What were the different steps?

The starting point was the day after a meeting of ECOWAS government experts, held in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, in March 2018, to examine and validate the creation of the WAPIS regional platform. The Minister of Security and Civil Protection appointed a national Single Point of Contact and a Technical Expert for the WAPIS Programme in Guinea.

The following steps led to the launch of the WAPIS Programme in Guinea:

– ECOWAS government expert meeting held in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, in March 2018;

– Visit by an INTERPOL delegation of experts including country officers and a legal expert;

– Audit of technical departments benefiting from the programme, with country officers, legal and IT experts from INTERPOL;

– Meeting between legal experts and WAPIS Single Point of Contacts in Abidjan;

– Signature of legal documents (MOU and Decrees establishing a Police data collection and registration centre (DACORE – known as the CREDPOL in Guinea);

– First WAPIS National Steering Committee meeting (WANACO);

– Identification and preparation of premises to host the DACORE;

– Receipt of IT equipment destined for the DACORE and a number of police and gendarmerie services (in stock);

– Bidding process for companies to renovate the DACORE. The files submitted following the bid are currently being examined;

– Declaration of the WAPIS system to the National Authority in charge of personal data protection in Guinea, the Agence nationale de la sécurité des systèmes informatiques (National IT Security Agency).

– Creation of a budget line (for inclusion in the Finance Law in 2021).

– Bidding process for fitting-out (link DACORE to the Internet). The list of companies concerned has been sent;

– Training as well as the second WAPIS National Steering Committee meeting are pending.

3. What are the challenges you face during the implementation of the WAPIS programme?

There are several challenges facing us: firstly, in terms of rendering the DACORE operational, selecting and appointing staff to work at the DACORE, the establishment of a budget for the DACORE, and creating a healthy working environment to foster the sustainability of WAPIS in Guinea.

4. What advice would you give to other WAPIS participating countries?

I would suggest that all the participants in the WAPIS Programme pay particular attention to the recommendations issued following the various meetings of the WAPIS Steering Committee, and that each one regularly monitor the progress of the WAPIS Programme in their own country.

EXPERTS' CORNER

Update of the list of offences in the WAPIS System

The list of offences was originally drawn up for the WAPIS database by the Programme's pilot countries (Benin, Ghana, Mali and Niger) which took into account the various security challenges that needed addressing in the region and the region's needs. As new countries have joined, bringing the number of Programme participants to a total of 16, it is now essential to modify this initial list from 2014. For each one to fully take responsibility for WAPIS at national level, law enforcement agencies must be able to identify their national law in this system.

This conclusion led to a series of recommendations being issued by the ECOWAS Committee of government experts held from 22 to 24 October 2019. Its recommendations were adopted by the Steering Committee during a meeting held on 26 and 27 November 2019, the outcome of which, besides the addition of new offence categories, was that there should be a two-stage process for incorporating the offences contained in each participating country's WAPIS system.

During the first stage, with technical support from INTERPOL, all the offences coming under the eight common categories established in the WAPIS system – previously selected during a legal seminar in 2019 - will be adapted in each participating country's criminal law and then modified in their WAPIS system to reflect the national nomenclature used for criminal offences. INTERPOL has drawn up a table known as "concordance of offences" table that each participating country must fill in to facilitate the updating of each WAPIS system. This table has been made available in English, French, and Portuguese to make it easier to use.

The second stage of the process, which will occur once the implementation of WAPIS by INTERPOL has been completed, will involve each country extending the incorporation process to all other offences contained in its WAPIS system, and to any other offences it wishes to add.

These same stages will be implemented in the Chad Police Information System (SIPT).

Ultimately, this process will also require an updated declaration of the system made by each country to its respective Personal Data Protection Authority.

CONCLUSION

Richard GOTWE
WAPIS Head of Programme

Dear readers,

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to spread throughout the world, with a second wave announced here and there. Africa, particularly West Africa, has proved very resilient, which has allowed the gradual re-opening of borders, under certain conditions.

INTERPOL has extended the moratorium on in-person meetings and on-site missions until the end of November 2020. However, the WAPIS Programme has been authorized, exceptionally, to resume its training activities and on-site missions. Strict health guidelines have been established and are being scrupulously observed when organizing these events.

This has enabled us to hold training sessions over the past few weeks in Nigeria, Togo and Senegal. Other training sessions will be organized in the coming weeks in Benin, Gambia, Guinea and Liberia.

Following the latest recommendations of follow-up meeting with Programme partners which was held on 14 October 2020, we will also organize a number of strategic joint ECOWAS-EU-INTERPOL missions to give fresh impetus to WAPIS's implementation in those countries where we believe the programme is lagging behind others.

Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we were unable to hold the Steering Committee meeting that was scheduled for October, even though a number of subjects urgently require decisions. For this reason, we will be organizing a Strategic Steering Committee meeting by the end of the year, to include the Ministers of Security, so that decisions essentially related to ensuring the WAPIS system's sustainability can be taken: the establishment of the required legal framework and national budget lines for the operation of the system.

COVID's impact has not been all negative however, for during this period we were able to work on certain structural issues relating to the implement of WAPIS, as I shall explain below.

Firstly, WAPIS's e-learning platform gathered pace and should be finalized in the first quarter of 2021.

We have also have launched a process to identify local technical partners in each of the participating countries to help install and update the systems. These partners may play an important role after the Programme ends in June 2022, and the countries can continue to rely on them with a view to ensuring sustainability.

A monthly virtual meeting with WAPIS Single Points of Contacts has been established, with four two-hour long meetings having been organized so far, giving us a snapshot of the implementation of WAPIS in each of the countries. These monthly meetings will be maintained even after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The budget model for the national WAPIS systems has also been finalized. This is presented in an Excel file including capital expenditure (CAPEX) and operating expenses (OPEX) that will ensure the future operation and sustainability of the WAPIS system after the Programme ends.

Lastly, a quality management guide has been produced, with the support of an external consultant. This guide will cover the cultural, legal, technical and operational conditions relating to the proper implementation of the System. It also includes a data quality self-assessment tool that participating countries can use to continue to monitor the quality of their data after the completion of the Programme.

INTERPOL