

ECOWAS commits \$12.6m for humanitarian assistance in West Africa

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) said it has committed the sum of \$12.6 million to humanitarian purposes in the West African region this year 2024. Speaking in Abuja at the opening of a two-day Strategic Engagement Workshop with Heads of government-owned television stations in West Africa organized by the ECOWAS Commission in collaboration with Media Foundation For West Africa (MFWA), Director of Humanitarian and Social Affairs of the ECOWAS Commission, Dr. Sintiki Tarfa-Ugb said Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Mal, and the contiguous countries that are bearing the spillover effects of terrorism got \$4 million. The ECOWAS Director said the commission has in place a robust humanitarian response mechanism and has been able to properly monitor and get feedback from its interventions. She said: "We know that our countries continue to face a number of challenges, conflict, terrorism, climate change, food insecurity. But our organization, the ECOWAS Commission, continues to accompany our member states to strengthen their resilience and recovery to some of these challenges that they continue to face." As I did in my presentation, I highlighted that this year; the ECOWAS Commission has committed \$2.6 million to support persons of concern within our region, those that are displaced, refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants. Also, you know that our region, especially the Sahel, continues to battle the terrorist attack and a lot of victims of terrorism. "And so for our humanitarian response to victims of terrorism, \$4 million has been committed to provide support for the frontline states of Nigeria, Mali, Burkina Faso, and also to the contiguous countries that are bearing the spillover effects of terrorism. Of course, you know Ghana, Benin, Togo, and Cote d'Ivoire." She also noted that despite giving the grants to governments, the commission has been able to monitor the implementation. She explained: "Our implementation is guided by a robust ECOWAS humanitarian response mechanism. Part of that response mechanism has an important element, which is the monitoring and the evaluation."

Tarfa-Ugb, while citing Togo instance, explained that: "The implementation of our project is between the government of Togo, the Civil Protection Agency, and the World Food Program. So you see, we have a solid kind of agreement with the member state and the partners. "And what we do is that when we give grants, we also go for monitoring and evaluation missions. So far, we've gone to four countries. We've gone to Togo to really see on the field and speak to the beneficiaries of those programs. "So we've gone to Togo, we went to the northern part of Togo, where we saw that our assistance has made them able to, you know, get funding to cultivate more areas of land, which they couldn't do as individuals, and also to access fertilizer to grow their crops. We've also seen in some of the countries where they've been giving cash assistance to, you know, strengthen their livelihood support, either they are small-scale businesses, so that they can recover. This is very important for resilience building for the communities. "We've gone to Gambia, if you see one of my

presentations also, we've provided food and nutrition support in the Gambia and flood assistance support in the Gambia, all amounting to about \$900,000. And our team were there, they saw people being given cash assistance. You know that in all the countries this year, it has been very, very difficult because of the food and nutrition situation. "We've been to Liberia also to see, you know, some of the responses that we have provided. In his keynote address, the Director of Cabinet of the President of the ECOWAS Commission, Abdou Kolle, said in recent years "our Community has endured and continues to endure daunting challenges. The Community is faced with a risk of split with the announced withdrawal of three Member States, threats to regional peace, and numerous terrorist attacks that have claimed hundreds of lives, unemployment among the youth and women, the immediate consequence of which is the migratory crisis and the resulting deaths of our fellow citizens in the desert and in the Mediterranean Sea." He added that: "These crises are further compounded by the issues of democratic governance, poverty and natural disasters caused by floods or serious fires in some of our Member States, leading to dire humanitarian crises." In his remarks, the Executive Director of Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), Sulemana Braimah, said the partnership and collaboration of MFWA with ECOWAS is happening at a time when the world, and indeed our region, is highly polarised in such a way that it has become difficult, and sometimes impossible, to building consensus around matters of mutual interest. It is happening at a time when the climate crisis and its associated challenges are escalating. He said: "Of course, in the midst of all these challenges, community citizens are expecting a lot from their ECOWAS and as expected, some are questioning whether ECOWAS is truly serving the interest of community citizens." He noted that "addressing the critical challenges of our time will require that community citizens are provided avenues and opportunities to fully participate in deliberative and governance processes. It requires that community citizens are well informed and have access to factual information on matters of critical importance. "It also requires that citizens are informed and educated about the activities and impact of ECOWAS as well as the role that they as citizens can play to complement the efforts of ECOWAS in addressing the challenges we face collectively. "But doing all these will in turn, require the existence of a vibrant, free and professional media as envisaged in the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance and in the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework, among other statutes. The workshop aims to strengthen the cooperation and partnership between ECOWAS, the media and critical stakeholders in fostering peace, prosperity and democracy amongst ECOWAS Member States and ultimately contribute to the vision of "ECOWAS of the Peoples: Peace and Prosperity for All.

ECOWAS collaborates with media to combat disinformation

The Economic Community of West African States, ECOWAS, has launched collaboration with media across the region. This is in order to enhance its image and showcase its contributions to the socioeconomic development of West Africa. Speaking at the inaugural session, which brought government-owned media outfits across the region together in Abuja, the capital of Nigeria, the Chief of Staff in the Office of the President of ECOWAS Commission, Hon. Abdou Kolley, said the initiative was created to promote an accurate reporting of ECOWAS activities and tackling the growing issue of disinformation. Kolley said the event, themed 'Strategic Engagement with Public Media Actors in Our Member States to Strengthen Collaboration and Positive Coverage of ECOWAS Programmes and to Combat Disinformation in West Africa,' was also timed to prepare the ground for the forthcoming ECOWAS's 50th-anniversary celebrations and to bring information to the people of the region on the contributions of the bloc to the socioeconomic wellbeing and humanitarian interventions in the last half century.

Kolley while addressing media leaders from across West Africa at the inaugural high-level consultative meeting in Abuja, noted that the programme was organized in partnership with the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), noting that the two-day event is part of a broader push to ensure media outlets serve as key partners in promoting ECOWAS's mission of regional integration, peace, and development. During the address, delivered on behalf of ECOWAS President, Dr. Omar Touray, Kolley stressed the critical role that media plays in shaping public opinion and influencing the socio-political landscape. He noted that misinformation, particularly on social media, remains a significant challenge for the organization, making accurate media coverage essential.

He said: "The ECOWAS Commission recognizes the media as one of our indispensable and critical stakeholders. "As gatekeepers and purveyors of information, we are fully aware of the important role of the media in creating and maintaining goodwill and mutual understanding between the Commission and its people. "This explains why the Commission has convened this important stakeholders' meeting with the Heads of government-owned broadcast stations as part of our ongoing efforts to proactively broaden our engagement and strengthen our collaboration with the media towards achieving our common and shared vision

as encapsulated by our vision 2050, this on the eve of the celebration of 50 years of existence of our institution."

Kolley noted that the media's role in countering false narratives and raising awareness about ECOWAS's achievements is crucial for fostering regional unity and public trust. He said the meeting is coming up at a time when West Africa is facing multiple challenges, including political instability, economic pressures, and a surge in misinformation across digital platforms. He revealed that the partnership between ECOWAS and the MFWA, formalized in December 2023, aims to build media capacity in tackling these challenges. He said the collaboration will focus on promoting democratic values, countering disinformation, and fostering peace in the region. Kolley also shared highlights from the 2024 Interim Report on the state of ECOWAS institutions, pointing out progress made in economic integration, peace building efforts, and humanitarian responses. He however noted that misinformation often overshadow these achievements, which is why ECOWAS is keen to deepen its media partnerships. He said: "The summary presentation of the results recorded during the first half of 2024 shows that ECOWAS is making a definite effort to support its Member States. "Unfortunately, however, our populations are not very well informed about these efforts. Instead, they are inundated with false information deliberately disseminated by certain vile individuals via the social media with the aim of destroying our common institution. "Indeed, as is often said, the absence of credible information is a breeding ground for disinformation," the Chief of Staff lamented. Kolley called on media partners to continue working closely with ECOWAS to inform and engage the public, ensuring that the organization's work is well understood and appreciated across West Africa. He said: "I, therefore hope that at the end of this two-day interactive meeting, the Commission will be in a better position to: Coordinate with national media partners to raise awareness of ECOWAS and its activities in the Member States among the citizens of the Community by increasing media programmes on ECOWAS as part of the celebration of the 50th anniversary of our institution. "Strengthen the capacity of the media in Member States to contribute to the reinforcement of democratic values and peace through media initiatives focusing on combating narratives of violent extremism and radicalization; and combating misinformation."

ECOWAS Parliament: Speaker Ibrahima Advocates for Stronger Policies on Health, Education in West Africa

Speaker of the Parliament of the Economic Community of West African States ECOWAS, Hon. Memounatou Ibrahima, has emphasized the importance policies that will enhance health and education for the development of the Sub-region. Speaking at the opening of a delocalized meeting of the ECOWAS Parliament Joint Committee on Health/Education, Science and Culture/Telecommunications and Information Technology/Industry and Private Sector in Conakry, Republic of Guinea, Speaker Ibrahima highlighted the numerous challenges Member States face, including limited resources, inadequate health infrastructure, and significant health disparities. The theme for the meeting is "Promoting Health Services and Education in West Africa: The Role of ECOWAS Parliament", brings members of these committees to exchange experiences and best practices in advancing health and education across the region. She said: "ECOWAS plays a key role in harmonizing health policies across Member States. However, challenges such as managing epidemics, coordinating efforts among countries, and adequately training health professionals persist. "It is essential that we collaborate to overcome these obstacles and ensure that our citizens have access to quality healthcare and education."

The Speaker underscored the importance of health education, describing it as a critical preventive measure aimed at reducing premature deaths related to diseases and accidents often linked to behavior and lifestyle choices. "By investing in health education, we empower our citizens to make informed decisions about their health and well-being," she noted. The Speaker also expressed her appreciation to the Guinean Government for the warm reception extended to the Parliament members. "I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the highest authorities of this brotherly nation for the warm, typically African welcome



we have received since arriving in Guinea. We are confident that this meeting will be successful and will contribute positively to the development of our region", she added. The recommendations from this meeting will be presented to the ECOWAS Parliament for consideration and possible implementation.