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WAPIS

NEWSLETTER



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EDITORIAL

Dear readers,

West Africa is currently experiencing a proliferation of security threats. Terrorism, maritime piracy, and transnational organized crime are of the most concern, and an appropriate response must be made in order to maintain peace, tranquillity and security in our countries.

If we are to achieve this, gathering information and sharing it between law enforcement agencies is absolutely crucial.

Benin has clearly understood this and, in 2009, set up the Public Security Documentation Centre (CDSP). Its mission is to centralize, at national level, all information relating to crimes recorded by the various law enforcement agencies so as to share it more easily between officers.

The advent of the West African Police Information System (WAPIS), sponsored by the ECOWAS Commission and financed by the European Union during 2011, was therefore warmly welcomed by Benin. For us, WAPIS is a vital tool in the fight against national and international crime. It is already revolutionizing the day-to-day work of police officers in Benin and the sub-region. I am delighted by how much Benin's police officers are using the system and the concrete results they are achieving in their police work and criminal investigations. The various officers' efforts are starting to bear fruit and have elevated Benin to the ranks of countries that have achieved the targets set by the WAPIS Programme.

Benin's success can be attributed to political will at the highest level of government and good synergy between the various participants, who all realized the importance of this tool to the country's security arrangements. Support from their partners is also worthy of mention.

Here are some of the actions they achieved:

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

- Putting in place the necessary infrastructure, personnel and a budget provision for the CDSP (DACORE);
- Extending the system to the whole national territory, with more than 150 Republican police units already interconnected with the support of Interpol and German cooperation through its GIZ agency;



- Preparatory work for extending the system to other jurisdictions, customs investigation and forestry inspection services, with excellent collaboration from the Ministries in charge of these administrations;
- Organization by the CDSP of regular training sessions in use of the system, aimed at law enforcement officers;
- Ongoing reform of the Public Security Documentation Centre status through adoption of appropriate texts to ensure the System has a lasting future, with dedicated staff.

These and other actions have resulted in encouraging statistics in terms of the data available in the database, and are legitimate grounds for satisfaction.

During June 2021, Benin's decision to organize a training session aimed at WAPIS system validators and administrators in French-speaking countries provided an opportunity to share best practice between players in the sub-region. This proves, once again, how Benin is keen to facilitate sharing experience in matters of security cooperation.

However, Benin has no intention of stopping when things are going so well. Work is currently in progress on the assessment function and operational use of specific records, for which usage protocols will soon be validated by all the players. Moreover, securing the future of the system is also of the utmost importance and every effort will be made to ensure this happens.

Like any programme, the WAPIS programme has a limited term. However, the system put in place has the capacity to be a tool that law enforcement officers use for their work on a daily basis, and hence become permanent.

Finally, it should not be forgotten that the main beneficiaries of WAPIS are the citizens of every country in ECOWAS, Mauritania and Chad. Together with the programme managers, plans are therefore afoot to organize information days so citizens can discover how important the WAPIS system is and how it works. This initiative will help convince people of the quality and reliability of the work done on a daily basis by police officers in particular and our law enforcement officers in general.

I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to the European Union once again for its financial support in helping us complete this ECOWAS project.

I would also like to congratulate INTERPOL's dynamic WAPIS team for the remarkable work they have accomplished.

I have no doubts about how willing my colleagues in other countries participating in the programme are to contribute effectively to reaching the targets we have set ourselves in our respective countries, which is reinforcing police cooperation in the sub-region and at international level.

I wish the WAPIS programme the best of luck in ensuring the security of the people of Benin, the subregion and the world.

LEAD STORIES

Nigeria strengthens its security architecture with the inauguration of the WAPIS Centre

The government of Nigeria, represented by its Minister of Police Affairs, Mr Muhammad Maigari Dingyadi, inaugurated the WAPIS Centre DACORE on 26 May 2021, at Nigeria's police HQ in Abuja.

The Vice-President of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Finda Koroma, the Deputy Head of the European Union Delegation in the Federal Republic of Nigeria and to ECOWAS, Alexandre Borges Gomes, INTERPOL's Executive Director for partnerships and planning, Carl Alexandre, and various law enforcement agency managers and serving ambassadors in Abuja, also attended this ceremony.

The WAPIS Centre is a data collection and registration centre (DACORE) that will be responsible for managing the WAPIS system in Nigeria. This centre will act as a catalyst for integrating collaboration between the different services in the country, by combining all the security arrangements in the process of collecting, storing and sharing criminal data at national, regional and global levels via INTERPOL's I-24/7 channel. By sharing criminal data in real time, the centre will be a game-changer in the regional fight against organized crime and terrorism.



Nigeria's Minister of Police Affairs cuts the ribbon at the inauguration of the WAPIS Centre, Abuja, 26 May 2021

LEAD STORIES

Law enforcement officers trained on data quality in Cotonou

Data quality is at the heart of the arrangements for implementing WAPIS. In this context, the programme organized, from 14 to 18 June 2021 in Cotonou, a regional training session on data quality for law enforcement officers and system users in six French- and Portuguese-speaking countries participating in the programme, namely Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Niger.



Family photo during the opening ceremony for the regional training session on data quality, Cotonou, 14 June 2021

This training, delivered by INTERPOL's WAPIS programme experts and Mr Christian Aghroum, a data quality expert consultant, improved WAPIS users' ability to process high-quality usable data in the system. Particular focus was placed on compliance with the principles of personal data protection when processing data in the WAPIS system.

The opening ceremony for this training was attended by the Director of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), representing the Director General of Benin's Republican Police, and the Head of the European Union Delegation in Benin.

A second regional training session on data quality will take place during September in Accra, in Ghana, for law enforcement officers from other (English- and Portuguese-speaking) countries participating in the programme (The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Nigeria, Sierra Leone).

The programme implementation partners review the recommendations of the 5th Steering Committee

Representatives from INTERPOL, the European Union and ECOWAS met on 22 July to review progress of the recommendations made to countries during the WAPIS programme 5th Steering Committee meeting, which was held on 30 March 2021 both in person and via video-conference.

At the end of this meeting, INTERPOL was given the go-ahead to continue activities in countries which had implemented the Steering Committee's recommendations. Other countries were invited to adopt the recommendations formulated for them before the next Steering Committee meeting planned for the end of September 2021.

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Law enforcement officers from Ghana, Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire get to grips with WAPIS.

With the resumption of WAPIS implementation activities, which had slowed down due to the COVID19 pandemic, the WAPIS programme is continuing to organize training sessions in the various countries participating in the programme.

Indeed, following the inauguration ceremony for its DACORE (WAPIS Centre), the first training session for WAPIS administrators and validators was held in Nigeria from 21 to 25 June 2021. This training session was followed by a train-the-trainer course for 10 officers from the various law enforcement agencies from 28 June to 2 July 2021. This training was also delivered in Accra in Ghana over the same period, then in Côte d'Ivoire from 26 to 30 July 2021 during the 2nd training session for WAPIS users.

The modules focused on theoretical and practical aspects of WAPIS, with particular emphasis on the principles of personal data protection, one of the key elements guaranteeing high-quality usable data.

Adoption of the programme and training modules by national trainers has been a real success story in the participating countries. In fact, more and more training courses are being delivered by national trainers without WAPIS team members being present, underlining how the system has been adopted and made permanent at national level.



Training WAPIS validators and administrators, Accra, 25 June 2021



Training the trainers to use WAPIS, Abuja, 25 June 2021

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES

The government authorities in The Gambia and Mauritania have reaffirmed their commitment to implementing WAPIS.

In the context of implementing the programme, INTERPOL organized a strategic visit in order to encourage the competent authorities at the highest level of government to implement certain major requirements of the programme formulated during the 5th Steering Committee.

On a mission to Mauritania from 17 to 21 May 2021, the INTERPOL delegation, led by INTERPOL's Director for Planning and Development, Dirk ALLAERTS, met the national authorities, notably the Minister of the Interior and Minister for Justice, with a view to overcoming all the challenges involved in implementing the Programme. These challenges, which are mainly of a legal nature, were swiftly addressed by the highest Mauritanian authorities, notably through adoption of the legal framework relating to the system and the DACORE a few weeks after the mission's visit during the month of June.

In a similar vein, the INTERPOL delegation continued its strategic visits to The Gambia from 24 to 27 May 2021, where they met representatives from the Ministry of the Interior and Ministry of Justice. These authorities also reaffirmed their commitment. The legal framework was also adopted in July 2021. In welcoming the delegation, the Gambian authorities reaffirmed their commitment by promising concrete actions, no sooner said than done, with the adoption of the legal framework by the authorities in July 2021, allowing activities to resume in the country.

For both countries, a new phase is opening up, with several activities scheduled in September 2021, notably inauguration of the DACOREs and a series of training sessions aimed at system data entry operators, administrators and validators.

The process of adopting the legal framework for WAPIS is in progress in participating countries

The importance of adopting an appropriate regulatory framework for the WAPIS system in participating countries is no longer in doubt, since it is a matter of legality, permanence and adoption of the system by the national authorities. After Nigeria and Cape Verde, with support from INTERPOL's WAPIS programme team, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania and The Gambia have in turn recently adopted the legal texts required to implement WAPIS at national level.

On 28 April 2021, Côte d'Ivoire thus adopted at the Council of Ministers a decree establishing the National Programme Steering Committee and a second decree, on the same day, establishing the police data processing centre (CTIP) and a police information system for Côte d'Ivoire (SIP CI).

Similarly, in Guinea-Bissau, two decrees relating to creation of the WAPIS National Committee, firstly, and the DACORE and the system, secondly, were signed by the Ministry of Justice and published in the country's Official Journal, and came into force on 9 June 2021.

As for The Gambia, the Ministry of the Interior signed this legislation relating to WAPIS on 14 July 2021.

Mauritania, on the other hand, adopted a joint order establishing the DACORE on 17 June, as a continuation of the legislation already adopted in 2019. It also adopted, on 26 August 2021, a joint order bringing the system into force.

It should also be noted, as concerns The Gambia and Guinea-Bissau, that both countries respectively published in the Official Journal the ECOWAS Supplementary Act A/SA.1/01/10 relating to protection of personal data in the ECOWAS space, while waiting for the relevant national regulations to be adopted and come into force, including data processed in WAPIS.

INTERPOL's WAPIS programme team is still on hand to assist participating countries in their efforts to adopt the legal framework needed to implement the programme on their territory

THE MEN AND WOMEN BEHIND THE SYSTEM

Benin joined the WAPIS programme in November 2012 as one of the first four pilot countries for the programme. The country has signed the MoU and taken the necessary steps to implement the system at national level. In order to highlight the excellent communication between our two entities, Mr Denis OGAN, the WAPIS Programme Point of contact and Director of the Public Security Documentation Centre (CDSP), spoke to us for this issue of the WAPIS Newsletter in order to share his thoughts.

1. Can you introduce yourself? How long have you been working on the implementation of WAPIS?



Directeur du Centre de Documentation de Sécurité Publique (CDSP) et Point de contact national SIPAO.

I am Police Chief Superintendent Denis Kadoukpe OGAN, Director of the Public Security Documentation Centre (CDSP) and WAPIS National point of contact. The CDSP is the national structure overseen by the Minister of the Interior and Public Security who manages the DACORE. I have been in this job since 2018.

2. What have been the starting point and different stages in implementing the WAPIS programme in Benin?

It is important to remember that Benin is a pilot country for the programme and therefore kicked off its activities in 2012. These include:

- setting up the DACORE
- its declaration to the personal data protection authority
- assignment of the staff, initial training and handover of equipment by the programme

After signature of the Memorandum of Understanding between Benin and Interpol on implementation of the programme in September 2019, several other initiatives have taken place, such as:

- appointment of WAPIS contact people by the minister
- setting up the WANACO and holding regular sessions
- extending the system to all departments in the country.

At present, the WAPIS system covers more than half the total number of police units at national level.

3. What challenges will you have to face while implementing the WAPIS programme?

The main challenges in implementing the WAPIS programme are:

- extending the system to all police units and other law enforcement agencies, such as the courts, customs, water and forestry services and the prefectures;
- launching the system assessment function, using records of wanted persons, stolen weapons, lost or stolen documents, etc.

4. What does WAPIS represent in Benin's security architecture?

WAPIS occupies a significant place in Benin's security architecture since it can immediately provide the investigation services with useful information on the criminal record of any accused person, and can be used to find people, weapons, vehicles, and other wanted items. Thanks to the statistics it provides on crime levels, WAPIS also allows the competent authorities to take appropriate action.

5. Could you tell us a success story about the use of WAPIS in Benin?

In terms of using the system, the investigation services have relied heavily on the systems to search for the owners of vehicles involved in offences and their criminal records.

I would like to talk about the case of a subject we will call H. H. A., who was questioned by Cotonou's crime squad over a kidnapping in the northern area of the country. Database searches revealed that this person had already been questioned and put on record for a case of assault and battery in the town of Kandi, in the north-east of the country. Due to lack of information, we cannot tell you anything about the judicial outcome of this procedure.

6. What advice would you give to other countries participating in the WAPIS programme?

I do not have any particular advice to give, since I am convinced that no investigation professional can ignore the importance of a criminal database in the course of their duties. Security needs to be increasingly proactive, and for this we need information, especially against a background of ongoing threats related to terrorism and crime in all its forms. If we can say that Benin has made qualitative progress in implementing WAPIS, I would like to emphasize that political will has been the secret of this success.

My sincere thanks to the programme managers, especially Mr François GUILLOT, country officer responsible for Benin, who has constantly been at our side.

Good luck to everyone. I wish WAPIS every success.

CONCLUSION



Richard GOTWE

Directeur du programme SIPAO

Dear readers,

The report by the United Nations Secretary-General for the Security Council on the activities of its Bureau for West Africa and the Sahel for the period from 15 December 2020 to 17 June 2021 shows that the general security situation in West Africa and the Sahel is still unstable, marked by high levels of violence, especially in certain parts of the central Sahel and Nigeria. This report also states that, in spite of intensified military and counterinsurgency operations conducted by national armies, the Mixed multinational force, the Joint force of the G5 Sahel and international partners, attacks by extremist groups and criminals targeting civilians, humanitarian personnel and goods, defence and security forces and civil protection volunteers have continued to multiply in the sub-region.

Our ambition is to put the WAPIS system at the heart of the law enforcement agencies' arsenal for tackling these extremist groups and criminals, through collection and centralization of police data at national level and sharing it

at regional and global levels. If we all mobilize ourselves and put in place the necessary foundations to get the system up and running in all West African countries, we can really achieve this goal.

This was the background to the third meeting to monitor implementation of the programme via video-conference on 22 July 2021 between the European Union, ECOWAS and INTERPOL. The presentation and assessment of the progress of programme implementation in participating countries highlighted the implementation status of the recommendations issued during the 5th Steering Committee meeting, especially adoption of the required legal framework and the status of countries who had seen their activities suspended pending implementation of the recommendations.

This meeting also shed light on certain key activities that have mobilized the programme team between April and the beginning of July 2021, namely:

- mid-term review of implementation of the WAPIS 3EDF phase by a team of consultants from IBF International Consulting, contracted by the EU;
- organization of the first WAPIS regional training session on data quality. This training course took place from 14 to 18 June 2021 at the Public Security Documentation Centre (CDSP - DACORE) in Cotonou, Benin

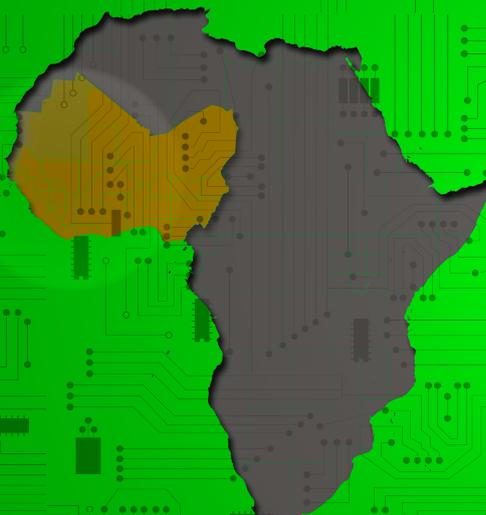
After the presentation of the implementation situation in the countries, more especially those where activities had been suspended, and the discussions that followed, it was recognized that progress had been made despite major difficulties being identified in some countries. The two principal decisions taken during this meeting are as follows:

- Lifting of the suspension of programme activities in Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Nigeria and Mauritania, with immediate resumption of actions in these six countries
- Continued suspension of the programme's operational activities in Liberia, Mali, Senegal and Togo. As a result, INTERPOL will not undertake any operational missions there. However, the authorities will be contacted to try and unblock the situation. As a last resort, high-level strategic missions could be organized to meet the competent national authorities before the next Steering Committee meeting.

Dear readers, before closing my remarks, I would like to announce some forthcoming operational activities, which you can be sure we will tell you about in the next issue of our newsletter:

- Inauguration of the DACORE in Mauritania;
- Inauguration of the DACORE in The Gambia;
- Regional training on data quality for English- and Portuguese-speaking countries participating in the programme;
- WAPIS awareness-raising week in Benin;
- A dedicated training session for Burkina Faso on personal data protection;
- Training sessions in use of the WAPIS system in Mauritania and The Gambia.

With many thanks again for your unwavering support, I wish you good health and hope you stay safe from the COVID-19 pandemic, which is still with us.



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