



ANNUAL REPORT

Resilience, Innovation, and Growth

2024

ANNUAL
REPORT

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD BY THE BOARD CHAIR	03
CEO'S MESSAGE	04
WACREN Board	05
WACREN Contact Address	05
Independent Auditors	05
Bankers	05
WACREN Secretariat	06
WACREN Community	06
PROJECTS	07
AfricaConnect3	07
Africa Digital Campus	07
Coalition for Sustainable Open Access Publishing in Africa Project	08
NETWORK	09
Expansion	09
Resilience	10
Performance	10
Network Security	10
NEW SERVICES	11
INITIATIVE	12
Open Science	12
Cybersecurity	13
Women Empowerment	14
Climate Agenda	14
EVENTS & CAPACITY-BUILDING	15
WACREN 2024	15
NREN Academy and Exchanges	15
Human Resources and Secretariat	17
Finance	18

The year 2024 was both a remarkable and challenging one for WACREN. We saw significant progress in expanding research and education networks, fostering open science, reviving our women empowerment programme, setting the foundation for our climate agenda and strengthening cybersecurity collaborations across our region. Our community grew with the addition of new NREN members from Guinea-Bissau and Mauritania, reflecting the increasing recognition of WACREN's role in advancing digital infrastructure for research and education. The successful completion of the Africa Digital Campus project, the development of new open science services, and the revival of the Women-In-WACREN programme highlighted our continued commitment to digital transformation and inclusivity in West and Central Africa.



Amidst these achievements, we faced an immense loss with the passing of Dr. Boubakar Barry, our founding CEO, on September 18, 2024. Dr. Barry was a visionary leader whose dedication and passion shaped WACREN into the strong and dynamic organisation it is today. His contributions to Africa's research and education landscape were invaluable, and we deeply mourn his loss. On behalf of the Board and the entire WACREN community, I extend our heartfelt gratitude to all those who shared their tributes and condolences. His legacy will continue to inspire us as we build on the foundations he laid.

As we look ahead, WACREN remains committed to advancing digital infrastructure, promoting open science, and supporting the next generation of researchers and innovators. The coming year holds new opportunities, including the next phase of the AfricaConnect project, further strengthening of cybersecurity initiatives, and deeper engagements in climate research. We thank our funders, especially the European Commission. We also commend our project partners, NREN members, other stakeholders as well as the WACREN community for their continued support. We look forward to another year of impactful collaboration for the benefit of the research and education landscape in our region and beyond.



The year under review marked a growth, resilience, and transition period for WACREN. As we expanded our services and strengthened our regional and global partnerships, we remained steadfast in our mission to provide world-class digital infrastructure for research and education in West and Central Africa. Under the AfricaConnect3 project, we were able to improve network connectivity, empower NRENs, and advance our open science strategy across the region. Our investments in cybersecurity, including the TrustBroker Africa framework, have also contributed to a safer and more resilient digital ecosystem for our members. Despite these successes, 2024 also saw a profound loss for WACREN. The passing of Dr. Boubakar Barry, our esteemed former CEO, was a heartbreak moment for our community.

Dr. Barry was more than a leader—he was a visionary and passionate advocate for African research and education networks. His dedication and unwavering commitment to WACREN's mission brought the achievements we see and hear today.

While we grieve his departure, we also celebrate his legacy, which will continue to guide us in the years ahead.

We are committed to consolidating the past year's gains while embracing new challenges and opportunities as we move forward. Our strategic focus in 2025 will include expanding connectivity, enhancing our services for research collaboration, fostering gender inclusivity in STEM, and supporting climate research. The AfricaConnect4 project, which is set to begin, will help to build upon our progress, ensuring that WACREN remains at the forefront of digital transformation in higher education and research in West and Central Africa.

We also recognise the importance of sustainability in our operations. Strengthening financial resilience, deepening member engagement, and fostering innovation in digital education and cybersecurity will be critical as we shape the future of WACREN. This means we are working to make our NRENs more efficient. Collaboration remains key to our success, and we are grateful for the unwavering support of our NREN members, partners, and stakeholders who continue to invest in our shared vision.

As we reflect on 2024 and look toward the future, we do so with optimism and determination. WACREN is more than a network—it is a community of innovators, educators, and leaders committed to shaping Africa's digital future. I invite all of you to continue this journey with us as we work toward a more connected, secure, and inclusive research and education environment in our region.

WACREN Board

Mr Pierre C.B. Bakoroba	Interim Chair, WACREN
Dr Ousmane Moussa Tessa	CEO, Niger REN / Board Member
Prof. Souleymane Oumtanaga	Board Member
Dr Joshua Attah	CEO, NgREN / Board Member
Mr Lucas Chigabatia	CEO, GARNET / Board Member
Dr Eyouleki T. G. Palanga	Interim CEO, WACREN

WACREN Contact Address

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-  +233 302942873 info@wacren.net

Independent Auditors

K. Asante Wiredu Consultancy
Chartered Accountants
P.O. Box AN 19196, Accra - North

Bankers

Ecobank Ghana
Silver Star Towers Branch
Airport City St, Ground Floor Silver Star Towers

WACREN Secretariat

1. Dr Eyouleki T. G. Palanga (Togo) – Interim Chief Executive Officer
2. Omo Oaiya (Nigeria) – Chief Strategy Officer
3. Edward Banjo (Nigeria) – Senior Network & Infrastructure Engineer
4. Ivan Yeboah (Ghana) - Finance and Administration Officer
5. Eric Attou (Benin) - Network and Systems Engineer
6. Tiguidanke Bah (Guinea) - Executive Assistant
7. Sefakor Ankora (Ghana) – DevOps Engineer
8. Abigail Essel (Ghana) - Project Manager
9. Koudoussou Ouattara (Burkina Faso) – NOC Engineer
10. Juliet Ahiagbede (Ghana) - Accountant
11. Brahim Nagi (Senegal) - NOC Engineer
12. Kwaku Effah Amponsah (Ghana) - Communication and Marketing Officer

WACREN Community

WACREN has an ever-increasing community of stakeholders. The community comprises NREN Members and their in-country communities (including academic and research institutions, researchers, students, libraries, librarians, etc.), partners, beneficiaries of programmes, initiatives, activities, and projects. In 2024, our community expanded as Rede Nacional De Ensino E Pesquisa (RNEP-GW) of Guinea-Bissau and the Réseau National pour l'Éducation et la Recherche de Mauritanie (RIMER) of Mauritania joined WACREN as an NREN Members on August 19, 2024. Through the LIBSENSE programme, WACREN welcomed new communities, including the Diamond Open Access community, public health researchers in Africa and Early Career Researcher (ECR) teams in Ghana and Nigeria. Our revived Women-In-WACREN programme also realised new communities in Ghana, Nigeria, and Cote d'Ivoire. By the close of 2024, WACREN had **16 NREN Members** and **six Premium Associate Members**. Details are on the website: <https://wacren.net/en/community/members/>. According to our yearly survey (country fiche), WACREN also had over **110 connected** higher education and research institutions across our region. Over **one million** academic community members in West and Central Africa are part of the WACREN community. Community members benefit from WACREN's services, advocacy, training and other forms of support.

AfricaConnect3

The operational part of the five-year-old AfricaConnect3 (AC3) project was completed in November 2024, while the procurement of links component was extended to 2025. In 2024, WACREN focused AC3 support on network connectivity expansion, capacity-building workshops, women's empowerment, and open science initiatives. One key achievement was the advancement in procuring connectivity links and equipment for network expansion.

Several contracts were awarded for different connectivity routes, and the procurement of 10 Gbps IP transit capacity was finalised. A total of 28 workshops were organised in eight countries, covering topics including eduroam deployment, BGP, cybersecurity, climate, business models and open science. These workshops strengthened technical expertise within National Research and Education Networks (NRENs) and fostered community engagement. More than 1000 persons within the research and education community benefited from our assorted training programme.

The AfricaConnect4 (AC4) project application was submitted, incorporating budget plans, a description of action, and a logical framework. The project team is now awaiting contract signing for AC4, which will further enhance network connectivity, digital infrastructure, women's empowerment, and RENs' capability to support climate research.



Africa Digital Campus

The year 2024 marked the final year of the Africa Digital Campus (ADC) project. WACREN and its partners achieved significant milestones in setting the foundation for enhancing digital education infrastructure in Benin and Burkina Faso. The deployment of ADC Cluster infrastructure, including installing server clusters, Zoom servers, and network equipment, provided universities with the capacity to host digital learning platforms and open educational resources. These advancements strengthened remote learning capabilities and improved students' and faculty's access to online courses. Identity management systems were also implemented to secure digital access across research and education networks.

Capacity-building initiatives played a crucial role in ensuring the effective use and sustainability of the deployed infrastructure. Training sessions equipped IT teams with the skills to manage campus networks, while hands-on workshops on the WACREN Video Kit enabled educators to create high-quality digital learning content. Despite procurement delays and logistical challenges, the project successfully enhanced digital literacy and connectivity in academic institutions.

The ADC closure conference in Cotonou in December 2024 marked the culmination of these efforts. It brought together stakeholders from WACREN, AUF, IRD, ASIN, and beneficiary universities to review the project's impact. The event facilitated discussions on sustaining digital education initiatives beyond the project's duration, emphasising the need for continued investment and collaboration.

Coalition for Sustainable Open Access Publishing in Africa Project

WACREN, in collaboration with EIFL and African Journals Online (AJOL), made significant progress in strengthening diamond open access (OA) publishing across Africa, under this project funded by the Wellcome Trust.

In 2024, the project focused on community engagement, capacity building, and diamond open access infrastructure. Key activities included the deployment of the BAOBAB regional shared repository and the PublishNow open review and scholarly publishing platform. Several organisations and institutions used the platforms, including the University of the Gambia, SLREN, and CERDOTOLA.

WACREN also launched a 7-week peer review training course in partnership with the Coalition for Open Access Publishing of Public Health in Africa (COPPHA), which attracted 1,200 registrants. Additionally, WACREN recruited a Community Manager to oversee the Diamond OA community of practice, ensuring ongoing stakeholder engagement and collaboration.



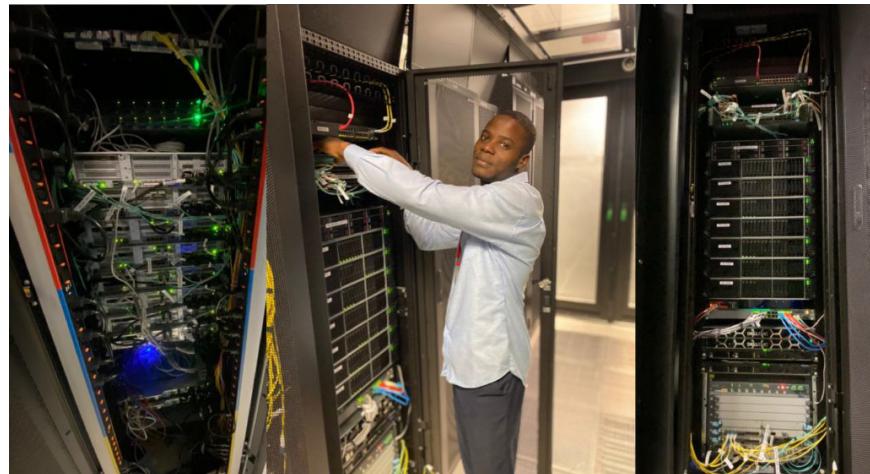
BUILDING CAPACITY FOR OPEN ACCESS PUBLISHING IN PUBLIC HEALTH: 5-WEEK PEER REVIEW TRAINING PROGRAMME



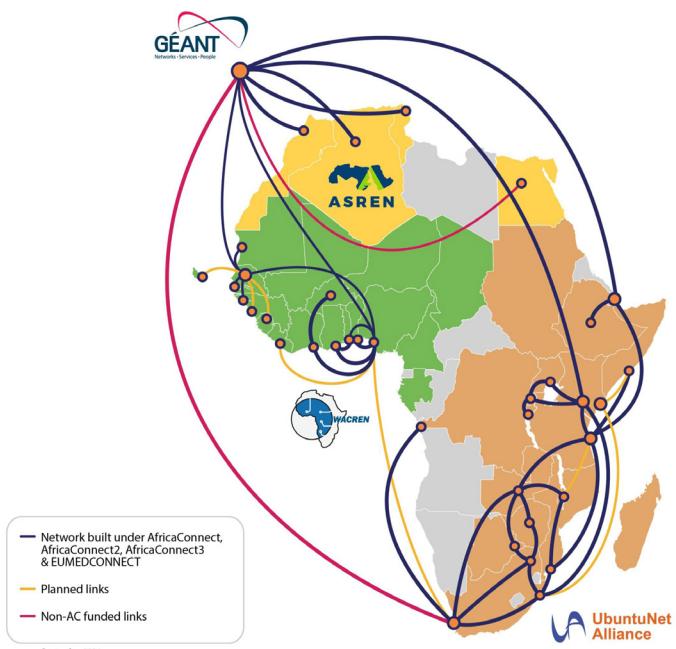
NETWORK

Expansion

In 2024, WACREN made significant strides in expanding its network footprint. The year saw the advancement of plans to deploy new connectivity links in several locations, including Senegal, Mauritania, The Gambia, Guinea Bissau and Sierra Leone, with vendor contracts signed for most routes. Establishing a Network Operations Center (NOC) in Accra was another milestone, with procurement processes and vendor evaluations completed. The Lagos MDXi cluster was also successfully deployed, featuring eight high-performance servers with 100GE port capacity and two Juniper Networks QFX switches with a high port density of 100GE interfaces. These expansions allowed for the migration of key WACREN services strengthened research and education network (REN) connectivity, and laid the foundation for future collaborations with international partners.

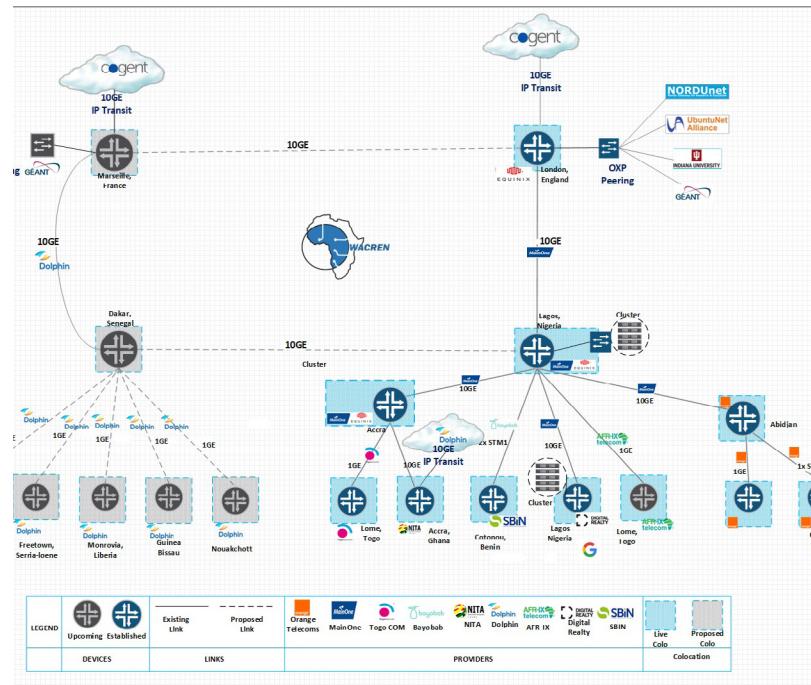


Co-funded by
the European Union



Resilience

To enhance network resilience, WACREN implemented strategic infrastructure relocations and upgrades. The Université Joseph Ki-Zerbo (UJKZ) Point of Presence (POP) in Ouagadougou was moved to the Virtix Data Centre, improving service reliability and peering capabilities. The Accra-Lomé link, which had been inactive for over two years, was restored in 2024, though service stability remained a challenge. Furthermore, WACREN completed a network refresh at its Lagos Edge POP, optimising routing efficiency and decommissioning outdated infrastructure. These efforts ensured that WACREN's network could better withstand service disruptions and improve the overall user experience for its member NRENs.



Performance

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Network Security

WACREN took proactive measures to bolster network security across its infrastructure in 2024. The migration of core services to the new Lagos MDXi cluster enhanced operational security by consolidating resources within a more controlled environment. The Accra NOC project also incorporated security-focused procurement, ensuring robust protection for the new infrastructure. Quarterly reviews with service providers included security assessments to mitigate risks and address vulnerabilities in connectivity links. These efforts collectively strengthened WACREN's ability to safeguard research and education data while maintaining a resilient and high-performing network.

NEW SERVICES

WACREN introduced new open access services to enhance the visibility of African scholarly works.

PIDsLink is a persistent identifier (PIDs) service that assigns Archival Resource Keys (ARKs) to digital objects and research outputs. PIDsLink is developed by WACREN to serve the needs of the African knowledge communities. It aims to improve the adoption of PIDs and enhance the visibility, discoverability and citation of African scholarly works in the global knowledge economy. WACREN exploited open source software to create PIDsLink, ensuring a cost-effective and adaptable solution for the African research community. PIDsLink ensures that digital objects, such as research papers and datasets, remain accessible and citable over time, even if their locations or URLs change. PIDsLink is integrated with BAOBAB, providing a seamless way to assign and manage PIDs for the digital assets in these systems, thereby enhancing their discoverability and reliability. A DSpace repository was also installed and integrated with PIDsLink to provide persistent identifier services for institutions using DSpace.

BAOBAB, the regional shared open access digital repository service, was deployed to support the management and dissemination of academic and research outputs. By the close of 2024, eleven communities were using BAOBAB. The assets span various disciplines, including public health, education, cybersecurity, agriculture, and NRENs. Ongoing enhancements include Single Sign-On (SSO) integration via SAML authentication and multilingual support, improving accessibility and usability for diverse users.

PublishNow, an open-access publishing platform, was deployed in a staging environment for testing, with stability and scalability improvements underway. Pilots are planned with partners like the Ghana Association of Food Scientists and Technologists (GhAFoST) and the Coalition of Open Publishing Public Health Africa (COPPPHA) to assess the platform's functionality and gather feedback. The platform is expected to be critical in expanding open-access publishing capabilities across African research institutions.



INITIATIVE

Open Science

In 2024, LIBSENSE continued to advance its mission of strengthening open science in Africa. A significant achievement was the release of the LIBSENSE Impact Report, a synthesis of nine years of work contributing to advancing open science on the continent. These nine years culminated in the development of open science services already mentioned in this report. LIBSENSE continued to capacitate researchers, librarians, institutions, and national stakeholders to advance the development of open science policies.

In collaboration with EIFL and as part of the [Collaboration for Sustainable OA Publishing in Africa](#) project supported by [Wellcome](#), LIBSENSE established the Diamond Open Access Community of Practice (CoP). The CoP ended the year with 200 editors and publishers. LIBSENSE also worked with the [PublicHealth.Africa \(PHA\)](#), [Peoples-Praxis](#), [AFREhealth](#), the [West African Institute of Public Health \(WAIPH\)](#), and the [Somali Health Action Journal](#), to establish the [Coalition for Open Access Publishing of Public Health in Africa \(COPPHA\)](#). COPPHA is an innovative initiative advancing Diamond Open Access publishing across Africa. Last year, the COPPHA trained close to 400 public health researchers from over 25 countries in Africa and beyond in peer review and open publishing.



LIBSENSE's Diamond Open Access publishing efforts garnered significant attention at the 2nd Global Summit on Diamond Open Access, held in South Africa in 2024. LIBSENSE ended the year with a new website. The website features key initiatives and resources that engage the African scholarly community.

LIBSENSE held capacity-building sessions for specific constituencies in its growing community. The LIBSENSE-Connect, Regional Leadership Engagement and National collaboration on Research Data Management, which emerged the Early Career Researcher (ECR) teams in Ghana and Nigeria. Diamond Open Access Publishing webinars for anglophone and francophone communities were held in collaboration with EIFL, AJOL and CAMES. LIBSENSE

hosted a session on the role of open data in transforming RDI practices at the National RDI Coordination Summit in Nigeria.

LIBSENSE also hosted the National Open Book Project and Open Research Workshop and supported open science efforts in Sierra Leone. LIBSENSE organised 12 capacity-building and community events, which were attended by 1730 participants, of which half were women. Most of the LIBSENSE activities were supported by AfricaConnect3.



Coalition for Open Access Publishing of Public Health in Africa

● Cybersecurity

The AfricaConnect3 and collaborative efforts supported the TrustBroker Africa (TBA) Cooperation Framework to gain a firm footing in 2024. This framework, designed with a lightweight governance structure, drew participation from diverse cyber sectors and gained significant traction among stakeholders within and beyond Africa, driving collaborative efforts in cybersecurity. A notable collaboration with FGI Bénin, the Open CSIRT Foundation (OCF), and the ShadowServer Foundation resulted in the SIM3 Auditor Certification Training, held in Cotonou. This event further strengthened regional cybersecurity capacity and highlighted the collective efforts to build sustainable solutions. By the end of the year under review, TBA had accepted two CSIRTs - CERT.tg (Togo) and KENET-CERT (Kenya)—bringing the listed security and incident response teams to ten from eight African countries.

In 2024, WACREN (through TBA) entered a new project with Shadowserver, funded by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). As part of the project, WACREN's cybersecurity teams will receive specialised training in cyber threat intelligence, ensuring they can effectively interpret and act on Shadowserver data. A comprehensive cybersecurity threat landscape report for ECOWAS countries will also be produced, providing critical insights for policymakers and security teams to mitigate risks and improve regional resilience. The project will enter maturity and completion in 2025.



Last year marked the revival of the **Women-in-WACREN** programme, strengthening efforts to bridge gender gaps in STEM. With support from the AfricaConnect3 project, WACREN equipped women from both English and French-speaking communities with essential skills in Python programming, climate data analysis, and IoT technologies. 93 women were trained (in Accra and Abidjan), significantly enhancing their technical capabilities in data science and IoT applications. Participants engaged in hands-on exercises, applying Python for climate data analysis and leveraging IoT for environmental monitoring, including traffic light programming and machine learning models. Beyond technical skills, the events strengthened networks among women in STEM, fostering peer learning and mentorship. Distinguished speakers—including Prof. Nana Ama Browne Klutse (Vice-Chair, IPCC Working Group I), Prof. Amos Kabo-Bah (Co-Chair, GEO Programme Board), Mr. Eric Asuman (Director General, Ghana Meteorological Agency), and Prof. Céline Koné (President, AFEMC-CI)—inspired participants to take active roles in climate and environmental research.



Climate Agenda

In 2024, WACREN built a foundation for enhanced engagements in the climate agenda for the years to come. In collaboration with the International Centre for Theoretical Physics (ICTP), WACREN converged African climate scientists, researchers and engineers into a workshop to explore leveraging IoT-based resources to extract and analyse data from climate research. This was followed by a Euro-Africa High-Level Meeting on leveraging NREN infrastructures and High-Performance Computing (HPC) centers to support climate research and data-driven solutions across Africa. Officials from key stakeholders, including the European Commission, GEANT, EUMETsat, AfriGEO, RUFORUM and WASCAL, contributed to the discussion.

During AfriGEO 2024, WACREN showcased these services and emphasised the importance of staying connected with the Earth Sciences community. This engagement ensured WACREN remained abreast of their evolving needs. To demonstrate our commitment to supporting the region's access to critical Earth observation data, WACREN established a multicast stream of EUMETcast terrestrial data to the Regional Centre for Mapping of Resources for Development (RCMRD) in Kenya.



EVENTS & CAPACITY-BUILDING

■ WACREN 2024



during the conference week. WACREN leveraged the Conference to build new relationships and deepen existing connections with stakeholders, partners and collaborators, including Invest in Open Infrastructure (IOI), ICTP, SCION, WASCAL, TETFund, RUFORUM, WAIPH and FCDO. We commend NgREN CEO - Dr. Joshua Atah and NgREN for the great support for the conference.

■ NREN Academy and Exchanges



the Value Proposition Canvas, focusing on sustainability and impact. Discussions also covered key concepts of Trust & Identity, authentication, and authorisation and how NRENs can support Open Science. By the end of the workshop, participants had enhanced their strategic planning skills, refined their business approaches, and developed actionable insights for expanding their NREN services. Thanks to DFN (German NREN) for supporting the content development and facilitation of the workshop.

The 9th Annual Conference was hosted by NgREN and held in Abuja on the theme - Charting the Course: Forging Future-Ready Higher Education and Research Communities. One hundred ninety-two participants from 25 countries participated in the Conference and the preceding workshops. There were eight meetings, workshops, and six conference sessions, with 42 panellists and speakers participating in various activities

This interactive workshop brought together 15 NREN managers from ten countries to explore business models, value propositions, and the role of NRENs in Open Science and Trust & Identity. Participants analysed their NREN business models using the Business Model Canvas, examined real-world examples, and engaged in hands-on exercises to refine their service portfolios. They designed and assessed new service ideas through

The Gambia's NREN (GAMREN) visited Ghana's GARNET to study NREN governance, structure, and operations as part of peer-learning for NRENs. As a result, GAMREN has now established its governance structure and is preparing to connect to WACREN in the next phase of the AfricaConnect project. RIMER (the Mauritanian NREN) also did a study tour at TogoRER.

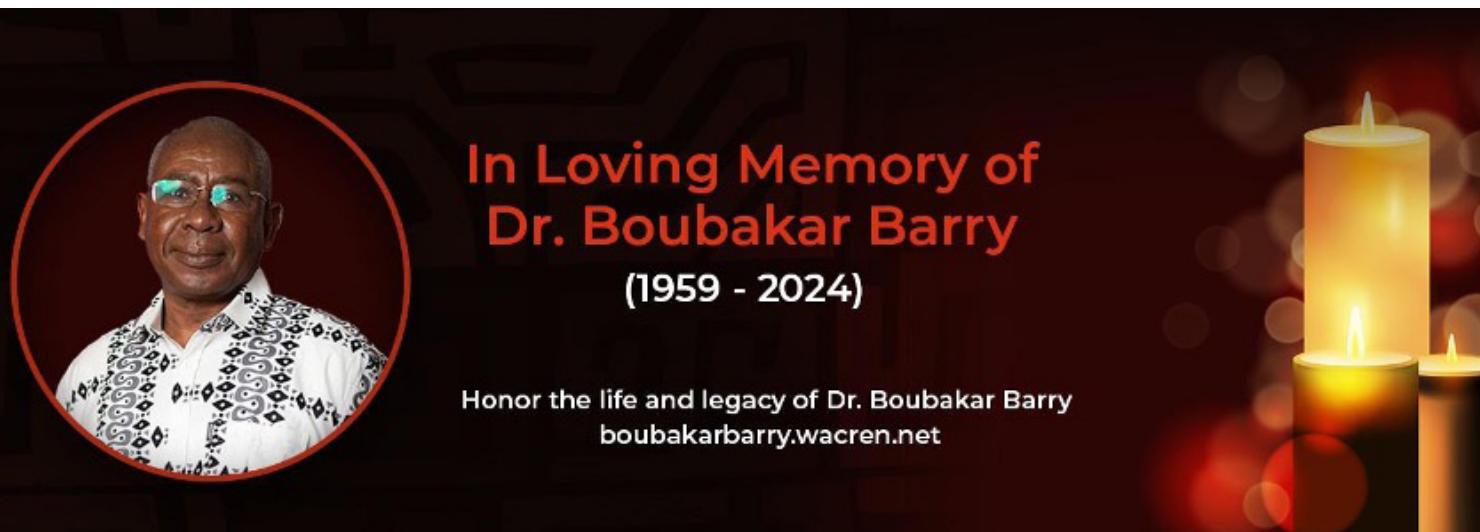
TRAINING NAME	LOCATION	START DATE	TOTAL
LIBSENSE National Workshop on Open Research	Abuja	04/03/2024	83
LIBSENSE National Workshop on Open Research	Accra	16/01/2024	20
WACREN-ICTP IoT Workshop	Ife	19/02/2024	63
PIDs Workshop	Abuja	06/03/2024	37
LIBSENSE RDM Workshop - Lagos	Lagos	24/01/2024	53
LIBSENSE RDM Workshop - Accra	Accra	29/01/2024	85
LIBSENSE Open Access Book Project	Lagos	26/01/2024	45
LIBSENSE Open Access Publishing in Africa Webinar	Zoom	27/05/2024	170
Coalition for Open Publishing of Public Health Research in Africa	Zoom	09/10/2024	396
Webinaire LIBSENSE : Publication gratuite en libre accès en Afrique	Zoom	08/07/2024	106
Women-in-WACREN 2024 - Accra	Accra	27/08/2024	65
Women-in-WACREN 2024 - Abidjan	Abidjan	04/11/2024	28
BGP Workshop for WACREN NRENs	Accra	02/10/2024	18
TrustBroker Africa (TBA) IV - SIM3 Auditor Certification Training	Cotonou	14/10/2024	13
Practical workshop on use cases for WACREN Video Kit in Benin	Cotonou	05/08/2024	17
Practical workshop on the use of WACREN Video Kit in Burkina Faso	Ouagadougou	26/08/2024	14
eduroam Workshop	Lagos	09/10/2024	37
LIBSENSE-Connect II - Workshop on Establishing a National Shared Repository Service	Abuja	14/08/2024	21
AfricaConnect Workshop on IoT-Based Acquisition of Research Data for Scientific Computing	Trieste	21/10/2024	35
Trust Identity and Access Management Roadshow - Sierra Leone	Freetown	04/09/2024	30

TOTAL: 1338

▪ Human Resources and Secretariat

The organisation suffered a significant loss with the passing of the founding CEO Dr. Boubakar Barry, on September 18, 2024. Dr. Barry was a visionary leader who led WACREN for 13 years, driving remarkable growth and success. WACREN delegation, led by the Board, visited and commiserated with Dr. Barry's family in Dakar. The Board and Secretariat of WACREN are thankful to the hundreds of loved ones and sympathisers who paid glowing tribute to Dr. Barry at <https://boubakarbarry.wacren.net/>, on social media and via emails.

To ensure business continuity, on September 24, 2024, the WACREN Board appointed Dr. Eyouleki T. G. Palanga, the Board Chairman, as Interim CEO until a substantive CEO is appointed. Mr Pierre C.B. Bakoroba, the CEO of MaliREN, was appointed the Interim Board Chair.



WACREN recruited a Project Manager (PM), an Open Science Community Manager (Anglophone), and an NOC Engineer. Contract renewals were completed for all staff except one. One staff member resigned to pursue further studies. One of the four interns was given a staff contract, and another had his internship renewed for another year.

By the end of 2024, WACREN had 13 staff members. WACREN rented a new office for the NOC in Accra.



In 2024, at a staff retreat in Dakar, we reviewed the strategic plan, which will inform the development of the next business plan for the upcoming term. This review ensured that WACREN remains adaptive to changing needs and continues to meet its objectives effectively.

Finance

WACREN continued to pursue internally generated funds sources with various service offerings to members in line with our sustainability goals. These include WACREN Connect, Zoom, data hosting, and regular member subscriptions. Some members' settlements improved notably, while others faced challenges fulfilling their financial commitments.

Two of the organisation's major externally funded projects ended during the financial year: Africa Digital Campus and AfricaConnect3. At the end of the financial year, the FCDO open-science project and EIFL-Wellcome open access project remained in progress.

Activities related to contracting and procuring new links and related equipment under the AfricaConnect cluster-0 managed contract were undertaken in the year, with an expected conclusion in the ensuing year.

All statutory human resource and operational requirements were fulfilled with the relevant regulatory bodies, including the Ghana Revenue Authority, SSNIT (Social Security and National Insurance Trust), Enterprise Trustees Ltd (Tier 2 Pension Contribution), the Registrar General's Department, and the Not-for-Profit Organisations Secretariat. Financial reports aligned with the standards and requirements of various funded projects were promptly submitted to funding partners.

The 2023 Financial Report was prepared, audited, and presented to the CEO and Board and subsequently to WACREN members at the annual members' meeting. Deloitte Ghana conducted an expenditure verification audit for the AfricaConnect3 project, and the Africa Digital Campus project audit for the first period was completed with IRD partners leading the audit readiness.

The financial year was characterised by various external economic factors, including high inflation and fluctuating exchange rates. Despite these challenges, WACREN successfully managed its finances, ensuring that project and internally generated funds were effectively utilised to sustain operations for the year.

