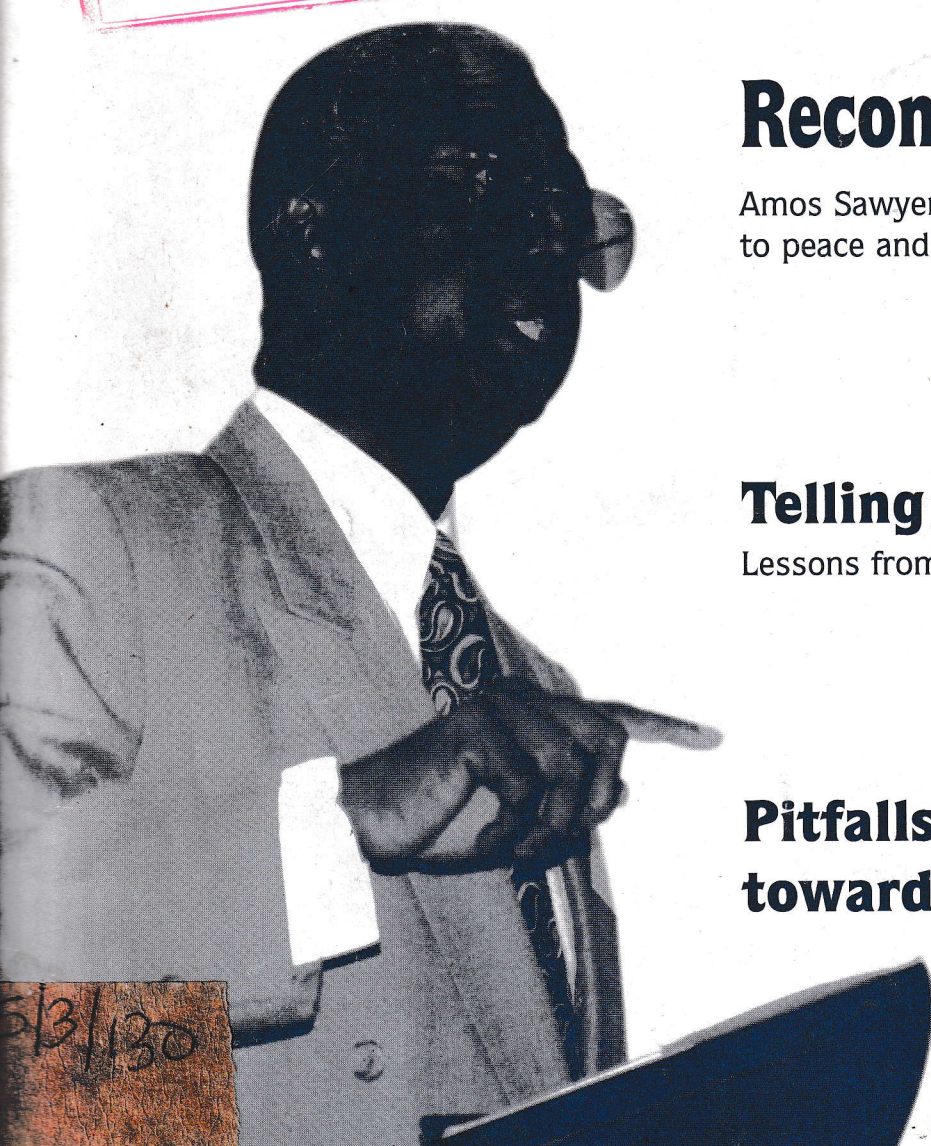


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# DEMOCRACY DEVELOPMENT

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## **Our goals are:**

- To theorise and systematise the relationship between democracy and development by analysing the West African experience;
- To research the theoretical and practical aspects of democratisation, draw on lessons from transitions from authoritarian rule elsewhere;
- To develop institutional structures that will serve the constitutional management of economic, ethnic, religious, gender and civil-military polarisations;
- To create training modules in democracy building, human rights, and governance based on identified unmet needs in civil society;
- To devise strategies for peace-building and de-escalation of conflict from local, national and regional levels;
- To provide the international community with regular, well annotated briefing materials on the state of democracy & development in West Africa.





T. ABDUL RAHEEM

# Renascent West Africa

*The demands for democracy and the opening up of democratic spaces are of course not uniform across the region but the struggle is not deniable in all the countries. Our collective experience has shown that democracy is too important to be left in the hands of the State, professional political classes or the largely city-based elite.*

**T**HE African continent is undergoing tremendous changes. Like all transitional processes, there are contradictory signals containing elements of advancement and reversals and the West African sub-region has had more than its fair share of these contradictions. The seven-year war in Liberia is one tragic demonstration of the contradictions. However, the war and the regional response to it also set the limits of management of conflicts in the region. It redefined the definition of what is local, national and regional. It has thrown up new social forces; issues, interests and challenges but more importantly challenged previous narrow definitions of sovereignty and international peacekeeping. It is one of those ironies of history that it took the tragic wars in both Liberia and Sierra Leone for a new West African identity to emerge. At the level of the states, there is an emerging consensus that the era of self-serving 'internal affairs' is over.

One other important development out of these crises is the increasing resilience and capacity of civil society forces. The demands for democracy and the opening up of democratic spaces are of course not uniform across the region but the struggle is not deniable in all the countries. Our collective experience has shown that democracy is too important to be left in the hands of the State, professional political classes or the largely city-based elite. The uneven democratisation processes that the region is undergoing is throwing up new questions about the relationship between democracy and development, the nature of parties and the contest for political power, the formal processes of democracy and the promotion or inhibition of fundamental freedoms.

The scope and definition of the democratic struggles are taking different shapes and directions in the region. There is enough

comparative experience that we need not re-invent the wheel but there is little co-operation between the different forces in the different countries. This is one area in which we hope the CDD can be of practical relevance to the people in the region – a bridge across divides: between academy and activism, between government and civil society and between policy makers in the North and policy makers/civil society in West Africa.

Without doubt, the West African sub-region's post-cold war experience needs some space for digestion. There is a need to step outside of the firmament of direct struggles and the grinding challenges that people face everyday and re-conceptualise the linkages between democracy and development in our region. This is our mission. We aim to complement what others are already doing and build genuine partnerships based on critical engagement, mutual respect and shared values and principles. Our point of departure is always to consult our people on the ground to appraise the situation, examine entry points, and decide on collaborative and non-collaborative division of labour before deciding what to focus on.

The challenge of building sustainable democracy and development in West Africa requires not just the reform of the state and enthronement of constitutional rule, but also the deliberate cultivation of democratic culture in our activities. For us, democracy is not just a claim on the state, it is a claim on us too, a claim on our commitment to transparency and accountability, a claim on our ability to build necessary linkages with governmental and civil society institutions and a claim on our determination to generate concrete ideas on how to manage political and economic transitions in our region.

\*Dr Abdul Raheem is chair of the Governing Council of the Center for Democracy and Development.