

# **Report of Evaluation**

## **Duration of evaluation**

November 1 – 24, 2008

## **Project evaluated**

Facilitating Civil Society Dialogue and Development to Foster Accountability and Good Governance in Liberia

## **Implementing agency**

Search for Common Ground (SFCG), Liberia

## **Sponsor**

Department for International Development (DFID)

## **Duration of project**

October 2006-October 2008

## **Evaluators**

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**November 2008**

## **Section 1**

### **Structure and Layout of the Report**

This section describes the structure and lay out of the report of the evaluation carried out as stated above. Immediately after this introduction to the report, the next section will be the executive summary. This is a concise description of the process, content and outcome of the evaluation.

The second section will describe in detail the methodology of the evaluation. This will include the survey instruments, data gathering tools and others. The main essence of this section is to show the reader how the evaluators arrived at the findings and what informed the analysis.

The third section will give a short context of both the evaluation and the project. This is to give the reader an insight into what informed the intervention and how the initiative was targeted at existing reality of the Liberian situation. It will also show the link or interface between the project, the tools and the results. It is a contemporary overview of the present day life in Liberian society.

The fourth section will describe the main findings. The aim of this section is to show from concrete evidence from the field whether the initiative was worth the money invested in it. This section will also look at intended and unintended consequences of the intervention with a view to examining the implications for the future.

The fifth section will focus on the usefulness of the tools of the intervention. Here the report will look at the Town Hall Meetings, the Media Programs, capacity building, network and partnership. The essence of this is to identify areas of strength and possible ways of improvement.

The sixth section will be some analysis of the findings/results. Having identified the results and findings, this section will focus on examining in a more in depth manner the implications and rationale of some of the findings. It will also look at the possible connections between the findings/results and its impact on the Liberian society.

The seventh section will dwell on the recommendations and lessons learnt. It will involve what was learnt during the evaluation and what was learnt during the implementation of the project. It will also discuss the recommendations for future intervention. The recommendations will be mainly focused on the project with occasional insights from the 'outside.'

The final section of the report is the conclusion or a kind of reflection on the entire exercise. Having traversed the length and breath of Liberia for three weeks, the evaluators will share key reflections, limitations and experiences. It will also give us a peep into the people that implemented this project and the challenges which they faced during the period. And finally are the annexure these include the interview protocol and report of the focus group discussions and key informant interviews.

## **Section 2**

### **Executive Summary**

This section summarises the entire report of the evaluation. The evaluation took place in the month of November 2008. There were two evaluators from outside of Liberia. The evaluation took place in four counties namely Nimba, Bong, Grand Bassa and Montserrado and in the following cities, Seclepea, Ganta, Sanniquellie, Gbarnga, Buchanan and Monrovia. The evaluators conducted Focus Group Discussions and key informant interviews in all the cities except Monrovia where there were no focus group interviews. On the whole the evaluators held 12 focus group meetings and 18 key informant interviews. The reports of the interviews are annexed to this document.

#### **Key Findings**

- ❖ The project created high level of awareness among the citizenry about government activities
- ❖ It created very high expectations among the citizens from the government
- ❖ The same level of awareness was not created about citizens' responsibilities to the government
- ❖ It created frustration where citizens are speaking out but lack enforcement strategies
- ❖ Media programs are very effective – but there is the need for more programs in local languages
- ❖ The use of drama as a medium is effective and resonates with people
- ❖ Town Hall Meetings have been very effective and useful –but there is the issue of representation and exclusion
- ❖ Capacity-building has been very effective but needs to be continued especially for media & civil society
- ❖ Government seem excluded from capacity-building programs
- ❖ Citizens voices are being heard but seem not to matter much in decision-making
- ❖ Citizens do not seem to have detailed and accurate information for constructive engagement
- ❖ Civil society is aware but are seen as agitators that have little to offer
- ❖ Civil society has very little engagement capacity
- ❖ Partnership with *Media* is very strong
- ❖ Partnership with civil society is also strong
- ❖ Partnership with government seem weak
- ❖ No partnership at all with private sector
- ❖ Attention was not paid to vertical relationship (between government officials)
- ❖ Level of citizen's demand of accountability is pretty high – but what do they do if the leaders are not accountable?

#### **Recommendations**

- There is the need to extend the intervention for at least three more years with clear exit strategies
- There is the need to also build partnership with the private sector because they are key partners in the development and peace agenda
- The radio networks should be trained on reporting corporate social responsibility (CSR) as a way of ensuring constructive engagement and

making available accurate and detailed information on issues e.g. the donation from Arcelor Mittal.

- Association of Liberia Community Radio should be encouraged to network with other such groups within the West African sub-region like the Independent Radio Network of Sierra Leone and Radio and Television Workers Union of Nigeria.
- There should be more focus on the relationship between the levels of government e.g. county and district
- The issue of urban/rural divide must be addressed because it is key to the future Liberia e.g. urban vs. rural radio, urban vs. rural civil society etc.
- There should be advocacy around the need to decentralize government activities e.g. people have to travel for close to four hours to Monrovia to get license plates for their motorcycles, and when they get there the plates are not available
- There ought to be forum or mechanism for rewarding deserving government officials to show them that they are appreciated and to encourage non-performing ones e.g. many participants in the FGD commended Senator Adolph Dolo.
- The organizational development component must also incorporate processes for civil society to internalize the values of accountability and participation in their various organizations and not just preaching it to government officials
- Though not the focus of this initiative, most programming should try and mainstream livelihood systems for the people for at the end of the day people want to earn their living in an atmosphere of peace e.g. many women FGD talked about Micro Credit.
- Participants in the FGD and KII asked for TDS to focus more on issues of justice, human rights and the rule of law this is because of the prevalence of impunity
- The use of drama for radio is also recommended for many participants talked about it
- Youths particularly wanted youth-focused programs to be aired in the evenings when they are at home and not when they are in the school or at work
- Participants wanted more program in their local languages
- They also wanted smaller THMs and for the meetings to be held in the districts as well
- Train civil society especially youths on “non-violence strategies for change”
- Train/ create awareness on citizens responsibility to government
- Need for preparing for THM and focus on specific policy issues
- There is need to start a ‘sustainability conversation’ now.

### Section 3 Methodology

<b>Summary of Interview Details</b>							
<b>City</b>	<b>County</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Youth</b>	<b>KII</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>No. of Hours</b>
<b>Seclepea</b>	<b>Nimba</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Ganta</b>	<b>Nimba</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Sanniqueullie</b>	<b>Nimba</b>				<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Gbarnga</b>	<b>Bong</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Buchanan</b>	<b>Grand Bassa</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Monrovia</b>	<b>Montserrado</b>				<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Summary</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>30</b>

The approach for this evaluation is ‘appreciative inquiry.’ We focused on what worked and why it worked. We also looked at what is not working so well and why. The main genre is qualitative. We also used interviews for the data gathering. We had key informant interviews and also focused group discussions. For the key informant interviews we spoke with one government official, one civil society person and a media practitioner. We were very careful to also balance gender. We also took into consideration the rural and urban divide. And for the focus group meetings we spoke with women, men and youths. Each focus group had at least ten people. And they lasted for an average of one hour each. The focus groups had a mix of government, civil society and media people. This was so because it was the partnership focus of the intervention.

The key informant interviews and focus group discussions were guided by interview protocol which the evaluators had earlier developed and shared with those that implemented the project. There were two separate interview protocols: one for the key informant interview and the other was for the focus group meetings. The proceedings were manually recorded.

The two evaluators facilitated the focus group meetings and the key informant interviews. While one facilitated and took notes, the other took notes and chipped in missing pieces. At the end of each session, the evaluators each compile their notes and the lead evaluator condensed the notes into one big report. As much as possible the evaluators recorded verbatim what the participants had to say. Participants voluntarily participated in the process. There was no force, coercion or any form of inducement whatsoever. Transport subsidy was however provided for participants to enable them to transport themselves to the venue of the meetings. But the evaluators conducted the key informant interviews in the offices of the interviewee while the focus group meetings were held at public places such as civic centre or civil compound of City Corporations.

There were some limitations in methodology. The first is time. There was time constraint to accomplish so much. The personnel were also few (just two) even though we had support from *Search for Common Ground* staff and other civil society groups who belong

to the network. We could also not interview the staff of SFCG. Language at a point was also a minor challenge this was quickly overcome after the first or second interviews.

## **Section 4**

### **Context**

Liberia has just come out of a war. It therefore is a post-conflict society. The challenge of most post-conflict societies is that they are in a hurry to catch up with lost grounds. Apart from this, there is also the challenge of peace consolidation. The priorities for peace consolidation in West Africa as presented by President Akufo-Addo of the UN General Assembly and reiterated by many others are: *to resolve any ongoing conflicts as quickly as possible; to prevent the relapse into conflict in those countries recently emerging from war; to prevent the outbreak of new conflicts; to develop institutional framework and capacities for successful peace initiatives; to mobilize the necessary international, regional, and national resources for peace initiatives; and, to comprehensively address the root causes of conflict in the sub-region*” (emphasis mine). The overall goal of SFCG in Liberia is *“to strengthen participation and inclusion to consolidate peace in Liberia.”* Critical from the above is the inter-relationship between peace consolidation, political, social and economic development. The driving force for all of the above of course is the people and another word for it is participation.

There is also the burning desire not to allow what happened in the past to happen again. This is the case of Liberia. Liberia has been one of the most stable countries in the whole of Africa. But when the bubble burst in 1980, the people were literally caught unawares. But as the war has come to an end, Liberians have shown a very strong desire to build a new nation where justice, peace and equality will reign.

To reinforce this they have held a very successful election which has culminated in the election of the first female president in an independent African state. Second, the proliferation of civil society organizations is a pointer to the fact that Liberians are in a hurry to rebuild their nation and in fact to take their destiny into their own hands. Third, Liberia has had an overwhelming support from the international community. This goodwill is something which they do not intend to dissipate.

Liberia faces the well-known challenges of a post-conflict society. First, is the fact that civil society seem to take on the role of government. This breeds all kinds of suspicions and mistrust and makes government almost irresponsible and unresponsive. But more importantly, it creates the impression that civil society is an avenue or stepping stone to political office. Second, civil society seems to run without a constituency but founded and run on the good-heart and reputation of the vision-bearer. This impedes institutionalization which in the long run affects organizational development and accountability and transparency.

On the other hand, Liberia experienced what is referred as the use and abuse of the media especially radio. While the media is a resource for peace, conflict prevention and management, it can also act as a source of conflict. This is more so where there is proliferation and mushrooming of small media houses. These are easy preys for

politicians on the prowl. There is the need therefore to clearly raise the bar of media performance for it to play its role in the enthronement and consolidation of an emerging democracy like Liberia. This involves professionalism and the solidarity of collectivity.

Finally, the citizens of Liberia have been traumatised by war. There is almost a total collapse of infrastructure and governance structures. They have been betrayed by a series of leaders. This has led to cynicism, despair and resignation. The implication of this is that people have become disinterested in how decisions that affect them are made. Second, they seem to discountenance their role in making democracy to work. For instance, the people of Liberia have experienced corruption and the impunity that go with it, to the extent that it is seen as a way of life.

Liberia is divided along several and different social strata. This is not unusual for a nation that has gone through almost twenty years of war. To bridge this division and heal the wounds of the past lies the strength of SFCG intervention because it seeks to bring these divided people together in order to harness their talents for good governance, accountability and participation.

But rebuilding requires so much money, so much capacity, tenacity and sincerity of purpose. In other words there is the need for planning, coordination, consolidation and a general harnessing of every resource and talent in order to actualise the Liberian project. This was and is still the focus of SFCG intervention in Liberia. It is to address all these that Search for Common Ground (SFCG) developed this proposal known as, *Facilitating Civil Society Dialogue and Development to Foster Accountability and Good Governance in Liberia*. This project was designed with the overall goal of SFCG in Liberia, which is “to strengthen participation and inclusion to consolidate peace in Liberia.” With the above in mind the project has two clear strategic objectives:

- 1.) Increase the capability of civil society to engage their new leaders on governance and accountability issues.
- 2.) Increase constructive engagement between the government and civil society on how the state is governed.

To achieve the above SFCG based on previous programming experience decided to use the media and outreach as strategies for strengthening participation and inclusion. And to be able to follow through on these SFCG decided to utilise strategic partnerships with the media, civil society and government agencies. And in order to give flesh to this initiative, SFCG based the overall intervention on existing realities. SFCG therefore used such policy frameworks as TRC and GEMAP as entry points.

SFCG also used other tools to inform and enrich the initiative. For instance, the civil society study, the media mapping survey, the polling, civil society engagement, town hall meetings, capacity building and the strengthening of rural radio network are also part of the overall strategy of deepening the intervention. All these activities are carefully targeted at different segments of the population. Apart from this different media is used also to communicate the messages. And embedded in all these is partnership with the different strata of Liberian society.

To what extent has this initiative enhanced civil society interaction, gotten leaders more engaged, enhanced/improved horizontal/vertical communication and fostered peaceful co-existence among community members and promoted accountability and transparency among the leaders? Apart from the above, have the rural radio network been developed? Has a civil society network been formed? Is there now a strategy for capacity building for civil society? Is there an enhanced strategy for communication? Is rural radio networks engaged in the reform process? Are platforms for dialogue created? These are some of the questions which this evaluation will seek to answer. If these exist to what extent can one say that it was due to this intervention? This is where the evaluation becomes a very useful tool.

## **Section 5**

### **Findings and results of the intervention**

#### **Research Findings**

- ❖ The project created high level of awareness among the citizenry about government activities
- ❖ It created very high expectations among the citizens from the government
- ❖ The same level of awareness was not created about citizens' responsibilities to the government
- ❖ It created frustration where citizens are speaking out but lack enforcement strategies
- ❖ Media programs are very effective – but there is the need for more programs in local languages
- ❖ The use of drama as a medium is effective and resonates with people
- ❖ Town Hall Meetings have been very effective and useful –but there is the issue of representation and exclusion
- ❖ Capacity-building has been very effective but needs to be continued especially for media & civil society
- ❖ Government seem excluded from capacity-building programs
- ❖ Citizens voices are being heard but seem not to matter much in decision-making
- ❖ Citizens do not seem to have detailed and accurate information for constructive engagement
- ❖ Civil society is aware but are seen as agitators that have little to offer
- ❖ Civil society has very little engagement capacity
- ❖ Partnership with *Media* is very strong
- ❖ Partnership with civil society is also strong
- ❖ Partnership with government seem weak
- ❖ No partnership at all with private sector (though this was not the focus of the project)
- ❖ Attention was not paid to vertical relationship (between government officials)
- ❖ Level of citizen's demand of accountability is pretty high – but what do they do if the leaders are not accountable?
- ❖ The increasing role and influence of private sector seem not to have been a cardinal focus of the intervention
- ❖ There is no room for sharing best practices either locally or outside



## **Section 6**

### **Usefulness of the Tools**

In the implementation of this project, many tools were used. But for this section we shall concentrate on the ones that people talked about so much during the focus group discussions and the key informant interviews. They include Town Hall Meetings, Media Programs/Outreach and the formation of partnerships with the media and civil society. These shall be the concentration of this section.

#### **Town Hall Meetings (THM)**

This is one of the most useful tools use for the intervention. Everyone in the focus group meetings and key informant interviews talked about the THM. The THM proved very useful because it was the very first time that the people had the opportunity to speak about what is important to them. Second, it was the first time that the people came face to face with their leaders especially the legislatures and county leaders and administrators. Third, it was also the very first time that the people knew that they are ‘powerful’ and had something to offer. On the flipside, it provided the people to ‘know’ in a negative way, the kind of leaders they had.

However, like every social phenomenon the THM has its challenges. First, the people wanted it to be held more often. Second, they wanted the THM to be held at the district level as well. They also complained about the distance of the venue of the meetings. They talked about attempts at excluding some people from the meeting. Some women in particular spoke about how the number of participants impeded effective participation. But for us as evaluators, the critical question is who should organise the THM, why, when and how often? And finally what will be a generally acceptable criterion for representation. SFCG has lit the flame; it needs to be stoked for it to continue burning.

#### **Media Outreach/Programs**

This tool is a complex mix. First, it involved the production of radio programs on topical issues. These programs were then aired by the many rural radio networks scattered all over the targeted counties. This achieved a lot. First, because most of the programs were interactive, it provided the people the opportunity to be heard. Second, some of the programs used the drama medium. While it entertained the people, the message was passed on. On the other hand, the programs were paid for this provided some form of financial relief for some of the struggling radio stations. Again the radio stations contributed to these programs thereby broadening the horizon of national discourse.

The other side of the media outreach was the formation and strengthening of Association of Liberia Community Radio (ALICOR). This has brought the various rural radio networks together to learn from each other and to share best practices. It also provided the opportunity for capacity-building for the radio journalists. In some instances, SFCG even provided equipments to enhance reportage of events.

#### **Partnerships**

Part of the strategy of this intervention is partnership with civil society and the media and to some extent with the government. The partnership with the media turned out very successful. That with civil society is also very successful. For instance, SFCG helped to facilitate the Motorcycle Union of Bong and even supervised their elections. *Ear for the Masses* also talked glowing about their strategic relationship with SFCG and how it has

enhanced their profile. Though partnership with government does not seem very strong on the ground, SFCG used engaged such policy frameworks as TRC and GEMAP. TDS even produced radio programs on these policy issues and thereby enabling the people to air their views.

### **Capacity-building**

Capacity-building achieves two aims simultaneously: it increases productivity and builds relationship. This was one tool which SFCG put to effective use in the initiative under review. Radio journalists were trained, civil society people also participated in several training programs. This brought people together to forge new relationships and learn from each other.

## **Section 7**

### **Analysis of findings**

This analysis is based on the assumptions that guided the entire evaluation. And they are that change is slow and difficult, that two years is too short a time for sustainable change to happen, that we evaluated what happened and not what ought to or should happen and that Liberia is a post conflict context. The challenge however is where does one start the analysis from and where should it end? Because society is dynamic, we have taken the liberty to be as elastic as possible bearing in mind that this project has several restrictions, limitations and time limits. We are also aware that this intervention was not intended to cure all of Liberia's ills. But that it was supposed to be guided by the history of Liberia. For instance, one of the policy frameworks used in mobilizing civil society in this project is the GEMAP which kind of focuses on fighting corruption. Was it the right policy framework or how does one explain the almost fatalistic attitude of Liberians to the issue of corruption. It would be recalled that in April 1987, a team of 17 American "operational experts" were sent to Liberia to help the government in putting her financial system in order. Many Liberians spoke against it and saw it as being tantamount to surrendering their sovereignty to a foreign nation. It is interesting that more than twenty years after that incident people are seeing GEMAP as the same thing. The issue then is this, is it that Liberians see corruption as a way of life or that they do not want to wash their dirty linen in public or that they feel that the GEMAP initiative is not home grown. The same could be said of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). It is obvious that the South African experience is different from the Liberian one. This short review is important in view of how dismissive some Liberians are towards these policies. However, it turned out that SFCG used these policy frameworks to open a big conversation on the renewal of national ethos and that has indeed enriched the project.

This intervention created a very high level of awareness among the citizens in the strategic counties (Nimba, Bong and Grand Bassa) about government activities. This could be distilled from the two major policy frameworks which *Search* used for the intervention namely: the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and GEMAP. Most participants in the Focused Group Discussions and Key Informant Interviews showed a keen awareness of these policies and their relevance, functionality and usefulness. For instance, at the FGD with women in Ganta they declared, "*We have heard of TRC from the radio.*" The men of Seclepea were even more forthcoming in acknowledging what they know, "*TDS talk about GEMAP in their program and how*

*GEMAP is bringing down corruption. For instance, they told us that US\$66,000 was given to Nimba County for development. TDS help us to know about this and what they did with the first US\$11,000. When we heard about it through TDS, we did our own assessment and found that the Palava Hut that was built was not up to US\$2,000. We also found out that no new building was constructed that they simply renovated an old building.”*

The missing piece here is what do you do with what you know? For instance when the people found out that no new building was constructed and that one old building was renovated, what did they do? What tools are available for them to ensure that the right things are done? This is important because frustration with change processes that have gone awry may breed violent responses to these issues.

Closely related to the above is the issue of high expectations from the government and especially the way and manner politicians positioned democracy as the ‘cure it all’ remedy. As a people coming out of war whose livelihood systems have been shattered, the people of Liberia are in a hurry to rebuild their lives. They are therefore in search of solutions, answers and partners. The issue then is, can democracy and the present crop of political actors deliver on these promises especially against the backdrop of weak institutional and capacity arrangements? This is pertinent because this is a group of people who over the years have been subjected to serial disappointments and betrayal by their leaders. What happens if these leaders do not deliver?

On the other hand, governance, democracy and leadership are not all about what comes to the people. It also involves what the people give to their country and society. The SFCG project has delivered on what the responsibilities of the government is to the people. One cannot say the same of the people’s responsibilities to the government. This is fraught with danger. Governance is a two-way traffic which involves giving and taking. From the field one gets the impression that the people do not feel that in the present circumstance that they have anything to offer. Even what they know that statutorily they have to offer they shrug off with the argument of corruption. As youths in Grand Bassa (Buchanan) put it during the FGD, *“during the last independence celebration, we volunteered to clean the city, but when we saw the budget for the celebration we simply withdrew.”* This is a problem because it breeds dependency and an unpatriotic attitude. It may even reflect in the people’s attitude towards the so-called government property. This is at the heart of participation. Participation is about asking questions, holding leaders accountable and doing what one ought to do as a responsible citizen.

The citizens are speaking out but do they know or have the strategies for ensuring that their views and voices are mainstreamed in policies? This is important because one of the main causes of the Liberian civil war is that of exclusion. Certain groups claimed that they were excluded from the governance processes. Not having the requisite strategies for ensuring that ones voices are heard and taken into consideration is another form of exclusion which may lead to frustration. This is a ready recipe for conflict. During the FGD at Buchanan, the participants were asked, how can you describe the relationship between you (youths) and your leaders? The response is instructive, *“cordial a little bit.*

*For me it is partly cordial, first they listen, but will not accept. If we ask them for something they do not accept, they promise they do not implement.*” This of course is not the kind of mindset required for rebuilding a post conflict situation. The challenge therefore is how to ensure that citizen’s voices are not just heard but taken into consideration in policy formulation and implementation. Moreover, at this very critical time in Liberia’s history, all hands must be on deck to deliver the promise of a good life to the people. The next alternative is better not imagined.

The media programs from Talking Drum Studio (TDS) have been very effective. In all the FGD and KII, people declared that the media programs have been very effective. As one media person who participated in KII in Seclepea put it, *“TDS programs are educative especially for young people, when the children hear their colleagues they want to be like them. That is why we now have child broadcasters, it brings in more listeners, it makes people to listen to the radio station.”* The people were also particular about the use of drama as a vehicle for conveying the message. As a strategy, it has been very successful. Because Liberia has high illiteracy rate, and radio is largely oral, the medium is powerful which means that an abuse of the power of radio could have devastating consequences on the nation. We are all too familiar with the impact of ‘hate radio’ in Rwanda. We were however informed that TDS should develop more programs in the various local languages to reach a wider population. This is important bearing in mind the urban/country dichotomy of the Liberian population and its role in the Liberian civil war.

The Town Hall Meetings have also been very effective in informing the people about government activities and bringing county leaders, legislators and the people together. The media have also done a great job in airing some of these meetings live. The first question that comes to mind is will SFCG continue to call and facilitate these meetings? Or will civil society and government put in place a mechanism for institutionalising these meetings. Another area for deep consideration is the frequency of these meetings. Should they be quarterly, monthly or bimonthly etc.? The venue of these meetings is also an issue. Many participants in the FGD and KII wanted the meetings to be held in the districts as well as the cities. They said that at times the meetings are held where many people due to bad road and high transportation cost cannot attend. Others spoke of the selection criteria which they said invited certain people and excluded others. As one participant of FGD in Ganta put it, *“information about THM does not go round, it goes to certain people. Sometime when you receive information, it says that there is a certain calibre of people that should go there.”* People also expressed their views about how the meetings are conducted. One participant of the FGD with women in Gbarnga said, *“they talk about all sweet, sweet, things and we see nothing. We could not ask questions because the place was packed full with people.”* Others suggested that such meetings should be called to discuss specific issues that arise and not to discuss everything and agree on nothing. For instance, they said that THM could be called on TRC or GEMAP or something else and that there is the need for adequate preparation before the meeting. For instance, one key informant in Monrovia told us that he attended a meeting on the Poverty Reduction Strategy and found out that neither government nor civil society participants have read the document. There was also the view that separate THM could be held for youths, women etc, while the findings could be collated for policy.

One of the key strategies for this intervention is capacity-building for civil society and media. Participants were full of praise for the trainings which they have received under this program. They wanted the capacity-building programs to be continued. But one snag here is that the capacity-building component of this project seems to have excluded government. This we think is a gap in this intervention. We feel that it is important to have joint training for government, the media and civil society as a way of building confidence and trust. Moreover, if we have a media and civil society whose capacity is overbuilt engaging with a mediocre government with little or no capacity, then result is better imagined than told. Another issue is whether the trainings have reflected or impacted the way people run their organizations and relate with each other.

It is one thing to hear what one is saying, it is another thing to listen and to make the person's voice to matter in decision-making. When a nation has a ruling elite that feel that they are doing the masses a favour by ruling them, there is the tendency not to credit the people with any form of intelligence. When this is the case, the people's voices become a mere rancorous cacophony. This aptly illustrates the present situation in Liberia. Many issues discussed at the various THM meetings are still pending because the people's demands are at variant with what their leaders feel is the right thing for them. This is how one youth at FGD in Gbarnga put it; *"youths are involved in meetings and others but after that nothing. For instance going beyond THM and not just creating forum but to monitor results, follow the issue to the end. Youths are invited to meetings, if there is disagreement a new meeting is called, our views are partially taken into consideration. But when it comes to implementation our views are not taken in."* This is how another described relationship with elected officials, *"I have not seen the senator for this county before because people say he is fearful and we cannot see him."*

What are some of the mechanisms for resolving these? Will the leaders go back to the people to seek their consent? As this project winds down what further mechanism exists for the people to air their views and for those views to matter?

This is made more complex by the fact that the people do not have detailed and accurate information about public issues which will enable them to constructively engage their leaders. A very good example is the so-called 'donation' from Arcellor Mittal. First, is what Arcellor Mittal did a donation or a statutory requirement? Is it a one-off affair or is it going to be regular? Is Arcellor Mittal paying for damages which its operation has caused the host community or are they just being socially responsible? Third, what does the law say about who should manage such funds? Is it the first time that a corporate body is making such a donation? Or have there been such instances in the past? If there have been such instances in the past, what were the precedents and what are some of the lessons that have been learnt from administering such funds? Finally, why is it that discussions around this money has centered on "Yellow Machines or No Yellow Machines?" What can be a possible role for the legislators in this scenario? As it stands, the conversations which this project has engendered needs to be broadened, deepened and sustained for the people's voices to begin to matter in decision-making. For this to happen, people need more detailed and accurate information. And there is the need for preparing people for the THM.

One of the major findings of this evaluation is that there is a high level of awareness among civil society. But within government circles civil society is seen a bunch of agitators or upstarts who simply joined the bandwagon to achieve visibility. In other words civil society is a stepping stone to government position. Some very active civil society actors have also found their way into government. While this project has achieved a high level of partnership between several strands of society, same cannot be said of the partnership between civil society and government. The relationship is still like that of cat and mouse and many government officials have very harsh words for civil society. This is how one KII participant in Seclepea put it, *“some NGOs have a very funny attitude, in that they will come functioning without informing the authorities. For instance, if some people come to work for you in your farm, you must tell them where to clean. NGOs don’t consult; in one area they built a school without specification. I called them and they apologized but apology cannot fix it. It is not all the NGOs that behave like that, some of them are good. My relationship with my people is cordial. I have been working for them without pay for four years now. Most of these NGOs and journalists do not care about the people, when a government official is not paid they will not talk about it, they are always commenting on corruption. Here I do not have a jail house, how do you discipline people? There is need for training for our people and the radio staff. NGOs must also learn to consult if they are truly partners.”*

There seem to be this feeling also that civil society has very little capacity for engaging their leaders. Many reasons account for this. First, literacy rate is generally low. Second, the proliferation of civil society organisations seems to have worn thin the available personnel for running them. Embedded in this whole scenario is fact that people seem to have lost confidence in the ability of the government to deliver public good. On one side is the disdain for civil society by government people, on the other side is the suspicion of government by civil society and the end result is civil society being either unwilling or unable to engage government. For instance, many civil society actors have simply heard of GEMAP, TRC and even PRS. The details and main points of these instruments are still alien to the people. And civil society actors seem always to latch on minute issues leaving the broader and deeper ones. Though civil society capacity has been built, this has been mainly in the area of organizational development and not in engaging issues that are of interest to the larger society.

One of the greatest achievements of this intervention is the partnership with the media. This is not unexpected because this is SFCG’s niche. This is how one KII participant articulated this partnership, *it (TDS) has helped us, and we follow their format. They also took people to their Gbarnga Field Office and trained them. They trained us on news writing, how to conduct interviews etc. SFCG also gave us digital recorders. It has been helpful because SFCG linked us with other people like BBC Trust. It has also fostered interaction between us and people from other parts of the country. We also generate revenue from TDS for they pay for air time for the programs. They have also been training us. They assisted us technically by using their experts whenever we have problem with our equipments. They gave motorbikes to some of our colleagues for news gathering.”* Unfortunately, the same kind of partnership does not exist between the

government and the media. This is how the same interviewee put it, *“generally there is tension between us and government officials. For instance, we asked the District Superintendent to give us a piece of land to build our office, he refused saying that we do not respect them, that we abuse them.”* This perception is mutual; this is how one government official from the same Seclepea described his relationship with the media, *“radio should be balanced and that before broadcasting any piece of information, that radio should check both sides. Broadcasters should be trained in what to talk. Radio stations should focus more on local language program and news because that is the best way to reach a larger segment of the population. Whoever is heading the radio station must be trained so that news is not reported out of context. For instance, a senator has said that people must not be forced to work and the radio reported that he said ‘no more forced labour.’ This kind of news will throw everybody out of development.”* For instance, hear one government official from Nimba county, *“Government looks at the media as enemy and media looks at government as enemy that should not be the case, they are partners in development and peace.”*

This kind of relationship does not augur well for a society that experienced a war based on very deep divisions. And if Liberia is going to develop, it needs every organ of society to be on board. Considering the power of radio especially, it is important to underscore the fact that something needs to be done about this relationship. But at the bottom of all these is that government officials have not learnt how to use the media in governance especially in a democratic setting. Unfortunately many government officials have always seen the radio, television and newspaper organs as an extension of government institutions which they can order around to do their bidding. Hear another KII participant in Gbarnga, *“there was a time we had a Superintendent who had a military mindset. He will simply call and say to you, I do not want to hear this kind of thing on radio.”* But in the case of community radio stations or generally independent media, the government will definitely need skills for media engagement.

Another major area of focus for this project is partnership with civil society. So much was achieved in this respect. This is how one KII participant in Ganta put it; *we have been doing a lot with SFCG. They have helped us appear and speak on Mirror Radio, Veritas etc. The relationship has been cordial; we have been getting technical support which has helped to upgrade our capacity. They have also helped to provide international support by making people especially government officials to know that we are not just local.”* Participants at the FGD for youths in Gbarnga said, *“we are waiting for SFCG to come and inaugurate the union since after the election.”* This may after all be the greatest achievement of the project. SFCG assisted many civil society organizations to come together. They also assisted them in organizational development. And in some instances, SFCG also provided financial assistance through subcontracts, payment for radio programs etc. SFCG was also instrumental in ensuring full civil society participation in the various THM. The issue now is that a sense of dependency is creeping into civil society. They are waiting for SFCG to come and do practically every thing for them. A classic example is the Motorcycle Union of Bong County. SFCG helped to bring them together, SFCG also facilitated their elections but unfortunately now they are still waiting for SFCG to inaugurate the new executive. This is understandable in view of the

credibility which Search's presence tends to bring to bear on the entire process, but at some point in time SFCG must design and implement an exit strategy. Right now it is too early for that. On the other hand as well some civil society organizations have also picked up the gauntlet and are already having their internal sustainability conversations. For instance, Association of Liberia Community Radio (ALICOR) did ask that SFCG assist them with training on how to develop project proposals. This is a clear sign that with time most of the civil society organizations may be able to stand on their feet. But more importantly is that there has been increased interaction among civil society groups in the target counties. For instance, instead of competing, civil society groups are now cooperating and collaborating. But there is also a kind of tension between urban and rural civil society organizations. This is also discernible even among radio stations. As one KII participant in Gbarnga said, *"when we meet they call us 'rural community radio' they think we are less important, they feel more important but the relationship is improving. SFCG played a big role in bridging the gap by bringing us together through the Liberia Press Union."* Another civil society leader put it thus, *Urban CSOs are more profit-making because they do not know the problem. They tend to concentrate on few areas. There is scanty collaboration between urban and rural CSOs. Urban CSOs consider rural ones as inferior because of education. But Ear For The Masses has earned respect through its work and collaboration with Search."*

One of the proposed outcomes of this project is the engagement of county leaders in target areas and the promotion of a sense of accountability among elected leaders. To a very large extent this outcome is visible. While some county leaders see the engagement as useful others see it as an unwarranted distraction. One participant aptly captured this during the FGD for men in Seclepea, he said, *"sometimes we see our representative in our community, he came twice. Our relationship with Junior Senator Adolp Dolo is very cordial. I do not know whether it was because of the information that he started coming, but I think it is because of the information. It is because of TDS that they are afraid, because they are big people. The relationship is not too cordial with others, but the change is gradual. Our leaders are also learning. The relationship between us and our leaders is like what we call bitter kola. When you eat bitter kola it is bitter and when you drink water it is sweet. If TDS continue in the way they have been coming, and if it is aired people will be afraid. It was through TDS that we learnt that US\$30,000 was given to each electoral district for development. TDS should re-double their effort in dealing with a government that is not too fair to you. As for me TDS should be with us forever, that is the only way Liberia could be rebuilt. We want to thank TDS forever and ever, we never knew that we are decision-makers, whatever they say we say yes. It is through TDS that we can come together to share our views. TDS should also visit district headquarters to hear their views. Government should not give positions to those in big business because they will use government money to build their business."* The import of the above is that much still needs to be done to entrench accountability among leaders. Engagement with county leaders is still shaky.

But it is important to draw attention to what we might like to refer to as the missing link in this chain of partnerships and relationship. It is the vertical relationship between government officials. Even though this is not an explicit activity or expected outcome of



the initiative, it is still very important. The relationship between different levels of government is tension-soaked. This is how one government official put it during KII in Seclepea, *“there is always tension between us because people from Monrovia feel superior and have more access to better resources.”* Even where this is not obvious, other government officials have a way of pointing at the tension without appearing to do so. Another government official has this to say, *“Nimba is rural but I got money, I got population, I got resources you got to respect me. They are all small counties, when I talk, I talk with strength therefore I have no problem with urban counties. My relationship with them is cordial, we usually call them mushroom counties.”* We are drawing attention to this phenomenon for several reasons. First, the civil war in Liberia drew its main support from the rural areas. Second, there has always been this dichotomy between the country people and urban dwellers. Third, this dichotomy has been translated into how people access resources. It is therefore necessary to keep focus on this in order not to deepen the divide but to bridge it.

Generally partnership within and between government is weak. This was not intended but it is an unintended consequence of this initiative. It is important to accord it some more attention. In all these there is no partnership at all with the private sector. This is understandable since this is basically a governance project. But it also interesting that one conversation that ran through all the THMs is the County Development Fund from Arcelor Mittal. Liberia is naturally endowed. It has iron-ore, rubber, rice, timber and water. We have such big concerns as Firestone, Arcelor Mittal, ECOBANK and others. It is important therefore to bring them on board the governance train. As one senior government official put it in Nimba county, *“we are so concerned about the fund because we do not want the Nigeria repercussion.”*

## **Section 8**

### **Recommendations**

To our mind, the first and most important recommendation is that this initiative must not be abandoned at this stage because the citizens have not been adequately prepared to take on the issues raised through the intervention. There is the need to broaden, deepen and sustain this initiative for at least three more years with a clear and distinct exit strategy.

- There is the need to extend the intervention for at least three more years with clear exit strategies
- There is the need to also build partnership with the private sector because they are key partners in the development and peace agenda
- The radio networks should be trained on reporting corporate social responsibility (CSR) as a way of ensuring constructive engagement and making available accurate and detailed information on issues e.g. the donation from Arcelor Mittal.
- There should be more focus on the relationship between the levels of government e.g. county and district
- The issue of urban/rural divide must be addressed because it is key to the future of Liberia e.g. urban vs. rural radio, urban vs. rural civil society etc.
- There should be advocacy around the need to decentralize government activities e.g. people have to travel for close to four hours to Monrovia to

get license plates for their motorcycles, and when they get there the plates are not available

- There ought to be forum or mechanism for rewarding deserving government officials to show them that they are appreciated and to encourage non-performing ones e.g. many participants in the FGD commended Senator Adolph Dolo.
- The organizational development component must also incorporate processes for civil society to internalize the values of accountability and participation in their various organizations and not just preaching it to government officials
- Though not the focus of this initiative, most programming should try and mainstream livelihood systems for the people for at the end of the day people want to earn their living in an atmosphere of peace e.g. many women FGD talked about Micro Credit for women
- Participants in the FGD and KII asked for TDS to focus more on issues of justice, human rights and the rule of law this is because of the prevalence of impunity
- The use of drama for radio is also recommended for many participants talked about it
- Youths particularly wanted youth-focused programs to be aired in the evenings when they are at home and not when they are in the school or at work
- Participants wanted more program in their local languages because the population is largely illiterate
- They also wanted smaller THMs and for the meetings to be held in the districts as well
- Train civil society especially youths on “non-violence strategies for change”
- Train/ create awareness on citizens responsibility to government
- Need for preparing for THM and focus on policy

### **Lessons learned**

- ✓ The first lesson which we learned is the level of ignorance among government officials
- ✓ People know more about TDS (or rather equated TDS) with SFCG
- ✓ People want to talk, they know what they want but seem extremely helpless as to how to make their views matter
- ✓ We also learnt that SFCG staff are on ground and present, people spoke about them by names and talked about their extraordinary support
- ✓ SFCG and their network members provided easy support and access for the various interviews and FGD.
- ✓ Activities in the intervention are a little too heavy, without the background and capacity of an organization like SFCG, delivery would have been a big issue
- ✓ Government officials have not learnt how to use the media

- ✓ Many government officials still think that they are doing the people a favour
- ✓ We found a considerable number of women in government e.g. we spoke with a district commissioner and another a county superintendent and each is chairperson of their various associations
- ✓ A sense of dependency is gradually being created among the citizenry
- ✓ Government does not know how to use the media
- ✓ Impunity is still very prevalent
- ✓ There are issues around “Women & Children Rights” and its relationship with the culture of the people
- ✓ Is civil society applying the same standards of accountability and participation which they are demanding?
- ✓ Evaluation is about what happened but participants almost turned the FGDs and KIIs into complaint sessions and ground for ‘shopping list.’
- ✓ The evaluation was empowering for the citizens especially having people from outside e.g. from Sierra Leone and Nigeria
- ✓ We did not see one female radio station manager!
- ✓ The radio stations would like to share the findings of the evaluation with their listeners
- ✓ Why are Liberia’s neighbours ever willing to allow their territories to be used as launching pad against Liberia?
- ✓ Radio is powerful as a medium in Liberia, but what is power without control, the control here should be training and professionalism
- ✓ Liberia is a big rumour mill and therefore there is need for effective usage of radio

## **Section 9 Conclusions**

One of the most important conclusions that we drew from this evaluation is the integrity which SFCG displayed in remaining absolutely committed to the activities of the project in spite of the fact that it is heavy. We think that this should be shared with other civil society organizations that SFCG has worked with.

The selection of the counties was very strategic because Nimba was home to the rebels, just as Bong while Grand Bassa was a major theatre of war because of the port. The interdependence of the counties is also something that may have informed the intervention. As one KII participant in Grand Bassa put it, *Nimba is rich, they have iron-ore but they cannot export except through my seaport.*”

The time allocated for the evaluation and the number of personnel is small but this is understandable because of resource constraints. If not for this it would have been very helpful to also interview the staff of SFCG who implemented the project.

There is this feeling within government, civil society and the media that SFCG ground is scaling down its programs and activities. This is obvious since the project is winding down. This is causing despair among the target beneficiaries. There is this sense that they are about to be abandoned just as they were abandoned during the war.

The project has opened up a floodgate of demand for SFCG services. Can SFCG cope? Does it have the resources to keep up with the people's expectations? What are the likely consequences if SFCG do not deliver?