

**Civil Society in Liberia:
Towards a Strategic Framework
for Support**

**An Overview of
Civil Society in Liberia
for
Search for Common Ground**

April 2007

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ACRONYMS

BRU	(Motor) Bike Riders Union
CBOs	Community Based Organizations
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
DDC	District Development Committee
DFID	Department for International Development, UK
ENCISS	Enhancing Interaction and Interface between Civil Society and the State to Improve Poor People's Lives
EX-CAFF	Ex-child Soldiers or children associated with fighting forces
FBOs	Faith Based Organizations
FLY	Federation of Liberian Youth
FTUL	Federated Transport Union of Liberia
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GEMAP	Governance and Economic Management Assistance Program
GTUL	Genuine Transport Union of Liberia
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
INGO	International Non Governmental Organisation
IPRSP	Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
LINNK	Liberia NGOs Network
LSE	London School of Economics
MBRU	Motor Bike Riders Union
MPEA	Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs
NARDA	New Africa Research and Development Agency
NCDDRR	National Commission on Disarmament, Demobilization, Resettlement and Reintegration
NGO(s)	Non-governmental Organization(s)
NTAL	National Teachers' Association of Liberia
PRS	Poverty Reduction Strategy
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
PVOs	Private Voluntary Organisations
PUL	Press Union of Liberia
SFCG	Search for Common Ground
TDS	Talking Drum Studio
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia
WIPNET	Women in Peace Building Network
WONGOSOL	Women's Non-Governmental Organizations Secretariat of Liberia

Executive Summary

Liberia is coming out of a post war phase and is now establishing democracy. Civil society has been instrumental in promoting peace, and sections of civil society were intimately involved in the peace talks in Accra. Several sectors in civil society have been successful in promoting their agenda, in particular women's organisations and environmental groups.

Issues affecting civil society's participation in the policy arena, and its reclamation of the civil society arena after the elections which brought Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to power, the first female head of state for Africa, are many.

There is a lack of capacity in areas such as leadership and organisation development. Some key civil society leaders are now working in government and have left a space in civil society which needs to be filled. Organisations are struggling to get access to funding, while at the same time businesses are accessing funding meant for civil society organisations to work on rehabilitation and reconstruction projects.

There is also a skewing of funding and skills to the urban areas, and this is unintentionally promoted by donors and INGOs focussing on urban areas regarding funding and at the same time creating a skills gap by using the skills of civil society actors in their own work.

Membership based organisations are now seen as being extremely important to civil society and in ensuring accountability of government. These organisations have an inbuilt accountability to their constituents which few other civil society organisations have.

Strategic areas of importance include leadership as well as marginalised groups such as young people and women. The depoliticisation of the civil society space is beginning and needs to be supported as organisations move from political advocacy and electioneering to promoting citizen interests and managing citizen expectations of government.

Civil society needs to be supported in developing its own networks, leadership and space to articulate its own views on issues in Liberia. There needs to be a culture of inclusivity where the elite of civil society make way for the formerly marginalised and the rural.

Civil society has a key role to play now, during the peace. There are roles to be filled and monitored in areas such as government accountability and policy development as well as in advocacy and service delivery. Civil society will have a key role in the PRSP process, both in its development and in monitoring its implementation, and needs to equip itself with the skills to carry out these roles in a meaningful manner.

1. Background and Introduction

1.1 Background

Liberia is coming out of a post-war phase and is now establishing democracy. The results of the war are still felt. More than 270,000 people died in the conflict, hundreds of thousands became refugees and internally displaced persons. National institutions were destroyed and an incredible amount of damage was visited on government properties, buildings and institutions. The war itself hurried the pace of economic decline and today the economy is estimated at one eighth of what it was before the war. Unemployment in the formal sector is up to 80%. Many roads are in poor condition and this alone contributes to poor economic activity.

Liberia has a population of 3.24 million according to the 2006 UN Human Development Report. Life expectancy is 42.5 years and under-five mortality is 235 per 1,000 live births. Forty nine percent of the population is estimated to be malnourished¹.

Three quarters of the population live in severe poverty. Basic services, health, education, water and sanitation and food security are either non existent or inaccessible to most people, especially in the rural areas. Housing is often in very poor condition and some returnees are finding their properties taken over by other families, leaving them again homeless.

The origins of conflict in Liberia can be traced to the exclusion and marginalisation of significant proportions of society from institutions of political governance and access to key economic assets, especially land. The closed political system restricted access to decision making processes, and limited the space for civil society participation in government. This closed political system tended to fuel ethnic and class animosities and conflicts. (Land rights issues are still fuelling these problems today.)

The current government, led by Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the first female President of an African nation, is attempting to deal with all of these issues. Civil society is an important player in the national scene. Before the war Liberia had civil activists rather than civil society advocacy, with most civil society organizations managed by civil activists with national and international contacts and credibility. The institutions functioned around these activists rather than as viable and sustainable organizations. Some of these activists now work in government. Most groups have made little investment in the development of a middle management team to broaden and strengthen the leadership skills as well as building overall organizational capacity to respond to the emerging challenges of post-war nation-building.

Even during the war civil society was important to progress – during the peace process civil society groups were able to mobilise across factional lines and move the peace process forward. There is a very strong women’s movement that mobilised effectively, and parts assisted in the election of the current president. The new government has taken several key civil society actors from their role in civil society

¹ UNDP (2006) Human Development Report

and gave them jobs in government – this is part of the present context and an important issue.

The UNMIL is still operating in Liberia, though the security situation is greatly improved. At the time of writing UNMIL is beginning its drawdown, with some units leaving the country. Some international organisations still impose curfews on their staff.

1.2 The Study

Search for Common Ground is an international NGO which has programmes in 17 countries. Its mission is to transform the way the world deals with conflict, away from adversarial approaches towards cooperative solutions. How this mission is applied varies from country to country depending on situation and context. In Liberia, SFCG has established a multi media production studio (the Talking Drum Studio) and a complementary community outreach project. SFCG has strong relationships with civil society in general in Liberia, and is seen as a key player locally.

As part of its plan to work more closely with civil society, SFCG carried out a study of civil society in order to achieve the following objectives:

- To assess the institutional capacity of a cross-section of civil society organisations, including finance systems and procedures, management structures, work planning, project effectiveness, and other organisational development issues;
- To assess how effective civil society is in influencing government policies;
- To make recommendations to civil society on how it can be more effective; and
- To use the outcome of the assessment to inform SFCG and donors how to engage and strengthen civil society.

Consultation with civil society actors in Gbarnga and Monrovia took place regarding the development of the Terms of Reference for the study. A group of staff members from Search for Common Ground in Sierra Leone also contributed to the development of the Terms of Reference for the study. This group is involved with ENCISSE, (Enhancing Interaction and Interface between Civil Society and the State to Improve Poor People's Lives) the DFID funded Sierra Leonean programme which is working with civil society actors in Sierra Leone. The Liberian study is building on lessons learned in the Sierra Leonean project.

Two consultants carried out interviews with civil society actors in four counties in Liberia that is in Grand Bassa, Bong, Nimba and Montserrado (concentrating on Monrovia). A nation wide study was not possible due to resource constraints. Actors from government and the donor community were also consulted.

The preliminary results of the study were then shared with a group of civil society actors, some of whom took part in earlier discussions and their comments on the findings sought. A think tank group also gave input at a strategic level.

The output of all these processes has been distilled into this document. A detailed Methodology of the study is in the Annex.

1.3 What is Civil Society in Liberia?

The civil society arena in Liberia is mainly occupied by organisations and a few individuals. Though there have been a number of key leaders in recent years, all of them have been linked to or working within an organisation. Even if the organisation they worked for (e.g., a church) was not in the business of advocacy, being part of that organisation, usually in a leading role, gave the individual a platform from which to be heard.

The attempt by government to clarify the registration of NGOs has created some confusion. Some people think that unless an organisation is ‘registered’ it cannot be a legitimate member of civil society. It is worrying that government is thus ‘deciding who or what organisations can be members of civil society’. That is not the role of government in a free society. It implies an attempt by government, to control the activities of civil society. This in turn has security implications in a country such as Liberia where such actions by government, in not permitting a challenging civil society to flourish, have led to conflict in the past.

Civil society in Liberia is working towards change, progress and inclusivity. The organisations in civil society in Liberia include faith based organisations, professional organisations, trades unions, organisations working directly for democracy and peace building, as well as organisations working on poverty issues and advocacy on behalf of citizens. Civil society in Liberia is in a constant state of flux. New organisations are established regularly, and other people and organisations change their focus and become a force for change. As well as these formal organisations, the informal sector continues without access to funding, but with clear activities towards community empowerment, livelihood support and poverty reduction.

1.3 Activity

The usual definition of civil society² being separate from government and business is not so distinct in Liberia. Some CBOs and NGOs are involved in contract work for reconstruction and rehabilitation of physical infrastructure throughout the country which was damaged during the war. As well as those civil society organisations

²*Civil society refers to the arena of uncoerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values. In theory, its institutional forms are distinct from those of the state, family and market, though in practice, the boundaries between state, civil society, family and market are often complex, blurred and negotiated. Civil society commonly embraces a diversity of spaces, actors and institutional forms, varying in their degree of formality, autonomy and power. Civil societies are often populated by organisations such as registered charities, development non-governmental organisations, community groups, women's organisations, faith-based organisations, professional associations, trades unions, self-help groups, social movements, business associations, coalitions and advocacy group.* LSE Centre for Civil Society and

‘Civil society refers to associations that exist outside of the state or market which maintain a degree of autonomy and independence and have the potential to provide alternative views, policies and actions to those promoted by the state and market.’ INTRAC 2006

which are well meaning and are focussed on the benefits of their operations to civil society, there are also those who are involved in order to benefit themselves. Materials which have a ready market, such as cement, can be easily accessed through this construction work.

This contract work for reconstruction and rehabilitation, funded by UNDP among others, is only available to organisations which style themselves as NGOs. This work is assisting in the formulation of strong new organisations with a mandate to carry out development work in the guise of, for example, agriculture support to rural small farmers, but at the same time there is 'business' being carried out in the form of building, rebuilding and rehabilitation and road building. These non-traditional non-profit activities provide an opportunity for organisations with scant funding to get much needed income to finance their other work, or an opportunity for making a good living. There are also some organisations which are styling themselves as NGOs in order to avail of this income generating opportunity. Some opportunists are not being identified as having a different agenda than mainstream civil society organisations by donors. There is little monitoring of these projects, particularly in terms of who is carrying out the work. These are run by entrepreneurs and businessmen who do not have the usual motivation of civil society workers, but are looking to make a good profit from whatever work is available.

There is little or no sanction evident against this sort of profit making activity. This seems to be tolerated by the rest of civil society as many legitimate civil society organisations are also accessing this construction work in order to fund other activities and keep in business. This lack of distinction between profit making businesses and legitimate civil society organisations serves to dilute the power of civil society, and leaving areas of it open to the accusation of being supporters of fraudsters and money makers. It affects the integrity of the whole system and needs to be addressed before it becomes entrenched. Donors and funders have a key role to play in ensuring that they monitor who they provide funds to. That said, there is nothing stopping the donors from hiring profit making businesses to carry out rehabilitation and reconstruction work and thus assisting in the maintenance of clear lines between business interests and civil society.

In many cases it can be seen that work in civil society organisations is being 'projectised', that is, being compartmentalised in a way which is acceptable to international NGOs and donors so that the local organisations can access funding. Even advocacy work is sometimes 'donor driven' in this way, with activities being distorted to fit into an agenda from outside, which may not support the core work of the organisation. This also has an important effect on the work of civil society, that the donors are setting the agenda in cases where organisations are not self financing.

1.4 Government

Several key civil society activists have resigned their civil society posts and now work in government. They were appointed in order to give legitimacy to the government on the assumption that these are credible and honest women and men in the eyes of both civil society and the international community. They are highly motivated people, with good education and organisational backgrounds, and whether or not they were headhunted to allow civil society's voice to be heard, they are effective people and an

asset to government. Some recall being approached in such a way that ‘they had no choice’. Others are still carrying out advisory roles in their former civil society organisations. But in general these people are no longer seen as part of civil society by the rest of civil society, as they are now part of government. In some cases their attitude towards civil society has changed slightly, they are now seeing society through the ‘government lens’ and identify more with their new role than their old one. In other cases they are trying to bring a true flavour of civil society to government, and see political parties as part of civil society with a role to play in monitoring government as part of civil society, not just part of the opposition. In this case they are not readily accepted by their government colleagues. There is no winner in this situation, and the main loser is civil society which now has to develop more leaders to replace those who have left.

One noteworthy relatively new member of civil society in Liberia is the Motor Bike Riders’ Union (MBRU). These are groups of motor cycle taxi drivers who work in all the major towns in the country. They are a union in their own right and are resisting being amalgamated into the Federated Transport Union of Liberia (FTUL). Many of the members of the MBRU are ex-combatants, and as such have a unique perspective on the new Liberia. They are a tightly organised outfit, with a strict structure which seems to be modelled on the FTUL. Most branches have good relationships with the police and their customers. The development of this organisation is significant to civil society in Liberia. They represent a definite advance within the grassroots of the country to a truly post-conflict society.

2. Institutional Capacity

2.1 Background

Civil society in Liberia is made up of organizations such as community based organizations (CBOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), labour unions, students, and youth organizations, social movements, women's organizations, traditional groups or leadership, philanthropic organizations, faith based organizations, professional organizations and the media. The presence of membership organisations in civil society such as trade unions increases the chances for government to be adequately monitored as these organisations work directly for their constituents on particular (usually) occupation based matters. Liberia's civil society also contains individuals who are active at a level in civil society which is not directly related to their jobs.

Since the transitional government has been in place, there have been improvements in the relationship between civil society and the state. Government is attempting to consult with civil society on some policy change issues. Even though there has not been an explicit government policy on civil society, except administrative guidelines prepared to provide regulation for NGOs operation in Liberia, there is a proliferation of civil society organizations. Civil society organizations are able to operate with little government interference. The regime of former President Taylor marked an era which civil society organizations and their programs were under close scrutiny by the state, and some civil society actors were harassed.

In Liberia, organisations are classified as NGOs or PVO (private voluntary organisations) if they have registered with the government. Other civil society actors include statutory bodies, trade unions and informal small scale organisations without a written constitution or bylaws. Unions and other membership based organisations tend to be registered with the relevant ministry.

Progress has been made towards efforts that may eventually lead to the enactment of laws for decentralization and the promotion of population participation of citizens and civil society in democratic governance. The administrative NGO guidelines are currently being revised by UNDP. These guidelines can act as a tool for government to monitor aid and development interventions, and also act as a way of controlling this part of civil society. Though relationships between government and civil society are cordial at the moment, these registration rules could act as a way of government controlling the space where these civil society actors intend to work.

Government collects union dues on behalf of some civil society membership organisations (as is common in many countries). This enables the associations and unions to ensure that they have an income from their many members scattered around the country, it is easier for the government to collect this money out of the pay checks of its employees at the same time as it collects other monies such as taxes. One development during the time of the study is that, according to the President of the NTAL, the government has informed the National Teachers' Association of Liberia (NTAL) that it will no longer be collecting the dues for the association. Already teachers have to travel to Monrovia to collect their pay, which imposes great costs to some rural teachers, as well as hardship. Now, there is concern that government is

trying to silence the association by cutting off its income, and thus making it unable to work, and no longer a strong force in civil society. Comments received at the validation meeting around this development were that ‘government is trying to silence civil society’.

There is a vibrant women’s movement in the country which supported the President to election. The Women’s Inheritance Right Bill was enacted into law and entitles married women the right to properties of their deceased husbands. Women now have greater political voice and access to development programmes with affirmative action on the part of Government to increase women’s participation in political affairs. Today, 35% of state actors in senior government positions are women. However, the situation of ordinary women, especially poor women, around the country has yet to change dramatically.

Membership organisations are recognised as one of the key areas of civil society activity. These organisations are particularly important to civil society as their members form a constituency to which the management is responsible. There tends to thus be good accountability and transparency in dealings because of this oversight by the membership.

The current government has headhunted and hired people to work as Deputy Ministers in various departments who were key members of civil society. This has been an interesting development. Some of these new Deputy Ministers still retain links with their former organisations, signing cheques and acting in an advisory capacity. There is some resentment in civil society that these people have left and ‘gone to the other side’. They may only be welcomed back to civil society if their return to civil society was because of a falling out with government over policy issues, or if they remain activists while in government.³

The **Motor Bike Riders Union** (MBRU) has evolved to support the young men who drive motor bike taxis in most of the large towns and cities in Liberia. Many of the ‘Bike Riders’ had been involved in the war, and the union has emerged out of the post conflict environment in order to provide support services to the young men which are related to their new occupation. It is an independent organisation which is organised on the lines of the other transport unions, but has resisted being taken over by either of them. The organisation is looking for ways to provide parking areas for members to congregate and wait for customers. It has liaised with local police forces to provide training for members on road safety issues. It provides support to members in negotiating with police and the legal system when accidents occur, and also provides financial support to widows and families when there is a death of a member. Most of its members are under 35 years of age. Members pay a joining fee and a monthly stipend which supports the activities of the organisation. This organisation is helping to harness the energy of the youth of the country, one of the country’s most valuable resources, and focus that energy on income generating activities which are beneficial to the entire community.

The existence of a vibrant civil society, including the media sector, is a major component of a sustainable post-conflict and post-election transition to lasting peace. During elections, the public space became politicized, with politicians and political parties vying for position within it, each with its own agenda and interests. Now that the elections are over, civil society’s role is changing and it will have to assert itself

³ This conclusion was reached at the Validation meeting for the Civil Society Study held on April 18, 2007 in Monrovia.

and reclaim this public space in order to promote the common good and interest of all. As the government introduces reforms and development policies, civil society has a role to embrace in holding the government accountable and serving as an advocate for its constituents, including women and youth, frequently marginalized from policy discussions.

2.2 Civil Society Progress in Liberia

Timeframe	Events
1956	LINSU organised by civil society actors like Kenneth Y. Best and others as members of the International Union of Students and World Assembly of Youths era of President Tubman. LINSU was later banned by the President and only restarted in 1976.
1960	Students protested at the French Embassy against testing of atomic bomb in the Sahara desert, which impacted on Liberia
1964	Emergence of 4 new counties Bong, Nimba, Grand Gedeh and Lofa were called provinces
1965	Problems on campus started BWI, UL were front liners; culture of reorientation of excluded youths into learning and elite environment
1970	The year of political turbulences gradually spread to other parts of Liberia
1979	Federation of Liberian Youths (FLY) established
1980	Constitution of Liberia was dissolved and became revised by 21 member committee headed by Dr. Amos Sawyer
1985	Innocent Mano/Gio ethnic population including prominent persons killed by Military in Nimba in revenge for failed coup led by Thomas Quoiwonkpa, a member of the ethnic group
1987	NARDA founded. WONGOSOL founded.
1989	Civil war led by Charles Taylor to remove dictator President S. K. Doe. NARDA founded.
1990	War in Liberia intensified and ECOWAS commissioned ECOMOG to restore peace and create space for peace building initiatives
1998	Major clamp down on civil society organizations including the Press Union of Liberia by Government. WANEP founded.
1999	Dissatisfied politicians and some members of former warring factions renewed hostilities in NW Liberia with alleged support from Guinea
2003	Women's movement and civil society groups demanded immediate departure of former President Taylor to enhance peace process in Liberia. LINNK founded.
2004	Proliferation of CSOs/NGOs in Liberia and revision of NGOs guidelines initiated by LINNK in collaboration with NARDA and MPEA
2005	Women activists demanded apology from former House Speaker for linking Liberian women in part of Europe to attitudes of prostitution. BRA evolved
2006	Development of CSO guidelines and youth policy begun

3. Post War Reform Process and Civil Society Organisations

3.1 Role of actors during peace process

Most organisations assessed had little activity during the war. Many have been set up since the war. Some of these are responding to needs which have arisen because of the war, and other are responding to opportunities which have arisen because of the war, or the end of the war. However, the organisations which were active during and after the war had a critical role to play.

During the peace process civil society groups were able to mobilise across factional lines and move the peace process forward, they played a key role. Organisations supported their leaders to make representations during the Accra peace negotiations. Women's organisations were particularly strong during the peace negotiations. The women's groups and environmental groups made representations to the peace talks. Other organisations demonstrated outside the talks regarding particular interests such as natural resource preservation. Some of these representations have resulted in government policy changes and civil society representation on some policy reform commissions.

3.2 The Government

The government has an NGO / PVO coordinating section which was established in 1988 in the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs. This NGO / PVO Coordination Unit acts as the registering location for all NGOs in the country. Legally, the organisations must register in order to be able to work. However, many organisations are not registered, and are not sure how to register. As mentioned above, the requirement of having to register is seen by many organisations as giving legitimacy to their work in civil society, rather than an analysis of that same work, as to whether or not it is beneficial to civil society and not merely to the directors of the NGO.

The government is supporting the new civil society policy (UNDP (2007) *Towards a Policy: Civil Society Organisation in Liberia* mimeo) which is in the final stages of development at the time of writing. This policy has been developed by government (the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs, MPEA), UNDP and civil society umbrella bodies in consultation with other organisations and interested individuals from around the country. This policy will form the basis of a legislative reform process around laws affecting civil society organisations. The frameworks laid out in the policy will help also with aid and donor harmonisation and help to assist government in targeting development interventions by publicising the activities of different organisations and where they are taking place. This in turn will help to avoid duplications of activity and parallel systems being created.

The development of the policy has had the side effect of entrenching the view that civil society is made up only of organisations which are 'registered' and that this registration gives them the sole right to operate within the civil society space.

Another outcome of the development of this policy is the side effect of increasing control by government of civil society. Though civil society organisations were

active in the development of the policy, some (including some INGOs) said that they were not sure what the purpose of the policy was, and that in the end they just agreed with the final version.

Membership based civil society organisations such as unions are usually registered with the relevant ministry. The Teachers' Association, the NTAL, was established in 1938 and enacted into law in 1958 by statute. The transport unions (GTUL, FTUL and MBRU) all register with the Ministry of Transport. The PUL is registered with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

3.3 Land disputes

The issue of land rights impinges on the operations of several organisations. Some organisations had lost buildings and land because they abandoned the buildings and land during the war and others had stepped in to claim the property. Some organisations were engaged in disputes with individuals or other civil society organisations regarding property. These disputes take a huge amount of resources, both in terms of money and time, and use up the energy of the organisation and its officers which may be used more productively for the organisation when put to the goal of the organisation rather than trying to assert its rights over property. The disputes also can exacerbate bad feeling which may already exist between the two organisations concerned, as is the case in the dispute between the FTUL and the GTUL.

3.4 Police

Most organisations said that their relationship with the police and other law enforcement organisations was cordial. One organisation met had no premises and the team met their representatives at the side of the road. Because of the noise and congestion in the street in Monrovia, the CSO suggested sitting in the compound at the police station where many people were resting. The police station head demanded a small sum of money to allow us to meet in the compound.

The Press Union said that some of its members are being harassed. (This was for acts other than printing lewd pictures of a politician which had occurred around the time of the assessment). No other organisations said that their members were being harassed by the police except some of the transport union members and that was in a very minor way. The harassment and arrest of journalists is a common event in societies which are closed and do not enjoy free speech. These incidents, however minor they may seem are actually attempts to silence the voice of the people. Civil society recognises this and is advocating against these activities.

3.5 Women and Power

There is increased rhetoric around the position of women in Liberian society since the election of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as the first woman President of Liberia, and the first female head of state in Africa. This new awareness of the power of women, and the publicisation of the fact that over 60 women have key roles in government, has yet to translate into improvements for women in poor communities. This acknowledgement of power of elite women is not new in Liberia. Women who got the vote in Liberia in

1948 were elite urban based women. Marriage and land inheritance reform laws were enacted in 2003. These do not seem to resolve inheritance and settlement issues in rural areas. Women who have recourse to laws pertaining to land rights during and after marriage are women who have married ‘in a western way’ and not women who have had ‘traditional marriages’. Those who are married in the customary manner, who are usually poorer and usually from rural areas, do not always have recourse to constitutional law.⁴

3.6 Communication

There is no landline phone system operating in Liberia, all communication is by mobile phone. Some organisations have access to wireless internet, and there are internet cafes in Monrovia and intermittent access in some other large towns. Radio stations are available in all towns, and many larger towns have their own local stations. Newspapers are available in Monrovia, but not readily outside the capital. This is problematic for many reasons. There is the basic issue of information access, information regarding the government’s performance, security issues and other news, as well as other areas of interest, social events and sport. Donors advertise jobs and invitations to tender in the print media only. This implies a blatant disregard of the fact that there are plenty of organisations in rural areas that would be interested in accessing the funding that donors provide to civil society organisations for activities based on a post war situation.⁵ These actions also support the notion that NGOs (and by default the leadership of the sector) are Monrovia based, and that vibrant, well organised groups are not working outside the capital city.

3.7 Donors: Dependence and Independence

Most NGOs in Liberia are dependent on one donor for intermittent funding on a project to project basis. Several have had funding from more than three donors sequentially, that is, one project finishes and the next is funded by a different donor and so on. This implies that either the organisation is flitting around finding money wherever it can, or that it cannot access money twice in a row from the same donor because its work does not measure up to the donors evaluation in some way. Very few receive any sort of core funding at all.

Several organisations reviewed as part of the assessment were not funded by outsiders or donors, but were run using subscriptions from members. This situation naturally applied to unions and professional organisations, but also to several advocacy organisations which did not know how to access funding from outside their village. Transparency and accountability seems to be greater in organisations that have a clear mandate from a membership base to carry out activities for the benefit of the members. Members are constantly questioning the managers of these organisations. Managers are watched carefully and their spending patterns are watched to help ascertain whether or not they are stealing from the organisation. Regular meetings take place of membership (at least annually) and more regular meetings (monthly) take place of elected representatives during which there are usually reports on income and expenditure as well as reports on other resources and activities.

⁴ Information from Think Tank meeting, April 19, 2007

⁵ This was raised in the meeting with UNDP, and the officers at the meeting said that they would look into advertising on radio as well as print media in future.

3.8 Security

Some organisations had experienced robberies recently, and one international NGO had considerable monies and equipment stolen at gun point during the night in Lofa during the study period. Besides this, most organisations said that they took precautions to keep their equipment safe, and had experienced no great problems with security in recent months.

Other aspects of security relate to the openness of the civil society space. A commonly agreed cause of the war was a lack of transparency in government and an inability of many sectors of society to participate in government either through exclusion or marginalisation. Civil society needs to be able to function and give a voice to all its members, and focus those who have not had a loud voice up to now, in particular the young people and women. A strong active civil society which is accountable will contribute by its very actions to a peaceful country.

3.9 Staff shortages and staff retention

Staffing problems are widespread in the sector. Many organisations have lost staff to other organisations which were more generously resourced. Some have lost staff to international NGOs or donors. This is a widespread problem in all development situations, and one which is not easily addressed. This will continue to happen until there is a critical mass of trained personnel in the country with the relevant skills and competencies to support a vibrant civil society.

3.10 Civil Society and the Policy Making Process

Civil society is not as influential in the current policy making process in the country as it could be. It is true that many of the recommendations put forward at the Accra peace talks by civil society have been acted upon and made into government policy. There are policy developments ongoing in Liberia. One policy area which is prominent at the time of writing is the GEMAP. GEMAP is a partnership between the Liberian government and the international community which is aiming to prevent corruption and ensure that funds allocated for specific purposes are used for those purposes. There is one person on the GEMAP from civil society instead of two persons which was first recommended because the government would agree to only one civil society representative. Civil society is not as engaged in the process as it may seem because there is no forum for the 'representative' to report to civil society, and the 'representative' is not accountable to civil society in any way.

Thus, the lack of a civil society fora where representatives to institutions such as GEMAP could be selected limits civil society's involvement in the policy making process. Civil society, at the moment, is not well resourced or positioned to engage in the policy making process, or to interact with government at a high level.

4. Main Findings and recommendations

4.1 General

The civil society organisations assessed can be classified, very broadly, into several categories:

1. *Formal NGOs* - Organisations with a strong presence in their field, working well and with clear mandates, i.e., these organisations have good leadership, clear objectives and stick to their own main line of work. Accountability of management in these organisations is upwards to a Board of Directors, or similar. There is usually no accountability to a constituency of members.
2. *Membership NGOs* – These are the trades unions, professional organisations and other similar organisations, some of which are statutory, which have a clear mandate from their members to carry out their day to day activities. They rarely get involved in, for example, other income generating activities, but work solely for the benefit of their members regarding their professional capacity. Accountability of management in these organisations is downwards, to the membership of the organisation who have elected the leaders.
3. *Entrepreneurial NGOs* - This category are clear in what their main area of development or advocacy activity is, but also work on reconstruction and rehabilitation projects in order to have access to funds which in turn supports their main area of activity.
4. *Profit making NGOs* - These organisations are run by entrepreneurs who have styled themselves as NGOs in order to be able to access contracts from the UN and other agencies for reconstruction and rehabilitation work. They are profit making and benefit the staff of the organisation only. This sector really belongs in the business community.
5. *Borderline NGOs* - Fifth category, these are very weak organisations. Some are struggling after the war, competing with other CBOs / NGOs for staff and inputs and not being able to access funding. They are not likely to survive in their present form for long and may 'die a natural death'.
6. Other organisations comprised donors, international NGOs and trades unions.

4.2 The Sector

4.2.1 Leadership

Several key civil society actors have been enticed from their civil society jobs and roles to work in government. This has left a gap in the sector, both in terms of leadership and other skills. There is also the question of what type of leadership is needed in post war civil society in Liberia. There is a need for a strong independent leadership which is seen to be engaging with government while at the same time supporting the citizens of Liberia, and helping to manage expectations of the new government.

Different types of civil society organisations have different sorts of leaders. Management in NGOs are usually responsible, upwards, to a Board of Directors. NGOs usually do not have a constituency. The Management of membership based organisations such as unions, the National Teachers' Association, the Press Union of Liberia are elected by the organisation's membership, and thus are responsible to the members.

The skills required for leaders of a group of advocacy and development organisations may be different than those required for a group of humanitarian and peace building

organisations. Though the same people may be required to shift their focus from one to the other activity, they need the support and skills to do so.

4.2.2 Networks

Network opportunities exist at all levels in the sector. At the rural county level, organisations meet according to sector under the umbrella of the Superintendent and the CDC. Civil society actors recognise the need to build an effective framework to enhance coordination and networking, to be able to inform each other and the rest of civil society, and to disseminate information. Networks need to be supported at all levels, including the operational level and the leadership level. Leaders need to be able to take advantage of regional and international civil society networks in order to keep up with current trends in civil society advocacy, and built their own and their organisations' capacity.

4.2.3 Gender

Overwhelmingly, the people working in development and civil society organisations in Liberia are men. This is particularly so in management positions. Many organisations did not recognise the importance of having staff of both sexes. Some got around the issue by having a 'Chairlady' or other high profile well educated woman in a prominent role, and then did not worry about not having women in other positions. A few (very few) were proud of having women in several key positions in the organisation, but these were the exception.

There is a disconnect between the visible female faces in the government and its operations, and the few women involved in civil society in any meaningful way. There are few women of strength in civil society, except in the women's movement and a few, very few, other areas. Women are also then stretched because all forums need female representation and the same women are targeted again and again and given more and more responsibility.

4.2.4 Staff Retention

As mentioned already, staff retention is a big issue. Small organisations lose committed skilled people regularly to larger organisations, and to organisations in the urban areas. Liberian organisations in Monrovia lose staff to INGOs and donors. The INGOs and donors say that they need good people to run their organisations and are willing to pay. The benefits to staff of working for an INGO or donor cannot be overstated. There may be greater job security and a salary which may be several times that available in a local organisation. There are other benefits, such as the use of a vehicle and per diem allowances, there may be opportunities for further study or attending workshops abroad. In some cases there are opportunities for embezzlement and fraud.

More than one INGO told the team that they are looking into 'growing their own local NGO', where they would encourage their own local staff to establish and NGO which

the INGO could then use as a partner, knowing that it is staffed with trained trustworthy personnel.

People working in high profile effective local organisations told us of the many job offers they have had to work with INGOs and donors. Also, there are offers to people working in local organisations to do consultancy work for donors and INGOs. This can be very lucrative, and at that same time takes the person away from their work in their local organisation for extended periods. INGOs and donors say that this work can give the person enough extra income that they will stay in the local organisation because they can afford to. However, others said that the time away from their 'real' job is extensive and it is not possible to be effective at both.

4.2.5 Urban / Rural Differences

There are striking differences between organisations based in rural areas and those in the urban areas. Organisations outside of Monrovia do not have access to the same sort of resources as organisations in the capital. One striking example of this occurred around the UNDP's advertisements during the assessment for local partners. UNDP advertises in several newspapers regularly, giving details of how different funding mechanisms can be accessed. Only one organisation outside Monrovia knew of this particular call because their Director had been in Monrovia and had bought a newspaper. UNDP (and many other funders) do not use local radio or notice boards to get information to people outside of Monrovia. When this was discussed at the meeting the team had with UNDP, they said that they would look into working with radio in the future.

In general, the smaller less well informed organisations were in rural areas. These were the ones which are in need of training in issues such as organisation development, proposal writing and basic activity skills (agriculture, awareness raising etc.). In the urban areas, the costs of setting up even a small organisation are much greater than in the rural areas because of rentals, transport costs to and from work, etc. In the rural areas, though the distances to travel are greater, the scale of work is smaller and competition is not as ruthless as in the urban areas.

Some rural organisations are based in the home of the director. In other rural cases, offices are bright and airy with new cement wall and are painted. Many organisations are taking advantage of the reconstruction and rehabilitation work to upgrade their own premises. Saclepea was described by one person there as 'the new Georgia' because of all the new buildings and construction work which is going on at the moment.

Urban organisations are sometimes located in terrible conditions. The noise of generators, the precarious stairs and the crumbling buildings, do not make for easy working environments. The mobile phones are constantly referred to. Some organisations have suffered burglaries and in some cases they are a regular occurrence. Security in many cases is non-existent. Contrast these busy but under-resourced organisations with their international counterparts. INGOs have dozens of vehicles, alert security around their offices, constant electricity and clean facilities. The UNDP offices seemed very western compared, anecdotally, with other UNDP

offices the team had visited in the region. Their removal from the environment is extreme, and it was not a surprise that they were not aware that their advertisements in the newspapers did not reach the entire country.

Generally the capacity to engage is greater in the urban area, and knowledge about what resources are available is greater in the urban area, even if the skills needed to access the resources are lacking in the urban area, there is a greater sophistication and aggressiveness in going after resources in the urban areas.

4.3 The Organisations

4.3.1 Management

Some organisations have very clear guidelines and separate roles for management and the board of directors or board of advisers. In some cases, board members are elected from the body of members, this is particularly so in the unions. However, in other organisations, interested people are selected to be on the board by the management, often by the Executive Director with no discussion or process other than his own judgement. In other organisations there is no separate board at all. All of these scenarios have implications for accountability as well as performance of the organisation. The role of a Board of Directors is to oversee the activities of the organisation according to the policies of that organisation. The Board will usually be the direct employers of the Executive Director and will have a certain amount of control over his or her activities. The Board should form a 'checks and balances' service to an organisation. It should give a safety net to the organisation, and ensure that no one person is responsible for decision making, and no one person can have total control of resources.

When there is no Board, or no effective Board, the Director can do as he or she pleases with no boundaries set by anyone. This situation is unusual, but it does occur. It lends itself to the possibility of total lack of transparency and accountability in the operations of the organisation. It makes the possibility of financial mistakes very likely, whether these 'mistakes' are intentional or not. It also leaves the control of all the resources of the organisation in the hands of one person and thus prone to abuse.

When the Board of Directors is appointed by the Executive Director there are several problems which may arise. The Board may not be the most effective, as sometimes the appointees are relatives and friends of the Executive Director, and not necessarily competent Board members. This sort of situation can assist with fraud among a group of family members, where the resources of the organisation are misappropriated for the good of the family and not used for the good of the organisation.

If a Board of Directors is appointed by a selection committee of diverse persons, or by election, there is a greater chance that the Board will act in a fair, open and accountable manner to the constituents of the organisation. The Board is also more likely to oversee the activities of the Executive Director in a fair and unbiased manner.

In membership based organisations, there is an entirely different structure, and the power relationship between the management and the overseers is quite different to that of NGOs. In membership organisations the management is responsible downwards to the membership. This makes for different accountability issues.

There is generally poor accountability to civil society from NGOs, although there are notable exceptions, organisations with exemplary leaders who are accountable to society as a whole. There is great accountability in membership organisations and these can be said to truly represent civil society.

4.3.2 Financial Management

Some organisations, in particular the better established, have properly trained financial staff, good conditions for accountability and use a bank account. Other organisations have a Treasurer who has been in post for some time and keeps the funds in their house, with no other person in the organisation having access to books of accounts or any other financial tools. The issues here for transparency and opportunities for errors are enormous. Even if the staff are honest and well meaning, the safeguards of a proper accounting system are necessary to avoid the appearance of corruption.

There is also a gap in financial management capability in other areas of the organisation. Some board members and the Executive Director should all have some financial management awareness in order to be able to oversee the management of the organisations financial and other resources. Therefore, ensuring that non financial managers have some financial management skills is a key element in ensuring the financial accountability of an organisation.

4.3.3 Mainstream Development Activities

Some staff of organisations working on agriculture, for example, had never had any training in agricultural issues. While it is good that local knowledge is being used and passed on to younger people, there have been many advances made in these areas and knowledge of more modern vegetable gardening, farming and animal husbandry techniques would be useful in these cases. Most of these staffs did not know how to go about getting up to date information which they could incorporate into their courses. Training should be provided in up to date ways of carrying out the activities which are mainstream in the organisations and thus assist in building capacity at local levels.

4.3.4 Awareness Raising

It was clear that many organisations working on conscientising issues such as gender based violence, peace building and HIV/AIDS did not have the knowledge around these topics to deliver correct information to their constituents. This was particularly the case when the awareness raising work was supplementary to their usual work of, for example, reconstruction and rehabilitation, or agriculture. There are often funds available for awareness raising work and these are easier to come by than they should be in some cases. Some people talked to villagers about 'what was right' and did not seem to have any framework or outline of a group of talks or any formal training in

giving information on these issues whatsoever. It is a concern that such sensitive issues can be discussed without any formal background or guidance given by funders. Some spoke to us about training courses which had huge numbers attending and no assessment process of the trainees before they went out to 'raise awareness'. Others told of being taught by someone who was several removes from a 'training for trainers' course themselves.

4.3.5 Participatory Techniques

It was clear that many small organisations which were working on issues such as community mobilisation, gender based violence, HIV/AIDS and other peace building activities had no modern skills available to their staff in order to bring information and knowledge to local people. Phrases were used such as 'we preach at them' and 'we tell them' and 'we give them lectures' on the topics. Basic exercises which enhance community participation and ability to negotiate with community leaders in order to work with people need to be made available. Gender issues were not addressed, staff did not always understand the importance of allowing women their own space to speak away from men, and how it may also be necessary to afford the same opportunities to young men and young women. Participatory techniques have been mainstreamed throughout development interventions, and it should be straightforward enough to enable small organisations to learn these techniques. Some sensitivity in how these courses are presented can ensure that even those who claim to be already trained will receive 'refresher' courses which will upgrade their skills to the appropriate level.

4.3.6 Programme Development

Many organisations have a clear plan of activities (even if they do not call it a 'strategic plan'). These organisations have clear definition of roles of all staff, and work formally and stay to their mandate. Other organisations seem to 'follow money' and will be involved in, for example, reconstruction and rehabilitation work, alongside their usual, for example, agriculture outreach work, in order to have access to the considerable funding and materials that go with reconstruction and rehabilitation work. Some programmes are developed in an 'ad hoc' manner, with well meaning staff following an idea, but without adequate background knowledge or training on how to take the organisation forward and implement the activities correctly, using local community members as partners.

4.3.7 Partnerships

Many organisations do not know how to go about getting partners to work with them. Some organisations have good working relationships with local government sector employees and meet regularly (usually monthly) at with their sectoral representatives at the District Development Committee (DDC) meetings. These meetings have the potential to be a huge support to smaller organisations, where their officers can mingle with other more experienced workers in their sector. Some DDCs are more approachable than others, but most have this facility.

Other partnership issues, mentioned above, involve INGOs looking for local partners to assist in implementing their programme. The INGOs say that it can be difficult to

find organisations to work with. Partnership arrangements are formalised and there can be a lot of resources involved in the process, money, vehicles, office machinery, training and so on. However, this sort of partnership can be one way of an organisation increasing its capacity. However, INGOs are very particular about, for example, what other activities are carried out by the local NGO and may have too great a role to play in the governance of the local organisation. This, then, is not a partnership but a situation where the INGO wants to manage the smaller organisation and use it for its own programme activities. Some INGOs have ended up hiring the staff of the local partner, leaving the local partner sometimes without their key staff.

However, there are few cases of true partnership. Many said that it was not possible to truly collaborate and that real partnerships are rare. Most so called partnerships are in fact a relationship between donor and beneficiary. They are also relationships between the contracting agent and the contractor. One is working for, and not with, the other.

Local level partnerships and relationships between organisations with the same or similar activities could be used to better effect and improve capacity in both or all players. Some strong true partnerships exist with organisations at the local, usually rural, level, where resources and skills are shared (proposal writing, computers, vehicles). This creates a community spirit between organisations and fosters strength in civil society. Many other organisations visited did not know, or said that they did not know, about the activities of other locally based organisations and how they could assist each other without being in competition for staff and resources.

The NCDDRR will be looking for more partners to assist in carrying out its mandate. At the moment many organisations wish to work with the NCDDRR, but do not know how to do so. NCDDRR is concentrating on becoming a nationally executed programme, and will need more partners to carry out its mandate when no longer controlled directly by the UN. NCDDRR will be putting out calls for expressions of interest for partners and not all the CSOs who wish to be partners will have the capacity to do so at the moment.

4.3.8 Monitoring

Many organisations such as the UN and some INGOs have very strict travel restrictions and curfews. This prevents them from monitoring and evaluating adequately their partners and other interventions. This needs to be addressed, as some organisations are carrying out mandates which they have not got the skills to complete and therefore could be creating problems where none have existed, particularly in sensitive areas and issues such as HIV/AIDS and GBV.

Few CSOs carry out monitoring activities as such, unless it is a condition of funding they are receiving from a donor. Most do, however, know how they performed in previous years, what their membership or activity rates are, and have a general idea of how their performance is, but these pieces of information are not collected in a systematic manner, or using particular criteria developed by the CSO or their constituents.

4.4 Capacity Building Support

4.4.1 General

The most straightforward way of providing capacity building support is to provide training to address capacity building needs. There are obvious skill gaps in the country as a whole, such as infrastructure development, tackling corruption and delivery of basic services (health, education, etc.). The needs of civil society in Liberia at the moment are myriad. Nevertheless, a few well chosen widely dispersed pieces of training, workshops and awareness raising skills development could assist in bring up the capacity of dozens of organisations which form the backbone of civil society.

The ‘quick fix’ approach should be avoided. There are some interventions which are low cost and would have very strong affects almost immediately. In particular, providing training in participatory techniques would give some civil society organisations the skills to involve communities, in a meaningful sharing manner, in having a say in their own destiny. This training could also assist in changing attitudes towards people who are different, for example, of a different education level, different ethnic or religious group, different age or sex, thus decreasing the prevalence of exclusion and marginalisation of people in the governing process both at government level and at civil society level. Participatory approaches use techniques which show dignity to people, and allow people to maintain their dignity. In a scenario where peace building has been the underlying theme of almost all civil society work, this can only be a good thing.

A significant proportion of civil society organisations are unaware of what constitutes best practice in terms of organisational governance and development. Issues such as the roles of management and Board members, financial management and decision making are all areas which need to be addressed so that organisations can be run in an accountable manner.

4.4.2 Training Needs

Training needs are mentioned above, and a list is in the section on Recommendations below.

4.4.3 Network support

Small local networks should be supported. Some networks already exist, though in an informal manner. They are arranged around sectoral issues, combined trainings, organisational development.

Explore the possibility of serviced (electricity, water, sanitation, security) buildings provided for small urban based organisations, where they could share support services (office equipment / staff, etc.) and have the advantages of improved security and collegiality that a group of like minded organisations brings?

More details are explained below about supporting a network where leaders of civil society could meet to discuss relevant issues, form alliances and common positions on

issues of relevance and build their own agenda for the way forward for civil society. It is important that this space be as inclusive as possible, while at the same time allowing leadership skills to be developed and to flourish.

4.4.4 Engaging civil society in PRSP formulation, implementation and monitoring

Civil society should be taking a key role in working on the development of the PRSP and later in its implementation and monitoring. The training and preparation for these roles should begin as soon as possible, so that civil society is adequately resourced when the time comes. Training issues here may include

- Participatory techniques
- Participatory poverty assessments
- Participatory monitoring and evaluation

4.5 SWOT Analysis

The SWOT Analysis is divided into three sections, the Sector, NGOs and Membership organisations. The SWOT of the Sector takes a view of the entire civil society, the individuals and the organisations. The SWOT of the NGOs looks at the local NGOs alone and their strengths and challenges. The SWOT of the Membership Organisations looks at the trades unions and the new Bike Riders Association. These organisations are the key to strengthening civil society. They have a mandate from their members for representation and thus can be a real force for accountability and change in the country. Recommendations arising from the SWOT analysis are contained in Chapter 6 on Recommendations.

4.5.1 The Sector

Strengths	Weaknesses
Integrity of many organisations and individuals despite corruption Widespread activity Commitment to Justice issues New legal framework being developed View of CS as broader than just registered NGOs Emergence of new membership based organisations	Poor organisation development Inability to access funding Competition at the local level Lack of knowledge outside of Monrovia about new legal framework Lack of recognition of CS as a diverse group with common aims No forum for dialogue within the sector Donor driven in many cases because of funding availability
Opportunities	Threats
Reconstruction and Rehabilitation funding available Training available Partnerships being sought Strong sectoral links at county level Policy development ongoing, PRSP process about to start	Staff retention problems Corruption at all levels Poor communications Weak infrastructure Dilution of specialisation due to need for funds Government too involved in regulation of the sector

The Strengths of the sector are solid. Integrity and commitment are present and are vital elements to supporting the framework of an effective civil society. These are, of

course, threatened by corruption which is present in all parts of Liberian society. A lack of a forum for civil society to meet and become strong in its own terms is hindering its solidification and becoming a unified force. Too often civil society leaders and activists only meet at fora organised by government and donors who are pushing their own agenda. A network of civil society which is owned and controlled by civil society will assist in its strengthening.

In order for civil society to participate in policy development and to be a force for change in ensuring government accountability, it needs to have a strong sense of itself and be clear as to what its own objectives are. The move towards unity in civil society means that key actors need to work together on a common platform. Already key individuals are stretched and women are especially challenged as so few are involved at senior levels, and the few that are, are constantly called upon. This requires communication at all levels, particularly among and between the various actors and organisations. Again, a forum of its own will foster this sense of self.

4.5.2 NGOs

Strengths	Weaknesses
Well recognised by government Well recognised by donors Some good leaders Some strong organisations Strong sectoral links at rural levels	Donor driven activities Funding opportunities limited in some cases No constituency Poor organisation development in many cases Dilution of specialisation due to need to access funds
Opportunities	Threats
International support for the sector Key place for government to search for policy reform partners	Corruption Use of NGOs as springboard for government jobs

NGOs are the main face of civil society in Liberia. Most actors have a base in some organisation or other. Again, here, as in the sector, there is a tendency for NGOs to be reactive to demands of government and donors, rather than pursuing their own agenda. This is partly because of their activities being based around the elections for some time. Civil society organisations need to reclaim the space taken over by electioneering and use it again for their own objectives.

Issues of poor organisational development are easily tackled. One of the biggest threats to NGOs and indeed to civil society in general is the movement of leaders from civil society to government and to international NGO jobs. There is active recruitment by government and international donor and NGOs of talented, experienced Liberians. Donors and INGOs should consider the consequences of their actions in this regard.

NGOs are ideally placed to become key partners with government in the policy reform processes, including the PRSP process. They need to exhibit key skills and knowledge in these areas and present a united front to government.

The lack of constituency for NGOs is an issue for all NGOs, both local and international. There is no requirement for a membership base or a funding base, in

order to being operating as an NGO. However, there are key skills available in local NGOs and the potential for development of more skills. Government and donors are using these organisations as partners already, and some of the organisations are well placed to deepen these relationships.

4.5.3 Membership Organisations

Strengths	Weaknesses
Constituency based Vocationally focussed, one issue	Can be unwieldy Can be urban focussed
Opportunities	Threats
Links with similar organisations in country could provide capacity building Links with similar organisations internationally could provide training for officers	Corruption Lack of funding for wider activities Conflict between similar organisations Jostling for power

Membership based organisations are the way forward for civil society in Liberia. They have a clear voice on issues which are important to their constituents. These are mainly vocational issues, but they do and can move into more policy level involvement with government and donors.

These organisations have the potential to be a force for change in Liberia. Some of them are mired in old issues and competitive problems. Others, most notably the BRA are ideally placed to energise civil society by their young, focussed platform. These organisations need skills development in organisational development and in some governance issues. Most have key partners in government depending on what their vocational base is. They are ideally placed to participate in policy development according to their vocation and some have a very wide constituency and thus may be involved in wider issues such as the PRSP, or other governance issues.

5. Strategic Engagement

5.1 Introduction

There are several issues and trends which the study wants to capture in order to assist in formulating a strategic framework to map the way forward in supporting civil society in Liberia. These issues and trends involve key areas for civil society to find itself more active and work with actors who may not have been included as obvious civil society participants in the past. New organisations and interest groups have been established and there is a move towards a more inclusive definition of civil society. New leaders are appearing, and the formerly marginalised members of society in Liberia are organising and being included in the sector.

Government is increasing its regulation of some civil society groups through the MPEA. Some actors feel that these NGOs are the ‘real’ civil society because they are able to access funding from donors. This narrow view is not widely held, and civil society is broadening out its own recognition of itself and acknowledging many types of organisations as being part of civil society.

The areas listed below provide examples of entry points for support to civil society by outside actors, other civil society organisations and donors. These are areas of strategic importance which focus on particular issues which are holding civil society back from being as influential as it could be. These areas show up weaknesses in civil society and issues which help focus on specific activities for capacity building and strengthening generally.

The definition of civil society helps to delineate the sector, and illustrates how all embracing most civil society actors are when talking about and working with their sector.

5.2 Definition of Civil Society

There is a lot of discourse around accessing funding and the legitimacy of civil society organisations being based on whether or not they can access funding from donors and INGOs. One of the requirements for accessing funding is that organisations be registered with the MPEA. The Validation Meeting of the study showed that people in civil society hold a wider view, and that civil society includes organisations which are not registered as NGOs with MPEA as well as those that are. The narrow definition of civil society (that it is a group of registered NGOs) implies that all other organisations do not have the right to occupy the space of civil society, to advocate for local issues, or to interact with other groups around common issues, themes and provide pressure on government to be accountable to the citizens.

The Validation Meeting of the civil society study established that civil society includes both formal and informal organisations. The formal organisations include those registered NGOs and PVOs. These organisations usually have an upward

accountability; the management is accountable to a Board of Directors⁶. It also includes statutory bodies such as the National Teachers Association of Liberia (NTAL) and Federated Transport Union (FTU). Other unions are also key members of civil society, and a new union, the Motor Bike Riders Union has captured the strength of some of the youth of the country and is helping to organise them. These statutory bodies and unions are particularly important as they have a constituency, the management is accountable to its membership (a downward accountability) and thus these organisations may be run in a more transparent manner than the registered NGOs and PVOs.

Informal organisations are numerous. They include those who are organised around a common goal, but without written bylaws and constitution. They are recognised by the community and have a shared code of conduct among members, this is not written or formalised, but is understood by all members.

5.3 Transition

Eighteen months after the Presidential elections, civil society is in transition from working in a post war society, to working in a democracy. Before the elections, and during the war, civil society operated around service delivery and later around rehabilitation and peace building and provided a humanitarian response to the crisis. Civil society is starting to focus on how to engage as the nature of work changes, and their role now revolves around advocacy and facilitating the development process. Civil society is supportive of government in the pursuit of national development and seeks a deeper role in policy reform.

This is a key time for civil society to prepare for its involvement in the PRSP process. Civil society has not been involved in some major policy developments (the Security policy and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission) and has been involved in others (Governance policy) but has had no proper forum for accountability and feedback. This is vital for national ownership of the PRSP process that civil society is involved in planning and executing participatory exercises throughout the country, as well as being a key participant in sectoral and thematic groups and committees. Without civil society participation at a meaningful level there cannot be national ownership, and national ownership is a key element of the PRSP process and indeed is a requirement if the process is to be transparent and the results meaningful.

Civil society can also prepare for its role in monitoring the PRS implementation process as it comes on line in a few years. The involvement of civil society is, again, key to holding government and its international partners to account and in the implementation of the PRS. Civil society has a role in supporting the participatory monitoring and evaluation exercises which should be carried out in communities. These are best facilitated by civil society groups and actors who have the relevant skills.

Other than the PRSP process, this is also a time in Liberia for civil society to ensure its participation in the policy change process. A civil society representative was

⁶ In some cases there are no rules about how a Board of Directors is formed, or who is eligible under what circumstances to be a member of that board. There can be important consequences because of this lack of regulation regarding transparency and governance issues.

allowed to work as part of the GEMAP and the Forestry Review process only when donors insisted that they be included. In the end only one person (instead of the recommended two persons) was included in each process, and that person was vetted by government. It is important that civil society be properly represented in such fora, by elected members of civil society, and not by token members who are selected by government.

The current civil society actors who have been chosen by government to participate in some of these policy making processes have no accountability to the rest of civil society because they were not selected by civil society. They were chosen by government sometimes because of their skills and on other occasions because of their personal links to government officers. This is a clear form of tokenism. The evidence so far shows that government is not committed to including civil society members in its policy reform agenda.

Nevertheless, there are civil society actors involved in some of these policy development processes. It is up to civil society to make these people accountable, to bring them to fora and have them discuss the issues being raised in the policy reform process. This should not be too difficult as they came from civil society and claim a strong affinity with it. But there needs to be a formal accountability, with regular feedback to the civil society community to ensure as much transparency as possible in the policy reform process

5.4 Decentralisation

This trend is not merely the decentralisation of government, which is on the agenda. This trend, in civil society terms, is the decentralisation of the voice of the people, particularly the voice of the poor. It is decentralisation of focus and access to information. This involves moving the nucleus of civil society out from Monrovia to embrace actors and activities and organisations throughout the country. It involves inclusiveness, working with the formerly marginalised, the youth, the women, the returnees and so on. Decentralisation in civil society terms is linked with the expanding understanding of what civil society is. It involves moving from the perception of civil society as a group of registered NGOs, to civil society as a force which includes small organisations, vocational membership groups and even goes so far as to involve all organisations outside government and business who are working towards a common goal for the benefit of a defined group.

5.5 Leadership

Leadership is a major issue in civil society. Key actors have joined the government and there are some gaps. As well as this, civil society is diversifying; notice in particular the emergence of the MBRU and other like minded organisations.

Leadership in civil society is not creating its own space for dialogue. There is no platform where networking and information sharing can take place without the threat of competition, and rivalries, no space which is controlled by civil society and not by the agendas of other actors. Currently, meetings of civil society leaders generally take place under the auspices of donors or government, and discussions occur around the

agenda of those groups. It is important that civil society leaders have a space to interact with each other around issues of their own choosing.

The leadership of civil society needs to move from the traditional view of leaders coming only from well established (and registered) usually NGOs run by elites in Monrovia, and look to new membership organisations to include the formerly marginalised, women and young people to form a non political leadership of civil society.

Different types of leadership are not commonly promoted in civil society at the moment. The recognised leadership consists of people working around issues through NGOs which are registered and usually based in Monrovia. The recognition of membership organisations as a force in civil society will promote a new type of leadership, which is directly responsible to the membership; these leaders have a clear constituency to whom they are responsible, a downward accountability. Leaders from the NGO world are generally accountable to a Board of Directors, an upward accountability. Often the Board is selected by the director of the NGO and thus have no autonomy, and no real accountability or transparency can occur. However, in cases where real leadership occurs, the leaders are responsible, and see themselves as responsible, to society as a whole.

5.6 Depoliticisation

Linked to the leadership issue is the issue of moving civil society out of the political arena and into the civil arena. Politics can be exclusionary and divisive. Civil society is now seeking the public good and is striving to be an inclusive and uniting force. Civil society's energy has been used by the political arena in recent years, particularly in the run up to the Presidential elections. It is important that the civil society space is opened up to more organisations and that there is inclusivity in the working of civil society. Legitimacy can be given to organisations which have not been seen to be members of civil society in previous times by inviting them to participate in civil society fora and having them recognised by their colleagues in other civil society organisations.

The Citizen's Forum in Bong worked to bring parliamentarians back home and account for their actions and that of their government to the people who elected them. This process involved meetings every three month where the Senator would describe what the government was doing with the country's resources. There would then be questions put to the Senator from his constituency, present at the meeting. The second stage of this process will involve the Senator getting involved in Strategic Planning for the Community.

For many civil society actors who have moved to work in government, civil society was a political platform. Political personalities emerged working on issues related to the war, and some of these are now in government.

The value in depoliticising is that civil society can take up its role of pursuing citizen interests and managing (and limiting) citizen expectations of the government. There will be a shift from seeing the government as political party agent to seeing the government as being for all the people. Those who did not vote for the party can still make demands on the government. Civil society can unite the nation and support citizens' to access the government. In time there will be eventual participation in civil society and a place for everyone in the depoliticised arena. There are also links here,

again, to the PRSP. The process of developing the PRSP will provide a platform for unity and civil society and government working together towards poverty eradication. In any case, this process is ongoing and needs to be supported and recognised. There is a possible agenda, which is not from civil society, about dividing and conquering. Civil society needs also to recognise the agendas of its partners outside civil society and work around them towards unity.

5.7 Marginalisation and Exclusion

Marginalisation of women and young people and some ethnic groups in Liberia is a reflection of historical narrative, and it is deeply entrenched in the culture of the country. The marginalisation of some groups in Liberia was a direct cause of the war. Groups are marginalised according to gender, tribe, youth and disability, and according to whether they are returnees or refugees. It is important that marginalised groups are afforded the same space in civil society as other citizens and that the space in civil society is not totally taken up by elite, educated groups who have dominated the space in recent times. The leaders must recognise these issues and work with them to encourage unity.

Exclusion is a conscious decision to keep some groups out of power, out of civil society or out of the governing process. Marginalisation is about poverty in many cases. It is about those with power, either in government or in civil society ignoring people who are different and leaving them aside. Often these groups are not at all important to the ruling elites (whether these elites are ruling in government or are leading in civil society). A conscious effort to include all parts of Liberian society will help to ensure a vibrant, unified civil society.

5.8 Youth

The young people of Liberia have been traditionally one of the marginalised groups. A huge proportion of the population is under 14 years, 43.6 %, and the birth rate is 43.75 births per 1,000 population, so this group will continue to grow⁷. Young people are one of Liberia's greatest assets. The young people are the foundation of the future of the nation. If this resource is not nurtured properly it will lead to further marginalisation and exclusion from civil society and the government process.

The national youth policy states that young people will be institutionally included in the policy making process. There is little evidence of this happening. The statements in the IPRSP concentrate on keeping ex-combatants occupied, either through emergency employment programmes or by playing sports. No mention is given to young women; any of the few interventions mentioned are targeted at young men.

Though the Federation of Liberian Youth (FLY) is active, it has poor resources, in common with many civil society organisations. FLY is running several projects with unemployed young people, and engage in whatever fora they are able to. MBRU is a young person's organisation at the moment, as most of the members are under 35 years. These organisations have the ear of the youth of the country and are an entry point to working with this group.

⁷ CIA World Fact Book 2007

5.9 Women

The position of women in Liberia is talked about in all forums because of the fact that President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf is a woman, and that she is the first woman president of an African state. This is indeed an achievement. Women mobilised from across political, ethnic and socio economic groups to support her. There are posters in many offices showing the faces of the 60 or so women in key roles in government and its institutions. However, there is little or no talk about the changes this visibility of women in power has brought to ordinary poor women in Liberia. A key question is how to link the force for change at the highest level in government in the country, and use it as leverage for the most marginalised, poorest communities, where women have seen no positive changes in their lives since the new regime. How can real rural poor and urban poor women benefit from the rise of women in government?

The rise of women in government has not had a corresponding rise of women in civil society. Women in civil society are not more visible than before. Granted, the urban well established women's organisations have a strong leadership and are well recognised, partly because many women active in these organisations are urban based and well educated, part of the elites in Liberian culture. Women are rarely visible in organisations which are not based around 'women's issues', except in fairly menial non leadership positions. In rural organisations women are conspicuous by their absence. Even in many so called women's organisations in the rural areas, there are men in leadership positions.

6. Recommendations

6.1 General

In order for civil society in Liberia to be able to properly represent the concerns of the citizens, help to manage their expectations of the new Liberia and interact with government, donors and with itself in a strategic manner, there needs to be cooperation and capacity building at all levels. Recommendations regarding strategic involvement with civil society are mainly based around fostering the independence and development of civil society. Strategic engagement of civil society within itself is the most important recommendation. The skills required to promote capacity building need to be fostered so that civil society has the capacity to engage with government strategically and to set its own agenda to pursue its own goals.

Civil society needs to focus on itself, sharing information and concentrating on strengthening its own abilities. Civil society needs to strengthen and empower its umbrella organisations and build its own objectives and move out from the electioneering activities which have occupied it for so long. The move into advocacy and promoting the interests of the citizens will take a shift in culture of civil society. This move will foster a changing relationship with government. Ideally civil society will become a partner with government, helping to manage the expectations of the citizens, while at the same time participating in a consultative process of post conflict policy reform that addresses root causes of that conflict and subsequently is a key actor in monitoring the actions of government and assisting in implementing reform processes. Government needs to make sufficient commitment and put energy into involving civil society in policy development initiatives.

6.2 A ‘Civil Society Centre’

In order to further promote the strengthening of civil society, a premises for use of all civil society organisations, NGOs and constituency based organisations, should be acquired. Civil Society in Liberia needs a space where it can pursue its own agenda, unhindered by the priorities of other actors. Premises should be provided which could fill this need. The premises would house a small secretariat providing office facilities and supplies, meeting rooms and a resource centre. Computers, photocopying and access to the internet would further assist in capacity building in the sector. A resource person or coordinator would be available to facilitate meetings and run the centre. Large and small meetings rooms would be available to organisations and individuals for use on civil society business. This could assist in providing a forum for civil society to meet and discuss areas of common interest and develop their own agenda. The Centre would also facilitate all the other recommendations, in one way or another.

6.3 Training – Basic skills development

Financial management training is useful for civil society actors at all levels in organisations, particularly financial managers and managers who do not have a financial role, but have oversight of financial managers, and all board members.

A core set of exercises on advocacy and awareness raising and participatory techniques should be run in conjunction with civil society organisations who may be able to field the exercises. These should focus on key development areas relevant to Liberia today such as gender based violence, HIV/AIDS, sustainable livelihoods, peace building and others

- Participatory techniques
- Awareness raising on issues such as GBV, HIV/AIDS, civic responsibility and peace building
- Monitoring and evaluation for small CSOs
- Agriculture
- Proposal writing
- Financial management for financial managers
- Financial matters for non-financial managers (to assist in accountability)
- Some specific training needs for members of organisations such as the BRU, in areas such as traffic law compliance and safety measures, as well as HIV/AIDS and GBV awareness.

6.4 Training - Organisational Development

Organisational development training, including information regarding the roles and responsibilities of different actors in organisations should be made available to civil society organisations. Focus should be concentrated on organisations which have a mandate from a membership base, such as trades unions.

- working with constituency based NGO's to look at their own feedback and downward accountability mechanisms. This could be important to set a framework in place that other civil society groups could emulate.
- Working with NGOs to look at their boards and their own accountability issues
- Leadership training and financial accountability training
- Ensuring umbrella organisations are representational and meet regularly not becoming just another project
- Organisational development issues, the role of the board, the management and the staff , how to have a membership base, how to collect fees

6.5 Leadership

A renewal of leadership in civil society will fill gaps caused by the war, by the movement of some leaders to government and by the changing nature of the requirements of leadership in civil society.

- Leaders and leadership skills should be fostered at local and national levels.
- Networks of leaders can be supported and a physical space provided where leaders can voice their ideas and opinions in a relatively safe environment.
- Leaders should be promoted outside Monrovia, and women should especially be encouraged into positions of responsibility.
- Links should be fostered with international civil society organisations (e.g., Civicus) and support leaders attending international conferences to glean ideas and promote confidence building.

6.6 Women

- Women at all levels in civil society need to be encouraged and promoted in order to take on more responsibility.
- Training, encouragement and recognition is important, especially in non traditionally active groups such as women from very traditional communities in rural areas, women who do not have a western type education and women who are very young, very old or disabled.

6.7 Staff retention

- There needs to be a critical mass of ability in the country before this situation improves. Experienced people need incentives to stay in the country and remain working in civil society, and to encourage their colleagues to do so.
- Donors need to recognise the strain they put on Liberian civil society experts by pulling them out of their ‘day jobs’ to carry out consultancy work.
- More sharing of information between donors should reduce the need for overlapping studies, and scholarships for civil society organisation staff could encourage a growth in professional talent.

6.8 Determining a collective agenda

- civil society should meet regularly to discuss contemporary issues and determine its agenda around these issues
- Local level networks should be supported to further strengthen relationships at the local level, and subsequently to enable determination of local collective agendas to feed into the national level
- leadership promotion within their own ranks – training in organisational development and management issues which focus on leadership will assist emerging leaders.
- promote a strengthening of purpose of constituency based organisations. They can use their strength to promote the interests of the citizens as a whole, not just their own vocational interests. More interaction between advocacy and awareness raising organisations and the constituency based organisations will enable one to learn from the other and could give NGOs a wider platform for action.

- Collective agenda to help determine action without having to rely on a donor driven approach and avoid dilution of specialisation due to need to access funding.

6.9 Consultative processes for policy reform

- Civil society should engage with the civil society representatives even if they were not selected by civil society for regular feedback on the policy groups where they are represented such as GRC, GEMAP.
- A regular forum with their own agenda of feedback and consultation can support unification and solidarity building and could be a forum for training, information sharing and other beneficial activities.

6.10 PRSP preparation

- Government and donors should ensure that civil society is involved in its key role in developing the poverty strategy for Liberia.
- Civil society should equip itself with the skills to carry out its duties and functions properly.
- It should also equip itself with the skills to carry out its oversight of government and monitoring and evaluation of the poverty strategy when it is up and running.

6.11 Partnership

As capacity is built in local civil society organisations, they will be in a better position to insist on true partnerships rather than contractual arrangements. A culture should be fostered within civil society and the NGO community to promote a partnership approach wherever possible. The difference between partnering a donor in order to implement activities and partnering another civil society actor should be made clear and civil society in Liberia should enable itself to form true working partnerships with other CSOs and membership based organisations in order to facilitate the exchange of information, to building capacity in partner organisations, to share resources and knowledge, and to form a united front when engaging with government, donors or other actors outside civil society.

6.12 Accountability and Inclusiveness

- work with membership based civil society to strengthen accountability with leadership training and support to finance the expansion of this agenda
- work with umbrella groups to convene meetings nationally to ensure that membership is broad based and that the groups are truly representative of civil society
- support meetings and trainings with membership based groups in other regional capitals such as Bomi, Gbarnga, Buchanan and Ganta

- Assist constituency based organisations to become nationally focussed, rather than urban focussed.

7. Conclusion

Civil society in Liberia is helping to move the country from a post war situation to one of democracy. The transition is raising some key issues which civil society is tackling along with government. Some of these issues include finding appropriate space within civil society to enable civil society to be in charge of its own agenda.

The leadership issue is one which will evolve over time, as new organisations become more to the forefront of civil society, their leaders will become leaders of the sector as well as of their organisations. Support is required to foster that leadership and allow it to grow and mature.

As government finds its place in Liberia, now eighteen months after the election, the role of civil society is to assist all Liberians to acknowledge that government as their own needs to be fulfilled. Liberians can all demand accountability from government; it is the government of all the people, not just those who support the political party.

The all too frequent issue of marginalisation of women, the youth and the poor as well as other groups, is also being tackled by civil society. The elites in civil society are recognising that the sector is not for them alone but for all the people of the country to occupy if they so wish. This challenge is also being seen in the disconnect between women gaining such power at the head of government and women at the grassroots seeing no change in their level of livelihood, no greater access to justice and no voice heard at the policy reform level. These are serious issues which civil society can tackle in the new democratic Liberia.

Possible entry points for support to civil society are detailed in the chapter 5, 'Towards a Strategic Framework'. These entry points are places where interventions can easily be placed to support either specific elements within civil society, or the entire sector.

The sector has many strengths. The women's movement, the civil society organisations working with natural resource conservation and the young people's organisations including the MBRU are all important and need further support. The membership based organisations have ready made constituencies and are in a very strong position to support each other and civil society in general in ensuring that government is held to account.

ANNEXES

Annex 1

CONCEPT NOTE AND TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY STUDY

Introduction:

Search for Common Ground (SFCG) is an international conflict transformation organization with programs in 17 countries worldwide. SFCG began working in Liberia in 1997, establishing a multi-media production studio called Talking Drum Studio and a complementary community outreach project. SFCG in Liberia works towards an overall goal of *strengthening participation and inclusion to consolidate the peace in Liberia*.

Summary of the project

Since its establishment in Liberia, SFCG has built strong partnerships with Liberia's civil society organizations. In August, SFCG commissioned an evaluation of its program in Liberia for the past two years and preliminary findings from the evaluation showed that most Liberian perceive the organization as a member of civil society despite being an international NGO. This finding reaffirms the belief we hold that we are indeed a part of civil society and therefore is committed to contributing to its success in Liberia. It was against this background that SFCG approached the Department for International Development (DFID) to fund a two year project to work with civil society in a more structured way. The project has the following objectives, components and intended results:

Objectives:

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

Results:

- Enhanced Civil Society interaction
- County-level leaders more engaged in key target areas
- Horizontal communication fostered
- Credible public information available
- Understanding promoted among community members
- A sense of accountability promoted among elected leaders to their constituents.

Major Activities:

- Civil society study
- Media sector mapping
- Polling
- Facilitation dialogue through media
- Capacity building
- Strengthening rural radio network

Targets:

SFCG will target several different groups under this project, including:

- Monrovia-based civil society groups



Abidjan Amman Bujumbura Bukavu Conakry Freetown Jakarta Jerusalem
Kathmandu Kiev Kinshasa Lagos Luanda Monrovia Rabat Skopje

- Civil society and Community associations in 5 locations
- 15 Rural community radio stations
- County Superintendents in 5 locations
- Parliamentarians (from the House of Representatives) in 5 locations
- Community residents, mainstreaming women and youth sectors

Background:

In post-conflict countries like Liberia, civil society plays a central role in the discussions of democratization, governance, environmental protection, rule of law, violent conflict prevention and policy dialogue. Generally speaking, civil society refers to the organizations that act as intermediaries between the governed and the government, representing specific groups and interests. In Liberia, civil society is a relatively new concept, which formally emerged at the height of the civil war when state institutions collapsed and the state could no longer meet its responsibility of protecting its citizens. Since then, civil society has grown and taken on different roles in suggesting solutions to the Liberian crisis, monitoring the peace process and human rights situation in the country and contributing to the elections of 2005.

With an emerging democratic process, the role of civil society in promoting and, when necessary, defending the principles of democracy is indispensable. A functional democracy depends to a large extent on a vibrant civil society that keeps the government accountable for its action. Similar to other developing countries, Liberia's civil society organizations are at different levels in terms of organizational development and program management. The operation of most civil society organizations is driven by key individuals who are the founders and serve in the post of Executive Directors. A large number of them operate from brief cases. They source donor money yet lack transparent mechanisms for the management of resources.

With time, Liberian civil society organizations have grown in number, but this growth does not necessarily imply that they have the skills and capacity that is required to constructively engage the state in a sustained manner. Civil society organizations do not always have strong connections with the constituencies who they claim to be representing. As a result of this disconnect, it is difficult for them to mobilize a large sector of the population in order to undertake a sustained advocacy campaign. In addition, civil society feels accountable to the donors rather than to the people on whose behalf funds are raised.

Civil society organizations are personality driven, lack strong solidarity, and there is an unhealthy internal competition for resources, reputation and recognition. Civil society takes the form of elitism that is heavily centralized and has little connection with rural organizations. The legitimacy of civil society is greatly undermined because they do not have constituents so it is difficult to assess whose interest civil society is representing. These problems are further compounded by the lack of a regulatory policy framework and a code of conduct to govern the operations of civil society organizations. The lack of a regulatory framework makes it difficult to establish a data base for civil society organizations that would map out who is doing what and in what location with which donor funding. In Liberia, the discourse of civil society is heavily centered on registered non-governmental organizations and there is a tendency to exclude other groups such as the Teachers' Union, Student Union, the Bike Riders Association, Marketing Association and Fishermen Association that have legitimate constituencies. The legitimacy of these groups lies in the ability of their members to elect or remove their leaders unlike NGOs that are founded by an individual that ascends to the leadership by virtue of being the founder.

In terms of organizational development and sustainability, civil society organizations are generally fragile, weak, and in many instances, totally dependent on foreign money for survival. In addition, civil society's fragility is also rooted in their reluctance to work together

as thematic groups on specific issues as a way of building synergy and maximizing results. Groups frequently engage in multiple activities at the same time, even though they do not necessarily have the personnel to support them and the activities do not fall within their mandate and mission. Furthermore, grants from donors are project driven, meaning that they usually do not take into account the organization's particular strengths and capacity coupled with the fact that civil society or communities have little or no input in influencing the funding agenda and priorities of donors. Almost every civil society organization has a Board of Management but the Board in many instances has little influence on how civil society organizations are managed. Most of the Boards are established to meet donor requirements.

Civil society in Liberia however, has the potential to grow into its role and is already serving as an asset in nurturing the fragile democracy. Sustained civil society engagement requires strengthening their capacity to facilitate dialogue between the state and its people, form alliances, and learn to negotiate with the state and donors in promoting the interest of the common good and not the needs of individual organizations.

Purpose of the Study

SFCG, with support from the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID), is implementing a two-year project entitled Facilitating Civil Society Dialogue. The project is integrated into SFCG-Liberia's program, working towards its overall goal of strengthening participation and inclusion to consolidate the peace in Liberia.

To inform its strategy for the implementation of this project as described above and to foster the input and buy-in from civil society, SFCG is commissioning a comprehensive study of civil society in Monrovia and three other counties—Bong, Nimba, and Grand Bassa. During the 2005 election campaign, politicians took over the public space fostering their own interests and positions. Now that the elections are over, that space needs to be occupied by civil society if they are to create a functional line of communication between the governed and government. But maintaining this space requires strengthening the capacity of civil society organizations and this can better be done when their operational and institutional capacities are assessed through a thorough analysis of their work and impact in Liberia. Capacity-building activities will be better targeted and more effective when they are based on a thorough analysis of civil society groups' current capacity, work and impact in Liberia.

It is against this background that this study is being organized: to understand fully the dynamic and composition of civil society, their operational strategies, the various factors which affect their impact and effectiveness. This information will be used to identify what needs strengthening and the approach to accomplish this.

Overall Objectives of the Study:

The study has four fundamental objectives, which are:

- To assess the institutional capacity of a cross-section of civil society organizations, including finance systems and procedures, management structures, workplanning, project effectiveness, and other organizational development issues;
- To assess how effective civil society is in influencing government policies;
- To make recommendations to civil society on how it can be more effective; and
- To use the outcome of the assessment to inform SFCG and donors how to engage and strengthen civil society.

Assignment and Key Deliverables:

The contracted consultant is expected to meet with a diverse cross-section of civil society organizations, their constituents, as well as government policy-makers to collect the

information to adequately and accurately meet the deliverables outlined below. While the study will primarily be concentrated in Monrovia, the consultant is expected to meet with groups in Bong, Nimba and Grand Bassa Counties as well to explore the contrast in program intervention and capacity between the capital city and the county-based civil society organizations.

Within the body of the overall assessment report, SFCG expects the following deliverables:

- A definition of civil society and description of the space and how it functions in the Liberian context as well as the current challenges facing civil society. [SWOT analysis]
- A critical assessment of the socio, economic and political context in which civil society operates.
- A critical assessment of the role civil society actors played in the Liberian peace process from the Accra Peace Talks to other major events such as the Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration and Rehabilitation (DDRR) of ex-fighters as well as the elections.
- The findings of the study need to be a reflection of the input of a wide range of stakeholders so that recommendations that are generated can be responsive to their needs in terms of developing a framework for engagement between donors and civil society.
- A review of the institutional capability of at least ten diverse civil society organizations (criteria will be determined later on in consultation with SFCG before the assessment starts) to have an in depth knowledge on their internal management systems and decision making processes. This review should include an examination of how the systems and processes integrate gender issues such as equal access to information and decision-making roles.
- A review of the role that Board of Management and other advisory boards play in the operation of civil society organizations, including what expertise they provide and their involvement in internal governance and management.
- An analysis of the programs of civil society organizations (the ten that will be engaged above) and the process used in the development of the programs.
- An assessment of the coordination and sharing mechanisms--both formal and informal--among various civil society organizations in the implementation of advocacy programs.
- Recommendations on how civil society's capacity can be strengthened and how the groups can be more effective in engaging the state in constructive dialogue on governance and democracy issues. The recommendations should be designed to inform civil society, the policy making community both internal and external, and Search for Common Ground.

METHODOLOGY:

The consultant will be expected to use a variety of tools to compile the information to provide the above deliverables. A proposed methodology should be submitted with the consultant's application for the assignment. A proposed detailed budget (not in excess of \$30,000 – 35,000US) should be submitted with the methodology.

Upon selection of the consultant, SFCG's Institutional Learning Team and West Africa-based program staff will provide input and revisions to the methodology for final approval before deployment. The Liberia program team in collaboration with the identified consultant will hire a national consultant who will serve as a colleague to the consultant in carrying out the study. This process will be guided by the principle of transparency and the consultant and the Liberia Country Program take collective responsibility for the person who will be selected.

This is intended to identify the person with the required knowledge and skills to support the consultant.

This study as with many other studies will need to go through the process of validation to ensure that the draft report captures and articulates the issues that were raised in the interaction with interviewees. If the external consultant does not have the time to participate in this process, the validation will be facilitated by the national consultant and key staff of the Liberia Country Program and participants will include representatives from civil society organizations. SFCG will have the opportunity to read the draft report and make comments where necessary. The outcome of the validation from civil society as well as the feedback from SFCG will be used by the external consultant in compiling the final report.

Recommended tools to be used include but are not limited to:

- Desk review of literature on Liberian civil society development
- Use of participatory tools such as focus group discussions and key informant interviews.
- Interviews with donors and international agencies providing support to local civil society organizations
- Review of documentation of file with the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs responsible for NGO registration and coordination.
- Data analysis and comparative grouping of rural verses urban civil society organizations.
- Compare results to the experience and lessons learnt from the engagement of civil society in other post conflict countries, preferably Sierra Leone.

COMPETENCIES REQUIRED:

- Minimum five years' experience in field-based research
- Strong analytical skills
- Strong working knowledge of the growth and development of civil society in Liberia
- Capacity to assess CSO financial systems
- Experience in organizational development and management
- Work experience in post-conflict countries within civil society
- Proficient written and spoken English, with experience in preparing professional research reports

TIMELINE & MILESTONES:

The duration of the contract will be a total period of 2 months. From end of January 2007 to end of March 2007. Included in this is an envisaged 4 weeks for fieldwork.

MILESTONES:	Date
1. Deadline for applications (including proposed methodology, budget and sample of work)	19 January 2007
2. Evaluator recruitment deadline	26 January 2007
3. SFCG Comments/feedback on initial methodology	29 January 2007
4. Deliverable 1: final methodology and fieldwork plan	31 January 2007
5. Fieldwork	1 month from end Jan to end Feb2007
6. De-brief with preliminary findings to the SFCG country office	Last day of fieldwork

7. Deliverable 2: Draft Final Report	16 March 2007
8. SFCG comments/feedback provided to consultants	21 March 2007
9. Deliverable 3: Final Report	30 March 2007

APPLICATION PROCESS:

Please submit a CV, proposed methodology and budget (no more than 5 pages), sample of work, and statement of availability to Rebecca Besant at rbesant@sfcg.org. The application deadline is January 19, 2007.

Annex 2

Methodology

Terms of Reference for the study were validated by meetings of civil society actors in Monrovia and Gbanga. Further input was obtained from SFCG staff in Sierra Leone who had gone through a similar process with the ENCISS programme there.

Search for Common Ground hired an international consultant to lead the process. She assisted SFCG to hire a local consultant. The two consultants formed the team which carried out the assessment and they worked closely with SFCG local and regional staff.

The objectives of the study were:

- To assess the institutional capacity of a cross-section of civil society organisations, including finance systems and procedures, management structures, work planning, project effectiveness, and other organisational development issues;
- To assess how effective civil society is in influencing government policies;
- To make recommendations to civil society on how it can be more effective; and
- To use the outcome of the assessment to inform SFCG and donors how to engage and strengthen civil society.

A desk review was undertaken by the consultants of relevant documents from the media, NGOs and government as well as other studies on civil society in Liberia and elsewhere. A list of documents consulted is in the Annex.

Planning meetings were held between the consultants and SFCG officials. The planning meetings decided which organisations and individuals would be visited by the team, and how information would be collected. A driver and vehicle were provided for the duration of the work.

The team travelled to Nimba County where they met with representatives of Liberian CBOs / NGOs and the team. One member of the team also visited organisations Bong County and Grand Bassa County. The meetings were held in the premises or workplace of the organisation visited. Several organisations and individuals were also visited in Monrovia. A full list of people and organisations met during the review is available, 41 organisations and 10 individuals were interviewed as part of the study. The discussions covered the following:

- History of the organisation, including the affect of the war on the organisation and its activities
- Governing structures
- Funding mechanisms
- Staff composition, including gender breakdown
- Activities
- Challenges

The team also tried to get an impression of how the organisation fitted into civil society, the kind of partnerships it had, and how gender issues were addressed in the organisation and in its work, who the main donors were and how they affected the organisations' operations. Anything about criteria used?

The assessment did not cover every civil society organisation in the four counties, but neither was it intended to be. The results are an impression of what civil society is in Liberia today, how it functions, and what the main challenges are. The recommendations are the views of the team on how SFCG and other organisations, including donors, may interact with civil society in order to build capacity and assist civil society in its role of monitoring government and participating in the running of the country.

The team met with organisations from the broad spectrum of NGOs / CBOs in the four counties visited. In some cases officers from the organisations were not available to meet with the team (and so the meetings didn't happen or you met with other people?). In other cases large, fairly key organisations were not willing to meet. One large international NGO in particular was virtually impenetrable and wanted a letter of introduction in order to arrange a meeting, and reacted differently to the two members of the team when they tried to make arrangements to meet.

Communications were difficult. In arranging meetings, mobile phone numbers for each person met had to be obtained. In only one or two cases were the arrangements made through an intermediary (is this meant to say in all except 1-2 cases?). This makes it very difficult to arrange this type of field work. More importantly, it means that mobile phones are vital to communication, there is no (or very little) messaging service, so phones are on all the time and interruptions are frequent. The team was also disturbed regularly by their phones, they could not be turned off in case another meeting was being rearranged or confirmed.

Travelling around the four counties was relatively easy. The roads were good, other travellers were friendly and check points did not stop the SFCG vehicle or demand payment. Accommodation was clean and friendly; food and drinking water were easily acquired.

The team met with people from all types of civil society organisations in the four counties reviewed. They met with key actors who had been involved in civil society for many years, as well as people who are relatively new to the work and are finding their way.

Government and donor officials were also consulted as well as representatives of international NGOs. They were asked about their role in civil society in Liberia. In the case of donors, they were asked about their experiences working with Liberian civil society, how they selected their partners and what sort of challenges they faced.

Government officials were mostly former civil society actors who had moved into government having been invited to work with the new administration. Their views were sought regarding civil society in Liberia and the challenges it faces today, and how they envisaged progress in development and strengthening of civil society.

A draft was prepared and shared with members of civil society groups who had been consulted during the study. This Validation Meeting served to endorse the findings of the study with a group of the participants as well as to probe some of the issues in more depth.

The draft was also shared with a smaller group which worked as a Think Tank to discuss wider issues around the findings of the study and again allow the consultants to probe for more in depth information around civil society in Liberia. This discussion fed into the issues described in the Strategic Framework section of the document.

A final draft was submitted to Search for Common Ground and distributed.

Annex 3

Persons Consulted during Civil Society Assessment March / April 2007

TORs Development

Teacher's Association
WONGOSOL (WOMEN NGO Secretariat)
Liberia's Women's Initiatives (LWI)
Catholic Justice and Peace Commission
Sustainable Development Institute (SDI)
WANEP
WIPNET
Centre for Justice and Peace Studies
Liberia Democracy Watch
Liberia Marketing Association
Federation of Liberian youth
Press Union of Liberia
Centre for Transparency and Accountability
Representatives from ten groups from Lofa, Bong and Nimba.

Search for Common Ground

Oscar Bloh,	Director
Rebecca Besant,	Programme Manager
Frances Fortune,	Regional Director

Ganta

Nyan Fluomo,	Station manager, Radio Kerghema
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Concerned Women

Yah Paye,	Co Chairperson
Marie Payga,	Member of Board
Tanie Youhn,	Secretary General
Kour Bakala,	Vice President
Milton Gbatu,	Secretary of Officers

Sehkpel Foundation

Richmond Yarkbol,	Executive Director
Samuel Bangura,	Office Assistant
J. Doran Lekpge,	HIV/AIDS Counsellor

GTU, Genuine Drivers Union

Lalah Seesay,	National Secretary General
William Tiche,	Treasurer
Geroge B. Say,	President for Nimba

MBU Motorbike Riders Union

Dexter Tukper,	PR
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Eric Johnson, Chairman
Adam Konk, Fee Inspector

FTU, Federated Transport Union

Sam T. Collins, Deputy Secretary
Gabriel Weezh, VP Operations
Jerry Luogan, President
Laurie Queeglay, VP Admin
Nidu Muso Kardamie, Secretary
Anna Vouleh, Treasurer

Saclepea

LRWNE Liberian Rural Women National Empowerment

Mary K. Voie, Executive Director

CHESS Community Health Education and Social Services Incorporated

J. Alexander Nyalar Sr. Executive Director

CIDA Community Integrated Development Association

Bobbie Gbaimgee, Executive Director
Ayae Dorbiae, Finance Officer

Sanniequellie

Ears for the Masses

Levi Flahma, Administrator
Sam Karrwoods, Legal Advisor
Francis Wapie, Member and Co Legal Advisor
Adolphus Beon, Fee worker
William S. Wandem, Founder and Field Worker
Arthur Scell, Field worker

SEARCH Special Emergency Activity to Restore Children's Hope

Emmanuel Siaway, Administrator
Sindah Wilson, Director
Lorweimon Johnnie, Family Tracing and Reunification Supervisor

ARS Agricultural Relief Services

Lernpeker Dangan, Agricultural Field Officer
Andrew S. Genteh, Agricultural Field Officer
Anderson Paye, Administrative Officer
Michael S. Zeine, Project Officer
James Gono, Field Officer
Harmon Quon, Field Officer
Joseph Manta, Logistic Officer
Onikel Suah, Sustainability fee assistant
Martha Menleh, Sustainability supervisor

Monrovia

LDI Liberian Democratic Institute

Dan T. Saryee, Sr., Executive Director

Government of Liberia

Elizabeth Hoff, Deputy Minister for Technical Services,
Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism
S. Tornorlah Varpilah, Deputy Minister for Planning, Research and
Development, Ministry of Health and Social
Welfare
James Logan, Deputy Minister of Planning and Development,
Ministry of Agriculture
Benjamin Jlah Sr., Senior Development Specialist / Economist,
Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs

Bike Riders Union, Old Road Parking Lot

Bayo Gerwerh, Chairman
James Tohpah, Assistant Chairman
Trohon Williams, Member

LMA Liberian Marketing Association

Jallow Corvah, Personnel
Wilhemina Fahn, Interim Management Team
Stephen Gbokie, Administrative Assistant
Tarpeh Chea, Assistant Secretary General
Makai Sherif, Business Manager, Interim Management
Team
Elizabeth Mbakellah, Chief Cashier, Interim Management
Team
Martin Dean, Secretary General, IMT

LCUNA Liberian Credit Union Association

Henry G. Valhmu, National Consultant for Credit Union
Affairs

NTAL National Teachers' Association of Liberia

Harold S. Kawh, Secretary General
Joshua F. Sammy, VP Administration
Randolphson Kollie, VP Operations

NCDDRR National Council for Disarming, Demobilisation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration

Rev. Robert B. Carloh, Deputy Director

PUL Press Union of Liberia

George Baypeen, Director

Concern Worldwide

Marianne Byrne, Country Director
Sean Corrigan, Partnership Liaison Manager

WIPNET Women in Peace Building Network

Lindora Diawara,	Coordinator
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SDI Sustainable Development Initiative

Silas Siakor	Director
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Centre for Transparency and Accountability

Jasper Cumme,	Director
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UNDP United Nations Development Programme

Emmett Wilson,	Assistant Res Rep, Programme
Paavani Reddy,	Civil Society Officer
Alfred Sayon,	National Civil Society Officer

Mercy Corps

Tricia Matthews,	Deputy Country Director
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FLY Federation of Liberian Youth

George Wilsner,	Director
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Organisations met in Grand Bassa**Buchanan Child Community-Based Care (BUCCOBAC)**

David Mehdeh	-	Executive Director/BUCCOBAC
Tony B. John	-	Finance Officer
Junius Frazier	-	Program Officer

Grand Bassa County Agriculture Group (G-BAG)

Dehsazwren C. Tukpa-	Acting Administrator
Marian Green Cooper	- Field Officer
Robert b. Sevelee	- Field Officer
J. Alfonsel Williams	- Field Officer
Joseph S. Varmbo	- Program Officer
Christian Moore	- Acting Executive Director

Forum for African Women educationalists – FAWE

Mary B. Beh	-	Chairlady
Esther P. Smith		Project Supervisor
Nancy B. Bryant	-	Registrar
Magdanle Duobai	-	Animator

Bassa Women Development Association (BAWODA)

Martha F. Kangar	-	Chairlady
Monetta N. Davies	-	Administrative Asst.
Louis Gbawheen	-	Social Worker

Bicycle Riders Association (BRA)

Cyrus Wolo	-	Sr. Advisor
Max Kpleaware	-	Dep.Chair/Adm
Eddie Henry	-	Dep/Operation
Isaac Bulubyla	-	Members
Isaac Gaye	-	Acting Chair

Young Women Christian Association (YWCA)

Matthew Davis	Program Coordinator
Joseph Mankar	Expeditor / Custodian

Liberia Marketing Association (LMA)

Washington S. Brown	County Sec. General
Bangale Kaba	Table Director
Winston King	Local Secretary
Peter Gbaa-goon	General Superintendent
Dorothy K. Clarke	Local Superintendent

Gbarnga, Bong County

Liberia Marketing Association (LMA)

Jerry V. Siaker	Chair
Mary Lartah	County Superintendent
Sabastine Quelline	Dept. City Superintendent
David W. Kargar	General Secretary
Mulbah Sulon	Financial Secretary

Liberia Environmental Care Organization (LECO)

Alfredson W. Taikerweya	General Coordinator
John Kekulah Gongbo	Dep./Adm./Finance
David M. Morris	Agriculture Officer
J. Porlor Kollie	Program Officer

Gbarnga Zonal Women Organization (GZWO)

Lorpu Togbah	Adult Literacy Facilitator
Mary K. Zeon	Teacher/Adult Facilitator
Boto Roberts	Member
Josephine Yallah	Adult Literacy
Jestina L Zazay	Lust/Skills Training / tailoring
Noami Wah	Chair

Bong Student Union (BONSU)

Victor O. Flomo	President
Jeremiah Nuatomue	- Financial Secretary
Randall Makor	Secretary-General
Nancy Korbedeh	Vice President/Adm
Nakilee Nushane	Vice president/Op

Sustainable Development Promoters (SDP)

David P. K. Harmon, Sr.	Officer-in-Charge
Marlyn T. Jarwoe	Social Worker

Bicycle/Motorbike Riders Association (BRA)

Sam B. Elliot President
J. Wilson Juah Vice President/Operation

Women NGO Secretariat of Liberia (WONGOSOL)

Cerue Garlo (Mrs.) Coordinator

Justice and Peace Commission (JPC)

Atty. Augustine Toe National Director

Validation meeting participants

Silas Siakor	Sustainable Development Institute
Nat Walker	Conservation International
Bayo Garward	Bike Riders Association
Hilary Norris	Justice and Peace Commission
Ahmed Pasawee	Liberia Democracy Watch
Lena Cummings	WANEP/WIPNET
Joseph Samukaituah	Federation Liberian Youth
Paavani Reddy	UNDP
Jasper Kumeh	CENTAL
Margaret Flomo	National Teachers Association of Liberia
Magdalene Fabulleh	Sinje Radio
George Barpeen	Press Union Of Liberia
Gbawu Woiwor	National Human Rights Commission
Cecelia Danuweli	WIPNET
James Makor	Save my Children Future

Think Tank participants

Patrick Coker -UNMIL Civil Affairs
Tornolah Varpilah _ Deputy Minister for Planning and Research, MOH
Ernest Gaie - Country Representative-Action Aid-Liberia
Thomas Du - Program Manager - National Democratic Institute
Selmah Gibson - Program Officer, SOS Village

Annex 4

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