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Trusted Voices in Challenging Times

Civil Society and Media Leadership (CSML) Program
Final Report



IREX/Dara Lipton

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Trusted Voices in Challenging Times

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Final Report

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IREX/Berenike Schott

The authors' views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the view of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government

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FRONT COVER: Female journalists interview a representative of a disability rights civil society organization as part of the two-week Girls’ Media Frontiers (GMF) training. The GMF program was part of a broader set of activities that IREX implemented in early to mid 2014 working with journalists and civil society organizations to prepare for the 2014 Special Senatorial Election in Liberia.

INSIDE FRONT COVER: A young man shares his story of surviving Ebola at a Community Leader Forum (CLF) in the Waterside community in rural Montserrado County in October 2014. This gathering was one of over 60 CLFs held in 13 counties across Liberia that brought together formal and informal leaders for facilitated discussions to identify their fears, their concerns, and identify strategies to mitigate these challenges to ensure their community remained safe and informed throughout the Ebola crisis.

INSIDE TITLE PAGE: Two young girls watch an “I Know My Rights” Forum facilitated by the Liberia Women Media Action Committee (LIWOMAC) and Liberia Women Democracy Radio (LWDR). Over 60 of these types of forums were held in CSML’s original seven target counties and later in 15 counties as a result of the Ebola crisis to engage community members on issues impacting their lives and provide a platform for dialogue and information sharing.



The goal of the Civil Society and Media Leadership (CSML) Program was “To sustain peace in Liberia through greater inclusion, giving a voice to, informing and engaging Liberian citizens.” IREX partnered with The Carter Center, Social Impact and over 100 Liberian institutions to build the capacity of the media and civil society sectors to sustain themselves, to represent the interests of their constituents to Government and other stakeholders, and to effectively respond to crises.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For over five and one-half years, the Civil Society and Media Leadership (CSML) Program, led by IREX in partnership with The Carter Center and Social Impact, contributed to building a more capable, collaborative, and agile civil society and media sector in Liberia. The CSML team provided intensive support including training, mentoring, small grants, and equipment to over 60 civil society organizations and 35 media outlets in 15 counties. IREX has distributed over \$6 million in grants to civil society organizations to conduct advocacy, reconciliation, civic and voter education, Ebola awareness raising, and contribute to their own organizational development. Community radio stations have received a total of over \$400K worth of equipment, including 19 transmitters. The Carter Center trained 3,500 chiefs, women, and youth to advance access to justice and resolve community disputes, and broadened awareness of Freedom of Information to over 15,000 Liberians across the seven original target counties. Beyond these outputs, CSML has contributed to true impact, fostering an improved and enhanced

civil society and media sector. These accomplishments are a result of the collaborative effort of IREX and its wealth of partners both international and national who sought, together, to achieve the goal to “sustain peace in Liberia through greater inclusion, giving a voice to, informing and engaging Liberian citizens.”

As a result, in part, of the CSML program, IREX’s civil society partners conduct advocacy that is more informed and less confrontational, engage the media as a key stakeholder, and have more productive strategies for engaging local and national government. These institutions are accessing outside funding opportunities to sustain themselves explicitly as a result of CSML training and mentoring; winning grants from external funders over the past four years worth over USD \$7 million. Many organizations have clarified missions and visions, structured and sustained board and management structures, and filing systems that enable them to remain accountable and attractive to would-be donors. Several still are running social enterprises that allow

A community leader from the St. Paul Bridge Community in Montserrado County discusses the impact of the Ebola crisis on the community and the stigma that their community faces as a result of their high incidents. This Community Leader Forum is one of over 60 forums held in communities across 13 counties during the height of the Ebola crisis through the CSML program.



IREX/Maria Lipton

them to fund their civil society work through sustained income that also fills a community need.

IREX's community radio partners have better trained staff; capable of developing conflict sensitive, ethical content that reflects and responds to local priorities. Many of these partners have wider listening coverage; with partner stations in the original target counties increasing reach from 79% to 91% of their target populations. Whereas previously community radio stations would remain off the air for months or even years due to equipment failures, stations now have access to an Equipment Resource Pool managed by local partners at the helm of the media sector in Liberia, coupled with a cadre of Regional Service Technicians providing much needed sustainable tech-

nic expertise. Radio stations also have improved relationships with their listeners, resulting in more targeted and relevant content and increased community investment, both literal and figurative, in the survival of the station.

CSML's Monrovia-based media partners employ journalists that have enhanced confidence and capacity to report on priority issues and produce investigative stories that challenge the status quo and broaden the conversation beyond politics. Media managers better understand the media market and advertising opportunities and are accessing new partnerships and funds as a result. Media associations including the Association of Liberia Community Radio (ALICOR) and the Press Union of Liberia (PUL) have stronger management founda-

tions, policies, and procedures, and are collaborating on more initiatives towards the sustainable betterment of the sector.

Female journalists have increased in number (increasing in representation from 14% to 24% from 2010 to 2014) and capacity; producing content for newspapers, radio, and TV that heightens the voices of all Liberians, including its most marginalized and historically silent citizens. Many Station Managers are more aware of their responsibility to support all of their staff, regardless of gender, and provide opportunities for aspiring female journalists to learn and grow professionally. Media outlets across the country benefit from a ratified Gender Policy, developed by the Liberia Women Media Action Committee (LIWOMAC) in partnership with the Female Journalists Association of Liberia (FeJAL) and the PUL which establishes standards for women's engagement and inclusion in the media sector.

Civil society and media institutions collaborate to achieve shared goals, and have seen clearly their importance in times of elections and international crises. Community radio stations better recognize their responsibility to share accurate information when distrust of government and international voices is rampant, and community leaders identified a new platform for sharing concerns and mobilizing one another towards positive behavior change in the face of tremendous fears.

In the midst of these gains, the CSML team has learned valuable

lessons. Civil society and media main partners required additional and earlier support to effectively serve as mentors for their assigned institutions, and these mentors require increased monitoring to maintain quality and impact for their mentees. When designing a program, simplification is encouraged as fewer activities may yield higher results and additional investment in basic resources for partners—computers, desks, etc.—may be necessary to provide the necessary foundation for growth. When working with many partners, competition can breed innovation and improvements among under-performing partners. Among civil society and media organizations, leadership remains a challenge, with centralized power limiting the growth and sustainability of institutions and media managers in particular reluctant to receive and respond to capacity building opportunities. The Ebola crisis revealed important truths and assets related to inter-sectoral coordination and specifically highlighted civil society and media as trusted voices at the community level, particularly when coordinated with respected community leadership. Learning from the Ebola crisis, additional work on accountability is needed at the community level to promote understanding of the concept and effective means for its promotion. ■



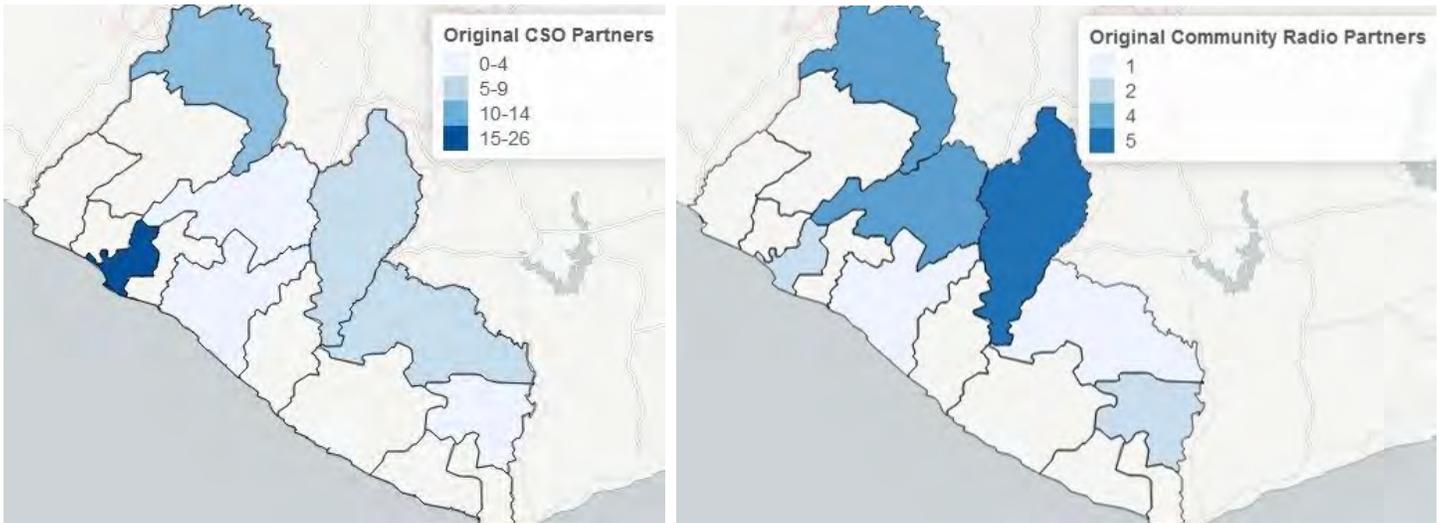
A traditional leader attends a Carter Center-led training to strengthen the capacity among these trusted male, female, and youth leaders to advance access to justice and resolve community disputes consistent with the rule of law. IREX partnered with The Carter Center's Access to Justice (ATJ) and Access to Information (ATI) teams to implement the CSML program. The ATJ team sought to ensure the passing of the Freedom of Information law in Liberia, and work with civil society and media to increase awareness and usage of the law among citizens. In addition to building the capacity of traditional leaders, the ATJ team sought to provide effective legal information and dispute resolution services at the community level and establish a policy framework to increase access to justice at the community level .

BACKGROUND AND PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Civil Society and Media Leadership program (CSML) was designed in response to the complex environment that characterized post-conflict Liberia. The fourteen year civil conflict in Liberia decimated existing infrastructure, resulted in widespread displacement of citizens, and revealed and heightened centuries-old tensions amongst citizens and distrust between citizens and their government. Following the Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration, and Rehabilitation (DDRR) process and in the midst of ongoing reconciliation efforts, USAID, the Liberian Government, and Liberian citizens recognized what was described in the CSML proposal as a “shifting focus from stabilization to development, (in which) strong civil society and media sectors are needed to drive the informed civic participation that leads to good governance, dynamic democracy and economic growth.”

The CSML program sought to address the pressing need of existing and emerging CSOs and media entities after the war, which faced the conflicting realities of being essential to

the nation’s development and future and simultaneously under-developed themselves, thus limiting their potential to fully represent and advocate on behalf of the Liberian people in a post-war environment. Most CSOs and media entities struggled with organizational and financial sustainability, lacking the capacity to sustain themselves outside of donor funds and adhere to their intended mission and vision. Media entities benefitted from a largely free media, but with more than 85% of media outlets established post-war and many struggling with limited professional training and inconsistent financial support, the media sector struggled to stay afloat and to remain professional in a highly politicized national and local climate. Additionally the nation’s history of inequality and widespread prevalence and perception of corruption solidified a general distrust between citizens, CSOs, media, and government and pointed to the need for efforts to bring these sectors together to confront their misgivings, collaborate, and develop solutions cooperatively.



Following an early modification to the number of partners outlined in the original CSML RFA, IREX identified 62 civil society partners and 19 community radio stations in seven of Liberia’s 15 counties to serve as partners.

In May 2010, IREX and USAID launched the CSML program with the goal to “sustain peace in Liberia through greater inclusion, giving a voice to, informing and engaging Liberian citizens.” What started as an \$11 million program focused in seven counties evolved into a \$19.2 million program across all 15 counties as a result of the collaborative efforts and commitment of almost 100 international and national partners and thanks to the vision and support of the Democracy, Rights, and Governance (DRG) team at USAID.

THE CSML APPROACH

Key to the success of the CSML program has been its approach, which is characterized by a commitment to adaptive management; an approach to institutional capacity building that recognizes the cumulative impact of mentoring, training, and small grants; and an unwavering commitment to empowering marginalized voices in the civil society and media sectors, with a strong focus on women.

Adaptive Management

A commitment to adaptive management ensured the ongoing success and impact of the CSML program in the midst of shifting national priorities, unexpected national crises, and lessons learned from continuously working with civil society and media for over five years. After the first year of implementation, IREX requested that the number of targeted civil society partners be reduced from 130 to 62, an adjustment that would enhance the quality and quantity of support to the remaining institutions and that reflected early on a flexibility on the part of both implementer and donor to make necessary adjustments to improve impact. Later a grading system was adapted by the Civil Society Team and its mentoring partners to help IREX and partners better identify the mentoring needs of the various partners and target their support as needed.

The IREX Media Team similarly made significant adjustments early on to reflect new information. A planned

Newspaper Subscription Service to improve access to print media for citizens living outside of Monrovia was determined to be impractical and not marketable following a rigorous assessment by IREX and partners. This enabled the program to focus on strengthening media sources that meet popular need and realistic limitations of low literacy and low wages in rural areas—namely community radio. Later in the program, the acute need for technical support and guidance for community radio stations led to an enhanced focus on training Regional Service Technicians to tackle recurring technical problems at stations in designated regions, something that significantly reduced the length of time stations are off the air due to technical problems.

In addition to the learning and subsequent adjustments described above, the program also adapted continuously to respond to external shifts—both expected and unexpected. With the General Elections in 2011 and then the Senatorial Election in 2014, IREX worked with USAID and its partners to broaden outreach to 15 counties. Simultaneously, IREX re-focused efforts towards ensuring that civil society and media partners could respond directly and meaningfully to these important events—this included heightening conflict-mitigation activities when fears of civil unrest emerged around election time. IREX’s civil society and media partners responded swiftly to an ever-changing environment and in the process had a meaningful effect on the tense environment of election

season in Liberia.

The outbreak of Ebola in mid-2014 and the resulting crisis posed the most significant challenge to the CSML program. The outbreak resulted in the death of over 4,000 Liberians and led to widespread fear and misinformation across the country to an extent not seen since the conflict years. IREX’s partners demonstrated incredible commitment and capability in the face of an ever-changing, frightening environment. With guidance and support from IREX, partners used the knowledge, skills, and confidence they had developed over the previous four years to confront and fight the epidemic while an international response lagged. The two vehicles utilized by CSO partner National Youth Movement for Transparent Elections (NAYMOTE) to conduct civic and voter education were transformed into mobile Ebola awareness-raising tools. IREX tapped into an established network of civil society partners to lead forums with affected communities in 13 counties and engaged media partners immediately to ensure that their coverage of the evolving crisis prioritized facts over sensational fear mongering. IREX joined forces with the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), World Health Organization (WHO), and others to support the Government of Liberia’s management of the Ebola response, including partnering with the Ministry of Information, Cultural Affairs, and Tourism (MICAT) to create public health messages, improve their partnerships with local media, and design a nationwide Ebola outreach campaign. As the crisis waned and con-



Staff members of Aiding Disadvantaged Women and Girls (ADWANGA), a CSO based in Nimba County, benefit from one-on-one training and mentoring led by their assigned Resource Partner

cerns over accountability of Ebola-related funding arose, IREX worked with USAID to re-focus efforts yet again on working with Liberian civil society and media to promote accountability of Ebola funds.

Training, Mentoring, and Grants

Integral to the success of the CSML program was an approach to learning focused on providing high quality targeted training, coupled with long-term one-on-one mentoring, and access to small grants to fund initiatives born out of that intensive engagement.

The four primary CSML Resource Partners (YMCA, WONGOSOL, WANEP, and NARDA) benefitted from intensive training in various key organizational development topics

(Project Cycle Management, Proposal Writing, Gender Mainstreaming, etc.) which they then adapted collaboratively in order to then provide or step-down the training to their mentee CSOs across the seven original counties. The Resource Partners (RPs) then continued to work with their assigned CSOs through field visits and frequent phone check-ins to ensure their full retention of the material and to support them as they put their learning into practice. The RPs also worked with the CSOs—initially via grants provided by IREX and later provided through the RPs themselves—to apply for small grant funds to hold various activities including government-citizen roundtables and advocacy initiatives.

The small grants process for CSOs

was unique in itself, because although CSOs were required to compete, they were each competing against themselves. Through mentoring, each CSO had to improve each phase—project planning, proposal writing, and grant implementation—in order to move to the next step or apply for a new grant. Although there were a few instances when one of the 62 CSOs did not continue the effort after receiving feedback on a first or even second draft of a proposal, everyone that was committed to improvement had opportunities to practice their learning and implement grants through the small grant program. Several of them, such as many featured in this report, implemented six or more small grants in the four or five year period.

This approach also proved essential with CSML media partners, particularly Monrovia-based personnel who are committed to learning but require follow-through to ensure true impact on knowledge, skills, and attitudes. This involved training of journalists and finance and/or marketing managers from partner media outlets followed by intensive one-on-one mentoring over a sustained period. Julius Konton, a reporter for SKY-FM/TV, one of CSML's Monrovia-based outlets, credits the CSML training and mentoring for the remarkable improvements in his reporting and writing skills. "My news writing skills have greatly improved because of the CSML program. I can now write short and concise sentences. I can pronounce words clearly. I can now ask clear and precise questions to get the right response. I am now able to do

proper research before conducting interviews." See page 70 of this report for more information on Julius' accomplishments and growth as a journalist.

As with CSOs, journalists in Monrovia and at the community radio level benefitted from small grant funds to cover expenses for investigative reporting and benefitted from reporting trips to various counties to cover important national and county issues. These resources ensured that the media outlet was able to cover the story effectively and with a successful final product the outlets were motivated to invest in their reporters to capture the strongest stories possible.

Emphasis on Gender Mainstreaming

In post-war Liberia, gender inequality, Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV), and Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) limit the country's progress towards development. Men highly outnumber women in positions of authority in the civil society and media sectors, and discussions of "gender" are typically equated with "women's issues," denigrated as secondary, and expected to be dealt with by women for women exclusive of male participation. These issues are particularly acute in the media sector. In 2010 women made up only 14% of professional journalists and 6% of media managers. As a result, media content typically did not feature the voices of women and neglected to focus on many of the issues most relevant to female citizens. Necessary sensitivities when re-

porting on rape and sexual violence were largely unknown or ignored, and women reporters were typically relegated to reporting exclusively on “women’s issues” or other “soft” news (i.e. women’s workshops, beauty pageants, etc.).

The CSML program embedded gender in all components of program activities and management, from considering fair representation in staffing, to providing gender mainstreaming training for IREX and Main Partner staff (inclusive of the four RPs, Development Education Network-Liberia (DEN-L), Liberia Media Center (LMC), and Liberia Women Media Action Committee (LIWOMAC)). Following CSML’s approach to training and mentoring, the Main Partners then provided the gender mainstreaming training to their mentee organizations leading many

of them to adopt gender friendly organizational policies, improve their hiring practices, and improve the sensitivity and subsequently the impact of their activities in communities. As a result of this gender mainstreaming training and mentoring, 48% of CSML partner CSOs designated Gender Focal Persons among their staff for the first time between 2011 and 2014.

Through the Women’s Media Initiative (WMI) led by LIWOMAC, CSML provided intensive training and mentoring to female journalists, engaged media managers to motivate increased support for female journalists, and created various platforms to increase women listenership of radio. In part due to these efforts, the number of women serving as professional journalists in Liberia increased by 2014 to 24% while women in management positions in the media increased to 15%. ■



IREX’s Gender and Youth Manager leads discussions with civil society leaders across CSML’s original seven counties, co-facilitated by Trainers and Mentors from the Resource Partners.

IREX/Berenike Schott

SUCCESS STORY

“From Nothing to Something” CSML Helps One Woman to Find her Voice and her Purpose

When Munah Kelly was first hired at the Women NGOs Secretariat of Liberia (WONGOSOL), she was a volunteer Office Assistant, receiving only a small monthly stipend to clean the office and sort incoming mail. A mother of five young children and in the process of leaving a marriage that left her feeling incompetent and silenced, Munah was reserved, quiet, and burdened with concerns that her opportunities to excel professionally were limited because of her lack of knowledge and skills. Based on their belief in her potential, WONGOSOL, one of IREX’s Resource Partners under the CSML program, asked Munah to serve as a Mentor for the program, meaning she would be responsible for supporting and counseling CSOs in order to strengthen their role in Liberia’s growth and development. Munah found herself cast in a new challenging role, and as she shadowed her more experienced colleagues she learned best practices in mentoring, and transferred those skills to her own mentorship.

After a few months, the Master Trainer designated to the CSML program at WONGOSOL left the position, but not before she recommended that Munah take over her role. With the further encouragement of WONGOSOL’s Executive Director, Munah stepped into the shoes of Master Trainer, responsible for her team’s mentorship of 17 CSOs and for delivering diverse trainings to her mentees. “I thought I couldn’t make it,” shared Munah, “but I started to gain confidence small small.”

Once Munah found her voice, she truly began to use it. Thanks to the initial and ongoing support of WONGOSOL, encouragement from IREX and her colleagues, along with her own commitment and growing confidence, by year four of CSML, Munah was leading training workshops, managing grants, developing trainings, and ensuring her mentee organizations got the help they needed. Her aspiration now is to become an expert trainer, and she



IREX/Dara Lipton

Munah Kieh Kelly, WONGOSOL Master Trainer

has already informed WONGOSOL that rather than hire external consultants for upcoming grant opportunities, she would like to be considered as the ideal candidate to develop and deliver trainings. “We can do it ourselves,” Munah shared, speaking of herself and her fellow mentors, “we can deliver.” She added “many times I look back, I see myself, and I thank almighty god, and WONGOSOL for accepting me as a volunteer and allowing me to be mentored, and the intervention of IREX—this has shaped my life, shaped me completely from being nothing, to being something.” ■

IREX's IT Officer trains community radio station journalists to use an SMS Platform to gauge listeners' opinions on issues affecting their families and communities. This tool was one of many innovative tools and approaches that IREX incorporated into the CSML program to provide new avenues for media outlets and civil society institutions to better represent and engage with the communities they serve.



DEVELOPING SUSTAINABLE INSTITUTIONS AND OUTCOMES

Essential to the accomplishment of the goal to “sustain peace in Liberia through greater inclusion, giving a voice to, informing and engaging Liberian citizens” is the establishment of sustainable institutions that represent the interests of the people and serve as communication and advocacy platforms to ensure that citizens are informed and have a trusted platform to share concerns and en-

gage with their leadership. CSML’s approach to fostering sustainable institutions included a multi-pronged holistic approach that included strengthening of institutional management and systems; ensuring the technical, financial, and social sustainability of media and civil society institutions; and training and mentoring of current and future leaders. ■

INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT TRAINING AND MENTORING

Organizational development (OD) support serves as the foundation of the CSML support to civil society. Previous to the CSML program, many if not all CSML partners had not established their organizational mission or vision, limiting their ability to target their activities and funding opportunities. Many institutions had no or

limited organizational policies, lacked filing systems, and had minimal staffing that largely worked on a volunteer basis. Funding opportunities, when identified, were applied for with little understanding of proposal writing or project design, and therefore wins were rare, resources were scarce, and CSOs frequently risked shutting down or operating with a skeleton staff.

The aim of CSML’s OD training and

mentoring was to ensure that all CS partners—Resource Partners and their mentee CSOs—had the knowledge and skills to improve their organizational and management structure and to install systems that promote accountability and growth.

Resource Partners

The key to the institutional development process for CSOs was the four Resource Partners (RPs)—CSOs selected to provide capacity building to other organizations through training, mentoring, and grants. Initially eight CSOs were selected as RPs through a competitive process, but by the end of the first year it was decided to reduce them to four to provide better training and mentoring and to better oversee their work with the 62 CSOs. The role of the YMCA of Liberia was changed to that of RP; formerly it was a CSML Main Partner supporting the program through provision of four County Coordinators, which was not found to be very useful. The other three partners that remained RPs were the New Africa Research and Development Agency (NARDA), West Africa Network for Peacebuilding / Liberia (WANEP), and Women NGOs Secretariat of Liberia (WONGOSOL). These four proved to be strong organizations capable of adapting themselves to the changing needs of the program and of recruiting and maintaining staff that could be trained to meet the program's needs. In addition, WONGOSOL and the YMCA were selected because of their focus on women and youth, WANEP because of its regional peacebuilding activities, and NARDA because it was

a strong NGO umbrella organization. The other five that had been RPs remained in the program as CSOs and received the same CSO level support and access to grants.

Despite being among the strongest Liberian CSOs, the RPs had significant capacity gaps to be addressed before they could approach their full potential and offer maximum assistance to others. For example, the process of writing, receiving feedback, and improving their proposals and budgets for each year's grant to carry out their roles in CSML was difficult and time-consuming. For the second year's grant, IREX worked with them through a series of workshops at which they each brought their latest draft for joint discussion and feedback. In the third year they began administering the small grants program to the CSOs they were mentoring. IREX trained them in judging and critiquing proposals, both narrative and budget, and they began to understand how to be consistent in a proposal so that the needs, objectives, activities, anticipated results, and budget all relate to one another coherently. They further developed their grant management skills by overseeing the CSOs' grant implementation. Over the five and a half years CSML granted \$1,984,077.64 to the four RPs specifically for training and mentoring CSOs, with close mentoring from the IREX finance, administration, and grants personnel. Thus their financial management experience was being continuously built up as well.

Besides the training that they re-



Mentors and Master Trainers from NARDA, WANEP and YMCA ideas and strategize at an Annual Workplanning meeting where they are joined by their fellow Main Partners, IREX, USAID, Social Impact, The Carter Center and other program stakeholders.

ceived and then stepped down to the CSOs, the RPs exclusively received training in mentoring, Fixed Obligation Grants, Communications, Organizational Development, Strategic Planning, Business Planning, and Monitoring and Evaluation. They were also given a CSO Resource Toolkit for mentoring, which they helped to develop, full of planning and policy documents, sample forms for financial and human resource management, and a special section of management documents for more advanced CSOs. Their Executive Directors participated in monthly Leadership Breakfast Meetings held with the heads of CSML's seven Main Partners and IREX staff on a monthly basis to discuss issues and topics related to leadership. In addition, the process of Master Trainers and Mentors receiving

training in targeted areas of organizational performance and programming and going out to train and work with other organizations in those areas also brought enormous capacity increases within the RPs themselves. The YMCA of Liberia and WONGOSOL provide good examples of the range of achievements of the RPs during the program.

The YMCA entered the CSML program with an overall baseline participatory organizational capacity assessment (OCA) score of 2.3 on a scale from 0 to 3.0, one of the highest among the 62 CSOs and four RPs. The OCA was administered yearly, and at the end of the program the YMCA's score had raised to 2.8. As the YMCA trainers and mentors took on specific tasks in the CSML project, their own organization made improvements in

those areas. YMCA Master Trainer Mabel Kear led the writing of the CSML Board Development training manual, for example, and its OCA score in Governance and Leadership, which focuses on appropriate board involvement, rose from 1.9 to 2.6. As CSML offered training in Monitoring and Evaluation systems, the YMCA asked to send two participants for training rather than one, and its scores on M&E went up from 1.8 to 2.9. The RPs worked throughout the CSML period to coach CSOs in project planning and proposal development, and the YMCA's Program Sustainability scores improved from 1.7 to 2.8. Two other areas of focus under CSML, gender and advocacy, saw OCA gains from 1.8 to 2.9 and from 2.2 to 2.8 respectively.

WONGOSOL started the program with a mean OCA score of 2.0 and ended the period with a 2.4. Ironically, WONGOSOL decided during its first assessment that it had not been practicing true gender mainstreaming because it was not giving adequate consideration to men and boys, and that it would benefit from widening its understanding and practice of gender issues. It succeeded, and its gender score jumped from 1.6 in year one to 2.3 in year two and reached 2.7 by year five. As a membership organization of other CSOs, WONGOSOL determined after its first assessment that it wanted to improve its outreach to constituents. Through its five-year relationship with its mentee partner organizations, it built its Outreach to Constituents scores from 1.7 to 2.6. This was primarily by providing some of its own network partners—

ten women's organizations that were not in the CSML program—training and mentoring that it was learning from CSML. This included for example the participatory organization capacity assessment instrument; the board development training; development of mission, values, and constitution; M&E forms and training; and strategic planning. Thus while WONGOSOL built up the skills of its CSO mentees in CSML, it multiplied the effects of CSML by expanding them to ten additional women's CSOs as well.

Another important area in which training others and overseeing other organizations' grants made a difference was WONGOSOL's financial management, which rose from 2.1 to 2.7 over the five years. Like the YMCA, WONGOSOL used its work with other CSOs in proposal writing to raise its own Program Sustainability score and raised its advocacy scores by providing training and mentoring in that area to other institutions.

Because of WONGOSOL's gender-focused mission, CSML ensured that it was involved with all CSML gender work. Thus, WONGOSOL was a partner to IREX in holding focus groups on women's issues in the seven original project counties and from there in developing the CSML Gender Strategy. IREX supported the travel of WONGOSOL staff members to attend two of the annual UN Report on the Status of Women meetings in New York and encouraged WONGOSOL to take on special gender-related activities during the 2011 and 2014 elections, such as its Women's Empower-

ment Program which provided training to prospective women politicians and organized forums for women to discuss the election, the issues, and their perception of the candidates. This has made them strong not just in institutional capacity but also in the field of women and gender, once again making them an effective network organization.

YMCA and WONGOSOL demonstrat-

ed the benefits of OD training and mentoring for their own institutions. The OD training and support that the RPs were then able to share with the partner CSOs has equally had significant impact on those institutions' organizational strength and sustainability, one such example is Refugees Education Sponsorship Program Enhancing Communities Together (RESPECT), described below. ■

RESPECT Gains Institutional Strength, New Funders, and Achieves Greater Impact as a Result of CSML Training, Mentoring, and Grants

In 2011, Refugees Education Sponsorship Program Enhancing Communities Together (RESPECT) was an organization of five volunteers, operating in the kitchen of the county administration building in distant Grand Gedeh County. That year it entered the CSML program, starting with training and mentoring in institutional strengthening, project cycle management, and proposal writing. Four years later it has earned \$511,000 in outside funding with impact in 82 communities and 10 schools. Donors include IBIS (strengthening intellectual clubs in schools), UNICEF (HIV/AIDS counseling and testing), German Agro Action (water, sanitation, and hygiene), and USAID through Mercy Corps (Ebola awareness).

In 2013 an IBIS/RESPECT assessment in nine schools revealed collection of fees for printing of tests, registration fees without receipts in primary schools where education is "free and compulsory," teachers trading grades for money, and sexual harassment and abuse for grades. With a CSML anti-corruption grant, RESPECT operated its "Reducing Educational Malpractices in Schools" project by training 56

students, teachers, parents, and education officers in six schools and facilitating the organization of Education Watch Clubs to monitor for malpractices and advocate against them.

Executive Director Shetha Koon Karmah credits all this to CSML and its mentoring partner, which led them to restructure their board; develop financial, procurement, and HR policies; and develop an annual strategic plan and quarterly program plans. "When I look back, I smile, and say to myself, God thank you for the IREX program, because I learned a lot from the program and its activities, mentors, and trainers. But most of all, I think it's because of the willingness to learn and make a change," she says. "I am a good manager because I have learned to share information and responsibilities with staff...Even if you are strong, hard-working and persistent you need knowledge to grow, and that is what the IREX program did for us." ■

INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR THE MEDIA SECTOR

Institutional development support to the media sector was also a key component of CSML. Unlike civil society, the focus here was on business development—helping media partners understand the business world by developing the requisite management skills to identify and tap into markets with the aim of increasing revenue to strengthen their chances of survival in an ever growing competitive media environment (see page 30 of this report for more on this).

INCREASING WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN THE MEDIA

Institutional and national development in Liberia cannot fully be realized if half of the population are subjugated or rendered silent in decision making. Within the media sector in Liberia, women are traditionally underrepresented both as journalists (producers of content), subjects (sources in stories, particularly outside of “women’s” issues), and consumers. Recognizing these gaps and the importance of women’s representation for effective sector strengthening and the achievement of development goals, IREX partnered with LIWOMAC to hold a conference in November 2010 to address these disparities and develop a strategy to ensure impactful and sustainable change.

Prior to the conference, LIWOMAC led a series of consultations with eight local and international organiza-

tions to establish empirical evidence to support the conference and inform plans for taking a holistic approach that cut across the media sector in Liberia, primarily focusing on the advancement of women in the media. The Advancing Women in the Media Strategy that emerged from this conference serves as the foundation for the Women’s Media Initiative (WMI), led by Main Partner LIWOMAC. The strategy is organized under three strategic pillars:

- Strengthening Women’s Media Organizations
- Strengthening Women in Media
- Increasing Women’s Access to Information

Strengthening Women’s Media Organizations & Women in Media

Historically, media outlets in Monrovia as well as community radio stations employ very few women, and those on staff typically serve as Finance Officer or Assistant. A study produced by the Christian Media Center in 2009 found that 14% of media professionals were female, while another study done by ActionAid Liberia and the LMC in 2010 found that women composed 5% of leadership roles at media entities. For women working in the sector, limited reporting opportunities and lack of access to equipment in comparison to their male counterparts are major barriers to professional growth and maintaining a presence in the industry.

IREX recognized that key to combatting these challenges was the existence of thriving institutions that



Young journalists who are participants in LIWOMAC's training and mentoring program learn how to sell their credentials and develop clips, a CV, and cover letter to support their job search in the professional media field.

represent the interests of female media professionals and that have the capacity to continue to support and capacitate new generations of female media professionals. Through the WMI, IREX worked with LIWOMAC and their radio station Liberia Women Democracy Radio (LWDR) from the early days of the program to strengthen their ability to support female journalists and promote a more equitable and safe environment for women in the media. Through organizational development training, financial support, and provision of equipment for a training studio, LIWOMAC and LWDR have the institutional support needed to continue to grow their institution and support the advancement of women in the media in Liberia.

LIWOMAC established a training and

mentoring program that benefitted 110 young women from around the country. Some were brought to LWDR's studio to undergo months of intensive training and mentoring that prepared them to take up employment at various media outlets in the country, including LWDR, the Inquirer Newspaper, and Truth FM. LIWOMAC's trainers and mentors also travelled across CSML's seven target counties providing hands-on training and mentoring to young women interested in working with community radio stations. In 2014, three beneficiaries of the WMI's training and mentoring program became the first county-based female correspondents in Liberia. As LIWOMAC's Executive Varnetta Johnson Freeman stated, "the fact that we have female correspondents in the rural areas is a huge impact that the program has had on

“A woman journalist at Magic FM was asked how either her way of working or the content of her work had changed following her participation in CSML trainings. Although she had worked at the CRS for more than eight years, she said her interviewing skills had improved. When asked to elaborate, a story emerged that pointed to her newly found ‘voice’ as a woman journalist. She said ‘My self-esteem is higher. I realized through the training that as a journalist—as a woman—I have every right to ask questions of officials and expect answers when I interview them.’ The interpersonal ‘shift’ seemed transformational.”

—CSML’S MIDTERM EVALUATION, OCTOBER 2012

the media landscape...Before then, we never heard of female correspondents in the rural areas. The fact that this program has produced three correspondents shows a great impact on the media and advancement of women.”

Nana Zarway is one of the three county-based female correspondents. She was a high school student in 2012 when LIWOMAC recruited her to work at Radio Kergheamahn, CSML’s partner station in Ganta, Nimba County. Nana has reported several stories for LWDR from towns near the Liberia-Ivorian border in Nimba County. At the height of the Ebola crisis, Nana travelled across Nimba and filed several reports for LWDR and Radio Kergheamahn. “I feel like I’m a role model for young girls in my town,” she said. “People are not used to hearing women on the radio and when they hear me, they are impressed. The CSML program really gave me an opportunity to pursue my passion in journalism. I am more confident about who I am and I am glad that I have the chance to tell stories about women and their issues in my community.”

IREX also provided training to the Station Managers of CSML’s original 19 partner stations on Gender Awareness and Inclusion, followed with intensive mentoring led by the RP Mentors. The LIWOMAC team engaged Station Managers further during their mentoring visits with female journalists to encourage a supportive environment at stations where women are afforded opportunities to grow and advance. For example, Radio Gee

in River Gee county—one of Liberia’s most conservative areas—now has four female talk show hosts including Tenneh Kamara Subah, who runs the “Women Voices” show that airs two times a week. Station Manager George Kayee shared that “the CSML program really transformed our programming. Before women voices were not heard, now they are taking over the airwaves. Because of CSML, we can say that we have greater women participation in our programs. Women are calling to talk about issues that affect them.”

CSML also hosted a scholars program that provided tuition assistance to women studying journalism at universities and tertiary institutions in the country. Fifteen young women benefitted from this, as well as capacity building guidance and mentoring in preparing resumes and participating in internships at women-focused NGOs in the country.

Through the WMI, IREX also provided support to the Female Journalists Association of Liberia (FeJAL), an institution that had long struggled with institutional management, as they developed their strategic plan. FeJAL also worked alongside LIWOMAC and the PUL to develop and pass a Gender Policy for the media that established standards for women’s engagement, inclusion, and a safe working environment. This Policy was validated by the Liberian media at the PUL Annual Congress in 2015 which was seen across the sector as a significant advancement for women and for the sector as a whole.

Increasing Women's Access to Information

As stated in CSML's Advancing Women in the Media Strategy published in April 2011, "in many communities, women's political awareness and capacity to engage decision makers are limited. Women therefore need civic empowerment to mobilize and utilize public spaces, including the media, through which leaders can be held accountable. Women also need to be given an opportunity to have more access to programs on radio and to become quoted sources in the news."

It is against this backdrop that CSML has worked with LIWOMAC to develop 22 Women's Media Empowerment Clubs; groups of community women that listen to the radio and identify opportunities for advocacy or community development as a result. As of the writing of this report, all 22 groups continue to actively listen and engage their radio stations with certain groups demonstrating their role as leading change agents in their communities (see the story of the Kamara Town Club on page 40 of this report).

Additionally, LIWOMAC and IREX collaborated to develop the "I Know My Rights" community engagement forum approach which combines public theater with crowd participation to immerse community members in pressing social issues and inspire all those present to claim agency and take action in response to issues that are disproportionately affecting women. These forums covered topics including SEA, rape, and land rights and ownership. In 2015, "I

Know My Rights" forums were re-named "Everybody's Business" forums, to reflect a shift in focus from rights issues to accountability of Ebola funds. A total of 60 forums were held in 22 communities over the course of the program, reaching approximately 800 people in 11 counties.

Through these platforms, CSML created a space for women to voice their views and broaden community dialogue on issues that are typically sidelined, the issues that matter most to them. These efforts combined with engagement of media outlets, managers, and capacity building of female journalists themselves aimed to enrich the content and diversify the voices that constitute the Liberian media. Estella Nelson, President of LIWOMAC noted that "it is good to acknowledge the fact that the media is opening up and responding in some ways with increasing women's representation as newsmakers and addressing some of the issues affecting women that were never reported. The issue is how we sustain that transformation."

BOARD DEVELOPMENT TRAINING AND MENTORING FOR CSOS

Board development is a crucial component of institutional development, as boards help to foster effective governance and oversight systems in CSOs/CRSs and contribute to building vibrant and accountable local organizations in Liberia. IREX partnered with Mabel Kear of the YMCA in 2012 to develop a Board Development Manual for CSOs and CRSs, which



The Flomo Theater Production team conduct Ebola information outreach in a community. Some of their Ebola outreach activities were funded via new partnerships made possible as a result of CSML Board Development training.

included information on the purpose of a board and best practices for identifying and recruiting board members and developing board job descriptions. The document included specific sections for CSOs and CRSs.

For board development of civil society partners, the YMCA's Mabel Kear worked with the other RPs to develop a training on board development based on the manual which they then stepped down to their 62 mentee CSOs in seven target counties.

One of the institutions to demonstrate significant impact from that support was Flomo Theater Production (FTP). Following their participation in the board development training, FTP staff decided to let its inactive board go, asking only one member, who brought strengths as a gender advocate, to stay. The four new members it brought in included a well-connected university arts professor with a specialty in Liberian arts

and culture who provides technical advice on performances and has put FTP in touch with others in the Liberian arts and theatre sector. Another member is the commissioner of the district in which FTP is active, who provides political assistance and gives FTP stature. Soon after their identification, FTP's RP, NARDA, trained the new board in their roles and responsibilities.

Since this initial support, the board continues to meet regularly and to support the mission of the institution. As the Ebola crisis began in 2014, one board member used a tactic taught in the board orientation: matching organizations together to increase impact. The board member connected FTP to a student organization and both groups then pooled their funds to purchase fuel and supplies to conduct Ebola prevention activities.

In another example, a board member who is a vice president at African

Methodist Episcopal University (AMEU), worked with FTP to establish a Liberia Arts and Culture program at the university. They plan eventually to develop courses for credit. To start, FTP trained its first set of 35 AMEU students in traditional dance and music as an extracurricular activity for a performance in early December 2015. The board has also brought FTP together with the Liberian Anti-Corruption Commission to work on delivering anti-corruption messages through drama.

FTP has clearly been strategic in its selection and work with its board members. This one institutional improvement, a re-structured and trained board of directors, says Executive Director Siafa Ballah, has taken the organization to a new level in many ways.

BOARD DEVELOPMENT MENTORING AND TRAINING FOR CRSS

In 2012, CSML began engaging community radio station boards about their role and how they could strengthen and effectively support the management of the station. In that year, the CSML media team conducted an assessment of 16 partner stations, and found that only four of the 16 (25%) had by-laws and/or statutes defining the role of the board, four out of the 16 (25%) had held elections since being formed (between 2004-2007), and a mere 38%—or six out of the 16 stations—claim that their board members understood their role. Additionally, local officials dominated the boards of community radio stations, leaving

some stations vulnerable to political influences.

Following the assessment, CSML began working with community radio stations on board development focusing on defining the role of the board and how they could strengthen and effectively support the management. Thirteen partner community radio stations received training in board development. The training focused on how to recruit new members; the role of the board in setting policies; financial management; staffing; and monitoring editorial content to ensure reporting is balanced, fair, and objective. In addition to the training, all partner stations were mentored and encouraged to diversify their boards to include more women, community members, and people with disabilities.

Nine of the 13 stations that received the training reconstituted their boards by recruiting new members to reflect the diversity of their communities and established or revised their by-laws and/or constitutions.

Radio Gee's board was heavily dominated by the county administration, but that all changed after CSML's intervention, said George Kayee, Station Manager. County officials, he said, initially resisted the change to increase community representation on the board but eventually gave in. The 11-member board now includes four women and is more representative of the community.

"In reforming the board, we wanted every sector to be represented," he said. "We now have religious groups,

people with disabilities, women, and tribal leaders. One thing we stressed was that the board members were never going to be paid, but there to give support. We reformed the board and the voice of the people helped us to remain a community radio station.” The new board constitution stipulates a two year tenure for board members.

Radio Bong Mines in Bong County also restructured its board after completing a two-day board development training. The station’s board had been inactive. Members did not meet regularly and were not involved in the station’s affairs until there was a problem. Today, the station has a nine member board that includes four women. The board meets every month and helps to raise money for the station.

Chris Yarwoe, Station Manager of Magic FM in Grand Bassa County credits the CSML board development training and mentoring for keeping his station on the right track. The nine member board includes six men and three women and meets once a month or as needed to address emergency issues. Yarwoe said the board played a leading role in securing land for the construction of a new building to house the station. “CSML really gave the board guidance on how to run the station,” Yarwoe said. “We now have a board that comes to us with problems and concerns and tells us what they like about the station and what they are not satisfied with. We are stronger because we have an active board.”

Radio Kintoma’s board was dominat-

ed by men before CSML’s intervention. Today, the station’s 13-member board includes three women, said John Gayflor, Station Manager. The board meets once a month and helps raise money for the station. “Before the training, the board was lax,” he said. “Some of them thought they could come in and run the station on a daily basis. But the CSML training told them that they were there to guide the management, not run it. The training helped them understand that they should help look for funding for the station.”

DEVELOPING LEADERS AND YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

Lack of access to quality formal education is a major barrier to development in Liberia. In addition to the continued training and mentoring provided through the CSML program to both civil society and media professionals, the program also provided targeted professional training and learning opportunities for entry-level and mid-level media professionals through the Sol Plaatje Fellowship and High School to Journalism initiative.

Sol Plaatje Fellowship

From 2012 to 2013, CSML funded seven mid-level media managers to travel to the Sol Plaatje Institute for Media Leadership at Rhodes University in South Africa to participate in a media management and business development course. The three week training at Sol Plaatje was the beginning of a four month training and mentoring program. Upon returning to Liberia, Fellows received distance



“I went from learning to report and write news to learning how to manage a media institution and teaching other people how to do it.”

—SAMUKA KONNEH
SOL PLAATJE FELLOW

IREX/Dara Lipton

mentoring from the Sol Plaatje team for several months followed by a visit to Liberia by a Sol Plaatje expert to complete the training program. The Fellows were then ready to serve as trainers and mentors for CSML, mentoring Monrovia-based media outlets and community radio stations in media management and business development.

Samuka Konneh credits IREX’s CSML program and the Sol Plaatje Fellowship in particular for helping him advance from a reporter at a local newspaper to one of Liberia’s leading trainers in media development. Upon his completion of the program, IREX hired Konneh as a consultant to train and mentor media outlets in developing business plans and marketing strategies to increase their advertising sales and tap into other sources of revenue. Konneh continued to consult for IREX through the implementation of the Regional Support Center

(RSC) program in Gbarnga, providing guidance to CSOs and CRSs as they developed and implemented their social enterprises (see page 31 for more information on this program).

Building off of this experience, Samuka partnered with his fellow Sol Plaatje graduates to create a marketing and public relations consulting agency in Liberia called Vivacious Consulting. In 2014, the firm landed a \$28,000 contract from Oxfam GB to assist small rice farmers in southeastern Liberia in developing business plans. “I went from learning to report and write news to learning how to manage a media institution and teaching other people how to do it,” Konneh said. “A lot of our media institutions were not generating income. They didn’t know it was their responsibility to go after ads. Now, they are pursuing advertisers. They also have financial policies on money management.”

High School to Journalism Initiative

The vast majority of Liberian journalists enter the profession from high school, and their training is typically limited to participation in Press Clubs while in high school, and on-the-job learning once they join a media outlet. Though some journalists do go on to enroll in University such as the University of Liberia's Mass Communications Department, the need to earn a living compels many young people to delay college to pursue their career in journalism.

Recognizing this common career trajectory, IREX partnered with the University of Liberia Mass Communication Department in 2013 to develop a training and mentoring program for high school students in four counties—Montserrado, Grand Bassa, River Gee, and Grand Gedeh—to prepare high school students for journalism.

The program's 136 participants (75 males and 61 females) received basic training in reporting, news writing, the role of the media in society, as well as practical experience at partner radio outlets including LUX FM, Radio Gee in River Gee County, and LWDR.

In River Gee, Ruth Tarwoe was one of the four students who produced a weekly radio news program featuring stories and issues relevant to high school students in the county. Ruth was a senior student at Tweh Jayklah High School in River Gee when she signed up for the program. The practical experience, she said, enabled her to pursue her career in journal-

ism. When IREX was recruiting young women for the Girls' Media Frontiers (GMF) program to train young women in multi-media journalism to report on the 2014 Special Senatorial Election, Ruth was one of the students selected to participate in the program through a competitive process. She reported on women and their issues during the Special Senatorial Election in 2014 (see page 71 for more information on the GMF program).

"The CSML program really gave me a start in journalism," Ruth said. "The High School to Journalism program was my first exposure to journalism. I learned how to write good news stories and report on what was happening in my high school."

In Monrovia, some of the High School to Journalism students ended up at LWDR. One of the major accomplishments was the production of seven editions of a weekly program on LWDR featuring a variety of issues affecting young people, especially during the Ebola crisis. The youth captured young people's voices on teen pregnancy, early sex and its impact on youth development, students' reaction to the reopening of schools post-Ebola, how students spent their time during the Ebola crisis, and a decision by the Ministry of Gender to arrest street children caught selling during school hours.

Adjoua Dadzi joined the program when she was a junior at Paynesville Community School. She said the High School to Journalism initiative gave her a head start in journalism and also provided an opportunity for her

to keep busy during the Ebola crisis when school was closed.

“The High School to Journalism Program really improved my reading skills,” she said. “I learned a lot by

interacting with the people in the studio at LWDR. We developed our own topics and learned how to ask good questions. It has had a positive impact on me.” ■

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Lack of access to funds has a tremendous impact on civil society and media institutions in Liberia—civil society institutions are forced to chase funding opportunities that may be outside of their scope to pay the bills, and staff, who are often volunteers, leave the institutions when paid or better positions arise elsewhere. Community radio stations remain off the air for extended periods of time because they lack the funds to pay for repairs and parts and nearly all community radio staff work as volunteers, similarly at risk of abandoning their station when schooling or paid opportunities emerge. Media outlets in Monrovia and at the community radio level are aware that advertising revenue is available, but most lack the training and experience to access those opportunities.

CSML has always prioritized financial sustainability as integral with institutional development and sustainability, recognizing that an institution cannot grow without sustainable access to funds and resources. The interventions that CSML undertook to address this significant challenge are described below.

PROPOSAL WRITING AND GRANTS MANAGEMENT FOR CSOS

In 2013, IREX worked with the RPs to develop a training in Project Cycle Management and Proposal Writing, which was then stepped down to 62 mentee organizations in the seven target counties. This training has widely been recognized by CSO partners as one of the most impactful trainings they had ever received. Within the first year of the training and with support from ongoing mentoring, 55 institutions wrote a total of 349 proposals to non-IREX donors, of which 154 were funded totaling \$2.4 million. All of the CSOs who were successful in winning these above-mentioned grants credited the CSML training as being instrumental in their success. Following that year the CSOs continued to submit applications, while developing management and operational skills as they implemented grants. Since the initial one year assessment of impact, eight CSML organizations received a total of over \$2 million for Ebola-related services, and five others raised \$2.6 million for various other social and economic development projects.

National Empowerment Program for Women and Children (NEP) is a good example of progress through good grant proposal writing and implementation. Before NEP was accepted into the CSML program, it had man-



IREX/Data Lipton

Young girls attend the launch of a women and girls' center in Kamara Town, Montserrado County, which was built by National Empowerment Program for Women and Children (NEP). The Executive Director of NEP credits CSML's Project Cycle Management and Proposal Writing Training for giving her the skills to write this successful proposal.

aged small grants totaling less than \$10,000 combined. Shortly after the Project Cycle Management and Proposal Writing training, NEP Executive Director Sianeh Omeze found a grant opportunity online from an organization based in Ghana. She proposed building a center for \$107,000 for women's and children's programs in Kamara Town, Montserrado County and now runs a center with training rooms, offices, a conference hall, and auditorium. She then discovered Global Giving, an online crowd funding site, where she raised additional funds for training materials and staff. In response to the Ebola crisis, NEP implemented programs with \$395,000 from four donors, contributing to the famous turnaround the Liberian people made in fighting Ebo-

la after receiving information they trusted from local NGOs. Since that time NEP implemented projects for another USAID partner in adult literacy. Today NEP is strong, it is contributing to the development of its community as well as other communities, and the women's and children's center has regular programs with permanent paid staff. "The CSML program was the game changer for NEP and has taken us to a whole new level," says Omeze. "We are very grateful and it was impactful!"

Fourteen CSML organizations that used their skills in project design and proposal writing to respond quickly to the USAID/OFDA-funded Ebola Community Action Platform (ECAP) program received a total of over \$2 million to implement vital Ebola-

“The capacity gains are measurable and the results are telling in terms of the YMCA’s growing capacity to independently write and win additional new grants like the award under the USAID/Mercy Corps E-CAP...We are defining partnership together in the real sense of capacity building and mutual relationship with benefits to our targeted beneficiaries and communities.”

-EDDIE GBOE, NATIONAL GENERAL SECRETARY, YMCA

related community activities. Three of the RPs applied, and all won, bringing in five of their CSO mentee partners as subgrantees. All three RPs have credited CSML directly for the capacity building and encouragement that brought them that success. YMCA head Edward Gboe emphasized that “the capacity gains are measurable and the results are telling in terms of the YMCA’s growing capacity to independently write and win additional new grants like the award under the USAID/Mercy Corps E-CAP...We are defining partnership together in the real sense of capacity building and mutual relationship with benefits to our targeted beneficiaries and communities.” In addition, the Bassa Youth Caucus (BYC) designed an Ebola awareness strategy and was funded by the steel company Arcelor Mittal Liberia. Lofa County Network of Local Non-Governmental Organizations (LOFANET) opened the LofaNet Safe Home to provide accommodations, feeding, psychosocial counseling, literacy, and clothing for 30 children who lost both parents from Ebola. They raised funds and in-kind support from a mobile clinic, a church, and the World Food Programme and are working to reintegrate the children into their communities through foster parents with regular support and visits.

Since the successful first year of fund raising, five other CSOs raised a total of \$2.6 million in 18 months for work in their specific sectors. Sustainable Agriculture Program for Liberia (SAP-Liberia) secured funds from the World Bank Agriculture Sector Rehabilitation Program that has improved

farmers’ production in vegetable and low land rice in eight communities in Grand Gedeh County. Another agriculture CSO, Rural Agriculture Alternatives (RAA), is implementing a grant from the USAID Food and Enterprise Development (FED-Liberia) increasing rice and vegetable production in Nimba and Lofa Counties. National Adult Education Association of Liberia (NAEAL) won three grants to increase adult literacy, while Children Assistance Program (CAP) has received grant funds for its work with children. Refugees Education Sponsorship Program Enhancing Communities Together (RESPECT) has extended its outreach to 82 communities in Grand Gedeh County with HIV/AIDS counseling and testing, Ebola awareness, student intellectual clubs, and sanitation and hygiene awareness with donor funding.

Grant funding pushed the organizations to quickly improve their financial management systems or risk failure. The mentoring partners were thus able to provide assistance as it was needed and as the mentees’ commitment to learn and improve increased.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT TRAINING AND SOFTWARE PROVISION FOR CSOS

Six CSOs in the program specifically asked for extra mentoring assistance in their financial management systems. The Children Assistance Program (CAP) developed its voucher system, petty cash, and payment request forms through this assistance and was mentored in its start up with the new software Quick Books. NAE-

AL reports that after the assistance it is easy to reconcile its accounts with the chart of accounts, income and expenditure statements aligned, and finds that financial audits go more smoothly. HICOD says that it is easier to win grants with a well-established financial management system. Four CSOs rated the help as very useful while two said it was useful. And the benefits continue—five of the six CSOs have used a financial management tool obtained through its mentoring from CSML to help another organization outside the CSML network.

INCREASING ADVERTISING REVENUE FOR MEDIA PARTNERS

As mentioned earlier in this report, business development was a prime focus of the CSML media program. The media in Liberia grew significantly in number in the years following the civil war. In pre-war Liberia there were three radio stations. By the time CSML launched in 2010, there were more than 20 stations in Monrovia, 50 community radio stations across the country, 40 registered newspapers, and three television stations. It was clear from the beginning that the market was saturated and that media entities needed to adopt a competitive stance to survive. However, CSML's Start-Up Assessment revealed that media entities "experience difficulties in understanding and creating markets, and many lack the skill and knowledge to effectively develop business plans and strategies to improve income generation." Thus financial sustaina-

bility became a prime focus of CSML's approach to institutional development of partner media outlets.

In 2011, IREX sponsored several finance managers from partner outlets to undergo financial management training at the Liberian Institute of Public Administration (LIPA). The goal was to prepare these managers to work with a hired consultant on better financial management and to increase advertising revenue. Later, IREX hired a consultant to provide training and mentoring to Monrovia-based partner outlets in marketing and advertising. Over a period of three years the consultant worked with the CSML Media Team to develop training in several areas with the overall goal of improving advertising strategies to increase revenue. Business, finance, and marketing managers from partner outlets were trained in marketing strategies, goal setting, sponsorship marketing, Internet advertising, among other topics. Each training was followed by days of intensive one-on-one mentoring.

In addition to the training and mentoring sessions, IREX partnered with UNESCO to organize a monthly Media and Business Sustainability Exchange Forum. These gatherings brought together executives from the business world and media managers to explore how the two sectors could benefit from each other. Business executives were brought in to discuss their approach to advertising and talk about what they expected from the media.

IREX also published the Understanding the Media and Advertising Mar-

ket in Liberia in 2011, the result of a survey on advertising preferences of news consumers in Liberia. This was intended to assist media managers to understand the advertising market, identify additional markets, and design the best approach to explore untapped markets and increase advertising revenue.

The result of the various interventions were very visible in some partner outlets. In 2013, the Informer Newspaper reported a 35% increase in advertising revenue. SKY Communications used data from Understanding the Media and Advertising Market in Liberia to reprogram its radio and news content. SKY also used skills acquired from the different interventions to design schemes to increase revenue from advertising and other broadcast services. For example, SKY Radio developed a sponsorship marketing concept that led to the introduction of a short code revenue sharing service in partnership with a local GSM network to allow people to use their phone to buy anniversary and birthday requests forms. Previously, people had to come to the station to buy request forms. The GSM company receives 60% of the revenue and SKY receives 40%. Overall, revenues at SKY increased 30% as a result of CSML interventions, said Martin Browne, CEO of the company.

“We are now more equipped, confident, and organized to bring sales from the field because of the mentoring and training our business and sales staff have undergone through the CSML program,” Brown said.

Some entities took steps to improve

their branding as a result of CSML interventions. For example, Women Voices newspaper redesigned its logo, as its Managing Editor put it, “to give the paper a stronger identity.” Women Voices also developed a Facebook page. “I advised...those who cannot afford a website...to launch a Facebook page... Helen (Women Voices’ Managing Editor) decided to adapt that idea and Women Voices now has a Facebook page that engages readers,” shared CSML Marketing Consultant Mya Padmore.

SOCIAL ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT FOR CSOS AND CRSS

On May 30, 2013, CSML launched the Regional Support Center (RSC) managed by DEN-L based in Gbarnga, Bong County. The RSC sought to address the scarcity of resources and structural needs that hinder many organizations, particularly those outside of Monrovia. The two focus areas of the RSC were organizational development and financial development through the Social Enterprise Development (SED) program, both fostered through intensive training and mentoring. Of the 17 organizations from Bong and Nimba Counties benefitting from the intensive training and mentoring, ten were selected in January 2014 through a competitive process to receive small grants to start-up their social enterprises. The goal of these funds was to provide the resource foundation coupled with intensive mentoring to enable these institutions to grow thriving enterprises that contributed to rather than distracted from their central mission.



IREX Senior Regional Support Center Program Officer stands inside a stationary store owned by Bong Mines Community Radio (BOMCOR). The store, which is the first of its kind in Bong Mines, provides much needed income to the radio station and was made possible through BOMCOR's participation in SED training and their successful win of a small grant through the CSML program.

Radio Karn of Nimba County received \$8,640 in seed money to build the first stationary store in Karnplay, Nimba's second largest town on Liberia's border with Guinea and Ivory Coast. As a result, students don't have to travel long distances to buy school supplies and county officials use the store's photo copying machine to copy official documents. Radio Karn also used some of the funds to build a production studio which provides an additional source of funds as local businesses, government officials, and NGOs pay the studio to record and air messages on their behalf.

Radio Kergheamahn received \$10,200 to purchase outside broadcast equipment and a public address system. Since Ebola subsided, the station began generating income from churches, NGOs, and citizens to broadcast rallies, events, weddings, and funerals. Groups such as YMCA, WONGO-SOL, and the Constitution Review Committee paid \$100 an hour to car-

ry their programs live with time slots varying from one hour to five hours. In October 2015, the station earned \$200 for providing live broadcast of the national Quizzing Competition that involves students from all over the country. "People were glued to the radio" to listen to the quizzing competition, the Station Manager Nyahn Flomo said. "One day, when we didn't air the program, they were calling to find out why. They missed it."

The SED program, shared Flomo, strengthened the station's connection to the community. "I think the CSML SED project gave us a competitive edge in the community," he said. "We have more visibility and people know that we provide a commercial service. The SED is a new service that we are providing the community."

The Center for Justice and Peace Studies (CJPS), based in Gbarnga, Bong County, is another organization that benefited from the SED program. CJPS received \$8,500 to provide mi-

croloans to young people. From previous programs, CJPS had graduated several young people in skills training programs but did not have the resources to help them start off on their career paths. With the SED grant, CJPS provided micro loans to 24 of its graduates in three cycles since November 2014. Investing \$4,000 in direct funding, the organization has generated a little over \$100,000 Liberian Dollars or

US\$1,136 in profits. Marline Jarwoe is the coordinator of the SED program at CJPS: “we had a lot of people graduating from our training programs but didn’t know what to do with them after graduation. They had no money to start whatever they wanted to start. The SED grant allowed us to give them life. Now, they have a beginning and I know with the little we give them, their families can now be assured of an improved life.” ■

TECHNICAL SUSTAINABILITY OF COMMUNITY RADIO

Remaining on air is one of the greatest challenges facing community radio stations in Liberia. Before the CSML program, most radio equipment and replacement parts were not available in country, leading stations to often wait months to ship parts from abroad or simply remain off-air indefinitely as the cost of importing parts was prohibitively expensive. With community radio serving such a valuable role in their communities as trusted sources of information, these technical challenges can have an enormous impact in rural areas.

CSML approached this need through a multi-pronged approach: providing equipment, establishing a technical support network including technical experts, and establishing a sustainable resource for purchasing equipment in-country. CSML provided transmitters and radio equipment to 20 partner stations in eight counties,

totaling \$405,966. Eighteen 300 and 500 watt transmitters were given to 18 stations in CSML’s seven target counties, broadening the reach of partner stations from 79% of the population in those counties in 2012 to 91% in 2015. Many stations now reach well beyond their county borders, including into Cote D’Ivoire, Guinea, and Sierra Leone. “The new equipment has given us a wide range of listeners. It took us from 40-watts to 300-watts. Our broadcast is clearer. The state-of-the-art equipment has helped improve the staff’s skill,” shared Kasia Porte, Station Manager at Voice of Rural Montserrado radio station. IREX also provided a 500 watt transmitter to Radio Bomi in Tubmanburg, Bomi County when it was gutted by fire during the Ebola crisis (see page 79), bringing the total number of transmitters given to stations under the program to 19.

Though the provision of equipment

including transmitters is important and was highly appreciated by partner stations, sustainable access to replacement parts and technical support is another important issue. After IREX and other INGOs leave, what structure will be in place to ensure the technical sustainability of the community radio sector? It is with this question in mind that IREX planned early on to partner with the LMC, ALICOR, and later the University of Liberia's Mass Communications Department to start the Equipment Resource Pool (ERP). The ERP is based at the Mass Communications Department of the University of Liberia and has stocked a supply of widely needed spare parts, valued at almost \$22,000. Stations are able to obtain the parts for a small fee. This is intended to reduce the length of time stations remain off the air while they wait for spare parts to arrive from Europe or the United States.

Through ALICOR, CSML also introduced a Help Desk to manage a team of technicians to provide technical

support to stations across the country. This was modeled after the Regional Service Technician (RST) program which was introduced in 2012 with three well trained technicians being available to respond to technical problems in CSML's target countries. The RSTs have served a valuable role in providing maintenance support and mentoring to partner stations. Many stations credit the RSTs with keeping them on the air when otherwise they would be off indefinitely. Anecdotal evidence shows that because of the RSTs the length of time that stations remain off the air due to technical problems has been reduced significantly as the RSTs are available to respond immediately to requests from stations. These RSTs also provided training to technical support point persons from partner community radio stations to enable station staff to conduct basic preventative maintenance and address minor technical challenges as they arise. ■

SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

In the context of Liberia and the CSML program, social sustainability is defined as the extent to which an institution (civil society or media) is interpreted by the citizens it intends to represent as serving their best interests. It signifies a commitment to providing a sustained platform for citizens to dialogue on the issues that matter to them most, and a commitment to managing and governing that entity in a manner that promotes accountability to the people.

CSML has prioritized social sustainability in different ways with both media and civil society partners, and in many cases enhanced this sustainability through providing avenues for these sectors to coordinate and collaborate toward a shared purpose.

PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE MEDIA

In the years following the war the community radio sector evolved into a viable and necessary tool for sus-



A radio host at Radio Bomi in Tubmanburg hosts a weekly program with disabled Bomi County residents. Through this type of programming, along with community outreach events such as the “I Know my Rights” and “Everybody’s Business” forums, Radio Bomi maintains strong ties with their listeners, thus increasing their own sustainability.

taining Liberia’s peace and contributing to the development of the country. The sector filled an important information void that existed during pre-war days when a vast majority of Liberians felt isolated and cut off from the governance process. Yet, radio stations faced major challenges in fulfilling their all important role. Among these challenges was the lack of resources—financial and otherwise—to sustain themselves, as addressed earlier in this report. Many stations also lacked the support of the community they served. Despite being community owned in theory, in practice many stations did not fully engage the inputs or voices of their listeners to increase the relevancy of their content, and community members were not engaged to inform management or fundraising decisions. The result was many stations

feeling isolated from their communities and the people feeling disengaged with their radio station. This was an issue that CSML had to address, thus several key approaches were adopted aimed at bringing about a more inclusive environment for the community radio sector.

Community Outreach Forums for CRSs

In 2011, CSML realized that community radio stations could evolve into viable entities that could be sustained in part by their communities. Thus a strategy was needed to address the disconnect between local community radio stations and the communities they served. IREX introduced the Community Outreach Forum concept to bring the stations together with various sectors of their communities to discuss issues of mutual benefit to

each other. Regular forums were held with representatives of civil society organizations, local government, chiefs, ordinary citizens, and the community radio station. Support for the station was key during each forum, but there was also discussion on how programs on the station could become more community focused.

Radio Gee in Fishtown, River Gee County is a shining example of the impact of the Community Outreach Forum. An in-depth assessment report of partner stations in 2011 concluded that the staff at Radio Gee seemed “unmotivated, disorganized, and ill prepared for the station’s service delivery.” The report also noted that the management lacked the ability to motivate and manage the staff, and that “community support and participation was dismal.” Thus it came as no surprise when the staff of the station went on strike less than a year after that report was issued, accusing the management of misusing funds intended for the station.

A CSML Community Outreach Forum resulted in an interim management team being set up, comprised mostly of ordinary citizens—members of civil society organizations, teachers, etc. The team led the revitalization of the station by mobilizing the community to raise funds to construct a new building. Programs broadcast on the station today reflect the local reality and are produced by members of the community— such as local teachers, pastors, and students.

Following a visit to Fishown in 2012, then Peace Corps-Liberia Country Director Vince Groh wrote “the

USAID/IREX...community radio station in Fishtown, River Gee county is fantastic. Great, great set-up with motivated staff and huge support from the county officials there. A real success story!”

Jorwah, Bong County, a community of subsistence farmers near the Liberian-Guinean border is another success story of the Community Outreach approach. The local station, Radio Jorwah struggled for years to sustain itself. The station was frequently off the air between 2010 and 2012 as it had no source of electricity to keep its broadcast going. They had a failing generator that needed major repairs. IREX provided a new generator to the station in 2012 after installing a 300 watt transmitter and new studio equipment. Later at a Community Outreach Forum members of the community decided to contribute \$LD20 a month that was used regularly to purchase fuel for the new generator to keep the station on the air.

Developing an SMS Platform

The SMS Platform under CSML, also known as the Constituency Communication Platform (CCP), was first utilized in 2011 during Liberia’s presidential and legislative elections amid fears that lack of perceived transparency in the process and misinformation could result in violence. In partnership with the LMC, an Election Reporting Center was established in Monrovia, and journalists used the CCP to report on events surrounding the elections and to provide independent preliminary election results from polling stations throughout the

country, which helped to legitimize the electoral process (see page 62). The tool was developed by a Liberian IT firm, MWETANA, with advisory support from IREX and the LMC.

In early 2013, IREX and LMC worked with MWETANA to expand the use of the CCP to serve as a tool for citizens and radio listeners to text their station to identify their priorities, provide updates on projects in their communities, and participate in opinion polls that survey preferences and perspectives. In 2013 four “hubs” were identified to pilot the revised platform; they were Radio Kergheamahn in Nimba County, Radio Kintoma in Lofa County, Magic FM in Grand Bassa County, and Super Bongese in Bong County.

Utilizing the Opinion Poll component of the platform, a radio show host posed questions to their listeners on air—how should the County Development Funds be allocated? What are the issues that are most important to you for the upcoming Senatorial Election in 2014? What do you think are the best ways to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse in our public schools? What is the best way to help your family stay safe from Ebola? Listeners are then provided with possible answers and the simple codes to text their responses into the platform at no cost to them. Instantaneously, the radio host was able to view the responses coming in and quickly assess citizens’ perspectives and priorities. The radio station staff received training and mentoring from IREX and the LMC to use this information responsibly, to share results

with their listeners, encourage productive discussion with local government officials to address the priorities identified, and create original radio programming that responds to the issues raised.

During the Ebola crisis, many pointed to early myths and misinformation about Ebola as being a major contributing factor to the high incidence rates of the virus early on. For example, in Nimba County, a man known as the “Vision Man” claimed publicly that he could cure Ebola with an herb remedy given to him by an angel. To gauge the public perception of this man’s claims, the Hub Operator at Radio Kergheamahn utilized the Opinion Poll component of the SMS Initiative to ask listeners whether they believed that the Vision Man could cure Ebola. Over 66% of the 121 individuals who voted affirmed that they did in fact believe the man’s claims. Recognizing the risks to public health, the Hub Operator contacted the UNICEF Ebola Awareness representative for Nimba County and invited him on the program. In a live interactive talk show the representative clarified the facts about the virus and confirmed that there was no cure, herbal or otherwise, and clarified the risks posed to those who do not seek formal care when showing symptoms of the virus. This program was seen to have shifted public perception about the Vision Man considerably, which Radio Kergheamahn views as a considerable success for their station.

In 2015, IREX partnered with LMC again to expand the platform to 27

stations in 15 counties, reflecting the expanded reach of the program in 2015 focused on accountability of Ebola funds (see page 79). The Platform provided a valuable tool for stations to gauge their listeners on important issues and ensure that they produced programs that were responsive to these needs. In the final year of implementation (November 2014-October 2015) participating stations cumulatively produced an average of 25 polls per month and received an average of 1,885 votes from radio listeners per month.

I Know My Rights Forums/ Everybody's Business Forums

The “I Know My Rights” forum was a CSML platform developed to address a number of gaps in Liberia’s media landscape. It’s one of several inter-

ventions designed under Strategic Pillar three of CSML’s Advancing Women in the Media Strategy, Increasing Women’s Access to Information (as referenced on page 18). Developers of the strategy argued that across Liberia women’s political awareness and capacity to engage decision makers were limited, thus the need for civic empowerment of women to mobilize and utilize public spaces, including the media, through which they can hold their leaders accountable.

As described on page 21, the program adopted the “Theater of the Oppressed” approach which challenges community members to engage directly with facilitated live drama performance. The “I Know My Rights” forums covered topics including SEA, SGBV, land rights, and rape. The



IREX/Berenike Schott

The team from LIWOMAC and LWDR present an “I Know My Rights” forum to a large group of community members on the topic of rape. Following the interactive drama performance, an SGBV expert provided information on rape including how victims and families of victims can access support, along with their legal rights.

open-air nature of the performance encouraged participation from all sectors of society, all ages, and both genders, with an average Forum attracting between 60 and 100 participants. A total of 60 forums were held in 22 communities over the course of the program, reaching approximately 800 people in 11 countries.

“The forum has helped me to know that I have human rights,” one woman from Montserrado noted during a focus group discussion held by LIWOMAC. Annie G. Cooper of Congo Town believes the “I Know My Rights” Forum reinforced residents’ intolerance for rape in her community. “My husband now knows about spousal rape because of the forum held in my community. He understands when I say I’m tired and does not insist on sexual intercourse during such times.”

Regina Saytue, President of the rural women’s group in Fishtown, River Gee, said her husband married her without paying a dowry. But the “I Know My Rights” forum on the issue inspired her to ask her husband to pay the dowry. “Before the forum, I did not know the disadvantage of living with a man who did not make the dowry payment,” she said. “Knowledge gained from the forum made me pursue my partner to pay dowry and he did.” In cultures across Africa, payment of dowry indicates official marriage between a man and a woman.

Key to the forum approach is recording the event, which is then edited and aired on radio. Initially these

programs were produced and aired exclusively by LWDR but over the years this tool was expanded to be used by partner stations across the country. In 2015, the “I Know My Rights” model was renamed “Everybody’s Business” in reference to a renewed focus on Ebola-related issues, specifically around accountability. No matter the topic, the approach provides an unprecedented opportunity to “bring the radio to the people,” according to the Station Manager at Radio Gee, a level of interaction that many stations identified as essential to their relevance and survival.

Women’s Media Empowerment Clubs

CSML’s approach to advancing women in the media also included giving women a voice in the media and providing a space for them to talk about sexual exploitation, early marriage, girls education, health care, and issues affecting women and their families.

As described on page 21, LIWOMAC created Women’s Media Empowerment Clubs in the 15 counties to provide women access to information and a forum to air their issues. LIWOMAC provided radios to the clubs to encourage women to listen to radio, call-in to the programs, and talk about the radio programs with one another. One community that has demonstrated incredible benefits as a result of the Club’s formation is Kamara Town (see story on page 40).

STRENGTHENING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN CITIZENS

SUCCESS STORY

Women's Media Empowerment Club Impacts Constitutional Reform Process The Women of Kamara Town

Since its inception with the support of LIWOMAC in 2011, the listening group in Kamara Town has grown from eight members to 27. Twice a week the women sit together, listen to the radio, and discuss what they hear and how they can use the information to better their own lives and community.

In 2013, LIWOMAC encouraged the women's group to listen to a weekly program run by the Constitution Review Committee (CRC) that had recently started on Liberian Women Democracy Radio (LWDR). In anticipation of an upcoming Constitutional Referendum, the radio program explained the constitution article by article in Liberian English, allowing listeners to understand what is included in their national constitution, as well as to begin to think about what changes might be needed.

The Kamara Town listening group immediately became immersed in the weekly program, frequently discussing the articles and also finding themselves with unanswered questions about the meaning of certain things, and wondering how they could get involved in the process. They called-in to the live radio program to ask several questions and were so impressed by the woman who ran the program—Justice Gloria Musu Scott, Chairperson of the CRC—they asked her to come to Kamara Town to speak with them. Within a month Ms. Scott arrived with eight of her fellow committee members, as did over 400 community members from Kamara Town as well as neighboring communities. Ms. Scott led a presentation on the Constitution, the referendum process, and encouraged the citizens to ask questions, and have a role in affecting their country's policies.

Along with 450 copies of the constitution, the CRC representatives left a suggestion box in Kamara Town for com-



munity members to contribute their ideas as to what changes should be made. To address the issue of poor literacy in the community, the women of the Kamara Town group identified the Principal of a local school and a youth group leader to serve as resources for community members who have questions.

The suggestions submitted by the Kamara Town group revealed the challenges they face on a day-to-day basis: boys who impregnate their girlfriends while in school should be held just as accountable as the young women who become pregnant and fathers should be required to provide child support.

Though the Constitutional Review process is still ongoing and the final changes are yet to be seen, the Kamara Town listening group accomplished something extraordinary. They created awareness and promoted participation among the citizens of their community and neighboring communities thanks to their radio listening and thanks to their belief that their voices belong within the national dialogue and that the government should be prepared to listen and respond. ■

AND CIVIL SOCIETY

For civil society to remain socially sustainable they must serve as advocates for their constituents on the issues that matter to them. Whether these be demands for policy change, development priorities, or responding to crises, these institutions require a toolbox of skills and knowledge to respond professionally and effectively. In order to empower CSML CSO partners to serve this role, CSML worked through the RPs to provide intensive training and mentoring on advocacy (in two phases), reconciliation (in two phases), anti-corruption, participatory governance, and accountability.

Advocacy Training and Grants Support

As the CSML program partnered with over 60 CSOs with varying missions and visions, generalized skills-building in advocacy was relevant for all partners to ensure they could identify their own targeted message, audience, and strategy. Training was provided to the RPs in 2011, who then stepped down the training to the first cohort of 28 partner CSOs, and the next year to the second cohort of 34. The training focused on helping partners understand what advocacy is, developing a clear message and allies, and effective strategies for advocating to their intended audience, whether it be government, the private sector, etc. Partners then had access to advocacy grants to fund their advocacy initiatives. In 2013 the RPs developed an Advocacy II and Anti-corruption training manual for all CSOs containing a refresher of the

key messages from the first advocacy training, more in-depth strategies for advocacy where skills in analyzing the context and working through intermediaries are needed, and a section on anti-corruption. Throughout the CSML program a total of 16 CSOs received advocacy grants totaling \$94,896, and many achieved meaningful impact.

With an advocacy grant, Aiding Disadvantaged and Traumatized Women and Girls (ADWANGA) based in Tappita, Nimba County, worked with parents and students from five local schools in Tappita and their respective Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) on sexual rights, reproductive health issues, and violence in school and in the home. ADWANGA then successfully proposed an additional grant to carry the project into six other towns, which also brought in more and higher level stakeholders. They held advocacy meetings with county coordinators from the Ministries of Education and Gender and Development on the need for girls' clubs in schools as called for in the Girls' Education Policy. They also called for the establishment of committees of community leaders, youth groups, women's groups, and PTAs in each community to assist the girls' clubs and ensure their sustainability. ADWANGA is now confident of its abilities to win funds to continue its advocacy efforts on behalf of school girls.

A CSML partner in the southeast, Save My Future Foundation (SAMFU), utilized their training and a small grant to peacefully resolve a land rights issues between the people of

IREDD Facilitates Productive Engagement Between Communities and Concessions, with Lasting Impact

In 2006, Liberia adopted a new National Forestry Reform Law. However, regulatory frameworks were poorly understood by government agencies charged with their implementation; citizens generally have poor access to government information; and forest communities, media, and civil society actors are constrained by government response to their activities. In 2013, CSML partner Institute for Research and Democratic Development (IREDD) found that citizens in Grand Gedeh County, which is the site of several iron ore mining and forestry concessions, felt they were not receiving what was promised them in the concession agreements and they were not able to get details of what those promises were. From the perspective of the concessions, it was the government's responsibility to inform citizens of their rights and the benefits promised in the agreements, but this was not happening. As a result, citizens' high expectations from the concessions were leading to anxiety and tension.

With a CSML advocacy grant, IREDD trained citizens in six forest communities in Grand Gedeh County on the relevant laws—Community Forest Rights Law, the National Forestry Reform Law, and ten core regulations of the Forestry Development Authority (FDA)—and how they have the right to advocate to foreign concessions by approaching them in a constructive manner. IREDD's CSML training in advocacy

had taught the importance of identifying intermediaries when possible, so they met with the Community Relations Officers in the companies to bring them together with community leaders for open discussion.

Two years later results are visible in two ways. Putu Mine, one of the companies operating in the area has rehabilitated the road from Putu to Zwedru, the county capital, installed hand pumps in nearby communities, and provided scholarships to students attending Grand Gedeh Community College. Secondly, several concessions are dealing with the communities more openly on their land rights. Because of the overlap of Liberia's customary land and statutory land laws, the government sometimes grants land to concessions that turns out to be customary land and therefore not the government's to give. Citizens in the six communities now know that they can make applications and present deeds and other documents for judgments on the disputed lands and may be able to either receive the land back from the company or receive payment from the company.

Thanks to IREDD's intervention, there is now open communication between the citizens of these communities and the concessions, and confidence among the citizens that they have the right to ask questions, pursue issues, and seek redress when appropriate. ■

Gborhoe Chiefdom in Grand Gedeh County and a Lebanese-owned mining company. In a region historically marginalized, the community was frustrated by what they viewed as the encroachment of Middle Island Resource Mining Company and generally angry over their exclusion from any inputs into land rights agreements between international companies and the government. As a result, community members built road blocks to block the operations, resulting in a scuffle and the company's temporary departure. SAMFU identified a local group, Arkondeh, and

trained them on approaches they had learned in the CSML advocacy training: how to advocate using constructive engagement, consideration of the larger context including Middle Island's perspective, and how to reach cooperation through positive lobbying. With SAMFU's help through CSML mentoring, Arkondeh prepared a report describing the community's lack of basic social infrastructure and its marginalization by the government and foreign companies working there. Still drawing from its CSML training, SAMFU then guided Arkondeh to invite Middle Island to a



IREX/Dara Lipton

A group of women stage a sit-in in front of the National Courthouse to protest the lack of justice for rape survivors in Liberia, in particular young girls. Led by WON-GOSOL and LIWOMAC, who benefitted from CSML Advocacy Training, the protest was part of a multi-day event which included a public march that brought together police, military, private and non-profit sector representatives, and high ranking government officials including the President to join their voices to fight the epidemic of rape in Liberia.

town hall meeting to hear from its citizens in an amicable manner. As a result, the company agreed to hire local people as much as possible and build a regional football (soccer) field and a three-classroom annex to the local school. Since completed, the larger school allowed the community to include both senior and junior high level classrooms so that Gborhoe high school students no longer go out of town to school. In addition, citizens have learned the benefits and the tactics for using advocacy to meet its basic needs.

Anti-Corruption Training and Grants Support

Much of the advocacy interests of CSML partner CSOs were related to the drive for more transparency in government operations, especially budget and spending, and concerns

about corruption. Since the war’s end, the entrance of numerous multi-lateral organizations and international NGOs, the new freedom of expression and the press, and the President’s inaugural address calling corruption “public enemy number one,” corruption had become a dominant topic of those watching government. It is often spoken of in the context of threats to sustainable peace. For these reasons, CSML included work against corruption along with advocacy as a theme for the small grants program.

Community Development and Research Agency (CODRA) and Bong Youth Association (BYA) used a CSML small grant to raise understanding and participation in the budget and spending process through several pathways, including engaging with students. They trained 40 students in

the budget process, using a simplified version of the national budget that the two CSOs developed, and showed the students individual lines for two school projects in Gbarnga: rehabilitation of Gboveh Public School and an annex for the United Methodist School. The students pledged to monitor the spending of public money in their schools, district, and county and to set up a school budget network to encourage student awareness of national and local budget processes. Students then met with the Gboveh school administrator and the district education officer. Despite their committed follow up, the money dedicated in the national budget for the Gboveh Public School renovation project did not come that year. CODRA learned that the reason offered in Monrovia was that the school administration had never made the necessary request. This experience demonstrated to the students that budget advocacy must be continued long after the passing of the budget, which is when funds become available for corrupt handling. Students also monitored the project at the Methodist School and succeeded in having two of their members placed on the committee that monitored the construction work to successful completion. They learned that persistent citizen advocacy and follow up can stifle opportunities for projects to become stalled because of someone “eating” the money. Some of them held radio talk shows and encouraged callers who were interested to follow county expenditures.

CODRA’s successes in Bong County brought the organization to the

attention of the Liberian Ministry of Finance, which invited it to apply for a government grant to track expenditures by the County Health Teams of the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, County Education Offices of the Ministry of Education, and County Social Development Funds projects in Bong and Nimba Counties. That project was nearing completion as CSML closed.

Reconciliation Training and Grants Support

In June 2012, Liberia’s Ministry of Internal Affairs released a “Strategic Roadmap” towards “a reconciled, peaceful, and prosperous Liberia.” Of the many components of the roadmap which included suggestions for the security sector, health sector, and others, there was a section on Alternative Dispute Resolution, which CSML identified as a valuable platform for civil society to contribute to the Roadmap’s aims. Building capacity in reconciliation work is also an important component of organizational development in a post-war environment where so much work directly or indirectly links back to the conflict and its ramifications on Liberia’s people and the nation as a whole. Empowering civil society to address reconciliation is also a key contributor to their social sustainability, as their ability to address issues that impact communities on a day-to-day basis informs their relevance as representative institutions.

CSML worked with a Liberian consultant to develop reconciliation training in two phases, an introduction to reconciliation and a second training fo-

cused on alternative dispute resolution. The consultant delivered them first to the RPs, and because it is a more specialized field than others offered by CSML, he carried it directly to the 62 CSOs. Many RP and CSO staff remarked that the strategies identified in the training included skills that could be useful at all levels of conflict resolution, from national conflict, to county, community, and

even domestic/household disputes.

Following the training, CSOs had access to grants to fund reconciliation activities in their target communities, and a total of four CSOs implemented grants worth a total of \$17,117. Lofa County-based CSO Lofanet's activities in Ziggida, described below, demonstrate the impact of this support. ■

Lofanet Facilitates Reconciliation among Tribal Groups, Promotes Lasting Peace

On March 19, 2013 the town of Ziggida in Lofa County saw ethnic fighting that ended with the mosque and a shrine of the Poro Society burned to the ground. This resulted in several injuries and many were sent to the nearest clinic; four of whom were referred on to the county hospital. The network of Lofa County CSOs, Lofanet, went there to investigate what could be done about the troubled town that had seen such fighting three times in recent years. Its grant proposal to CSML described a town split between two ethnic groups with different religions that had once lived together peacefully until the war put them in opposing factions. Its objectives were to conduct a citizens' reconciliation forum and then reactivate and train the Ziggida Conflict Management Committee. Recommendations from the forum would be carried into the training of the Committee. Lofanet drew on two strengths: although Lofanet's mentor was the YMCA, the CSML RP team included a trainer from WANEP who was experienced as a conflict mediator and came to lead the forum, and Lofanet had worked in the past with the Ziggida "Be Bold Women Group."

The forum started with a surprise when 123 people showed up instead of the expected 70. Undaunted, the Lofanet team commenced as planned with story-telling, allowing participants to publicly share their stories of the past and reflect on how it was when they lived together happily. They then broke them into groups, by age rather than tribe so as to draw on commonality rather than difference, to discuss and report back on what steps were needed for true peace and develop-

ment. The youth brought up issues of fairness, transparency with funds, and participatory leadership; women spoke of including more women in the committee by meeting at times convenient for them; men emphasized unity for development; and elders spoke of respect, abiding by the law and foregoing violence.

The three-day Conflict Management Committee training that followed emphasized conflict analysis and used role playing to teach conflict resolution methods such as patient listening, mapping individuals in the situation and relationships, analysis of behavior and goals, and setting up guidelines prior to the mediation. It closed by planning activities to make conflict management an ongoing rather than intermittent process.

Almost three years later, the two ethnic groups are still living together peacefully and all conflict related issues are being channeled to the Conflict Management Committee for solution. Ziggida residents also report that because of the improved relations between the two groups, NGOs are now more willing to bring projects to Ziggida than before. There are also unexpected additional benefits: the Ziggida Conflict Management Committee's effectiveness is so well established that it has been called to help in three other towns in the district. In Boi and Barwein, the Committee has mediated land disputes between the same two tribal groups. In Nica-borzu, there had been general conflict between the two tribes dating back to grievances from the war. The Committee was helpful to all three towns in analyzing the conflicts and identifying ways to manage them. ■



A woman gets ready to head home, grandchild in tow, after attending a meeting of her Women's Media Empowerment Club in Kamara Town, Montserrado County. She and her fellow members learned to produce soap to sell, construct latrines to improve sanitation in their community, and engage external donors to construct an extension to their school. These improvements, along with their engagement with the Constitutional review process (described on page 40), are a result of the teamwork and commitment of these women, harnessed through their Club which was started with support from LIWOMAC and IREX through the CSML program.

STRENGTHENING CITIZEN-GOVERNMENT ENGAGEMENT

A history of corruption has fostered a seemingly impenetrable culture of distrust between government and citizens in Liberia. Citizens perceive that government officials are profiting from their positions and are unaccountable to the citizenry while government often perceives citizens to be uneducated and confrontational. The CSML program recognized this distrust and lack of open communication between citizens and their leaders as a major barrier to growth and development as well as a risk for conflict. It envisioned civil society and media as crucial partners in mending

bridges and providing platforms for productive dialogue.

To facilitate this engagement, CSML led training in participatory governance, supported roundtables for productive discussion among all sectors, and hosted Community Leaders' Forums (described later in this report). IREX also partnered with The Carter Center (TCC) to further promote citizen/government interaction through promotion of the Freedom of Information (FOI) law and engagement with the National Traditional Council.

■

PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE AND CITIZEN/GOVERNMENT ROUNDTABLES

CSML partner Center for Media Studies and Peacebuilding (CEMESP) received a grant to design a training manual in participatory governance and test it in three towns with groups of CSOs, community radio stations, and local government officials. The

premise was that because there had been no transparency nor questioning of government operations in the past, government officials as well as citizens had to be shown how to conduct themselves to foster better communication and cooperation. By training

citizens, government representatives, and the media together, the workshop served as a laboratory for learning the perspectives, means of operating, and needs of one another. The pilot was so successful that in one town the participants pledged to continue working together as a group calling themselves a citizens' budget network. CSML granted CEMESP funds to continue the training in all seven CSML counties while drawing CSML's partner CSOs and community radio stations into the trainings. With a total of \$70,000 in grants, CEMESP delivered the training for three years to 187 participants. Topics included principles of good governance and leadership, citizens' participation and

inclusion, the respective roles of civil society and the media, the Liberian Constitution, government planning and the budget process, and advocacy.

Having the participatory governance training as well as the advocacy and anti-corruption trainings, CSO partners were provided an additional grant option to hold a citizen-government roundtable to provide a platform for government officials and CSOs to keep communication channels strong, build bridges, and provide opportunities for understanding all sides of important or controversial issues. These issues included the use of County or District Social Develop-

Community Safety Initiative (CSI) Roundtable Results in More Inclusive and Accountable Usage of District Development Funds

In 2013, CSML partner Community Safety Initiative Liberia Inc. (CSI) in Lofa County held a roundtable to advocate for increased transparency and accountability in the Kolahun District's District Development Fund (DDF) through the appointment of citizens' representatives on the Project Management Committee (PMC). It was attended by 57 people including chiefs, religious leaders, youth and women's chairpersons, civil society workers, the media, PMC members, and the mayor. The District Commissioner and PMC Chairman explained that when there is a call for a county sitting, the commissioners of the seven districts each appoint 10 representatives, whose duty is to observe the sitting and inform their various sectors of the meeting's outcome. The question and answer session revealed some of the concerns: they were asked about funds for the disabled, for the district chiefs, for the outlying clans outside the city, and for the community radio stations. They were asked to make regular reports and to explain the procedures for contract bidding. Seeing directly how participants felt poorly informed and inadequately represented, the Commissioner and PMC Chairman agreed on several action points: the commissioner and other local leaders

would share information on the timing of each county sitting, the Commissioners would include marginalized groups' representatives, and meeting results would be shared on the radio stations and other means. As a result of the roundtable, participants agree that they were better informed on the process and how they can be a part of it and understood that it is their right to ask for information about the funding process.

More than two years later, the roundtable's impact is still impressive. The District Commissioner made use of what he heard at the meeting, and the ten representatives who represent the Kolahun District at the county sitting are now selected by the various interest groups—women, youth, etc. When they return to the district from a sitting, there is an elected citizens' committee that discusses the uses of the DDF, and consensus is formed before final decisions are made. As a result, Kolahun residents are now enjoying a new district guest house and a scholarship fund, assistance is going to Ebola survivors, and a youth center is under construction. What used to be seen as a closed meeting has now become a participatory citizens' process. ■

ment Funds, Media Law Reform, and government response to the Ebola crisis, among others, and all included coverage from media partners enabling these important conversations to be broadened to a wider popula-

tion. Between 2013 and 2015 a total of 17 roundtables were held and the total amount of funds distributed for holding roundtables was \$51,000. ■

PROMOTING AWARENESS OF FOI

Liberia's Freedom of Information (FOI) Act is a transformative law that has the ability to improve governance and lives as public administration becomes more transparent and accountable and citizens are able to engage more meaningfully in public life. Under the CSML program, The Carter Center's efforts aimed to raise awareness about the value of access to information among a broad group of CSOs and media organizations, as well as to build CSO/media capacity to monitor and promote use of Liberia's FOI Act. By providing technical assistance and training, raising awareness, developing and disseminating materials, and convening key stakeholders over the five and a half years of programming, The Carter Center (TCC) has achieved both of these objectives. To date, more than 15,000 people across Monrovia and the seven initial CSML target counties have attended TCC awareness raising events, and core national and local networks have formed with the support of TCC to promote the right of access to information and to assure local ownership and sustainability of efforts.

The national Liberian Freedom of Information Coalition and the seven county FOI Networks have carried out

more than 500 measures to monitor and promote use of the FOI law. While the extent of compliance and effective implementation of the law remains a work in progress, the right to information is increasingly known and cited by civil society organizations, the media, and Liberian citizens. With greater awareness of the right to information has come more use of the law, as well as demands from civil society for greater government transparency and accountability in order to better understand policies, help determine public priorities, and use the information to ensure the exercise of other human rights.

THE LIBERIAN FREEDOM OF INFORMATION COALITION (LFIC)

Advancing the right of access to information is a joint responsibility between the government and its citizens. While the government must assure full and effective implementation and enforcement of the FOI Act, it is up to the citizens to monitor government efforts and to use the law. At the start of CSML programming, several organizations, particularly media groups, had already taken up the mantle of FOI advocacy particularly in promoting the passage of a law. In

order to ensure that these groups were working in concert and not at cross-purposes or duplicating efforts, and to ensure a balance of voices so as not to color the draft FOI bill as solely a media tool but rather a human right to be enjoyed by all, TCC helped support the establishment of the Liberian Freedom of Information Coalition (LFIC). LFIC was constituted as a group of ten national civil society groups and media institutions working together to advance the right of access to information in Liberia. TCC provided technical and legal assistance, capacity building, and small financial support as the LFIC established its organizational structure and strategic plan, processed its articles of incorporation, sought funding, and developed and carried out programming.

Since its establishment the LFIC has ushered in the passage of the Freedom of Information Act, raised awareness of the law, encouraged greater FOI use, and monitored government implementation and enforcement. The LFIC has helped to develop, launch, and maintain the System for Tracking and Monitoring Freedom of Information (STAM-FOI) which collects, systematizes, and reports on government compliance with various FOI requests in the face of poor government tracking of the same information. The STAM-FOI is accompanied by a FOI hotline, also run by the LFIC and its member organizations, that assists requesters in understanding their rights under the law, as well as filing and following up on requests and appeals. The LFIC has helped to build the capacity of

media to use the FOI Act as a tool for investigative journalism so as to professionalize reporting through the use of more accurate and reliable sources. In addition to being a unified front that both citizens and government officials can reach out to with regard to assistance with or collaboration on FOI matters, LFIC members have led by example by filing numerous FOI requests and appeals, often writing and publishing reports on their experiences.

Importantly, under CSML the LFIC has co-organized, along with the government of Liberia and the Information Commission, the annual International Right to Know Activities, serving to raise its profile as a legitimate national voice for the right to information. With support, LFIC has successfully raised external funds and is poised to remain an important advocate for the right of access to information in Liberia.

COUNTY FREEDOM OF INFORMATION NETWORKS

Similar to the need for national organizations to work together toward the common goal of advancing the right of access to information in Liberia, local civil society and media groups must also coordinate efforts, particularly to ensure the decentralization of FOI mechanisms. Thus, following the passage of the FOI law and when national FOI efforts were well underway but more concentrated in the capital city of Monrovia, TCC visited each of the seven target counties, meeting with community leaders and providing technical support for the formation of seven coun-



Counselor Negbalee Warner of The Carter Center's Access to Information team shares his insights on the Freedom of Information law and its role in furthering CSML's efforts to promote accountability of Ebola funds during the program's Year 6 Workplanning Meeting.

ty freedom of information networks. Initially, an awareness-raising event was held, led by TCC and LFIC members. From the first meetings of up to 50 organizations, a core group of CSOs emerged and a coordinator was selected.

At the initial meeting of the seven coordinators, TCC provided a more intense training on the provisions of the access to information law and ideas for raising awareness and encouraging use of the law within their communities. Over the course of this first two-day meeting, it was learned that the FOI Network Coordinators had never developed a project plan or budget, and in a few cases had never used a computer before. TCC spent one full day on project planning, identifying goals and activities, and creating a realistic budget. These capacity building trainings, on both FOI and project development, were

continued at least every six months as a group with interim individual support, and with the ongoing support, the Coordinators have transformed into noted leaders capable of managing multiple streams of funding and activities. From the inception of the FOI Networks in 2010, of the seven coordinators there has been only one change where her deputy took the lead. They are proficient in both the substantive as well as programmatic necessities for advancing the right to information and have successfully developed strong and stable networks, which continue to grow in number and commitment.

During the Ebola crisis, these networks were at the forefront of their county task forces, helping to ensure essential information regarding resources and prevention efforts flowed from Monrovia out to the rural counties, and that feedback re-

garding the impact of these resources and efforts was effectively communicated to national and local government.

One of the key legacies of the CSML program is the pool of local experts left behind to continue to engage and advance issues of transparency and accountability at both the national and community levels—such as the LFIC and the seven county networks. Today, the county FOI networks boast more than 50 civil society and community based organizations dedicated to advancing freedom of information at the local level. Led by driven, dedicated, and well known and respected leaders/coordinators, these local networks continue to raise awareness, file and follow up on FOI requests, build capacity of others to file and track requests, encourage proactive disclosure among local institutions, as well as convene stakeholders to identify challenges and develop/implement solutions for ensuring greater access to information. During the Ebola crisis, these networks were at the forefront of their county task forces, helping to ensure essential information regarding resources and prevention efforts flowed from Monrovia out to the rural counties, and that feedback regarding the impact of these resources and efforts was effectively communicated to national and local government.

The networks have helped to contribute to some of the greatest impacts of FOI programming under CSML including increased proactive publication of information by local govern-

ment and notably, the transformation of lives.

In addition to raising awareness of the value of FOI and encouraging increased use of the law, the local FOI networks have pushed for greater proactive disclosure of information by local institutions. Through the distribution of hundreds of copies of the FOI Act, meetings with local authorities, radio talk shows, and FOI requests in general, these FOI champions have urged local and national government to automatically disseminate information. For instance, in Grand Bassa County, requests for information on how the county leadership uses development funds increased. After receiving several requests, local authorities began proactively publishing the costs of the development projects, names of the contractors, pictures of the projects, and progress updates on the bulletin board of the county administrative building in Buchanan. Likewise, following repeated requests for information, the Bong County authorities began holding monthly public meetings to provide information on various county development projects. At the meetings, the County Superintendent and the project management committee provide documents containing the list of county projects, their locations, and contractor names so that citizens can monitor progress directly. The Bong County FOI Network Coordinator noted that this is the first time such meetings have taken place and that “FOI is changing the face of public administration.”

A core benefit of the right of access

to information is its transformative nature and ability to improve lives. Throughout the past several years of CSML programming, the FOI networks have supported many citizens and groups to request and receive information that has led to powerful, positive change. For example, in Zwedru, Grand Gedeh County, a FOI request resulted in the allocation of County Development Funds to three poor communities. Gender Peace Network (GPN), a community based organization working with community leaders and the Grand Gedeh FOI Network, requested a copy of the county development resolution that contains all development projects and budgetary allocations for the fiscal year, as well as the county development agenda. In reviewing the requested documents provided by county authorities, GPN observed that three Zwedru communities--Blue Camp, Crab Hole, and Camp Tuma--had been left out of previous allocations. GPN then used the information to successfully urge county leadership to allocate funds to the three communities. Following this work and the receipt of County Development Funds, Blue Camp was able to fix its main road, Crab Hole built a new and much needed elementary school, and Camp Tuma implemented a project to bring safe drinking water to the community.

Following three years of school fee collection by the District Education Officer (DEO), parents and students in Nimba County requested a copy of the Ministry of Education policy regarding the fees. After learning that no such policy existed, the DEO was

exposed and the collection of illegal fees immediately stopped. Nimba County Freedom of Information Network Coordinator Ruth Saye has stated that "Freedom of Information provides the best platform to help ordinary people expose corruption and advance community interest." From new bridges to new school cafeterias to changes in the way high school curriculum is monitored, TCC has collected dozens of stories over the years from the seven target counties that demonstrate how the exercising of the right of access to information has positively impacted Liberian lives.

CONVENING CIVIL SOCIETY AND GOVERNMENT STAKEHOLDERS

As noted above, advancing the right of access to information in Liberia requires government and civil society to work together. While government is responsible for implementing the Act, citizens have a duty to use the law and to monitor government implementation. Without the former, citizens are not able to effectively exercise their right to information. Without the latter, government lacks the incentive to continue with implementation, and the right of access to information risks atrophy. Thus to ensure the success of ATI programming, TCC prioritized improved engagement between the Government and its citizens at all phases of FOI regime building.

Starting with public hearings to encourage participation and dialogue around the development of strong legislation and ending with a stakeholder roundtable to identify next

steps for increasing governmental transparency and accountability around resources and efforts during the Ebola crisis and recovery period, the convening of key actors at both the national and local levels has helped to increase understanding of the challenges faced by the supply side of the equation, as well as highlight the frustrations encountered by FOI users. Together, government and civil society actors have identified and implemented solutions for improving the right of access to information in Liberia. Examples of such cooperative work include joint International Right

to Know Day celebrations and targeted awareness campaigns, Open Government Partnership planning meetings, as well as the various Ebola committees and task forces that helped to improve necessary information flows and strengthen community feedback. These convening efforts also have helped to cement lasting relationships between key government and civil society actors that will exist well beyond CSML programming and help to ensure continued and greater sustainability of FOI advances. ■

STRENGTHENING THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHIEFS AND ELDERS OF LIBERIA

A central aim of the overall CSML program was to build capacity for civil society to engage constructively in the peace building and democratization process. As outlined in the project proposal to USAID, The Carter Center's Access to Justice (ATJ) project was to add to this effort by contributing to "Increased civic participation at the local and national levels between citizens, civil society, and local government."

A wide range of self-identified individuals and organizations make up civil society, usually in the form of NGOs, religious groups, civic associations, women's and youth groups, labor unions and the like. In the Liberian context, another critical group is the customary leadership of tribal groups and their networks of influence. In present day Liberia, these networks of chiefs, elders, and cus-

tomary religious leaders still hold considerable formal and informal influence through their role in local government structures and as religious and cultural leaders.

Historically, this group played a key intermediary role in the relationship between the settler political elites and the indigenous rural inhabitants that has been described as the "failure of governance" that led to the 1980 coup and civil war. Working with this group as part of CSML's objectives, therefore, offered the potential for significant change both for the conditions of individual citizens and the overall establishment of a new social contract for post conflict Liberia.

Under CSML, The Carter Center (TCC) worked with customary chiefs, elders, youth, and women to strengthen the justice, governance, and dis-



Traditional leaders participate in a training led by The Carter Center's Access to Justice (ATJ) team to discuss their role in promoting reconciliation and awareness of the Rule of Law in Liberia.

pute resolution capacity in rural communities, consistent with best practices and the rule of law. This work has been conducted since 2006 by TCC's Access to Justice Project and, since 2010, the project has worked directly with customary leaders, through the Ministry of Internal Affairs and with a range of funding. The main mechanisms to achieve the project goals have been education and dialogue on the rule of law, training in Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), and providing resources to address disputes and promote good governance and dispute resolution practices such as town hall meetings and local and national dispute interventions. This process of knowledge exchange and capacity building has been done at the national level working with the National Council of Chiefs and Elders of Liberia (NCCEL), paramount chiefs, and national women's leaders. At the clan and district-

level efforts have focused in the priority counties of Bong, Nimba, and Lofa through county dialogue and support from county-based TCC staff called County Dispute Resolution Monitors.

The core activities under CSML have been a series of national and county-level training sessions on the rule of law, leadership, and dispute resolution skills for chiefs, women, and youth leaders. Over the past five years, approximately 3,500 chiefs, women, and youth have participated in regular trainings. Seventeen national trainings have been held for 45 people each time (for chiefs, women, and youth) and approximately 60 county level trainings for 45 people each time--one training per year for youth, women, and chiefs in each of four counties. This is not including the over 4,000 lower level chiefs trained nationwide during the Ebola

crisis and the same number trained ahead of National Immunization Days in 2015.

Additionally, since 2012, more than 500 town hall meetings have been held in four of the five target counties and were facilitated by Community Dispute Resolution Monitors (CDRMs). These meetings provide a platform for citizens to pose questions to their leaders and discuss issues of importance to them, and where community leaders take decisions and a forum through which inter-communal disputes can be resolved.

There are key elements of TCC's methodology that have formed the foundation of training and engagement with NCEC and traditional leaders more generally, they include framing change positively, resource support, integration with the formal sector, capacity building for sustainable organization, engagement with issues of national priority, and policy support. This approach contributed to USAID's positive evaluation in 2013 which indicated that in areas that TCC works the project was having significant impact toward decreasing harmful traditional practices.

FRAMING CHANGE POSITIVELY

In all trainings and discussions, the intent is to present the law in ways that explain the positive community impact of what most rural dwellers consider to be alternative approaches and ideas. This approach has allowed the dialogue to be constructive, because adversarial approaches based

on telling people what they are doing is wrong can be rejected. Two examples of such barriers are that customary leaders have a negative understanding of human rights and customary male leaders have resistance to conventional ideas of "women's empowerment." Human rights is often seen in terms of a generational conflict with community elders—both men and women—commonly stating that children have been taught about "human rights" in school and, as a result, refuse to listen to or respect their elders, or work in their communities. Similarly, conventional advocacy campaigns that target female genital mutilation/cutting—a widespread experience among Liberia women—also are rejected as an effort by "human rights people" to impose unwelcome external values.

TCC's experience has been that these issues can be openly discussed and attitudes changed through an open and respectful process of discussion and information sharing using the communities' experience as a starting point. TCC trainers are men and women who are either from rural communities themselves or who have an understanding and an ability to communicate with rural citizens. This dialogue process is based on demonstrating a deep knowledge of the challenges that rural communities face and then explaining what the statutory law says about these problems, including the logic, and then discussing the pros and cons of each approach. In this way, it has been possible to highlight which aspects of the customary approach are compatible with the law and which are not.

The language is about empowering women and men together for a stronger community rather than an exclusivist presentation that may feed the perception that women's rights come at the expense of men's rights.

Following this example, training on so-called women's issues—including domestic violence, inheritance, the rape law—is done in two ways. First, joint trainings are held in which both men and women learn together about the laws and discuss their meaning and implication. This ensures that there is a common knowledge base and avoids misunderstanding or misinterpretation as these issues play out in the future of the communities. Women are encouraged to participate actively in these sessions. Second, these issues are discussed individually and reinforced in the trainings for women, including discussion of the most effective means to overcome barriers to change.

RESOURCE SUPPORT

Training alone is insufficient for the chiefs to implement new approaches. A common complaint was that chiefs lacked the financial and organizational means to engage efficiently in short and long term activities. Barriers included costs associated with transportation and hosting meetings, as well as basic administrative support such as paper, files, or phone cards. Part of the County Dispute Resolution Monitors (CDRM)'s duties was to allocate monthly funds for support for meeting and transportation costs, primarily for town hall

meetings but, also, for ad hoc needs linked to resolving community disputes.

INTEGRATION WITH THE FORMAL SECTOR

Just as it has been important for men and women to share information in the same setting, the project has worked to ensure that formal justice sector and local government actors have also been part of the trainings. By including local police, magistrates, District Commissioners and others in the trainings—sometimes as participants, sometimes as presenters—these trainings have helped to build a common body of knowledge on the law and common body of practice. Senior Government officials—such as the Minister of Internal Affairs and Land Commissioner—have used these events to communicate with citizens, as have members of the legislature.

CAPACITY BUILDING FOR SUSTAINABLE ORGANIZATION

As part of the methodology, time is typically set aside for the customary leaders to conduct their own consultations without external guidance or facilitation, and to hold discussions with Government officials from the MIA. This provides a valuable forum for a range of local issues to be discussed and a further means for the views of chiefs, women, and youth to be communicated directly into the policy process.

ENGAGEMENT WITH ISSUES OF NATIONAL PRIORITY

An important element of the methodology has been to allow the training setting to be responsive to issues of national priority as requested by the MIA and to supplement this with regular activities to implement the best practices learned.

During the Ebola crisis, The Carter Center, with additional support from the CDC Foundation, responded to the MIA's request to help mobilize the chiefs and elders. This was done through a combination of training, convening, and resource transfer that allowed the chiefs to play a leading role in eliminating Ebola, particularly in rural areas. Work included convening a national gathering of chiefs to discuss the situation with government and the international community and providing resources and logistics for the MOH to train over 4,000 chiefs, elders, women, religious leaders, and youth in 87 health districts nationwide.

On several occasions, the Center has been requested by government to

support the leadership of the NCCEL to intervene in serious and violent disputes. These have included outbreaks of violence in Lofa, Grand Gedeh, Nimba, and River Gee Counties from 2010 through 2015. These interventions have involved a combination of mobilizing national and local level customary leaders at the request of the NCCEL and MIA, along with other relevant stakeholders including the Executive and the Legislature.

From the start of the project, the NCCEL took an increasingly formalized role in discussions of national importance. With support from The Carter Center including provision of training and logistical support the NCCEL has shown itself to be organizationally strong, particularly through its national chairman. The Government regularly approaches the NCCEL to resolve both cultural and political problems, including mediating between the Executive and the Legislature and between Christian and Mus-



IREX/Berenike Schott

lim communities on matters of the highest national importance. The NCCEL has, in effect, become part of the protocol order and is now consulted on most national issues.

This rise in influence was recognized by the legislature by the creation of the NCCEL as an independent entity, taking it outside the direct authority of the MIA. This notwithstanding, chiefs who provide administrative leadership received their salaries from the MIA which initially created tension between the two bodies. TCC was asked to help play the role of honest broker in early 2014 when the MIA and NCCEL were able to reach a strong working agreement on lines of authority.

POLICY SUPPORT

The Access to Justice Project assisted rural and marginalized voices to be active in the policy making process. Most importantly this encouraged policy dialogue on the reform of the dual justice system and developed a clearer legal aid and alternative dispute resolution policy framework. TCC staff were active in a wide range of policy committees and forums on these issues, including hosting a National Consultation on Customary Justice in 2010 and supporting the National Judicial Conference of 2013 and its implementation process that made recommendation to accept both paralegals and ADR as part of the legal system.

Education about land policy has also been a core element of the trainings and has been supplemented by work with the Land Commission to help

develop processes for community based land ADR systems and work with the MIA to facilitate and mediate sensitive boundary negotiations.

TCC's focus on increasing awareness of key legislation impacting women's rights, resulted in a widespread increase in knowledge of these laws among traditional leaders, according to USAID's 2013 evaluation. This includes the rape law, property rights with the customary marriage system, and domestic violence statutes. Generally, strengthening women's knowledge of their rights and their ability to implement them has been a core element of the training programming. At various times, TCC has provided support for the leader of the customary women, Mama Tumah, to convene traditional Zoes to discuss issues of mutual interest, including FGM/C. This dialogue process, that has included women government leaders, has allowed a discussion on this taboo topic to continue within the community at the same time that the government and others have been engaged in national advocacy against FGM/C. ■



A community leader in Bopolu, Gbarpolu County stands to share his concerns about the impact of the Ebola epidemic on his community. This Community Leader Forum was one of over 60 forums held in 13 of Liberia's 15 counties through the CSML program, providing a space for community leaders to share their concerns and develop strategies to fight back against the deadly virus.

RESPONDING TO CRISES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Over five and one-half years of implementation, various events and emerging issues of public concern caused CSML and its partners to adjust their approach and activities to ensure that partner institutions received the critical support they needed to respond to pressing needs. With the support of USAID, CSML was allowed the flexibility to reallocate funds, request additional funds,

and shift priorities in order to achieve the greatest impact. Whether in response to upcoming elections and fears of potential violence, capacity gaps of up-country CSOs, increasing incidences of rape, or the Ebola crisis—the program and its partners demonstrated the flexibility to re-focus and remain creative and adapt effectively in the ever-changing Liberian landscape. ■

ELECTIONS

2011 GENERAL ELECTION AND REFERENDUM

The 2011 elections were perhaps the biggest test of Liberia's fragile and young democracy. They took place against a backdrop of more than 20 years of political instability, failing infrastructure, poverty, high unemployment, corruption and a long history of social tensions between various segments of the population. These tensions had erupted into violent, inter-tribal conflict in Lofa Coun-

ty a year and half prior to the elections; an unfortunate event that many say was exacerbated by rumors and misinformation spread by citizens and some journalists. Happening during the same period was a controversial National Referendum, which was intended to amend certain provisions of the constitution. Liberia's history of misrule and fraudulent elections created doubts among the population that both the elections and referendum would be free and

“The Elections Reporting Center was a key and major player that touched everyone, including our president Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf. She followed the site developed by the LMC and we are convinced all the major parties followed the site.”

-NORRIS TWEH, FORMER DEPUTY MINISTER OF INFORMATION

fair despite assurances from the government. In fact the opposition argued that the National Referendum was a process designed to change the constitution in favor of the ruling party.

Tensions were extremely high during this period and many were fearful that election events could trigger violence and that Liberia could backslide into war and lose its recent gains. CSML responded accordingly by engaging its Main Partners to plot a strategy. This led to the Strengthened Media for Transparent Elections Initiative with additional funding from USAID and to the allocation of civil society grant funds for small election and Referendum grants. Interventions under these initiatives were aimed at educating voters, promoting peace during the elections, and supporting the integrity and transparency of the electoral process.

Support for Media

IREX provided grants totaling \$469,079 to media partners to undertake a number of interventions aimed at ensuring a peaceful and transparent election process.

Elections Reporting Center (ERC)

The On-time Results Reporting Website (www.lmcliberia.com), managed by the LMC was the ERC’s primary public face during the elections and unquestionably received the broadest exposure. Through the ERC, the LMC trained 300 reporters and stationed them at polling stations around the country to collect election results as soon as they were released at the various centers. These results

were sent via SMS to the ERC, vetted and posted to the On-time Results Reporting Website. The site received over 3.8 million hits in the days following the elections, a phenomenal achievement considering that there were only about 1.7 million voters. Radio and television stations in the country used the site to report and discuss the results as they came in.

Many argued that having what some called alternative independent results which closely mirrored results being released by the National Elections Commission greatly reduced suspicion of vote rigging. “The Elections Reporting Center was a key and major player that touched everyone, including our president Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf. She followed the site developed by the LMC and we are convinced all the major parties followed the site,” said Norris Tweh, former Deputy Minister of Information.

The Elections Reporting Center also worked to ensure that journalists covering the elections were well equipped. The LMC provided computers, cameras, digital recorders and smart phones to journalists across the country. It also provided about 20 motorbikes to community radio stations, enabling reporters from the stations to travel to hard-to-reach areas to report on the elections. As a result, the LMC’s website became the first Liberian site to produce graphic images of the electoral process, including more than 2,000 photos and videos of political campaigns and rallies.

Peace Actors

LIWOMAC received funding to mobilize and train 200 Peace Actors—129 women and 71 men—from 10 counties to deliver voter education and peace messages to communities, and to report elections related events and issues they encountered in their communities. This concept grew out of concerns that many, if not most Liberians lack civic literacy and that if they were not properly educated and informed, misinformation could cause them to turn to violence amid a volatile atmosphere in the country.

After an intensive one week training in Monrovia the Peace Actors returned to their various communities and worked to ease tensions by encouraging supporters of rival candidates or political parties to seek alternatives to violence. An important impact of the work of the Peace Actors was that their presence in communities opened up a space for constructive discussion on socio-political issues surrounding the elections. They held public forums and also produced radio messages and dramas, which were aired on LWDR and other community radio stations. The overriding theme: the need for peaceful elections and alternatives to violence for resolving differences between and among supporters of different political camps. These efforts were recognized by General Seth Obeng, ECO-WAS's Special Representative to Liberia during the elections when he praised LWDR for leading the way in promoting peaceful elections and conflict sensitive reporting.

LIWOMAC believes that the work of the Peace Actors was also instrumen-

tal in keeping the peace at the community level during the election period. Many citizens interviewed following contact with the Peace Actors mentioned "rejecting violence" as a key message they received from the Peace Actors.

Candidates' Debates

Two hundred and sixty candidates participated in 66 debates in 13 counties hosted by the PUL under the Strengthened Media for Transparent Elections Initiative. The debates provided an opportunity for voters to come face-to-face with candidates and to hear first-hand what the candidates had to offer. Voters surveyed after the elections said the debates allowed them to vote based on issues rather than friendship. They also commented that they came away from the event feeling that they had a sense of the candidates' plans as well as their track records. Finally, audience members said it encouraged enthusiasm and excitement in the electoral process.

Media Ethics Conference

In late September 2011, IREX partnered with UNESCO and the PUL to hold an emergency conference on "Media Ethics and Conflict Sensitive Reporting." This grew out of concern that the media was becoming increasingly partisan during the election campaign. As candidates and political parties traded insults, some media outlets, particularly several radio stations began taking sides and eventually attacked each other on the airwaves. This led to fears that if not checked, this could exacerbate an

already volatile election atmosphere and eventually lead to violence. IREX met with UNESCO and the PUL and decided to hold the emergency conference on “Media Ethics and Conflict Sensitive Reporting.”

Nearly 150 participants, including journalists, managers from Monrovia based outlets and community radio stations, NGOs, and government representatives attended. At the end of two days of discussion, participants agreed on a six point resolution to guide their future professional conduct:

- 1. To abide by journalistic ethics by reporting accurately, fairly, and impartially on news, including prior, during, and after Liberia’s elections.*
- 2. To report in the public interest, reinforcing peacebuilding in our country in pursuit of the truth.*
- 3. To adopt conflict sensitive language in reporting on the country’s elections, and to be mindful of announcing preliminary*

results, unless based on NEC’s results released by NEC officials at polling centers.

4. To cease the stereotyping of women candidates for political office, and to encourage and support equality of male and female journalists in the newsroom.

5. To not be subject to bribes in pursuit of news stories.

6. To educate the public and refrain from reporting news from unverified sources.

Civil Society Training and Grant Activities

Though CSML’s program revision for a special election initiative in 2011 focused on media engagement, civil society had a very important role to play in ensuring citizens were prepared to vote. In a country where most voters neither read nor understand constitutional specifics and where poor roads make some areas inaccessible, the challenges were extraordinary. The first task was helping the voters understand the Referen-



Civil society representatives conduct civic and voter education in the lead up to the 2011 Presidential Election and Referendum, made possible through training and grant support from the CSML program.

dum's propositions. They had to choose between absolute or simple majorities for the Presidential Election, weigh in on the retirement age of Supreme Court Justices, and determine how long Presidential candidates must reside in the country before they could run. These concepts are not easy to explain in the local languages. Furthermore, with the majority of the electorate unable to read, everything had to be reduced to drawings and symbols, which appeared on the ballots alongside the printed word. Predictably, the symbols could not convey the full intent of the propositions.

IREX provided training and small grants to 28 partner CSOs to address these issues. Partner CSOs were brought to a training where NEC representatives briefed them on the Referendum and how to explain it in local languages and Liberian English. Then IREX provided the CSOs small grants; as it was their first grant opportunity and it had to be managed in a short period of time, the total amount awarded was \$36,752. With this the CSOs directly engaged more than 28,000 people in 158 communities, 54% of whom were women, and at least 48% were youth (not all grantees reported the youth breakdown). Countless more were reached by CSOs over community radio.

CSO partners conveyed messages on the meaning of the Referendum, how to mark the ballot, and the need for peaceful elections through an impressive array of activities including sports tournaments, palava hut discussions, and town hall meetings.

They held dramas and cultural performances, hired town criers, broadcast radio jingles, and held radio and television talk shows. They carried their messages to churches, markets, schools, vocational training sessions, and door-to-door. All this was done in multiple languages. Fortunately, the Referendum was held and peace prevailed. Yet this was only a partial victory as the results included a large number of disqualified ballots and demonstrated that more voter education was needed.

Elections rapidly approached and as the campaign became more heated, candidate speeches employed rhetoric that threatened to inflame tensions. Large marches were promised, causing even more concern. Once again, CSO partners set to work, determined to reach as many districts as possible with information on the electoral process and messages of peace. A total of \$52,498 was granted to 22 CSOs. Using these funds and drawing from their IREX training, CSOs selected activities that had the greatest chance to have an impact. Once again there was a wide variety of activities.

The elections were generally peaceful, boasted a 72% turnout, and the number of invalid votes dropped from 20% during the Referendum to only 6%. The role of IREX's partners cannot be overstated in helping to achieve these results. Voters in Lofa and Nimba Counties for example told IREX that they had not planned to vote but did so after interventions from IREX's partners. They claimed that they had come to understand

the importance of the election and their role as voters only after hearing messages in their local language.

When the run-off election was announced, there were only two weeks for preparation, and threats of violence had increased. IREX met with RPs and media partners to explore ways to rapidly respond to promote peace. It was determined that mistrust of electoral processes was the greatest risk to instability and possible violence. IREX quickly organized a National Symposium to help those with little education understand the system and its many steps for ensuring transparency. The symposium, entitled “Road to the Run-Off: Understanding the 2011 Electoral Processes,” was carried out successfully thanks in large part to assistance from PUL and WANEP. The Acting NEC Chairwoman and other NEC officials took part. Sessions to explain each step of the electoral process in simple English using PowerPoint projections were led by NEC trainers and followed by adequate periods for plenty of questions and answers.

The program was covered live on radio, broadcast on television, and covered by print media across the country. Of the 181 attendees, 52 represented CSOs working in voter education, 40 were from community radio stations from around the country, and 33 represented other print, television, and radio media. In addition there were political party agents, including a presidential candidate defeated in the first round, members of government (Information Ministry and House of Representatives), and

the European Union. The end result is well known: violence was held to a minimum.

2014 SPECIAL SENATORIAL ELECTION

Building off of the success and lessons learned from CSML’s election activities in 2011, IREX submitted and received approval from USAID for the Strengthening Media and Civil Society for Transparent Elections initiative to respond to the 2014 Special Senatorial Election and Constitution Review process. The activities planned included adapting activities from 2011 (grants for CSOs to hold target activities in their regions, candidate debates, and election reporting training for journalists) as well as brand new approaches such as the Vote Smart Van and Girls’ Media Frontiers initiatives. Beginning in February 2014, partners carefully planned out nine months of activities building up to election day which was scheduled for mid-October. However, with the arrival of Ebola, priorities shifted and the election was put on hold. When the election was finally re-scheduled for December in the midst of what still remained a crisis, many of the planned activities were not able to be held as planned. However, showcasing their resilience and adaptability, IREX and its partners were still able to make important contributions to the election process in the face of unprecedented challenges.

Vote Smart Vans

IREX partnered with National Youth Movement for Transparent Elections (NAYMOTE) to launch the Vote Smart



NAYMOTE demonstrates the Vote Smart Van community engagement approach at the launch of CSML's election activities in June 2014.

IREX/Dara Lipton

Van (VSV) initiative. With most Liberians unable to access internet and misinformation and rumors rampant during an election season, Vote Smart Vans served as mobile civic and voter education centers. A team of 175 volunteers (89 males and 86 females) travelled with the vans and held public forums and visited households to increase awareness of the election, voting processes, and constitutional reform, reaching a total of 68,579 persons (35,904 males and 32,675 females). Notably these volunteers were recruited from their communities as they were best positioned to communicate with and understand the realities of their target audience. After engaging with a VSV volunteer, Chief Adama Kiadii of Grand Cape Mount shared that “our people are suffering, we don’t have

clinics in our community, our children don’t have jobs, the people that we vote for forget about us but because of the way you people have talked to us, I will encourage my people to vote.”

As part of the VSV initiative, NAYMOTE also established a Call Center at their headquarters in Monrovia where they worked with a team of volunteers to call prospective voters in all 15 counties to remind them about the election and answer basic questions about voting procedures. A total of 2,600 citizens (1,522 males and 1,078 females) were reached via the Call Center on election related issues.

Notably, when the Ebola crisis hit and worsened in the late summer of 2014, IREX and NAYMOTE brain-

stormed means to use the existing Vote Smart Van information dissemination tools to increase awareness about the Ebola virus. The vans were repurposed as mobile Ebola information centers and the Call Center made calls to the public to promote understanding of Ebola signs and symptoms and the measures to take if/when someone in their household becomes symptomatic.

Civil Society Training and Small Grant Activities

As the Special Senatorial Elections and the Constitution Review approached, CSML produced a training manual, and the Master Trainers and Mentors carried out training first to RPs who then trained all 62 CSOs. The training provided an understanding and overview of the Liberian Constitution, reasons for the Constitution Review, and the process being carried out by the Constitution Review Committee leading to a referendum. The election portion of the training included discussion of good and bad criteria for selecting a candidate, ideas for informing voters about the candidates through debates, promoting smart voting through voter education forums, and the consequences of selling one's vote or being "trucked" to vote in a difference district. The training also included discussion of the factors that lead to election violence, possible consequences of election violence, and how to promote non-violent elections.

Although the CSOs were working on Ebola grant proposals and activities at the same time, most of the 62 CSOs prepared grant applications for CSML

small grants for elections or Constitution Review. When their activities were halted because of the Ebola crisis, they waited to implement as soon as the election was re-scheduled. In some cases they negotiated to have some or all of the funds for their election activities re-allocated to their Ebola activities. When the election date was finally called in late December on six days' notice, IREX held an emergency meeting with the RPs, many of whom had begun their holiday leave, and everyone agreed to work overtime and forsake their leave to get the funds out to the CSOs around the country who were ready to implement election activities. In that week, often with pre-financing while awaiting funds from Monrovia, 34 CSOs successfully implemented election grants in their targeted communities. Their participants appreciated the opportunity, especially given the shortness of the campaign period, to finally be engaged by an organization that was trained to answer their many diverse questions about the election. Center for Justice and Peace Studies (CJPS) wrote that participants in Foequelleh and Bellemu, Bong County, "were very apathetic about voting" because of unfulfilled promises from the last election, but that after the events they "promised to cast their votes." After the shifting of funds from election grants to Ebola grants, election grants totaled \$88,000, with 34 CSOs implementing.

Two episodes, on election day and the day that results were officially read, provide insight into the impact of CSOs' work with IREX grants to

prevent violence around elections. In Grand Gedeh County, Feeding House Organization (FHO) and Gbarzon Youth Development Association (GBAYDA) trained 10 animators in each of four towns on causes of election violence and mobilizing to promote non-violence. One of the towns was Jarwodee, the administrative seat of Gbarzon Statutory District. When the results were heard there, supporters of a losing candidate set up barricades to obstruct supporters of the winning candidate from moving through town to celebrate. The animators who benefited from the two-day training immediately organized themselves and moved in to intervene. They worked with the losing party's supporters as they had practiced in their training and were

able to restore peace, which has been sustained since then.

In another case, a CSO's election day activities put their staff in the right spot for responding successfully to a violent episode. On election day after voting was closed, violence erupted in Weajour Town, Bomi County, among youth partisans of two major parties. Flomo Theatre Production (FTP) staff happened to be on the scene and quickly acted to bring together community leaders and party representatives to discuss the problem: a story was going around that ballot papers were being handled inappropriately. In tracking down the details they learned that someone had walked into the polling station after the election and saw ballot pa-

Young women practice their interviewing skills as part of their training for the Girls Media Frontiers (GMF) program. This training prepared 24 young journalists to return to their communities and produce original radio and television content and to tell the stories of how ordinary citizens are effected by the Election.



IREX/Dara Lipton

SUCCESS STORY

A Young Reporter Affecting Change

Journalism Trainings Help SKY Reporter Broaden his Reporting Skills

When Julius Kontoe began his broadcast journalism career six years ago, he primarily reported on politicians and their conflicts with other politicians. Many of his stories failed to show how those politicians were impacting the lives of the people they served.

Kontoe's outlook on his reporting started to change when he began participating in CSML's thematic trainings on conflict sensitive reporting, gender sensitivity reporting, politics and governance, investigative reporting and peace and conflict. He also received one-on-one mentoring in basic news writing and reporting.

"Before the training, I normally focused on hard news with big names, but now I've shifted to human interest stories and stories that bring about change in the community," said Kontoe, a reporter at SKYFM/TV, one of CSML's Monrovia-based partner media outlets.

Kontoe credits the training and mentoring for the remarkable improvements in his reporting and writing skills. Some of his stories influenced the Liberian government to respond to the public concerns.

In November 2013, the Central Bank of Liberia installed 10 public toilets in the West Point and Clara Town communities after Kontoe reported that people were using the river as toilet. The story highlighted the health hazards of defecating in a river that people sometimes bathe in. "These types of stories change people's minds about how to protect their health," he said.

The Reporting trips, Kontoe said, has really broadened his reporting skills because it gives him an opportunity to do reporting assignments that his media outlet cannot afford. He also appreciates the one-on-one mentoring that is a major part of the reporting trip. "(My mentor) taught me to write short sentences in order to hit the main point and be clear about what I want to say," Kontoe said. "I learned to use appropriate words and be very clear so that people can understand me instead of being ambiguous."

Kontoe didn't have a hard-nose for news when he joined SKY Communications in 2009, said Martin Brown, president of the company. But Brown noticed a big change after his reporter



Julius Kontoe, Reporter, Sky Communications

IREX/Dara Lipton

began participating in CSML trainings. The management is so impressed with Kontoe's improvements that the station is considering giving him an opportunity to direct news coverage and work with other reporters.

"He's trying to get balanced stories that are not always restricted to political issues," Brown said. "He's trying to diversify the news. My office is next to him and I sometimes hear him telling people, 'No, I will not take the story from that angle, that's public relations.'" ■

The GMF program allows us to tell our own stories...It's important for a girl like me to go behind the camera to tell the stories of ordinary Liberians."

**-NAOMI FALIKA,
GMF PARTICIPANT**

pers being moved. He interpreted this as officials cheating and raised an alarm. It turned out that the person came after counting was complete and all observers and parties had accepted the results, and had actually seen the ballot papers being packed to be taken to NEC. When this information was passed around, the youth were satisfied. FTP's ability to bring people together and sort out the facts led citizens of Weajour Town to request their involvement in settling other community disputes and religious problems.

Girls' Media Frontiers (GMF)

Women's participation in elections in Liberia is disproportionately lower than men's. This is likely a result of a variety of individual and social factors, one of which is women feeling that they cannot relate to the candidates or their platforms. To broaden women's voices throughout the Election and Constitutional Review process, IREX partnered with LIWOMAC to recruit 24 young women from 15 counties to participate in a two-week training on multi-media journalism. Facilitated by an international consultant, the training prepared the young women to write scripts, conduct press conferences, use film and audio equipment, and build their confidence to tell stories about women and their issues during the Special Senatorial Election and Constitutional Review process—which evolved to include women's views on the impact of the Ebola crisis.

After the training, the women returned to their communities to develop reports which were aired on their

local radio stations and LWDR.

One of the highlights of the program was the opportunity for many of the young women to learn how to use video to tell news and feature stories. Some were already exposed to radio production, but the training was their first experience standing behind a video camera.

LIWOMAC had an agreement with three television stations in Monrovia to air a program, "My Voice Matters" produced by GMF participants from Montserrado County. Six editions of the program were produced and aired on Liberian National Television (LNTV), Power Television, and SKY Television. They featured stories on the Ebola-related burial practices, the Constitution Review process, Female Genital Mutilation, among others.

"The GMF program allows us to tell our own stories," states Naomi Fali-ka, a participant from Montserrado County. "It's important for a girl like me to go behind the camera to tell the stories of ordinary Liberians."

Gabrieline Cleone said she gets a lot of stares when she's behind the camera reporting news in communities across Liberia. Most people think that only men can stand behind the camera, but the CSML program gave Gabrieline the confidence to believe that she can use the camera to report news. "I think it's inspiring when other females see us standing behind the camera," she said. "CSML has had a positive impact on me. It has really strengthened my skills. It has broadened my knowledge in covering any story."

Elections Reporting Center

IREX also rebooted the Elections Reporting Center for the 2014 elections. Journalists were trained and sent across the country to report on voter turnout and overall election activity from polling places. The ERC staff received phone calls from monitors and reporters in the field and posted updates on voter turnout, the impact of Ebola on the election, and provided anecdotes of voter participation. Pictures and news updates from the field

were posted on the “Liberia Votes” Facebook page.

IREX also worked with the LMC to refurbish the studio at LNTV to host a three hour television election special hosted by veteran journalist Frank Sainworla. This was the first of its kind where experts provided live analysis on television of the election process as it unfolded. ■

REGIONAL SUPPORT CENTER (RSC)

Throughout this report there have been references to the various challenges—organizational, financial, and technical—that Liberian institutions face. Following the initial few years of implementation, IREX identified that these challenges rested particularly with institutions based outside of Monrovia, where lack of access to information, training, and funding opportunities serve as common barriers to growth and impact. It was in early 2012 that IREX began discussions with USAID to pilot a new initiative within the CSML program, one that would enhance the resources and mentoring provided to CSML civil society organizations and community radio stations based in rural areas, and mitigate their two major challenges—organizational and financial sustainability. IREX partnered with DEN-L to manage the Regional Support Center (RSC), which would serve as a resource center to CSOs and CRSs and a base for a team of Mentors and Master Trainers providing

more intensive OD and SED support to 17 institutions in Bong and Nimba Counties.

The most significant impact of the RSC was the SED component, which led CSOs and CRSs through a process of identifying business ideas and their intended audience, conducting a market analysis, and developing business plans. Following a competitive process, 10 institutions were selected to receive grants ranging from \$8000 to \$15,000 to fund the start-up for businesses that would serve to strengthen the objectives of the host institution. For more on the RSC and for examples of successes that emerged from SED grants see page 31. ■



BOTPAL presents their business plan to visitors and judges who have come to attend the Social Enterprise Development competition in Gbarnga. After receiving extensive training and mentoring on SED, 17 organizations developed business plans and presented their ideas to a panel of judges, vying to win one of ten start-up grants. BOTPAL was one of the winners.

RAPE IN LIBERIA

“In 2012, the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection reported a total of 2,493 Sexual and Gender-based Violence crimes across Liberia, up from 2,029 cases in 2010. A majority of these (58 %) were rape cases, of which 92% or 1,348 involved rape of children between the ages of three months and 17 years.”

“If Ebola is Public Enemy Number One, Rape is Public Enemy Number Two,” said a participant at IREX’s conference to combat rape held in March 2015 in partnership with LI-WOMAC. With increasing incidences of violent rape occurring as the Ebola crisis subsided, the CSML program

led by the IREX Gender and Youth Manager commemorated International Women’s Day by holding a series of consultative forums with highly affected communities in Montserrado, Margibi, Bong, and Nimba Counties; a precursor to a national conference.

The forums created a platform for communities to air their concerns on prevention and response services and advance recommendations for improvements in services and policy. Patience, a mother from Brewerville whose daughter died after a rape, blamed the weak police response. “When my daughter came home

bleeding we chartered a car and went straight to the police station. The policeman took his time asking questions and filling a form while my daughter sat there bleeding to death.” With the new trend of child rape which sometimes results in death, some forum participants described people who rape children as murderers and recommended that they be charged as such.

Testimonies from Patience and other community members led to the decision to hold a national stakeholders conference to review the findings from the community forums with national stakeholders.

On March 31st, over 100 rape response service providers, community representatives, and relevant ministries and agencies were brought together for a conference to discuss key findings. In his opening remarks, the representative of the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection flagged the need to see rape as

an enemy to the existence of the state. Two panel discussions looked at the role of the community in rape prevention and response and the gaps and challenges of rape response services. Panelists were drawn from the communities, the health sector, Liberia National Police (LNP), the courts, and NGOs. Inspector Susie Telleh of the LNP Women and Children Protective Services (WACPS) outlined the WACPS’s numerous constraints: one vehicle for the fifteen counties and constant compromising of evidence by communities and families. Representing the health sector, Dr. Wilhelmina Jallah spoke of the lack of forensic testing materials to preserve evidence.

The discussion highlighted huge gaps and led to recommendations for coordination among and between service providers and the community, improved information dissemination, and enhanced capacity in the LNP and the courts. ■



Panelists at a national conference held by CSML discuss the challenges of combatting rape in their communities.

THE EBOLA CRISIS

From March 2014 to May 2015, Liberia and its neighbors Guinea and Sierra Leone experienced the worst outbreak of the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) ever recorded. More than 4,000 Liberians lost their lives to the disease. In the early months many citizens did not trust government messages and warnings, and the health care infrastructure was not able to provide the needed services and treatment. This led to rapidly spreading infection, exacerbated by dissension, rumor, and protests which threatened the nation's peace.

IREX and partners quickly shifted gears when the crisis first emerged, holding a workshop for journalists and civil society representatives in March 2014 with representatives of the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare to ensure that accurate information was provided and all necessary precautions were taken. When the crisis quickly worsened in July and August, IREX received permission from USAID to reallocate some Election funds towards Ebola response activities, including forums with community leaders, CSO led community outreach, and training of Monrovia-based and community radio journalists.

COMMUNITY LEADERS' FORUMS

In response to the Ebola crisis, IREX/CSML provided \$55,400 in grants to eight of its partners to work in communities with local leaders—traditional, community, religious, and

government—to hold Community Leaders' Forums (CLFs) to identify issues and discuss means for addressing them. The forums provided a platform for community members to share their concerns and fears openly and discuss the risks of civil unrest and potential strategies for dealing with such issues. Many leaders expressed frustration that the government had not effectively engaged them when rolling out contact tracing or health response mechanisms, which limited their effectiveness and local relevance. Additionally, they expressed concerns over the impacts of government-issued restrictions; for example the school closing prompted concerns about girls getting pregnant and boys getting involved in drugs because of lack of supervision. At the end of each forum, the community leaders were coached in identifying strategies and action points to address the issues they had prioritized. The facilitating partner then followed up with them to monitor progress, make suggestions, and provide encouragement.

A total of 67 CLFs were held in 13 of the 15 counties, yielding a significant set of data that highlighted concerns and identified actions the communities themselves could take to tackle those concerns. More importantly, many of the community leaders found that by channeling their fears and frustrations into well considered activities to mitigate the negative effects of Ebola, they were able to achieve their goals and could feel the



A woman from the Waterside community in rural Montserratado speaks to Aaron of NAYMOTE about the challenges that she is facing as a result of the Ebola crisis. This discussion took place during the Community Leader Forum, which was followed by ongoing mentoring and visits from the NAYMOTE team to support the community as they implement their action plan to improve their circumstances and reduce their risk.

IREX/Dara Lipton

power of their own efforts.

As the disease subsided, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf praised communities for the role they had played in turning around the attack. With its large data set on specific community initiatives and actions, IREX organized a national conference to showcase the community leaders' work and invited President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to deliver the keynote address. She accepted, and at the conference asked IREX to share its data and the conference results with her. Thirty of the 1,000 community leaders who had participated in CLFs were invited to Monrovia to join with government leaders and civil society and media workers to share their experiences so that their successes could be cap-

tured and recorded. In her remarks at the conference the President said that "we see this conference as a pace-setter in a long-term agenda to strengthen community structures to enhance our overall national development agenda. We understand that with a chain of over [1,000] community leaders in 13 counties across the country, you have identified several critical gaps in the fight against Ebola. We ask IREX to share its findings with the government to assist us in our planning overall process." IREX has shared the final report from the CLFs with the President's Office.

CIVIL SOCIETY SMALL GRANT ACTIVITIES

During the Ebola crisis 22 CSO part-

“We see this conference as a pace-setter in a long-term agenda to strengthen community structures to enhance our overall national development agenda. We understand that with a chain of over (1,000) community leaders in 13 counties across the country, you have identified several critical gaps in the fight against Ebola. We ask IREX to share its findings with the government to assist us in our planning overall process.”

**-ELLEN JOHNSON SIRLEAF
PRESIDENT OF LIBERIA**

ners operated 20 CSML small grants totaling \$65,980 to fight Ebola and assist stricken communities, and others implemented grants with external funding. Bassa Concerned Citizens Movement (BCCM) conducted Ebola contact tracing, using a form they designed with their mentor, WONGOSOL, and reported all findings to the County Ebola Task Force. Through this effort they identified nine new Ebola cases. Society for Women and AIDS in Africa (SWAA) worked through Monrovia sex workers to raise awareness on violence prevention among other hard-to-reach youth. CODRA held town hall meetings in five Gbarnga communities with zonal heads, tribal governors, women and youths groups to address the issue of stigmatization of people infected with EVD. Inter-Visionary Artists (IVA) used “Community Forum Theatre,” an interactive drama form, in five communities of Ganta to engage people in asking and answering questions about Ebola. Rural Human Rights Activists Programme (RHRAP) held community forums in three communities of Arthington, Montserrado County; they formed two working groups, one to encourage residents to turn over all burials to the burial team and another to raise community awareness and report Ebola issues to the designated persons. Bong Youth Association (BYA) held a community forum at which they screened a documentary film on Ebola and led a discussion on prevention.

LIBERIA MEDIA FOR DEMOCRATIC INITIATIVES (LMDI)

Liberia Media for Democratic Initiatives (LMDI) became a special CSO partner to CSML when the Ebola crisis created a need for more reconciliation activities. LMDI promotes community reconciliation, good governance, and peaceful co-existence by blending the media with community “Dialogues.” That is, its staff go to communities and organize large gatherings to build the space for open discussion where people have issues to address. The impact is deepened through the second component of LMDI’s blended approach, airing the Dialogues on radio.

As Ebola came into communities, it created strong schisms over difficult issues such as whether to report or hide cases and whether to bury the dead in the traditional fashion or follow the Ebola protocol and call for strangers to carry them to an unknown site. Through a \$10,500 CSML grant LMDI facilitated discussion with local leaders and citizens in twelve communities and broadcast them to citizens across the country. Each forum included discussion of procedures and updates of the work of the Ebola Taskforce and encouraged cooperation with Ebola response teams, while giving community members a chance to discuss their grievances and in the end feel consulted and able to play their role.

After the Ebola crisis, CSML gave LMDI a second grant to facilitate discussions in 21 communities aimed primarily at digging out accountability issues around the use of Ebola funds. However it quickly became apparent that the trauma and conflicts caused

by the disease were still predominant issues, and reconciliation became a secondary outcome of this series of forums as well.

For example, the town of Gbolokai Ta is said to have lost some 100 people to Ebola, but because many tried to deny its existence for a long time, records were not kept and proper procedures were not followed. These facts alone might signal conflicts that were felt but largely unseen. Those who were burying the dead against government precautions claimed it was necessary because of the government's slowness and the perils of leaving corpses unburied, while others felt that the authorities had not been alerted fast enough and that unauthorized burials were perpetuating the risks. Because of fears that the mass graves were a continuing danger, the whole town had migrated to a new site, and one man who was especially recognized as championing and carrying out burials was being stigmatized. At an LMDI Dialogue the man disclosed that he was being ostracized and had even been beaten for what he considers to have been saving the community. The LMDI facilitator used mediation techniques to give all sides of the issue a voice and to allow citizens to air their feelings. This was especially useful in allowing those who had ostracized him to hear the man's perspective on why he had carried out burials, often alone, what he felt would be the result if the bodies had remained unburied while the disease spread, and what this decision had cost him in his relationships with his neighbors. At the end of the public discussion, the

man was again accepted by the community, and later follow up shows that he is now treated as a member of the community again.

REPORTING EBOLA

When news of the Ebola crisis hit the newsstands and airwaves in March 2014, Liberian journalists, like most citizens, did not understand the disease or its mode of transmission. Headlines were more sensational and less informative. News reports focused on Ebola's impact on people's sex lives and the fact that they could no longer eat their favorite bush meat. The lack of understanding and information about the disease fueled doubts about Ebola's existence on street corners and in the halls of government.

To strengthen reporters' capacity in reporting on the crisis, IREX hired a broadcast consultant to work with a team of 10 Monrovia-based reporters to cover Ebola. During the height of the crisis, the reporters covered Ebola deaths, ETUs, the impact of the State of Emergency on citizens, the hike in prices of chlorine and sanitary commodities, quarantined communities, international and government response to the crisis and how the disease was spreading from one county and one community to the next.

The consultant accompanied the reporters on field assignments and guided them in writing and producing their stories for their radio stations and newspapers.

"It helps that you have someone who can guide you when you come from

the field,” said Akoi Baysah, a former reporter with the United Methodist Radio, one of CSML’s partner outlets. “The consultant taught me how to construct my story and look for different angles on the Ebola crisis. I also learned to be sensitive in my reporting.”

In addition to supporting reporters, IREX also collaborated with international organizations to help the government of Liberia communicate its Ebola strategy to citizens. CSML was instrumental in helping the government implement the “Ebola Must Go” campaign, an initiative launched December 8, 2014 to mobilize Liberians to eradicate Ebola in their communities by embracing survivors, not touching sick people, and burying dead bodies.

IREX organized a team of reporters to cover the launch event by President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in New Georgia, a suburban community recognized for reducing Ebola by caring for Ebola orphans, embracing Ebola survivors, reporting the sick, and providing food and water for quarantined families. IREX’s partners LWDR and SKY-FM radio broadcast the program live.

“The Ebola crisis was a new experience for us, so it was helpful to have someone guide us in our reporting,” said Gloria Tamba, a reporter from the Daily Observer newspaper.

MESSAGING

As the Ebola crisis began to worsen in July the need for effective and clear messaging to increase awareness of EVD and prevention methods became apparent. There were concerns that messages being sent across the country were not having the intended effect. In fact several messages misrepresented the facts of the disease, and there were fears this would lead to additional infections. To help address the situation, IREX began working with the Ministries of Information and Health to develop targeted messages to be broadcast on community radio stations across the country.

CSML’s partners LIWOMAC and CEMESP engaged the Ministries of Information and Health in the development of the messages that included both audio and video productions. The audio messages were broadcast on 35 community radio stations across the country, four radio sta-

Radio Bomi Gets Back on the Air When it Matters Most

In 2014 when the Ebola crisis first began to worsen, a prominent radio station outside of CSML’s target seven counties experienced a fire resulting in the destruction of their station and equipment. With permission from USAID, CSML supported Radio Bomi in Tubmanburg, Bomi County to get back on the air within a month. As Bomi was a region hard hit by the crisis and Radio Bomi served as the most prominent station and source of information in the region, this technical support was

essential. CSML provided a 500 watt transmitter and studio equipment to the tune of \$28,458,00. “When we were on air, we didn’t have many cases, but our death and infection rate went up by about 55 percent after the fire. After the fire, we didn’t know how we were going to inform our people in the midst of the Ebola crisis. When IREX came in, it was a great relief for our citizens,” shared Zinnah Cassell, Station Manager at Radio Bomi. ■

tions in Monrovia and two televisions. As some of the first radio messages developed in Liberia in response to the crisis, these messages served an important role in both increasing

widespread awareness and highlighting the potential for government, civil society, and media sector collaboration towards achieving shared goals. ■

ACCOUNTABILITY OF EBOLA FUNDS

With so much money and resources flooding into the country as a result of the Ebola crisis, concerns among citizens, NGOs, and the international community about accountability were increasing. Liberia's history shows that such an environment can fuel misinformation, confusion, and even conflict. Once again IREX was well placed with its strong networks of civil society and media partners to develop multi-sector activities that promote accountability on the local, county, national, and international level. In July 2015, IREX received an additional \$2.2 million from USAID to engage media and civil society in promoting dialogue and raising awareness around accountability of Ebola funds and resources.

By accountability, IREX specifically refers to the obligation of the government of Liberia and other stakeholders, including donors and INGOs that make commitments, to the people of Liberia to account for their activities, accept responsibility for them, and to disclose the results in a transparent way. Our interventions during this period focused on how much and what came in, how much was disbursed, the purpose for which it was used, etc. The activities also aimed to give people the platform or opportunity to look at structures that were

being put in place and the impact they were having on communities. This approach of citizens informing themselves on spending and performance on their behalf and involving themselves in requesting accountability was a new experience for them.

THE SITUATION ROOM AND ACCOUNTABILITY REPORTING OF EBOLA FUNDS

IREX trained 99 community radio and Monrovia-based journalists on how to report on the impact of Ebola funds and resources earmarked for Ebola in the 15 counties. The project created a social media platform and website (www.trackingaidliberia.org) which featured a database compiled with Ebola funds earmarked for Liberia and stories and features about the impact of Ebola funds and resources. Reports to the Facebook and YouTube pages and the website were filed by 20 field researchers in the 15 counties and 19 Monrovia-based reporters. All across the country, community journalists were asking international organizations to account for how they spent Ebola funds and resources.

Reporters told stories about how Ebola funds were being used to help survivors, orphans, and farmers. They also raised questions about the mil-

lions of dollars that were spent on Ebola Treatment Units that never saw one Ebola patient after they were opened in January 2015.

“We’ve always had basic journalism training, but the accountability reporting project took us beyond basic reporting,” said Chris Yarwoe, Station Manager of Magic FM. “We have had positive engagement with stakeholders and are asking them to account for the public’s money.”

During the accountability training, reporters learned how to identify sources of the various funding on Ebola, network with relevant stakeholders, develop story ideas on Ebola funds, and connect with international organizations who could explain how they spent Ebola dollars in their communities. They also learned how to identify credible sources and fact-

check a variety of sources before reporting their story.

Reporters said the project was their first attempt to look at expenditures and have the opportunity to interview sources about how they spent public dollars. Before the project, reporters simply wrote audit reports without talking to the people affected.

The project enabled reporters to interview some of the international organizations about their projects and the funds they received and visit communities where Global Communities, Samaritan’s Purse, PCI, and other organizations were implementing Ebola-related projects. “We are excited that IREX is leaving us with something that we can carry on in terms of how we can make people and institutions who received money in the



John Kollie, Executive Director of LMDI and host of the Dialogue program leads a discussion with the Black Jinnah Community in Monrovia on accountability of Ebola funds. Community leaders (seated in rear) shared information with those present to clarify how funds were spent. This forum was one of 21 LMDI-facilitated events focused on encouraging accountability and transparency at the community level, supported through CSML.

IREX/Dora Lipton

name of the Liberian people account for the money they received,” said Al Varney Rogers, of FrontPage Africa.

Frank Sainwora, a veteran journalist and an IREX broadcast consultant who mentored the reporters, said the accountability reporting project changed the mode of journalism in Liberia. Journalists, he said, are digging more deeply under the surface of routine news reports. “Reporters and media institutions have been put in the accountability reporting mode,” he said. “This is demonstrated by their own curiosity to go outside the box.”

COMMUNITY LEADERS PROMOTING ACCOUNTABILITY OF EBOLA RESOURCES

As described on page 75, Community Leaders’ Forums during the height of the Ebola crisis served as a valuable means for citizens to share their fears and concerns in regards to Ebola and develop targeted action plans. The success of the approach led IREX to continue working through Main Partners to facilitate forums to specifically address accountability of Ebola funds. IREX worked with a local consultant to lead a training on accountability and a workshop on holding Community Leaders’ Forums for 13 partners—the RPs, partners CEMESP and NAYMOTE that became Main Partners during the Ebola crisis, and six project CSOs selected and mentored by the RPs. These partners then relayed this training and CLF approach down to community leaders in 41 communities in 11 counties, preparing a total of 688 community leaders to understand that accounta-

bility of the government to its citizens is considered a basic human right.

A significant focus of this work was to empower community members to understand accountability and their right, as citizens, to information on how funds were spent. But because questioning someone in authority has not been the custom in Liberia, they started the training with a worry: “When a community leader walks into an official’s office asking how he distributed Ebola resources, the official is going to ask, ‘Who are you?’” They needed to understand this right and practice how to ask questions while still demonstrating respect.

Community leaders found the trainings eye opening. Customarily, “engaging public officials on issues of accountability was seen as disrespecting your leaders or undermining authority,” explained trainer Sam Darpolar of WANEP. However, after training “they realized that accountability was about rights and quality of service delivery.” One woman brought another female community leader to the second day of training, saying she shouldn’t miss it. In another town residents carried placards protesting that more people couldn’t join the training. After training in Klay, a woman proclaimed, “We cannot read and write but we have knowledge to discuss issues on accountability.” In Lofa, a participant reasoned, “The workshop has taught us that as a leader, you yourself should serve as role model, so accountability should be voluntary. We should not wait for people to ask us—this way we will be transparent.”

Next the CSOs mentored community leaders to identify their top concerns about Ebola spending and develop an action plan for pursuing them. One community filed a Freedom of Information request to the County Superintendent. In another community the seven block leaders designed and conducted a survey of 169 households to verify their own reports of what was received and reported the findings at a public meeting. Letters were sent to government officials and community leaders visited public offices to arrange meetings. Most officials agreed to come to meetings to address the residents, but sometimes pre-meetings and promises were required to convince officials that the desire for information was not antagonistic, and they would not be attacked. Gradually the idea took hold that requests for information could be merely a practice of one's rights in a democracy.

Within two months of the training, countless meetings had been held in government and NGO offices, and 33 communities had organized town hall forums and roundtables at which

government officials personally addressed their constituents and submitted themselves to question and answer periods. The officials included development superintendents, district commissioners, paramount chiefs, mayors, elected representatives to the legislature, and heads of Ebola Task Forces. It was a new and exhilarating experience. At the end of a forum, a paramount chief speaking on behalf of those invited to give account of resources handled, expressed gratitude to the organizers. "Today, the leadership of the district has been invited by a handful of citizens to give account of materials and funds they received during the Ebola period," she said, "This same group, together with those of us who were invited to give account, can invite our county authorities and legislators to give account of their actions. The power to improve our district lies in our hands." ■

LESSONS LEARNED

After five and one-half years of implementation, IREX and its partners have benefitted from a wealth of experiences through implementing the CSML program that can inform future work in Liberia and in the region. It is impossible to include every learning experience that IREX encountered throughout the implementation of CSML. Described below are IREX's major findings that should prove the most informative to USAID, Implementing Partners, local entities, and other development partners committed to fostering the development of Liberia.

1) INCREASED TIME FOR TRAINING AND PEER SUPPORT IMPROVED MAIN PARTNER PERFORMANCE AND OUTCOMES

Before the war began in 1989, Liberia was home to very few NGOs. By the war's end the number had exploded, NGO work had become one of the

few legitimate and high potential ways to earn a living in the decimated economy. During the war, work had consisted mainly of farming and hunting upcountry, with some functions like school teaching possible in the cities and some rural areas. Many people, both in and out of refugee and displaced person camps, passed most of their days doing almost nothing, very few had seen NGOs or other offices functioning. There was not a culture of office work during this period and little knowledge of office systems and performance expectations.

CSML was launched with the aim of building the capacity of 130 CSOs, working through Resource Partner (RP) organizations. This required heavy reliance on the RPs in order to spread interventions across the large number of beneficiaries. Once the baseline organizational capacity assessments were performed, it was learned that the RPs themselves, as

well as the local CSOs, had large institutional weaknesses to overcome. It was also apparent in visiting RPs and CSOs and in administering the OCAs that in the first year the organizations were generous in rating their capacities, generally because they either wanted to make a good impression or they didn't have enough experience at that time to know their weaknesses. Thus their scores didn't always tell the full story.

As the RPs staffed up for the CSML program, people were put in Master Trainer or Mentor positions with no experience in training and capacity development. The CSML capacity building program was built upon the premise that frequent one-on-one mentoring must go hand-in-hand with training, yet the RPs needed to be in the field immediately. They were given a Training of Trainers workshop and later a one-week mentoring workshop, yet this was not enough of a substantial investment

and the two-person IREX Civil Society Team, who mentored the RPs as much as time allowed. One solution was to match weak trainers with strong trainers. For example WANEP Master Trainer Sam Darpolar delivered training jointly with WONGOSOL Master Trainer Munah Kieh Kelly, who admitted that she was not sure of herself as a trainer and wanted to learn (see story on page 11). In another case, Mabel Kear of YMCA tirelessly mentored the other members of the YMCA training/mentoring team while she carried most of the work. As she would ask another trainer or mentor to lead a session, she provided feedback to help them make improvements. The same approach occurred as the teams went into CSOs' offices to mentor. Some would lead the majority of a training at first and gradually turn over more responsibility to other team members, which allowed them to mentor different persons in the same organi-



zation on different topics simultaneously.

In acknowledgement of the inherent limitations, USAID agreed to reduce the number of CSOs to 62 while adding the 19 community radio stations to the mentoring schedule. Thus the four RP teams mentored 79 organizations, increasing mentoring to two days per month, and later to three. With this increased practice, more training, quarterly meetings and mentoring from the IREX team, the RP Master Trainers and Mentors increased their own knowledge and confidence and brought better benefits to the CSOs and radio stations.

2) “SHOCK TREATMENT “ - INCENTIVES AND COMPETITION HELPED MOTIVATE UNDER-PERFORMING CSOS

By the second year, 62 CSO partners had been selected, assessed, and assigned to RP organizations for mentoring. In the third year, when RP mentoring abilities were stronger and the capacity of partner CSOs was evident, RPs reported at their quarterly meetings that CSOs were not progressing at the same rate. The IREX CS team studied the OCA assessments, RPs’ quarterly reports, mentoring checklists, and small grants files and concluded that the variations did not vary by RP: all RPs had strong performing and weak performing CSOs. In addition, they did not correlate with the strength of the organization. In-depth discussion at the quarterly meetings provided much evidence that the RPs were right in their belief that the differences aligned with the CSOs’ motiva-

tion. In several cases, as the mentoring checklists showed, the CSO’s office was closed up when the RP arrived for a pre-arranged mentoring meeting. This sometimes happened consistently for periods of time. In addition, some did not appropriately select participants for CSML trainings, which some saw as an opportunity for travel to the county capital and a source of a money in the form of per diem. Some Executive Directors chose to go to every training themselves, taking up one of only two slots allocated for their organization, while others seemed to send those they wanted to reward even if the person was not a good fit for the opportunity, for example sending an accountant to an advocacy training.

Thus, in the third year the RPs recommended groupings for the CSOs according to how much effort they were putting forward. They put CSOs in three groups labeled A, B, and C, with C being those who would be watched for at least a quarter and considered for elimination from the program if their level of effort did not improve. The CSOs were all informed of the group in which they were placed, and the C group was told that they would not be invited to training or be eligible to receive small grants if they did not participate in mentoring. The RPs called this “shock treatment” in order to wake up the C group and motivate them for better performance. In some cases the RPs took 1-2 staff members from group A to join mentoring sessions for group C CSOs to further encourage peer learning and a cooperative civil society environment.

The groupings and progress were discussed at every quarterly meeting, and IREX and RPs discovered that the “shock treatment” was having a positive effect. This was not so much because of the threat of missing training, the RPs said, because there was a tendency to invite them anyway, but rather because of the shock of being in the poorest performing group. In the end, no CSOs were dropped from the CSML program.

3) LACK OF CORE FUNDING AND DEPENDENCY ON SHORT-TERM GRANTS LIMITS CSO EFFECTIVENESS

The work of CSOs in Liberia could achieve greater impact if they were better resourced. Emblematic of this problem was the fact that a large number of the partner CSOs were not able to employ or retain key permanent staff. Some CSOs, such as the YMCA and NAEAL, had enough grant funds to keep project staff on board continuously, but even they become operationally vulnerable if grant funding were to decrease significantly within a year. Other CSOs function as largely voluntary organizations, paying staff only when grant funding is received. Due to their small size CSOs in this group tend to get short term grants, such as the CSML small grants, that only provide enough funds to pay staff salaries for a few months. This leads to staff departures to find farm work or whatever other paying jobs they can find. As noted in this report, great progress has been made in CSOs’ capacity to raise funds for projects, but this seldom provides core funding. Other strides have been

made: NEP, LIWOMAC, Feeding House Organization, and several others succeeded in acquiring land and building offices so that they will never pay rent again, and NEP has even begun to explore online crowd-sourced funding to sustain its core activities.

For the purposes of the CSML program, it would have helped if there had been enough funds available to provide every CSO a laptop computer and the necessary stationery supplies. Mentoring a CSO without a computer meant that the mentor’s laptop and sometimes a printer had to be carried to the CSO’s office to develop documents—for example for human resources records—print it on site (or wherever they could find power), and leave it for the CSO staff to work on revisions. Then when the mentor returned for the next mentoring session they could access the document again and put in their revisions. CSOs with a computer could be trained to set up financial records on Excel, while others could not. Very small investments in basic operational support could have had a substantial impact on partner CSO learning and effectiveness.

4) ACCOUNTABILITY MATTERS—EFFORTS TO PROVIDE SPACE FOR DIALOGUE ON ACCOUNTABILITY ARE CRUCIAL BUT REQUIRE TIME TO PROGRESS

Explaining to citizens their right to transparent governance and to inquire about how others have handled funds on their behalf was one of the most rewarding activities of the CSML



IREX / Dara Lipton

program. Corruption in Liberia exists at every level, from family to national government, through many practices, and for many reasons. One of the important principles contained in the CSML anti-corruption section in the earlier Advocacy II training was that everyone who witnessed or suspected corruption of any kind and did nothing was partly responsible for the problem. Trainers began the section by printing on flipchart paper “We have met the enemy, and it is us” and led discussions around the theme. IREX’s Ebola Accountability training and mentoring took this idea a step further by directly showing citizens how to make such inquiries in ways that could not be easily rebuffed or put them in jeopardy. This was yet another example of the importance of regular and frequent mentoring after training.

The results were impressive—as recounted in the portion of this report

on Accountability of Ebola Funds beginning on page 80, almost all of the communities that benefited from Community Leaders’ Forums succeeded in going to government or NGO actors to request information about their use of Ebola resources, and 33 out of 41 were successful not just in holding these meetings, but in getting those officials to come to large forums of citizens and publicly answer questions on this issue. Citizens and officials learned that this is possible in Liberia. Now that these officials—as well as the few who declined to come to meetings—have been given a warning, they need to know that it will happen again. Thus the meetings were a step in a process that should not be cut off. The communities that have reached this point need to continue to put pressure on public servants to be transparent in their use of public resources. However they need further coaching to be

able to carry this out. Also many more communities and citizens need this training and mentoring; citizens were so excited at this knowledge and opportunity that they uniformly asked that it be repeated for their neighbors and friends.

The cost extension to promote Ebola Accountability—arising from factors beyond the control of USAID/Liberia or IREX—were squeezed into a four-month period, and after the two steps of the step-down training and the necessary community entry procedures, was actually carried out in only two months. This success indicates that more of this same work over longer periods of time could be an important entry point for fighting corruption.

5) OVERLY CENTRALIZED LEADERSHIP LIMITS INSTITUTIONAL GROWTH

In working with CSOs, IREX observed that many CSOs founded by a single person were not growing because that leader did not delegate well. Often, this leader would not have a succession plan or any vision for a future of the organization without him/her at the helm. Heads of CSOs, especially in large successful organizations, by and large did not appear to recognize the value of leadership training and failed to see how such training for themselves could possibly strengthen their organization as a whole. Leaders of large organizations also don't easily accept that they can improve themselves, and can be reticent to tacitly acknowledge the fact publicly by participating in a training event with others.

IREX attempted several strategies to get CSO managers to leadership training. It quickly became obvious that heads of main partner organizations were not invested in a training on non-profit business planning and institutional fund diversification. They would routinely leave the room to answer phone calls under the guise of having more pressing business to attend to. There was also a widespread feeling of humiliation at having to be trained by a fellow Liberian whose social status they perceived to be beneath them. To address this reality, IREX even brought in a trainer from South African for a particular course. However, continuing such a practice is not financially viable and does not address the root cause of issues. Instead, IREX changed course, inviting the heads of Main Partner organizations to convene for regular "Leadership Breakfasts". As a forum to share and problem solve similar issues shared across organizations, the meetings were not perceived as trainings for struggling managers yet provided a space for learning and professional growth none the less.

The TCC/ATI team, also observed that organizational capacity is concentrated among a few dynamic individuals within many CSOs. Problematically, when one of these individuals is no longer able to lead, either due to unfortunate circumstances or lengthy stints abroad, as was the case with some of the LFIC members and the Secretariat, the transition to new leadership can be slow and cause momentum to stagnate. Taking this into account the TCC team learned to identify and build the capacity of sev-

eral individuals within various networks and encourage the sharing of leadership roles as necessary. Similarly, utilizing local leaders and networks at the county level, rather than relying on more centralized national leaders, diffused authority and helped FOI efforts better permeate in communities.

6) LESS IS MORE— CONCENTRATING ON FEWER ACTIVITIES YIELDS HIGHER QUALITY RESULTS

One of the major challenges with the CSML program was that it tried to do too much in a short amount of time.

Within the media program in particular activities were numerous and disparate: Pilot Subscription Service, Sol Plaatje, High School to Journalism, training and mentoring of Monrovia-based outlets in organizational and content-creation skills, training and mentoring of community radio stations in organizational and content-creation skills, establishment of the Equipment Resource Pool, Women’s Media Initiative, etc. All of these activities were valuable and all were interconnected in the aim of achieving a stronger holistic media sector. However, inevitably, implementing so many activities with a small team and within five years is challenging, and it is possible that higher quality outputs could have been achieved with a simplified, pared down media approach.

7) CIVIL SOCIETY AND LOCAL MEDIA ARE ESSENTIAL PART- NERS IN CRISIS RESPONSE

During the EVD crisis, it quickly became evident that a lack of reliable information was exacerbating the outbreak. Isolated communities across the country were not receiving basic information on how to protect themselves or manage cases. And as the Liberian government remained unable to respond to the scale of the crisis it was obvious that local groups would have to take matters into their own hands.

CSOs and CRSs—organizations that best understood the realities of the havoc Ebola was wreaking in their communities—were perfectly positioned to respond. As trusted arbiters of information, CSOs and CRSs served as a lifeline during the crisis and acted as community mediators and trusted voices.

“We didn’t have to wait for the government, we could do it ourselves,” said S. Aaron Weah-Weah III of NAYMOTE. Through community leadership forums CSOs such as NAYMOTE worked within the traditional and formal structures of communities to plan, implement, and provide ownership of Ebola response activities. For example when community members in Bomi feared stigmatization for seeking treatment at an ETU, a CSO worked to equip volunteers with WHO facts to sensitize residents to the realities faced by Ebola survivors and victims’ families.

CSOs and CRSs succeeded where the government or outsiders could not. Creative solutions and rapid response of trusted actors validated official health messages and delivered immediate, highly visible solutions.

Civil society and local media must be engaged as early as possible in crisis management. Doing so can help mitigate civic unrest and better communicate crucial information where the need is greatest. The Ebola outbreak showed just how vulnerable weak systems are to external crisis but also showed the valuable contributions that can be made by civic actors.

8) MENTORING HOLDS PEOPLE ACCOUNTABLE, BUT MONITORING IS NEEDED TO ENSURE QUALITY OF SUPPORT

Mentoring was one of the most successful aspects of CSML. IREX didn't simply provide Monrovia-based reporters training in thematic areas such as conflict sensitive reporting, investigative reporting, peace and conflict, politics and governance. IREX

hired a team of consultants to mentor the reporters as they developed story ideas, pursued reporting, and produced their stories. Consultants also worked with reporters on field trips and during their reporting on the Ebola crisis and the accountability of Ebola funds.

The benefits of this approach is evident in the results achieved by Samu-ka Konneh and Julius Kontoe both of whom point to their mentoring as a primary reason for professional success and growth under the CSML program (see pages 25 and 70)

However, mentoring is only useful when the mentor is very competent and rigorous monitoring of mentors is necessary to ensure a high level of quality is sustained. The LMC, which was charged early on with mentoring community radio journalists, lacked the capacity to mentor reporters



IREX/David McDonald

effectively, and thus the community radio journalists did not benefit as much as they could have from their support. To reverse this trend, IREX began working with media veterans to serve as community radio mentors who spent extensive periods of time in the field working one-on-one with station staff. The mentors also maintained more rigorous ongoing communication with IREX staff to ensure issues were addressed as they arose. This more demanding, hands-on, approach proved more advantageous than previous approaches.

9) MOTIVATING MANAGERS—ADDITIONAL WORK WAS NEEDED TO INCREASE THE BUY-IN OF MONROVIA-BASED MEDIA MANAGERS

Media Managers embraced the concept of CSML, but getting them to make systematic changes proved frustrating and tedious. Despite numerous group and one-on-one meetings, customized trainings and grants to support the institutions, very few Monrovia-based media outlets implemented systematic changes to improve their output.

In recognition of this barrier, in year three, IREX diverted the grants from institutions as a whole to individual reporters, funding field trips and investigative reporting to enable reporters to broaden their scope of reporting and draw attention to issues affecting people in rural areas. Media Managers supported the effort, but failed to recognize how they could be investing in similar initiatives for their reporters.

One potential means of motivating further buy-in from Media Managers is to provide professional development opportunities abroad (in the region) to enhance their skills. Safe guards such as editors being able to qualify for the funds only after a year or two of improving organizational systems and demonstrating clear commitments to professional integrity could mitigate risk of abuse of the benefit.

10) COMMITMENTS TO GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN THE MEDIA STILL LAG

Despite the gains achieved through IREX's Women's Media Initiative, more work needs to be done to empower women in the sector, particularly at the community radio level.

Women's representation at the community radio level remains disproportionately low, and attrition rates are high. Reasons for leaving are typically due to poor salary, sexual harassment, and/or better educational and professional opportunities outside of the sector. Additional efforts are needed to promote an environment that can sustain community radio staff as a whole, including women. Work must also be done with Station Managers—particularly at community radio stations—to better understand the value of bringing on women staff, paying women fairly, and promoting a safe space for all employees, free of SEA. Managers must also understand that greater women's representation in the media doesn't just benefit women, it benefits society as a whole. ■