



The GOL-CSO ACCORD

A Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of Liberia and Civil Society
Organizations of Liberia



Dedication

This Government of Liberia-Civil Society Partnership Memorandum of Understanding and its corresponding Policy Framework are dedicated to the people of Liberia from all walks of life that over the years have demonstrated remarkable resilience in the face of grave challenges time after time. The Liberian People deserve improvement in the quality of their lives and are already taking steps in the villages, towns, and cities to advance their lives. The Government and the Civil Society Organization through this endeavor challenge each other to a partnership that will bring something more and something new to make national development work for the Liberian people

Message from the President



From the founding of Liberia until now civil society organizations have been working in active partnership with the Government in providing vital services for the citizenry. Indeed, it was a civil society organization, the American Colonization Society that founded Liberia. Most recently, civil society organizations have played pivotal roles in providing relief services during Liberia's civil conflict and, thereafter, are also helping in the recovery process.

Both the Government and civil society organizations are aware of the importance of forging an effective partnership for the purpose of accelerating socio-economic and political development in Liberia.

The Government is also fully aware that, on its own, it will be a daunting task to engage civil society. However, in partnership with civil society organizations, full participation of the citizenry, including the marginalized and poor, can be guaranteed, so that, empowered, they can take part in democratic governance and the development process. The partnership between Government and civil society organizations can also ensure that vital public services are provided.

The Government of Liberia is therefore consciously and deliberately entering into this agreement with civil society organization in recognition of their pivotal role in the national development process and the need for a more structured relationship.

This Government-Civil Society Accord is a memorandum of understanding in which civil society organizations are aligned with Government's development priorities to assist the Government in achieving those priorities. This partnership can only yield win-win-win results for the Government, civil society organizations and the entire citizenry. I welcome it.

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
PRESIDENT

Foreword by the Minister of Finance and Development Planning



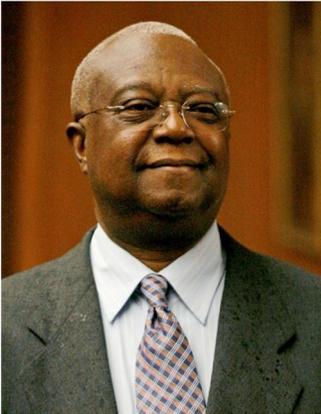
The Government of Liberia has had a variety of partners since its inception, but the role of civil society organizations as development partners has never been given its due recognition and prominence until recently in the 1990s when an NGO Policy was formulated. Of all the Government's partners, civil society organizations are perhaps the most important and strategic in accelerating grassroots development. This is why the Government is committed to strengthening the enabling environment within which civil society organizations can realize their potential and give impetus to Government's myriad development programs, among which are the *Agenda for Transformation* and the *National Healing and Reconciliation Roadmap*, both of which are supported for within the framework of the *Liberia RISING National Vision 2030*.

Strengthening the enabling environment includes, broadening the space for civil society organizations to thrive as independent entities that exercise their civil liberties, albeit in a responsible manner; supporting the building of institutional and human capacity of civil society organizations so that they can become more productive and effective partners with Government in the development and implementation of development programs; and assisting in CSOs' resource mobilization ventures.

The Ministry of Finance and Development Planning will continue to strengthen its partnership with CSOs in national development, supporting their comparative advantage in undertaking certain grassroots and community endeavors and in the objectivity CSOs can demonstrate as partners in advocacy and monitoring.

Amara M. Konneh
MINISTER

Foreword by the Chairman of the Governance Commission



Prior to and during the Liberian Civil War, the role of the Liberian civil society organizations had been pivotal in the delivery of goods and services throughout the country. The delivery of public services was left to the civil society organizations as a result of governance breakdown in the institutions and structures of the national government due to the civil crisis. A broad spectrum of civil society organizations including CBOs, NGOs, INGOs, FBOs and the private sector had to step up to provide services in health, education, agriculture, road maintenance, water and sanitation and other specialized areas.

At the introduction of a national democratic government in 2006, civil society organizations had become very highly visible, influential and dominant as service providers in many areas. As widespread as they were throughout the country, the need to regularize their functions and specializations within the framework of the state became apparent. But it seemed that as donors returned and sought partners for collaboration, CSOs, except few, became less specialized and more generalized, shifting everywhere there was funding. Their functions became more overlapping and unstructured thereby necessitating Government's intervention through an improved approach to existing NGO regulations and to strengthen standards by which all CSOs including NGOs would operate as development partners with government.

The Civic Engagement, National Identity and Vision Mandate Area, engaged the CSOs in Monrovia and later elsewhere in Liberia in order to gain more understanding of the landscape of NGOs and CSOs as a basis for working with them on policy issues related to ensuring effective partnership with government in policy making and therefore, strengthening their capacity for policy engagements for development. The objectives pursued were (1) to establish and/or strengthen umbrella leadership structures with which CSOs can be identified and categorized and through which they can undertake collaborative engagements in the fifteen counties; (2) undertake the mapping of CSOs in the fifteen counties and produce a CSO Directory, (3) build leadership capacity in order to strengthen their rights-based approach to advocacy grounded in professional and technical knowledge, and (4) Develop with GoL an agreed framework for policy-based dialogues and consultations to strengthen democratic governance and national development. To date a National Civil Society Council was established in 2012, which now requires significant capacity development and support to develop the desired umbrella leadership and thematic competencies. An initial mapping of NGOS was also undertaken in 2012 and arrangements for updating the directory of CSOs have started. This Government of Liberia Civil Society Partnership Policy represents work on our desired aim to make our partnership more predictable and productive.

The above objectives are founded in the following principles:(a) Good governance requires a partnership between government and societal organizations;(b) In order to be a constructive partner, the knowledge-based capacity and proper leadership orientation of CSOs must be developed; (c) It is in government's interest and the interest of the entire society to have orderly, informed and productive policy engagements between government and civil society; and (d) A framework for GOL-CSO policy dialogues and consultations must be established as an agreed governance mechanism to end the situation of ad hoc engagements.

Amos C. Sawyer
CHAIRMAN

Foreword by the Chairperson of the National Civil Society Council of Liberia



Civil society organizations are aware of their role as advocates for social, economic and political reform. In addition to implementing the reform agenda, civil society organizations have the potential for ensuring mass participation in the governance process. They reflect the multifaceted nature of the Liberian Society and represent its interests, concerns, and aspirations.

In view of their strategic importance, their potential needs to be harnessed so that they can deliver on socio-economic and political development. One sure way of harnessing their potential is to develop their capacities, since civil society organizations are at varying levels on the 'organizational development ladder'. This must claim the utmost attention of the Government, if the partnership is to blossom and bear fruit.

The kind of organizational development that is envisioned for civil society organizations, if they are to play their partnership role, requires the establishment of effective governance, management and accountability structures. It will also require access to secured funding so that civil society organizations network and collaborate and not compete with each other for diminishing levels of funding.

There is no doubt that as the umbrella body of civil society organizations in Liberia, the National Civil Society Council of Liberia takes seriously the GOL-CSO Accord that it is entering into. However, realistically, the best way to protect and preserve the partnership would be to work to create the 'enabling environment' for civil society organization which, among other things, involves ensuring their independence and democratic space as well as facilitating the organizational development and access to resources.

As with all memoranda of understanding, there are undertakings for all parties. The National Council will work assiduously to ensure that it remains a productive partner in democratic governance and development in Liberia.

Ms. Frances Greaves
CHAIRPERSON

Introduction

Good governance in democratic Liberia is the result of partnerships among government, civil society, the private sector and the international community operating under the leadership of government. Since the induction of a democratically elected government in 2006, the Government of Liberia, with the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs and the Governance Reform Commission, in partnership with a range of civil society organizations, began a process of consultations designed to ultimately establish a policy that would guide the relationship between the Government of Liberia and CSOs. Since the consultations began, there have been significant developments within the institutions leading the discussions as well as in the outcomes: the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs has morphed into the new Ministry of Finance and Development Planning; the Governance Reform Commission has been transformed into Governance Commission; and the participating civil society organizations have formed an umbrella known as the National Civil Society Council.

Reaching the understandings which constitute the contents of this policy required of government patience borne out of a conviction that, in the long run, participatory government makes for sustainable governance; and that engagement with civil society – though sometimes tumultuous – can build trust, which can sustain partnership for democratic governance.

Civil society organizations have had their struggles: struggles to manage internal frictions, mobilize resources, and develop self-identities and independence. But of special importance in this case, is the struggle to manage, if not overcome, the suspicions of government's motives. This Memorandum of Understanding will not end these struggles and suspicions, but will reduce them and constitute a firm framework for sustained engagement.

This Memorandum of Understanding draws from a larger policy document and focuses on critical commitments, which are at the core of a functional and productive relationship, and which must subsist between government and civil society organizations in order for Liberia to pursue its national vision, achieve its development objectives and advance reconciliation and healing in the land.

What the Government of Liberia and Civil Society Organizations Want

After extensive consultations, the Government of Liberia and civil society organizations have agreed to strengthen their partnership in working for the realization of the following set of shared objectives:

1. An enabling environment for the development of a viable civil society;
2. Broadened and deepened participatory governance through Liberian Government partnerships with citizens and development partners for the purpose of building an inclusive and cohesive society;
3. An integrated partnership role of a strong, diverse and independent civil society sector in national development processes; and,
4. Amplified voices of the poor and marginalized in national development.

Government and CSO Actions

The Government of Liberia and civil society organizations commit themselves to general and specific actions to advance this partnership, working for the realization of their shared objectives:

General Commitments:

The Government of Liberia will:

- Support an annual National Partnership Summit to bring together government and civil society leaders to review partnership obligations and foster joint planning;
- Contribute to the establishment of a GOL/CSO Partnership Policy Technical Working Group that will monitor implementation of the GOL/CSO Partnership Policy and organize the GOL/CSO National Partnership Summit; and,
- Support the design and implementation of a CSO Capacity Development Program.

The National Civil Society Council of Liberia (NCSCCL) will:

- Ensure that all CSOs are fully registered and accredited;
- Contribute to the establishment of a GOL/CSO Partnership Policy Technical Working Group;

- Update the directory of civil society organizations every two years. The Directory shall locate all member CSOs, provide information on areas of specialization, linking them with the various sector ministries;
- Review, revise and adopt a CSO code of ethics, consistent with the National Code of Conduct, and ensure its implementation by the entire NCSCL membership; and,
- Ensure that as a council, it will be faithful to its organic rules, other governance documents and regulations; and that it will be transparent and accountable in its operations.

Specific Commitments

In order to meet the GOL-CSO partnership objectives outlined above, the following commitments are hereby made by each partner:

Objective 1: An enabling environment for the development of a viable civil society

The Government of Liberia will:

- 1.1. Support an enabling environment for civil society, both in law and practice, leading to policies that promote more effective, equitable and sustainable development, and inclusive growth;
- 1.2. Draft a CSO Bill for enactment by the National Legislature;
- 1.3. Support and resource CSOs in fair and reasonable ways, including the encouragement of the establishment of a Civil Society Trust Fund (by parties to this Accord) where CSOs are deliberate in helping the Government fulfill development goals;
- 1.4. Work with local and national support and development organizations to ensure that CSOs' capacity and capability to deliver positive outcomes are improved;
- 1.5. Improve access for CSOs to State resources and facilities;
- 1.6. Commission studies, through the Governance Commission and the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, to strengthen GOL-CSO partnership.

The National Civil Society Council of Liberia (NCSCL) will:

- 1.1. Ensure that campaigning or advocacy is truthful, honest and supported by evidence, including information about the source and range of people and communities represented or affected;
- 1.2. Uphold their independence and focus on the cause(s) they represent, irrespective of their relationships with the Government, donors, and global CSO alliances or otherwise; and
- 1.3. Commission studies to strengthen the GOL-CSO partnership.

Objective 2: Broaden and deepen participatory governance, through the Government of Liberia's partnerships with citizens and development partners, to help build a Society that is both inclusive and cohesive.

The Government of Liberia will ensure that:

- 2.1. CSO laws make ownership, registration and accreditation processes for CSOs as easy as those for businesses or other profit-making organizations;
- 2.2. CSOS are consulted by GOL as a partner in processes of formulating and implementing public policy. Toward this end, a structure for consultation will be organized in each public sector area;
- 2.3. There is representation and participation of CSOs on the county development steering committees, as well as the county and social development funds; and
- 2.4. While demanding accountability and proper reporting, utilize existing CSO networks for wider social mobilization, awareness and information dissemination as well for enhanced citizen participation in national decision-making processes, especially at the grassroots levels of society.

The National Civil Society Council of Liberia will ensure that there is:

- 2.1. Competent, principled and committed CSO representation and participation at all levels of consultations with government on policy formulation and policy implementation;
- 2.2. Collaboration with GOL to broaden national ownership of policies, plans and programs, by utilizing existing CSO networks for wider social mobilization, awareness and dissemination; and
- 2.3. CSO commitment to deepen citizen participation in, and feedback on, national decision-making processes, especially at the grassroots level; using processes of effective reporting and proper accountability.

Objective 3: Integrate the role of civil society organizations as a strong, diverse and independent development partner of government in national development processes.

The Government of Liberia will:

- 3.1. Appoint focal points in all ministries, agencies and commissions and at county and district levels to improve registration and accreditation processes and, in so doing, ensure the availability of data for better planning and CSO coordination.

The National Civil Society Council of Liberia will:

- 3.1 Establish specialized thematic committees that will serve as civil society focal points to engage with Government at various levels, and with other development actors.

Objective 4: Promote multi-sector approaches that amplify the voices of the poor and marginalized people in national development.

The Government of Liberia will:

- 4.1 Work with the National Civil Society Council of Liberia in consulting with civil society and reflecting their views in the formulation of policies, programs and systems for service delivery;
- 4.2 Identify and remove barriers that may prevent citizen participation in national decision-making; and
- 4.3 Ensure that invitations for the participation of citizens and the National Civil Society Council of Liberia shall be timely.

The National Civil Society Council of Liberia will:

- 4.1 Work with civil society and reflect their views in the formulation of policies, programs and systems for service delivery;
- 4.2 Work with the Government and other development partners to develop the capacities of civil society organizations through the provision of training, technical assistance and logistical support;
- 4.3 Serve as an honest peace broker between government, the private sector and communities; and
- 4.4 Develop and articulate 'exit plans' to allow for deliberate growth and development of the community as an active stakeholder in national development processes.

The signing of this memorandum of understanding by the Government of Liberia and the National Civil Society Council of Liberia reaffirms the two parties' commitment to work within the framework of the Government's Partnership Policy for Civil Society and shall serve as a solemn commitment for conducting and directing engagement of the Government of Liberia and civil society organizations.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the parties hereto have caused this Agreement to be duly executed on this _____ day of _____ 201__.

FOR THE NATIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY COUNCIL OF LIBERIA (NCSCCL)

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Position: _____

Date: _____

FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF LIBERIA (GOL):

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Position: _____

Date: _____