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The GOL-CSO ACCORD

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



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Excerpts from the GOL – CSO Partnership Policy and Accord

The Liberian Government has signed a partnership agreement named the “GOL- CSO Accord: A Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of Liberia and Civil Society Organizations”, accompanied by a GOL-CSO Partnership Policy. The Accord focuses on critical commitments of both Liberian Government and Civil Society Organizations which must subsist in order for Liberia to pursue its national vision, achieve its development objectives, and advance reconciliation and healing in the land.

Both Government and Civil Society Organizations, CSOs (under the umbrella organization – National Civil Society Council of Liberia, NCSCCL) are committed **to strengthening their partnership for the realization of four shared objectives**. These include:

- ✚ Ensuring an enabling environment for the development of a viable civil society;
- ✚ Broadening and deepening participatory governance through government partnerships with citizens and development partners to ensure of an inclusive and cohesive society;
- ✚ Assure of an integrated partnership role for a strong, diverse, independent civil society sector in national development processes; and
- ✚ Protect multi-stakeholder approaches to amplify voices of the poor and marginalized in national development.

The purposes of this partnership are to:

- a. create a registry of registered *CSOs, private and non-profit service providers, “volunteer” driven organizations and alliances, through which people organize to pursue shared interests, values, beliefs, and objectives;*
- b. Understand how civil society organizations are organized, their area of specialization, scope, and operational locations.

Civil Society Organizations are found at the global, regional, national and local levels, and are membership driven working for the benefit of their members, and/or providing services to society. CSOs are considered development actors in their own right and may form networks and strategic alliances to scale up their work for greater impact.

The Partnership policy stratifies Civil Society Organizations in Liberia to include non-governmental organizations (**NGOs**) which may be national or transnational, community-based organizations (**CBOs**), grassroots organizations (**GROs**), faith-based organizations (**FBOs**), people movements (**PMs**), trade unions (**TUs**), cooperatives (including traditional *susus* and *kuus*), consumer groups (**CGs**), human rights organizations (**HROs**), women associations (**WAs**), youth groups (**YGs**), professional associations (**PAs**), student movements (**SMs**), not-for-profit independent media, and academic and research institutions. Examples of CSOs also include but not limited to advocacy groups, capacity development and support organizations, rural women groups, farmers’ associations, faith-based relief and development agencies, philanthropic organizations, human rights groups, labor unions, youth and student organizations, co-operatives (including *susus*, *kuus* and mutual lending societies), village associations, professional associations, independent research institutes, and humanitarian assistance organizations.

The Governance Commission held numerous consultations with CSOs while the Ministry of Finance for Development Planning, MFDP, consulted with national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on the formulation of national policies to guide CSOs and NGOs operations in Liberia. According to Dr. Amos Sawyer, Chairman of the Governance Commission in pursuit of these objectives both GOL (GC and MFDP) and NCSCL have been networking to achieve the following objectives through appropriate activities, most of which have already been accomplished:

- (1) Establishment and/or strengthening umbrella leadership structures through which CSOs can be identified and categorized, and 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.

It is important to note that the partnership policy framework seeks a more empowering environment for structured engagement with civil society organizations that are dedicated to strengthening the country's resilience and development. The process includes information sharing, joint capacity development programs, national consensus building dialogues, consultations, operational collaboration, and funding arrangements. The partnership policy therefore encourages all civil society organizations to register and obtain accreditation from government and membership in the National Civil Society Council of Liberia to benefit fully from the partnership.

Liberia has signed and is committed to a number of international instruments and principles which prioritize the empowerment of civil society/civil society organizations. These are expected to help guide the government and CSO partnership. It can be recalled that the Liberian government, in the past, committed itself to a number of international principles aimed at empowering civil society in a democracy. These include:

- a. The **doctrine of "maximum feasible participation"** of Liberian citizens which is considered a fundamental principle in the governance of Liberia, and a critical indicator of both policy-making and policy implementation. This Government and CSOs Partnership Policy is embedded in this notion and inspires the general agenda for enhancing state and society cooperation "under conditions of equality as to not only advance the general welfare of the Liberian people but also the economic development of Liberia" (Chapter II on General Principles of National Policy, Article 4 and 7 of the Liberian Constitution).
- b. The **Paris Declaration** and subsequent **Aid Effectiveness Agenda** outcomes which helped to articulate a **Draft National Aid Policy** guided by the principles of **National Ownership; Alignment; Donor Harmonization; Managing For Results; and Mutual Accountability**. The Accra Agenda for Action reaffirms the commitments of the Paris Declaration, and consists of four clauses relating to government and civil society partnerships for national development: (1) participation of civil society in national policy formulation, (2) creating

an enabling environment for civil society's growth and development; (3) the need for civil society's effectiveness (with focus on results), and (4) the need to respect the autonomy of civil society.

- c. **Agenda for Transformation (AfT)** which highlights Government' commitment to the principles of inclusive development and partnership with civil society to "help Liberia achieve a higher standard of Living". The AfT calls for a combined effort of government, civil society, and the private sector to deliver on national expectations, noting that "success depends on consistent planning, effective coordination, robust implementation, prudent and efficient use of resources and a collective will to succeed".

- d. **Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation:** This 2011 agreement forms the foundation of cooperation for effective development among governments, donors, CSOs, and other development actors.

It guides international efforts to reduce duplication, harmonize humanitarian and development assistance, achieve burden sharing and division of labor, reduce transaction costs, and avoid excessive fragmentation of aid at the global, country, and sector levels.

The principle of inclusive development partnerships affirms that "openness, trust, and mutual respect and learning lie at the core of effective partnerships in support of development goals," and recognizes the different and complementary roles of all actors. The Busan Partnership recognizes that civil society is an independent development actor in its own right, and acknowledges the importance of supporting an enabling environment for civil society.

- e. **The New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States:** Liberia supports the "New Deal", and is a "volunteered" pilot country for its implementation. At the Busan High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, the *New Deal* laid out the **principles of country ownership and leadership**, and the advancement of five peace-building and state-building goals (i.e. legitimate politics, justice, citizen security, economic foundations, and revenues and services). The New Deal also calls for renewed partnerships built on: country compacts in support of national plans; political dialogue; increased transparency; improved risk management; strengthened country systems for improved service delivery; and greater flexibility and predictability.

- f. **Istanbul Principles for Development Effectiveness** forms part of the International Framework for CSO Development Effectiveness. Eight principles were developed by and for civil society to assist organizations in achieving greater development effectiveness:

Commitment to human rights and social justice

Gender equality and equity

Equitable partnerships and solidarity

Democratic ownership and participation

Environmental sustainability, transparency and accountability

People's empowerment

Creating and sharing knowledge and committing to mutual learning

Realizing positive sustainable change

It is realized that national ownership should mean more than just state ownership, and the Government working in partnership with civil society organizations has a pivotal role in creating

the enabling environment to ensure that this happens. At the same time, CSOs require State and self-regulations to ensure wider and deeper citizens participation in accountable and transparent ways that represent and incorporate citizens' concerns, needs and values into national decision-making.

This collaboration emphasizes the pivotal role of civil society in helping to build national or country ownership, and strengthening of the alignment and harmonization of policies and development processes, and fulfillment of policy commitments and implementation.

The CSOs are also expected to actively participate in discussions and be involved in the design and delivery of policies, as well as ensuring that outcomes of these engagements reach grass root communities. They, CSOs, therefore must be credible, transparent and accountable to the communities they serve, government and development partners, while at the same time serving as honest brokers of peace.

The Government through this partnership policy framework for engaging CSOs seeks a more empowering environment for structured engagement with civil society organizations that are dedicated to strengthening the country's resilience and development effectiveness. This process includes information sharing, joint capacity development programs, national consensus building dialogues, consultations, operational collaboration, and funding arrangements.

General Policy Recommendations

The general policy recommendations sharpen the government/CSOs Partnership Policy by creating the required attention to improve relationships between the two sectors, reinforce existing roles and responsibilities, and provide the platform from which a more structured obligatory relationship can be developed to effectively benefit citizens and communities, with emphasis on the policy's full implementation at all levels across Liberia.

These recommendations are in support of the four objectives of the partnership policy (as also stated in the Accord) and mentioned earlier. These recommendations have been placed in three categories: Legal framework; Institutional arrangements; and Operational guidelines.

As stated in the Accord and partnership policy, the Liberian Government committed itself to supporting the holding of an annual *National Partnership Summit* bringing both government and civil society leaders together to review partnership obligations and jointly plan and act on the design and delivery mechanisms and processes (including joint planning and implementation by CSOs and the GOL) to promote collaboration for viable government and civil society engagements.

The NCSC, GC, and MFDP, will create a GOL/CSOs Partnership Policy Technical Working Group (**PPTWG**) to monitor the implementation of this Partnership Policy Framework and support the National Partnership Summit. The PPTWG will work with line ministries and relevant CSOs thematic groups to ensure the establishment of an inclusive *Sector Plans Harmonization and Alignment Platform* that meets quarterly to review coordination, harmonization and alignment mechanisms and their implications for implementation effectiveness.

The Government will support the NCSC to design and implement CSOs Capacity Development

Programs. Also, government, through the Ministries of Internal Affairs, Finance and Development Planning, Governance Commission and other relevant line ministries shall work with the NCSCCL to develop a decentralized system for supporting CSOs accreditation at the county level, and the registration of CSOs at both the county and district levels. It is the responsibility of the NCSCCL to ensure that all of its members are fully registered with and accredited by Government.

Operational Guidelines

In addition to supporting efforts to provide the proper legislative and policy frameworks, Government plans to prioritize monitoring implementation of the partnership policy and encourages all parties to respect their commitments. This section intends to operationalize the GOL/CSOs Partnership Policy Framework through a series of mechanisms and processes providing operational guidelines.

Registration and accreditation rules and procedures for CSOs shall be reviewed and revised consistent with partnership procedures and obligations that ensure participation and ownership, and reinforce partnerships considerations of mutuality and equality, as contained in this policy.

The NCSCCL shall update the directory of CSOs in Liberia every two years. The Directory shall locate all member CSOs, provide information on areas of specialization, linking them with the various sector ministries, agencies and commissions of Government, the kind of programs and associated cost, as well as participating target groups benefiting from these interventions, among others.

The Directory shall serve as an initial point of entry for decision-making on coordination, harmonization and alignment of CSOs activities to national development priorities at sector and district levels to ensure a more balanced and inclusive approach to Liberia's development. Note that resources channeled through CSOs will support and compliment the efforts made by other development actors in all sectors, including Government and the private sector.

Within the spirit and intent of this partnership policy, the MFDP along with CSO partners shall develop a Manual of Procedures for Alignment and Harmonization to serve as a CSO advisory guideline for improved coordination and collaboration between the Government and CSOs.

The NCSCCL shall review, revise and adopt its code of ethics, consistent with the National Code of Conduct and ensure its implementation for the entire membership of CSOs.

Objective Specific Policy Recommendation

Objective (6.1): Facilitate an Enabling Environment for the development of a Viable Civil Society Sector

For over two decades the mode of engagements between CSOs and the Government has remained mainly antagonistic and generally combative. Regulations for promoting effective governance of the civil society sector have accordingly been ineffective, generally selective and highly discretionary. However, for civil society to be strengthened it must operate in an enabling environment that respects the rule of law, promotes good governance and protects human rights, including freedoms of expression, association and assembly.

The Government committed itself to supporting an enabling environment for civil society in the country, both in law and practice, leading to policies that are more effective, equitable and sustainable development, and inclusive growth. To facilitate this process, the Governance Commission, in collaboration with relevant MACs and the NCSCSL shall draft a CSO Bill for enactment by the National Legislature.

The Government encouraged “collective support” to CSOs in fair and reasonable ways including the establishment of a Civil Society Trust Fund to address human capacity needs of CSOs. Government is also considering CSOs having improved access to State resources and use of State facilities. CSOs, on the other hand, agreed to ensure that their campaigns/advocacy are truthful, honest and supported by evidence including information about the source and range of people and communities represented. CSOs also committed to ensuring that their independence is maintained, focusing on the cause(s) they represent, regardless of whatever relationship they may have with the Government, donors, global CSOs alliances or otherwise.

The Governance Commission (GC) and the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MFDP) and the NCSCSL, shall commission studies to strengthen the partnership.

Objective (6.2): Broaden and Deepen Participatory Governance through Government’s Partnerships with Citizens and Development Partners to help build an inclusive and cohesive Society

The Government’s continued engagements with civil society through the GC and MFDP to transform the existing relationship with CSOs through this Partnership Policy reinforce its political will to build a better partnership framework to deepen existing spaces for democratic governance. It also opens up new ones to broaden the democratization of public decision-making through civil society and citizens’ participation on the one hand, and CSOs willingness to engage government within a more structured and obligatory platform that is deliberate in developing civil society capacity on the other.

Legal Framework

In order to strengthen freedom of association and speech, and operationalize the doctrine of maximum feasible participation in policy-making and policy implementation essential for strengthening state and societal relationships as enshrined in the Liberian Constitution, **CSO laws shall strive to make ownership, registration and accreditation processes for CSOs as easy as possible.** The Government and the NCSCSL will promote and ensure the broadening of national ownership of policies, plans and programs by utilizing existing CSO networks for wider social mobilization, awareness and dissemination as well as ensuring CSOs commitment to deepening citizens’ participation in and feedback on national decision-making processes, especially at the grassroots level through proper accountability and reporting.

Representation and participation of Government and CSO partners in decision-making processes at all levels will be obligatory with each of the partner designating its own representatives. Direct representation and participation of CSOs on the county development steering committees, as well as the county and social development funds must be ensured.

Objective (6.3): Integrate the Role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) as an independent Development Partner of Government into national Development Processes.

Institutional Arrangements

Considerations from the Revised Draft National Aid Policy and the Listening Meetings from a cross section of CSO leaders throughout the country suggest that strengthening existing frameworks and developing new ones for operational collaboration between CSOs and the “government” is desirable, possible, and required so that they deliver direct channels for CSOs inputs into policy design and implementation.

The Revised Draft National Aid Policy points to significant disconnect at the sectorial level due to lack of well-defined, results-based, sector specific strategies and action plans, and points particularly to CSOs as principal instrument of development partners aid delivery to work with national development actors for better harmonization and alignment.

This Partnership Policy promotes the strengthening of Government and CSO sectorial relationships that cover such Aid and ensure that it reflects in sector plans and discussed in sector working groups at the relevant line MACs at national, county and district levels to increase citizens participation in decision-making; reducing the probability of duplication and improve resource allocation and effective performances.

Objective (6.4): Promote Multi-Stakeholder Approaches That Amplify the Voices of the Poor and Marginalized People in National Development

The Liberian Government and NCSCL shall work together to consult and reflect citizens’ views in the formulation of policies, programs and systems for service delivery. The process of consultation shall also identify and remove barriers that may prevent citizens’ participation in national decision-making.

According to the partnership policy, invitations for and the Civil Society Council’s participation in these consultations will be timely, allowing time for collecting, analyzing and presenting citizens’ responses focusing on evidence-based solutions with clear propositions for desired outcomes.

The NCSCL working in collaboration with the Government and other development partners shall develop the capacities of CSOs through the provision of training, technical assistance and logistical support. Civil society is expected to serve as honest peace-brokers between government, the private sector and communities. CSOs are also expected to develop and articulate “exit plans” to allow for deliberate growth and development of the community as an active stakeholder in national development processes.

Finance Minister Boima Kamara Pays Acquaintance Visit to GC

The Minister for Finance and Development Planning paid the Governance Commission an acquaintance visit on Monday July 11. Too often the public, including those working in the public sector, complain of not knowing much about the works of the GC. And so the Commission was glad that the Minister took interest in wanting to know about GC.



Dr. Amos Sawyer who chairs the GC’s Board of Commissioners welcomed Minister Boima Kamara to the Commission and led discussions surrounding the works and operations of GC. Dr. Sawyer pointed out that the Commission has a new five-year strategic plan that places emphasis on a number of issues including rewriting of Liberia’s history, Monitoring and Evaluation of all government’s programs, decentralization of governance among others, and that GC has decided to focus strategically on the first two years of its strategic plan.

This first two years of the GC Strategic plan focuses on the Elections (electoral process) and the subsequent transitional period which will usher in the next government. GC hopes to work with relevant government ministries, agencies, and commissions (MACS) to design a framework that ensures peaceful transition of political power from the incumbent president to the incoming president, and to ensure that gains made in restoring peace to Liberia are not reversed.

Dr. Sawyer briefed Minister Kamara on a number of other issues the Commission had been



involved with since the last twenty months including reforms of public institutions’ mandate and functions; institutional frameworks such as the Civil Service Authority (employee) reform organized in collaboration with the Liberia Institute for Public Administration, LIPA; the GOL/CSO partnership Policy which provides the platform for constructive engagements (to enhance

political exchanges and/or dialogues) between government and CSOs in Liberia – identifying roles and responsibilities of both partners.

Other issues the GC is grappling with include completion of activities proposed in the National Vision 2030: Liberia Rising document; assessment of reconciliation as enshrined in the reconciliation roadmap upon which the next government can build upon; and the status and benefits of the decentralization process.

The government needs to increase its support to GC to allow the Commission implement its various programs. Part of the Transitional plan of GC entails promoting policy and political dialogues between political actors and the people to avoid zero sum gains; delays, and “wait and see attitudes” on the part of donors; and hold consultations around the recommendations of the CRC report sent to the Legislature by President Sirleaf. These recommendations highlight the concerns of Liberians on 15 contending national issues including the issue of dual citizenship among others.

A power point presentation of GC’s accomplishments, challenges and the way forward was also presented to Minister Kamara.

Responding Finance and Development Planning Minister Boima Kamara thanked GC for the level of partnership and work done in support of political, social and economic reforms and governance in Liberia. Minister Kamara observed that work related to Liberia’s transition is already helping to assure stability, and at the same time build human capacity (software) into the hardware projects/programs of Liberia.

Minister Kamara noted the multiple needs of the various MACs and promised to work with GC in strengthening the implementation of its numerous programs. The GC appealed to the Minister to help distribute copies of the GOL/CSO partnership policy among MACs, a request he quickly oblige to do at Cabinet. Minister Kamara, like his predecessor Amara Konneh, has committed to help strengthen the decentralization process and other policies in keeping with resources available in the context of government/MFDP.

The government is currently funding salaries and some operational costs of GC but still needs to step up support for GC programs to match that of donors, to maximize the Commission’s output.

Muslim Community Celebrates Ramadan with GC

The Muslim Community on June 6, 2016 visited the Governance Commission as part of its Ramadan celebration. The group included senior Islamic clerics including Associate Justice Kabina Ja’neh, Commissioner Soko Sackor of the Constitution Reform Committee, CRC, two Lawmakers, and Imams, entrepreneurs and the National Mandingo Caucus among others.



Lofa County Representative Mariama Fofana noted that the group decided to celebrate this year’s Ramadam with Liberian peace advocates that have championed religious tolerance in Liberia over

the years. Representative Fofana said Muslims and non-Muslims alike are particularly grateful to Dr. Amos Sawyer and the Governance Commission for championing religious tolerance in Liberia. She noted that God created diversity and stakeholders need to appreciate that “there is strength in diversity”.

The Muslim Community prayed fervently for unity among Liberians and sustainable peace in Liberia.

Responding Dr. Amos Sawyer thanked the Muslim Community for appreciating the works of the Commission adding “we are humble and gratified”. Dr. Sawyer observed the diverse caliber of people “including the luminary Justice Ja’neh” that had taken off time to celebrate Ramadan – appreciating each other as humans.

Dr. Sawyer emphasized that we need a day like Ramadan to celebrate highlights of our achievements as a people, and how much we still need to do. In familiarizing the visitors with the work of GC, Dr. Sawyer said the Commission develops and make recommendations and strategy implementations to inform and address issues relating to governance; worked on building a platform for GOL/CSO partnership, and continues to work on issues relative to integrity, economic empowerment, security, decentralization and the building of a strong, united viable Liberian nation.

Dr. Sawyer commended the delegation for being resilient, despite all odds, and for making significant contributions to the Liberian economy. He concluded by introducing Commissioner Wesley Johnson who had just started his first day at work.

The visit of the Muslim community to GC was live on Truth Television and Radio based on directive from the proprietor Musa Bility.

Several others made statements during the visit to GC, thanking Dr. Sawyer and others for championing religious tolerance in Liberia.