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GC Prioritizes Security, Elections and Transition Issues

The Governance Commission (GC) has disclosed (to its donors) three priority areas it plans to focus on within the next two years. The Commission identified its two- year (2016-2018) areas of focus to include:

1. Security (in the phase of UNMIL drawdown);
2. The 2017 Electoral process (which has already started somehow with NEC's Guideline release); and
3. The Transitional process which involves the smooth transfer of political power from the incumbent to the new government come 2018 and even beyond.

The disclosure was made at the recent Two-day Open House event organized by the Governance Commission (October 27-28 2016) and held at its 9th Street Office in Sinkor. The 2 day event brought together members of the Diplomatic Corp, international donors, members of the Executive and Legislative branches of Government, and heads of Civil Society Organizations including the Media.



Executive Director for GC Stephen Manley

As you have already heard, The Governance Commission has adapted a new five year Strategic Plan (2016-2021) with more focus placed on the first two years (2016-2018). The GC Open House and resource mobilization event held under the theme “Successful Elections, Smooth Transition, Sustaining Governance Reforms also highlighted the three major categories under which GC first two year programs have been placed. The three major categories and activities include:

a. Sustaining Reforms

Activities:

- Completing and protecting public Sector Reform;
- Implementing Decentralization and Local Governance;
- Sustainability Project;
- Support to National Integrity Forum (a consortium of national integrity institutions in Liberia);
- (Rewriting) Liberia history project, strengthening and actualizing Liberia's Reconciliation Roadmap;
- Citizenship Education

b. Political Transition

Activities:

- Monitoring and Evaluation of Transitional Assets Management;
- Gol/CSO Annual National Conference;
- Streamlining of the National political process for inclusive and participatory governance; and
- Holding of an annual National Political Summit.

c. Successful Elections

Activities:

- Produce and launch the Annual Governance Report (AGR): that for 2016 is on the topic “**The Liberian Electoral System**”; (to be completed);
- Survey on Political Transition;
- Popularizing of the Code of Conduct;
- Monitoring and Evaluation of Voter’s Education.

d. Crossing Cutting issues

- Establishment of a Gender Desk, and Resource Center; and
- Establishment of a “30 minute Radio Program” to enhance awareness of GC work.
(Also recommended by several partners at the Open House event)

As enshrined in its Legislative Mandate, the Governance Commission in its Post-transition governance role serves as:

- ✚ The institutional memory on governance reform;
- ✚ A major/significant contributor to the strengthening of governance capacity (institutions, processes, structures) after transition;
- ✚ Most significant contributor to strengthen governance partnership with CSOs;
- ✚ Capacity for monitoring and evaluating governance performance;
- ✚ Promoter of national identity & citizenship;
- ✚ Promoting, facilitating and catalyzing National Vision programming.

It is also important to note that GC plays a pivotal role in protecting and sustaining gains of governance reform in Liberia.

Pipeline Products

The Commission proposes to focus its programming on the prioritization of strategic actions, resources and partnerships in:

- ❖ completing constitution reforms;
- ❖ protecting and completing public service reform;
- ❖ strengthening decentralization implementation;
- ❖ ensuring effective asset management particularly during the transition;
- ❖ developing conflict management arrangements in natural resource governance;
- ❖ Establishment of a gender desk within the Commission;
- ❖ strengthening reconciliation,
- ❖ Building confidence among political actors, supporting the electoral process and the transition, among others.

Those familiar with Government's Statement of Mutual Commitment (SMC) will note that GC programs are in line with expectations of Government for the fulfillment of the commitments to achieving national transformation by 2030. While overcoming the numerous challenges in the path to national success may seem insurmountable by 2030, the Commission strongly believes that with the help of international donors and partners Liberia stands poised to achieving its transformation to middle income status as a country, reconciling our differences, and assuring peaceful coexistence by 2030 (as perceived by the Liberian people in 2012).

Therefore, in assuring that the gains made are irreversible, the GC has placed priority on the following for the first two years of its Strategic Plan which include:

- ✓ consolidating the gains of current reform initiatives;
- ✓ enhancing security through community policing;
- ✓ reinforcing reconciliation;
- ✓ Carefully preparing for and successfully holding of the 2017 Elections, and ensuring a near-seamless transition.

Funding Gap

This two-year results-based strategic programming started in January 2016 and is being implemented through a coordinated Joint Work Program (JWP) among Mandate Areas and other partners. The JWP projects US \$4.99 million dollars to support the Commission for the first 2 years of its Strategic Plan. 64% of the total funding goes directly to Program related activities totaling US\$3.99 million, while 36% (representing government's funding/support) goes toward operations and support of the Commission.

To ensure proper funding of GC programs, there is still a funding gap of US\$1.71 million representing unfunded budget. GC has therefore called on her partners both prospective and current to help provide the funds direly needed to ensure the irreversibility of the current gains.

Civil Society and Donors/Partners Pledge support to GC Programs

There have been numerous comments as to the actual works of the Governance Commission though much has been done by the Commission to engage the public in its work activities. The Commission recently held an Open House event inviting its major and prospective partners, civil society including the media, relevant government ministries, agencies, and commissions, the legislature, to its 2 day four sessions Open House event. Day one featured donors, foreign missions, and heads of international organizations during the first session while the second session was graced by the Private sector, Central Bank Governor Milton Weeks, and members of the Business Community. Day 2 morning session was



graced by the heads of Ministries, Agencies and Commissions as well as the Legislature. The afternoon session was attended by civil society and the media.

Invitees expressed interests and support to the of Governance Commission (GC) event noting the quality achievements by the Commission over time, and recommending the need for increased public awareness.

In his Welcome remarks, Dr. Amos Sawyer, Chairman of the GC Board of Commissioners noted that the Commission was using the Open House event to acquaint invitees with the Commission's work. According to Dr. Sawyer,

“The fundamental of governance is a partnership between the government, the private sector and civil society, as well as the international community. I hope that we can begin to correct our work with this initiative – incase we've left out any partner”.



He said partners/donors have been very generous and that GC appreciates every ounce of resource - whether in cash, or technical support to the Commission.

Dr. Sawyer also made a special appeal (having in mind Liberia's numerous constraints) for donors and partners' continued generosity. He said due to the growing work of the Commission, government provides incremental support to GC which is now placed at about 40% of the Commission's needs (covering staff salaries and some operational needs). With the pending national elections and numerous national programs and expenditures, there is a high possibility that government will not be in a position to contribute more than it is doing now for GC in the next 2 years.

Most of GC's work is intangible though extremely important for Liberia's transformation. An example is GC's role in the triple transition. Liberia faces a triple transition with respect to:

- a. **Self-security** (in the wake of UNMIL drawdown) and maintaining the peace;
- b. **Transition as it relates to the end of the first Agenda for transformation (AfT)**, its effects on good governance, and the need to start the process for a new AfT for the next five year development agenda/plan; and
- c. **Transition with respect to the national elections** - the holding of the 2017 national elections – an Open seat election wherein the incumbent (president) will not be participating, and Liberia lacking experience in such a situation. The last of such elections happened in 1944 (when President Edwin Barclay turned over the mantle of power to President William V. S. Tubman).

Governance Commission is under mandate to help manage the holding of free and fair democratic elections, and ensure that the next government gets off to a decent start; design and recommend policy measures and implementation of strategies necessary to establish an inclusive, participatory, just, accountable system of government; Promote good governance by advising, designing and

formulating appropriate policies and institutional arrangements and frameworks required for achieving good governance and adherence to the rule of law; and Promoting integrity at all levels of society and within every public and private institution.

The Commission has already started the design of such frameworks with the holding of dialogues with political actors, The National Elections Commission, civil society and all other stakeholders (women, youths, lawyers, media, and business community/private sector) to ensure of an inclusive and participatory transitional process - a new and delicate transition and so much including our economy depends on its success.



ECOWAS Ambassador to Liberia His Excellency Babatunde Ajisomo commended GC for the Open House event describing the program as welcoming and laudable adding that *“we appreciate the work that you are doing, and on all governance issues – you’ve been setting excellent pace”*.

Ambassador Ojisomo assured GC of ECOWAS support, and on the issue of the 2017 elections - promised to work closely with the Liberia. Liberia is said to be the only ECOWAS member country heading for elections in 2017.

ECOWAS has planned to provide massive support for Liberia’s electoral process. The ECOWAS Ambassador therefore advised that GC, NEC and relevant stakeholders to work closely together to maximize this regional support.

The head of the African Development Bank Liberia Office is Madam Margaret Kilo. Mrs. Kilo commended GC for initiating a gender desk noting that issues surrounding women form the majority of Liberia’s population and their contribution to the economy and social transformation cannot be ignored. She therefore noted that the gender desk will ensure that women issues are prioritized in all of GC programs.



Madam Kilo surrounded by journalists

Mrs. Kilo also noted her appreciation for all policy issues of GC but pointed out that the Commission needs to increase public awareness of its programs. She therefore an increase in communications if issues discussed even at the Open House so that the public can then have a greater appreciation of the Commission’s work.

The Governance Commission has a very robust communications strategy designed to addressing its various programs but lacks the necessary support to inform the public in a structured and continuous manner to ensure the desired impact.

Mrs. Kilo noted that the ADB works with institutions that provide both tangibles and intangibles and emphasized that the intangibles do not speak for themselves but need a voice. This can be done through radio – initiating a radio program. She said Liberians can benefit more through radio programs.

A number of other partners also supported the need for GC to have a radio program to enhance its public awareness. Mr. Ledgerhood Rennie, Director General of the Liberia Broadcasting System also made similar recommendation at the Open House Event. Mr. Rennie said the state radio ELBC is GC's best bet in that it covers the farthest communities in Liberia. Community radios across Liberia also link up with ELBC to help educate and inform the public on issues of national concerns including the Agenda for Transformation.

The Governance Commission is therefore thinking about initiating a radio program to disseminate its achievements, on-going programs and other planned activities on elections and transition process for the benefit of the entire country.

Margibi Assesses Service Delivery at its County Service Center

Margibi County recently held a Policy Dialogue in Kakata to assess service delivery at its County Service Center (CSC). The Dialogue brought together 75 participants with focus on the overarching theme; ‘Enhancing Citizens’ Access to Government Services: Lessons learned from the Margibi County Service Center’. The Dialogue was organized by the Ministry of Internal Affairs in collaboration with the Governance Commission, and sponsored by UNDP.



Six months after its official opening, the government through its responsible agencies - the Governance Commission and the Ministry of Internal Affairs on Wednesday, October 12, organized a one-day Policy Dialogue on emerging issues in its decentralization reform program in Margibi County.

The dialogue discussed citizen perception on service delivery at the County Service Center, management and local coordination issues between the office of the Superintendent (on one hand) and the ministries, agencies and commissions (MACs) working in the county (on the other) on lessons learned, as well as citizens’ demands.



The dialogue presented key outcomes of the CSC initiative as observed in the county, its role in promoting local economic empowerment, the advancement and promotion of public health, and the processing of relevant data on births and development issues in the County.

In his presentation, the coordinator of the County Service Center, Mr. Sam Artist, noted that the CSC has and continues to spearhead efforts which helped increase the migration of numerous businesses from the informal sector to the formal sector. Such efforts include the issuance of permits and certificates, psychosocial services and support

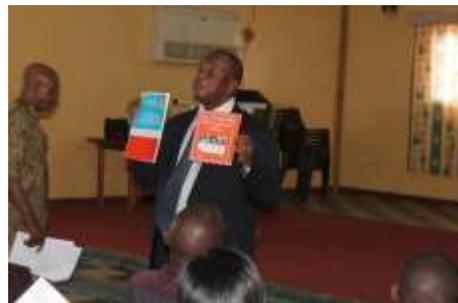
rendered citizens (mostly women), deeds registration and labor cases recorded and adjudicated at the Center”.

Mr. Artist stressed that CSC is highly beneficial to citizens of Bassa. He however recommended the need for improved access to services provided noting the increase of needy citizens on a daily basis. Services obtained at the grand Bassa County Services Center include:

- Traditional Marriage Certificate
- Liberian owned sole-proprietorship
- Business Registration
- Foreign owned sole-proprietorship
- Liberian owned Corporation
- Liberian owned Corporation (branch)
- Petty Trade Category “A”
- Petty Trade Category “B”
- Western Marriage Certificate
- Deeds Registration
- Letter of Administration
- Zoning & Land Use permit
- ECOWAS Alien Work permit

Mr. Artist emphasized that the registration of land deeds at the Center, has increases confidence of tenure and security, and serves as a check against land disputes which is currently rampant across the country due to poor land administration and record keeping mechanisms especially outside Monrovia.

In his opening remarks, Commissioner **Yarsuo Weh-Dorliae** of the Governance Commission said “the purpose of this workshop is to discuss emerging issues from the Margibi County Service Center. He said the Governance Commission and the Ministry of Internal Affairs are interested in knowing the problems faced by both those receiving and providing services at the Center. Commissioner Dorliae encouraged free discussion by everyone at the dialogue.



Earlier Mr. Aaron Dennis, **deputizing the Kakata City Major**, welcomed participants to the workshop and reminded participants that the City of Kakata was pleased to host such an important workshop. According to Mr. Dennis, the opening of the Margibi County Service Center has contributed highly to economic growth in the county. He pointed out that the County Service Center has provided relief to the citizens of Margibi by bringing services closer to the people of Margibi.

Mr. Jonathan A. Wordsworth of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, urged citizens to make use of the services provided at the County Service Center in order to improve their lives. He advised

participants to take ownership of the Center and cautioned against politicizing the issue of service delivery at the Center. Mr. Wordsworth also urged participants to point out challenges at the Center in order for policy makers to ably address them and improve the quality of service provided.

In his remarks, Superintendent Sarnor of Gbarpolu County, praised government for their tireless efforts in establishing County Service Centers around the country. Referencing his county as a beneficiary of the program, Superintendent Sarnor pointed out that this is a manifestation of the political willpower of this government to bring decision making and services closer to its citizens throughout the country. He anticipated that the workshop will enable him learn more about prospects and challenges in the management of county service center.

Dr. Alfred Kulah served as consultant to the national decentralization program and facilitated the



workshop. Dr. Kulah urged participants to define, in simple words, their understanding of decentralization. Participants responded with a number of simple working definitions of what they think decentralization is. He also summarized the decentralization program in Liberia and steps in the national program role-up from “deconcentration to devolution”, and the current status of the Local Government Act.