



TrustAfrica is an independent foundation that strives to secure the conditions for democracy and equitable development throughout the continent. Led by Africans, we convene dialogues, catalyze ideas, and provide grants and technical assistance to organizations working to advance these goals. Our programs focus on:

- Democracy & Civil Society
- Equitable Development
- African Philanthropy

We also award competitive research grants through our:

- Investment Climate & Business Environment Research Fund



Humanity United is an independent philanthropy committed to building a world where mass atrocities and modern-day slavery are no longer possible. By helping to build permanent constituencies to end atrocities and slavery, supporting efforts that empower affected communities, and addressing the root causes of conflict and injustice, Humanity United seeks to help restore human dignity in place where it has been lost and to help create a lasting global peace. To learn more, visit HumanityUnited.org.



Sidi Diawara

Strengthening Civil Society in Liberia

TrustAfrica and Humanity United are working to build stability and democratic participation as the nation rebounds from civil war.

With the election of President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf in November 2005, Liberia took a decisive step toward restoring democratic rule after a brutal civil war. Yet this West African nation still has far to go to ensure the health and durability of its democratic institutions. Many Liberians believe that cultivating a vigorous civil society holds the key to maintaining peace and stability and advancing equitable development.

Recognizing this urgent need, Humanity United and TrustAfrica embarked in 2008 on a US\$2 million partnership to strengthen the civil society sector in Liberia. A joint panel of Humanity United and TrustAfrica staff has since awarded grants to a cohort of nine leading civil society organizations (CSOs) working on governance monitoring, community empowerment, and independent media issues. These grantees are receiving additional support in the form of strategic planning assistance, leadership and management training, and participation in local and regional convenings. The aim is for them to inspire and mentor other groups throughout the country.

“While we all applaud Africa’s first woman president,” says Emira Woods, an expert at the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, D.C., “it is critical, particularly in a country emerging from 26 years of war, to build the institutions that will meet the needs of citizens at the community level; advocate for effective government and international policies; and also hold the government, international actors, and corporations accountable. Liberia’s community-based service providers and advocacy groups remain fragile and poorly funded. As such, your focus on civil society is right on point.” ▶



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The Liberian public sector's struggle to deliver services effectively in recent years has raised expectations that civil society will assume greater responsibility for service delivery and the financing of local development programs—in addition to articulating grassroots concerns, shaping national policy agendas, and providing oversight of governing bodies. To fulfill these many roles, however, CSOs must overcome significant challenges related to their technical capacity, communications, fundraising, accountability, collaboration within the sector, and relationships with government.

Strategies

Through our Liberia initiative, we make grants, deliver technical assistance, and create peer-learning opportunities aimed at building a strong, vibrant, and credible nongovernmental sector that responds more readily to the needs and aspirations of the Liberian people. More specifically, we are working with CSOs to:

- Build their capacity to monitor the central government and engage in advocacy;
- Empower communities to address issues that affect them and engage constructively with local authorities, thus fostering inclusive governance; and
- Strengthen the quality and professionalism of the media sector.

In this way, TrustAfrica and Humanity United seek to build the capacity and accountability of Liberia's civil society sector so it can better inform public policy, address local and national issues, and improve the state's accountability and responsiveness to the citizenry.

Activities

In April 2009, we convened a forum in Monrovia where CSOs from throughout the country came together to take a hard look at themselves, develop a better understanding of the challenges they face, and discuss ways to collaborate with one another as well as with the national government. More than 90 people took part, including former civic leaders who are now in government. Together they drafted a resolution outlining steps they can take to strengthen the civil society sector, such as forming an NGO Advisory Council and developing a Code of Conduct for NGOs. The full text is online at www.trustafrica.org/liberiaresolution.

As of May 2009, the initiative had made grants totaling approximately \$850,000 to nine leading CSOs in Liberia. These groups include:

- Action for Genuine Democratic Alternatives (AGENDA), which received \$65,000 to conduct research aimed at developing a Civil Society Index for Liberia;
- NAYMOTE Partners for Democratic Development, which got \$84,450 to engage youth in leadership training, civic forums, and community organizing; and
- The Liberia Media Center, which received \$91,665 to strengthen media coverage of the nation's poverty reduction strategy and democratic governance issues.

TrustAfrica and Humanity United will build on these efforts in the months ahead through additional grants, further technical assistance, and continued dialogue. ■