



REPORT OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM

Strengthening NGOs through strategic collaboration, coordinated policy advocacy and constructive engagement with the National Government

Date: 3 to 4 April 2009, Monrovia

Venue: SKD stadium

Liberia Civil Society Initiative

Monrovia- April 2009

Acronyms and Abbreviations

GoL	Government of Liberia
CDA	County Development Agenda
CDF	County Development Fund
CENTAL	Center for Transparency and Accountability in Liberia
CIVICUS	CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
LACC	Liberia Anti-corruption Commission
MHSW	Ministry of Health and Social Welfare
MYS	Ministry of Youth and Sports
UN	United Nations
UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia
LEITI	Liberia Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
AGENDA	Action for Genuine Democratic Alternatives
CSAC	Civil Society Advisory Committee
CSM-L	Civil Society Movement of Liberia
TJWG	Transitional Justice Working Group
NACCSOL Liberia	National Coalition of Civil Society Organizations of Liberia
NARDA	New African Research and Development Agency
LICONGO	Liberia Coalition of NGOs
LINNK	Liberian NGO Network
WONGOSOL	Women NGO secretariat
WANEP	West African Network for Peace
IRCL	Inter-Religious Council of Liberia
UDO	Union of Disabled Organizations
CODEL	Coalition for Democracy and Elections in Liberia
NAYMOTE	National Youth Movement for Transparent Election
ICCO Cooperation	Interchurch Organization for Development Cooperation
WIPNET	Women in Peace Network
ICNL	International Not Profit Law
FOHRD	Foundation for Human Rights and Democracy
LMC	Liberia Media Center
LDI	Liberia Democratic Institute
LDW	Liberia Democracy Watch
FIND	Foundation for International Dignity
RRF	Rice & Rights Foundation
PRS	Poverty reduction Strategy

I. SUMMARY

Over 90 civic leaders gathered in an unprecedented forum in recent times, from 3 to 4 April, 2009; to share insights related to the issues affecting Civil Society in Liberia, the governance of the sector as well as Civil Society relationships with the National Government. The forum was supported by Humanity United and TrustAfrica through the Liberia Civil Society Initiative which aim is to strengthen the capacity of leading Liberian groups and also help in enhancing the professionalism and quality of the private media sector. Panel discussions and group activities were the main features of the forum that also served as an opportunity to disseminate the *Defending Civil Society* principles as they result from a report recently published by the World Movement for Democracy. Former Civic Leaders who now serve in various capacities in the Government contributed to the Panel discussions and provided insights from their experience in Government. A set of recommendations which came out of the group activities and the two day- exchanges, were reflected in a final resolution.

There were two side talks on on-going initiatives in Civil Society, including the current NGO/CSO Council formation process, under the auspices of the Civil Society Advisory Committee and the unfolding Civil Society Index Research which is to be conducted by the Agenda for Genuine Democratic Alternatives (AGENDA). Another initiative discussed was the Liberia Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (LEITI); a summary of the full report of the LEITI Secretariat was presented, with a call for increased civil society organizations (CSO) involvement in the monitoring and civic education initiatives beyond the current Publish What You Pay Framework.

Agreeing on next steps, the groups recognized the need to move forward from the forum, working together to build up the professionalism, unity and coordination of the Civil Society Sector, and to hold similar forum around the issues every year, using the Civil Society Advisory Committee (precursor to the eventual National CSO/NGO Council) as a possible platform for the continuation of the exercise.

II. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE FORUM

In a democracy, citizens have the right to be heard, the right to form associations and the freedom of speech. These rights are effectively articulated through civil society organizations that operate around specific thematic areas that impacts socio-economic and political transformation. In the last two decades, the importance of civil society organizations especially in fragile states emerging from violent conflict and enmeshed in misguided governance practices, have become a vital ingredient for the amplification of reforms. Liberia has a history replete with excesses that have hinged on a culture of violence promoted by misrule and bad governance. Civil society organizations in Liberia, started as a brainchild of politically conscious individuals who thwarted barriers to gain state power democratically, reverted to building the consciousness of citizens by alerting them of their rights under the constitution and other established laws. Obviously, governments have been suspicious of a sprouting civil society, populated with their political opponents disguised as civil society activists and in many cases tainted by vested interests. Successive governments saw this as a threat to their grip on power and orchestrated various schemes to manipulate and weaken civil society.

Fortunately, many of the issues raised by pioneering civil society organizations resonated with citizens whose human and civil rights were trampled upon. The Liberia civil society has evolved; its main players are less linked to political organizations and the issues being tackled have expanded beyond human and civil rights to environmental concerns, corruption, media, health, education, agriculture etc. The pursuit of an agenda that helps to maintain the rights and self-actualization of citizens has heightened the relevance of civil society organizations. However, many civil organizations are not convinced that they have taken full advantage of the leverage to impact and contribute to a sustained transformation of the Liberian society.

A functional and effective civil society is needed to contribute to setting national policy agenda; stimulating sound and robust grassroots' response to varying issues of governance; and wielding the authority necessary to leverage the uneven power dynamics that characterize citizens and government relations. As a result of the un-coordinated inputs to policy-making on national issues, civil society has been perceived by the governing elites and sometimes by ordinary Liberians as clusters of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) lacking political legitimacy and holding no genuine allegiance to the constituency they claim to represent. There is an obvious lack of cohesion but civil society organizations face challenges of their own, ranging from institutional to capacity problems. These have impacted on their advocacy strengths and effectiveness.

With Liberia's transitioning to democracy, civil society organizations have been confronted with a new challenge: deciding how to organize their advocacy approach to issues emanating from a government peopled by products of civil society. There have been noticeable disagreements amongst strong and prominent civil society actors as to how to define and confront activism in the face of the new political order. It is this debate often heard in private that has further fuelled the division in thinking, methodology and action.

It is consistent with this understanding that several CSOs leaders have accepted to collaborate with TrustAfrica to organize a discourse so as to understand and appreciate the differentiation in thinking. Working in partnership, it was agreed to convene a forum to tap on the vast experience of a cross-section of civil society organizations in delivering a clear and concrete illustration of the problems, challenges and opportunities that exist and to address them.

Representations at the forum were drawn from (1) primarily TrustAfrica partner groups; (2) existing coalitions: Civil Society Movement of Liberia (CSM-L), the Transitional Justice Working Group (TJWG), the National Coalition of Civil Society Organizations of Liberia (NACCSOL), The New African Research and Development Agency (NARDA), Liberia Coalition of NGOs (LICONGO), Liberian NGO Network (LINNK), the Women NGO secretariat (WONGOSOL), WANEP, the Inter-Religious Council of Liberia (IRCL), The Union of Disabled Organizations, Coalition for Democracy and Elections in Liberia (CODEL) and from the media Sector as well as a selected number of individual organizations. It was high level meeting, only Senior Staff and/or Managers were invited. No international group was invited as the forum was meant to focus on internal issues related to local CSOs.

Several organizations that are not necessarily affiliated with coalitions have also participated and even played an active role during the forum. Among them we can mention: Rights and Rice Foundation (**RRF**); United Muslim Empowerment and Advocacy Organization (**UMWAEO**) Women in Power international

(**WOPIO**), Concerned Muslim for National Development (**CMND**), Young Women Christian Association (**YWCA**); **EARS**, Inc. International organizations such as Action Aid Liberia, Search for Common Ground (SFCG) and the Governance Commission have also participated and played an active role in the panel discussions and the group activities. We have also benefited from the invaluable participation of three Deputy Ministers: (Health and Social Welfare, Youth & Sports, Agriculture).

The forum sought to:

- Build a shared understanding of policy, governance, interest and relational issues affecting civil society performance as a driver of democratic governance;
- Facilitate exchange in defining strategies to improve governance in the NGO sector;
- Explore ways to improve collaboration between groups and define guiding principles for collaboration or engagement with the government;
- Define strategies aimed at promoting the defending principles of Civil Society in Liberia.

An organizing committee identified thematic areas for discussion during pre-convening consultations.

III. THEMATIC DISCUSSIONS

Four thematic areas were chosen after deliberation by the organizing committee and four CSO leaders volunteered to develop background paper that would guide discussions during the forum. Four panels were to be organized along the line of the thematic areas.

1. Issues and challenges facing the civil society sector:

In treating this topic, it was expected that the points below would be covered or at least touched on in the background paper and then the issues would be further analyzed during the forum:

- Technical capacity in the CSO sector;
- Communication
- Fundraising
- Collaboration between Groups/Coalitions
- Policy advocacy

Thomas Doe Nah, Executive Director of the Center for Transparency and Accountability in Liberia (CENTAL) volunteered to lead on this topic. He developed the needed background paper that was distributed to all the participants.

A Panel, composed of 4 persons including Thomas Doe Nah of CENTAL; Beyan Kota of the Union of Disabled and Tornolah Varpilah, Deputy Minister of Planning and Research, Ministry of Health and Social Welfare and moderated by Mrs. Korto R. Williams of Action Aid Liberia discussed this topic during one and half hour. The background paper laid the foundation for the discussion, but panelists were not obliged to espouse views expressed in the background paper. They were free to present any ideas that supported or contradicted views proffered in the background paper. Discussion revolved around several issues that included the dependency of local NGOs on external funding; the weakness or absence of effective schemes that promoted collaboration between CSO groups (even within coalitions); the failure of leaders of coalitions to become transparent and accountable to their membership, thereby contributing to the fragility within coalitions; how Civil society groups can harmonize their policy advocacy efforts, how to build strong alliances within the government etc.

Challenges specific to the disabled groups were highlighted by Beyan Kota. He indicated that disabled groups face the same challenges like all other CSOs but they also face issues that are very peculiar: timely access to information as they tend to rely more on others for assistance; how to mobilize the disabled persons who, in many instances, are very poor, and are trying to survive in the post conflict environment; dealing with social stigma and beliefs regarding disabilities, accommodating the disabled when it comes to access to public services and utilities. Society tends to deal with disabled in a way that is not about taking responsibilities but rather taking pity on inferior beings. So changing the general mentality about the disabled persons remains a big challenge.

Deputy Minister Varpilah spoke of the need for CSO to engage with their counterparts in government, as a way of creating a critical mass of people that could help sustain their work. He emphasized that in such engagement CSOs must know their facts and master the issues or agenda items they wish to engage their government counterparts on. He spoke of support to the New Africa Research and Development Association (NARDA) and other programs under the ICCO initiative for Liberia, and challenged other groups to call on him and others for advice. He said, when CSO distance itself from its former colleagues in government, it is only helping to entrench the status quo that resist change. He also insisted on the need for concerted efforts by CSOs to ensure that the key people are identified in their communities and even within CSO

that could organize to support candidates that that share CSO vision; and over time the right kind of people would be in government.

Contribution from the audience focused on fundraising challenges in the context of a global economic crisis and the perceived “shift” in donors’ interest as Liberia is now said to be a “democracy”. Participants also raised the issue of the lack of expertise development within Civil Society that ensures that NGO practitioners are well situated to deal with key policy issues. The proliferation of NGOs was also raised; many local CSOs leaders expressed concern that some of these CSOs did not have an office nor ran any identifiable program.

2. Governance in the CSO sector:

It was anticipated that this topic would cover issues such as:

- The formation of the NGO Advisory Council
- The project of A Code of Conduct for CSOs

It was agreed that in general, the governance of Liberian Civil Society is weak the need for collaboration and coordination as a critical element to strengthening governance structures was stressed. The initiative to set up an NGO Advisory Committee was applauded as the step in the direction for enhanced coordination of CSO activities.

Four panelists including moderator Commissioner Elizabeth S. Mulbah of the Governance Commission, Ernest Gaie, Country Director, Action Aid Liberia; Eddie Jarwolo, Executive Director of National Youth Movement for Transparent Election (NAYMOTE), Frances Greaves of the Women NGO Secretariat (WONGOSOL) discussed the issue of CSO governance in a frank and animated session. Contributions focused on the governing structures of the many CSOs and the dysfunctional feature noted in many CSOs especially the ill-defined or absence of clear management procedures, that leaves confusion between program management and financial management responsibilities within many groups. The proliferation of “briefcase NGOs/CSOs” and the formation of misguided coalitions that competes for funding with their own membership were highlighted as a core governance issue that needed to be addressed. Panelists noted that “transparency and accountability” are yet to be entrenched in many NGOs, and though CSOs require National Government adhere to principles of transparency and accountability in managing national resources, CSOs themselves are obligated to “practice what they preach;” this would strengthen their position as a voice for change.. The Representative from WONGOSOL highlighted findings from a recent research into the capacity of women focused NGOs. She noted that many of these women focused NGOs

function like “personal businesses,” allowing limited staff development and internal access to information.

Commissioner Elizabeth Mulbah of the Governance Commission admonished CSOs leaders to be governed by principles of self respect and dignity for others, treating others as they would expect others to treat them. She spoke of division of responsibilities in an organization, and the need to regard people working in the organization as valuable assets. She noted that in the inception NGOs lead a harmonious existence, but as soon as funding starts coming into the organization then confusion, all sorts of schemes and marginalization of staff starts to set in. As one of the longest serving voices in Liberian NGO community, she further stated that whenever any civic leader or organization sits before donors and speak negatively about others, in effect they are talking about themselves, because donors talk to each other, and whatever statement you make is widely shared. She then called for a Code of Conduct that would govern the behavior and attitudes of CSOs, perhaps under the auspices of the CSO advisory Committee.

It was noted that the initiative to establish a NGO Advisory committee could help in strengthening the governance of the sector through “self regulatory” mechanism and also safeguard CSOs’ interest. Contribution from the floor focused on the internal governance structures and their function as a warrant to organization development as well as gaining respect from donors and government. Many participants were also concern about what steps would be taken to mitigate the systemic weaknesses in NGO governance.

3. Civil society and Government Relationship:

Lawrence Randall, Executive Director of the Liberia Media Center developed a background paper that was distributed to all the participants. His paper dealt with the following:

- Defining Consultation and setting parameters
- Participation of Civil Society in different development efforts

A panel of 4 persons that included Randal Lawrence, Sam Hare, Deputy Minister for Youth Services, Ministry of Sports & Youth, Lindora H. Diawara, Coordinator of WIPNET and moderated by Oscar Bloh of Search for Common Ground. Contributions focused on CSOs participation in various national development efforts such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS), the fight against corruption and various policy consultation processes. It was noted that some NGOs tend to develop a rather negative relation with the government and fail to seek constructive engagements. The Government is also culpable as it fails to make the effort to reach out to the larger CSO community; limiting consultations to a

few and when CSOs are consulted, their contributions are not adequately incorporated in the larger policy formulation process. It was also noted that irrespective of the manner in which CSOs perceive government, there are some public officials who are supportive of CSOs undertakings. The CSOs were admonished to identify their allies in government and foster a spirit of collaboration in pursuit of their reform agenda. WIPNET spoke of its experience in dealing with the Government on women issues and found how rewarding and constructive the engagement has been so far.

Minister Sam Hare talked about how the involvement of characters in the government with NGO background has brought change in some places, especially the Ministry of Youth and Sports, where for once the idea of work plans, strategic plans, reporting and proposals were introduced. He said that although the environment is quite different from the NGO world, they still make their impact and indeed welcome engagement with the rest of civil society for information sharing and policy alternatives.

He spoke about the Ministry's engagement with the Federation of Liberian Youth (FLY) in developing the Youth Policy document, and that during the process of crafting the policy, the Federation was given space and opportunity to disagree with the Ministry and raise issues they thought were relevant to the process including disagreeing with the President as to how they should proceed with the policy. He challenged Civil Society to demonstrate such proactive posture in dealing with government.

NGOs do recognize that collaborating with the Government on the basis of mutual respect is critical to achieving their various missions. It was noted that for a constructive engagement with the National Government, CSOs ought to set some parameters and work together to ensure that those parameters are enforced at every occasion.

Contributions from the floor focused on how coalitions can lead in the engagement with the Government and the need to share information on a larger scale to keep all the groups abreast of what is unfolding during consultations. The participants also noted that CSOs should also take the initiative to engage with the Government and not always wait for the Government to initiate the dialogue; however, this should be done in a coordinated manner to avoid duplication and eventual contradictions between NGOs.

Lunch time talk:

During the lunch break; a briefing talk was held on two issues: (1) the Civil Society Index Research to be conducted by AGENDA, with technical support

from CIVICUS and funding from TrustAfrica, and the NGO Council formation process. This talk was given by G. Jasper Cumme, III; Senior Policy Director of AGENDA.

On the research, he explained that the research is multi-dimensional, action-oriented and ground breaking for Liberia, assessing civil society from five different dimensions: (1) engagement (2) structure (3) values (4) impact (5) environment.

He also said that a National Advisory Group of CSOs, Government Institutions, Private Sector and International NGOs has already been set up, and that this group would meet to validate field questionnaires prior to the inception of field work which would involve the use of five different participatory research tools, and that the result of the research would prove a useful advocacy and reference information for improvement of the sector, including the eventual structuring of CSOs and NGOs through the Council formation.

On the NGO Council, he noted that the Advisory Committee has adopted an approach that allows counties NGOs and CSOs to elect a Focal Group that would lead the process in ensuring that counties council are formed, and so far, only seven County Focal Groups have been elected in Montserrado, Bong, Nimba, Margibi, Bomi, Cape Mount and Bassa. The focal groups are now raising funds to hold district level meetings in the county for CSOs and NGOs. The representatives from each district would move on to the County Council.

4. The Defending principles of Civil Society:

A presentation on “Defending the Principles of Civil Society” was made by Cecil Griffiths, Executive Director of the Liberia Law Enforcement Society and the interaction between Mr. Griffiths and the participants was moderated by James Yarsiah of the Rice and Rights Foundation (RRF). The presentation was drawn from a report recently published by the World Movement for Democracy on Civil Society operations and co-authored by the International Not Profit Law (ICNL).

The presentation noted that Civil Society is facing serious threat today across the globe and offensive against democracy has spread and intensified. This ongoing backlash against democracy has been characterized by a pronounced shift from outright repression of democracy, human rights and civil society activists and groups to more subtle governmental efforts to restrict the space in which civil society organizations (“CSOs”) - especially democracy assistance groups - operate. Too many regimes still employ standard forms of repression, from activists’ imprisonment and organizational harassment to

disappearances and executions. But in other states - principally, but not exclusively authoritarian or hybrid regimes - these standard techniques are often complemented or pre-empted by more sophisticated measures, including legal or quasi-legal obstacles such as **barriers to entry** to discourage or prevent the formation of organizations, and **barriers to resources** to restrict organizations' ability to secure the resources required to carry out their activities.

Governments have tried to justify and legitimize such obstacles as necessary to enhance accountability and transparency of non-governmental organizations ("NGOs"); to harmonize or coordinate NGO activities; to meet national security interests by countering terrorism or extremism; and/or in defense of national sovereignty against foreign influence in domestic affairs. The report exposes such justifications as rationalizations for repression, and, furthermore, as violations of international laws and conventions to which most governments are signatories.

The report articulates well-defined **international principles protecting civil society** already embedded in international law, including norms and conventions that regulate and protect civil society from government intrusion. These principles include: the right of NGOs to entry (that is, the right of individuals to form and join NGOs); the right to operate to fulfill their legal purposes without state interference; the rights to free expression and to communication with domestic and international partners; the right to seek and secure resources, including the cross-border transfer of funds; and the state's positive obligation to protect NGO rights. Even though Civil Society is not under any particular threat in Liberia, it's still important to promote these principles to further the civic space as history has shown that even in democracy gains are not necessarily irreversible when it comes to civic space. The presentation was followed with discussion that focused mainly on the policy environment in Liberia and the possibility for Government to create its own "NGOs"

Griffiths proceeded with the presentation by posing three important questions:

- Is the Government preventing or posing barriers to entry for Civil Society Organizations?
- Is the global financial crisis having any impact or effect on Civil Society?
- Is the Government creating GONGO's?

Responses from the participants proffered answers to the three questions; "no" to the first question, "yes" to the second and "no" to the third. These questions were however explored in depth later during the group discussion of the second day.

IV. GROUP ACTIVITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Activity Focus

Participants were divided into four groups to work on the basis of the four thematic areas along which the forum was demarcated and asked to answer the following questions:

How do we reach out to each other beyond thematic lines and leverage each other?

How do we harmonize our advocacy efforts especially when we are working on similar issues such as good governance?

How can civil society set the example of Transparency and good governance?

How can Civil Society be seen as more relevant to the communities groups claim to serve?

What should be the parameters in engaging with the National Government?

Each group made an effort to define a set of concepts and even performing SWOT (Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threat) analysis in some instances.

1) Group one (1) focused on “**Issues and Challenges facing Civil Society**” and made an effort to first answer questions such as: Who are we and what is civil society? The group defined civil society as an arena of uncoerced collective action around shared interest, purposes and values. E.g.: Social movement, coalitions, advocacy groups, Development NGOs, community groups, faith-based groups, Unions, business associations. The group further analyzed the following points:

Threats to Civil Society: This did not focus specifically on Liberia but was analyzed in a broader sense. The group agreed that some of threats to Civil Society are: dictatorship, tyranny and bad governance in general, lack of civil liberties and human rights, complacency as a result of change in the socio-economic and political environment

The group identified some weaknesses as: inadequate funding, weak policy advocacy, human resources, weak internal governance structures, lack of internal operational procedures, weak collaboration, undefined vision and goals, manipulation by donors and other stakeholders because of weak governance and financial dependency, inadequate research and documentation, brain drain and strain. However, they noted that there are strengths to tap on, such as: the conviction and passion that drive most civic leaders, the diversity in the sector (gender, skills, talents...) and the relatively easy access to organizations and actors. There are also opportunities, mainly the existence of a democratic environment and the global community of CSOs that positively impact the Liberian Civil Society Sector.

2) Group two (2) focused on “Governance in the Civil Society Sector” and started off by defining governance as *processes, structures, procedures, systems that are employed by organizations to ensure that they pursue their mandate in an accountable, transparent, participatory and effective manner to achieve their mission*. The group further averred that to be successful, an organization must have a clear mandate for which it is formed and a specific identity. Structures can include membership, Board, Management and general staffing. Systems are concerned with Administration, financial management and reporting system, program and project management system. The following challenges to Governance were identified:

- Capacity building
- Participation
- Information dissemination and coordination
- Weak governance structure and poor management system
- Lack of proper documentation, research, accountability, monitoring & evaluation
- Failure to adequately engage stakeholders including the public

The group however fell short in identifying the responses to the challenges.

3) Group three (3) focused on “Civil Society and Government Relations”

The group indicated that CSOs and Government have a long history of partnership. This relationship needs to be strengthened in the wake of the prevailing challenges hindering the furtherance of national growth and development. Some of the areas to be considered are:

- Advocacy and engagement
- Public policy reforms
- Supporting CSOs through State financing
- Regulation vs. self regulation of CSO governance
- Parameters for consultation

There are challenges to the constructive engagement with the National Government:

- Weak advocacy/engagement strategies
- High expectation of CSO from Representatives in the Government
- Poor networking among NGOs
- Attracting/getting GoL recognition and/or appreciation of CSO's work
- Multiplication of Networks+ lack of organization among CSOs
- Lack of strategic alliances and commitment

- CSO perception of GoL as rival

Opportunities exist though:

- Inclusion of former CSO actors in Government
- Appreciable tolerance of political regime
- Formation of the CSO/NGO Advisory Committee
- Increased donor finance to CSO
- Membership strength of CSO

Based on the point enumerated above, the group suggested a *Model of Engagement with the National Government*: Participants basically agreed that there must be a *hybrid model of engagement* that involves constructively engaging and working to complement the National Development agenda. This could require a principle of mutual respect for the roles and responsibilities of actors in both the private and public sectors.

4) Group four (4) focused on *Defending Civil Society*

The Group focused their deliberations on answering the following critical questions. Are there policies/laws that prohibit CSOs/NGOs operations in Liberia? Is the CSO sector affected by the global financial crisis? Does the government establish and support its own NGOs?

The answers to the questions were a resounding “NO,” except that for the second question, the “NO” is qualified, because the group observed that there are people in government who support NGOs/CSOs by directing funding that pass through government executing agency to their favored CSOs/NGOs.

Defending CSOs, according to the group requires:

- Building trust
- Sharing information
- Research (Know the facts)
- Commitment
- Establishing rules of engagement and networking
- Speaking out
- Harmonizing Advocacy efforts
- Collaboration/Partnership
- Research and information sharing

Setting examples of transparency and good governance

- Sharing of institutional financial and narrative reports

- Strengthen the NGO Advisory committee to take responsibility of the general formation of the

National NGO Council and to do joint monitoring of CSO activities

- Documentation and publication
- Setting parameters in engaging with the GoL

B. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE GROUP ACTIVITIES

The first concern of the participants was about disseminating the outcome of the forum among civil society groups and extending it to the National Government and the International Community. The need to have CSOs share information and the resolution emanating from the forum with Government and other actors was also emphasized. It was also proposed that an Action Plan be developed out of the forum and a follow-up meeting to review progress on the action plan takes place in six months. The participants recognized that it will be critical to support the work of the CSOs advisory committee in the formation of the NGO National Council. Many of the recommendations formulated will be taken over by the Advisory committee for implementation and reported to a larger body of Civil Society.

Several recommendations emanated from the group activities as well as the panel discussion. They are summarized and captured below in specific intervention areas:

1. Advocacy and alternative policy formulation:

All the participating groups recognize the value of advocacy in bringing about reforms and but lamented that effective advocacy that should be delivered by many CSOs is undermined by ill-informed, isolated and ineffective strategy. Very few organizations seek to form alliance for advocacy purpose and when they do, their efforts are rarely sustained therefore they fall short in achieving the reform that is needed. Most of the time, the efforts are limited to issuing a press statement or organizing a radio program without any follow up or direct interaction with the beneficiaries. In order to correct the major shortcomings in advocacy work, the participants recommended that:

- CSOs undertake research and systematic documentation on issues they are trying to address; gather as much data/facts as possible before engaging the Government or launching an advocacy campaign;
- CSOs always share the results of their research with State institutions as they go public;

- Proper and systematic follow up be organized on the passage of important bills as well as the implementation of the policies designed;
- NGOs must collaborate, share data, research results and leverage each other in advocacy rather than competing;
- When several groups deal with the same issue, they must make an effort to harmonize their demands and policy propositions which will guarantee respect from the Government and the donor community and yield in the success of their efforts;
- Groups must lend capacity support to each other for data and information analysis as well as message formulation;
- NGOs must build alliances within the Government system and not consider Government Officials as “Opponents”; advocacy doesn’t work without strong alliances in a political system;
- Existing Coalitions must link up for advocacy purpose in order to give more weight to their efforts regardless of the subject matter because all the issues are, somehow, inter-related.

2. Governance in the Civil Society Sector:

It was recognized that most NGOs in Liberia are characterized by weak governance arrangements. Structures in place exist in theory and do not necessarily function. Many registered NGOs do not have an identifiable Office, the Board never convenes, and no reports are submitted to the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs. If Civil Society requires good governance, transparency and accountability from the National Government, they should first “practice what they preach” and create the moral ground for such demands. It was therefore recommended that:

- NGOs sign up to a *Code of Conduct* to be prepared by the CSO Advisory committee and submit it to the larger NGO body in the next three months;
- Every NGO puts in place clear and functioning governance structures with sound financial management procedures developed in line with recognized standards
- NGOs carry out annual audits and publish the results;
- NGO leaders must be transparent about their management, salaries and benefits and share all organizational information with the staff;
- Financial management and programming responsibilities must be separated and clearly defined;
- The establishment of a “peer review mechanism” in the NGO sector;
- Coalitions that have a functioning secretariat must proceed to regular “checking” of their membership and put in place self regulatory mechanism;

3. Capacity building/strengthening of governance structures

Capacity building or strengthening needs to be understood as a process whereby organizations work to improve their processes and delivery and in order to do so; they acquire new skills, knowledge and other capabilities or work to improve the existing capacity. When establishing an NGO one needs to ensure that the minimum capacity exist but should not create an organization for the sake of funding availability and then ask for capacity building interventions. Capacity building should then be understood as:

- *An explicit effort to improve an organization's performance in relation to purpose, context, and resources.*
- *A self-managed process of organizational change by which leaders, members and other primary stakeholders learn to assess strengths, diagnose key organizational weaknesses, recognize priority issues, apply and assess actions to address these issues.*
- *Acquiring new skills and changes in individual behavior, and also in organizational behavior, in terms of systems, structures, procedures, culture, strategies and decision-making*

Capacity building is then first and foremost the responsibility of the leadership, members (when it's a membership organization) and governing bodies, not donors' responsibility.

It was recommended that:

- NGO strive to focus on few specific issues or even one specific issues allowing them to develop an expertise over time;
- Set realistic development goals taking into account the resources that are available locally and not resources that may be available in the international arena;
- NGOs assist each other: Liberian NGOs count a diversity of talents and knowledgeable individuals in every sector of social development, therefore NGO are encouraged to tap in to local capabilities through collaboration and mutual assistance schemes;

4. Parameters for collaboration with the National Government and participation in Government initiatives

There has been much debate recently on Civil Society and Government relations and the

debates are dominated by criticism from both sides and sometimes civil society literally call

for a “boycott” of government initiatives. It certainly takes two to nurture a relationship but

on the Civil Society side, it was recommended that NGOs seek to always engage with the National Government and its agencies in a constructive manner keeping in mind the national interest that goes beyond individuals. However there must be some parameters for collaboration with the National government. The following parameters were agreed on:

- When government invites CSO to join or contribute to any initiative, the invitation shall be extended to all existing coalitions and made public, not to a select number of groups it feels "comfortable" with for one reason or another;
- Participation should be understood as a process that gives space for all parties to contribute with ideas, contest and learn;
- When Government rejects propositions put forth by Civil Society during a consultation process, the rejection must be explained and clearly communicated to the groups ahead of Government final decision;
- NGOs and the public must be invited to hearings organized by the National legislature;
- Consultation should not be confused with "information session" and if Government were to issue any public statement after a consultation, disagreements with Civil Society -if any- must be mentioned;
- Central Government as well as local governments must make information on development efforts and public funds available to Civil Society;

Civil Society must denounce bad governance practices in Government, but at the same time must acknowledge successes and efforts by Government in promoting good governance, transparency and accountability.

5. Funding support to Civil Society

Many Civil Society groups have been relying on external donors to support their interventions. Even though this funding scheme can reach a level that cannot be matched by any local source, efforts must be made to raise funds locally. In that line, it was recommended that the National Government allocate a portion of the national budget to NGOs on the basis of specific criteria in terms of access, areas of interventions and reporting. Many International NGOs (from Europe and North America) invest in Liberia funds that are provided by their Governments and those funds are sometimes counted as part of the Development Assistance; it will therefore not be *unusual* if the government of Liberia were to fund local NGOs. However, NGOs/CSOs are keen to ensure that funds set aside in the national budget is managed in a process that is transparent and accountable, and that funds are not used as a basis to control or shepherd organizations to government sanctioned advocacy.

NGOs are also encouraged to strategic plan for the future and innovate for financial sustainability. They are also encouraged to undertake the following actions:

- Produce knowledge that *sells* to support on-going activities such as publications;
- Support local communities to sell their artifacts and other intellectual production, and promote *fair trade* in return for minimal financial support;
- Develop fundraising strategies that will target philanthropists (in and outside of Liberia), Private Citizens, local businesses and Corporate but not to allow donors to influence their political choices or policy propositions. The strategy should actually spread the dependency to several donors;
- Organize targeted interventions for the benefit of select communities which may help in raising funds from the Diaspora;
- NGO with expertise should provide consultancy services when feasible in order to raise funds to support the organizations;

6. Regulation of the Civil Society Sector

Self regulation of the sector is the most preferable option for Civil Society to operate free of hindrances or harassment by government agencies. NGOs do recognize the need of a National Policy as long as the said policy is not intended to reduce the civic space. The current NGO policy must therefore be probated and later amended. However, it should be noted that NGOs are not the only *elements* constituting Civil Society therefore policies that regulate NGOs can be applied to other Civic groups that serve our various communities operating sometimes on an informal basis but recognized by the communities;

- Government should strive to improve the regulatory conditions for CSOs governance
- CSOs should improve their professional standards to reduce statutory regulation of the sector
- CSOs should enforce existing self regulatory mechanism including a Code of Conduct and institutional by-laws for the proper governance of the sector
- NGO policy must be probated as soon as possible and later on amended to ensure adherence to it and not to leave it to manipulation by succeeding administrations in government.

7. Collaboration between individual groups and between Coalitions

Collaboration between individual groups and coalitions is one of the

“weakest links” in the Civil Society Sector. This affects the impact civil Society, particularly NGOs could have in their advocacy work and in contributing to the National development agenda. The participants recommended that take the responsibility to address this critical issue and work to:

- Enhance collaboration/relations among CSOs through meetings for resource and information sharing;
- Share their different advocacy agenda for the purpose of leveraging each other;
- Disseminate results of research among NGOs whether they were conducted by Liberian groups or external entities;
- Initiate regular convening between coalitions;
- Participate in the upcoming Civil Society Index research

V. RESOLUTION OF THE FORUM

The forum concluded with a Resolution adopted by the participants after a rather lengthy debate on the content and the size of the text. The resolution reflects the subject matters discussed but also concerns that were raised during the different panel discussions. It reads as follow:

WE, the representatives of various Liberian civil society groups participating in the first Civil Society Forum sponsored by Trust Africa and Humanity United, under the theme: “Strengthening NGOs Through Strategic Collaboration, Coordinated Policy Advocacy and Constructive Engagement with the National Government” convened at the Samuel Kanyon Doe Sports Complex on the 3rd and 4th of April A.D 2009;

APPRECIATING the tremendous and generous technical and financial support of Trust Africa and Humanity United as well as the insightful initiative of FOHRD, LMC, NAYMOTE, CENTAL, LDI, AGENDA, LDW, FIND for the successful convening of the forum;

ACKNOWLEDGING, the valuable contributions of government institutions to the various deliberations and issues arising from this convening;

RECOGNIZING the meaningful and important contributions of hundreds of civil society organizations, networks, consortiums, umbrella groups, trade unions, health workers, the student community, labor unions, general workers’ union, marketing associations, religious institutions, national and international NGOs, teachers, women groups and the civilian population throughout the length and breadth of Liberia in the recovery process and democratization of Liberia;

REFLECTING on the fact that civil society groups have got tremendously underutilized power necessary for the realization of not only legal and political

reforms but also socio-economic changes, characterized by the lack of effective and sustained advocacy initiatives.

RECOGNIZING that some civil society organizations are affected by weak governance structures and lack of technical and human capacities which often times results to a passion for insurgent emotionalism and robs them of intellectual respectability;

ACKNOWLEDGING that the recent and contemporary history of Liberia is replete with the abusive use of power, political and economic injustice, wide spread corruption and theft of public resource, political marginalization, economic exploitation and social estrangement, deprivation of our people and denial of access to the benefits of the financial and natural resources of the country;

CONVINCED that only a well informed and effectively mobilized civil society organized around the philosophy of non-violence and peaceful direct actions and guided by unarmed truth and the techniques and methods of Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. can constructively influence public policy and challenge injustice in society through negotiation and broader peaceful protest;

REALIZING that “power concedes nothing without demand”; and that the civil society of Liberia urgently needs that cohesive power appropriate, necessary and relevant to make the power that-be to say “yes” even when they want to say “no”.

ENCOURAGED by the fact that there are more benefits to be derived in the interest of the country and people when most or all civil society organizations and the poor people of Liberia work together in a well focused creative solidarity for the sole and only purpose of joint, united, coordinated, collective and people-centered advocacy;

HAVE THEREFORE RESOLVED to:

1. Undertake steps for the continuation of an annual convening of civil society organizations to periodically review progress, share experience and strengthen governance arrangement by engaging through the “Liberia Civil Society Forum”
2. In addition to these steps, CSO Advisory Committee and representatives should work to develop an action plan to fully operationalize the priority action areas contained in this resolution in cooperation with other partners including TrustAfrica;

3. *In cooperation with other partner organizations work in designing a comprehensive strategy for capacity enhancement, skills development and strategies for institutional and financial sustainability;*
4. *Endeavour to instate good leadership practice anchored on the principles of information sharing, peer review and institutional assessments;*
5. *Work to develop a system for effective monitoring and evaluation of the various activities and processes of governance with the view to constructively contributing to filling gaps and strengthening compliance to policies;*
6. *Conduct high quality research and documentation of the core areas and issues being worked around with the view of making said research and reports a public document;*
7. *Utilize lessons learnt from M&E findings of CSOs work with view of stimulating interest in CSOs work by donors and other members of civil society;*
8. *Establish links with stakeholders and the public and build and/or strengthened strategic alliances with key actors in government and the international community;*
9. *Sharing information including research findings with relevant state institutions before making findings public especially where it concerns the workings of these structures;*
10. *Instate follow-up and follow-thru processes around passage and implementation of legislations, policies, regulations and standard guidelines facilitated by the state and if possible engage new authorities on lobbying already in progress;*
11. *Strengthening CSOs governance for effective collaboration with the state institutions;*
12. *CSOs agree to engage and reasonably seek to inquire and request audience with appropriate authorities on emerging disagreements before making these disagreements a public affair;*

13. *Engage government on the development of a strategy that would facilitate direct state financing of CSOs development and advocacy work through a clearly defined mechanism for fund administration backed by legislation and design to insulate CSOs from government interference*
14. *CSOs Advisory Committee should be strengthened through institutional capacity building opportunities;*
15. *Undertake to take steps to encourage private sector financing of CSOs through a clearly defined mechanism for fund acquisition designed to insulate CSOs from private sector control*
16. *Encourage harmonization of CSOs approach to public policy formulation and engage Government to involve CSOs in the policy formulation process from the word “go”;*

DONE THIS 4TH DAY OF APRIL, 2009 A. D. 2009 AT THE SAMUEL KANYON DOE SPORT COMPLEX

VI. EVALUATION OF THE FORUM BY PARTICIPANTS

Participants were invited to evaluate the forum using a form (appendix D) with focus on the content of the forum, suggestions as to some of the issues discussed and the logistics. 60 forms were returned out of the 91 that were distributed through the welcome pack.

The 60 participants who evaluated the forum answered all the questions. We then have the following summary:

1. NGOs capacity and Content of the Forum:

- **NGOs operation:** 60% of respondents propose to change the accreditation process and decentralize it. 30% believe that more stringent conditions should be placed on NGOs once they are accredited and that those that cannot show a functioning office and at least one project should not be considered as NGOs and must not therefore be re-accredited. 10% do not see need for any change but would like to see more funding coming to NGOs and less competition within the NGO sector;

- **Coalitions functioning:** 75% suggested that Coalitions should not be implementing programs but rather strengthen the capacity of their membership, represent them before the government, do lobbying on their behalf but not implement projects for which they compete with their own members. 25% suggest that one group should not be member of several coalitions and coalitions should share information, work closely together.
- **Identification of the issues:** 95% of the respondents indicated that all the issues have been accurately identified but the forum did not have enough time to deal with them as one would hope; 5% of the respondents think that the issues were not dealt with but rather debated without a general consensus on the solutions;
- Areas of engagement with the government: All the respondents believe that NGOs should engage with the National Government on all policy matters but 57% insist on issues related to poverty elimination and fighting corruption.
- Improvement of the NGO policy Guidelines: This area seemed to have been the most difficult evaluation point as 95% of the respondents couldn't identify clearly which area need improvement even though they all agree that the document should be improved. One area that was touched on by the remaining 5% is the extension of the policy guideline to the greater Civil Society Sector instead of limiting it to NGOs. Our conclusion is that most NGOs are not familiar with the Policy Guideline. This can only be attributed to their own lack of interest.

II. Meeting organization and Logistics

The overall standard of the meeting preparation was rated "very good" by 80% of the respondents and "good" by 20% which is quite satisfactory. However, all the respondents agreed that in the future we should improve on the "invitation" process and possibly send background documents ahead of the meeting. Five among the respondents insisted that the forum should have received more media attention during the preparation phase.

In terms of lesson learned, once can say that in general we make assumption about NGOs knowledge of topics affecting their own existence but it's obvious that many NGOs, perhaps because they are struggling to "survive" are ignorant of the content of major policy issues and processes that could ultimately affect them in the long run.

VII. CONCLUSION/NEXT STEPS

The forum was a unique opportunity that brought together a large section of key Liberian non-government organizations to share insights on dealing with

governances and structural challenges that undermine their effectiveness. The participation of former civic leaders who are now in government gave a particular dimension to the event as it was the first time for “former colleagues” to get together around the table since the inception of the current government. Many participants have wished to see the establishment of a formal forum but given the difficulty of managing a formal grouping, it was rather wise to seek ways to reinforce existing groupings and ensure that the recommendations from the forum will be taken forward by the current CSO Advisory Committee that is working to put in place a National NGO Council. The recommendations from the forum shall be taken forward by the core group of TrustAfrica/Humanity United partners and the Advisory Committee.

It appeared clearly during the debate that most NGOs tend to rather do “reactive advocacy and media work” and not operate on the basis of strategically defined goals requiring regular facts finding, analysis and media work. Therefore their impact on society remains very weak.

A formal follow up meeting involving only the core group and the Advisory Committee will be the next logical step once this report is published. Humanity United and TrustAfrica, through the Liberia Civil Society Initiative will continue to play a facilitation role within the limits of their capacity. Two areas that should be very much scrutinized and reviewed on a regular basis are (1) how much collaboration takes place between NGOs and between Coalitions; (2) how Civil Society engage with the National government and particularly in the various governance reforms being crafted. This will be the role of the NGO Council but also that of each and every coalition. (3) the NGO Policy Guidelines and how to ensure that these are fully internalized by CSOs / NGOs but how to ensure that actions are agreed upon e. g. whether to enact it now and later amend it or let it remain for amendment and later enacted.

VII. APPENDIX

A. LIST OF THE PANELISTS

1. Panel 1:

Topic: Issues & Challenges facing Civil Society in Liberia

Panelists

- Thomas Doe Nah, CENTAL
- Tornolah Varpilah, Deputy Minister for Planning & Research, Ministry of Health and Social Welfare
- Beyan Kota, Chair, Union of the Disabled Organizations

Moderator: Korto Williams, Action Aid Liberia

2. Panel II:

Topic: Governance in the Civil Society Sector

Panelists

- Ernest Gaie, Action Aid
 - Eddie Jarwolo, NAYMOTE
 - Frances Greaves, WONGOSOL
- Moderator:** Elizabeth S. Mulbah, Governance Commission

3. Panel III:

Topic: Civil Society & Government Relations

Panelists

- Lindora K. H. Diawara, WIPNET
 - Randall Lawrence, LMC
 - Sam Hare, Deputy. Minister, Ministry of Sports & Youth
- Moderator:** Oscar Bloh, Search for Common Ground

The presentation on the “Defending Civil Society” principles was not a panel discussion. A presentation was made by Cecil Griffiths of the Law Enforcement Society and moderated by James Yarsiah Sr, Executive Director of Rights & Rice Foundation

B. LIST OF COALITIONS AND NETWORKS REPRESENTED AT THE FORUM

COALITIONS/NETOWORKS	CONTACT OF THE LEADERSHIP
<p align="center">Liberian NGO Network LINNK</p>	<p>John Jukon, Executive Director E-mail: linnkliberia@yahoo.com Tel: 06 524 189</p>
<p align="center">Coalition for Democracy and Elections in Liberia- CODEL</p>	<p>Segbe Nyanfor, President E-mail: ssnyanfor@yahoo.com</p>
<p align="center">West Africa Network of Peace building-WANEP Liberia Chapter</p>	<p>Kombeh Lombeh, National Coordinator E-mail: kombeh.lombeh@yahoo.com Tel: 06 526 717</p>
<p align="center">Civil Society Movement of Liberia- CSM-L</p>	<p>Daniel Towalid, Secretary General E-mail: towalid2005@yahoo.com Tel: 06 558 981</p>
<p align="center">National Coalition of Civil Society Organizations of Liberia NACCSOL</p>	<p>Ben Tarnue E-mail: naccsolsecretariat@yahoo.com Tel: 06 411 629</p>
	<p>Martin Kerkula</p>

<p align="center">Publish What you Pay</p>	<p>E-mail: kfahnlon@yahoo.com Tel: 06 514 699</p>
<p align="center">New African Research and Development Agency NARDA</p>	<p>Lancedell Matthew, Executive Director E-mail: umbra54@yahoo.com Tel: 077 020 338</p>
<p align="center">Women NGO Secretariat -WONGOSOL</p>	<p>Mrs. Cerue Garlo E-mail: ceru2garlo@yahoo.com Tel: 06 552 788</p>
<p align="center">Liberia Coalition of NGOs - LICONGO</p>	<p>Rev. Christopher Toe E-mail: cordin05@yahoo.com Tel: 06 518 724</p>
<p align="center">Inter Religious Council of Liberia -IRCL</p>	<p>Rev. G. Boimah Freeman, Secr. GI E-mail: revgboimah@yahoo.com</p>
<p align="center">Mano River Women Peace Network- MARWOPNET</p>	<p>Ruth Caesar, Chair E-mail: marwopnet@yahoo.com Tel: 06 552 574</p>
<p align="center">National Human Rights Center -NHRC</p>	<p>Alfred Quyjandee Tel: 077 523 847</p>
	<p>Siaffa Denis Morris E-mail:</p>

Montserrado, NGO Council Focal Group	dsiaffan_2002@yahoo.com Tel: 077207 903
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* Please note that for calls coming from abroad you will need to first dial +231, skip the zero and then dial all the rest of the digits.

C. AGENDA OF THE FORUM

TIME	ACTIVITIES
DAY 1 (Dan Saryee, Master of ceremony)	
8:30-9:30	Registration and breakfast
9:30:9:45	Invocation and Beginning of the program
9:45-10:00	Opening Remarks
10:00-11:15	<p>Session 1: Issues and challenges facing Civil Society in Liberia <u>Moderator:</u> Korto R. Williams, Action Aid Liberia Panelists: Hon. S.Tornolah Varpilah, Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, Beyan Kota Christian Blind association, NACCSOL, LICONGO, AFELL, CHAL, CENTAL</p>
11:15-11:30	Coffee Break
11:30-13:00	<p>Session 2: Governance in the Civil Society Sector <u>Moderator:</u> Mrs. Elizabeth S. Mulbah, Governance Commission Panelists: Cllr. Negbalee Warner, Ernest Gaie, Country Director Action Aid Liberia, LINNK, NAYMOTE, WONGOSOL</p>
13:00:14:00	<p>Lunch break (with a lunch time talk on the NGO Council formation and the Civil Society Index research by J. Jasper CummeH III)</p>
14:00-15:00	<p>Session 3: Civil Society and Government relations <u>Moderator:</u> Oscar Bloh, Search for Common Ground Panelists: Hon. James Logan, Ministry of Agriculture, Hon. Sam Hare, Ministry of Youth & Sports, NARDA, LMC, WIPNET, IRCL</p>

Liberia Civil Society Initiative

15:00-15:30	Coffee break
15:30-16:30	Session 4: Defending Civil Society: sharing international standards Presentation by Cecil Griffiths, Liberian Law Enforcement Society-Discussion to follow and moderated by James Yarsiah
16:30-16:45	Announcement and end of Day 1

DAY 2 (Thomas Doe Nah, Master of Ceremony)	
8:30-9:15	Registration and breakfast
9:15-9:30	Working Groups formation: 7 groups, process to be facilitated by the MC of the day Groups activities to be moderated by: Aloysius Toe, Dan Saryee, Lawrence Randal, Thomas Doe Nah, James Yarsiah, Jasper Cummeh III, George Wah Williams
9:15-10:45	Group Activities: <u>Questions to discuss</u> How do we reach out to each other beyond thematic lines and leverage each other? How do we harmonize our advocacy efforts especially when we are working on similar issues such as good governance? How can civil society set the example of Transparency and good governance? How can we be seen more relevant to the communities we claim to serve? What should be the parameters in engaging with the government? PS: These questions are guidelines, groups can expand on the topics but should stay focused and be as specific as possible in their answers and not try to deal with every other question or give in to mere criticism.
10:45-11:15	Coffee break
11:15-13:00	Groups report
13:00-14:00	Lunch break (with Lunch time talk on the LEITI experience and lessons learned for Civil Society by Cllr. Negabalee Warner)
14:00-15:00	Plenary session on "Next steps": What do we do from here? (follow up Actions) to be facilitated by Jasper Cummeh
15:00-15:20	Break for the drafting of the meeting resolution Drafting Committee: Aloysius Toe, James Yarsiah, Estella

	Nelson, Thomas Doe Nah, Lawrence Randall
15: 20-15:30	Presentation of the draft resolution
15:30-16:30	Discussion and adoption of the resolution
16:30	Closing remarks by the most Senior NGO Leader present

D. FORUM EVALUATION FORM

I. CAPACITY AND CONTENT

1. If you could recommend one change in the way NGOs operate what would that be?
2. In your view how should Coalitions and/or Networks function?
3. Did the sessions identify clearly the issues and the most effective ways to deal with them?
4. What are the most critical areas in which NGOs should constantly engage with the National government?
5. Assuming that you are familiar with the content of the National NGO policy guidelines, what improvement would you suggest in order to protect NGOs and promote the freedom of association?
6. Are there any additional propositions you would like to share that would strengthen NGOs and their coalitions and help in holding Donors and the Government accountable?

II. MEETING ORGANIZATION AND LOGISTICS

Please assess the overall standard of the preparation for this meeting: invitations, agenda and coordination. Please tick your answer

Excellent	
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Very good	
Good	
Average	
Poor	

Please tell us what aspects of the meeting could be improved and how we can do better next time.

Areas	Suggested improvement