STRENGHTENING THE CAPACITY OF CIVIL SOCIETY TO PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE GOVERNANCE IN LIBERIA

Mid-Term Evaluation

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A. Executive Summary

The project

SFCG-Liberia and the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) began implementing the project entitled *Strengthening the Capacity of Civil Society to Promote Sustainable Governance in Liberia* in November 2012. The **overall objective** of the project is to "strengthen the capacity of civil society organizations in Liberia to promote a sustained democratic culture, the protection of human rights, and the inclusion of citizens in decision-making". This objective is supported by **four specific points**:

- Increase the programmatic capacity of partner civil society organizations (CSOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) to engage the state on targeted reform areas;
- Increase the institutional and financial capacity of CSOs and CBOs for sustained engagement with state institutions;
- Strengthen networking and collaboration among CSOs and CBOs at national and county levels;
- Increase information-sharing and dialogue between citizens, state institutions, and CSOs/CBOs at national and county levels.

Objectives of the evaluation

The scope of the evaluation includes evaluating the **effectiveness** of the project implemented by SFCG and six Liberian partners as well as the various factors that are either contributing or hindering the effectiveness of the programme. The report aims to provide pragmatic recommendations for maximizing the impact of the project through effective implementation during the second phase of the project. More specifically, the evaluation aimed to answer **the following evaluative questions**:
- Progress of partners towards their participatory benchmarks;
- Level of change in partners' capacities since the initiation of the project;
- Level of implementation of the project's activities;
- Level of engagement of the partners with other partners and with other stakeholders;
- Level of visibility of partners at the county level;
- Assess the effectiveness of the radio programme run by SFCG.

Evaluation methodology

In order to conduct this mid-term evaluation, a mixed methodology was used, collecting both qualitative and quantitative data. Data collection methodology included (a) a desk review of all relevant project documents, reports and monitoring data; (b) key informant interviews with 18 partners organization members, 1 donor and 6 SFCG employees; (c) three participatory

evaluative working sessions with the partners; (d) a survey distributed to 6 randomly selected community members of Bong, Grand Bassa and Nimba counties; (e) a survey on time-allocation administered to 6 SFCG staff members; (f) an auto-evaluation Capacity assessment survey administered to 17 partner organizations members.

The evaluation took place during the period of June–October 2014, with the preparation occurring in June, data collection in July, and data analysis and writing of the report occurring from July to October.

This evaluation is an internal-external evaluation: the lead evaluator, Charline Burton, is part of SFCG's Institutional Learning Team for the West and Central Africa region. The lead evaluator was not involved in project design or baseline. Charline Burton was assisted by the Liberia DME coordinator Roselyn Korleh and international intern Ashish Pradhan for data collection. Survey data entry and analysis was conducted by Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services (LISGIS). Lastly, data analysis was conducted with the support of Institutional Learning Team's international intern Maurane Tschibambe.

Main Findings

Progress of the Partners on their Benchmarks
- Eleven months after the benchmark process was launched, 47% of the 6-months benchmarks and 14% of the 12-months benchmarks have been achieved. The progress of partners on their benchmarks is therefore lower than expected at this stage of the project;
- So far, more efforts have been put into reaching the programmatic benchmarks (37% complete) than the financial (24%) or institutional benchmarks (18%);
- The main obstacles to the progress on benchmarks have been the lack of common understanding on the importance of the benchmark process during the first semester of the project as well as the lack of clarity around financial support to that process;
- However, all partners do recognise the importance of the benchmark for his or her organization's growth and development, in providing a structured framework to increase the organization's structural capacities.

Evolution of Partners' capacities
- All partners mention having increased their capacities as a result of the project. More specifically, this results from a combination of: collaboration with the other partners, coaching provided by SFCG, logistical and financial support provided by the project in terms of implementation of activities, and/or trainings that each partner went through;
- The comparison of the partner's auto-evaluation of capacities in 2013 and 2014 points towards mixed results: partners have increased in about half of the capacities' categories, but have also decreased in half;
- We are noticing a general increase of all partner's institutional capacities; a better capacity to engage at the local level; a clear increase of the national partners' (NP) capacities to network; strong teamwork capacities. However, the data also points to

weak monitoring and evaluation capacities; low networking capacities of the County-Based Partners (CBPs); and mixed sustainability or finance capacities of the partners;

- Partners have not yet benefitted from as much training as they could have at this point in the project. This is mostly related to the modus operandi for capacity-building, which relied mostly on SFCG staff and is not effective enough in answering all the training needs.

Implementation of Project activities

- Various activities were implemented by SFCG and by the implementing partners; but the evaluation team was unable to comprehensively assess the level of implementation of the project's activities and draw conclusions on the pace of progress. This is mainly due to the lack of an efficient monitoring system;
- The positive relation between SFCG and the partners, is mentioned frequently as contributing to quality and timely implementation of the project's activities;
- On the other hand, delays in funding on the part of SFCG have been a continuous internal challenge, and difficult collaboration between national and local partners was also an obstacle at the early stages of the project, hindering the effectiveness of project activities implementation.

Level of engagement of national and county-based partners

- Collabouration and communication between national and county-based partners increased as a result of the project. Interviews with partners point at mutual benefits from both national and county-based Partners;
- It is now easier for NPs to mobilize communities and to organize county-level activities. CBPs point at some benefits in terms of capacity building;
- At this point, however, the project still falls short in increasing the CBP's visibility at the national level and connecting the local partners with the national networks and platforms;
- The project contributed to increase the engagement of partners with other stakeholders. CBPs and NPs mostly increased their engagement at the county and community levels. However, the project is yet to have an effect in increasing the engagement of NPs or CBPs at the national level.

Level of visibility of the Partners

- Partners feel confident that the project contributed to increase their visibility at the county level. However, since visibility was not assessed before the project launch, it is not possible to allude to an evolution of the partners' visibility based on the survey data;
- Between 57.5% and 79.9% of survey respondents "have heard" of the project's partners. 78% of those who "have heard" of the CBPs state that "they know the type of work that they do", and this rises to 82% for the NPs' work.

Effectiveness of the Blay-Tahnla radio program

- 88.7% of the survey sample listens to the radio. SFCG partners with a total of 13 radio stations, among which one or two are of the most popular radios in each target county;

- 67% of radio listeners have already heard Blay-Tahnla, among which 79.4% listens to it between once and three times a week;
- Programme listeners related well to the soap opera: 68% of the programme listeners like it "much" or "very much";
- Additionally, 42.9% agree that the programme "often" talks about issues that are familiar to them;
- The Blay-Tahnla programme seems to be producing minor effects in terms of increased knowledge on the key project's themes: Blay-Tahnla listeners indeed have a slightly better knowledge of some key governance issues than those who have never listened to the show.

Main Recommendations

Based on the evaluation findings, the evaluation team presents the following recommendations to SFCG in order to increase the project's effectiveness and to benefit from the lessons learned from this project in future project design:

For the Benchmark process, it is recommended that:
- The benchmark process be duplicated in future SFCG programmes, taking into account the lessons learned from this project's experience;
- More efforts be made by SFCG in monitoring partners' benchmarks;
- Each partner prepare a working plan for the next 18 months of the project, detailing how each benchmark is going to be reached, when, and through what means.

For the Capacity Building activities, it is recommended that:
- Specific needs of the various organizations be analyzed in detail by SFCG and that efforts be made to support the weakest points of each partner;
- A capacity building plan be created by each of the partners. This plan should be concrete and detailed. Given limited human resources, time and expertise of SFCG, external training should be favoured in those plans;
- More efforts be made by SFCG in ensuring quality monitoring of capacity strengthening activities over the course of the project;
- For similar programmes in the future, the budget makes room for extra staff, namely a civil society expert be added to the SFCG team;
- The final evaluation team conduct a before and after review of the actual partners' documents as it relates to finance, budgets and the institution in order to measure change of capacities in that regard.

For the implementation of project's activities, it is recommended that:
- Efforts to maintain a close and supportive relationship to the partners be sustained;
- The frequency and lengths of the partners review meetings be increased;
- SFCG continue to strengthen partners' capacities in finance reporting in order to ensure timely, compliant report from each partner. Additionally, we recommend that SFCG's

finance officer, project coordinator and DME officer each visits every partner in their office at least twice a year;

- The partners' reporting frequency be extended to a quarterly basis as opposed to a monthly basis;
- More efforts be made by SFCG into systematically monitoring the implementation of activities.

For the engagement of national (NPs) and county-based Partners (CBPs), it is recommended that:

- Clear benchmarks be set regarding the level of involvement of CBPs and NPs partners;
- More efforts be undertaken by the NPs to transfer capacities and knowledge to their county-based counterparts;
- For future identical programmes and newly contracted county-based partners, it is advisable that the governance issues that CBPs should focus on over the course of the project be left to their discretion;
- Ensure that "coordination of action" be on the agenda of the partner review meeting.

For the visibility of the Partners, it is recommended that:

- Efforts be sustained to continue implementing activities at the county level by both the CBPs and the NPs;
- Collaboration between CBPs and NPs continue in order to allow a high number of NPs' activities to take place at the county level;
- The level of visibility of each partner be assessed again at the end of the project.

For the Blay-Tahnla radio program, it is recommended that:

- The Blay-Tahnla programme be continued;
- Ways to adapt the morning airing times of Blay-Tahnla be explored, as well as ways to schedule the programme during morning prime time;
- An effective monitoring system be put in place to ensure that partner radio stations respect the clauses of their contract regarding airing times and days;
- SFCG explore the possibility of partnering with Radio Gbazon in Grand Bassa and Radio Sehwai in Nimba.

B. Introduction

Context of the project

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed in Accra, Ghana in August of 2003, ended Liberia's civil war. In the past ten years Liberia has experienced progress towards addressing issues of insecurity and has begun consolidation of the peace[1]. The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) was established in October 2003 to help keep the peace and begin to rehabilitate and reform the security sector. An influx of international aid as well as an initially reform-oriented government sparked optimism among Liberians tired of war, endemic poverty, and underdevelopment. Investment in the timber, iron ore, diamond, and palm oil sectors – as well as prospects for oil sector investment – drove expectations that Liberia was on path to full recovery.

However, within this great sense of optimism and the expectations which accompany it, lies a serious risk that frustration with the lack of progress made by the government could pose a risk to stability moving to 2017 and beyond. The current drawdown of UNMIL further complicates this picture; with only 4,000 of the required 8,000 officers recruited, the Liberian National Police (LNP) has neither the man power nor the financial and logistical resources to maintain security over the entire country.[2] The economic situation of Liberia's large unemployed population of young people also poses a serious structural threat to the country. In 2013, it was estimated that up to 85% of the youth population were unemployed.[3] To make matters worse, the education system has not yet recovered and many of those who are unemployed have minimal technical skills to leverage.

In 2012, when this project was created and funded, issues such as decentralisation of governance, security sector reform, and natural resource management had the potential to act as either a constructive force to consolidate stability, or as the fault lines which would drive apart political partisans. The electoral reform around the 2014 senatorial election and the 2017 presidential election are critical issues which have the potential to undermine gains that have thus been made. It is in this regard that SFCG-Liberia decided at the beginning of this project to target these particular issues through partnering with the National Youth Movement for Transparent Elections (NAYMOTE), the Security Sector Reform Working Group (SSRWG), the Sustainable Development Institute (SDI) and beginning in 2014, the Election Coordinating Committee (ECC).

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[1] Dowd, C. and C. Raleigh. (2012). "Mapping Conflict Across Liberia and Sierra Leone". ACCORD: *Consolidating Peace: Liberia and Sierra Leone*. Issue 23
[2] "No Money, No Justice: Police Corruption and Abuse in Liberia" (2013) *Human Rights Watch*. Pp. 2
[3] Dunmore, Charlie. (2013). Liberian President Says Youth Unemployment a Threat to Peace. *Reuters News*. http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/11/25/liberia-sirleaf-idUSL5N0JA43B20131125

Programme Background

Project title: *Strengthening the Capacity of Civil Society to Promote to Sustainable Governance in Liberia*

Donor: the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA)

Project length: 3 years (2012-2015)

Location: Bassa, Bong, and Nimba Districts for the full duration the project and either Rivercess or Sinoein the Forest Sector for the second phase, starting in July 2014.

The **overall objective** of the project is to "strengthen the capacity of civil society organizations in Liberia to contribute to a sustained democratic culture that protects human rights and promotes citizens participation in decision-making processes". The project aims to accomplish this through an integrated three-pronged approach designed to improve the programmatic, institutional, and financial management of partner organizations; reinforce civil society networks; and establish a platform for constructive dialogue with government institutions. There are **four specific objectives**:

- Obj. 1: Increase the programmatic capacity of partner civil society organizations (CSOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) to engage the state on targeted reform areas;
- Obj. 2: Increase the institutional and financial capacity of CSOs and CBOs for sustained engagement with state institutions;
- Obj. 3: Strengthen networking and collaboration among CSOs and CBOs at the national and county level;
- Obj. 4: Increase information-sharing and dialogue between citizens, state institutions, and CSOs/CBOs at the national and county level.

The expected results of the project are as follows:

- The demand side for better governance among citizens be increased around targeted reform processes;
- Communication between citizens and state institutions be increased on key development policies;
- Targeted CSOs have increased institutional capacity to achieve their aims and purpose over time;
- Strengthen networks between CBOs and CSOs, enhance effective and efficient programmatic capacity including advocacy and results-based interventions and reporting;
- Civil society engage cohesively during different governance phases including electoral, decentralisation as well as Constitutional review and amendment processes;
- Government recognises the unique contributions of CSOs to the nation's development and governance process.

The following activities have been or will be implemented in pursuit of the stated objectives grouped into the following components: Start-up, Programmatic, Institutional Development, and strategic engagement.

- **Start-up:** Setting an Advisory Group, Recruitment, Planning, Capacity Assessment of CSOs, Selection of partners
- **Programming**: Outcome mapping, Baseline development, Work plan and budget development, Coalition Building, Conducting action-oriented research, Development of an advocacy strategy, Development and validation of a communication strategy, Increasing Public Information on Key Reform processes, Training of community radio stations, Peer-to-peer engagement and review, Performance benchmark Workshops, Mid-term review
- **Institutional development:** Outcome mapping, Development of a budget, benchmarks assessment workshops, Productivity Skill Building
- **Strategic engagement**: Initial partnership forum, Sharing of research objectives, regular updates to government, partnership for joint actions sought, review of the engagement

The Ebola crisis

The evaluation report was written at a difficult moment for Liberia. In February 2014, The World Health Organization announced an outbreak of the deadly Ebola virus in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. In July 2014, the number of suspected and confirmed cases reported peaked, declaring Liberia as the epicentre of the outbreak. In response, the Government of Liberia declared national public health emergency in August 2014 and outlined a number of extraordinary measures. Government scaled down normal operations in order to adequately respond to the crisis while international NGOs as well as private sector aligned operations with the public health emergency. Thus, the outbreak has hit the country hard, undermining public services and further fracturing the social fabric across the country. The Ebola virus has victimized thousands of Liberians and claimed the lives of several thousands, including the lives of those who have been involved in the implementation of the project. It is clear that there will be a "before Ebola" and "after Ebola" phase of this project and of the country overall.

The evaluation team looked over the 18 first months of implementation of the "Strengthening the capacities of the civil society" project, which took place under stable and normal conditions. Data collection for this evaluation took place in July 2014, at a time when Ebola was already present in the country but was still limited in its scope and impact. August was a turning point when a state of emergency was declared as the country grappled with the deadly virus. At the time of writing the report (September – October 2014), SFCG and SIDA are exploring ways to adapt the project to the evolving context. The evaluation team is therefore aware that the conclusions and recommendations from this evaluation may not be relevant or applicable to the post-Ebola crisis Liberia. However, it is important that the evaluation process be concluded in order for best practices and lessons learned in order to be gathered and shared for future use, in Liberia or otherwise.

Methodology of the evaluation

Evaluation objectives and definition

SFCG used a mixed method qualitative/quantitative methodology to conduct an internal mid-term evaluation. The evaluation explores the question of the **effectiveness** of the project implemented by SFCG and six Liberian partners and the various factors that are either contributing to or hindering the effectiveness of the programme. The report aims to provide pragmatic recommendations for maximizing the impact of the project through effective implementation during the second phase of the project, and to provide lessons learned that will benefit similar projects in Liberia and beyond.

The OECD DAC[4] "Guidance on evaluating Development Co-operation" was used as resources for defining the evaluator's understanding of the effectiveness criteria.

> "*Effectiveness: A measure of the extent to which the aid activity is provoking or likely to provoke the intended changes and therefore to reach its intended objectives, in a timely fashion*"

Evaluation questions

More specifically, the evaluation aimed to answer **the following evaluative questions on the project's effectiveness**:

- Progress of partners towards their participatory benchmarks;
- Level of change in partners' capacities since the initiation of the project;
- Level of implementation of the project's activities;
- Level of engagement of the partners with other partners and with stakeholders;
- Level of visibility of partners at the county level;
- Assess the effectiveness of the radio programme run by SFCG.

Scope of the evaluation and target population

The evaluation was conducted in Bassa, Bong, and Nimba Districts and in Monrovia. The evaluation targeted the following groups:

- The population of Bassa, Bong and Nimba Districts with 630 randomly selected people invited to participate to the survey. The sample population included:
    - 55.6% male and 44.4% female;
    - 212 people surveyed in Bong, 205 in Grand Bassa, and 213 in Nimba;
    - 25.4% people 18-25 years old, 31.9% of 26-35, 22.2% of 36-45, and 20.5% of 46 and above;
    - Educational level: 12.7% post-secondary; 16% technical/vocational training; 41.1% secondary school; 12.2% primary school education and 17.9% who had no education at all.

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[4] The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) – Development Assistance Committee

- SFCG staff: the evaluator interviewed the staff involved in the project implementation including the country director, the project manager, the programme coordinator, the DME manager, the media manager, the programme associate, the finance and administration staff. A total of six SFCG employees were interviewed;
- Implementation partners: NAYMOTE, SSRWG, SDI, BAWODA, CJPS, SEARCH. The evaluator interviewed and surveyed at least three senior members of each organization. A total of 18 partners' members were interviewed. In order to respect the partner's anonymity, the evaluation report does not use the names of the various organisations. Rather, we refer to our partners anonymously as the "County-Based Partners" (CBP1, CBP2, CBP3) and as the "National Partners" (NP1, NP2, NP3);
- The donor SIDA. One representative of SIDA was interviewed.

Data collection activities and tools

SFCG used a mixed methodology to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. In order to collect the data that serve as a basis for the evaluation analysis, the following data collection activities were undertaken by the evaluation team:

- Desk review of all relevant project documents (project proposal, project logical framework, project budget, capacity assessment reports, baseline report, outcome mapping report, progress reports, benchmark tracker, partners' quarterly reports, monitoring visits reports, monitoring matrix, bi-yearly review meeting notes, and June 2014 progress marker exercise report);
- Key Informant Interviews (KII) using open-ended questions;
- Capacity Strengthening Assessment survey with Likert-scale closed-ended questions;
- One participatory evaluation session with partners using various methodologies such as working groups to ease brainstorming;
- Survey among randomly selected population of the three target counties. We conducted between 205 and 213 surveys per county for a total of 630 surveys: this represents a 95% confidence level and a 7% margin of error.

All tools and participatory sessions used English as the language of communication. Survey questions were translated into Pidgin English during the surveyor's training session. The key informant interviews were articulated around semi-structured open-ended questions, while the survey used 37 closed-ended questions. All data collection tools are to be found in the report appendix (shared on request by sending an email to: cburton@sfcg.org).

Evaluation team

The evaluation was conducted by a team made out of the following members:

- **Lead evaluator**: Charline Burton, SFCG West and Central Africa regional DME Specialist. Burton was in charge of conducting the desk review, the key informant interviews, the partners' capacity assessment surveys, facilitating the participatory evaluation session, training the surveyors, analysing the data, writing the report;
- **Assistant evaluators**: Roselyn Korleh, SFCG Liberia DME Assistant, was in charge of supervising the quantitative data collection (survey) on the field, selecting the surveyors,

supervising the surveyors, ensuring the quality of the survey and the filling of survey protocols, ensuring the quality of data entry. SFCG international intern Ashish Pradhan took notes of the main results and output of the participatory evaluation session and acted as note-taker during the key informant interviews with the project's implementing partners. International Institutional Team intern Maurane Tschibambe analyzed the data from the partners' capacity assessment surveys and participated to the analysis of the qualitative data.

- **Surveyors**: Six surveyors (three men and three women) participated in the data collection. Because the survey aimed to assess the partners' visibility, we didn't request local partners' involvement in the survey process. The surveyors were trained by the lead evaluator during a one-day training during which the survey protocol was also field-tested and modified afterwards in order to reflect upon the surveyors' feedback.

- SFCG partnered with the **Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Service** (LISGIS), a government body, who entered the 630 survey protocols, under SFCG's close supervision. LISGIS provided the following deliverables to SFCG: a database of all processed entries, an Excel spreadsheet with all the tables relative to the survey questions, disaggregated (a) per district, (b) per gender, and (c) per age group.

Difficulties and methodological limitations

The present evaluation report was developed and implemented carefully to ensure that the results would accurately represent the reality and perceptions during the data collection period in July 2014. However, as with any social science work, there are some limitations to it.

- The evaluation team faced difficulties in collecting different data related to the project's activities implementation. This is linked to the lack of a consistent data monitoring and of a comprehensive and up-to-date monitoring system. The evaluator therefore had to rely on other sources of data, such as the partner's perceptions or SFCG's narratives of how the project was being implemented. It is uncertain how much those perceptions and narratives differ from the reality. For that reason, the evaluation team avoided drawing conclusions based on partial data or data that could not be verified;

- Because of limited time, qualitative data was collected only with stakeholder directly involved in the project. No interview was conducted with local or national authorities, networks, CSOs or institutions with whom the implementing partners are collaborating. The evaluation report therefore represents solely the views of SFCG and the implementing partners. The evaluation relied on such views, opinions and stories of change to draw conclusion on a series of questions such as the one related to the level of engagement of the partners with other stakeholders.

- The mid-term evaluation team applied a different methodology and sample during the auto-evaluation of capacities for the partners than the one that was used during the baseline. The comparison between pre-project and mid-term data may therefore be not as reliable as it would be, should a similar methodology have been used at both moments. The reader should bear this in mind when reading the data from Section 2 "Evolution of Partners' capacities".

C. Findings and Analysis

The evaluation focuses on six main themes, all related to the project's effectiveness. The selection of these themes was made jointly by the evaluator and by the Project's team. Such themes were decided in such a way that the mid-term evaluation would serve Search for Common Ground's accountability obligations, as well as the project team's learning needs.

The effectiveness of the project is assessed by exploring the following sub-themes:

1. Progress of partners on their benchmarks;
2. Increase in partners' capacity levels;
3. Level of implementation of the project's activities;
4. Engagement of the partners with other partners as well as with government;
5. Level of visibility of partners at the county level;
6. Effectiveness of the radio programme Blay-Tahnla.

The "Findings" section is articulated around each of those themes. In the following pages, the evaluation team presents the data collected through various means and sources, which aim to shed light on the six sub-themes and allow the drawing of conclusions on the effectiveness of the Project. Such conclusions are presented in the next section entitled "D. Conclusions", on page 36.

1. Progress of partners on their benchmarks

Progress towards achievement of benchmarks

"*The benchmarks are perhaps the most important document of this project. The primary purpose of this project is to build the capacity of partnering organizations. The benchmarks are a key tool in guiding and monitoring that capacity strengthening*" – SFCG partners review Meeting, January 2014.

The progress of partners on their benchmarks is much lower than expected at this stage of the program[5]. Indeed, as shown in Table 1, the average completion and progress on the 6- and 12-months benchmarks is as follows:

- 47% of 6-months benchmarks have been achieved;
- 28% of 6-months benchmarks are "in-progress";
- 14% of 12-months benchmarks are completed and;
- 16% of 12-months benchmarks are "in-progress".

Table 1: Benchmark progress

BP =County-based partners NP = National partners	CBP 1		CBP 2		CBP 3		NP 1		NP 2		NP 3		AVERAGE	
	Complete	In-Progress	Complete	In-Progress	Complete	In-Progress	Complete	In-Progress	Complete	In-Progress	Complete	In-Progress	Average Complete	Average In-progress
Programmatic benchmark														
6-month	50%	50%	44%	56%	25%	0%	100%	0%	38%	50%	67%	33%	54%	32%
12-month	100%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	33%	0%	0%	67%	11%	28%	24%
Financial benchmark														
6-month	100%	0%	44%	33%	0%	0%	0%	100%	75%	25%	22%	22%	40%	30%
12-month	0%	50%	44%	22%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	11%	11%	9%	14%
Institutional benchmark														
6-month	50%	50%	56%	44%	0%	11%	33%	0%	75%	13%	67%	11%	47%	22%
12-month	25%	25%	0%	30%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	10%	4%	11%
Average of 6-months benchmarks													47%	28%
Average of 12-months benchmarks													14%	16%

Adapted from "SFCG Master benchmark Spreadsheet – updated on July 15th, 2014"[6]

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[5] In July 2013 All partner organizations designed three sets of benchmarks: one set that they were "expecting to see in 6 months", another set of benchmark that they would "like to see in 12 months" and lastly, a set of benchmarks they would "love to see in 18 months". The mid-term evaluation took place 11 months after benchmarks were decided upon. At that time, all "expect to see in 6 months" benchmarks should therefore have been completed while all "would like to see in 12 months" benchmark should either be completed or in progress.

Disaggregated data from the various partners show a large difference in the level of progress towards the benchmarks. While County Based Partner 1 (CBP1) completed 44 % of their benchmarks so far, other organizations such as National Partner 2 (NP2) (27%) and NP1 (22%) are progressing at a slower pace. CBP3 remains far behind, with only 4% of their benchmarks achieved so far, and only 2% "in progress". In terms of priority, more efforts were put into reaching the Programmatic benchmarks (37% complete), followed by the Financial benchmarks (24%). Institutional benchmarks are even further behind, with only 18% completed.

Factors explaining the level of achievement of benchmarks

First, there has been **a lack of clarity among the partners on the outcome mapping process and the role of benchmarks in the project**. Throughout 2013, partners did not have an appropriate understanding of the importance of benchmarks in the project. To them, benchmarks were the result of a useful reflection process, but none of the organisations actually considered it or used as a project work plan against which the success of the project would be measured. The partners' priority focused mainly on the implementation of activities which they traditionally have considered as indicators of success.

According to SFCG's Headquarters DME Manager, who lead the benchmark process and the initial mapping workshop (July 2013), the central role of benchmarks for this project had been stresses various times at the inception of the project. However, SFCG in Liberia recognises that there was a lack of emphasis during SFCG's monitoring of the partner's activities and therefore partners paid minimal attention to it. More clarity was provided by SFCG during the January 2014 "partners review retreat". Following that, all partners had a better understanding of the importance of benchmarks as a key to their own success in that project. All of them now understand the importance of achieving financial and institutional benchmarks as well as programmatic benchmarks. Additionally, a "benchmark focal point person" was designed by all partners: that person was tasked with monitoring the progress of his or her organisation towards benchmarks. As a result, the level of progression on benchmarks increased in 2014: In January 2014, the average of completed benchmarks was 6%, while 4% of them were "in progress". In July 2014, this had increased to 25% and 18% respectively.

Consequently, **the efforts to reach the benchmarks had not been appropriately financed by the partners** in the budget plan for the first semester of the project. Even for the partners who had been willing to move forward on their capacity building, there was a lack of clarity around the financial support to benchmarks. While various benchmarks needed the support from external persons such as trainers, such costs had not been included in the finance forecast. Some of the capacity building was therefore conducted by SFCG staff, but due to SFCG's own limitation (of staff and capacity), it was not sufficient to progress on all expected benchmarks. The project holds funding for capacity building, including funds for international

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[6] In January 2014, a "partners review retreat" took place and two partner organizations decided to edit slightly their benchmarks. Those changes are not taken into consideration when assessing progress towards expected achievement of benchmarks.

travel to bring experts in from abroad. Even yet, it was unclear to some partners that SFCG was available to provide training services on request. This represented a lost opportunity to increase the level of achievement of some of the benchmarks.

Another factor that explains some of the delays is **the varying nature of the benchmarks**: the outcome mapping process undertaken by each partner led to the choice of a large variety of benchmarks, ranging from some very quick and easy-to-reach task such as "Conduct two days training on fundraising" (SSRWG Financial benchmark 2) to more complex and interdependent type of activities, such as: "Establish partnership with government institutions and community dwellers" (NAYMOTE Programmatic benchmark 7). The benchmarks had been classified into three different categories: the 6-months, 12-months, and 18-months benchmarks, which were meant to be adapted to each benchmark's level of complexity. According to SFCG, many efforts were undertaken during the participatory benchmark creation process in order to ensure all benchmarks were realistic and feasible. However, at mid-term of the project, one can notice that benchmarks that take a longer time to be achieved or depend on external stakeholders have suffered delays. For example, BAWODA Institutional benchmark 11 refers to "an active board that meets regularly". But BAWODA encountered some challenges as they had a hard time convincing people to sit on their board without being paid. However, this factor only affects a minority of the benchmarks, as a large majority only depend on the partner's inner organization, willingness or planning in order to be reached.

About the benchmark process

All partners are unanimous about the usefulness and relevance of the benchmark process. The participatory nature of the process, the involvement of key staff in their design and the focus on three essential elements of their organizations (finance, program, institution) were much appreciated by every one of them. It served as a way to reflect on what the vision of the organization is and where they hope to be by the end of the project. Bringing up topics that some partners usually don't look at (gender, board, finance procedures, etc.) and presenting them as standards to try to improve upon was a way of bringing the partners to a higher level. The participatory nature of the process allowed for all organizations – disregarding their initial level of capacities – to create benchmarks that best meet their needs.

Despite the positive feedback from all the project's stakeholders globally, there are some minor elements that hindered the success of the process, namely: some benchmarks were too ambitious; others were too broad and therefore difficult to achieve. SFCG recognises those weaknesses: according to the partners, this is linked to the care they took of not interfering with the partners during the benchmark design process. However, they admit that they would do it differently if they had the chance to repeat the process. Furthermore, the lack of an easy-to-use monitoring tool for the benchmarks makes it hard to monitor progress of each partner and to stimulate inner organization willingness to achieve progress towards benchmarks.

2. Evolution of partners' capacities

Two of the Project's specific objectives related to the increase of programmatic capacities of the partners (obj. 1) and of institutional and financial capacities (obj.2). Those objectives are meant to be achieved by the implementation of the various project's activities combined with efforts to reach the benchmarks. Capacity building is meant to be a transversal aspect of the action.

Since inception of the project, the partners have benefited from a variety of trainings[7]. All partners were invited to participate in an advocacy strategy workshop as well as a communications strategy workshop provided by SFCG's senior staff. Additional trainings were organized by SFCG for some of the partners, based on specific requests or needs. For example, the CBP BAWODA was provided a series of trainings adapted to their needs, including: two IT trainings, a basics of Monitoring and Evaluation workshop, and a strategic planning workshop, all of which were provided by SFCG's staff, including: the DME Coordinator, the Programme Associate and international Interns. Furthermore, SFCG hired a private company to train the partners in the use of QuickBooks financial software.

Limited monitoring data of the partners' training was shared with the evaluation team[8]. For this reason, the evaluation team lacks quantitative data to demonstrate an increase of knowledge or capacity of the partners as a direct result of such trainings. However, qualitative data collected during interviews with the various partners demonstrate **the effectiveness of such trainings to enhance the partner's knowledge and capacities**. All partners but one could provide examples of an increase in their capacities as a result of the trainings.

> "*In terms of programming, proposal and report writing, we've improved quality of reports following those trainings. We used to have partners write our reports, as we have more proposals being approved under this arrangement. Now, the proposal writing process is being spearheaded by our organization's volunteers. So we can see direct results of the training these volunteers are getting and how they are helping the organization achieve things*" – National Partner 1 (NP1)

In order to comprehensively assess the increase of partners' capacities, the evaluation team administered an "auto-evaluation form" to three senior members of each the organization. All of was asked to rate his organization's capacities on a series of 45 topics relating to: Institution, Board, Human Resources, Team Work, Finances, Project Implementation, Networks, Sustainability, and Policies. Partners were asked to rate their capacities on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 meant "not at all" and 5 meant "excellent". The results of this auto-evaluation were compared to the ratings that were similarly collected 15 months prior, in line with each

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[7] However, the evaluator was not provided a comprehensive list of trainings organised in favour of the partners and the information collected may therefore be incomplete.
[8] The evaluation team was provided the analysis reports of two trainings: a DME training and a basic computer skills training to the same CBO. Results from those reports show an increase of knowledge for 100% of the DME training participants, and an increase of knowledge for 40% of the IT training participants.

partner's Organisational Capacity Assessment. The figures below highlight the changes of capacities from pre-project to the mid-way of the project: in green are increased scores; decreases in pink. However, this source of information is not fully reliable given the subjective nature of the data collection process.

Table 2: Auto-evaluation of Partners' capacities

	County-based partners (CBP)						National partners (NP)					
	CBP 1		CBP 2		CBP 3		NP 1		NP 2		NP 3	
	2013	2014	2013	2014	2013	2014	2013	2014	2013	2014	2013	2014
INSTITUTION	3,41	4,17	3,76	4,12	3,25	3,28	4,02	3,61	4,09	4,22	3,82	3,83
BOARD	4,17	3,44	3,40	4,00	3,40	4,11	3,51	3,33	2,35	3,14	2,17	1,60
HUMAN RESOURCES	3,88	3,73	3,92	4,27	4,27	4,13	4,17	4,20	3,75	3,73	3,07	4,40
TEAM WORK	3,63	4,00	4,36	4,33	4,33	4,08	4,07	4,25	3,47	4,08	4,36	3,63
FINANCES	3,96	3,75	4,14	4,06	3,58	4,08	3,89	4,11	4,49	3,89	2,69	3,11
PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION	3,87	3,61	4,03	3,49	3,75	3,53	4,03	3,94	3,66	3,54	3,74	3,58
NETWORKS	3,73	3,33	4,23	3,62	3,65	3,27	3,81	4,07	3,73	4,13	4,19	4,60
SUSTAINABILITY	3,75	4,25	4,33	3,82	3,54	3,64	4,08	3,75	4,25	4,25	3,51	3,63
AVERAGE SCORE	**3,8**	**3,79**	**4,02**	**3,96**	**3,72**	**3,76**	**3,95**	**3,91**	**3,72**	**3,87**	**3,44**	**3,55**

Each partner was asked to select a score from the following: "1. Not at all", "2. Needs major improvement", "3. Needs improvement in a limited way", "4. Good" and "5. Excellent".

The table shows **some mixed results in terms of the evolution of partners' capacity**. While there are significant increases by all partners in approximately half of the capacity categories, we also notice a decrease in capacities for the other half[9].Categories and topics subject to decrease or increase vary greatly from one partner to another. However, some general tendencies were found:

A. There is a general increase of institutional capacities among most partners.
While the average score for this category was 3.73 in April 2013, it has now increased to 3.87 by July 2014. All but one of the organizations ha increased their institutional capacities. This is partly due to the fact that such capacities have specifically been targeted by the project as an area of growth and action, and specific institutional benchmarks were designed by each partner to ensure strengthening of their organizations in that domain. For instance, SFCG organized

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[9] Those figures are partly contradictory with qualitative data collected during interviews: indeed, all partners as well as SFCG ensured that they clearly noticed an increase of capacities. This may be explained by the following reasons, among others: the 2013 auto-evaluation form was used with a larger number of members for each organization, disregarding their grade. The July 2014 assessment was administered only to three senior members of each organization. Figures could therefore be biased to those that participated and those that did not participate. Additionally, the partners may have overestimated some of their capacities during the 2013 baseline capacities assessment. During the trainings – which took place after the initial capacity assessment - partners may have realized that they had weaknesses relative to some specific capacities, which they were not aware of before the project launch.

training on communication advocacy strategies for all partners. The results of the training are clearly noticed through the assessment's score: all partners now mention that they are either "good" or "excellent" at having a mission and overall vision. Four out of six partners increased their rating of the following statement: "*The staff can articulate in the mission of the organization in their own words*". However, this increase of institutional capacity is not consistent among all partners: while some increased their scores significantly, such as CBP1, CBP2 or NP2 , half either did not progress (CBP3 or NP3) or even regressed (NP1) in that category.

B. There is a clear correlation between increase or decrease of institutional capacities and the reach of the institutional benchmarks by the partners: CBP1, CBP2 and NP2 are the partners with the higher completion and "in progress" rate for the institutional benchmarks, while CBP3 and NP1 barely made any progress in that regard. **However, there is no such correlation between the finance capacities and the reach of finance benchmarks**. For instance, neither CBP3 nor NP1 made any progress on their finance benchmarks (0% completed), yet have the best score in the "finance capacities" category (4.08 for CBP3 and 4.11 for NP1). Conversely, CBP1 completed 100% of their 6-months finance benchmark and scored 3.75 on their finance capacities self-assessment.

C. All partners gave themselves a lower score for the "Project Implementation" category topics than in April 2013. All partners provided a score that ranges from "3. needs some improvement in a limited way" to "4. good". Yet, when having a closer look at this category's different topics, some nuances appear:

  a) **Monitoring and Evaluation**: During the interviews, most organizations mentioned that the outcome mapping process and the benchmark experience had been a useful way to increase their capacities in monitoring. However, the auto-assessment shows mixed results in that regard: when asked to evaluate whether there is a "clear Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) system", the score dropped from 3.64 in March 2013 to 2.56 in July 2014. All provided lower scores in terms of incorporating M&E into the work plans or evaluating their project. It seems obvious that there still is much room for improvement in terms of M&E, even if some small progress has been achieved. For instance, 5 out of 6 organizations said that they are "good" at collecting data during each activity, an increase since the project's inception.

  b) **Engagement at the local level:** Before the project, only one partner (NP1) had provided a satisfactory score (4 or above) when evaluating its capacity to meet regularly with members of the community. At mid-term into the project, all but one partner (CBP2) consider themselves to have good or excellent capacities to meet on a regular basis with members of the community. All six partners also demonstrate high capacities of being well-rooted within the community, with an average score of 4.58. However, apart from NP2, partners' capacities to meet regularly with local government officials are still quite weak, as the average score is 3.47.

D. There is a clear increase of the NPs' capacities to network. Indeed, all three have improved their score in almost all of this Category's topics, such as "*spending time speaking with other CSOs and NGOs*", "*good external communication about the organization's results*", and "*ongoing communication with private companies*". While the NP's capacities to meet with local government officials still needs improvement, their capacities to have an ongoing communication with government officials at the national level has much improved from the pre-project situation. It is now considered as "good" (average score 4.06). **However, CBPs have not improved on their networking capacities.** Their scores have even decreased since the pre-project assessment (from 3.87 to 3.47 on average). The only area of improvement in that category is that they are now all members of a least one national coalition, which has strengthened their capacity to network. For all other topics, there is a need for minor to major improvement.

E. Teamwork seems to be a strong capacity of most partners (all but NP3), with "good" or "excellent" capacities in most topics according to their auto-evaluation. All partners state that they work as team more now than 18 months earlier, that there are many leaders to whom work can be delegated to, and that they're "good" or "excellent" at having the management take into account the opinions of all the people in the organization. The only downfall of that category is gender balance, a topic for which four organizations mention that they have minor or major improvements to do. NP3 is an exception, with an average score below 4 for this category.

There is no clear trend in the Finances, Sustainability, Human Resources or Board Capacities Categories. Increase of capacities or challenges vary from one partner to the other. Additionally, results vary greatly among one same category, depending on the various topics.

For instance, **Finance capacities** of CBO2, CB3 and NP1 improved on the following themes: existence of an annual operating budget, secured annual income, multiple sources funding. However, SSRWG scores much lower on those topics, ranging from "needs major improvement" to "needs improvement in a limited way". Despite SFCG's regular coaching of the partners on finance issues, capacities are very different from one partner to the other regarding the quality of the finance reports: SSRWG auto-evaluated itself as 'excellent' (score of 5) about the quality of their financial reports, while SDI scored 2.3.

Findings relative to the **Sustainability Capacities** of the partners are also mixed: all six partners' capacities of being rooted within the community range between "good" and "excellent", and apart from NP2, all partners mentioned that they have assets of their owns such as vehicles, buildings or machines. This increase of capacities is among others linked to the project which provided different assets to each partner, including a car for the three national partners. Some partner organizations are housed in their own infrastructure and are therefore not paying rent anymore, while others are even renting part of their facilities to generate income. However, not all partners are equal in terms of income generation capacities: CBP3, NP1 and NP3 score between 1.3 and 2.00 (between "not at all" and "needs major improvement"), while CBP2 scores 3.00, NP2 4.00 and CBP1 4.33.

3. Level of implementation of the project's activities

Level of implementation

The evaluation team was not able to collect enough data to comprehensively assess the level of implementation of the project's activities, for which the root cause is the project's lack of an efficient, up-to-date monitoring system that is managed properly. The table below provides information about the main outputs and activities completed at mid-term into the project. However, because the evaluation team was not provided comprehensive information about the expected level of implementation of the project, such as an overall project work plan against which progress so far could be measured, it is not possible for the evaluation team to draw conclusions about the pace of completion of the project's outputs.

Table 3: List of project's outputs and status at mid-term (source: SFCG Liberia DME)

No	Outputs / Activities	Status
1	Setting an Advisory Board	Completed
2	Pre-project Planning	Completed
3	CSOs Capacity Assessment	Completed
4	Selection of Partners	Completed
5	Launch of Project	Completed
6	Signing of MoUs with Partners and Government Institutions	Completed
7	Organizational Strengthening Capacity Assessment	Completed
8	Baseline Study	Completed
9	Outcome Mapping Approach to Set Benchmarks	Completed
10	Action-Oriented Research Reports on Key Reform Area	Finalized Stage
11	Advocacy Development Workshops	Finalized Stage
12	Development and Validation of Communication Strategy	Completed
13	Training of Community Radio Stations	Completed
14	Increasing Public Information on Key Reform Process	Ongoing

Level of implementation may also be measured via the partners' perception of their own progress. Such insights are illustrated below:

County-Based partners:

- CBO1: "*We are not ahead of time nor behind. We are going according to the activity plan because we have a schedule and the activities can only be done in the districts.*"
- CBO2: "*I think we are approaching but not yet at the middle (…) because in terms of implementation initially there was some delay but since the beginning of this year things have been moving. Support is on time. We are moving. Again the benchmarks, there are some things that we're supposed to do. Getting consultants, etc. depends on their schedule.*"

- CBO3: "*We've covered about 75% of what is planned from January to June 2014. Every 6 months we revise the workplan. We haven't been able to complete all due to late funding.*"

National partners:
- NP1: "*We're on course for that project. Regarding how to measure implementation, we have an action plan that we normally develop: a one-year work-plan. We're halfway on that plan. The only issue that is outstanding is our strategic plan. We have made significant progress.*"
- NP2 "*We are where we thought we would be if not slightly ahead.*"
- NP3: "*We have done more than 50% of our activities. It's not a challenge per se but in dealing with security people, initially we had some challenges especially in the first 6 months (…) because in planning activities especially with security people, you have to give them a set time.*"

Factors favouring quality and timely implementation of activities

The relation with SFCG is a constant element mentioned by partners to explain success in delivering the services related to the project. When asked to rate their relationship with SFCG, partners give an average of "4. Very good" on a 5-point Likert-scale. SFCG's constant and cordial way of communicating with partners is unanimously appreciated and valued. The relationship, which is "*forceful but cordial*" creates "*positive pressure*" on the partners, who are encouraged to perform better, to comply with working plans and to provide quality outputs. Additionally, all partners welcome SFCG's availability to provide support, address issues that may arise, and answer last-minute questions. "*The relationship between SFCG and our staff has broken the barrier of bureaucracy; I can just go and visit the director without prior notice. This cordial relationship helps make our work easier*" (CBP2). Promptin answers to email queries, phone calls or requests for support are mentioned by all partners as positive aspects of the relationship. However, more efforts are requested from SFCG to provide quality and timely feedback on the project and activities deliverables. This indeed tends to take more time than expected by the partners.

Two partner review meetings took place so far: one in January and one in July 2014. As illustrated in previous parts of the report, those meetings have proven to be very effective at (a) ensuring a common understanding of the project; (b) building the partners' capacities; (c) allowing for coordination of action among partners and SFCG. Adequate re-orientation was taken as a result of the meetings and various bottlenecks were addressed. However, the full potential for effect of such event is not yet met, given the low involvement of the partners in the preparation of such meeting, the tight agenda, and the space between the meetings (once every six months).

Challenges of partners in implementing activities

Overall, partners faced two main challenges that hindered progress of service delivery in one way or another:

External factors: partners work on governance topics that require an interaction with the government and official institutions at the local, regional or national level. Such interaction sometimes proves difficult. All three national partners pointed to the "lack of political will" or "political and institutions procedures" being a challenge. Indeed, influencing the political will of governments or institutions is outside their scope of influence, they said. Below is a quote which exemplifies how this may hinder completion of activities by the partners:

> About the collection of data on Country Social Development Fund: "O*fficials are supposed to meet once a year to decide how funds are spent. Officials were very reluctant to release this information but the Ministry of Internal Affairs was willing to share it. Since we didn't get far with the county officials, we got it from Ministry of Internal Affairs instead (…). This is the political context in which we are working. Officials hold onto information they do not want the public to be aware of*". – A national partner

This point is further developed in the "Engagement with other stakeholders" section on page 29.

Internal factors: Internal factors contributed to decreased effectiveness of the partners. The factor most frequently mentioned was the delays in funding by SFCG (mentioned by four partners), as best described below:

> *"Delay in timely remittance of funds for project activities is posing serious challenge to implementation and timely reporting quarterly. We are expected to report on time but in most cases our activities are not implemented on time due to delay in the remittance of funds."* - Excerpt of a NP's quarterly report

According to SFCG, this persistent problem throughout the second reporting period was due to the paperwork and institutional safe guards of SFCG-Global, which made the monthly transfers very burdensome and time intensive. Additionally, a delay in financial reporting from any one of the six partners causes delays for all partners' funds allocation.

Collaboration between national and local partners was also a challenge at the early stages of the project and continues to be one for one of the county based partners (see section on Mutual Engagement on page 26). Local partners sometimes feel the national partners consider them as a strictly logistical counterpart – in charge of inviting people, finding a room for the event, etc. – rather than as real programmatic partners who can learn from each other. There also were issues of coordination between the local and national partners when two national partners would be willing to organize an activity at the same period in the same county. This issue was partly lifted as a result of the January partner review meeting, yet some partners continue facing it.

4. Level of engagement of national and county-based partners

Mutual engagement of partners

In line with Specific Objective 3 "*To increase networking and ccollaboration among CSOs and CBOs at national and county levels*", the Project expects to enhance collaboration and networking among the various partners. The expected outcome of activities related to this objective is: "*Enhanced effectiveness and efficiency of programming due to improvement of existing networks between CBOs and CSOs[10]*".

Some partners were already collaborating with each other before the inception of the project: SEARCH and CJPS were research partners for IREX, and BAWODA and SDI had worked jointly before that time. However, these collaborations (2 lines of bilateral collaboration) were minor with regards to the expected number of bilateral collaboration lines meant to be created as a result of the project (3 county based partners X 3 national partners = 9 lines of bilateral collaboration).

Data shows that collaboration and communication between national and county-based partners clearly increased as a result of the project: each national partner (NAYMOTE, SDI and SSRWG) is meant to collaborate with each of the three county-based partners (BAWODA, CJPS and SEARCH) and conduct joint action and activities. Mutual visits, phone calls, joint activities increased significantly as a result of the Project.

According to the project's logical framework, one of the specific objective 3 indicators is *"# of county-based organization partners receiving a 'high' score for degree of engagement with national partners around targeted reform processes*". The target is set to all three county-based partners receiving such a degree at Year 1. In order to assess the progress towards this indicator, each partner was asked to rate their level of engagement with other partners, on a Likert-scale from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent). A "high" degree (as mentioned in the project's logical framework) corresponds to a rate of 4 or 5. Rather than asking only the national partners to rate their level of engagement with the county-based partner, we asked all 6 partners to do so. Table 4 below illustrates the rates provided by 5 of the 6 partners (one of the national partner did not provide scores). As pictured in this table, **the target is not met for this indicator**.

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[10] Such increase is meant to happen thanks to:
- Act 3.11 Coalition Building: SFCG will provide support to the ECC to organize two regional county consultations and one national consultation with key stakeholders on electoral matters. The consultations will enable sharing between various organizations working on electoral matters, to improve cohesion and networking.
- Act 3.1.2. SFCG will also facilitate collaboration between national CSO partners and CBOs on the action research to encourage transfer of skills and knowledge.
- In addition, networking and collaboration were also meant to be increased through the implementation of joint activities and the participation to joint coordination meetings.

Table 4: Level of mutual engagement of Partners

Rating the level of engagement organisations around the reform issue they are working on: from 1: poor; 2: low; 3.: medium; 4: high, to 5: excellent						
Partners (↓) rating their level of engagement with other project's partners (→)	NP 1	NP 2	NP 3	CBP 1	CBP 2	CBP 3
NP 1				No data	No data	No data
NP 2				3.6	3.6	3.6
NP 3				3	4	4
CBP 1	3	3	2			
CBP 2	4.5	3.5	3.5			
CBP 3	5	5	5			

Generally speaking, **all partners mentioned the importance of mutual engagement and the power of such collaboration** between county and national-based organizations, as best phrased by one of the NPs:

> "*I think the project was written by a visionary. That is the best part of this project to create linkages, collaboration among national institutions and local institutions. It is very, very effective. I made it clear that it's a unique experience*". – NP1

All partners agree that the design of the project is a unique and interesting experience for them. Such design is supposed to be a win-win situation where national partners increase their visibility at the local level and where county-based partners increase their visibility at the national level as well as their expertise in specific governance reforms. **Data shows that there are benefits on both sides from that collaboration; however, such benefits are not equal for the national partners or the county-based partners.**

National partners highlight the positive outcomes of such collaboration and engagement, mainly in terms of <u>mobilization of communities</u> and capacities to easily organize activities at the county-level thanks to the county-based partners' support and network:

> "*The issue of mobilization is a key one. It was difficult before (…) Now it's just a phone call away. Nimba for instance was a very challenging place to work after the war because people there are very sensitive to outsiders. So we avoided the county in the past. But now it is different to work with a local partner there and we are received differently when they are part of the team.*" – A National Partner

County-based partners also point to some benefits from the joint collaboration with national partners, mainly regarding <u>capacity-building and sharing of experiences</u>:

> "*We are happy that we sat in the workshops when they [the national partners] are facilitating so we're getting knowledge on Local Governance Act, SSR. So when they're too busy to come, we can now facilitate*" – A County-Based Partner

Another outcome of the project is the collaboration among partners outside the scope of the project. As a result of their positive mutual engagement, some national and county-based partners decided to replicate the model in the framework of other projects. In addition, some national partners decided to start similar partnership with new partners in other counties. For instance, NAYMOTE is implementing two other grants in collaboration the CJPS, BAWODA and SEARCH. SDI is collaborating with SEARCH and BAWODA on an OSIWA and an Ears for Masses grants.

Aside those positive outcomes, not all aspects of this "mutual engagement" part of the project have been fully successful. So far **the project has not yet reached the expected outcome of increasing the CBP's visibility at the national level.** All CBPs are now part of the Civil Society Organisations Platform at the national level, but apart from this, the connection with national networks has not been as effective as expected by the CBPs. "*For now the linking is not happening. We haven't organized joint action: only joint activities*" says for instance one CBP. Generally speaking, CBPs mention that the linking with the national level is too low or too weak. This correlates with the findings of the Capacity Assessment that each partner went through (see page 19-23), which pointed towards more benefits for NPs than CBPs from the partnership than the CBPs in terms of networking.

In addition, some partners point to some **minor flaws in the design of the project, namely asymmetrical relationships and a lack of involvement by one or more counterparts**, as explained below:

> Asymmetrical relationship: This issue had been raised by CBPs during the January partners' review retreat and it has been solved for two of the three CBPs. However, it still remains a major issue for one of whom mentions that it does not feel valued by the NPs. According to that CBP, the relationship with national partners is unilateral instead of being bilateral: "*We call them* [the NPs] *to facilitate in our training for natural resource management, Local Governance Act or SSR (…). We know what they're good at. But they don't know what we're good at when it comes to presenting and when it comes to* [that CBP's domain of expertise]". In addition, there is an issue of collaboration, with the CBP stating that it is never asked to take on responsibilities such as co-chairing or co-facilitating, rather to "*just prepare meals and coordinate the logistics*". However, other CBOs have not expressed such concerns.

> Lack of involvement: As part of the project design, County-Based Partners and National Partners are requested to work together to implement joint activity and action. Each of the National Partners has a specific focus and expertise in one of the project's three priority areas: governance decentralisation, natural resource management, or security sector reform. County-Based Partners also have their own vision and own focus, but those are not systematically aligned with the project's three priority areas. Their interest in some of the priority areas is therefore limited. According to a National Partner, this results in a low engagement of some County-Based Partners. "*Some CBPs aren't*

involved in County Social Development Fund, for example. They don't take ownership and are involved in many different things. They do it because they've been asked to as part of this partnership".

Engagement with other stakeholders

Engagement of CBPs with other stakeholders: The project contributed to increase the engagement of CBPs at the county and community levels mainly. As a result of the activities implemented – many of them in sectors that they were not familiar with -, CBPs were able to strengthen their ties:

- At the county level with the authorities, the police, the community watch forum, other NGOs and CSOs;
- At the community level with the local police, traditional leaders, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, and women.

At the national level, the project had limited results in terms of favouring engagement of the CBPs with national structures or networks. All CBPs are now members of Civil Society Organizations. But apart from this, the only concrete examples of an increased engagement of CBPs at the national levels are (a) SEARCH's strengthened relationship with the Child Protection network and the Child Protection coalition and (b) CJPS's engagement with the Civil Platform on Decentralisation.

In terms of relationship with the government, CBPs rate them at "low" (CBP1) or "good" (CBP2 and 3), but all agree that the relationship improved as a result of the project. There are different reasons explaining that limited quality of relationship. CBP1 for instance mentions that the "*low relationship is linked to the type of work that we do. If we're having workshops around County Social Development Fund, it's a big thing: citizens come and say the money is being misused*". Other issues raised as part of the programme may not always be welcomed by the local and county authorities, such as awareness-raising on how to report on police abuses. However, the other two CBPs mention that the relationship is good despite the nature of the work they do. They refer to "*collaborative advocacy*" and "*respectfully disagreeing*" as examples of how they juggle with authorities to ensure good relationships are maintained.

Engagement of NPs with other stakeholders: NPs greatly increased their engagement at the county and community level. This is clearly pictured by the schema designed by SSRWG (Figure 1) to illustrate the stakeholders they were engaging with *before* the project (in blue) and those they are engaging *mid-way into the project* (in red). The schema clearly demonstrates the benefits of the project in increasing the relationships at the county and community level, as shown by the multiplicity of new stakeholders they are with engaged with (in red).

Figure 1: Evolution of engagement with other stakeholders - SSRWG
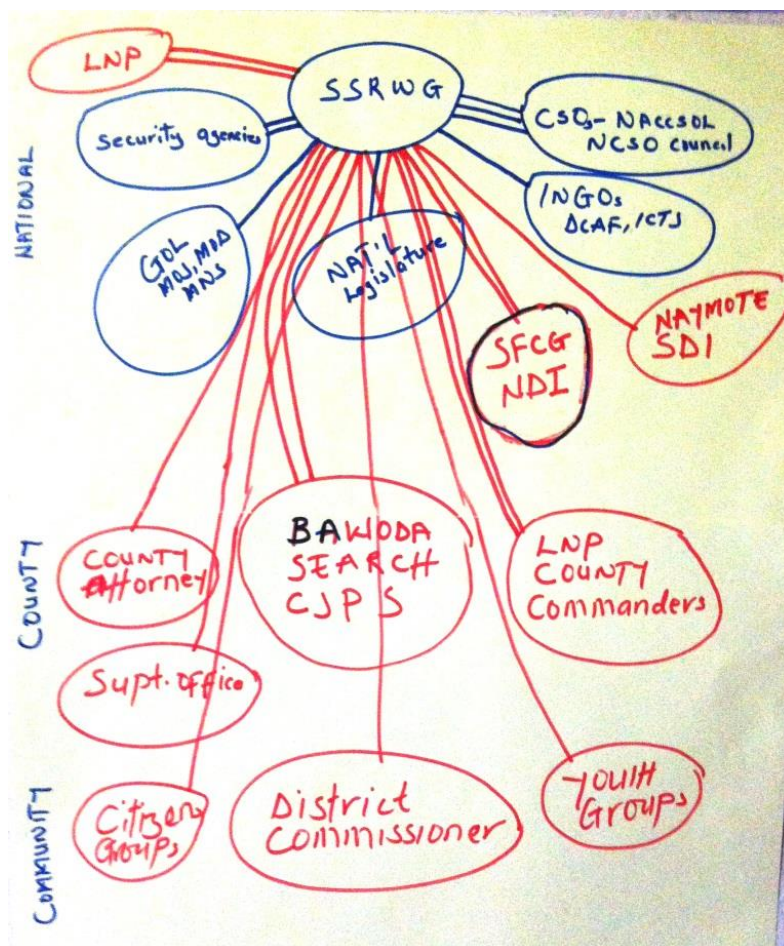
At the national level, the project did not seem to have much impact in terms of engagement. NPs note that their relationship with the government is still varies greatly from one institution to another, from one issue to another, or even from one person to another. Yet, success of their action depends very much of the government bodies' reaction to their work or on the government's own strict procedures, as illustrated in the examples below:

> About the oversight of the Security Sector: "*We developed a draft legislation to develop the law enforcement oversight authority. The draft is at the national legislature. And the bill is still in the plenary. We presented that bill in Aug 2013. It was read a couple weeks later and sent to the committee. Now it is very challenging. We either have to lobby hard or the act must be so good that people just want to pass it*". – A national partner

> About the work on Decentralisation: "*The challenge we have is that all we're doing for the constitutional review process will not go anywhere if it's not placed in the review process because the draft Local Governance Act has a lot of constitutional implications for example elections for superintendent. So we're working with lawmakers and trying to get a referendum*". – A national partner

5. Level of visibility of partners at the county level

The level of visibility of the partners was assessed during a survey conducted in Bong, Grand Bassa and Nimba counties[11]. Three questions were asked to the respondents:

1. Have you ever heard of (Name of the partner)?
2. Do you know the type of work that they do?
3. If yes, did you or someone you know ever attend one of their activities?

As shown in Graph 1, all CBPs are quite well known in their respective counties, with between 57.5% and 79.9% of respondents stating that "they have heard" of this partner. BAWODA has the highest visibility rate in its Grand Bassa county, with 79.9%, followed by SEARCH in Nimba (61.5%) and CJPS in Bong County (57.5%).

Those rates are higher than the NPs, who are known by a bit less than one respondent out of two in each county. As pictured in Graph 2, NAYMOTE has the highest visibility rate in the various counties.

Furthermore, respondents were asked whether they knew "the type of work that theorganization is doing". For CBPs, on average 78% of those who have heard of the organization (n=416) state that they know the type of work that such organization does.

Graph 1: Visibility of local partners
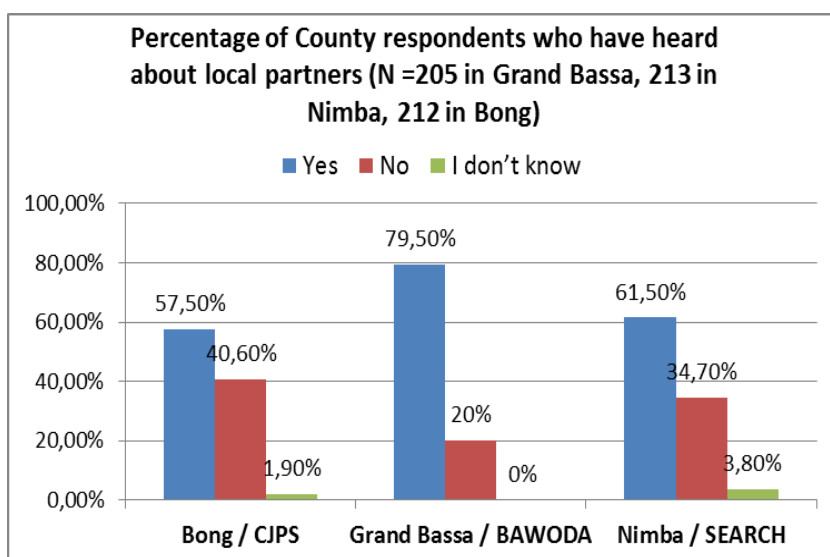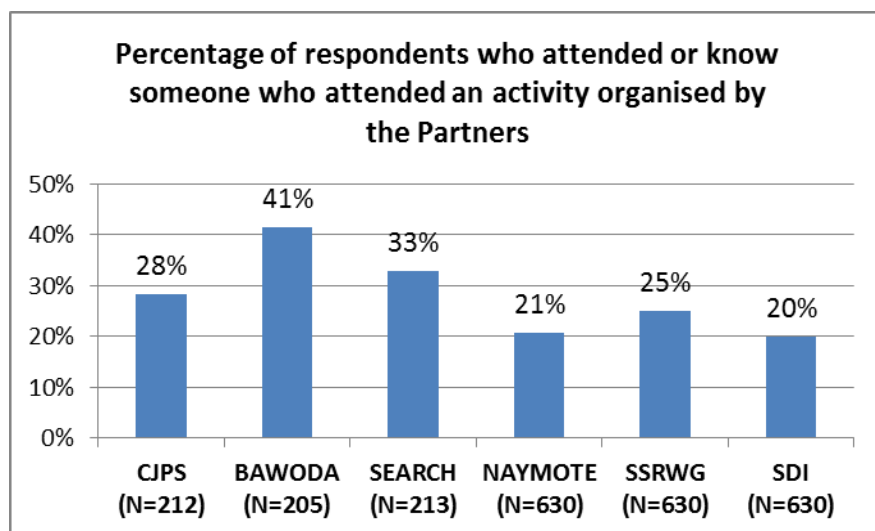

Graph 2: Visibility of national partners

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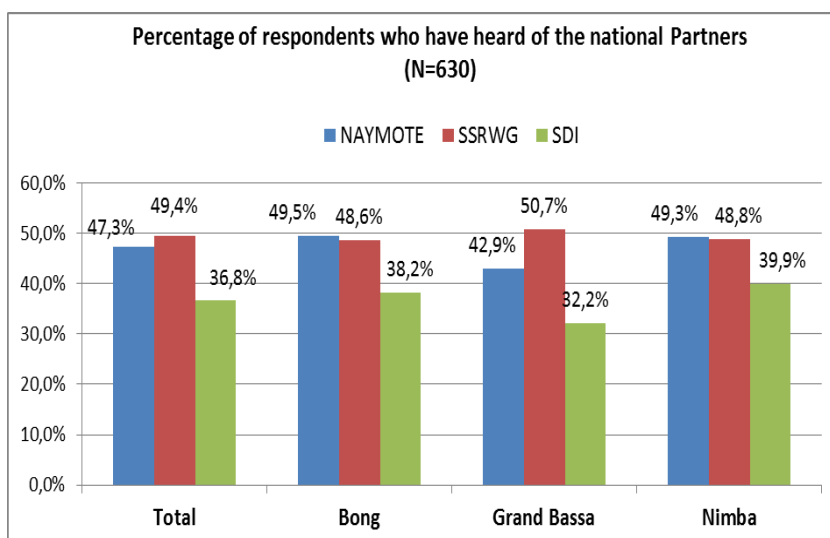
[11]As no baseline data is available regarding the partner's visibility, the evaluation team was not able to draw conclusions on the evolution of that visibility over time.

Graph 3: Knowledge of the national partners' scope of work

Percentage of respondents who have heard of the Partner and know the type of work that they do

■ Naymote (N=298) ■ SSRWG (N=331) ■ SDI (N=232)
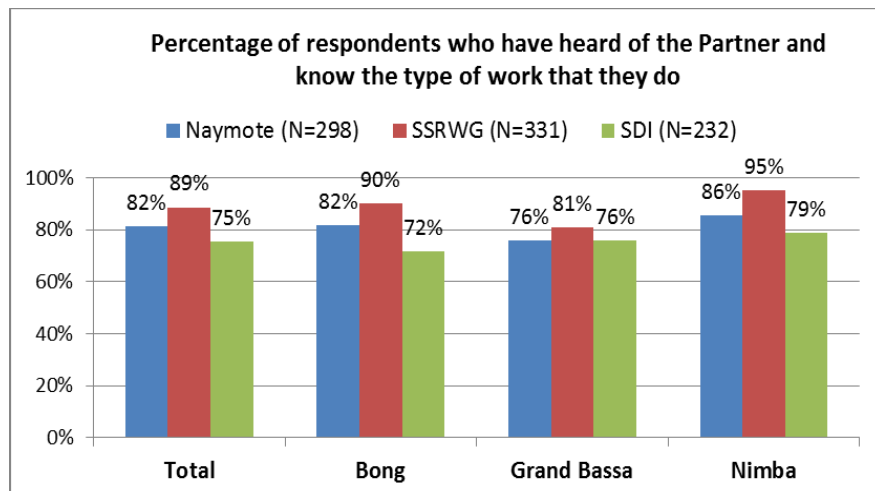
As shown in Graph 3, respondents have a good understanding of the work undertaken by all NPs, with an average of 89% respondents who state that they know what SSRWG does, 82% who know what NAYMOTE does and 75% who know what SDI does.

Graph 4: Attendance to the partners' activities

Percentage of respondents who attended or know someone who attended an activity organised by the Partners

At least one person out of 5 among the surveyed said that they have attended or know someone who attended an activity organized by one of the partner organisations. This rate increases for CBPs, ranging between 28% and 41%, as illustrated in Graph 4.

In terms of visibility, CBPs acknowledge that the project contributed to increase their visibility at the national level. "*The SIDA project has moved us at a different level in terms of visibility. We're not just at the county level. We're at the national level. And the project has helped us reach that level*" – CBP2. However, as further detailed in the "Engagement" chapter, page 26, this increase of visibility at the national level has not yet happened to the extend expected by CBPs.

NPs all agree that the project contributed very much to an increase of their visibility at the local level. This visibility also leads to positive effects in the various counties: for instance, NAYMOTE states that since the beginning of the project, they have more partners trying to find out what they are doing and they were therefore able to get two additional projects. According to them, this is due to an improvement in reach and an increase in visibility.

6. Effectiveness of the Blay Tahnla radio program

Radio listening habits

88.7% of the sample stated that they listen to the radio. Favourite times to do so are between 5 and 7 AM (60.8%), 7 and 9 AM (23.4%), 6 and 9 PM (30.2%) and 9 and 12 PM (36.9%). Approximately one third of the sample (29.7%) usually listens to the radio on weekdays, another third (29.3) and a last and bigger (38.8%) portion of the sample does not have any clear preference, and listens to the radio "any days". Favourite radio stations vary from one county to the other. Only one radio is listened to frequently in all three counties: the UNMIL radio station. Apart from this, the listeners' choice falls for local radio stations, as illustrated in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Top 3 popular radios in each country (* show SFCG's partner radios)

Top 3	Bong	Grand Bassa	Nimba
Number 1	Radio Gbarnga* (95.7%)	Magic FM* (68.8%)	Nimba FM* (53.8%)
Number 2	Super Bongues* (90.9%)	Radio Gbazon (64.2%)	UNMIL radio (39.1%)
Number 3	UNMIL radio (45.2%)	UNMIL radio (52.8%)	Sehwai (33.5%), Radio Kehgamai* (30.5%)

SFCG has partnership agreements with 13 radios in the three counties, including most of those favourite radio stations: Radio Gbarnga and Super Bongues in Bong county, Magic FM in Grand Bassa, Nimba FM and Radio Kergheamahn in Nimba. According to the contract signed with those radios, most of them are supposed to air the Blay-Tahnla programme twice per day, once in the morning and once in the evening. Evening airing times take place during the peak listening times, around 8, 8.30, 9.00 or 9.30 PM, varying from one radio station to another. However, for the morning airing times, only one of the 13 partner radios uses the 5 to 7 am prime time hour to air Blay-Tahnla, and only 3 of them air during the second most listened-to morning period (7-9 AM). Hence, most of the partner radio stations air Blay-Tahnla at a time when listenership is the lowest.

Reach[12] of the Blay-Tahnla program

Among the radio listeners (n=559), 67% say that they have already heard the radio programme Blay-Tahnla (69.8% in Bong, 68.5% in Nimba and 62.4% in Grand Bassa), as shown in Graph 5. Among the respondents who listen to Blay-Tahnla (n=422), 79.4% listens to that programme between 1 and 3 times a week (34.6% once a week and 44.8% 2 or 3 times a week). Among all the counties Blay-Tahnla is aired in, the population of Grand Bassa listens to the programme the most as shown in Graph 5.

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[12] This terminology relates to SFCG's approach to measuring the success of her media programmes, called "The three Rs framework: Reach, Resonance, Response": The framework focuses on three main dimensions of our media project, which gives a comprehensive picture of the results achieved. *Reach* relates to (a) the saturation of a show in the society and (b) the types of people who view / hear the show; *Resonance* seeks to understand whether or not the audience is relating to and absorbing the messages of the show; *Response* intends to measure what changes occur in the society as a result of the show.
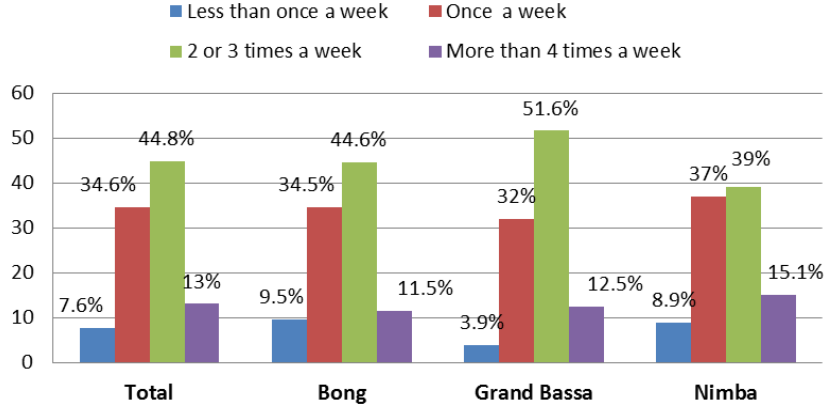
Resonance of the Blay-Tahnla program

The Blay-Tahnla programme is a fictive radio soap opera airing three times a week. Five main themes are mainstreamed throughout the scenarios: electoral reform, corruption, decentralisation, SSR and natural resources. Monitoring data[13] shows an uneven distribution of airtime to each of the themes, as pictured in Graph 6.

Graph 5: Frequency of listening among Blay-Tahnla listeners (n=422)


Among the population who listens to Blay-Tahnla (n=422), 68% state that they like the programme "much" or "very much". There is no difference between men and women's appreciation of the programme or among age ranges. However, regional disaggregation of the data shows a slightly larger proportion of people appreciating "much" the programme in Grand Bassa county, as shown in Graph 7.

Graph 6: Distribution of airtime among the 5 main themes of the Blay-Tahnla programme (Jan-May 2014)

88.4% of listeners agree that the programme "sometimes" (45.5%) or "often" (42.9%) talks about issues that are familiar to them. 25.6% of the listeners are able to name at least one of the show's characters. Among them (n=108), the favourite characters are Bob John (41.7%), Joe Moore (36.1%) and Sata (27.8%).
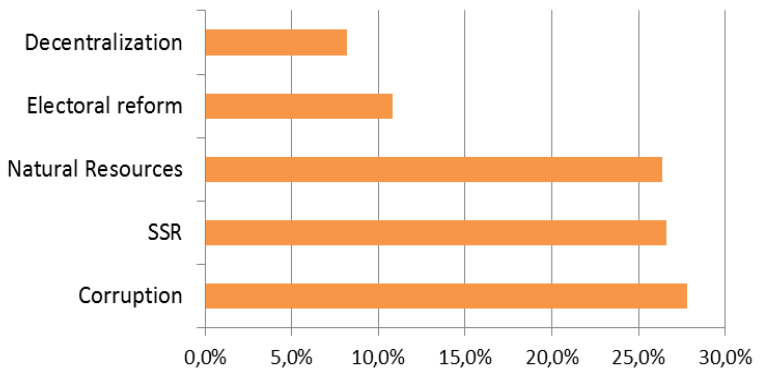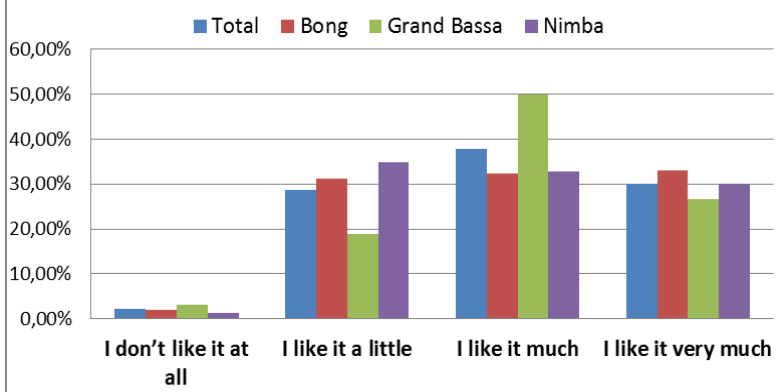
Graph 7: Appreciation of the Blay-Tahnla programme by the listeners (n=422)

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[13] Data from January to May 2014. No radio-related monitoring data was made available to the evaluation team for 2013 or July 2014.

Despite the high listenership rate of the program, the programme barely receives any feedback from listeners[14]. According to the SFCG staff, the low number of feedbacks may be due to the "*lack of seriousness*" (SFCG staff) of some of the radio partners. Some of them do not play the drama at a regular time or day. For this reason, listeners are unable to regularly follow the drama and they therefore provide little feedback to this programme. No qualitative data was collected among the radio listeners so it is impossible to confirm such hypothesis.

Response to the Blay-Tahnla show

There is a correlation between the listenership of the Blay-Tahnla programme and a better knowledge of some key issues relative to the main governance themes of the project. Graph 8 illustrates a slight increased knowledge on 5 out of 6 governance issues relative to elections, customary land, land reform policy, county development fund, reporting abuses from the police.

As an example, the average percentage of respondents who say they know the new land reform policy is 55%. However, the percentage of Blay-Tahnla listeners (n= 422)'s positive answers is higher for that question, with 63% of them who know about the land reform policy.

Graph 8: Variation of knowledge of key governance themes, based on listenership rate of the Blay-Tahnla programme (n=422)
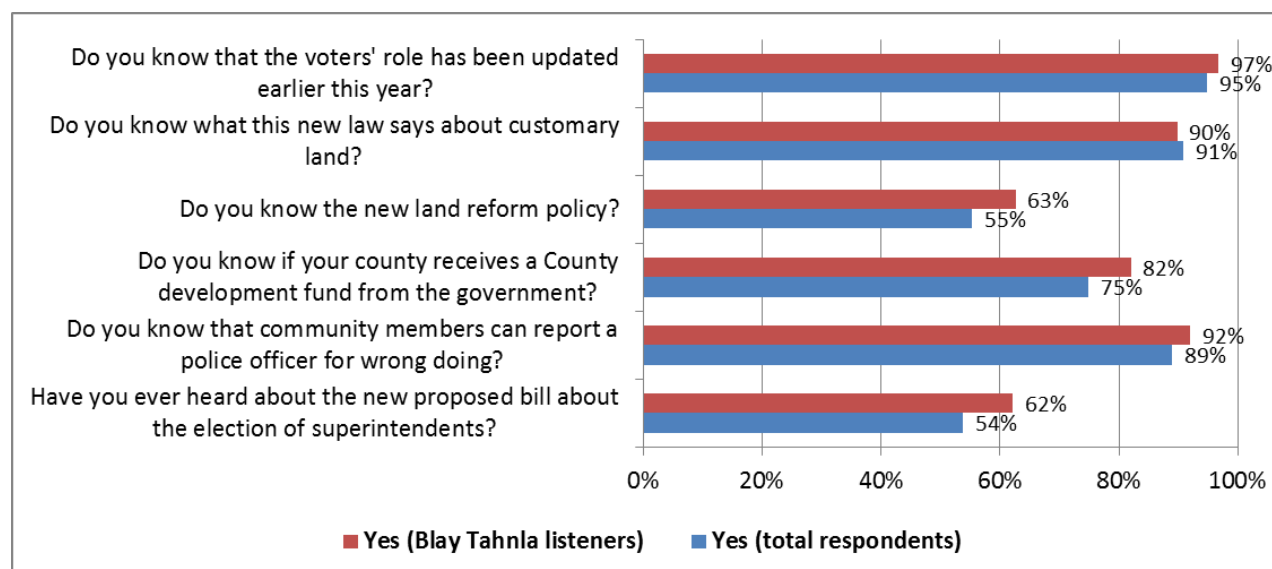
This is a sign of the Blay-Tahnla project having a positive effect on the mass population's degree of awareness and knowledge of some key governance issues. However, disaggregated data shows that the increased knowledge is not proportional to the increased listenership of the programme.

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[14] Between 2 and 10 SMS or calls per month received between January and May 2014.

D. Conclusions

Progress of the Partners on their Benchmarks

Each partner recognises the importance of the benchmark for his or her organization's growth and development. This provides a structured framework to increase the organization's structural capacities. However, the progress of partners on their benchmarks is much lower than expected at this stage of the project, despite efforts undertaken to make up for delays after the first partners review retreat in January 2014. Eleven months after the benchmark process was launched, 47% of the 6-months benchmarks and 14% of the 12-months benchmarks have been achieved. There is inconsistency among the partners in terms of efforts to reach benchmarks and level of achievement. So far, more efforts were put into reaching the programmatic benchmarks (37% complete) than the financial (24%) or institutional benchmarks (18%). This may be because of the nature of the institutional benchmarks and the fact that they need leadership or relationship for them to be achieved. The main obstacles to the progress on benchmarks have been the lack of common understanding about the importance of the benchmark process during the first semester of the project as well as the lack of clarity around financial support to that process. Clear communications over that topic were followed by an increased level of progress on the benchmarks in 2014. However, such efforts did not succeed in working through the backlog of the project.

Evolution of Partners' capacities

SFCG provided a series of trainings to the partners based on their needs and requests. However, given SFCG's staff workload, this *modus operandi* is not effective enough. SFCG staff has little time to provide all the trainings that partners need in order to meet the project's objectives. Additionally, they do not have all the expertise required to do so. Because of a lack of clarity on budgeting procedures for capacity strengthening, partners have called on external trainers only sporadically. As a result, they have not benefitted from as much training as they could have by this point in the project.

There is a lot of disparity among partners in regard to their capacities and to the increase of their capacities over the course of the project. Some of them have benefited from a lot of training and coaching support from SFCG, while others have not. Qualitative data drawn from interviews with the partners shows that all mention increased capacities as a result of the project. More specifically, this results from a combination of: collaboration with the other partners, coaching provided by SFCG, logistical and financial support provided by the project in terms of implementation of activities, and/or trainings that each partner went through. However, there is no monitoring data or grid to objectively evaluate each partner's capacity. Therefore, the evaluation team cannot draw conclusions on whether the increase of capacities is over or under the expected level at this stage.

The comparison of the partner's auto-evaluation of capacities in 2013 and 2014 provides hints about the evolution of the organizations' capacities. It points towards mixed results: partners have increased in about half of the capacities' categories, but they have also decreased in half.

There are some positive trends that stand out, such as: an overall increase of all partners' institutional capacities; a better capacity to engage at the local level; a clear increase of the national partners' (NP) capacities to network; strong teamwork capacities. However, the data also points to weak monitoring and evaluation capacities; low networking capacities of the County-Based Partners (CBPs); and mixed sustainability or finance capacities of the partners. Evolution of the capacities depend on a series of factors, including: dedication to improve the capacity, inclusion of the capacity as part of the benchmark and the implementation plan and budget, time and resources available, and external support received, among others.

About the implementation of Project activities
Various activities were implemented by SFCG and by the implementing partners, such as informational tools on key reform processes, partnership with radio stations, training of partners, communication strategy, etc. However, the evaluation team was unable to comprehensively assess the level of implementation of the project's activities and draw conclusions on the pace of progress. This is mainly due to the lack of an efficient monitoring system and the lack of comprehensive information about the expected level of implementation of the project over time - such as an overall project work-plan against which progress so far could be measured.

The positive relation between SFCG and the partners and the organization of the partner review meetings are two factors contributing to quality and timely implementation of the project's activities. Partners faced various challenges that hindered progress of service delivery in one way or another. All three national partners pointed to a "lack of political will" being an external challenge, against which they had little power of influence. Delays in funding by SFCG have been a continuous internal challenge, and difficult collaboration between national and local partners was also a challenge at the early stages of the project, hindering the effectiveness of project activities' implementation.

About the level of engagement of national and county-based partners
Collaboration and communication between national and county-based partners clearly increased as a result of the project. Mutual visits, phone calls, and joint activities increased significantly. Interviews with partners point at mutual benefits from both national and county-based partners; however, such benefits are not equal for the national partners or the county-based partners. National partners enjoy various positive outcomes this increased engagement with the CBPs, notably the ease of mobilizing communities and organizing county-level activities. CBPs make reference to some benefits in terms of capacity building. However, at this point, the project still falls short at increasing the CBPs' visibility at the national level and connecting the local partners with the national networks and platforms.

The project contributed to increase engagement of partners with other stakeholders. CBPs mostly increased their engagement at the county and community levels. In terms of relationship with the government, CBPs rate them at "low" or "good", but all agree that this relationship improved as a result of the project. NPs increased a lot their engagement at the county and community level: they are now engaged with a large variety of new local stakeholders in the target counties. However, the project did not yet have much effect in increasing the engagement of NPs or CBPs at the national level.

About the level of visibility of the Partners

All CBPs are all well known in their respective counties: between 57.5% and 79.9% of respondents "have heard" of the organizations. National partners's rates are just below 50%, which is still a very high rate of visibility at the local level. Not only has the population "heard of" the organisation, but they also "know the type of work" that they do. 78% of those who have heard of the CBPs state that they know the type of work that they do, and this rises to 82% for the NPs. Though those scores are high, since visibility was not assessed before the project launch, it is not possible to allude to an evolution of the partners' visibility based on survey data.

Partners feel confident that the project contributed to increase their visibility at the county level. All of them say that the source of such visibility is the increase of the number of activities implemented at the local level, mostly for the NPs, some of whom had barely ever organised activities at the county level before. One out of three people surveyed (34%) attended or knows someone who attended one of the CBPs' activities, and one out of five people (22%) attended or know someone who attended one of the NPs' activities. These high scores demonstrate the capacity of partners to reach the grassroot community level when conducting activities.

The effectiveness of the Blay-Tahnla radio program

Radio is an effective way of reaching grass rooted communities, as survey data shows that 88.7% of the sample listens to the radio. 67% of radio listeners have already heard Blay-Tahnla, among which 79.4% listens to it once to three times a week. SFCG partners with a total of 13 radio stations, among which one or two are of the most popular radios in each target county. Morning airing times could be moved to a peak listening time (5-7 AM).

Blay-Tahnla fictive soap opera is a tool that focuses on five main themes: decentralisation, electoral reforms, natural resources, SSR and corruption, all related to the project's areas of interest. Analysis of the BlayTahnla's scenario shows that the "decentralisation" and "electoral reform" themes are referenced less frequently than the three other themes.

Programme listeners related well to the soap opera: 68% of the programme listeners like it "much" or "very much". This rate is slightly higher in Grand Bassa County. Additionally, 42.9% agree that the programme "often" talks about issues that are familiar to them. One of every four listeners can name some of the show's characters. The Blay-Tahnla programme seems to be producing slight effects in terms of increased knowledge on the key project's themes: Blay-Tahnla listeners indeed have a slightly better knowledge of some key governance issues than those who have never listened to the show.

E. Recommendations

Based on the evaluation findings, the evaluation team formulates the following recommendations to SFCG in order to increase the project's effectiveness and to take benefit of the lessons learned from this project in future project design:

The Benchmark process

- The benchmark process should be duplicated in future SFCG programmes. Lessons from the experience with this project should be taken into account, such as:
  - monitoring the benchmark design process to ensure a balance between allowing for a participatory process to take place and ensuring that benchmarks are clear, achievable and realistic;
  - ensuring that the partners create appropriate benchmark monitoring tools from the inception of the project;
  - ensuring that enough clarity is given to partners with regards to financing achievement of benchmarks;
  - ensuring that partners create and use a "benchmark action plan";
- More efforts should be made by SFCG to monitor the partners' benchmarks. This could take place by strengthening the monitoring missions to each partner, with an increased regularity and length of each visit and with a priority for CBPs (i.e. at least half a day per partner each month). This would have a two-pronged effect of monitoring the partner's progress and also strengthening the capacities of the partners. Each visit should be prepared adequately to ensure that the latest barriers faced by partners are addressed by SFCG;
- Each partner could prepare a working plan for the next 18 months of the project, detailing how each benchmark is going to be reached, when, and by what means. SFCG's facilitation would be an asset to ensuring the success of this process.

The Capacity Building activities

- Specific needs of the various organizations should be analyzed in detail by SFCG and efforts need to be made to support the weakest aspects of each partner. This includes:
  - More efforts conducted in order to increase the CBPs' capacities to be included in national platforms and increase their capacities to network;
  - Efforts to strengthen the partners' monitoring and evaluation capacities be continued, among other via the provision of specific trainings and tools by SFCG or by external consultants;
  - Support CBPs in strategizing and implementing income-generation plans;
  - Support NP3 in finding ways to increase their teamwork capacities, support CBP2, CBP3 and NP3 in increasing their institutional capacities.
- A capacity building plan should be created by each partner, based on the capacity assessment and the benchmark documents. This plan should be concrete, with information about the type of trainer/coaching needed, dates, and to-do list with clear

responsibilities and deadlines. Given the limited human resources, time and expertise of SFCG, external training should be favoured in those plans. SFCG's facilitation would be an asset to ensuring the success of this process;

- More efforts should be made by SFCG in ensuring quality monitoring of capacity strengthening activities over the course of the project, including a systematic use of pre- and post-tests during the trainings, timely entering of the data in a monitoring matrix and proper storage of the data;

- For similar programmes in the future, it is advisable that extra staff be budgeted for a civil society expert with high specific technical skills in governance, excellence in project management and pedagogic capacities should be added to the SFCG team. That person would be roving from one partner's office to the other for periods ranging from 4 and 6 weeks. Drawing on similar *in-situ* trainings experience undertaken by SFCG in other contexts, this has proven to be an efficient way of building capacities of partners, bringing added value to the program;

- For the final evaluation team to conduct a before and after review of the actual partners' documents as it relates to finance, budgets and institution to measure change of capacities in each regard.

The implementation of projects activities

- Efforts to maintain a close and supportive relationship to the partners should be sustained and that such spirit be applied by all team members;

- The frequency of the partners review meetings should be increased to one per quarter, as opposed to one per semester, and the length be extended from 2 to 3 days. Ensure that such meetings be adequately prepared by anticipatively asking partners' inputs on the agenda, by respecting the agenda and ensuring proper note-taking. Any important re-orientation of the programme that occurs as a result of the meeting should be appropriately documented within a reasonable timeframe;

- SFCG should continue to strengthen partner's capacities in finance reporting, in order to ensure timely compliant report by each partner. This could be done via a dedication of ½ day to finance during the partner review meetings. A similar capacity building effort could be conducted for monitoring and reporting, dedicating ½ day to the topics. Additionally, we recommend that SFCG's finance officer, project coordinator and DME officer each visit every partner in their office at least twice a year and dedicate ½ day per partner to provide in-situ coaching;

- The partners reporting frequency be extended to a quarterly basis as opposed to a monthly basis. Similarly, the work plans should be done on a quarterly basis;

- More efforts should be made by SFCG to systematically monitor the implementation of activities, (including level of achievement of indicators) via proper storage of reports and activity data, training of the DME coordinator on the use of monitoring databases, creation of an adequate monitoring matrix and attribution, frequent update of monitoring databases, and proper storage of the database;

- SFCG should provide more structured, comprehensive and timely feedback of the partners' outputs and activities' deliverables.

The engagement of national and county-based Partners
- In order to ensure that the partnership becomes a mutually beneficial situation for both the CBPs and NPs, ensure that this issue is discussed frankly by all partners during the partners review meeting. Additionally, the quality and frequency of the relationship between partners should be monitored by SFCG and the partners. Clear benchmarks should be set regarding the level of involvement of CBPs and NPs partners, among other relative to: number of monthly contacts, best ways to collaborate for activity preparation, best ways to communicate, etc.;
- Furthermore, more efforts should be undertaken by the NPs to transfer capacities and knowledge to their county-based counterparts. NPs and CBPs, with SFCG's support, could go through a reflection process to analyze where CBPs could most benefit from NPs' network and technical skills. A work plan with clear benchmarks should be designed and used to monitor capacity-strengthening and mutually benefit partners;
- For identical programmes in the future and newly contracted county-based partners, it is advisable that the governance issues that CBPs should focus on over the course of the project be left to their discretion (i.e.: select two themes that best match their organization's vision). This would allow more buy-in from the CBPs and more sustainability of the knowledge and capacity transfer from NPs to CBPs;
- Ensure that "coordination of action" be on the agenda of the partners review meeting. As recommended earlier, quarterly meetings would be effective ways of ensuring all partners coordinate properly and plan accordingly;

The visibility of the Partners
- Efforts should be sustained to continue implementing activities at the county level by both the CBPs and the NPs;
- Collaboration between CBPs and NPs should continue in order to allow a high number of NPs' activities to take place at the county level;
- The level of visibility of each partner should be assessed again at the end of the project (final evaluation) in order to measure an evolution of their level of visibility at the county level, and draw conclusions on the effects of the project in that regard.

The Blay-Tahnla radio programme
- The Blay-Tahnla programme should be continued. Improvements should be made in terms of more evenly addressing all five themes of decentralisation, electoral reforms, natural resources, SSR and corruption. Furthermore, SFCG's DME and media team should conduct some complementary data collection with radio listeners in order to collect information about their appreciation of the radio programme (characters, tone, level of language, storylines, etc.) and adjust accordingly;
- Explore ways to adapt the morning airing times of Blay-Tahnla and schedule it during prime time. Additionally, an effective monitoring system should be put in place to ensure that partner radios respect the clauses of their contract regarding the airing times and days. Lastly, SFCG should explore the possibilities of partnering with the following radio stations: Radio Gbazon in Grand Bassa and Radio Sehwai in Nimba.