

FINAL EVALUATION:

Search for Common Ground's 'Strengthening the Capacity of Civil Society to Contribute to Sustainable Governance in Liberia'

Final Evaluation Report

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AfT	Agenda for Transformation
BAWODA	Bassa Women's Development Association
BYC	Bassa Youth Caucus
CBO	Community-based organization
CJPS	Center for Justice and Peace Studies
CODRA	Community Development and Research Agency
CSC	County service center
CSO	Civil society organization
CDF	County Development Fund
CSDF	County Social Development Fund
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
EARS	Effective Activity to Restore Stability for the Masses
EPO	Equatorial Palm Oil
FGD	Focus group discussion
GAC	General Audit Commission
GC	Governance Commission
GOL	Government of Liberia
HDI	Human Development Index
KII	Key informant interview
LAC	Liberia Agricultural Company
LAVI	Liberia Accountability and Voice Initiative
LGA	Local Governance Act
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NAYMOTE	National Youth Movement for Transparent Elections
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NRM	Natural Resource Management
OECD	Organization for Economic and Development Cooperation
Sida	Swedish International Development Agency
SDI	Sustainable Development Institute
Search	Search for Common Ground
SEARCH	Special Emergency Activity to Restore Hope
SSRWG	Security Sector Reform Working Group
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development

Executive Summary

Search for Common Ground (Search) Liberia and the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) implemented the project *Strengthening the Capacity of Civil Society to Promote Sustainable Governance in Liberia* commencing in November 2012 and finishing in July 2017. The overall goal 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 overall goal has a number of specific objectives:

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

This final evaluation was commissioned by Search and conducted by an external evaluation team consisting of a lead evaluator and evaluation assistant. The evaluation was conducted from July 15th – October, 15th, 2017.

Objectives of the Evaluation

Rooted in outcome harvesting and leveraging OECD-DAC’s criteria for assessing development interventions, the evaluation sought to assess the program’s outputs and outcomes against the program’s key indicators of success and the larger theory of change by examining its relevance, effectiveness, impact and sustainability. The evaluation approach focused on qualitative methods to support and triangulate the quantitative data that had been collected by Search during the course of the program. Specifically, the evaluation aimed to assess:

1. Level of change in partners’ institutional and financial capacities since the beginning of the project;
2. The level of implementation of the program’s activities;
3. The impact of the project on objectives related to governance reform, including decentralization and security sector reform;
4. Level of engagement, cooperation and cohesion between: partners involved in the project, project partners and other civil society actors, and project partners and local and national government;
5. Level of visibility and credibility of partners at county and national level;
6. Effectiveness of Search’s radio programs in advancing programmatic aims.

Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation used a primarily qualitative approach, incorporating focus group discussions with citizens, key informant interviews with partner leadership and external stakeholders, a participatory reflective exercise guided by a questionnaire with staff from partner organizations, and a comprehensive desk review of project documentation. In order to assess outcome claims made by partner CSOs, a verification approach was used to validate claims across different stakeholders who were interviewed. Outcome indicators received a score of three (high) for verification across three different sources, two (medium) for verification across two sources and one (low) for an outcome claim made without verification by other sources. Data collection took place in Monrovia and three counties in Liberia—Bong, Nimba and Grand Bassa—in August 2017. Assessment and analysis was completed between August - October 2017, and a validation workshop was held with Search staff and partners in October 2017.

Findings

Many of the program's objectives were sufficiently achieved during the course of the project. With respect to effectiveness, this evaluation demonstrates that the program effectively reached its aims with respect to: increased programmatic capacity of CSOs and CBOs to engage the state on governance and development issues, increased networking and collaboration amongst CSOs and CBOs at national and county levels, and increased interaction between citizens, citizens' institutions (CSOs and CBOs) and state institutions at the national and county levels. Using the verification methodology, qualitative data collected demonstrates that:

- Objective 1 successfully achieved 93% of outcome indicators by National Partners and 56% of outcome indicators by County-based Partners;
- Objective 2 successfully achieved 63% of outcome indicators by National Partners and 60% of outcome indicators by County-based Partners;
- Objective 3 successfully achieved 90% of outcome indicators by National Partners and 93% of outcomes by County-based Partners;
- Objective 4 successfully achieved 83% of outcome indicators by National Partners and 80% of County-based Partners.

In terms of relevance, The Search program was highly relevant to the civil society partners who participated in it, as well as to other civil society advocates and leaders in the country. In particular, the program was able to demonstrate that improved capacity is indeed a driver of better performance of civil society actors, leading to better advocacy outcomes and improved collaboration and cohesion among stakeholders.

With respect to impact, it is impossible to quantify how many people the program affected as most of the program partners did not keep detailed records of the number of beneficiaries reached. However, there is sufficient evidence of impact at the level of the partner CSOs. While not all of the partner organizations reached the target of 75% achievement of benchmarks, all CSOs experienced capacity related gains that are contributing to improved visibility, credibility and sustainability, leading to improved relationships with citizens, other CSOs and government officials.

Finally, in terms of sustainability, there are many indications that the program benefits have been sustained after the donor funding ended in July 2017. All of the organizations that participated in the program have successfully attracted additional funds from other donors to continue their work, and for many the additional funding is supporting the same priority areas and themes they worked on during the Search program. There is also evidence that the collaborations and partnerships established during the course of the project are continuing, with many partner CSOs continuing to work together and supporting one another.

However, the program fell short in terms of achieving many of the wider societal impacts on objectives related to governance reform, including decentralization and security sector reform. This is due in part to the disruption in program activities that occurred in 2015 as a result of the Ebola crisis, and in part to the lack of a robust theory of change and M&E systems at the partner level to capture sufficient evidence of impact. Further, while there is sufficient evidence that the program successfully improved dialogue between citizens and CSOs, and contributed to an increase in citizen engagement around target reforms, there is not sufficient evidence that it improved dialogue between citizens and the state. Moreover, in a closed governance space like Liberia, more needs to be done to effectively change collaborative and constructive relationships between civil society and the state.

Recommendations

A number of recommendations emerged as a result of the evaluation.

1. Search's radio program should be integrated with other programmatic elements to increase reach and impact, and radio dramas should be built into a talk show that allows citizens to engage interactively with the issues.

2. Use a phased or modular training approach to support capacity development over time, rather than one-off training sessions.
3. The capacity benchmarking process should be simplified, and supported by resources to help partners better achieve their benchmarks.
4. CSOs need additional support to develop project-level M&E plans to monitor their activities. Achievements and impacts across projects should be mapped onto the program's larger theory of change to effectively capture societal-level changes.
5. Given that the project partners who participated in the program for more than three years had the most sustainable gains, capacity development programs for all CSOs should be longer than one year to ensure improvements are institutionalized by partner organizations.

I. Background and Context

In 2012, Search for Common Ground (Search) Liberia commenced the three-year *Strengthening the Capacity of Civil Society to Contribute to Sustainable Governance in Liberia* program with funding from Sida through the Swedish Embassy in Liberia. After two years of implementation, the programmatic activities were suspended due to the Ebola outbreak. Under a no-cost extension, Search resumed the final year of activities in August 2016. The **overall goal** of the project is **to strengthen the capacity of civil society organizations to promote good governance, enhance democratic process and support the inclusion of citizens in decision-making**. According to the project logframe, there are four specific objectives that support the realization of this aim:

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

Civil society in Liberia has a number of strengths, including: sustaining activities in the face of limited resources; successfully resisting political cooptation; and remaining neutral with respect to the ethnic and tribal divisions that have historically divided the country.¹ Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Liberia do hold the potential to channel people's participation in economic and social activities and to organize them into potent forces that can influence public policies.² CSOs also have an important role in creating efficient mechanisms for allocating social benefits and providing a voice for poorer groups in political and governmental decision-making.³ Across all sectors in Liberia, civil society is an evolving and important counterpart that can bring diverse voices to the table, as well as serve as a check on government power. For these reasons, the GoL's national development plan—the Agenda for Transformation (AfT)—which aims to create, in partnership with citizens, “transparent, accountable and responsive public institutions that contribute to economic and social development as well as inclusive and participatory governance systems”, recognizes the important role of civil society in this vision, stating, “civil society has a key role in furthering good governance.”⁴

Yet, despite the promise of civil society to help usher in governance reforms, the capacity of Liberian CSOs remains low, and they struggle with a number of challenges in fulfilling their role to facilitate

¹ See *Beyond Numbers: An Assessment of the Liberian Civil Society*, conducted by AGENDA, a Liberian civil society organization, 2010

² Nah, T. 2016. *Issues and Challenges Facing the Civil Society Sector in Liberia*. Monrovia: CENTAL. <http://bit.ly/2edtOX1>

³ UNDP (1997). *Reconceptualizing Governance*. Discussion Paper No. 2. New York: UNDP.

⁴ Developed in 2013, Liberia development plan lays out steps toward “Liberia Rising to 2030”. <http://bit.ly/2eyTo88>

inclusion and keep power holders accountable (ibid). Some identified weaknesses of Liberian CSOs include: a dependency on donor funds, limited human resources, and poor understanding of the key issues, low capacity for M&E, poor accountability to citizens, high centralization of CSO decision-making in Monrovia, and poor collaboration between organizations, groups and coalitions.⁵ Many CSOs and CSO platforms in Liberia have noted the need to facilitate more cross-CSO collaboration and networking to ensure that civil society is able to jointly push for required change and hold government and other key decision makers accountable. In addition to weaknesses at all level for implementing governance reforms in Liberia, progress is hindered by crippling poverty, massive underdevelopment, unchecked corruption and weak institutions.⁶

⁵ Nah, 2016.

⁶ Liberia was in 177th place out of 188 countries on the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI) in 2015, an improvement from its standing near the bottom of the HDI after the civil war, although still a low rating that puts the country in the bracket of countries with a 'low HDI'.

Program Approach

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

Donor: the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA)

Project length: 4 years of implementation (2012-2014; 2016-2017)

Location: Nation-wide – through support to CSO partners in Monrovia that have national reach, and a radio program aired in all 15 counties; County-based interventions in Grand Bassa, Bong, and Nimba counties for the full duration of the project and Grand Gedeh for the second phase only

Overall Goal

The overarching goal of this intervention is improved performance of civil society organizations to contribute to a sustained democratic culture that protects human rights and promotes citizens participation in decision-making processes.

Specific Objectives

1. Increased programmatic capacity of CSOs and CBOs in engaging the state on governance and development issues;
2. Increased institutional capacity of CSOs and CBOs for sustained and constructive engagement with the state;
3. Increased networking and collaboration amongst CSOs and CBOs at national and county levels.
4. Increased interaction between citizens' organizations and state institutions at the national and county level.

Expected Results

1. The demand side for better governance among citizens is increased around targeted reform processes.
2. Communication between citizens and state institutions is increased on key development policies
3. Targeted CSOs have increased institutional capacity to achieve their aims and purpose over a period of time;
4. Strengthen networks between CBOs and CSOs enhance effective and efficient programmatic capacity including advocacy and results-based interventions and reporting.
5. Civil society engages cohesively during different governance phases including electoral, decentralization and Constitutional review and amendment process.
6. Government recognizes the unique contributions of CSOs to the nation's development and governance process.

In order to address these issues, the first phase of Search's program, which ran from 2012 – 2014, was designed in the context of a number of transitions occurring in Liberia intended to promote good governance and the rule of law. In particular, Search focused on improving accountability in the natural resources sector and supporting decentralization processes and security sector reforms by building the capacity of civil society to support transitional processes and monitor government performance by engaging government and citizens on these issues through evidence-based advocacy.

For the first phase of the project (2012-2014), Search partnered with a number of national-level Liberian civil society organizations that had expertise in one or more of the identified issues:

- National Youth Movement for Transparent Elections (NAYMOTE)
- Security Sector Reform Working Group (SSRWG)
- Sustainable Development Institute (SDI)
- Election Coordinating Committee (EEC) (in 2014 only, and not included in the final evaluation)

The program also incorporated three county-level partners:

- Bassa Women's Development Association (BAWODA): Grand Bassa
- Center for Justice and Peace Studies (CJPS): Bong
- Special Emergency Activity to Restore Children's Hope (SEARCH): Nimba

When the Ebola crisis struck Liberia in 2014 – 2015, *Strengthening the Capacity of Civil Society to Contribute to Sustainable Governance in Liberia* ground to a halt as Search explored ways to work with the government and other humanitarian organizations to respond to the emergency. Activities under this program resumed in 2016 after the crisis was over. However, given the time lapse coupled with new, pressing transitions occurring in the country in the lead up to the October 2017 presidential elections, the program needed a conceptual reboot and redesign. Search refocused the overall aims and objectives of the program in a new proposal to Sida for a programmatic no-cost extension, which was approved in February 2016, and implementation resumed in August, 2016. The focus of the 2016-2017 program is narrower in scope than the first phase with the same overall objectives, and focuses on security sector reform and decentralization, which were identified as pressing issues by a roundtable of experts in January 2016. The program retained SSRWG and Naymote and added a number of additional county-level partners:

- Bassa Youth Caucus (BYC): Grand Bassa
- Community Development and Research Agency (CODRA): Bong
- Effective Activity to Restore Stability for the Masses (EARS): Nimba
- Gender Peace Network Ltd. (GPNL): Grand Gedeh

II. Purpose and Scope

Search Liberia commissioned a final evaluation examining a number of criteria central to OECD-DAC's method for evaluating development interventions⁷ including effectiveness, relevance, impact and sustainability. By examining the outputs and outcomes against the program's key indicators of success and the larger theory of change, the evaluation assesses: improvements in CSO capacity at organizational, programmatic and financial levels; the extent to which the program facilitated the establishment of strategic networks to enhance the work of CSOs; improvements in the ability for partner CSOs to effectively engage government in reform issues at national and local levels; the visibility and impact of community engagement activities on citizen perceptions of and engagement in governance issues; the intended and unintended results; and the likelihood of continued CSO collaboration, citizen engagement and policy influence over time following the close of this project (see Annex 1 for the evaluation matrix).

The evaluation took place from July 15th – October 15th, and involved the following phases:

⁷ <http://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm>

1. Inception, planning and preparation: Leading to an inception report, final methodology, data collection tools and a stakeholder map to identify informants.
2. Data collection in Monrovia, Bong, Nimba and Grand Bassa: Focus Group Discussions, Participatory Reflection Workshops with partners, Key Informant Interviews with stakeholders.
3. Data analysis: Rooted in a realist approach and outcome harvesting framework.
4. Mid-point validation meeting with Search to discuss the results of the data collection
5. Drafting the final evaluation report: Including first draft, Search review, revisions and final draft.

Evaluation Approach

The evaluation is rooted in Outcome Harvesting—an approach that determines impact according to changes in *actions, relationships, policies* and *practice*. Outcome Harvesting derives from Outcome Mapping, a method developed by the International Development Research Center (IDRC) of Canada. According to the approach, “outcome” is defined as “change in the behavior, relationships, actions, activities, policies, or practices of an individual, group, community, organization, or institution.”⁸ Outcome Harvesting helps to generate accurate and robust data because it requires descriptions of outcomes and program contributions to be precisely formulated such that it is clear who changed in what way, when and how the change agent—in this case Search and its civil society partners in Liberia—contributed to each outcome. This approach required the participation of civil society partners in Liberia and other stakeholders who helped define the successes, barriers to success and mechanisms of change, and also served to verify the outcome claims across different sources.

The outcome harvesting approach typically begins with evaluators reviewing project reports and other project documentation to identify the outcomes. This was a useful approach for this evaluation, as there were a number of reports that provided this information, including partner progress reports, capacity assessments, a midterm evaluation, and an outcome harvesting workshop report. The outcomes to assess were identified from these documents, and verified with Search staff and in country through focus group discussions and key informant interviews conducted with a variety of stakeholders—partner CSOs, county-level government officials, civil society experts at county and national levels, and citizens with no known affiliation to the project partners. Contribution statements across stakeholders were compared to the outcome objectives in order to determine if they are sufficiently verifiable.

Verification of Outcomes and Contribution Analysis

For the purposes of this evaluation, which uses participatory methodologies, the verification of project objectives and outcome indicators is rooted in the **SPICED** criteria.⁹

Subjective: Outcome indicators are formulated and assessed with informants who have a special position or experience that gives them unique insights.

Participatory: Objectives and indicators are developed together with those best placed to assess them.

Interpreted and communicable: Outcome indicators can be interpreted across stakeholder groups.

Cross-checked: The validity of outcome claims is cross-checked by comparing different objectives/indicators and progress, and by using different informants and methods.

⁸ Outcome Harvesting, 2012, Ricardo Wilson-Grau & Heather Britt, Ford Foundation. Available from <http://www.outcomemapping.ca/resource/resource.php?id=374>. (Accessed June 7th, 2017).

⁹ Lenni, J. Tacci, J. Koirala, B., Wilmore, M. & Skuse, A. (2011). *Equal Access Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation Toolkit*. Available from: http://www.betterevaluation.org/en/toolkits/equal_access_participatory_monitoring. (Accessed July 15th, 2017).

Empowering: The process of setting and assessing objectives/indicators is empowering in itself and allows groups and individuals to reflect critically on their changing situation.

Diverse: Different objectives and outcome indicators are assessed from a range of groups and a variety of perspectives.

In order to verify the achievement of objectives and validity of outcomes, outcome and contribution statements were developed through initial interviews and documentation review according to the SPICED criteria, and verified across a minimum of three different stakeholder groups, including the partner, and supported by project documentation. Claims of outcomes and impacts were given a score of 0 (low) if there is no supporting evidence, 1 (low-medium) if one participant/group made a claim that could not be verified by others or by additional supporting evidence; 2 (medium) if a claim was made by one participant and verified by another and/or by additional supporting evidence; 3 (high) if a claim that is made by a participant is verified across a minimum of two other stakeholder groups and additional supporting evidence.

Score	Weight	Criteria
0	Low	An outcome statement has no supporting evidence
1	Low-medium	An outcome claim is made by one participant/group without additional supporting evidence
2	Medium	An outcome claim is made by a minimum of two stakeholders and/or by other supporting evidence
3	High	An outcome claim made by a participant/group is verified by at least three stakeholder groups and/or additional supporting evidence

The outcomes described meet four criteria that support their credibility:

- Informants were knowledgeable about the outcomes. For all outcomes, the primary informant was the social actor that had changed, in this case the Liberian civil society partner;
- The description of outcomes and how the intervention contributed are specific enough to be verifiable;
- Outcomes identified by the primary informant were validated across other stakeholder groups;
- The outcomes are supported by project evaluation data collected through benchmarking assessments, the midterm evaluation and the outcome harvesting workshop;
- The relationship between how the Search program contributed and the outcomes was deemed to be plausible by the evaluators.

III. Methodology

The evaluation was conducted by a team of external evaluators comprising:

1. Lead Evaluator – Responsible for evaluation design, inception workshop and report, drafting data collection tools, overseeing and conducting interviews and focus group discussions, data analysis and writing the final report.
2. Evaluation Assistant – Responsible for recruiting research assistants in the field, organizing focus groups, logistics and planning, conducting interviews and focus group discussions, and contributing to writing the final report.

Data Collection Methods

The evaluation used a primarily qualitative approach, incorporating focus group discussions, key informant interviews, a participatory reflective exercise with staff from partner CSOs guided by a questionnaire, and a comprehensive desk review of project documentation. Semi-structured tools for

interviews and focus group discussions can be found in Annex 1. A qualitative assessment is favored for the final evaluation for a number of reasons:

- 1) Outcome mapping requires in-depth descriptive accounts of results to assess how change occurs;
- 2) It would be difficult to obtain an appropriate level of statistical significance with a quantitative assessment given logistical and resource constraints;
- 3) The program's focus is primarily on CSO capacity building and secondarily on the impact of CSO activities on citizen knowledge, attitudes and engagement in local governance issues. For this reason, it is crucial to understand the barriers and facilitators to change that CSO partners experienced during the course of project implementation;
- 4) Throughout the duration of the project, M&E activities relied primarily on quantitative data. Qualitative data collection is therefore necessary to triangulate the data collected during the course of program implementation.

The evaluation incorporated the following data collection methods:

Desk review of project documentation: The evaluation team scanned project documentation collected during the course of implementation to synthesize results obtained and challenges faced.

Focus Group Discussions with citizens: The evaluation team conducted six focus groups with community members—two in each of the target counties—to assess the impact of CSO activities on citizen knowledge, perceptions and engagement with local governance issues, in particular SSR and decentralization. The FGDs used a semi-structured questionnaire that was adapted based on the context and key focus areas of the partner CSOs working in a particular county. Due to time and resource constraints, the tools were not pilot-tested, but were pre-approved by Search. FGD participants gave informed ethical consent prior to participating and no remuneration was paid for participation.

Sampling Strategy

The objective of the citizen-level FGDs was to assess the following impacts of the program, which were identified as areas of assessment in the baseline study:

- The relationship between civil society and the government;
- The relationship between civil society and the people;
- The relationship between the people and the government;
- Understanding and knowledge of the key sector reforms.

The evaluation team employed a purposeful convenience sampling to select focus group participants. That is, respondents were selected for their ability to speak on the selected topic, and were individuals who listen to Blay-Tahnlá and who have some understanding of issues related to security sector reform and decentralization. Efforts were made to ensure a level of randomness such that FGD participants represented a wide range of perspectives and were less likely to fall into “groupthink”. Focus groups consisted of 6-9 individuals per FGD, and were mixed gender.

Focus group discussions were conducted in the following locations:

- Nimba: Sanniquellie and Ganta
- Bong: Gbarnga
- Grand Bassa: Buchanan

Key Informant Interviews: The evaluation team conducted semi-structured KIIs with stakeholders identified in advance in consultation with Search. Informants were drawn from local government officials, central government, Sida, partner CSOs, and national and local civil society networks. The interviews were guided by a semi-structured questionnaire, which was developed by the lead evaluator

and approved by Search, but was not pilot-tested due to time and resource constraints. Informed ethical consent was obtained prior to interviews, and KIIs are identified by their title only. The final KII list is included in Annex 3.

Key informant interviews were conducted in the following locations:

Focus group discussions were conducted in the following locations:

- Nimba: Sanniquellie and Ganta
- Bong: Gbarnga
- Grand Bassa: Buchanan
- Monrovia

Participatory Reflective Workshop and Questionnaire with Partner CSOs: All partners other than GPNL, SEARCH and SDI participated in a participatory reflective exercise with senior staff members who were involved in the program implementation. A partner questionnaire guided the reflection exercise, which was semi-structured. The reflective workshops allowed participants to discuss what they feel their biggest achievements are from the program, any challenges and barriers to success they experienced, and how they plan to integrate lessons learned into future activities.

Desk Review

A preliminary desk review of project documentation—including a baseline study, partner baseline and midline capacity assessments/benchmarking data, a 2014 midterm evaluation, a 2017 outcomes harvesting workshop report, and narrative reports submitted by partners on a monthly basis to Search—identified a number of useful avenues of inquiry for this evaluation (See Annex 4 for a full list of documents reviewed).

Baseline Study

A baseline study that was conducted in July 2013 established many of the program’s initial objectives and priorities according to a number of key themes.

1. Voter Education and Electoral System Reform

The baseline study indicated a need for increased civic education on elections reforms and policies, an especially important issue in the second phase of the project given the upcoming 2017 elections. Respondents indicated that county-level CSOs, rather than the National Elections Committee, should be responsible for informing voters about elections processes, policies and reforms.

2. Constitutional Reforms

The baseline study suggests that many citizens are unaware of the constitutional review process, and whether or not reform committees have been established in their counties to monitor progress and provide input.

3. Decentralization

The baseline report highlights that awareness of the decentralization process—including the Local Governance Act and Decentralization Policy— is low among citizens in the target counties. As a result of a lack of awareness, many citizens are not engaged in pushing the government to implement the decentralization reforms, such as county level government service centers and increased country ownership of resources.

4. Security Sector Reforms

The baseline report demonstrates that citizen trust in the police is relatively high, and that citizen-police relationships are generally cordial and productive. This findings, however does not reflect other studies on citizen-police relationships in Liberia, which have highlighted high levels of corruption, low levels of trust among citizens, and systemic abuses of power. These studies, along with the baseline study's finding that effective policing is hampered by the common practice of paying small bribes for police services and weak systems for reporting crimes against the police points to the need to strengthen citizen-police relationships and monitoring and reporting of police activities.

5. Natural Resource Management and Accountability

The baseline highlights a lack of accountability and transparency and low levels of, citizen participation in issues related to the County and Social Development Funds. The study recommends expanding community representation—especially among women and youth—on the Project Management Committee, and increasing the knowledge and motivation for citizens to participate in the CSDF process.

6. Relationship Between Citizens and Government

In line with the issues identified with respect to natural resource management and decentralization, the baseline study found few avenues for citizens to engage the local government, and to demand information that could help to assess and monitor government performance. The study identified the need to improve dialogue between citizens and the government to improve trust and enhance checks and balances on government officials through grassroots monitoring.

7. Relationship Between Civil Society and Government

While most respondents report a positive relationship with civil society, the report highlights low visibility of CSO activities among citizens, unclear avenues for citizens to engage CSOs on important issues and poor communication about progress towards advocacy aims. The study stresses the need for CSOs to improve engagement and consultation with citizens, and enhance awareness of their activities and progress.

Revised Program Plan 2016-2017

In the program proposal submitted to Sida for Phase 2 of the project (2016-2017), the revised program objectives focused on just two of the initial thematic areas—Security Sector Reform and Decentralization. These were identified as priority areas due to shifts happening in the country—in the first case, the withdrawal of UNMIL and handing over of security to the Liberian Army and Liberian National Police, and in the second the establishment of a number of county-level government service centers as part of the first phase of decentralization.

1. Security Sector Reform

The second phase of the project identified a number of areas of focus within security sector reform, including:

- Legislative engagement at the national level to accelerate the passage of a number of key bills, including the National Prison Reform Act, Independent Law Enforcement;
- Complaints Oversight Authority Act, Drug Enforcement Agency Act and Narcotics and Substance Control Act;
- Monitoring of an SMS complaints hotline to improve citizen reporting of police misconduct;
- Improve citizen awareness of the GoL security transition plan as UNMIL withdraws;
- Monitoring implementation of the transition plan in the counties;
- Improving information sharing about concessions agreements and conflict mediation in aggrieved communities where there are disagreements between citizens and companies.

2. Decentralization/Deconcentration

Within the realm of decentralization and deconcentration, the second phase had the following priorities:

- Improving understanding of decentralization/deconcentration among local authorities;
- Enhancing awareness about decentralization and related government services among citizens;
- Monitoring progress in health and education reforms at the county level;
- Enhancing the capacity for citizens to monitor health and education services and issue complaints;
- Increasing participation of civil society in county sittings.

Partner Capacity Assessments/Benchmarking

In order to help civil society organizations achieve the stated objectives, Search and partner organizations identified capacity-related targets and key performance indicators grouped under: Institutional Capacity; Financial Capacity and Programmatic Capacity. A baseline capacity assessment completed by partner organizations revealed a number of capacity gaps in each domain. The majority of partners cited weaknesses in fundraising, sustainability, organizational policies and procedures, and internal systems related to M&E, media and financial management. All partners also demonstrated weaknesses in engaging citizens and creating demand for their services, and in establishing and sustaining vertical and horizontal networks, i.e. collaborating with peer organizations, state institutions and stakeholders across sectors who are working on similar issues.

After the initial capacity assessment, Search and partners developed benchmarks for organizations to work towards a strategy to measure progress to achieving benchmarks over time. Partner CSOs participated in benchmarking assessments at the beginning of the first phase of the project (2013), midway through the project for the midterm evaluation (2014) and again in February 2017 during the second phase of the program, giving three assessments at different points in time to track progress.

The midterm evaluation found that after 11 months of implementation all partners were well behind their targets, achieving 67% of 6-month benchmarks and just 14% of 12-month benchmarks. The midterm evaluation points to a lack of understanding of the importance of the benchmark process and uncertainty about financial support for some of the activities. The major areas that were not substantially improved by this stage of the project include monitoring and evaluation, financial management and financial sustainability. However, the evaluators noted significant improvements in collaboration between National Partners and County-based partners, improvement in the capacity to engage communities at the county level, increased ability for national partners to collaborate and network, and increased confidence among team members in all CSOs. The National Partners had greater overall improvements than the county-based Partners, who continued to struggle with achieving visibility at the national level, and with successfully building strategic networks. However, the evaluators identified significant disparities among the partners with respect to increased capacity, and were unable to explain why some organizations seemed to benefit greatly from Search's training and mentorship while others did not. The evaluation also noted difficulties in assessing the level of implementation of project activities due to ineffective monitoring systems.

As evidenced by a capacity assessment carried out by Search in February 2017, partner capacities improved much more significantly during the second phase of the program, especially among "new partners" who were not part of the program from 2012 – 2014. For instance, at the inception of the project, the partners' average response to the survey was 3/5, a score that increased to an average 4/5 in 2017 (where 1 is the lower score, and 5 the highest score). Also, 50% of partners self-reported an increase in capacities in all of the eight categories assessed. While the February 2017 assessment did not report on a possible reason for the improvements in achieving benchmarks compared to the 2014 midterm evaluation, it is possible that partners became more comfortable and more committed to the

process over time, and that new partners were introduced to it with clearer expectations than the original partners.

Midterm Evaluation

In addition to the benchmarking capacity assessment described above, the 2014 midterm evaluation also assessed the level of visibility of the partners among citizens and effectiveness of the Blay-Tahnla radio program on citizen knowledge and perceptions about the target themes, namely decentralization, security sector reforms, electoral reforms, natural resources, and corruption. The evaluation found that partner CSOs greater increased their visibility among communities at the county level. While county-based CSOs were well known in their communities prior to the program, staff noted an increase in their ability to engage citizens and local leadership suggesting that increased visibility was leading to enhanced credibility. National partners, on the other hand, were not well known among rural communities prior to the program, and greatly increased their visibility among citizens at the county-level.

While the midterm evaluation noted wide listenership of Blay-Tahnla, with most respondents indicating they enjoy the show and that it talks about issues that are relevant to them, the evaluation also demonstrates that listeners have slightly better knowledge than their peers about local governance issues. However, the evaluation did not clearly demonstrate significant improvements in knowledge among listeners or changes in perceptions or confidence of local government officials or governance processes.

Outcome Harvesting Workshop

In addition to conducting the benchmarking assessment in 2017, a reflective outcome harvesting workshop was held with seven project partners, who were asked to identify concrete examples of changes around key policies that they had helped bring about and could attribute to their improved capacity. All partners were able to point to unanticipated improvements in decentralization processes or peacebuilding/violence prevention that they feel directly resulted from their improved capacity. For instance, partners cited their role in ***increasing the number of services offered to citizens at county-level government service centers; improving dialogue between conflicting groups; establishing complaint mechanisms for citizens to report police misconduct; enhancing awareness of decentralization processes among citizens thereby increasing demand for local government services.***

VI. Limitations to the Evaluation

The evaluation has some limitations, including:

- An evaluation approach rooted in outcome harvesting can make claims about contribution, but not direct cause-effect claims of impacts. As a result, this evaluation can demonstrate how the project activities contributed to change, but cannot make claims of direct attribution.
- Lack of availability of all partner organizations to participate in the participatory reflective workshop;
- Due to financial and logistical constraints, a quantitative audience survey for Blay-Tahnla was not conducted, meaning the evaluation methodology will not exactly mirror the midterm methodology. Further, it is impossible to make claims of radio reach and population-level changes in knowledge and perceptions through the citizen focus groups.
- The time gap between the first phase of implementation and the second due to the Ebola crisis meant that not all staff interviewed was involved in the program since the beginning. Also, some partners who only participated in the first phase of the program—SDI and SEARCH—could not recall specific details about the program.

- It was not possible to visit GPNL due to the logistical difficulty of traveling to Grand Gedeh during the rainy season. Efforts were made by the evaluation team to conduct telephone interviews and to have GPNL staff complete the partner questionnaire and return over email. However, fulfillment of these requests by the partner was unsuccessful.
- Different tools were used to assess capacity at baseline and midterm, meaning claims made of changes over time are not as robust as if the exact same tools and methodology were used at each phase of the benchmarking assessment.
- Given that some of the program focus areas changed during the second phase, it was difficult to determine progress towards objectives in areas related to natural resource management and elections reforms.
- The evaluation team was unable to receive supporting documentation related to activities or achievements by some partners due to poor records keeping.

V. Evaluation Findings

Verification of Findings and Analysis of Contribution

Data to assess and verify outcome indicators was taken from: Interviews with leadership of the CSOs, partner questionnaire completed by CSO staff during a participatory reflective exercise, interviews with stakeholders at national and county levels, focus group discussions with citizens at the county level, final benchmarking data and the outcome harvesting report which were produced in February 2017. Due to the evaluators' inability to interview relevant staff at SEARCH and GPNL, there is not a sufficient number of diverse data sources to adequately verify outcomes claims for these two organizations. A score of 'NA' signifies that the change claim is not relevant to the work of a particular organization.

Objective 1

Description: Increased programmatic capacity of CSOs and CBOs to engage the state on governance and development issues.

Expected Results:

- Government recognizes the value of multi-stakeholder contributions, including by CSOs, to the nation's development and governance process.
- Civil Society engages cohesively during different governance phases, including electoral process.

CSO	SSRWG	SDI	NAYMOTE	BAWODA	BYC	EARS	SEARCH*	CODRA	CJPS	GPNL*	Avg. score
Outcome Indicator 1	CSO is involved in policy construction at the national and/or county level										
Score	3	2	2	0	0	0		1	2		1.3
Outcome Indicator 2	CSO is involved in policy engagement and implementation at the national and/or county level										
Score	3	3	3	1	2	3		2	3		2.5
Outcome Indicator 3	CSO has effectively collaborated with national and/or local government on reform issues										
Score	2	2	3	3	3	3		1	2		2.3
Outcome Indicator 4	CSO has made recommendations to local and national government on targeted reform issues										
Score	3	3	3	2	1	2		1	2		2.1
Outcome Indicator 5	Local and national government have enhanced awareness of CSO activities										
Score	3	3	3	3	3	3		1	3		2.8
Outcome Indicator 6	CSO has improved knowledge of key reform issues and bills related to decentralization/elections reform and/or security sector reform										
Score	3	3	3	3	3	3		2	3		2.9

*Data was not received from SEARCH or GPNL.

Average Scores

National Partners: 2.8/3

County-Based Partners: 1.67/3

Discussion of Scoring

While many of the outcome indicators under objective 1 received a higher degree of verification for national partners than county partners, there is significant evidence that county-level CSOs and CBOs have increased the extent to which they are engaging the state on target reform issues, especially at the county level, and that such engagement is being sustained beyond the program duration. Furthermore, there is significant evidence that CSOs are better informed about key policy issues and thereby more effectively positioned to collaborate with government on reform issues and to make policy recommendations. Across the levels of verification, there is substantial evidence that the majority of county-level CSOs are well-known and deemed credible by county authorities. The one exception is CODRA. While county authorities and other stakeholders who were interviewed in Bong know of CODRA, they could not identify specific activities or priorities and have not collaborated directly with them. Nonetheless CODRA received a score of 1 for many outcome indicators due to their own perception of change. CODRA cited many examples of policy engagement, including: invitations to participate in bimonthly county development meetings with local authorities, advocacy related to the Local Governance Act, citizen awareness and engagement in issues related to the LGA and decentralization, and monitoring the use of the CSC. They have also made three concrete, though informal, recommendations to local authorities during consultations: 1. The county needs to develop a multi-year development plan; the county should use part of the CSDF for a reserve fund and find an investor to match; the college that is under construction in Gbarnga and has yet to be opened should be completed.

All other county-based CSOs scored highly for indicators of change related to increased visibility, collaboration and engagement with local officials. Similarly, national level CSOs are very visible and considered credible by central government authorities and county-level authorities. There is substantial evidence that partnerships with county-based CSOs improved the visibility of national level partners among county authorities. However, the program falls short of increasing the visibility of county-level partners at the national level, with stakeholders at the national level indicating they are unaware of the CSO, or have heard the name but are not aware of its specific activities.

Objective 2

Description: Increased institutional capacity of CSOs and CBOs for sustained and constructive engagement with the state.

Expected Results:

- CSOs have increased institutional capacity to achieve their aims and purpose

CSO	SSRWG	SDI	NAYMOTE	BAWODA	BYC	EARS	SEARCH*	CODRA	CJPS	GPNL*	Avg. Score
Outcome Indicator	CSO is tracking level of engagement with the state, and it is increasing over time										
Score	1	1	1	0	0	0		0	0		0.3
Outcome Indicator	CSO has continued engagement with the state that is being sustained after the project has ended										
Score	3	3	3	3	3	2		1	3		2.6
Outcome Indicator	CSO has increased their visibility and credibility among local/national government agencies										
Score	3	3	3	3	3	3		2	3		2.9
Outcome Indicator	CSO has implemented institutional systems and processes to measure advocacy success in target reform areas										
Score	1	2	1	2	1	2		1	1		1.3
Outcome Indicator	CSO has improved financial, institutional and programmatic capacity to reach its aims										
Score	2	2	3	2	2	1		0	1		1.6
Outcome Indicator	CSO has mainstreamed gender across institutional and programmatic areas										
Score	1	0	2	3	2	0		0	1		1.1

*Data was not received from SEARCH or GPNL

Average Scores

National Partners: 1.9/3

County-Based Partners: 1.8/3

Discussion of Scoring

There is substantial evidence that the majority of CSO partners have improved their institutional capacity, thereby being better positioned to: engage the state around key reforms and monitor progress; engage citizens and raise awareness about issues related to security sector reform and decentralization; raise additional funds; and collaborate with other stakeholders at community, county and national levels. Further, there is evidence that many of the drivers or sustainability have been met by CSOs, including increased visibility and credibility, a refined and well-articulated mission and vision, and enhanced capacities in programmatic and financial management. Despite the high scores for verification of capacity-related outcomes claims for national partners, it is difficult to determine the relative impact Search's program on their capacity development. These partners have participated in many additional programs with other donors during the project period, and had higher capacity at the outset than community-based partners. The county-based partners, on the other hand, greatly improved their capacity as a result of the program, with many of them largely informal organizations prior to the commencement of the project. Stakeholders, including the national partners, local government and local civil society, recognize the improvements in professionalism demonstrated by county-based partners.

However, there are still a number of capacity-related weaknesses that were identified during the course of the evaluation.

1. Partners are not formally tracking stakeholder engagement, and therefore struggle to measure their progress over time. This weakness was found among both national-level and county-level partners, though the national level partners indicate they are informally tracking engagement, thereby receiving a score of 1. None of the partners have developed formal tracking mechanisms.

2. While most partners indicate gender is a priority for them, very few have developed a gender policy or strategy, or have equal gender representation among staff and board members.
3. Monitoring and evaluation remains a significant weakness, especially among county-based organizations. NAYMOTE and SDI both have established institutional processes for measuring advocacy successes over time, the other organizations continue to track impact on an ad hoc basis.
4. Financial capacity remains a weakness, especially among county-based organizations.

However, despite the need for ongoing capacity development, some of the organizations have made significant gains in these areas. For instance, EARS and BAWODA have institutionalized tracking mechanisms to track how many citizens attend forums, and how many are using County Service Centers. BAWODA tracks the number of women using CSCs, and has noted an increase since they started their citizen engagement activities. Despite financial weaknesses, improvements have been made, and all CSOs involved in the project have received additional funding for their activities from other sources due, in part, to their enhanced financial accountability.

There is evidence that some of the capacity-related outcome indicators were not reached because they do not fit in with the CSO’s organizational ways of working, despite being co-designed with project partners at the outset. For instance, none of the partners understood what was meant by a mechanism for tracking engagement with the state, and claimed that some of the outcome indicators were overly “technical”, “theoretical” or “scientific”. As a result, some of the failure to achieve particular outcomes may be related to how they were defined from the outset. Also, partners involved in the second phase demonstrate better capacity-related gains than those in the first, which can be attributed to the program’s redesign which included a greater emphasis on, and financial allocation for, training activities to support capacity development of the partners.

Objective 3

Description: Increased networking and collaboration amongst CSOs and CBOs at national and county levels.

Expected Results:

- Civil Society engages cohesively during different governance phases, including electoral process
- Enhanced effectiveness and efficiency of programming due to improvement of existing networks between CBOs and CSOs

CSO	SSRWG	SDI	NAYMOTE	BAWODA	BYC	EARS	SEARCH*	CODRA	CJPS	GPNL*	Avg. Score
Outcome Indicator	CSO held joint activities with other national and local CSOs involved in the program										
Score	3	3	3	3	3	3		3	3		3.0
Outcome Indicator	CSO engages other county-based organizations not involved in the program around target reform issues										
Score	1	2	3	3	3	2		1	2		2.1
Outcome Indicator	Civil society networks and coalitions and national and county levels are aware of partner CSOs activities and focal areas										
Score	3	3	3	3	3	3		2	3		2.9
Outcome Indicator	CSO worked effectively and constructively across different ethnic-religious and regional groups										
Score	2	3	2	3	2	3		1	3		2.4

*Data was not received from SEARCH or GPNL

Average Scores

National Partners: 2.7/3

Discussion of Scoring

Almost all of the outcome indicators related to Objective 3 received high verification scores across partners and external stakeholders. There is significant and substantial evidence that the project contributed to:

1. Improved collaboration between county-level and national level CSOs;
2. Increased collaboration between project partners and external CSOs/CBOs
3. Enhanced collaboration between partner CSOs and government agencies;
4. Greater cohesion among CSOs in advocacy related to security sector reform and decentralization.;
5. Increased visibility of partner CSOs through engagement with civil society networks and coalitions.

There is also evidence that many of these collaborations are continuing, with partners citing additional joint activities and projects related, including:

1. A partnership between CJPS and SDI to break down key policy actions—such as the decentralization plan and security sector reform plan—into small briefs to conduct awareness raising with community based organizations;
2. SSRWG and CJPS are collaborating on a project funded by International Alert to continue work around county-level security sector reform;
3. NAYMOTE continues to include many of the partners in joint forums related to decentralization, in particular CJPS, BYC, SEARCH and BAWODA;
4. BYC and BAWODA continue to collaborate, especially on areas related to gender;

Some of the partners achieved successes in peacebuilding by bringing conflicting groups together to enhance dialogue, in particular SDI, EARS and CJPS. For these three organizations, successful dialogue was corroborated by local government officials and citizens/citizens' groups. Bringing groups together to mediate conflicts is particularly important in the target counties, where frequent conflicts over tribal lands between different groups was identified as a potential driver of violence by USAID in 2016.¹⁰

One outcome indicator—*CSO is actively using a monitoring plan for tracking stakeholder engagement and feedback*—could not be verified across any interviewees. Similar to some of the indicators in Objective 2, many partners did not fully understand the outcome or how it could help contribute to their work. Despite this shortcoming, all of the partners feel that increased collaboration and cohesion with other CSOs at county and national levels is the greatest project achievement. Similarly, external stakeholders noted an improvement in collaboration, expressing that they feel such collaboration is essential in order to have community and county-level impact in advancing reform efforts.

Objective 4

Description: Increased interaction between citizens, citizens' institutions (CSOs and CBOs) and state institutions at the national and county level.

Expected Results:

- Citizens have greater access to information on key reform processes to make governance demands
- Communication between citizens and state institutions is increased through CSOs

¹⁰ USAID, 2016. *Liberia conflict vulnerability assessment*. <http://bit.ly/2eJivo7>

CSO	SSRWG	SDI	NAYMOTE	BAWODA	BYC	EARS	SEARCH*	CODRA	CJPS	GPNL*	Avg. Score
Outcome Indicator	Citizens are aware of the activities of partner CSO										
Score	NA**	3	3	3	3	3		2	3		2.8
Outcome Indicator	Citizens attended forums or engagement activities with local officials hosted by the CSO										
Score	NA**	2	3	2	2	3		1	3		2.3
Outcome Indicator	Citizens feel that the CSO's mission and related activities are important and contributing to positive community change										
Score	3	3	3	3	3	3		1	3		2.8
Outcome Indicator	Citizens have increased access to information and enhanced understanding of issues related to target reform areas as a result of the CSO's activities										
Score	3	3	3	3	3	3		2	3		2.9
Outcome Indicator	Citizens have increased access to and engagement with local and/or national government and community leadership										
Score	NA**	1	1	2	1	2		0	2		1.3

*Data was not received from SEARCH or GPNL.

**Since SSRWG works as a coalition of different organizations, citizens are unlikely to be directly aware of the working group, but are more likely to have participated in activities by implementing partners that are part of their coalition.

Average Scores

National Partners: 2.5/3

County-Based Partners: 2.4/3

Discussion of Scoring

Outcome indicators under Objective 4 also received high verification scores across indicators and partner CSOs. Most of the citizens and citizens' groups such as youth groups and women's groups who were interviewed indicate they have attended forums related to decentralization and security sector reform organized by partner CSOs. While information on outcomes retrieved through citizen focus groups is not representative of citizens at large, it does suggest that CSOs involved in the project have a high degree of visibility among citizens. Further, when asked what they feel are the most important issues in their county that civil society should focus on, many citizens identified priorities that are core to the work of partner CSOs, such as conflict prevention, improved police-citizen relationships and greater devolution of power to the county level through decentralization. However, given that there are elections in October, 2017, many citizens indicated they would like to see more awareness raising and support for informed voting, and also greater involvement in implementation and monitoring of the CSDF.

Citizens also expressed that they have greater awareness of the Local Governance Act, the decentralization process including the CSC, and the Budget Reform Bill as a result of forums they attended with partner CSOs, and through radio programs that partners produce or participate in to raise awareness of these issues. Citizens generally feel that the CSOs involved in the program are credible and are creating positive changes in their communities.

CODRA was the only CSO where many of the outcomes claims could not be verified by citizens, perhaps due to being smaller and less established than some of the others, and therefore less visible. The outcome claim that could not be sufficiently verified across counties and partners is the last indicator—*citizens have increased access to and engagement with local and/or national government and community leadership*. While the citizens who participated in the focus group discussions spoke highly of the CSOs, and feel better informed on target reform issues, they generally do not feel that they have greater access to local or national government, nor that their opinions and needs are better represented. This suggests that while CSOs are adequately implementing citizen awareness activities, they are not sufficiently engaging citizens in discussions with decision-makers, a key component of improved citizen participation.

Sector-specific Outcomes

While the above outcome indicators are useful for assessing the project’s progress towards pre-identified indicators of success, they do not entirely capture all of the change claims made by participants, particularly those related to community-level changes that resulted from CSO activities in the areas of decentralization and security sector reform. Additional unanticipated outcomes identified in the outcome harvesting workshop conducted in February 2014 were assessed using the same verification methodology in each of the two sectors. Since not all of the partner CSOs are working in both sectors a score of ‘NA’ signifies that the change claim is not relevant to the work of a particular organization.

Security Sector Reform

CSO	SSRWG	SDI	NAYMOTE	BAWODA	BYC	EARS	SEARCH*	CODRA	CJPS	GPNL*	Avg. Score
Outcome Indicator	CSO’s activities has improved citizen understanding of the roles and responsibilities of police										
Score	2	NA	NA	2	2	2		1	3		2.0
Outcome Indicator	CSO has improved complaint mechanisms for citizens to report police abuse or misconduct, and has created demand for these services										
Score	NA	NA	NA	2	NA	2		1	2		1.7
Outcome Indicator	CSO has brought conflicting groups together and improved dialogue between them about issues known to provoke violence, such as land rights										
Score	3	3	NA	3	2	3		2	3		2.7

Discussion of Scoring

There were mixed outcomes in issues related to security sector reform, with most outcome claims receiving a 2 for verification across partners. While many organizations have a high opinion of their own work and that of the CSOs they partnered with, it was difficult to verify this among a broad swathe of external stakeholders, in particular citizens. While many citizens and citizens’ interest groups interviewed attended forums that brought community members together with the police to discuss the roles of responsibilities of officers, as well as to explain complaint mechanisms, they do not feel that it is creating better citizen-police relationships. While complaint hotlines have been set up in some counties, they are not widely used by citizens, even if there is a high degree of awareness. Citizens overwhelmingly feel that police complaints will not be adequately addressed. One indicator in this thematic area did receive a high score for verification across partners—*CSO has brought conflicting groups together and improved dialogue between them about issues known to provoke violence such as land rights*. Citizens and citizens’ interest groups that were interviewed praised the work of a number of the partner CSOs—SSRWG, SDI, BAWODA, BYC, EARS, CODRA and CJPS—for their ability to promote dialogue among conflicting groups, including between different tribes (CODRA, CJPS, SDI and SSRWG), between citizens and mining companies (SDI, BYC and BAWODA).

Decentralization

CSO	SSRWG	SDI	NAYMOTE	BAWODA	BYC	EARS	SEARCH*	CODRA	CJPS	GPNL*	Avg. Score
Outcome Indicator	CSO's citizen engagement and awareness activities have created a demand for local government services										
Score	NA	NA	3	3	2	2		1	NA		1.8
Outcome Indicator	CSO activities have created a greater awareness among citizens' groups and citizens about the Local Government Act and related issues										
Score	NA	NA	3	3	3	2		2	3		2.7
Outcome Indicator	CSO engagement with local government has improved the number and quality of services available to citizens at the county service centers										
Score	NA	NA	1	1	1	1		1	NA		1.0
Outcome Indicator	CSO advocacy has created more space for citizen and citizen group participation in setting county development priorities										
Score	NA	NA	2	2	1	1		1	2		1.5

Discussion of Scoring

External stakeholders directly attributed specific changes—such as increased use of the CSCs, especially by marginalized people, and greater inclusion of citizens' groups in county development planning forums—to the awareness-raising work of the CSOs. For instance, the Coordinator of the Grand Bassa County Service Center has seen a dramatic increase in demand for services among youth and women, which he attributes to the citizen engagement work of BAWODA and BYC. Similarly, the Director of the CSC for NIMBA directly credits EARS for increasing awareness of the center and creating increased demand for services, particularly among remote communities, and citizens in Bong also claim that they have used the service center after attending forums hosted by NAYMOTE. Outcome indicators related to improved citizen awareness about draft bills and acts related to decentralization also received high verification scores across partners. One area that was not sufficiently verified is related to the ability for program partners to create greater space and representation of citizens and citizen groups within county-level decision-making structures. Citizens stress that they remain excluded from decision-making at all levels. Citizens' interest groups in Bong and Grand Bassa indicate that they are increasingly included in county-level decision-making, for instance by receiving invites to county development planning meetings or county sittings, and they feel the advocacy work of CSOs like NAYMOTE, BYC and BAWODA has contributed to this change. However, they attend forums as observers only, without any official delegation or status that would allow them to have a say in setting county development priorities.

VI. Partner CSO Case Studies of Impact

Security Sector Reform Working Group

Interviews with staff and assessment of program documentation demonstrates that, as a result of the program, SSRWG has improved their capacity to work at both national and county levels on security sector reform. SSRWG's self-reported capacity assessment, administered through a questionnaire delivered at baseline (2013), midterm (2014) and endline (Feb. 2017) demonstrates that most areas showed improvements, with the greatest perceived achievement in areas related to Board selection, management and oversight. While SSRWG's self-assessment indicates that networking capacity decreased from 2014 - 2017, improved visibility and collaboration at the county level was one of the greatest achievements listed during interviews with the group's leadership team.

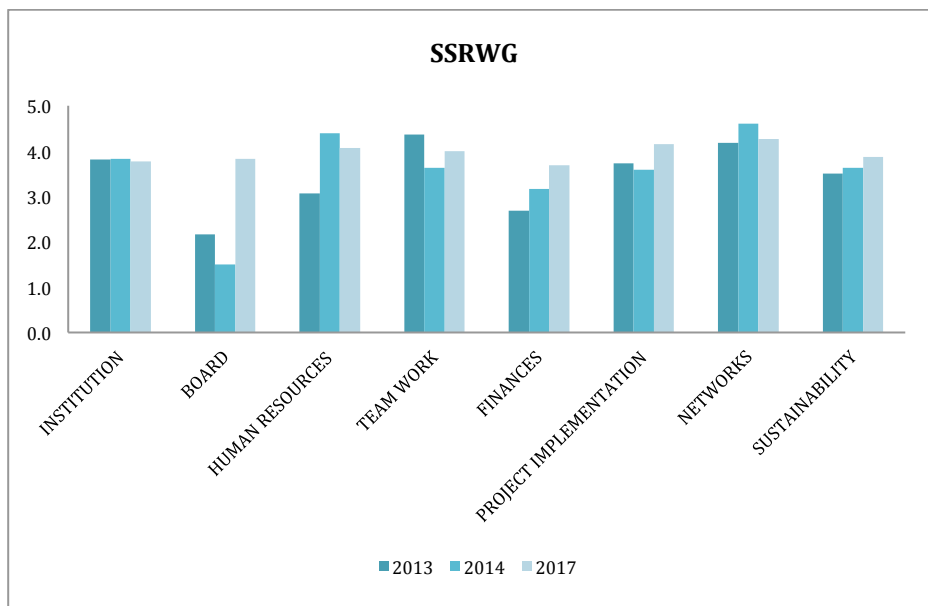
The project really helped us gain visibility, at the national and county levels but also among international donors. We have been able to gain more prominence among international actors such as UNMIL, which is a direct result of our increased visibility and credibility in the sector (SSRWG).

Interviews also highlighted improvements in financial management, sustainability and M&E, though respondents feel these achievements would have been greater if they had additional finances to support

the capacity development of their member organizations, and more training sessions organized by Search. Respondents also indicate that the working group did not fully benefit from the capacity-building component of the project, due to the 12-month gap in funding in 2014/2015. When they resumed their activities after this long delay, a number of staff that received the original training were no longer employed at the organization, leaving a gap in knowledge. Despite these challenges, SSRWG's capacity assessment reports improvements in:

- 1) Institutional capacity, including ensuring all staff can articulate a clear mission and vision, and designing project's that uphold the mission;
- 2) Teamwork, including inclusive decision-making;
- 3) Financial management, including donor reporting;
- 4) Project implementation, in particular monitoring and evaluation;
- 5) Networking with government officials at the national level and CSOs/NGOs at the county level;
- 6) Sustainability, including an enhanced reputation among donors and citizens, and an increase in organizational assets.

Senior staff also indicated that they passed along the training they received to SSRWG's member organizations, thereby having a ripple effect in terms of impact by also improving the capacity of CSOs not directly involved in the program.



Interviewees external to the working group corroborated many of the claims of improved capacity. For instance, county-based partners spoke highly of the training delivered by SSRWG and of the joint activities they held, feeling that their own organizations benefitted from improved knowledge of key issues and greater credibility through their partnership with SSRWG.

SSRWG made a number of formal recommendations for security sector reform during the life of the project. For instance, they made a recommendation that police officers have a badge with a number for identification purposes to enhance accountability, which is currently being rolled out in a number of counties. They also successfully drafted two pieces of legislation:

- A Public Safety Reform Act to provide greater oversight of the security sector, in particular private investigators and security guards;
- A bill to establish an independent civilian rights authority that could oversee all of the security sector organizations.

The working group worked closely with the Ministry of Justice in the development and validation of both draft legislations, which are currently under review. In collaboration with the MoJ and the chair of the Senate Committee on National Security, Defense, Intelligence and Veterans Affairs, small civilian boards were established while the Public Safety Reform Act is under review. SSRWG staff also believes that the greater capacity and visibility they achieved through the Search project has helped them to attract additional funding, thereby contributing to their sustainability. They have new and emerging partnerships with UNMIL to conduct citizen awareness and engagement sessions in the counties and with UNDP to develop an early warning system for elections.

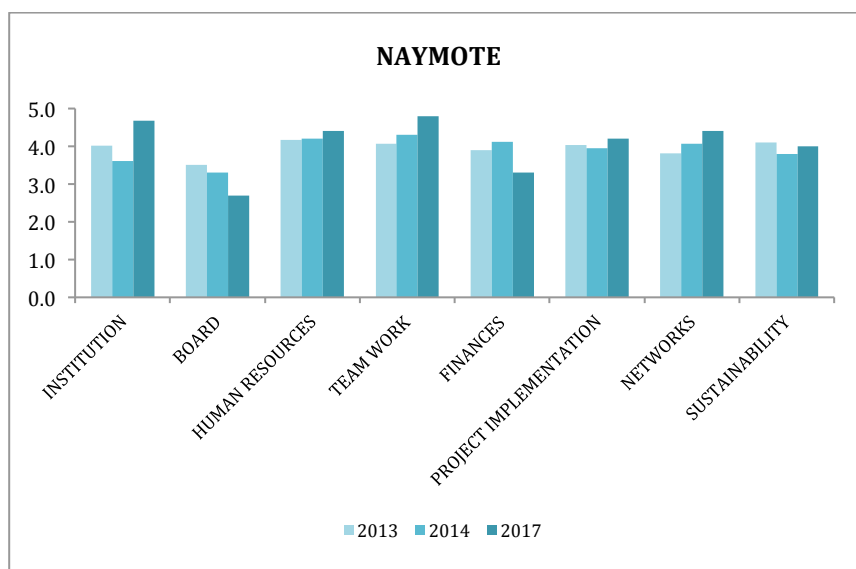
National Youth Movement for Transparent Elections

NAYMOTE also made a number of self-reported capacity gains from 2013 – 2017, with the greatest self-reported gains in areas related to institutional and teamwork benchmarks. In particular, NAYMOTE reports that it developed a mission, vision and multi-year strategic plan during the course of the program, and that the mission guides the design and implementation of projects.

I think the development of our strategic plan was very good. It gave us a clear direction about what we want to do as an institution. Our communications plan was also very successful because it helped us learn how to communicate our messages clearly. These were two areas that really helped us improve on our weaknesses (NAYMOTE).

Respondents from NAYMOTE also highlight improvements in teamwork, and in particular improvements in staff policies that stress the equal representation of men and women. As a result, its staff currently comprises over 60% women. Other self-reported capacity improvements include:

- Regular board meetings to enhance oversight and the establishment of an archive for meeting notes;
- The development of a human resources policy and a gender policy;
- Increased annual income and organizational assets;
- An increase in the number of meetings with national-level government officials and private companies;
- Greater visibility and credibility among civil society at the county level.



NAYMOTE credits the project for the strong relationships it now has with the county-based partners it worked with during implementation, in particular BAWDOA, BYC and CODRA, and also for its

ability to attract additional funding from a variety of international donors, including UNMIL, USAID LAVI, NDI, and the National Endowment for Democracy. NAYMOTE conducted a number of M&E activities, such as citizen surveys related to changes in knowledge of target reforms, and increased participation in county consultations, to measure the success of its initiatives. As a result, they have robust evidence of increased knowledge of issues related to the CSCs and the CSDF among youth who participated in training sessions and debates, and improved understanding of the budget process among local leaders.

“Most of the local leaders previously had very limited understanding about the county budget process; they had no knowledge about how to track budgetary allocations. Through our engagement—the Open Budget Initiative—we printed the budget and gave it to them in the counties. Now, many of them have a better understanding about how much money is going into the counties, and they are now holding their leaders accountable.” (NAYMOTE)

County-based CSOs and external stakeholders who were interviewed as part of the evaluation corroborate NAYMOTE’s claims of improved capacity and successful implementation. All of the partner CSOs who attended training sessions and/or conducted joint activities with NAYMOTE feel their capacity greatly improved as a result of the collaboration, and in particular their knowledge of decentralization issues. External stakeholders—including county leadership and citizens’ interest groups in Bong County— universally expressed that NAYMOTE is a credible and highly professional CSO, with respondents rating them a 4 or 5 out of 5 for citizen engagement, collaboration with other CSOs and collaboration with local government. Among citizens in Bong County, NAYMOTE is a highly visible CSO, with all citizens interviewed demonstrating familiarity with their activities, and many indicating they have attended forums or workshops organized by NAYMOTE.

“NAYMOTE has done a very good job of monitoring local government activities, especially the County and Social Development Fund budget and use. They go and get the reports from representatives and follow the implementation of activities. They use radio all the time to talk to citizens about what representatives are doing.” (Citizen, Sugar Hill)

NAYMOTE feels that the Search project contributed to many of its successes, but also expressed that the gap in funding in 2014 significantly slowed progress and demotivated their team. They did receive some funding from USAID LAVI to continue their activities during the gap in program funding, but expressed that many of the smaller organizations that they were collaborating with were required to suspend their activities completely during this time. Despite this, NAYMOTE respondents feel that the project’s aims, objectives and activities are highly relevant to what CSOs in Liberia need. They also appreciated the participatory nature of the program whereby they could set their own priorities based on their knowledge of the context rather than “dancing to the donor’s tune”.

“One of the things that made the SFCG project different to others is that we were also part of the development of the project. We had involvement from the beginning in everything and that’s made a difference to outcomes. Now we’re dreaming big. We’re building collaborations with partners throughout West Africa. In five years time we want to make sure that we are recognized as one of the major think tank organizations in the Mano River Union focusing on democracy and governance and decentralization.” (NAYMOTE)

Sustainable Development Institute

SDI was involved in the program from 2012 – 2014, but was not involved in the second phase from 2016 – 2017 due to the programmatic reset where natural resource management was no longer included as a priority sector. As a result, the benchmarking and capacity assessments were not completed in 2017, and the 2013/2014 assessments are sufficiently out of date to warrant excluding them from the evaluation. Furthermore, some of the staff who were originally involved in the program are no longer

at the organization. Members of staff who were interviewed stressed that their responses need to be considered with caution as they were only involved with the program near its end in 2014 and not from the outset, and do not recall many of its details due to the time that has lapsed.

Respondents from SDI feel that the Search program helped consolidate their work to increase accountability and transparency related to the CSDF in Bong, Grand Bassa and Nimba. In particular, the collaborations with local groups in these counties, such as Bawoda, CJPS and SEARCH, greatly improved their impact and reach, especially in terms of citizen engagement and awareness. SDI broke down the budget law into small pieces of information and trained the county-based partners to deliver it to citizens in their communities. SDI feels that this kind of collaboration is essential since the county-based partners have a greater understanding of the context of their communities while national partners like SDI have greater awareness and understanding of the laws and structures at the national level.

“With this project, it was no longer SDI documenting issues with the CSDF. CJPS in BONG, SEARCH in Nimba, Bawoda did the groundwork. We developed tools with them and provided training for them. We would get the consolidated information. They used the information to engage with the local authorities in real time. They didn’t need to wait for us to write a report. We had a relationship with the local radio stations, and the local organizations were using the radio programs to discuss the issues.” (SDI)

SDI also feels that the program contributed directly to advancements made in the Land Rights Act through collaborations at the county level.

“Prior to this project we had been working with a lot of international groups to form our own position on different policy issues. With this project, we had to work with local organizations. It was no longer just SDI writing the policy brief and doing outreach in the communities. This became easier for us. It helped us gain credibility at the county level while also building the capacity of the county organizations.” (SDI)

Respondents also feel that the project was highly relevant to the need of civil society actors in Liberia, who often do not work together, and do not know how to effectively engage and collaborate with government.

“We need to build a stronger cohesion among civil society. This is one weakness of civil society. They often back down when the lawmakers say to. For instance, the president tried to pass a bill to make all CSOs submit all their reports to the president’s office. There is a concentrated effort to suppress dissent in this country.” (SDI)

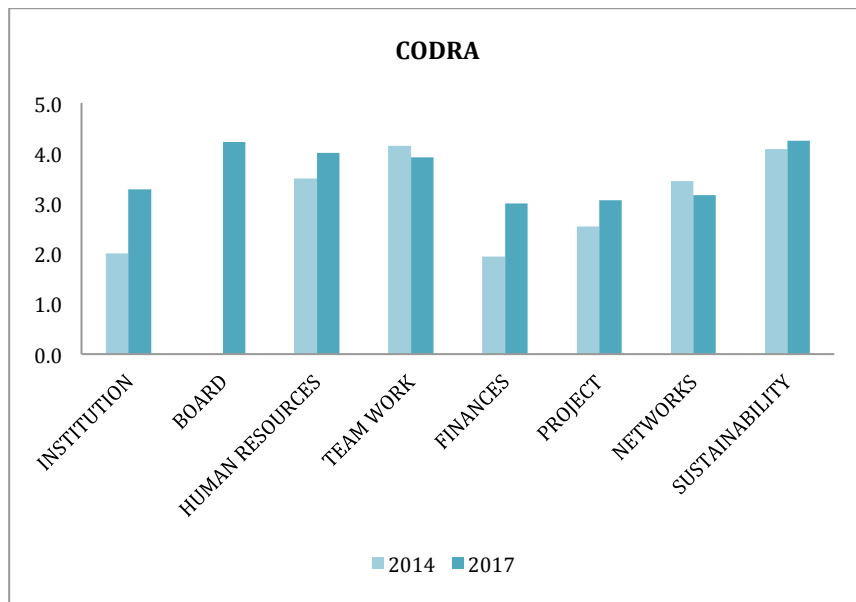
Most of the citizens interviewed in Bong, Grand Bassa and Nimba are aware of SDI’s work. While it is impossible to claim that this is directly a result of the program, it does suggest that improved collaboration with county-based organizations has increased the reach of SDI’s programs, and has contributed to greater awareness among citizens outside of Monrovia, thereby advancing the organization’s advocacy aims.

While interviewees from SDI rate the program’s objectives and aims highly, they expressed that the focus on capacity and cohesion, while desperately needed in Liberia, does not go far enough. They stress that there needs to be greater emphasis on training civil society how to work directly with government and awareness-raising within government to change how officials perceive civil society. There is a lot of suspicion and dismissal of CSO activities among government officials at all levels, even with highly professional organizations. They further highlight that while increasing professionalization of the sector improved the credibility of CSOs, it does not necessarily translate into improved relationships and collaborations with government. Interviewees also expressed that the reporting requirements were overly laborious and detracted from their work, and that the program was

overly complicated, with too many themes and objectives, recommending that greater successes would have been achieved with targeted expertise that addressed a fewer number of themes.

Community Development and Research Agency

A review of project documentation and interviews with staff and external stakeholders reveals that indications of CODRA’s improved capacity are mixed. CODRA’s self-assessment shows improved capacity from 2014 - 2017¹¹ in most domains with greatest achievement in the recruitment and management of a Board, financial capability and institutional capacities. The self-assessment highlights that CODRA developed a mission and vision for the organization that is guiding programmatic decisions, and has improved strategic planning through regular staff meetings. CODRA also established a board as a result of the project, which is selected based on merit and meets regularly with the organization. CODRA’s self-assessment also shows improvements in financial management and grant management and reporting, but the organization has not yet attracted enough additional funding to have an annual operating budget. While still scoring lower than the other organizations across indicators, CODRA has made a number of improvements related to project implementation, including establishing systems for integrating recommendations from citizens, developing workplans for staff and instituting a monitoring and evaluation system. While CODRA scores itself highly for networking, including high scores for collaborations at the local level and for outreach, the 2017 score dropped over time from the baseline score. This may be due to the fact that a different methodology was used for the self-assessment at baseline than endline. The self-report also has relatively high scores for sustainability indicators, including its rootedness in the community, ownership of assets and the fact that it has an office with a conference room available for rent to receive additional revenue.



An interview with CODRA’s Executive Director reveals that the organization is proud of the achievements it obtained during the course of the project. In particular, their work on the local governance act has improved citizen awareness of the need to press local leaders for the bill to be passed. Also, citizen awareness-raising about the CSC has improved the use of the center, with as many as 2,000 citizens visiting the center over a 3-month period. CODRA was not able to say how much their activities directly contributed to this demand, or whether this represented an increase in use from

¹¹ Importantly, while the baseline capacity assessment was conducted in 2014, programmatic activities did not commence until 2016. As a result the 2017 assessment is based on one year of capacity development for CODRA, EARS and BYC..

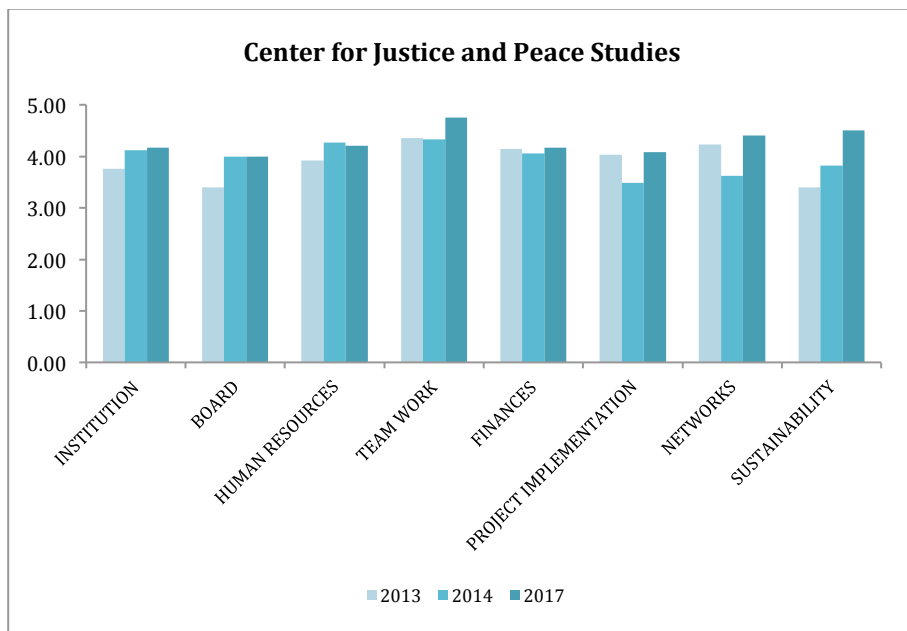
the previous 3-month period. However, the Director of the CSC in Bong believes that CODRA's awareness-raising activities are contributing to improved uptake of services among citizens.

Many of the outcome claims could not be verified by supporting documentation or through interviews with external stakeholders. This may be because CODRA is less visible than many of the larger CSOs in Bong and remains relatively unknown among local leaders. While many citizens who participated in focus group discussions were familiar with CODRA's work, suggesting the project contributed to greater visibility among citizens, they could not cite specific activities or priority areas the organization is involved with, nor had any respondents attended a forum or meeting hosted by CODRA. Participants in one FGD gave CODRA a 1 out of 5 for citizen engagement, claiming they do not reach out broadly to citizens, but "only speak to the same people all the time."

Despite a lack of verification for outcome indicators across stakeholders, staff from the organization feel that the Search program contributed greatly to capacity-related improvements, and increased their visibility and credibility. They have not received additional funding to work on the same priority area (decentralization), but have raised additional finances to work in other sectors, including elections and peacebuilding. CODRA feels that the partnerships with more established CSOs in particular helped to raise their profile in the county, which has contributed to their ability to raise additional funds and to sustain themselves.

Centre for Justice and Peace Studies

Self-reported data from CJPS demonstrates capacity-related improvements in all areas during the course of the project (2012 - 2014; 2016 - 2017). In terms of institutional capacities, the greatest improvements were made with respect to creating a mission and vision and multi-year strategic plan to guide strategic decision-making. The data also highlights improvements in teamwork, and especially in terms of establishing more inclusive decision-making processes. CJPS demonstrated few improvements in terms of financial management. In terms of project implementation, CJPS reports gains in most indicators, with greatest achievements in collaboration and outreach with citizens and county officials, improved donor reporting, and the establishment of monitoring and evaluation systems to measure project outcomes. Finally, CJPS reports substantial improvements in networks and sustainability, with enhanced relationships with other county-based CSOs and greater visibility and credibility among county government, and national-level partners and government agencies, and an increase in assets and sources of revenue generation.



Interviews with CJPS leadership highlight that one of the greatest successes of the project was their ability to bring different people together—police officers, commissioners, women’s groups, disability rights group, county chairmen—to discuss issues of importance to the county. According to respondents, the best part of the project was the collaboration with other groups, in particular national-level CSOs that they typically do not have much contact with.

“One of the best things was the collaboration with other organizations. Through this project we started working with SSRWG, and through them the Liberia National Law Enforcement Association. We are still working with them on other projects and are continuing the relationship.”

The focus on police-citizen relationships wasn’t originally in CJPS’ peacebuilding framework, but they have included it as a result of the collaboration with SSRWG. In addition to programmatic shifts that CJPS made as a result of collaboration with other partners, they feel capacity-related gains, including improved program management, networking and financial management, has improved their credibility, especially among international organizations and donors. They feel that they still possess weaknesses in terms of M&E, saying they did not receive an appropriate level of training during the program, and in terms of institutionalizing a gender policy.

CJPS is well-known and well-respected among citizens and external stakeholders in Bong County. Respondents in citizen focus groups repeatedly named CJPS as one of the most active and visible CSOs in the county, who, on average, rated them 4.2 out of 5 for citizen engagement, 4 out of 5 for collaboration with other CSOs, and 4 out of 5 for collaboration with local authorities.

“We are very familiar with CJPS. They are involved in mediating disputes, such as land disputes, and help create positive relationships, for instance between citizens and the police. CJPS is helping us to better understand our rights.” (Citizen, Gbarnga).

External stakeholders also rate CJPS highly in terms of their credibility and professionalism. The Bong County Police Superintendent lauded a partnership with CJPS called “The Dialogue Program” where they go into remote communities to talk to people about their security issues.

“We (the county police) are working together as a team with CJPS to create partnerships with the communities. This is the first time we have done something like this, and it has changed our approach to policing dramatically. Nowadays we are receiving information directly from community members through CJPS’ outreach work. They are calling us, unlike before...before they were afraid that if they gave us information, they might also be arrested. But now they understand that when you give information, we’re going to work with them.” (Bong County Police Superintendent)

Local government officials, on the other hand, are aware of the activities of CJPS, but feel that the coordination and collaboration with county leadership is lacking. The Bong County Superintendent confirms that CJPS is well-respected among the community and is skilled at community engagement and outreach, rating them 4 out of 5, but feels that they need to improve coordination with the superintendent’s office.

“The problem I have with CJPS is that they don’t really regard the county administration to be anything [of importance]. We need coordination...that’s the only way the county will move forward. If you’re doing activities and you don’t inform me I will not know anything about your organization besides what the people in the community tell me.” (Bong County Superintendent)

An interview with the leader of a women’s group similarly feels that CJPS is excellent in terms of citizen engagement and collaboration with other civil society groups, but needs to improve relationships with local authorities, which she stresses is a problem amongst all CSOs in Bong County. In particular, she would like to see prominent CSOs like CJPS push forward reforms that would help get citizens’ interest groups included in county sittings and other decision-making forums, which they are currently excluded from.

Special Emergency Activity to Restore Children’s Hope (SEARCH)

SEARCH was involved in the program from 2012 – 2014, but was not involved in the second phase from 2016 – 2017 due to the programmatic reset, which did not include natural resource management as a priority theme. As a result, the benchmarking and capacity assessments were not completed in 2017, and the 2013/2014 assessments are sufficiently out of date to warrant excluding them from the evaluation. Furthermore, it was difficult to recruit staff involved in the program for interviews. The evaluation team was only able to interview two members of the leadership team, but neither was centrally involved in the implementation of the project, and they stressed that it was difficult to recall specific details due to the time that has lapsed since the program ended in 2014. As a result, there is little data to evaluate the success of the program for SEARCH and findings should be considered with caution.

The interviewee highlighted three main successes from the project:

1. Collaborations with other CSOs, in particular SSRWG, NAYMOTE and CJPS. SEARCH continues to have a relationship with NAYMOTE in particular since the end of the program, but does not have a formal collaboration.
2. Institutional capacity building: The project helped SEARCH strengthen its organizational policies and systems, leading to improvements in financial management and M&E.
3. The project helped SEARCH to improve its relationship with county-level government officials and leaders, relationships that have persisted and strengthened since 2014.

“In terms of advancing our relationships with local leaders, this project was one of the best projects that we had. We developed a good relationship with our local leaders; the project brought us very close to them. At every point of the implementation process there were meetings held, consultations...if you’re looking at, for example, the county development funds, the assessment of what steps to take could not be done in isolation. It required the participation of stakeholders at key points along the way. We have managed to maintain good relationships with local government actors since then.”

With respect to the organization's assessment of the program's relevance to the needs of CSOs, the interviewee feels the aims and activities are highly relevant and needed to improve civil society in Liberia. In particular, there is a need for CSOs to work together and collaborate to meet advocacy aims, especially in a country where many areas are inaccessible to Monrovia-based CSOs due to logistical constraints. Partnerships with county-based organizations can help extend the reach of CSOs. Further, the interviewee stresses that both Monrovia-based CSOs and smaller, local organizations have their own strengths and areas of expertise that can compliment and strengthen one another. The respondent feels that the collaborative relationship with Search was also a strong element of the program. SEARCH was unable to give details on the outcomes of the project on the organization's NRM work due to the fact it wasn't fully implemented, and was stopped before they had a chance to evaluate achievements and impacts.

Interviews with external stakeholders reveals that SEARCH is a respected and reputable CSO in Nimba and Bong. The District Commissioner in Nimba rates SEARCH as one of the most credible and accountable CSOs:

“Civil society in Nimba is too partisan. Many organizations have antagonistic relationships with the local government. SEARCH is more balanced than most. With many CSOs, there is a lack of accountability.” (District Commissioner, Nimba)

The Executive Director of Nimba's NGO network also lauded SEARCH for their professionalism, claiming that SEARCH has stronger financial and organizational management than other organizations that are part of the network. SEARCH also has its own office in Nimba, which the respondent stresses has contributed greatly to its credibility and visibility in the county.

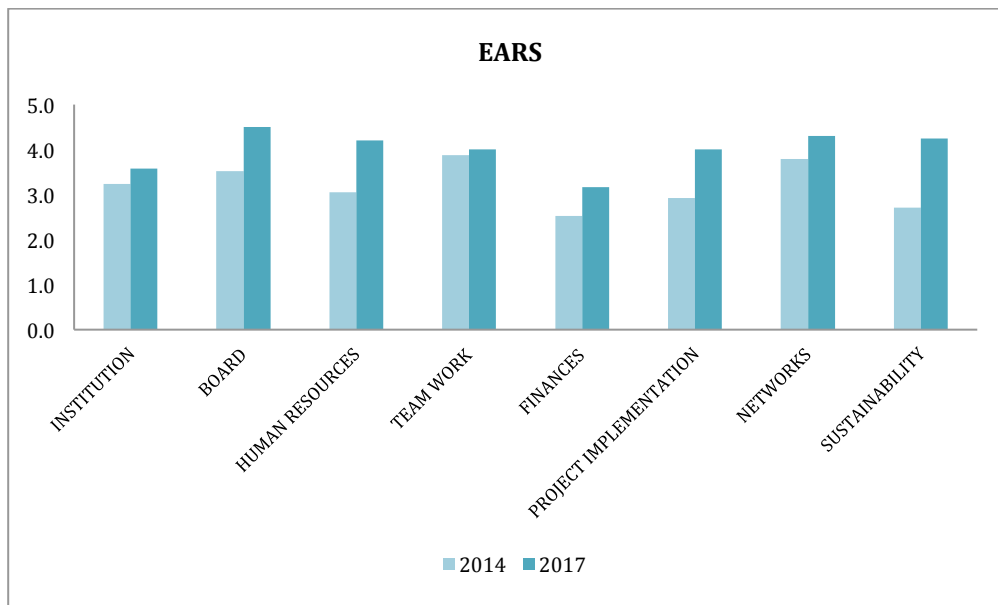
Citizens who participated in a focus group discussion in Sanniquellie are all aware of SEARCH, and many have participated in forums related to NRM and the rights of children. One focus group respondent feels that one of SEARCH's strengths is its ability to bring different groups together.

“I went to a focus group discussion organized by SEARCH. They asked us how we felt the women are treated within the community when it comes to decision-making. The best thing about it was that everyone was involved in the discussion—women, men, Muslims and Christians. This doesn't happen very often here.”

FGD respondents rated SEARCH an average of 4 out of 5 for citizen engagement, and 3.5 out of 5 for increasing citizen awareness of issues.

Effective Activity to Restore Stability for the Masses

In comparing self-reported capacity improvements from baseline (2014) to endline (July 2017), EARS reports substantial improvements in all areas. At the institutional level, EARS created a mission and vision for the organization, and now designs projects according to its mission. EARS also made improvements in terms of the operations of the Board, which is now selected based on their understanding of key issues and meets regularly. While EARS has made improvements in inclusive decision-making, there is still low representation of women among staff, and the organization does not have a gender policy. EARS made significant self-reported gains in project implementation and financial management, with greatest improvements in donor reporting, project design and monitoring and evaluation. EARS made capacity-related gains in terms of networks, improving cohesion and collaboration with other CSOs in Nimba and making modest improvements in relationships with local officials. While EARS reports improvements in sustainability, such as having organizational assets, interviews reveal that sustainability remains tenuous, and there is an ongoing need for it to improve its ability to secure donor funds and develop additional sources of revenue.



Interviews with leadership and the participatory reflection exercise with staff revealed that EARS is very proud of its accomplishments under this program, in particular their involvement in policy implementation related to decentralization/Local Government Act and the CSC. It has made two formal recommendations to lawmakers:

- Further decentralization of the county service centers to the district level to reach remote communities;
- A Senator’s Championing Bill that would ensure senators champion the Local Governance Act’s reform to elect rather than appoint superintendents.

Through the program, EARS was able to deepen their relationship with communities, since it allowed them to conduct citizen awareness sessions in hard to reach villages that they hadn’t previously been able to access. EARS also credits the program for improving its organizational and financial management. However, given that they were only involved in the program for one year, staff felt the training was not enough, and that many of the sessions were too short. In particular, they would have liked additional training in M&E and gender mainstreaming, which are two areas where they do not feel they have sufficient capabilities. As a result, they have not yet developed an M&E strategy for the organization, and feel ill-equipped to assess the impact of their activities. They appreciated the benchmarking process and, while they felt it was overly complicated and technical, they have adapted a version of it for their own institutional use. EARS also feels that collaboration with the other partner CSOs, in particular NAYMOTE and SSRWG, was very valuable, and helped improve their knowledge of the core issues related to decentralization and police reform.

There is substantial evidence from EARS’ own project documentation as well as from interviews with external stakeholders and citizens that EARS is an active and highly visible CSO in Sanniquellie and beyond. During the program, EARS developed a tracking system to monitor the use of the CSC. EARS also convened eight forums during the course of the program, attracting between 30 to more than 150 participants, including citizens, local chiefs, and local officials. All of the citizens who participated in an FGD in Sanniquellie were familiar with EARS’ work, and many had attended community forums hosted by EARS related to decentralization, the CSC, the CSDF and complaint mechanisms to report police misconduct.

“The thing I really like about EARS is that they told us about the county service centers. I did not know that you can get land deeds, marriage certificates and car licenses there. Before I heard about this

from them, I thought you had to travel to Monrovia for these such things. They are informative and they give sensible information to the public.” (Citizen, Sanniquellie)

“EARS for the Masses helped me to know about projects like infrastructure, especially how the county development funds are allocated to infrastructure projects. It’s good, because before there was no accountability to tell citizens how the government is using the money.” (Citizen, Sanniquellie)

An interview with the Program Director of Radio Sehway also highlighted the popularity of EARS’ biweekly radio program, confirming that the main topics of discussion are decentralization, the Local Governance Act, the Land Rights Act and security sector reform. The manager claims that as a result of the program’s popularity and the trusted information it provides to citizens, the organization is able to get a good turn out when it holds community forums. Station staff members are always invited to attend community forums, and there are always a minimum of 50 people present, including important community influencers like Paramount Chiefs and town leaders. The director further indicated that the station does not have close relationships with civil society organizations other than EARS.

“EARS, more than other civil society organizations, really understands the power of using the media to reach people. Other organizations don’t think it is worth the money and don’t budget for it, but EARS knows how valuable the radio station is to raise awareness about important issues.” (Program Director, Radio Sehway)

The Station Manager and Radio Nimba further corroborated claims about EARS’ commitment to using media as a tool to raise awareness about issues and to bring groups together for dialogue.

“EARS comes to the station often to talk about issues related to security sector reform and decentralization. They host a talk show with a moderator and call-in for citizens to ask questions. It is a very popular program. Many people call in, usually asking questions related to how to use the service center. They even bring county officials onto the show, like the District Chairman and Development Superintendent to citizens can ask them questions.” (Station Manager, Radio Nimba)

Almost all citizens interviewed were familiar with a radio program run by EARS that talks about decentralization and speaks in local vernacular languages. The citizens rated the program high, indicating they received information about how to get their voter registration card and national ID card. The Director of the CSC in Nimba also expressed that he feels EARS is doing important work to create demand for the center, especially among citizens in remote villages who often don’t know it exists or what services they can access there. When the CSC first opened in 2016, the director reports that there was a lack of awareness, and that few people were using it, and attributes improved usage directly to EARS’ awareness raising activities.

“Our problem previously was lack of awareness. When we started last year, awareness was not too much so people were not coming. But with the launch of the EARS program, the awareness is good now. It has boosted our services to the extent that we are happy. Last year, our monthly service uptake was very low, but after awareness rose thanks to EARS for the Masses, use of our services began to pick up. From May 2016 to June 2017, we delivered a total number of services to more than 4000 people.” (Director Nimba CSC)

The Nimba District Commissioner and Development Chairman both confirmed that collaboration between EARS and the local government has improved over the past year. They also point to EARS’ credibility and impartiality, which makes them trusted among local leaders and citizens.

“EARS are very good. They are always at our door and we have a good relationship with them. They give us information about the community needs and priorities. When we want to disseminate information back to the community we also work through them. They have a reputation for speaking

without bias, for not becoming embroiled in community conflicts, and speaking for everyone regardless of which community they represent.” (Development Chairman, Nimba)

The Director of the Nimba NGO Network also rated EARS highly, indicating that he has noticed an increase in their activities over the past year, and in particular their ability to engage the state on reform issues. However, he feels that since EARS does not currently have its own office space, this affects its credibility and visibility in the community, especially among other CSOs and local leaders.

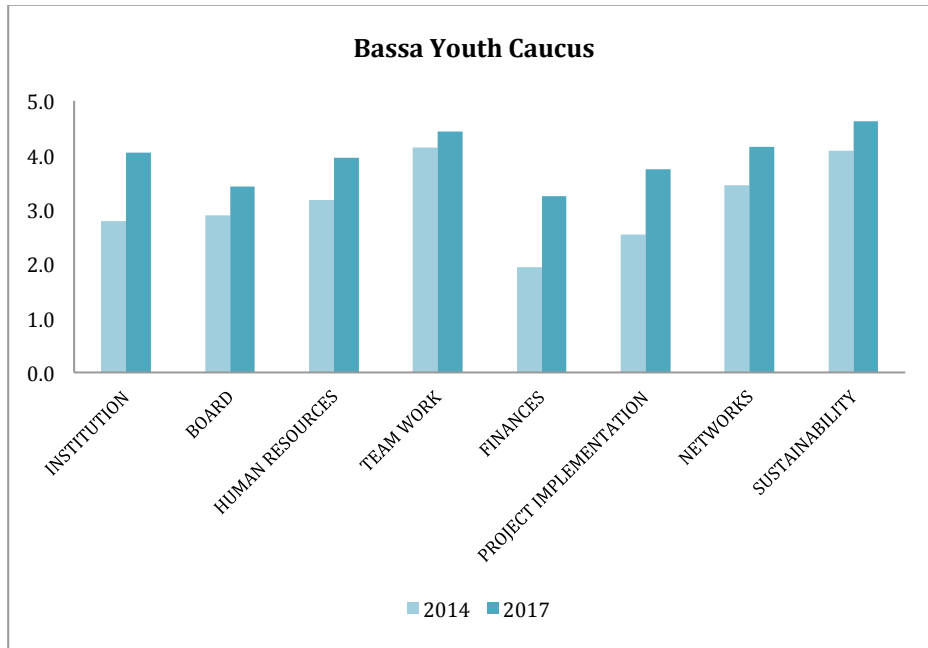
A senior representative from the County Police Department who was interviewed as part of the evaluation was more critical of EARS’ work than other external stakeholders. The police were not initially informed of their program to set up a complaint hotline on the radio and to hold community forums related to citizen complaint mechanisms. As a result, the commissioner feels that some of the information was incorrect and inflammatory, and not substantiated with evidence. While he feels that EARS is giving important information to the community and is well-positioned to conduct community engagement activities, he feels that there needs to be better collaboration and coordination with his office.

“When they started the program, they did not involve the police, and it’s a community-based program. The police needs to be a part of it because we are partnering with the community. I mean, look at the community policing partnership - that has been working extremely well, so there’s no reason why we can’t also partner with the community on the EARS project. But the way it happened initially, it just seemed like they were running a campaign against the police. They were inciting citizens against the police.” (Representative, Nimba County Police Department)

The Commissioner feels that programs like the one EARS was implementing would work better if a CSO network was established that had regular meetings and collaboration with the police. He feels that civil society is an important actor in bridging citizens and the police, and in helping to build greater trust and better relationships, but that they need to work together rather than against one another.

Bassa Youth Caucus

BYC made substantial capacity-related gains from 2014 to the end of the project in 2017, especially in areas related to institutional management, project implementation and sustainability. In particular, BYC reports that they refined their mission and vision, and it is now used to direct project design, implementation and marketing efforts, and that they have developed a 5-year strategic plan after conducting a SWOT analysis. The organization has also made improvements in teamwork, and in particular inclusive decision-making and gender representation. The organization reports that it still has some financial capacity related weaknesses, but improved its donor reporting and its sustainability by diversifying its funding base. BYC reported a number of capacity-related improvements in program implementation and network building, including ensuring that the board is more involved in strategic decision-making and oversight, increasing innovation in its programming, enhancing monitoring and evaluation systems and strategies, developing an external communication strategy to keep in regular contact with stakeholders, and establishing contact with private companies. BYC also improved its capacity for sustainability during the course of the program by recruiting additional high-quality volunteers highly, improving its relationship with communities and developing strategies for revenue generation, such as building a conference room to rent out to other organizations, and developing plans to build a guesthouse. The conference room is completed and BYC is earning income from it, and the blueprint is completed for the guesthouse and 50% of the finances required to build it have been secured.



Throughout the course of the program, BYC was involved in a number of activities related to policy implementation, including advocating for youth interests in the setting of development priorities for the CSDF, and making a number of formal recommendations to lawmakers, such as:

1. A recommendation to revise the budget law so that youth leaders can participate as delegates in the county sitting;
2. Lobbying to have voting power as members of the county council.

BYC had at least 10 consultations with external stakeholders during the program, such as the CSC Director, Senators, the Development Superintendent, and a number of private companies including ArcelorMittal, Equatorial Palm Oil (EPO), and the Liberian Agricultural Company (LAC). The objective of consultations with private companies is to develop a partnership so that they contribute to BYC's activities through their Corporate Social Responsibility schemes. They achieved success with LAC, who sponsored a youth summit on female participation in Buchanan in July 2017. Discussions with EPO and ArcelorMittal are ongoing.

In terms of citizen outreach and engagement, BYC held three forums at intellectual centers to discuss issues related to decentralization and the Local Governance Act with youth, and they also have a weekly radio show to engage youth. BYC does not have a gender policy, but is in the process of developing one and has established a gender committee and has developed a human resource policy that requires female representation at leadership roles in the organization, which is currently being reviewed by the board. Staff at BYC directly attribute advances they have made in gender mainstreaming to training they received as part of the Search project. In addition to establishing the gender committee and developing an HR policy, they have promoted a woman in the organization as manager of the center, and have hired a gender coordinator and gender assistant.

As a result of the capacity developments BYC made during the Search program, they have improved both their visibility and credibility in the county and at the national level, and have received additional funding to support their work from IFES, UNDP and Concern Worldwide.

"We made many achievements during the project and the relationship with Search was very good. They mentored us and recommended us for other programs. As a result of the project, we are developing our organizational management and systems that allow us to attract funding from other

international donors, and we have much greater knowledge of issues related to decentralization. We made improvements to our building so we can rent out the space to other organizations, including the police who use it free of charge as a community benefit.” (BYC)

The high opinion BYC staff and volunteers have of their achievements and capacities is shared by external stakeholders and citizens. The Development Superintendent of Grand Bassa indicates that BYC frequently engages his office and asks for information to share with citizens:

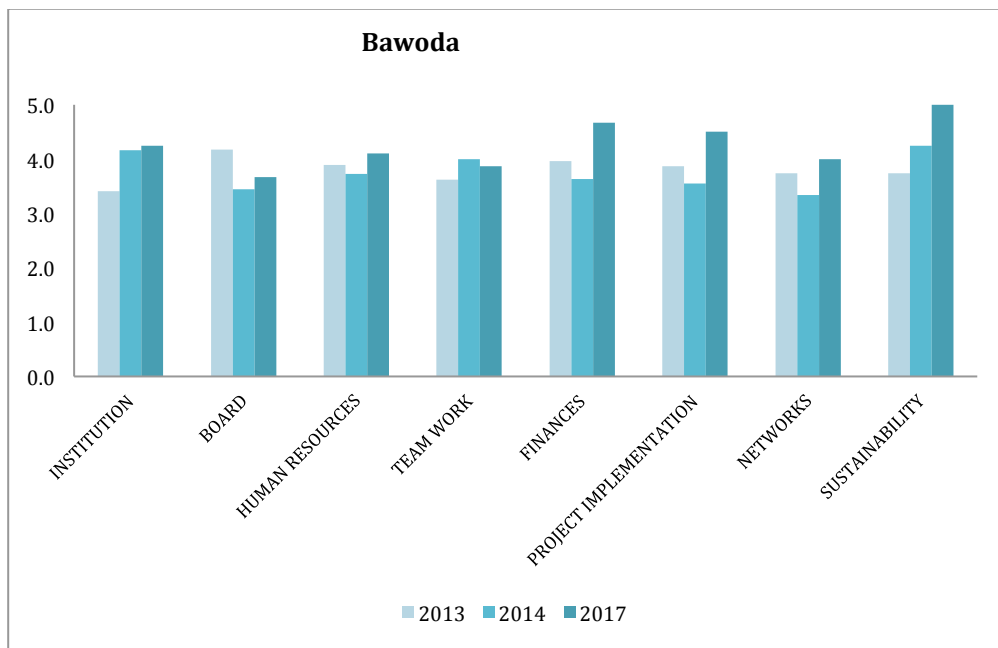
“BYC comes here all the time, at least once a month, and ask us for information. We have a good relationship with them and they are holding us to account. This engagement has increased a lot in the past year and we have greater collaboration with them now than ever before.” (Development Superintendent, Grand Bassa)

As a result of this relationship, the Superintendent’s office is relying on BYC to help them implement the youth empowerment program they have as part of the county development agenda, and is channeling many of the related activities through them. A focus group discussion with youth held at an intellectual center in Buchanan further verifies that BYC is a visible and credible organization in the country, with participants calling them “the voice of youth in Grand Bassa.” Respondents indicate that they have learned about the Land Rights Act and the Local Governance Act through forums conducted by BYC and through a weekly radio show hosted by the organization. Citizens’ interest groups who were interviewed are also aware of BYC’s activities, and are particularly impressed by their work related to gender. Representatives from Grassroots Advocacy for Social Justice—a CSO based in Buchanan—attended a gender workshop hosted by BYC that led to them developing their own gender strategy.

“We attended a workshop by BYC about gender that was part of the Search program. Prior to the Search program, they were not known as gender champions in the county. But now, BYC’s programs are strengthening women’s participation in advocacy. We now see young women doing community organizing. Our own activities did not initially include gender, but after we attended BYC’s gender workshop and we developed our own strategy.” (Representative, Grassroots Advocacy for Social Justice)

Bassa Women’s Development Association

BAWODA, who was involved in the Search project for both phases (2012 – 2014; 2016 - 2017), reports a number of capacity-related improvements over the course of the project. Bawoda had a relatively well-established mission and vision at the outset of the project, but during the course of the project they also developed three-year strategic plan that includes an annual review and planning meeting with staff. BAWODA made the greatest improvements in terms of financial capacity, including securing an annual income, developing an annual operating budget and improving financial accountability, reporting and oversight. BAWODA also substantially improved its networking capabilities, establishing partnerships with other CSOs and increasing its engagement and collaboration with local officials. BAWODA also reported significant improvements in sustainability over the life of the project, and raised its score from 3.78 out of 5 in 2014 to 5 out of 5 in 2017. The organization has effectively attracted additional funding from a diversity of sources, secured organizational assets, and has built two conference rooms to rent out as a source of revenue.



For BAWODA, the Search project was the first time they worked on issues related to security sector reform and decentralization, both of which are not prioritized in their strategic plan. After receiving training on these areas from the other partners in the project such as NAYMOTE and SSRWG, BAWODA realized that they had an important role to play in these sectors in terms of the inclusion of women and girls. Through the Search program, they conducted information and engagement sessions with women so that they could be informed about the issues and contribute meaningfully in consultations. Over the three years, they trained more than 1000 women in remote communities about the county service centers and how getting a marriage license can empower them by giving them access to their husbands' land if he dies, and about security issues like speaking out to police if someone sees violent acts against women. They also reached more than 2000 women through community-based forums. BAWODA has their own weekly radio program where they discuss issues related to female participation, decentralization and security sector reform. In addition to citizen awareness activities, BAWODA also developed monitoring systems to track female complaints to the police and assess follow-up, and to record the usage of the service center by women. BAWODA also made two formal recommendations to lawmakers:

1. The establishment of a CSC in Grand Bassa. They were one of the groups that were involved in bringing the CSC to Buchanan;
2. Rotating the county sitting from one district to another rather than always having it in the same district. This recommendation was developed after consultations with women who stressed there would be greater diversity and better representation if the county sitting rotated. This recommendation was accepted, and as a result there is greater participation of women in the county sitting.

BAWODA is a highly active and visible CSO in Grand Bassa. Throughout the program, they had formal collaborations with more than 10 other CSOs and NGOs at county, national and international levels, including Action Aid, Mercy Corps, Child and Women's Secretariat, YWCA, Pact, National Civil Society Council, Ministry of Gender, and the Grand Bassa County Health Team and the Grand Bassa County Service Center. They also have established relationships with county and district level authorities and national and local media institutions.

BAWODA attributed many of their successes to the Search project, especially improved sustainability and enhanced credibility. The capacity-building training activities that they participated in helped them better market themselves at the community level, and also helped develop their skills in proposal

writing and donor reporting, which enhanced their credibility among national and international organizations.

“We secured two acres of land and increased our space. We built training halls and that has helped with sustainability because we rent out the space and use the money to buy additional land that also brings in more revenue. We learned that sustainability is less about securing project funds and more about ensuring you have revenue even when there is little funding.” (BAWODA)

“The fact that a small organization like ours could manage funds from Sida and manage it well such that we now train other organizations...this is a huge achievement. We are very proud of this.” (BAWODA).

BAWODA feels that the program would have been improved if they were able to procure assets like a vehicle which would have made it easier to move throughout the county, and if there hadn't been such a long delay in funding in 2015, which led to some difficulties with communities who they had made commitments to and who had expectations of them. Nonetheless, the program was highly relevant to BAWODA's needs and greatly contributed to their growth as an organization. Staff spoke highly of the relationship with Search, who “were available at all times in between training and really mentored [BAWODA's] staff.”

BAWODA's claims of improved visibility and credibility was easily verified among external stakeholders and citizens, all of whom spoke very highly of the organization's work in Grand Bassa. The Coordinator of the Grand Bassa CSC has seen a dramatic increase in the number of women using the CSC over the past 6 months, and feels strongly that this is the result of BAWODA's work to sensitize women about why it is useful to them and how to use the services.

“Over the past 6 months we have seen a continuing increase in the number of women who are using the service center, and we feel BAWODA has been very involved in creating this demand. We have a very high impression of them.” (Coordinator, Grand Bassa CSC)

The Development Superintendent of Grand Bassa similarly praised the work of BAWODA to address the needs of women in the county, and spoke highly of their constructive collaboration with local authorities:

“BAWODA is one of the most highly engaged CSOs in this county. They do a lot of awareness raising activities and they always consult us about it. They are on the county security task force; they bring citizens together with police. We attended a forum they held with all of the community leaders together with the police inspector general. We are very impressed with how well they engage the county leadership.” (Development Superintendent, Grand Bassa)

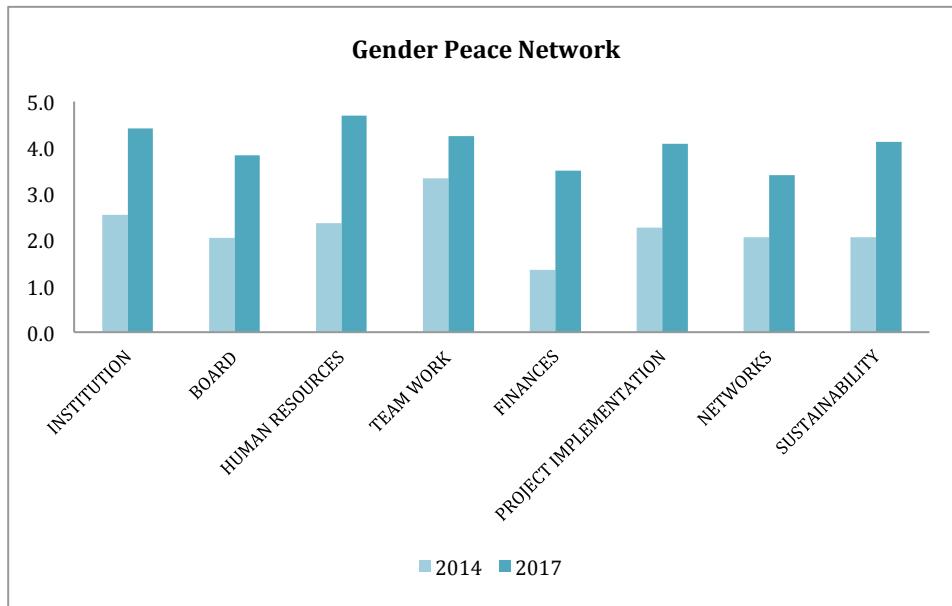
Citizens who participate in a focus group discussion in Buchanan were unable to identify specific activities that BAWODA has conducted, but they all have a high impression of the organization, and regularly listen to BAWODA's radio program. Citizens' interest groups, such as a group that represents disabled people and two women's groups who were interviewed, have all participated in training sessions organized by BAWODA, a testament to their strong ethos of collaboration with other civil society actors. The leader of a women's group who was interviewed feels that BAWODA is really leading the effort to improve cohesion and collaboration among civil society in Grand Bassa:

“Collaboration between CSOs has improved a lot over the past two years. There is a CSO council, and CSOs are linking their activities together. And collaboration between CSOs and local government is also increasing. Organizations like BAWODA is really leading these efforts. They are very well known among citizens and county leaders in Grand Bassa.” (Buchanan Women's Group)

Gender Peace Network Limited

Due to difficulties in traveling to Grand Gedeh during the rainy season, data about the impact of the Search program on GPNL's work is limited. Efforts made by the evaluation team to have the partnership questionnaire completed and to conduct phone interviews with senior staff were unsuccessful. Despite the challenges, data received through self-reported capacity assessments, and interviews with Search staff, indicate GPNL made substantial improvements across all areas during the course of the program. The improvements reported by GPNL and Search are truly impressive, especially given the short time duration of the program (less than 12 months) coupled with the logistical challenges of working in a remote county that is not served by well-paved roads or other services. GPNL reports significant capacity improvements in institutional management, and developed a mission, vision and multi-year strategic plan through the course of the project. They also improved the function of the Board, and improved its ability to provide strategic and financial oversight. In terms of human resources, GPNL has established policies, systems and workplans to guide and manage employees, and has inclusive decision-making processes.

GPNL does not currently have a gender policy or the equal representation of women on staff, but they are striving to improve gender equity and mainstreaming. GPNL scored lowest in financial management among all categories, but still showed substantial improvement from the baseline assessment, particularly in terms of securing funds from diverse sources and improved financial management and reporting. While GPNL reports improvements in overall project implementation, including community outreach, program design and program planning, they achieved smaller success related to the engagement of local government officials. The organization greatly improved its sustainability potential as a result of the Search project, reporting that they have received additional funding from UNMIL, and have attracted additional volunteers and secured organizational assets such as computers and phones for staff. Finally, GPNL reports a significant increase in collaboration with other CSOs as a result of the program.



VII. Blay-Tanhla Radio Program Effectiveness

The Blay-Tahnla program is a fictive radio soap opera airing three times a week. Five main themes were mainstreamed throughout the scenarios for the duration of the project period: electoral reform, corruption, decentralization, SSR and natural resources. Given that the evaluation did not include a listenership survey, it is extremely difficult to make claims related to the impact and effectiveness of the Blay-Tanhla radio program. However, in the absence of a listenership survey to assess reach, and changes in knowledge and attitudes related to target reforms, qualitative data was collected through citizen focus groups held in three counties—Bong, Nimba and Grand Bassa. Almost all citizens interviewed across five focus groups (92%) are familiar with the program, and 53% of respondents could cite particular episodes and describe specific details about characters and situations.

Most respondents feel that the program addresses issues of importance to the community, and that they have learned about human rights, land rights, informed voting and of the roles and responsibilities of the police from the program.

I listened to them (Blay Tahnla characters) talk about land. I learned that the double selling of land in Liberia is a crime, which I didn't know before (FGD participant, Sanniquellie, Nimba).

I listened to one of their episodes about the police, and how the citizens and the police can interact. It was about police corruption and gave me good information about the responsibilities of police (FGD participant, Sugar Hill, Bong County).

I appreciated one episode of Blay Tahnla about a corrupt chairman. The people voted him into power. It brought the issue of corruption and transparency to life. It means that people should shine their eye on corruption (FDG participant, Buchanan, Grand Bassa).

I learned about land rights. Some people go around selling land to three or four persons. I learned that it is not good to sell land to three or four persons. It can bring about conflict and there could be a riot (FGD participant, Gbarnga, Bong County).

It gave us information about what to do about police corruption. If it is an individual, you get the badge number and you take the complaint to court and they can do an investigation. There is a hotline number you can call (FGD participant, Sanniquellie, Nimba).

Citizens who were regular listeners to the program rated it highly in terms of its entertainment value and for its ability to give important information on issues of importance to the community. When asked to rate the program from 1 – 5 with 1 low and 5 high, the following scores averaged across respondents were received:

Location	# of Participants	Avg. Score Entertainment	Avg. Score Valuable Information
Sugar Hill, Bong	9	5	5
Gbarnga, Bong	10	4.5	4.7
Sanniquellie, Nimba	12	3.7	3.8
Buchanan, Grand Bassa	9	4.1	3.9
Buchanan, Grand Bassa	6	4.5	4.67

However, some respondents indicate they the program is not played a regular time on their station, and as a result they do not listen to it on a regular basis. For instance, citizens in Sanniquellie, Nimba County said they would listen to it more frequently, but often it is played at times when they don't have time or access to a radio, and the schedule is irregular. The Director of the NGO Network in Nimba similarly said, "Blay-Tanhla is a good program but it isn't played frequently or on a regular schedule on our stations." Many respondents also claimed that the program doesn't have a great reach with citizens outside of towns, because they programs are in Pidgin English, which is not understood by many people in remote communities who speak local vernacular dialects.

"It's good but I would like for it to be in other dialects so everyone, even the old man, can understand it." (FGD participant, Gbarnga, Bong County)

FGD participants in Buchanan had similarly criticized the show:

"The radio programs are only in English. They don't reach everyone and many people can't understand them as they speak local languages." (FGD participant, Buchanan, Grand Bassa)

Furthermore, women who participated in an FGD in Sugar Hill, Bong County claim that the program "is more popular for men than women", elaborating that "the episodes are very good and educative, but women don't often listen to these types of radio shows like men do." The indicated that they are too busy with household chores during the times when the program airs, and that they do not have access to a radio set or mobile phone.

While partner CSOs are familiar with the program, they did not have any interaction with it. Interviews with radio station managers in Nimba, Bong and Grand Bassa highlighted that the show is pre-produced and sent to them to play, and that it is not integrated into programs or supported by a talkshow.

"Blay-Tanhla is popular but people feel it is too short. They don't have a talk show or call-in, just play the drama on its own. Listeners would prefer the issues in the drama to be discussed, and they want an opportunity to ask questions and give their opinions." (Station Manager, Radio Nimba)

VIII. Discussion of Results

The following discussion of the results presented in this evaluation report are rooted in assessing the program according to a number of OECD-DAC's criteria for evaluating development effectiveness.¹² The criteria leveraged for this evaluation are: relevance, effectiveness, impact and sustainability. Since the evaluation does not involve a value for money analysis, efficiency has been excluded from the assessment.

Relevance

To assess relevance, OECD-DAC asks three primary questions:

1. To what extent are the objectives of the programme still valid?

¹² The *DAC Principles for the Evaluation of Development Assistance*, OECD (1991), *Glossary of Terms Used in Evaluation*, in 'Methods and Procedures in Aid Evaluation', OECD (1986), and the *Glossary of Evaluation and Results Based Management (RBM) Terms*, OECD (2000). Available at <http://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/dacriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm>.

2. Are the activities and outputs of the programme consistent with the overall goal and the attainment of its objectives?
3. Are the activities and outputs of the programme consistent with the intended impacts and effects?

The Search program was highly relevant to the civil society partners who participated in it, as well as to other civil society advocates and leaders in the country. Many of the partners expressed how the project allowed them to focus on what they need to improve institutionally, while giving them the freedom to work on the issues that are of greatest importance to them. Interviews with Silas Siakor and Thomas Nah—two prominent civil society experts in Liberia—revealed that many CSOs suffer from mission drift due to the influence of a donor saturated civil society space. As a result of large amounts of donor funding for specific sectors or priority areas, many CSOs need to shape their missions and priorities to follow these trends. The Search program, given its participatory approach, allowed CSOs to solidify their mission and vision based on the issues that they are best positioned to work on in their communities.

Further, the focus on capacity-building and coalition-building is highly relevant to the civil society space in Liberia. Informants, including project partners, highlight that there is a lack of cooperation, cohesion and coordination among CSOs, which often limits collective action to effect community change. During the evaluation, all of the project partners indicated that the greatest benefit of the program to their organizations was the collaboration with civil society actors at the national level and across counties. For national partners, the collaboration with county-based CSOs allowed them to extend their presence in the counties where they work, and to ground their policy-related work in the daily struggles of smaller, local civil society organizations. For county-based partners, the connection with larger and more established national CSOs allowed them to improve their credibility, enhance their knowledge and awareness of sector-specific issues, and gain visibility among national stakeholders and international donors.

With respect to whether the program objectives are relevant to the intended impacts and effects, there were a number of issues that prevented the complete fulfillment of criteria used to assess relevance. The participatory approach to setting indicators of success contributed to programmatic relevance, however interviews with project partners reveal that some of these indicators weren't as effective or relevant as they were intended to be, and did not adequately meet SPICED standards. For instance, while the participatory benchmarking was intended to be empowering for project partners, they found it overly technical and burdensome, and did not feel like they really owned the process. As a result many of them could not explain their progress on the benchmarks, and most have not continued using past the end of the project. Also, the program suffered from an unresolved tension between its objective to build the capacity of CSOs and improve collaboration and cohesion and its sector-specific aims and objectives. To recap, the program's expected sector-specific results within decentralization and security sector reform include:

- Improve information sharing about concessions agreements and conflict mediation in aggrieved communities where there are disagreements between citizens and companies;
- Improve citizen awareness of the GoL security transition plan as UNMIL withdraws;
- Monitor implementation of the security transition plan in the counties;
- Improve understanding of decentralization/deconcentration among local authorities;
- Enhance awareness about decentralization and related government services among citizens;
- Monitor progress in health and education reforms at the county level;
- Enhance the capacity for citizens to monitor health and education services and issue complaints.

While there is some, albeit very limited, evidence that progress was made in some of these focus areas, it is impossible to determine attribution or even contribution of the program to these outcomes. This difficulty is due to two primary reasons:

1. The program was not designed to effectively measure the progress of partner CSOs in these domains;
2. M&E capacity among partner CSOs is low such that they are not effectively capturing robust evidence of the impact of their activities.

Despite these challenges in determining whether the outputs of the program are consistent with the intended effects, there is sufficient evidence across partners that enhanced institutional capacity and coordination is improving outcomes at the programmatic level. For instance, there is robust evidence across partners that they are influencing the demand side of better governance among citizens through their engagement activities, and that they are engaging cohesively around governance-related reform efforts. There is very limited evidence, however, that the GoL has greater recognition of the contributions of CSOs to the nation's development, or that there is increased communication between citizens and state institutions as a result of the program.

Effectiveness

To assess effectiveness, OECD-DAC suggests considering the following questions:

1. To what extent were the objectives achieved/are likely to be achieved?
2. What were the major factors influencing the achievement or non-achievement of the objectives?

As discussed in detail in Section V of this report, many of the objectives were sufficiently achieved during the course of this project. Using the verification methodology, the program's stated objectives were achieved by:

- Objective 1 successfully achieved 93% of outcome indicators by National Partners and 56% of outcome indicators by County-based Partners;
- Objective 2 successfully achieved 63% of outcome indicators by National Partners and 60% of outcome indicators by County-based Partners;
- Objective 3 successfully achieved 90% of outcome indicators by National Partners and 93% of outcomes by County-based Partners;¹³
- Objective 4 successfully achieved 83% of outcome indicators by National Partners and 80% of County-based Partners.

This assessment demonstrates that the program effectively reached its aims with respect to: increased programmatic capacity of CSOs and CBOs to engage the state on governance and development issues, increased networking and collaboration amongst CSOs and CBOs at national and county levels, and increased interaction between citizens, citizens' institutions (CSOs and CBOs) and state institutions at the national and county levels. However, it did not effectively achieve Objective 2: increased institutional capacity of CSOs and CBOs for sustained and constructive engagement with the state. While there is substantial evidence that all partners improved their institutional capacities, it hasn't yet translated into sustained engagement with state actors. This may be due, in part, to the closed governance environment in Liberia and the antagonistic relationships between government officials and civil society. For this reason, it will likely take a longer timeframe than the project duration for civil society organizations to transfer improved capacity into more constructive engagement with the state.

While all CSO partners had demonstrable and verifiable improvements in programmatic capacity, which is greatly improving their ability to meet their missions and objectives, they are still falling short in terms of sustained engagement with the state. This is likely due to the fact that a fair bit of antagonism between civil society and the state persists due to the closed nature of governance in

¹³ Outcome indicator 4—CSO is actively using a monitoring plan for tracking stakeholder engagement and feedback—was eliminated from the average due to a lack of awareness about it among partner CSOs.

Liberia. While CSOs are making inroads by forming constructive and collaborative relationships with government officials at the national and county levels, government still does not take civil society seriously, and feels that their primary role is conflictual rather than collaborative.

It is important to view a lack of success in this area not as a failure of the project, but rather a symptom of an enabling environment that does not support these coalitions, and a closed civic space with few opportunities to enter into constructive relationships with power holders and duty bearers. As a representative from UNMIL stressed:

“I’m pretty sure that government pays a lot of lip service to the role of civil society...really they’d rather that they were not there, which also explains why the government is slow to give money to civil society. I guess there is a degree of cronyism as well, which means that if civil society does get money, it’s not necessarily that they have demonstrated a political edge in a competitive area, but often that they know a friend of a friend, which also undermines the legitimacy and credibility of civil society.” (Representative, UNMIL).

Within this environment, small gains that CSOs partners made to improve relationships with government agencies, especially at the county-level, should be viewed as important achievements.

Given the 12-month disruption to the project that occurred due to the Ebola outbreak coupled with internal management issues within Search global, and the resulting programmatic reset, the program made impressive achievements. Some of the objectives that were not entirely met, such as many partners not sufficiently fulfilling all of their capacity benchmarks, and a lack of evidence to demonstrate the program’s impacts on governance outcomes, can likely be attributed to circumstances that were largely external to the project itself, and the disruption and demotivation that occurred for partner organizations as a result of the project’s suspension in 2014.

Impact

To assess impact, OECD-DAC provides three guiding questions:

- * What has happened as a result of the program or project?
- * What real difference has the activity made to the beneficiaries?
- * How many people have been affected?

While it is impossible to quantify how many people were affected by the program as most of the program partners did not keep detailed records of the number of beneficiaries reached, there is sufficient evidence of impact at the level of the partner CSOs. While not all of the partner organizations reached the target of 75% achievement of benchmarks, all CSOs experienced capacity-related gains that are contributing to improved visibility, credibility and sustainability. The program’s theory of change posits that developments in organizational capacity, and enhanced collaboration among civil society and between civil society and the state, will contribute to greater success in achieving advocacy aims and, ultimately, improvements in governance structures at national and county levels. While this type of ultimate change is longterm and outside the parameters of a single project’s influence, there are indications that these shifts are occurring with respect to target reform areas.

As is detailed in Section VI, external stakeholders and citizens can point to specific improvements as a result of the work of the CSOs under the Search program, such as increased knowledge and use of the CSC, especially among women, improved knowledge among citizens about key governance reform legislation such as the Local Governance Act, the Budget Reform Bill and the Land Rights Act, and enhanced awareness and engagement in issues related to the management of the CSDF at the county level. However, these improvements are difficult to quantify, and evidence is primarily anecdotal (though verified across diverse sources). Furthermore, there are many factors external to the project

that may influence the outcomes, such as the opening and closing of civic space, the funding landscape for civil society and unanticipated negative events such as the Ebola crisis.

The greatest impact of the project is on the confidence of the CSOs, and in particular the small county-based organizations, and the impression they have of themselves as professional, credible and competent organizations. As one respondent says, “this program put us on the national map of CSOs in Liberia.” The smaller, county-based CSOs were much more responsive to the evaluation than the national partners, eager to answer the evaluator’s questions and to provide supportive documentation of success, such as log sheets showing the number of citizens who participated in a community forum. Many respondents made claims that this was the best project they had ever participated in and hope they will have another chance to further develop their institutional capacity, viewing it as an essential driver of their community impact.

Sustainability

OECD-DAC has three guiding questions to assess a program’s potential for sustainability:

- * To what extent did the benefits of a program or project continue after donor funding ceased?
- * What were the major factors which influenced the achievement or non-achievement of sustainability of the program or project?

There are many indications that the program benefits have been sustained after the donor funding ended in July 2017. All of the organizations who participated in the program have successfully attracted additional funds from other donors to continue their work. In eight out of the ten organizations, the additional funding is supporting the same priority areas and themes they worked on during the Search program. The most important driver of sustainability for many of the CSOs is the robust collaborations they established with the other project partners. Many of them have received additional funding after they were invited to join a funding bid with one of the project partners, or were recommended to a donor by Search or one of the other partner CSOs.

In terms of sustainability related indicators, such as receiving additional financial and non-financial resources and developing a sustainability plan, all partners who completed the participatory reflective exercise attribute sustainability-related gains directly to the project. The table below shows which partners developed a sustainability plan, comprising targets for revenue generation and plans to diversify their funding base, during the course of the project, which have received additional funding, and the what extent to which partner CSOs feel the Search program enabled them to attract additional financial or non-financial resources (out of 5 with 1 low and 5 high).

CSO	Received additional funding (Y/N)	Rating out of 5	Sustainability plan developed (Y/N)
NAYMOTE	Y	4	Y
SSRWG	Y	5	Y
SDI			
BAWODA	Y	5	Y
BYC	Y	5	Y
CJPS	Y	4	Y
CODRA	Y	4	Y
EARS	Y	4	Y
SEARCH			
GPNL	Y	5	Y

Most of the partners feel that their capacity-related improvements are sustainable since they have been institutionalized through the establishment and integration of new organizational processes and systems. However, the four county-based partners who only participated in the second phase of the program

stress that they have not yet had a chance to integrate many of the things they learned due to the short timeframe, and that they will need additional training to ensure that the gains are sustained.

IX. Recommendations

A number of recommendations emerged from the evaluation, which should be considered by Search in future programs related to CSO capacity-building in Liberia.

1. Integrate radio with other programmatic elements to increase reach and impact, and build radio dramas into a talkshow for citizens to engage with the issues. Blay-Tanhla is very popular among citizens, and Search's midterm evaluation in 2014 reveals that it is having an impact on awareness and understanding of key reform issues. However, in the *Strengthening the Capacity of Civil Society to Contribute to Sustainable Governance in Liberia* program, it was not well-integrated with the other programmatic partners. Many of the partners—NAYMOTE, BAWODA, BYC and EARS—are using radio on a regular basis to engage citizens, raise awareness about their work, and improve understanding of key issues such as the services available at the CSC or how to issue a complaint about the police. However, these media efforts remained entirely separate from the Blay-Tanhla program. Radio partners who air the program also are not very engaged with it, and do not seem to take it seriously as much more than a form of revenue. The program may have had greater impact if it was incorporated within a talkshow, and included interviews and call-ins with partner CSOs who could discuss their work and advocacy objectives. Finally, some respondents indicated that the program does not air consistently or at a regular time. Blay-Tanhla could increase its listenership by ensuring that stations commit to a regular timeslot and air the program during peak listening times.

2. Use modular training approaches to support capacity development over time. Many of the partners expressed that the training sessions were too short, and there was not enough effort to build and integrate training over time. They stressed that the training would be more effective if it was implemented in short, frequent sessions rather than as a single event. One partner recommends that the training sessions be modular, with modules occurring on a quarterly basis. Another partner feels the training would have been more successful with expert mentors for each topic that provided ongoing capacity-building with partners.

3. Support CSOs with funds to meet benchmarking objectives. All of the partners asserted that one of the reasons they were unable to meet their benchmarking objectives was that the activities were not supported by specific budget lines. They stress that training staff and building systems is resource-intensive activities that require funds to implement successfully. Future benchmarking approaches should ensure that there are sufficient resources—financial and otherwise—to support partner development.

4. Simplify benchmarking process to better meet the organizational realities and constraints of CSOs. While the majority of partners appreciated the benchmarking approach, and felt it is useful to help them track their institutional development, all of them highlighted that it was overly technical and theoretical and was not well-grounded in their day-to-day activities. As a result, they didn't really feel like they owned the process, and viewed it more as a burden that was required by the donor than a useful exercise for their organization. Fewer benchmarks and a simpler, less time-intensive process would help CSOs better understand and integrate the benchmarks, which would contribute to greater progress.

5. Support CSOs to develop project-level M&E plans to monitor their activities, and map achievements and impacts across projects onto the program's larger theory of change. Many of the partner CSOs could describe their achievements at length, but were unable to produce sufficient documentation or evidence to support the claims. Project-level M&E efforts were ad hoc and of

variable quality to effectively gauge portfolio-level impacts in governance objectives. Future programs should develop a robust theory of change at the outset, and ensure that partners have effective M&E systems established to collect data that can test and verify assumptions about how change occurs, and provide demonstrable evidence of impacts.

6. Implement capacity-building programs that are a minimum of three years in duration to ensure that capacity related gains are institutionalized and therefore have greater potential to be sustained.

The four partners who only participated in the second phase of the program all stressed that one year was not sufficient for them to train their staff and institutionalize new systems and processes. Unsurprisingly, the partners who participated in the entire 3-year program made significantly better capacity gains than partners who only participated for one year, despite the fact that the capacity training approach was better developed in the second phase. Training alone does not build capacity, and it takes time for CSOs to train staff, develop systems and institutionalize changes. Without institutionalization of new processes, there is a significant risk that organizations will not be able to maintain the capacity gains they achieved, and will quickly return to the ways of working that are more familiar to them.

X. Conclusions

The program successfully met many indicators of success it set out to achieve, including:

- improving the demand side for better governance among citizens around targeted reform processes, including increasing use of decentralization services, improving awareness of decentralization and security sector reform efforts such as draft bills and laws, and mechanisms for citizen engagement in county governance structures;
- improving the institutional capacity of partner CSOs to articulate and achieve their aims;
- strengthening networking between county-based organizations and national-level CSOs;
- enhancing CSO awareness of governance reform issues, including security sector reform, constitutional review and amendment processes, elections reform, and decentralization;
- increased visibility and credibility of county-based CSOs at the county level, among civil society networks and local government officials;
- enhanced reach and visibility of national-level CSOs at the county level.

Overall, the program set out what it achieved to do—namely to strengthen the institutional capacity of civil society organizations to improve their credibility, visibility, effectiveness and sustainability. There is evidence that many partner CSOs have refined their mission, developed a multi-year strategic plan, a communications plan, a gender policy and an HR policy. In addition, they are beginning to integrate new financial reporting and M&E structures. All of the partner CSOs have improved their sustainability by receiving additional funds to continue their work, and many of them have developed strategies to diversify their revenue generation, such as expanding their offices to rent out board rooms. A number of organizations are eager to pass their new knowledge onto others, with many training peer CSOs on what they learned through the Search program. Finally, the program was effective in improving their own confidence, with all of the partner CSOs expressing their appreciation of the program, and in particular the freedom they had to define their own priorities and objectives.

A number of lessons emerged during the course of implementation that are relevant for Search's future work in civil society strengthening, as well as for other organizations working in this sector.

1. The participatory benchmarking approach is useful to help organizations track improvements in their organizational capacity over time. However, there was a tendency for CSOs to overstate what was possible within a limited timeframe. As a result, benchmarks were not consistently met, and many of the capacity-related development were not fully institutionalized by the project end.

2. The integration of radio programs with other civil society organizing approaches—town hall meetings, workshops, and house to house outreach—is an effective way to improve awareness and engagement of citizens in governance reform issues on a mass scale.
3. Programs to improve the capacity and sustainability of CSOs, and to professionalize the sector, are crucial but often overlooked, in efforts to improve local governance in fragile and transitional countries such as Liberia.
4. There is a need to continue efforts to link civil society actors together for cohesive action and to further improve the enabling environment for civil society in Liberia by providing opportunities for CSOs to develop strategic collaborations, improve organizational capacity development, and attract donor funds to support their work.

Annexes

Annex 1: Evaluation Team

Lead Evaluator: **Heather Gilberds** is a Doctoral Candidate (ABD) in the School of Journalism and Communication at Carleton University. Her doctoral research is examining the use of media to build trust and broker relationships between civil society, citizens and the state in post-crisis Liberia. She has a decade of experience in media development, civil society strengthening and media advocacy as a program manager, researcher and evaluator. She has led research projects related to press freedom, media policy, digital inclusion, transparency and accountability, anti-corruption and civic media in Nepal, Malawi, Tanzania, Rwanda, Mali, Sierra Leone and Liberia. She has published and taught in the areas of qualitative methods for social scientists, media and advocacy, civic media and media and development.

Evaluation Assistant: **Kate Thomas** has lived in Liberia on and off since 2007. She is a researcher and writer with ten years' experience consulting for NGOs and UN agencies in Liberia. In 2015/16 she was the Health Journalism Advisor for Internews in Liberia/Johns Hopkins Health Communication Capacity Collaborative (HC3) and has conducted qualitative interview and editing projects for News Deeply, Social Impact/USAID and UNMIL.

Annex 2: Examples of Impact

Organization	Impact/Change Reported
SSRWG	<p>SSRWG reports an improvement in police-citizen relationships as a result of their activities under the Search program. In addition to developing a handbook that county-based organizations could use to help citizens understand the roles and responsibilities of the police and complaint mechanisms for police misconduct, SSRWG conducted workshops with county police services and sensitization sessions with the communities.</p> <p>SSRWG drafted two pieces of legislation that are currently under review:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A bill to establish an independent civilian rights authority that could oversee all of the security sector organizations. Since the bill is still in debate, SSRWG mobilized the Ministry of Justice to establish county-level civilian boards to monitor the activities of security sector organizations and track complaints. • A Public Safety Reform Act to govern oversight of the private security sector.
SDI	<p>As a result of the Search program, SDI was able to advance the Land Rights Act at the county level. Through the collaboration with county-level CSOs and government officials, the Land Rights Act is gaining greater traction. Also, the outreach activities conducted with county-level CSOs improved public participation and input, and helped them develop strong relationships with county officials.</p>
NAYMOTE	<p>The Search program helped NAYMOTE develop and strengthen many organizational processes, including developing a multi-year strategic plan, HR policy and gender policy, and integrating monitoring and evaluation activities into programs. As a result of improved organizational capacity in these areas, NAYMOTE has partnered with UNMIL on two major projects related to the political participation of youth, and</p>

	<p>capacity-building for young women to conduct citizen engagement sessions on important issues such as elections and decentralization. NAYMOTE has also greatly improved its marketing and outreach as a result of the Search program, using radio and social media as strategic tools to raise awareness about reform issues, reaching more than 400,000 people across Liberia on their social media platform alone.</p> <p>NAYMOTE has greatly improved its M&E, integrating knowledge and attitudes pre and post tests into evaluation activities to assess uptake of messages and identify gaps. NAYMOTE was also able to establish collaborative relationships with county officials, and conduct training sessions and workshops to improve their knowledge of the local governance act, budget reform bill and decentralization processes. They also helped local government to monitor and track budgetary allocations at the county level to improve accountability and oversight of funds.</p>
BAWODA	<p>The Search program was the first time BAWODA had worked on issues related to security sector reform and decentralization. As a result of their improved knowledge of these issues, they have been able to effectively advance the inclusion of women and girls in advancing advocacy aims in these areas. As a result of their activities, they report an increase in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the number of women and girls speaking out about police misconduct and seeking redress; • the number of women using decentralization services, and in particular, an increase in the number of women receiving marriage certificates, which allows them to inherit their spouse's land; • the participation of women in community forums and consultations as a result of having increased knowledge of reform issues thereby increasing their confidence to contribute meaningfully; • knowledge of decentralization among women in remote communities with more than 1000 women reached with awareness-raising sessions.
BYC	<p>BYC is extending the training received from Search on project management and sustainability to other youth civil society leaders, thereby having an impact ripple effect among other CSOs in Grand Bassa. In particular, BYC has conducted numerous gender-related training sessions with other youth-focused CBOs to help them develop more inclusive organizational structures. BYC's activities are having an impact on youth participation in county forums, and they are pushing forward a number of key recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amendment of the Budget Law to include youth leaders in the County Sitting; • Revision of the county council structure so that youth-led CSOs have voting power. <p>BYC was invited to participate in the county sitting for the first time in 2017 after engaging senators and the county superintendent under the Search program.</p> <p>BYC also reports an increase in the number of people using the CSC as a result of their activities under the Search program. They effectively advocated to increase the number of services offered, such as issuing birth and death certificates in addition to driver's licenses, and also conducted awareness-raising sessions to increase demand and use of the center.</p>
EARS	<p>EARS reports greatly improving their knowledge of target reform issues and their organizational capacity as a result of the Search program. As a result of improved relationships and greater credibility with local government official, EARS is</p>

	championing two senators to push forward the local governance act, and to further decentralization services to the district rather than county level.
CODRA	Through extensive and broad-reaching activities conducted by CODRA to improve awareness of the county service center among citizens in Bong, CODRA reports an increase of more than 2000 people using the center over a 3-month period. CODRA has made a number of informal recommendations, including for the county government to have a multi-year development plan.
CJPS	<p>Through the Search project, CJPS has been able to attract additional funding to work on the same security sector reform and peacebuilding issues. They are also continuing partnerships with the other CSOs they met during the course of the Search project, jointly developing proposals and implementing projects. For instance, CJPS was awarded a contract under a program called Civil Peace Service funded by German government, and another called Security Action for Everyone. They are implementing both programs with partner CSOs that they collaborated with under the Search program, including NAYMOTE, SSRWG and BAWODA.</p> <p>The Search program also helped CJPS improve relationships with governments through stakeholder engagement sessions. These sessions allowed CJPS to strategically identify which government officials had the greatest leverage to advance their aims, and to determine which agencies and individuals they needed to strengthen relationships with. These strategic relationships are continuing past the end of the project period.</p>

Annex 3: Key Informant and Focus Group Tools

1. Key Informant semi-structured interviews/participatory reflective exercise with partner CSOs

1.1 Core achievements and implementation of activities

- What activities during the course of the project were the most successful and why?
- How did you evaluate successful implementation?
- To what extent has your organization been involved in policy construction since the beginning of the program? Give tangible examples.
- What challenges have you faced in this area?
- To what extent has your organization been involved in policy implementation since the beginning of the program? Give tangible examples.
- What challenges have you faced in this area?
- Have you successfully leveraged additional funding for program activities? If not, why not? If yes, how much funding and through which agencies?

1.2 Relationship with other CSOs

- How many activities have you led with other program partners? With partners outside of the program?
- What prevented you from leading joint activities with some partners?
- What has enabled you to establish new partnerships? What has prevented you from establishing new partnerships?
- What successes have you experienced in convening forums related to your priority areas? What stakeholders did you attract to participate? Give tangible examples.
- What has prevented you from convening forums related to your priority areas or in attracting diverse stakeholders?
- What is the level of engagement (Poor, low, medium, high, or excellent) between your organization and the county-based organizations around the reform issues you are working on? Would you say that this has improved or decreased since inception of the project?

1.3 Relationship with government

- What is your relationship (Poor, low, medium, high, or excellent) with the local / national government around the reform issues?
- Do you feel that the level of your engagement with government increased over the last year? If yes, to what extent is this increase related to the project?
- Can you cite a concrete example of how the increased engagement contributed to a better reach of their organization's objectives?

1.4 Relationship with communities

- What kind of activity do you implement in order to have the citizen's voice better heard?
- How often do you meet with your target community? Would you say that this has improved or decreased since inception of the project?

1.5 Progress of partners on their benchmarks and improved capacities

- What you feel is the purpose of the benchmarks process?
- On a scale on 1-5, with 1 low and 5 high, how would you rate the process? Give justification for your score.
- What were the main challenges that hindered achievement of your benchmarks? Which benchmarks were the most difficult to achieve and why?
- What contributing to successfully reaching your benchmarks? Which benchmarks were the easiest to reach and why?
- Can you give any examples of how reaching some benchmarks contributed to an improvement in the ability for your organization to meet its objectives?
- What would you change about the process if you were to do it over again?

1.6 Capacity improvements

- What trainings did you find to be the most beneficial for your organization? Why?
- What trainings were the least beneficial/useful? Why?
- Who attended the trainings? Number and nature of the staff
- What skills and knowledge did participants gain from the training? How have these skills been used?
- What gaps were there in the training?

1.7 Impact

- According to you, what is the ultimate goal of the project? What is the change that the project is trying to provoke?
- How successful were you in reaching this goal? What were the biggest achievements? Biggest challenges in reaching the objectives? Key lessons learned?

2. Key Informant Interview with Donor/SFCG

2.1. Objectives and Achievements

- What are the biggest achievements of the program?
- Did the program meet its intended objectives? Why or why not?

2.2 Level of increase in partners' capacities

- To what extent has the capacity of partner organizations improved?
- Which areas saw the greatest improvements? The least? (finance, reporting, DME, program, networking, communications)
- Can you cite a concrete example of how such increase of capacity contributed to fulfilling the program's objectives?
- Can you cite a concrete example of how such increase of capacity contributed to fulfilling partner organizations' objectives?
- What were some of the barriers to achieving improved capacities?

2.3 Cost effectiveness

- How much do you feel that the following outputs contribute to the overall objective of the project and to the change this project is hoping to provoke? Outcome mapping, Baseline, Workplan development, Action-oriented research, Advocacy strategy, Communications strategy, Trainings, Benchmark development, Public Information on Key Reform processes, Joint activities
- Which activities were the most successful? The least? Why?

2.4 Level of implementation of the project's activities

- To what extent did SFCG deliver on expected outputs and services?
- What gaps in effective implementation can you identify and what was the reason for them?
- What challenges did you have in working with partner organizations?
- What challenges did partners have in achieving the program objectives and outcomes?
- What were the biggest successes? Biggest failures? Key lessons learned?
- Which program outputs/objectives were not achieved and why?
- If you could start the program again, what would you do differently?

2.5 Effectiveness of radio program run by SFCG

- How many radio programs were produced and aired?
- What were the key themes?
- How was impact of the radio program assessed during the course of the project?
- What were some of the challenges in working with partner stations?
- What challenges do face in terms of understanding the program's impact on the intended audience?
- What evidence of effectiveness of the radio program can you cite?

3. Key Informant Interview with local/national government representatives

3.1 Visibility of partner CSO activities

- Are you aware of the activities of the partners in the priority areas (decentralization, elections reform, natural resource management, security sector reform)? List any of the activities you are aware of.
- Have you collaborated with any of the partners on policy construction, review or implementation? Which ones? Describe the collaboration and outcomes.
- Are you aware of any recommendations to relevant government authorities made by partner CSOs? Please specify.
- Are you aware of any citizen engagement activities implemented by partner CSOs? Please specify.

3.2 Perceived impact of partner CSO activities

- What impact have partner CSOs had in this county/priority area?
- What is still lacking? What more needs to be done?
- Have you attended any gender mainstreaming sessions with partner CSOs/ What did it entail? Did you change anything in your own organization as a result?
- If CSOs are not having a great impact in the target areas, what should be done to improve it?
- What rating would you give partner CSOs from 1-5, with 1 low and 5 high in terms of:
 - Improving citizen engagement in (election reform, decentralization/deconcentration, security sector reform). Please justify score.
 - Increasing collaboration/interaction with authorities on issues related to (election reform, decentralization/deconcentration, security sector reform). Please justify score.
-

3.3 Collaboration with partner CSOs

- Have you participated in any consultations with partner CSOs? What did they entail? What were the actions developed?
- Have you participated in any training sessions with partner CSOs? What was the training about? What did you learn?

- What prevents collaboration with partner CSOs and how could it be strengthened?
- Have any of the partner CSOs improved their relationship with the government over the past 3 years? Please give concrete examples.
- What score would you give the partner CSOs in terms of collaboration with local authorities on a scale of 1-5 with 1 low and 4 high. Please justify score.

4. Key Informant Interview with local/national CSO networks

3.1 Visibility of partner CSO activities

- Are you aware of the activities of the partners in the priority areas (decentralization, elections reform, natural resource management, security sector reform)? List any of the activities you are aware of.
- Have you collaborated with any of the partners on policy construction, review or implementation? Which ones? Describe the collaboration and outcomes.
- Are you aware of any recommendations to relevant government authorities made by partner CSOs? Please specify.
- Are you aware of any citizen engagement activities implemented by partner CSOs? Please specify.

3.2 Perceived impact of partner CSO activities

- What impact have partner CSOs had in this county/priority area?
- What is still lacking? What more needs to be done?
- Have you attended any gender mainstreaming sessions with partner CSOs/ What did it entail? Did you change anything in your own organization as a result?
- If CSOs are not having a great impact in the target areas, what should be done to improve it?
- What rating would you give partner CSOs from 1-5, with 1 low and 5 high in terms of:
 - Improving citizen engagement in (election reform, decentralization/deconcentration, security sector reform). Please justify score.
 - Increasing collaboration/interaction with other CSOs on issues related to (election reform, decentralization/deconcentration, security sector reform). Please justify score.

3.3 Collaboration with partner CSOs

- Have you participated in any consultations with partner CSOs? What did they entail? What were the actions developed?
- Have you participated in any training sessions with partner CSOs? What was the training about? What did you learn?
- Have you implemented any joint activities with partner CSOs in the core thematic areas? What were they?
- What prevents collaboration with partner CSOs and how could it be strengthened?
- Have any of the partner CSOs improved their relationship with other CSOs over the past 3 years? Please give concrete examples.
- What score would you give the partner CSOs in terms of collaboration with local CSOs on a scale of 1-5 with 1 low and 4 high. Please justify score.

5. Focus group discussions with citizens

3.1 Visibility of partner CSO activities

- Are you aware of the activities of the partners? What types of advocacy have they implemented that you are aware of? List any of the activities you are aware of.
- Have you attended any events or consultations organized by partner CSOs? Please specify.
- Are you aware of the Land Governance Act? Please indicate what you know about it.
- Are you aware of this county's progress towards decentralization? Please indicate what you know about it.
- What do you feel like CSOs need to do better to increase their visibility and access to citizens?

3.2 Perceived impact of partner CSO activities

- What are your biggest concerns in this community?
- What impact have partner CSOs had in this county/priority area?

- What is still lacking? What more needs to be done?
- If CSOs are not having a great impact in the target areas, what should be done to improve it?
- What rating would you give partner CSOs from 1-5, with 1 low and 5 high in terms of:
 - Improving citizen engagement in (election reform, decentralization/deconcentration, security sector reform). Please justify score.
 - Making citizens more aware of security sector reform and decentralization in this county.
 - Engaging citizens in issues related to county and social development funds, setting county priorities and monitoring government activities?
 - What more needs to be done to improve citizen engagement and awareness?

3.3 Awareness and perceived impact of radio program

- How often did you listen to Blay-Tahnla: Most weeks; every week, at least a couple of times a month; once every few months; only a few times
- Describe your favourite episode
- Who were the main characters? Who was your favourite character and why?
- What were the main themes that you think were addressed?
- Did you learn something new or get a new idea from the program? If yes, what? If no, why not?
- On a scale from 1-5 with 1 low and 5 high, how would you rate the program in terms of:
 - Entertainment
 - Giving valuable information
 - Allowing me to hear from organizations in my community
 - Allowing me to hear about local government plans and priorities
- Did you learn anything about the new land reform policy on the program? Describe.
- Did you learn anything about how to monitor police or report abuses or corruption? Describe.
- Have you ever heard about the new proposed bill about the election of superintendents? What do you know about it?
- Do you know if your country receives county and social development funds? What is the process for deciding how they will be used? Have you ever been involved in a consultation?
- What do you think the radio program should have talked about but didn't?

Annex 4: List of Key Informants and Focus Group Discussions

Key Informant Interviews	
Position	Organization
Bong County	
Police Superintendent	Bong County Police
Superintendent	Bong County Government
Gbarnga City Mayor	Bong County Government
Development Chairman	Bong County Government
District Commissioner	Bong County Government
Leader	Women's Group
Program Director	Radio Gbarnga
Nimba County	
Police Superintendent	Nimba County Police
Director	Nimba County Service Center
Executive Director	Nimba NGO Network
Director	Nimba County Service Center
Station Manager	Radio Nimba
Program Director	Radio Schway
Grand Bassa County	
Coordinator	Grand Bassa County Service Center
Development Superintendent	Grand Bassa County Government
Group of 77 (CSO representing disabled people)	Executive Director

Grassroots Advocacy for Social Justice	Executive Director
Leader	Women's Group
National-level Interviews	
Deputy Chief	UNMIL Peace Consolidation Department
CENTAL	Former Director
Sida	Grant Manager
Researcher	Governance Commission
Program Partners	
SSRWG	Executive Director
NAYMOTE	Founding Executive Director
SDI	Former Director and Founder
SDI	Program Manager
SEARCH	Executive Director
SEARCH	Program Manager Nimba
BAWODA	Executive Director
BYC	Executive Director
CJPS	Executive Director
CODRA	Executive Director
EARS	Executive Director

Focus Group Discussions	
Location	Number of Participants
Sugar Hill, Bong	9 (5 men, 4 women)
Gbarnga, Bong	6 (6 women, 0 men)
Gbarnga, Bong	10 (6 men, 4 women)
Sanniquellie, Nimba	12 (7 men, 5 women)
Buchanan, Grand Bassa	9 (7 men, 2 women)
Buchanan, Grand Bassa	6 (6 women, 0 men)

Annex 5: List of Documents Reviewed

- Original Project Proposal (2013)
- Revised Project Proposal for no-cost extension (2016);
- Project logic model;
- Benchmarking data from baseline (2013), midterm (2014) and endline (2017);
- Baseline organizational capacity assessment reports;
- Baseline study;
- Data collected for M&E data purposes, including training data;
- Midterm report (2014);
- Evaluative workshop report (2017);
- Partner CSO monthly reports to Search;
- Policies, guidelines, strategy documents and outreach materials produced by project partners throughout the duration of the program where available.