



Conference on Building Civil Society Organizations' (CSOs) Resilience and Protecting Civic Space Ahead of the 2023 Elections in Liberia

Conference Report



Held at the Sinkor Palace Hotel, Monrovia, Liberia.

June 8-9, 2023

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Key Abbreviations

CSO	Civil Society Organization
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
CEMESP	Centre for Media Studies and Peacebuilding
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ECC	Elections Coordinating Committee
EPSAO	ECOWAS Peace and Security Operations and Architecture Project
EU	European Union
GC	Governance Commission
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
GSoD	Global State of Democracy
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organizations
LACC	Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission
LEON	Liberia Elections Observation Network
LRC	Law Reform Commission
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NAYMOTE	Naymote-Partners for Democratic Development
NCSCCL	National Civil Society Council of Liberia
NEC	National Elections Commission
PVO	Private Voluntary Organizations
PWD	People with Disabilities
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

1. Introduction

On June 8-9, Liberian civil society organizations (CSOs) held a conference on ‘Building Civil Society Organizations Resilience and Protecting Civic Space Ahead of the 2023 Elections in Liberia’ at the Sinkor Palace Hotel in Monrovia. The overall goal of the conference was to establish mechanisms that will enable civil society actors to proactively respond to any threat that may arise, and promote transparency and credibility in the forthcoming elections. Therefore, the event focussed on the following specific objectives:

- (i) create a forum for prominent civil society actors and other stakeholders involved in the upcoming elections to thoroughly examine the current state of the country's civic space and the challenges it faces;
- (ii) provide an opportunity for civil society actors to identify areas of collaboration and develop a unified approach to counteract the shrinking civic space, utilizing both digital and non-digital concepts; and
- (iii) discuss the current trend and develop mechanisms that will help civil society actors withstand threats and intimidation from state institutions and actors.

The conference was convened by Naymote-Partners for Democratic Development (Naymote) in collaboration with the ECOWAS Peace and Security Operations and Architecture (EPSAO) Project which is co-funded by the European Union (EU) and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), and implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ GmbH).

The two-day event consisted of speeches, panel discussions, group working sessions and plenary deliberations on various thematic areas focusing on civic space, electoral integrity, civil society and election observation, new media and digital technology, and civil society’s challenges and resilience, among others. This report covers the proceedings of the two-day conference. The report also includes annexes with the conference agenda, resolution, and the list of participants.

2. Conference Approach

The conference was organized around a mixture of panel presentations made up of subject matter experts and activists, plenary discussions that facilitated a platform for rich, frank, open and diverse conversation among participants and panellist as well as group discussions that sharpened the narratives and reinforced perspectives. Participants were fully engaged in all thematic sections, plenary discussions and group working sessions where they had focussed discussions on emerging and contentious issues, legal and regulatory framework, technology and new media and strategies to mitigating shrinking civic space and how to offer

more protection for civil society organizations. Each session of conference was facilitated by a team of facilitators, Ibrahim Al-bakri Nyei of the Ducor Institute for Social and Economic Research (Lead Facilitator) and Harold Aidoo of Integrity Watch-Liberia (Co-facilitator). A team of rapporteurs copiously took written notes of the activities and discussions at the conference.

3. Participants

A total of 70 delegates from around Liberia, comprising of representatives from women groups and organizations of the disabled, and heads of CSOs in Monrovia attended the conference. Delegates came from the following counties:

- i. Bomi
- ii. Bong
- iii. Gbarpolu
- iv. Grand Bassa
- v. Grand Gedeh
- vi. Grand Cape Mount
- vii. Grand Kru
- viii. Lofa
- ix. Margibi
- x. Maryland
- xi. Montserrado
- xii. Nimba
- xiii. Rivercess
- xiv. River Gee



Representatives of ECOWAS, EU, the Embassy of German in Liberia, USAID, UNDP also attended the conference. The list of participants is attached to this report as Annex 3.

4. Proceedings – Day 1

4.1. Opening Session

The conference opened with an introductory and welcome speech delivered by Mr. Eddie Jarwolo, Executive Director of Naymote. Mr Jarwolo highlighted the role of CSOs in the democratic process and the need for CSOs to collaborate and protect the civic space as Liberia goes to elections in October 2023. He stressed that the 2023 elections are very crucial because they will be solely organized and managed by Liberian institutions, unlike previous post-war elections that had the involvement of international actors and peacekeepers. He noted that Liberia's fragile peace, which has been maintained for 20 years, needs to be solidified and consolidated in ways that pro-democracy institutions and civil society activists can speak out freely without hindrance or coercion. He outlined some benefits of the civic space conference as a forum for CSOs practitioners to interact and build synergies ahead of the election and share experiences while holding public officials to account for their stewardship. He informed participants that the expectation of the conference is for civil society organizations to be strengthened, so that they can in turn build citizens' capacity for their voices to be heard. He concluded by thanking the partners, GIZ, EPSAO and the EU and all participants;

This was followed by special remarks.

- a. **Mr. Malcolm W. Joseph** - *Executive Director, Center for Media Studies and Peacebuilding, founding member, National CSO Council of Liberia*. Mr. Joseph expressed his delight to have attended the conference and noted that the conference was crucial to discussing the state of the civic space in Liberia in 2023. He reminded participants that Liberia will observe the 20th anniversary of the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), which brought to an end the nation's brutal civil war, in August 2023. Mr. Joseph emphasized that the successful management of the of 2023 elections by Liberians will be a manifestation of the gains from the CPA and will further solidify the democratic gains from the 2018 transition.

This period, he averred, is a critical turning point and that the conversation on shrinking democratic spaces is vital as the election campaign period draws closer. He cited the 2022 Global State of Democracy (GSoD) report which states that civil society spaces are shrinking across the world, particularly in West Africa. According to him, there is increasingly limited democratic space and influence for civil society activities, with legal and regulatory framework restrictions and plain violence against human rights defenders demanding transparency, freedom, equality, and justice. These interferences, he emphasized, have negative implications for sustaining vibrant and healthy democracies.

He further noted that there are new methods employed every day to dwindle the civic space for equal participation in Liberia. These include, for example, the undermining of democratic institutions— such as the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission (LACC), the Independent National Human Rights Commission (INCHR), and the Law Reform Commission (LRC); attack on the civic space, specifically attacks on freedom of information and expression, access to information, assembly, and association. Others include attempts by the government to interfere in other political parties' internal affairs, attempts to alter specific electoral procedures (employment, procurement, deployment etc.); co-opting of CSO actors; and the forming of groups to attack places where rival politicians' worship. According to Mr Joseph, all of these represent signs of an uneven playing ground for political contestation

- b. **Mr. Peter Speyrer** - *Deputy Head of Mission, The Embassy of Germany in Liberia*. Mr. Speyrer expressed profound appreciation for the opportunity to address the conference. He acknowledged the close relationship with the European Union, especially in light of the Embassy's efforts to advance economic growth and democratic consolidation throughout the West African region and Africa as a whole. He stressed that the conference was immensely important in the collective pursuit of democracy, transparency, and the safeguarding of civic space.

He noted that Liberia has come a long way since the end of the civil war, and it is commendable to witness the progress made in strengthening democratic institutions and promoting good governance. He said the vibrant and active presence of CSOs in Liberia has been instrumental in fostering public participation, advocating for human rights, and upholding the principles of accountability. According to Mr. Speyrer, as Liberia approaches the crucial 2023 elections, the role of CSOs have become even more vital in ensuring a fair, inclusive, and transparent electoral process.

He admonished CSOs to play a critical role in monitoring elections, encouraging voter education, promoting peaceful political participation, and holding authorities accountable to help build trust in the electoral process, which is the cornerstone of any democratic society. CSOs, according to him, must continue to uphold the highest standards of integrity, transparency, and professionalism, as they represent the voices of the people, and must work tirelessly for the betterment of society. He emphasized that CSOs need to be self-critical, honest, fair and balanced because the words of CSOs represent their tool, their credibility, and their asset.

He encouraged participants to seize the opportunity presented by the conference to build networks, share experiences, and strengthen their capacity to address the challenges ahead. He further encouraged

the participants to develop strategic action points from the conference that will further enhance their ability to observe the electoral process, empower citizens, and foster social cohesion.

He described CSOs as the cornerstone of a vibrant democracy, and they deserve the embassy's unwavering support. He encouraged CSOs to work harder as the 2023 elections draw near, and advised them to work together to protect the civic space, build resilience, and create a Liberia where every voice is heard, every vote counts, and every citizen can participate freely and without fear. He concluded by saying “remember that the success of any democratic society rests on the shoulders of its citizens and their active engagement”.



4.2. Technical session

The technical session comprised thematic presentations and panel discussions.

Presentation I. The State of the Civic Space in Liberia – Ibrahim Al-bakri Nyei, Lead Facilitator

The Lead Facilitator, Ibrahim Al-bakri Nyei, presented on ‘The state of the civic space in Liberia’. This presentation was intended to set the stage for other presentations that would examine the various thematic issues around the civic space more closely. The facilitator noted that the conference convened all the major actors in the civil society space, including those working on elections, so that they may discuss and identify some potential means of protecting the space for positive civil society engagement during the 2023 elections. This presentation first explained the concept of civic space, the benefits of an open civic space to democracy and socio-economic development and the threats a closing civic space poses to democracy and socio-economic development. An open civic space leads to political accountability and good governance, political participation

and inclusion, inclusive socio-economic development, democracy, peace and stability; while a closed civic space leads to political repression and oppression, corruption, insecurity and instability, uneven socio-economic development, and autocracy or dictatorship.

He mentioned various indices that have described the state of democracy, governance and civil society sustainability in Liberia — such as Freedom House which describes Liberia as ‘Partly Free’, World Democracy Index which says Liberia is a ‘Hybrid regime’, and the CIVICUS Monitor which says the civic space in Liberia is ‘obstructed’. From these indicators he concluded that the civic space in Liberia is ‘evolving’, suggesting that the environment for civic engagement is slowly developing, but with challenges that undermine civil society engagement and sustainability. The USAID’s CSO Sustainability Index also describes civil society in Liberia as ‘evolving’.

He named several national legal instruments that support a vibrant civic space: The Constitution of Liberia, the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act; and international instruments such as: Universal Declarations on Human Rights, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, among others.

He said protecting the civic space during the elections was a responsibility of all actors: government, CSOs, and the National Elections Commission (NEC). He noted that the government was responsible to provide a safe and secure environment for all citizens to exercise their rights and participate freely in political processes; the CSOs can support and nurture the civic space by responsibly engaging in civic and political activities, building consensus around issues and developing coherent strategies to pursue them, i.e., election observation; accountability; while the NEC must be encouraged to ensure meaningful civil society participation in all aspects of the electoral process

Presentation II. Legal and Regulatory environment for civil society in Liberia – Mr. Oscar Bloh, Executive Director, Centre for Democratic Governance and Chairman of the Elections Coordinating Committee, (ECC).

Mr. Bloh began his listing a raft of national and international laws and conventions that guarantee civil society work. He cited Article 15, (b) and (c) of the 1986 Constitution of Liberia which guarantee freedom of speech and association. According to Mr. Bloh, for democracy to expand and grow Liberia will need a robust civic space that is occupied by civil society organizations. And in that space, he averred, CSOs are required to perform multiple roles including generating information for both citizens and government; monitoring government policies and holding it to account, engaging in advocacy and offering alternative policies for

government and the private sector, delivering services especially to underprivileged and marginalized communities and defending the rights of citizens.

He unpacked the concept of democratic governance, and emphasized that its success depends on the existence of both an accountable state and a vibrant civil society, which creates the platform for citizens' voices to be mainstreamed in the formulation of national policies that contribute to inclusive socio-economic growth and development. To ensure there is sustained peace and economic growth, it would require an open space for CSOs to engage national government, as a means of promoting and increasing public and civic participation.

In terms of the legal framework, Mr. Bloh listed international laws that Liberia has ratified, which support the work of CSOs, i.e., International Convention of Civil and Political Rights, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the Africa Charter on Human and People's Rights. These international legal frameworks put some responsibility on the state. The state then has a duty to promote and respect human rights and fundamental freedoms. That duty includes both negative responsibility, that is to refrain from interfering with rights and freedoms. And the positive responsibility to ensure that the legal framework is appropriately enabling and that the necessary institutions and mechanisms are in place. At the national level, Liberia's Constitution guarantees the right to association and therefore sets the legal framework for the establishment of CSOs. Article 15 (b) and (c) of the Constitution guarantee the right to free speech and to hold an opinion as well as the right for the public to be informed about the government and its functionaries.

The right to participate in the conduct of public affairs is one of the fundamental rights to ensure that people can address problems that directly affect their lives. At the regulatory framework level, the first point is the legal existence. There is a process laid down for CSOs and NGOs to register in keeping with section 4.1, 5.6 and section 23.2 of the Association law of Liberia. The determination and dissolution of CSOs is addressed by the Association law chapter 11. Determination may follow a voluntary decision of the CSO or may result from government or by a court order. At the policy framework level, in 2020 the government adopted what is called the National Aid and NGO policy of Liberia.

In keeping with the current policy, all NGOs must be registered and accredited in order to operate in Liberia as detailed in the operational manual. NGOs are obliged to comply with provisions of all regulations which include the Revenue Code of Liberia, immigration laws and the Decent work Act. These requirements are contained in Section 4.2.6 of the policy. It further states that all development partners, international and bilateral partners are expected to comply with the government's financial oversight and accountability procedures. Under the law, spending entities are beneficiaries of development partners funding, including all registered and international NGOs and they are required to submit information on their activities — including

financial information — to the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning. The policy provides the following as requirements for accreditation and renewal of NGOs and CSOs:

- A letter of application
- Sector clearance from relevant line ministry or agency
- Annual activities / performance report
- Annual financial report / audited statement
- Detailed work plan
- Updated list of staff
- Regular volunteers' position, sex, nationality, national ID number
- Aliens should provide residents permit number and salary records
- Updated list of institutional assets

In the submission, NGOs/CSOs must submit name of the project, cost of the project, total amount committed by the donor, total amount received, duration, location, counties, etc.

According to Mr. Bloh, the current policy places too much emphasis on regulations which are meant to control NGOs and CSOs; and that all these are aimed at shrinking the space for CSOs.



Presentation III. Keeping Engaged: towards a strategy for sustainability and resilience of CSOs in Liberia – Mrs. Loretta Alethea Pope Kai, Chairperson National Civil Society Council of Liberia.

The chairperson of the NCSCL informed the conference that the council is the apex body responsible to coordinate the affairs of all civil society organizations in the country. This includes, investigation, research, monitoring, advocacy, networking, and strengthening coordination.

Mrs. Kai emphasized the need to build and sustain resilient CSOs in Liberia. She recommended the following as the way forward for resilience and sustainability of the civic space: developing an internalize commitment and general engagement framework, which would include but not limited to coordination, knowledge sharing, resource sharing, recognition and appreciation. She stressed that encouraging coordination and networking among CSO is very crucial, and networking can be done at forums such as the civic space conference and other workshops and events.

She further stressed the need to create the opportunity for CSOs to come together. She noted that this can help to foster a sense of unity and create a supportive network where CSOs can come together to learn, collaborate and share resources. To this end, CSOs would adopt multiple strategies in the following key areas: capacity building that involves training and resource sharing, promoting collaboration and knowledge, and fostering a culture of learning, innovation, financial sustainability, while at the same time engaging the government in the policymaking process.

She described the National Aid and NGO policy as more focussed on aid coordination and less on NGO. Therefore, the council intends to review the policy and make it more NGO-focussed. This review, she noted, will focus on concerns raised regarding registration and accreditation requirements of NGOs and CSOs.

These two presentations were followed by a Question-and-Answer session during which participants interacted with the panellists. The main issues explored were the regulatory framework, and extensive discussions were held on the registration requirements for CSOs, particularly the requirement on sectoral clearance which mandates that each CSO/NGO must receive a clearance from the government ministry or agency governing the particularly sector of their work before qualifying for accreditation. The dominant view across the room was that this requirement is cumbersome as there is no established standard fee across the ministries; some charge prohibitively high fees; while others use the clearance to delay or frustrate the work of CSOs critical of their work. There was a consensus that this requirement contributes to limiting the civic space as it works against the legal formalization of CSOs. Participants further agree that CSOs must engage the government to remove this requirement entirely.

Panel I. Reflection on the state of Civil Space for 2023 elections: opportunities, barriers, and recommendations for deepening civil society engagement

This panel assessed the state of the civic space for the 2023 elections from the views and experiences of three leading civil society activists. A plenary discussion followed, and participants shared their own experiences with engaging government policy process, the electoral process, and the constraints they face in promoting electoral integrity. Several recommendations were offered by the panelists and participants to support efforts at deepening civil society engagement with the electoral process.

a. Miatta Darwolor, Executive Director of Sister Aid Liberia

Ms. Darwolo highlighted some important legal frameworks that encourage CSOs engagement with the government and the electoral process. She however pointed out several constraints including challenges faced by women in politics. She also highlighted the signing of the Farmington River Declaration on peaceful elections, and the Violence Against Women in Politics Protocol signed by political parties to commit to peaceful elections and to end violence against women during elections. The signing of these instruments represents an important milestone for improving the civic space for the 2023 elections, particularly for women in politics. Ms Darwolo proposed the adoption of laws that provide for harsher punishments for individuals who threaten or incite violence against women during elections.

b. Adama Dempster, Secretary General- National Civil Society Human Rights Advocacy Platform

Mr. Dempster reflected on CSOs involvement in democratic processes from the human rights perspective, stressing that an open civic space is very crucial as the election approaches. Dempster noted that the space for civic engagement has been created over the years; however, protection remains missing, as CSOs actor are sometimes harassed in the line of their duties. He stressed that in an environment where civil society actors are not protected, it will not be possible for them to do their work freely. He lamented that despite improvement in legal frameworks, in practice, there have been restrictions, attacks on CSOs, and most of civil society actors, especially women in the rural areas, suffer violence. According to him, the environment needs to be conducive for civil society actors, and for citizens to freely express their thoughts on national issues.

He further noted that the process of obtaining sectoral clearance is illegal and not transparent, and it contributes to corruption because the ministries do not report the money collected for issuing sectoral clearance to the Liberia Revenue Authority. He warned that government should not use sectoral clearance to suppress civic

space; and encouraged the government to harmonize the fees and make the process more formal if they intend to keep that requirement on the books.

c. Mr. Anderson Miamen, Executive Director, Center for Transparency and Accountability in Liberia

Mr. Miamen began by hailing the civic space conference as a very important conversation that has to be held often. He described two ways in which people seek to narrow the civic space: government and other actors may take direct or indirect actions including approving laws (directly) or making it difficult for CSOs to access grants from external donors (indirectly) to limit the civic space. If the resources are not available for civil society to operate it becomes a problem, he noted. In his remarks, he pointed to three things which CSOs should focus on in improving the civic space: 1) maintain the peace, 2) unite member organizations and 3) to widen the scope and build the capacity of other CSOs, and strengthen the organizations through unity. The civic space conference, therefore, presents an opportunity for participants to network and strengthen their capacity. He proposed that CSOs regularize the conversation on civic space and hold it periodically in different parts of the country.

During the Question-and-Answer and comments, participants stressed the need to encourage and promote women participation in election. Women were identified as a key stakeholder group and are engaging and doing a lot of advocacies across the country. Participants also called for CSOs internal collaboration to benefit from each other's experiences, share lessons and build synergies in protecting the civic space during and after the 2023 elections.

The presentation on "The NEC and Civil Society: Deepening partnerships for electoral integrity and inclusivity", as reflected on the program agenda (see Annex 2) was never delivered because the NEC did not send a representative. However, the time allotted for this presentation was used to deepen discussion on the role of the civil society in promoting inclusivity. During this session, Michael Eche Agada and Valerie Oyeb Arikpo-Ettah of the GIZ shared their experiences with working with civil society organizations in protecting the civic space during elections in other countries, including Sierra Leone. They emphasized synergy, collaboration and knowledge sharing among CSOs as means of building CSO capacity to confront threats and protect the civic space.

5. Proceedings - Day 2

5.1. Opening and Recap of Day 1

The second day of the conference began with a recap of the first day by the lead facilitator. In his summary, he noted that the first day of the conference focused on discussing the challenges CSOs face in the country, particularly the legal requirements for accreditation and threats and harassments of CSO actors and women. He said many participants had cited the sectoral clearance as a legal constraint on the civic space. The lead facilitator noted that while Day 1 focused on identifying the challenges, Day 2 should focus on identifying potential solutions to improving the civic space.

5.2. Technical sessions

The technical session comprised a panel discussion, group working session, and plenary deliberations.

Panel 1. Civil Society and the 2023 elections: Preparations and Engagements

This panel assessed the state of preparations among CSOs for the 2023 elections. Representatives of three leading CSOs working on the elections discussed the state of preparations in their organizations and the level of work they have done to improve civic education, ensure CSOs participation in the electoral process and promote electoral integrity. The panellists were Bawudu Johnson Williams, National Coordinator of the Elections Coordinating Committee (ECC); Augustine S.N. Tamba, Head of Secretariat of the Liberian Election Observation Network (LEON); and Peace Match Boyee, Program Director at Naymote. Below are summaries of their presentations.

ECC – The ECC was established in 2010 ahead of the 2011 election to engage in and support democratic process, advocate for free and fair elections, and promote women participation. ECC has offices in the 15 counties of Liberia and it is one of the biggest CSO platforms, consisting of 7 civil society organizations and networks, working on the election. The ECC is currently observing the pre-election activities, including electoral violence, through the deployment of long-term observers, and has recruited more than 1000 short-term observers to observe the elections in October. The aim is to observe the major electoral process, campaign and nominations process.

The ECC reported that there was improvement in Phase 2 of the voter registration process as compared to Phase 1. Issues observed and reported by ECC during the Phase 1 voter registration exercise include: registration of underaged individuals, NEC staff leaving the site early, lack of materials, open voter trucking by aspiring candidates. The ECC proposes a thorough monitoring of the implementation of the campaign financing regulations.

LEON – LEON was established in 2017 and it runs four main programs. They are: Election Observation, Legislative Monitoring, Social Media Monitoring, and Research and Advocacy. LEON has conducted key surveys on national issues including preparedness of the security forces, and factors that cause high number of invalid votes in some parts of the country. LEON identified the lack of sufficient voter education as a factor that contributes to the high number of invalid votes. LEON is preparing to deploy over 1000 short term observers across the country during the election. They plan to coordinate deployment with ECC so that the two organizations may not overlap or duplicate efforts in the field.

Naymote – NAYMOTE is promoting peace and non-violence campaigns, women participation and the inclusion of people with disability. Over 930 people, mainly youth and women, have recently participated in Naymote election-related activities aimed at improving the civic space. These activities are meant to encourage deeper engagement and participation of the target population with the electoral process. She informed participants that her institution has trained some of the most prominent young politicians in Africa. The institution believes that a purposeful and effective civil society is needed to set the national policy agenda, stimulate sound and healthy grassroots' response to governance issues, and influence the uneven power dynamics that characterize the relationship between Liberia's citizens and government.

5.3. Group working session

During this session, participants were divided into five breakout groups to discuss and propose ways of **'Enhancing the civic space for electoral integrity and inclusivity'**. Though there were five thematic questions, Groups 2 and 4 combined since they both focused on the role of various media in the civic space. The two groups, however, presented separate reports as seen below. Participants were selected for the thematic groups based on their interest and areas of experience and expertise. Each group was supported by the facilitators who went around responding to clarifying questions and explaining concepts.

Each group had a group leader and a note taker. The groups discussed their thematic areas for an hour and reported back to the plenary on their recommendations for enhancing the civic space during the elections. The group reports are presented below.

‘Enhancing the civic space for electoral integrity and inclusivity’

Group 1. Legal and Regulatory Framework

Issue: Business registration service is not available at the county service centers

Recommendations:

- Strengthen the county service centers and make them more functional,
- Decentralize the business registration process,
- Provide support to CSOs through the national budget.

Issue: Sectoral clearance is not legal; fees are high and not harmonized; and clearance process is not decentralized:

Recommendations:

- Requirement for sectoral clearance should be removed.

Issue: MFDP accreditation: Minimum requirement for accreditation does not Favor small CSOs and CBOs; accreditation process is not decentralized; there is limited awareness on MFDP digitalization process.

Recommendations:

- Set CBOs specific requirements
- Decentralize the accreditation process through the service centers
- Increase awareness on MFDP digitalization process

Group 2. leveraging technology and new media: How could technology be leveraged in building CSOs’ resilience and promoting electoral integrity

Issues: leveraging social media to increase visibility and information sharing and civic education

- Facebook/messenger
- Instagram
- Zoom
- WhatsApp
- Twitter
- LinkedIn

Recommendations:

- Increase communication among targets on social media,
- Advocate the passage of the cybersecurity bill,
- Conduct assessment on cybersecurity threats,
- Establish civil society networks,
- Collaborate on the passage of laws on the cyber space,
- Build capacity in the area of Artificial intelligence.

Group 3. Promoting the participation of women and marginalized groups

- Conduct capacity building training for women and marginalized groups across the country
- Ensure massive inclusion of women and marginalized groups in election processes
- Advocate for constitutional reform to include 30% women and people-with-disabilities (PWD) in public offices
- Advocate for the implementation of laws and policies that promote women and marginalized groups; and PWD
- Provide legal aid response to violence against women in elections and politics



Group 4. How can Traditional media (newspapers, radio, TV) be leveraged for building CSSs resilience and promoting electoral integrity?

Recommendations:

- Partnership
- Awareness
- Interview
- Press statement/release
- Opinions
- Publication
- Documentary
- Fact-checking

Group 5. Building coherence amongst CSOs: how could stronger partnerships (far beyond what we have presently) be established?

Recommendations:

- Enhance effective coordination at county and regional levels.
- A decentralized way of communication, coordination and networking.
- Organize regular county coordination meetings
- Support common values
- Identify CSOs by thematic areas
- Encourage mutual respect
- Strengthen partnerships
- Monrovia CSO should build capacity for county CSOs

6. Review and adoption of draft conference resolution

The facilitator presented a draft resolution for review and adoption by the participants. The resolution items derived from the issues and recommendations offered by the participants during the two days of deliberation. The review process was participatory and deliberative. The draft was projected on a screen and read out, and participants reviewed each paragraph and collectively revised the contents to ensure they were in line with the issues discussed during the two days.

The revised resolution was read out and participants unanimously endorsed the document as the final resolution of the conference. The resolution — attached as Annex 1 of this report — calls for a reform of the current regulatory regime for registering and accrediting civil society organizations; full implementation of the Local Government Act of 2018; protection and security of activists and journalists during the elections; non-violence and peaceful campaigning by political parties; full recognition and protection of the rights of women, PWD and other minorities during the elections; deeper partnership between the NEC and CSOs; speedy investigation and adjudication of cases of electoral violence and disputes; and access to state-owned and independent media to all actors during the election. The resolution was signed by delegates from fourteen counties and leaders of CSOs in Monrovia. Sinoe County was the only county not represented at the conference.

7. Closing Session

The conference officially closed following the adoption and signing of the resolution. Closing remarks were delivered by Madam Lauretta Pope-Kai of the NCSCSL, Madam Valerie Oyeb Arikpo-Ettah of the GIZ, and Mr. Eddie Jarwolo of Naymote. The speakers thanked the participants for attending the conference and for fully committing themselves to the activities of the two days. They all admonished the participants to work together and follow up on the implementation of the items elaborated in the resolution.



Annex 1. Conference Resolution

See attached

Annex 2. Program Agenda

NATIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY CONSULTATIVE MEETING ON CLOSING CIVIC SPACE IN LIBERIA AHEAD OF THE 2023 GENERAL AND PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

Sinkor Palace Hotel, Monrovia

June 8-9, 2023

Program Agenda

Time	Content	Responsible Persons
	8 June 2023	
08:30 – 09:30am	Registration/Breakfast	Secretariat
09:30 - 10:00am	Welcome statement and overview of the conference Special Remarks	Eddie D. Jarwolo Executive Director Naymote Partners for Democratic Development Mr. Malcolm W Joseph Executive Director Center for Media Studies and Peacebuilding Founding member, National CSO Council of Liberia Mr. Peter Speyrer Deputy Head of Mission The Embassy of Germany in Liberia
10:00 – 10:10am	Group Photo	All
	Technical session	Facilitator
10:10am – 11:40am	Presentations 1. The state of civic space in Liberia 2. Legal and regulatory environment for civil society in Liberia	Ibrahim Al-bakri Nyei, PhD Director, Ducor Institute for Social and Economic Research Cllr. Oscar Bloh Executive Director

	3. Keeping Engaged: Towards a strategy for sustainability and resilience of CSOs in Liberia	Centre for Democratic Governance and Chairman of the Elections Coordinating Committee, (ECC) Mrs. Loretta Alethea Pope Kai Chairperson National Civil Society Council of Liberia
11:40am – 12:15pm	Questions	All
12:15pm – 01:15pm	<i>Lunch Break</i>	All
01:15 – 02:00pm	<i>The NEC and Civil Society: Deepening partnerships for electoral integrity and inclusivity</i>	Mrs. Davidetta Browne Lansanah Chairperson National Elections Commission, (NEC) Republic of Liberia
02:00pm – 03:30pm	Plenary Discussion <i>Reflection on the state of Civic Space for 2023 elections: opportunities; barriers; and recommendations for deepening civil society engagement</i>	<i>Lead Discussants</i> Miatta Darwolor Executive Director Sister Aid Adama Dempster Secretary General National Civil Society Human Rights Advocacy Platform Mr. Anderson Miamen Executive Director Center for Transparency and Accountability in Liberia Republic of Liberia
03:30 – 03:45pm	Wrap-up Day 1	Facilitator

03:45pm – 4:00pm	Tea Break/ Closing	<i>All</i>
Day 2 9 June 2023		
08:30 – 09:30am	Registration /Breakfast	<i>Secretariat</i>
09:30- 10:00am	Recap Day 1	<i>Facilitator</i>
10:00 – 11:00am <i>(20 minutes each)</i>	Presentations 1. Civil Society and the 2023 elections: Preparations and Engagements	a) Bawudu Johnson Williams– National Coordinator, Elections Coordinating Committee b) Augustin Tamba, National Coordinator, Liberia Elections Observation Network c) Peace Boyee, Program Director, Naymote
11:00-11:30am	<i>Questions</i>	<i>All</i>
11:30am-01:00pm	Breakout Groups– <i>Enhancing the civic space for electoral integrity and inclusivity</i> <i>Group 1. Legal and Regulatory Framework</i> <i>Group 2. Leveraging Technology and New Media</i> <i>Group 3. Promoting the participation of women and marginalized groups</i> <i>Group 4: How can Traditional media (newspapers, radio, TV) be leveraged for building CSSs resilience and promoting electoral integrity?</i> <i>Group 5: Building coherence amongst CSOs, how can strong partnerships (far</i>	Facilitator Groups

	<i>beyond what we have presently) be established?</i>	
01:00- 02:00pm	<i>Lunch Break</i>	<i>All</i>
02:00 – 03:00pm	Plenary Presentations and Discussion	Harold Marvin Aidoo, Executive Director, Integrity Watch-Liberia Co-Facilitator
03:00pm -04:00pm	<i>Review and adoption of Draft Communique</i>	Ibrahim Al-bakri Nyei, PhD Director, Ducor Institute for Social and Economic Research Lead Facilitator
04:00-04:20pm	<i>Closing remarks</i>	a). Eddie D. Jarwolo, Executive Director. Naymote Partners for Democratic Development b). His Excellency Laurent Delahousse, Ambassador of the European Union to Liberia
04:20 – 04:30pm	<i>Coffee / departure</i>	All

Annex 3. List of Participants