



THE
CARTER CENTER



2021 A Year in Review

With Exclusive Focus on the Liberia-Access to
Justice: Community Justice Advisor Project



INTRODUCTION



The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 16 calls for all societies to “promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, **PROVIDE ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR ALL** and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”. The Declaration of the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Rule of Law at the National and International levels also states: “we emphasize the right to equal access to justice for all including members of vulnerable groups, and the importance of awareness-raising concerning legal rights, and in this regard we commit to taking all necessary steps to provide fair, transparent, effective, non-discriminatory and accountable services that promote access to justice for all, including legal aid.” Upholding the rule of law and human rights are key principles of any democratic state and having access to justice is a fundamental part of protecting those rights.

Access to Justice can be described as “the ability of any person, regardless of income, to use the legal system to advocate for themselves and their interests” (Texas Access to Justice Commission) and to “prevent the abuse of their rights and obtain remedies when such rights are abused” (United States Agency for International Development, 2010, 12)

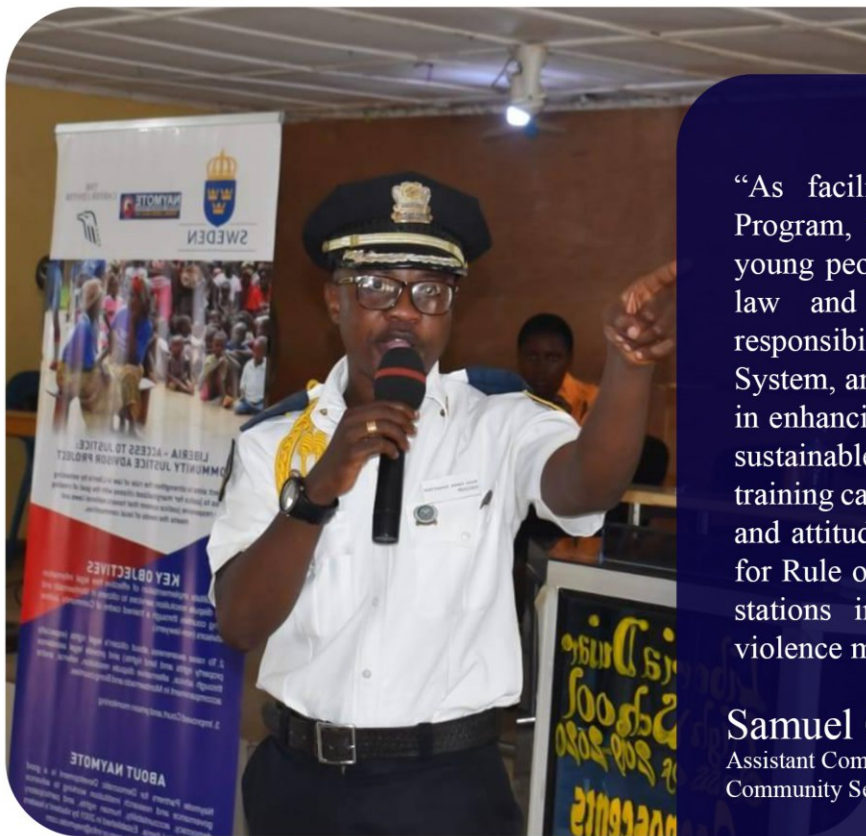
Internationally, inaccessibility to justice is a major issue. Without any doubt, it is a known fact that there are barriers to accessing justice in Liberia. Poor people and other marginalized groups are having unequal access to justice and this clearly promotes inequality in a society. For this, Naymote Partners for Democratic Development with support from the government of Sweden through the Carter Center has been implementing the Liberia-Access to Justice: Community Justice Advisor Project designed to strengthen the rule of law in Liberia by enhancing access to justice for marginalized citizens with the goal of creating a responsive justice system that honors national laws and meets the needs of local communities. Since the beginning of this year (2021), we have been working in 120 communities in Montserrado and Bong Counties through 12 trained Community Justice Advisors (CJAs).





The project is focused on providing effective free legal information and dispute resolution services to citizens in Liberia through a trained team of CJAs (non-lawyers) who provides community-based justice services. Concentration is on raising awareness about citizens' legal rights and providing legal assistance through pieces of advice, alternative dispute resolution, referral, and/or accompaniment. Looking at the year in full, it was one but continued vigilance and commitment as our institution implemented series of activities geared towards achieving the project overall goal and objectives, and yielded significant impact. Activities implemented include pre-inception meetings, school law and justice events, community law and justice events, mobile phone calls to educate citizens about their fundamental rights, civic engagement events by community justice advisors, CJAs routine visitations at courts, prison facilities, and police stations to monitor key human rights violations, participation in the Carter Center (TCC) sponsored radio programs, and other media engagements.

These activities are helping citizens across our 120 project communities to gain a deeper understanding about their fundamental rights, the rule of law principles and getting access to justice. The School Law and Justice Program, Community Law and Justice Events and civic engagement sessions have provided opportunities for several community dwellers including town chiefs, zonal heads, school administrators, students, women groups, disabled, and several disadvantaged youths across our project communities. These activities were mostly facilitated by experienced police officers and lawyers, which helped build community trust in accessing justice, understanding civil cases that could be handled through ADR and criminal cases that could be referred through the police, etc. The following individuals made the remarks captured below as a proof of how impactful our workings have been across all the communities that have been captured by our project:



“As facilitator of the school law and Justice Program, it gives me hope and aspirations to see young people eager to know their rights under the law and to also understand the roles and responsibilities of the Liberia Criminal Justice System, and how can citizens have access to Justice in enhancing the promotion of the Rule of Law for sustainable peace and security. The impacts of this training can be attributed to the changes in behaviors and attitudes of these young people having respect for Rule of Law by working with their local police stations in addressing issues rather than using violence means by addressing them”

Samuel G. Ford

Assistant Commissioner of Police of
Community Services, Liberian National Police.

“Thanks to Naymote-Liberia and her partners for bringing such a unique program in Bong County that is strengthening citizens’ understanding of the rule of law and how to access justice. I continue to hear good news from my town chiefs and citizens across parts of the county about NAYMOTE-Liberia “Access to Justice Project.” County

Madam Esther Walker,
Superintendent, Bong



Naymote is also restoring the hopes of citizens and rebuilding relationships through its mediation exercises and civic education sessions across its fifty project communities. With this, Mr. Thomas D. Kollie, Chairman Civil Compound Community had this to say: “

I am grateful as community leader to have this project in Civil Compound Community, Salala City. Today, my relationship with the community is very cordial based on my new approach of handling disputes through the support of NAYMOTE CJA working in this community.”

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“Since the coming of NAYMOTE in our community, access to justice has taken a new dimension, your work is impacting several lives in our community. To date, I have transferred more cases of debts and child support to your assigned CJA for mediation because of my confidence in your work.”

Titus A. Railey,
Stipendiary Magistrate, Salala
Magisterial Court.

This statement was in reaction to our Community Justice Advisors ensuring that the rights of citizens are upheld and given a fair trial at the magisterial courts across the county. Magistrates now have explicit trust in our work and are transferring civil cases to our CJAs for mediation.



Our Community Justice Project does not only benefit community dwellers – it is also impacting our cadre of community justice advisors who are being bred into future advocates for societal transformation. Carcious Allen, our CJA, Salala District had this to say: “The compelling issues of access to justice in my assigned communities give me more reason to continue being a Community Justice Advisor. I have mediated several disputes between communities, citizens, husbands, and wives, and advocated for the release of prolonged pretrial detainees, and juveniles from prisons and police stations. All these could not have been achieved without this project. I hope that this project is continued as the justice needs of our people continue to exist.”



ACCOMPLISHMENTS

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Within the period of nine months, the project has reached 54,434 rural residents (24,249 males and 29,448 females) in Montserrado and Bong Counties with legal information through the help of 12 trained Community Justice Advisors (7 in Montserrado and 5 in Bong) that are currently deployed across 120 project communities, each assigned to 10

- There have been multiple cases received and documented by our CJAs of which 477 cases were satisfactorily resolved using the alternative dispute resolution, client advice and referral etc.

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ACCOMPLISHMENTS

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- Of all the cases, majority were reported for child support, follow by debt, while the remaining are in the category of child custody, loving problem, child abuse, land dispute etc. Child support is the most prevalent case type for the implementing period.

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- The School Law and Justice Program has benefited over 4,000 students from 20 high schools in Montserrado and Bong counties through education about their fundamental rights and the rule of law principles, this program has been facilitated by experienced police officers and lawyers

It is also worth mentioning that since February, there are many visible indicators that further suggest that the SIDA/ Carter Center grant is increasingly making noteworthy impact on its targeted population. Here are some few highlights:

- Most civil cases are being managed/handled at the community level using the Alternative Depute Resolution method while criminal cases are transferred to the Police for redress. CJAs are regularly invited by community members whenever they have issues especially on child support, debt, and other family matters to help them find solution.

- Local leaders including community residents are making use of legal information being provided by our CJAs with the help of the CJAs manual and the law book business. Women are constantly pushing for their rights and reporting all forms of domestic violence in their communities.

- Engagements in the 120 project communities is transforming public perception about the rule of law in Liberia and increasing citizens' participation in the criminal justice system, improving relationships amongst community leaders, rural residents, and police officers.

- Our School Law and Justice Program is breeding ambassadors of change within high schools, students engaged are leading justice advocacy and providing awareness in their respective schools and communities using our institution produced Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) that are being distributed to students at every program.



Naymote Partner for Democratic Development understands that access to Justice for all citizens is a cornerstone of democracy, good governance, and inclusive development. This is why during the year under review, we have been fully engaged with diverse group of people in rural communities by providing them free legal information and dispute resolution services through the help of our trained and committed CJAs. The success rate of this project clearly demonstrates that with the necessary support through funding, Naymote can reach far into several rural communities where the issue of accessing justice is a major challenge to help the most vulnerable groups in those areas.