

Understanding Differences & Acting on Commonalities

SEARCH FOR
COMMON
GROUND
IN LIBERIA

Liberia Update



SFCG has encouraged the formation of focus groups to promote solidarity

UPDATE OVERVIEW

This update describes Search for Common Ground's (SFCG) progress on its three main projects in Liberia. First, SFCG and the New Field Foundation have supported Radio Kintoma to increase women's voice in the media. Second, SFCG and the American Institute for Research (AIR) are working to improve girls' retention rates in secondary school. Third, SFCG is supporting good governance in Liberia, as a member of the Elections Coordinating Committee (ECC). The ECC is working to ensure that the 2011 elections are free, fair and transparent by deploying 2,000 monitors across the country on election day.

The need for monitoring was brought to the fore with the irregularities faced in the country's referendum on August 23, 2011. It was held to amend the Liberian Constitution regarding: (1) judge tenure, (2) election scheduling, (3) residential requirements for presidential candidates and (4) the electoral system. All four propositions failed to meet the two-thirds constitutional requirement needed to pass.

The referendum was undermined by several factors, including a 34.2 percent voter turnout; politicization of the referendum by political parties, with some parties calling for their supporters to boycott it or vote "no" on all four propositions; and more than 100,000 invalid votes, caused by an error on the ballot. The ECC deployed 400 monitors during the referendum and a detailed report of their findings will be released. A press release about Liberia's National Elections Commission's role during the referendum has just been released by the ECC.

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SFCG TO CHAIR THE ELECTION COORDINATING COMMITTEE (ECC)

Liberian civil society organizations have formed an Election Monitoring Network with the mission of supporting credible and sustainable democratic processes in Liberia. The Election Monitoring Network has formed the Elections Coordinating Committee (ECC), that unanimously selected Search for Common Ground/Talking Drum Studio to chair its activities. This is an important recognition of the work of SFCG/TDS in Liberia, because it demonstrates the confidence that local NGO's have in SFCG.

The National Elections Commission (NEC) of Liberia, as well as local and international partners on electoral matters in Liberia, have recognized this coalition and offered their support. The ECC is primarily funded by the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) with some additional funding from the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, and will provide support to all aspects of the 2011 electoral process.



“The importance of the ECC is that though Liberia has had several referendums, they have never really been documented. This time the ECC will document the activities of the 2011 Referendum and Election Process so the next time elections come, we will have a template to work with.”

Jasper Cumme III, board member of the ECC

The activities undertaken by the ECC include consultation with political parties, voter education, and the enforcement of a code of conduct and monitoring of the voter's registration process. The ECC will closely monitor the elections in order to ensure transparency and sound management from the NEC. More information about the ECC can be found on their website: <http://eccliberia.org>.

GENDER ACTION AGENDA

SFCG PROVIDES PUBLIC SPACE FOR RURAL WOMEN IN FIVE COUNTIES

SFCG/TDS received funding from UN Women to implement a project aimed at creating community based and women-owned empowerment centers. They are to serve as a hub for addressing issues affecting women's development and participation in society.

The first phase of the project has focused on the construction of women empowerment centers in five different counties, which have all been completed. The communities include: Zai Town - Grand Gedeh, Totota - Bong County, Gbei-Gbei Town - Margibi, Little Bassa - Grand Bassa, and Henry's Town - Gbarpolu.

The overall purpose of the intervention is to reduce economic insecurity among women in five rural counties in Liberia. Accordingly, the three key objectives are:

- To establish five community empowerment centers;
- To increase women's access to micro-finance; and
- To increase the numeracy and literacy skills of women.



SFCG helped set up five women empowerment centers

TOWN HALL MEETINGS AND LIVE DRAMA PERFORMANCES IN SUPPORT OF GIRLS OPPORTUNITY TO ACCESS LEARNING

As Liberia transforms its educational system, the need to give attention to girls' education has taken center stage. The American Institutes for Research (AIR), with support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), is implementing the Girls Opportunity to Access Learning (GOAL) project in three counties of Liberia: Grand Bassa, Bong, and Lofa.



Becoming a partner for the GOAL project was a major step taken by SFCG to promote girls' education

As one of the implementing partners of the project, SFCG conducted eleven town hall meetings and fifteen drama performances in the project locations. The town hall meetings and live drama performances are meant to increase the information available to communities about the importance of girls' education.

"...As long as girls do not have access and equal access to education, that empowerment vision will remain out of reach, and our goals of healthier families and healthier communities will remain a pie in the sky."

Estella Garmai Korboi Calvins, 2011 National Orator; speaking in Voinjama City, Lofa County on July 26 to kickoff Independence Day celebrations

RAISING WOMEN'S VOICES: PROVIDING TECHNICAL SUPPORT FOR RADIO KINTOMA

Over the past few months, SFCG, with the support of the New Field Foundation, has worked hard to reinforce the media sector and raise women's voices in Lofa county; a locality tarnished by ethno-religious violence. There is a belief held by Radio Kintoma and SFCG that a revamped media sector will enhance communication in times of conflict by spreading credible information and encouraging dialogue. SFCG has partnered with Radio Kintoma in Lofa County to build their capacity to produce radio programming for peacebuilding, including supporting women in taking an active role in the advancement of their communities by working in the media.



Increasing the voice of women is a key component of SFCG's overall strategy in West Africa

After having received intense training in radio programming and management, interviewing skills, and talk-show production, the women journalists SFCG trained were required to use their newly earned skills to produce "Women's Voices:" a women-centered talk-show aired on a weekly basis. It serves as a platform on which women in the community can discuss the most urgent issues they face in their communities. Such issues include the exclusion of women in the decision-making process at the community level, female entrepreneurship, and gender-based violence.

SFCG in Liberia wishes to thank the following donors for their support:

