

STRENGTHENED MEDIA FOR TRANSPARENT ELECTIONS



Lessons Learned



June 2012

CONTENTS

Foreword	1
Introduction.....	2
1. The Civil Society and Media Leadership Program at a Glance	4
2. Background to the Strengthened Media for Transparent Elections Initiative	6
3. Project design and Implementation.....	7
3.1. The Liberia Media Center.....	9
3.1.1. Elections Reporting Center.....	9
3.1.2. Elections Reporting Van	13
3.2. The Liberia Women Media Action Committee	14
3.2.1. Voice for Peace: The Remarkable Experience of the Peace Actors	14
3.2.2. Mobile Platform: LWDR’s Outreach and Electoral Sensitization Campaigns	18
3.3. The Press Union of Liberia	19
3.3.1. Dialogue for Democracy: Taking the Candidates to the People	19
3.3.2. Media Ethics Conference	20
3.4. Additional Activities of the CSOs and CRSs.....	21
3.4.1. Referendum Forums	22
3.4.2. Voter Education by CSML’s CSOs	23
3.4.3. Symposium.....	23
4. Overview of Results	25
4.1. Outreach to the Electorate.....	25
4.1.1. The Referendum	25
4.1.2. The Elections:.....	26
4.1.3. The Debates:.....	27
4.1.4. The Elections Reporting Center.....	28
4.2. Support to Reporters	29
4.2.1. The Elections Reporting Center (ERC)	30
4.3. Support for the Process	31
5. Lessons Learned.....	32
5.1. Liberia Media Center.....	32
5.2. Liberia Women Media Action Committee	33
5.3. Press Union of Liberia	34
6. Part Two: Impact Assessment Survey.....	35
6.1. Methodology.....	35
6.1.1. Methods of Data Collection and Analysis.....	35
6.1.2. Research Design.....	36

6.2.	Impact Assessment Findings	36
6.2.1.	Elections Reporting Center (ERC)	36
6.2.2.	Voice for Peace: The Remarkable Experience of the Peace Actors	43
6.2.3.	Mobile Platform: LWDR's Outreach and Electoral Sensitization Campaigns	49
6.2.4.	Dialogue for Democracy: Taking the Candidates to the People	51
7.	Conclusion	55
7.1.	The Media's Role in Liberia's New Democracy: Challenges and Prospects.....	55
7.2.	Polarization.....	55
7.3.	Recommendations	57
8.	Appendix A: Peace Actors' Drama Script (Written in Liberian Parlance)	59
	about the implementing partners.....	63

FOREWORD

The International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) is an international nonprofit organization providing thought leadership and innovative programs to promote positive lasting change globally. We enable local individuals and institutions to build key elements of a vibrant society: quality education, independent media, and strong communities. To strengthen these sectors, our program activities also include conflict resolution, technology for development, gender, and youth. Founded in 1968, IREX has an annual portfolio of over \$70 million and a staff of over 400 professionals worldwide. IREX employs field-tested methods and innovative uses of technologies to develop practical and locally-driven solutions with our partners in more than 100 countries.

In Liberia, IREX is currently implementing the Civil Society and Media Leadership (CSML) Program with funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). This five year program seeks to build the capacity of civil society and media through the provision of training & mentoring, grants, equipment and resources, and networking opportunities with the goal: “to sustain peace in Liberia through greater inclusion, giving voice to, informing and engaging Liberian citizens”. This goal contributes fully to Liberia’s Strategic Objective of “enhancing citizen participation in and ownership of government policy formulation and implementation” per Liberia’s Poverty Reduction Strategy. While the CSML program did not focus on elections related activities specifically, as a civil society and media development program, CSML was well positioned to assess needs on the ground and support Liberian organizations wishing to ensure and enhance the quality of the Liberian elections and promote peace.

The media plays an essential role in supporting elections in mature democracies. TV, newspapers, magazines, websites and radio informs citizens of electoral processes, explains party and candidate platforms, explores issues that are important to voters, and ensure that electoral processes are fair and transparent.

The current document is a report on CSML’s efforts to support the 2011 presidential and legislative elections, primarily through IREX’s Liberian media partners and civil society organizations. It is also hoped that the document will serve as a guide for supporting electoral processes through media development in other countries in West Africa and beyond. The report provides a brief background into the context in which the elections and national referendum were held, lists critical assumptions considered as each intervention was designed, a detailed explanation of how interventions were conducted, and an overview of the results of the Initiative. The document also outlines lessons learned throughout the process and makes recommendations for the future of media development in Liberia.

The initiative was conducted by three strong media focused civil society organizations: the Liberian Women Media Action Committee, the Liberian Media Center, and the Press Union of Liberia. Each of these organizations has a successful track record of conducting media development projects and has extensive formal and informal networks throughout the country. Close monitoring and

evaluation was conducted on all of the activities of these three organizations, the results of which are included in the report.

We hope this document will help the media industry in other regions support peaceful, fair and transparent elections and democratic development in the coming years.

Tilly Reed



Chief of Party

IREX-Liberia

INTRODUCTION

Democratic and economic development, processes believed to go hand in hand, continue to make gains in Africa. Over the past decade, six of the world's 10 fastest growing countries were African. Foreign direct investment has risen sharply on a continent which now has a rapidly growing middle class¹. In 1990, Freedom House listed just three African countries with multi-party political systems, universal suffrage and regular fraud-free elections. By 2005, Freedom House listed 24 electoral democracies in sub-Saharan countries. Today, regular elections, the most outward manifestation of democratic participation, are expected by over 1.5 billion Africans.

Yet troubles persist. High illiteracy rates on the continent continue to frustrate the ability of Africans to participate in governance, and some analysts say many voters are more interested in receiving handouts than voting for good leaders. This leaves the electorate in many African nations easily manipulated by politicians and parties. In recent years The Democratic Republic of Congo, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Nigeria, Guinea and Zimbabwe all saw serious clashes instigated by party supporters following their most recent polls².

The fits and starts characteristics of democratic and economic development in Africa are also evident in Liberia. Following the unprecedented stability and economic progress in recent years, Liberia again went to the polls in October and November 2011 to elect the president and legislature. The elections were widely regarded as the country's first truly democratic transition – a

¹ The Economist. "The Hopeful Continent: Africa Rising." December 3, 2011.

² The Economist. "African Democracy: A Glass Half-full." March 31, 2012.

phenomenal step for a country that was considered a failed state³. The elections were regarded as Liberia's first nationally run, free and fair elections in more than a century, a herculean feat involving Liberia's first National Referendum in 20 years, general presidential and legislative elections, and a run-off election between the leading candidates of the general election. The entire process took place in just over two months from August 23rd to November 8, 2011.

The elections, however, took place against a backdrop of more than 20 years of political instability, failing infrastructure, poverty, high unemployment, corruption and a long history of social tensions between various segments of the population. These tensions had erupted into violent, inter-tribal conflict in Lofa County in February 2010, an unfortunate event that was exacerbated by rumors and misinformation spread by citizens and some journalists.

Several problems continued to plague democratic development in Liberia in the run-up to the elections. Although the Johnson-Sirleaf government spoke strongly about the need to reduce corruption during her first term in office, observers commonly noted that government failed to prove, and in some cases, bring cases against many former officials who were dismissed amidst allegations of graft, leaving many Liberians to question the government's commitment to fighting corruption. Similarly, the government had been criticized for failing to implement the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a process that was meant to be an important step in reconciling Liberians following the war. Many youth in Liberia were a part of the conflict and many others grew up in it; unfortunately, both received very little education. As the campaign season progressed, their frustration with economic growth and job opportunities that had yet to reach them was evident. Finally, a controversial National Referendum was poorly attended, and the process further enhanced the doubts that opposition parties had about the neutrality of the National Elections Commission (NEC), just one month before the presidential and legislative elections.

Recent incidents of election violence occurring in neighboring Ivory Coast raised tensions and fear among Liberians that weapons had flooded into Liberia. These fears were heightened by the arrival of nearly 200,000 Ivorian refugees trying to escape the violence in their home country. Some of the refugees and Liberians were suspected of having taken part in the violence there as combatants and mercenaries⁴. As Liberia prepared for the vote, many were fearful that election events could trigger violence and that the country could backslide into war and forfeit its recent gains.

Given the social and economic development recently seen in the country and the stubbornly persistent threats to stability that remain, the elections were clearly a crucial event in Liberia's development and progress. With funding from USAID, and in close partnership with national

³ IREX. "Media Sustainability Index 2010." 2011.

⁴ The International Crisis Group. Liberia: "How Stable is the Recovery?" August 19, 2011.

organizations, the Civil Society and Media Leadership Program developed a series of interventions to educate voters, promote peace during the elections, and support the integrity and transparency of the electoral process called the Strengthened Media for Transparent Elections Initiative.

From the outset, the Initiative functioned under the unifying goal of the CSML Program: “to sustain peace in Liberia through greater inclusion, giving voice to, informing and engaging Liberian citizens”. During the 2011 Elections period, the Initiative pursued this goal by providing media institutions, media focused CSOs and reporters with the tools, resources, and training necessary to ensure the dissemination of election news and information that was fair, balanced and responsible. It was believed that by doing so citizens would have the knowledge necessary to exercise their civic duty by making informed decisions at the ballot box; understand the electoral process and ensure its integrity, and reject election related violence.

This report primarily catalogues the experiences of the three implementing partners of the Strengthened Media for Transparent Elections Initiative – The Liberia Media Center (LMC), the Liberia Women Media Action Committee (LIWOMAC), and the Press Union of Liberia (PUL). The report is divided into two parts. Part 1 provides an analysis of the work done by the three implementing partners during the elections. It also provides some information on elections related activities of the CSML Program outside of the auspices of the Strengthened Media for Transparent Elections Initiative. Part 2 is the result of a survey conducted by IREX to determine the impact of the various interventions under the “Strengthened Media for Transparent Elections” Initiative. It was important to know what the people thought of the work done by the three implementing partners.

It is our hope that media development organizations and donors, both local and international, will find the content of this document helpful in determining future assistance to the media, especially during the next elections. Certainly, there’s no better guide in any situation than experience. And the collective experience of our partners and the people’s perspectives on how they were impacted by the interventions are a powerful combination to help shape future interventions and assistance to the media.

1. THE CIVIL SOCIETY AND MEDIA LEADERSHIP PROGRAM AT A GLANCE

CSML is a five-year \$11.9 million dollar program funded by USAID, and implemented by IREX. The goal is “to sustain peace in Liberia through greater inclusion, giving voice to, informing and engaging Liberian citizens”. This goal contributes fully to Liberia’s strategic objective of “enhancing citizens’ participation in and ownership of government policy formulation and implementation” per its development programs – the Poverty Reduction Strategy, which is being revised, and the current Vision 2030 Consultative Process. In order to achieve this goal, IREX partners with Liberian organizations such as the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA), New African Research and Development Agency (NARDA), Women’s NGOs Secretariat of Liberia (WONGOSOL), the West

Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), as well as LIWOMAC and the LMC, and international partners The Carter Center (TCC) and Social Impact.

Currently, the CSML Program provides support to over 60 CSOs, 19 Community Radio Stations (CRSs), nine Monrovia based media houses and numerous individual media and civil society professionals. They receive educational, subgrant and networking opportunities, which are intended to improve their technical capacity and build their organizational and financial sustainability. By doing so, the program seeks to further the dissemination of knowledge to communities, increase civic participation and build bridges between citizens and their government in a way that sustains peace.

CSML has 8 Objectives:

1) CSOs have measurably increased organizational capacity and culture to serve as a vehicle for representing their members' interests.

The program focuses on organizational development, advocacy and networking to prepare CSOs and CRSs to represent the interests of their communities and influence the policy process at the local and national levels.

2) Advocacy CSOs in 7 counties have capacity to monitor government policy, performance and expenditures.

The program enhances the effectiveness of CSOs in monitoring policy development, implementation and enforcement, which is critical for the growth of strong, accountable Liberian institutions.

3) Enhance perceptions of CSOs by the government and of the government and CSOs by citizens.

The program promotes civic participation locally and nationally by channeling information between citizens and the government and connecting people's views to the policy process.

4) Independent media operates more professionally.

The program raises the capacity of media outlets and professionals to provide reliable information through activities integrating journalism training, media management and business development. Objective 4 includes the following initiatives:

- Specialized Consulting and Business Development Initiative
- Sol Plaatje Media Leadership Training
- Pilot Subscription and Distribution System
- Women's Media Initiative
- High school to Journalism Program
- Investigative Journalism Program

- Online Resources Clearing House

5) Community Radio Stations in 7 target counties engage with community, diversify listening audience and improve reach.

The program supports the organizational and financial sustainability of 19 CRSs, which will become model stations in the 7 counties. It also works with the stations to enrich their content and expand their coverage areas, enabling them to reach many isolated communities in the 7 target counties.

6) SMS technology is utilized as a link between people and their leaders.

The program supports mobile phone based information distribution systems that utilize SMS and voice messaging to allow communities, their leaders and journalists to collect and share information across the country.

7) Engage civil society and the media to advance the establishment of the right to access to information.

The program offers training and technical assistance to promote understanding of the newly enacted Freedom of Information Law and encourage use by communities.

8) Strengthened Media for Transparent Elections

Ensure a transparent elections process and keep Liberia on the path of peace.

2. BACKGROUND TO THE STRENGTHENED MEDIA FOR TRANSPARENT ELECTIONS INITIATIVE

On February 17, 2009 the US-based Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA) hosted a roundtable discussion at the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) on Liberia's media. Approximately 75 representatives of the Liberian media, international organizations, media development practitioners, and others discussed the state of the Liberian media and possible future development initiatives for the press. The gathering highlighted several issues that continued to impede media development in Liberia. High on the list was the lack of coordinated international support for media development. If the media were to become major stakeholders in the 2011 electoral process, international development partners had to come together to strengthen the media in meeting the high demands of Liberians for information.

Since that symposium, the Liberian media landscape has improved significantly due to concerted and coordinated support from international development partners. At no time in Liberia's media development history has international assistance been more focused than it was during the period leading to and following the 2011 National Elections.

As the elections approached, Liberian and international media development organizations recognized the importance of the media in determining whether Liberia would stay on the path of peace or return to conflict. It became clear early in the process that conditions must be created for politicians and their supporters to see the process as being free, fair and transparent. Media development organizations pointed to many advanced societies where media is considered to be a watchdog and guarantor of democratic processes. However, the media in Liberia still struggles to assume this role. Problems include: lack of training for journalists; lack of access to capital; lack of professionalism, conflict sensitivity and the tendency to sensationalize stories, present misleading or distorted information; lack of access to tools and resources such as computers and the internet; and, importantly, the persistence of bribery for stories (to be run or not run) known in Liberia as *kato*⁵. Many development organizations, including IREX, set out to ensure that efforts be made to help the media confront these problems and play a critical role in ensuring successful elections.

With its overarching goal of sustaining peace in Liberia, IREX began to engage its partner organizations to plot a strategy to help prepare the media to effectively cover the elections and ensure a transparent process. Discussions were held with the LMC, LIWOMAC, and the PUL and a number of international partners including the Accra based African Elections Project. These discussions resulted in a concept paper for the Strengthened Media for Transparent Elections Initiative, which was presented to and approved by USAID.

3. PROJECT DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

The Strengthened Media for Transparent Elections Initiative was designed over the course of several months in early 2011 in close consultation with our CSML partners. Following numerous planning meetings, a program framework emerged that took into consideration the above mentioned problems, as well as conditions and climate on the ground in Liberia between the months of April 2010, when CSML began, and March 2011 when the concept paper was submitted to USAID. It also took into consideration the experiences and lessons learned from the 2005 elections, and recent elections in other West African nations.

The initiative was designed to support the electoral process through media outlets and media development organizations based upon the following assumptions:

1. Elections are a key event in consolidating democratic development and sustaining peace in Liberia
2. Many citizens are illiterate and do not understand the voting process, the electoral process

⁵ IREX. "Media Sustainability Index 2010." 2011.

3. Many citizens outside Monrovia do not have access to news and information and feel isolated from the political processes that affect their lives
4. Journalists and media organizations play a critical role in informing citizens so that they can effectively participate in civic and democratic processes
5. Most journalists still lack the skills and tools to do their work efficiently and effectively
6. Poor media coverage, distorted information, or the influence of bribery in the media could affect the outcome of the elections

Therefore, by supporting journalists to inform citizens in a fair, balanced and transparent manner, educated voters can capably participate in the elections and help to ensure the integrity of the electoral process.

Additionally, the program was designed to support peace in Liberia during the electoral season based upon the following assumptions:

1. Elections, while being important opportunities to practice democratic habits, are a time in which people, policies, and platforms compete with each other, thus causing conflict on the national and local level
2. Violent conflict has the potential to arise if the integrity of the electoral process is in question
3. Many Liberians do not understand the electoral process and believe that it can easily be manipulated
4. Many Liberians, particularly youth, are under-educated, unemployed and frustrated because they have not personally benefited from the nation's development
5. Weapons remain easily available in Liberia to mercenaries and ex-combatants who may have participated in conflicts in Guinea and Ivory Coast in recent years
6. Like other African countries, Liberia has a history of incumbent governing regimes rigging elections so that elections are believed not be a fair representation of the electorate's will

Therefore, by giving media outlets and media focused organizations tools to inform citizens and promote peace, such as conflict sensitive reporting training, detractors of peace will be discouraged from instigation of, and educated citizens will be less likely to participate in, violence.

Each component of the Initiative was based upon implicit and explicit program frameworks that took into consideration existing weaknesses, strengths, resources, and customs to achieve a desired result. Once implementation began, IREX and its partners reevaluated needs on the ground and adjusted and added to the Initiative to ensure the greatest impact.

The following are the major actions taken by the Initiative:

3.1. THE LIBERIA MEDIA CENTER

A. The Elections Reporting Center:

Establishment of an Elections Reporting Center and the use of ICT for transparent elections. This grew to include the On-time Results Reporting Website, which provided independent alternative results to the public.

B. The Elections Reporting Van:

Provision of an elections reporting van to help reporters get to political rallies and other events across the country.

The LMC recognized that the 2011 Elections, the country's first multi-party process in which a sitting president was to preside over an election as a candidate elections would be a crucial test and milestone of democratic development in Liberia. In addition to choosing a new legislature and the president, the elections presented Liberians with two distinct choices: consolidate the peace and security gains by reaffirming the legitimacy of democratic processes and national development, or resort to violence as a means to seizing power and allow the country to degenerate into chaos. The elections were to test the resolve of all Liberians, including the government, politicians, the voters, civil society and journalists, each of whom played a role in ensuring the integrity of the process and the maintenance of peace.

3.1.1. ELECTIONS REPORTING CENTER

The LMC established the Elections Reporting Center (ERC) to serve as a resource and nerve center for journalists covering the 2011 Presidential and Legislative Elections. Since its founding, the LMC has confronted the problem that many Liberian journalists do not have access to or know how to use tools of the journalistic trade. Many journalists have only a high school education and have very limited ability to use or access computers or the internet. Therefore, ERC was opened to allow all national and international journalists to gather current news from the field, use computers, the internet and other IT tools, and receive training. Equipped with state-of-the-art audio-visual media monitoring equipment, including desktop computers, laptops, high definition cameras, televisions and a call center, the ERC provided journalists an ideal working environment to conduct research and upload elections-related news stories.

The center was dedicated on August 26, 2011 by Vice President Joseph Boakai who deputized for President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf. The flow of journalists and the public to the Center was phenomenal in the days following the dedication. It averaged over 50 visitors and 15 users of the system daily. It recorded 80 users in its first 10 days. The center was equipped with computers and internet services to be used for researching, writing and filing stories. Between August and March, the ERC recorded

over 400 visitors, mostly journalists, who made use of the facility by sending images/photos, researching international opinions, writing and filing stories.

Among the Center's functions described below, it provided ICT for journalism trainings, transportation for journalists to pursue elections related stories, free access to a Caller User Group (CUG), and the ability to communicate and receive news and information through a free SMS platform. Additionally, the center monitored the media quality produced by Liberian journalists and reported strengths and weaknesses in the reportage.

3.1.1.1. "BECAUSE ACCOUNTABILITY MATTERS:" TRACKING MEDIA ELECTIONS COVERAGE

Journalists have a special duty to account for what they say, write or do. This accountability is cardinal to earning public trust, respect, and confidence. Though journalists are not elected to serve as public watchdogs, they are morally bound, however, to work within the limits of public trust at all times; and, therefore, are under obligation to preserve this responsibility. However, it is also incumbent upon civil society and peers to hold journalists and media outlets accountable when they fail to produce quality reportage.

With this in mind, the LMC launched their "*Because Accountability Matters*" report, which was an output of the media monitoring component of the Strengthened Media for Transparent Elections Initiative. The report successfully captured the performance of a significant segment of the Liberian print and electronic media regarding their coverage of the 2011 electoral process. This component of the program was managed by the Media Monitoring Unit of the Elections Reporting Center (ERC).

The media monitoring exercise covered elections reporting from July to November 2011. During that period, two reports, one for July to August, and one from September to October, were released. The *Because Accountability Matters* reports gauged media performance during the electoral period based on coverage and professionalism, and attempted to establish a correlation between media performance and its impact on the elections. The *Because Accountability Matters* project assessed the reportage of roughly 33 stories per day based upon two components:

The first component of the report focused on the media's ability to report on issues that should drive elections such as developing roads, electricity and water; the rising cost of basic commodities; social service delivery such as education and healthcare; jobs creating; and others. The issues that should drive the elections were indicated by an elections issues-mapping survey conducted by LMC in seven counties including Montserrado, the most populous county, earlier in the year.

The second component of the study, focusing on professionalism in the media, captured media performance during the period under review based on whether or not their coverage hinged on biases, partisan reporting, gender stereotyping, conflict sensitive reporting, ethical breaches and the general quality of the news/program content. This included their ability to access the candidates, including female candidates and political parties.

The report was shared with over 150 journalists and media outlets at a Media Ethics Conference that was held between the first round and the second round of the elections. *Because Accountability Matters* was intended to be a yardstick by which the media could measure and improve their performance. Despite the shortcomings of the Liberian media revealed by the monitoring, the outcome of the exercise indicates the media's robust engagement with the electoral process as the nation prepared for the first elections conducted by a post-war democratically elected government.

3.1.1.2. MEDIA DEVELOPMENT: STATE OF THE ART

Many Liberian journalists and media outlets do not have access to or the ability to use information communications technology (ICT) such as computers, the internet, or cellular communication systems. These technologies are increasingly recognized for their ability to facilitate civic participation and democratic engagement, particularly in under-developed regions of the world with poor infrastructure and educational systems. However, in Liberia aside from typing scripts in word processors, many journalists are not proficient in the use of ICTs to advance their work. With computers and media gadgets high priced, many media outlets are short on equipment, least to mention journalists themselves.

Under the Strengthened Media for Transparent Elections Initiative, ICT equipment and training were provided to over 50 media institutions and 300 journalists around the country. In total, they received 50 laptops loaded with open source software developed in Africa, 50 digital cameras, 40 digital voice recorders, and 30 internet-enabled mobile phones, training in the use of each of these items, and free access to the internet at the ERC. Through the LMC, the Initiative was also supported by a number of other donors, including the International Media Support (IMS) that provided an additional 20 internet enabled mobile phones for journalists.

The Initiative set up a Caller User Group (CUG) through which 300 journalists, registered to the group, could make calls and send SMSs to other journalists registered in the group without charge. A CUG directory was printed and distributed so that reporters would have the contact information of their counterparts in different locations across the country. The CUG facilitated an unprecedented exchange of information and live reports on many radio stations as news began to come in from outlying parts of the country, including River Gee County. "We did not have to switch our news to UNMIL radio, we simply used the caller directory to follow events in other parts of the country and our colleagues collaborated by providing live reports from their area", commented a community radio beneficiary of the program.

The ERC also allowed freelance and web-based journalists to conduct research and file news reports in a timely manner. With the high speed internet, the LMC's Facebook page kept the rest of the world in tune to the electoral process with live

"During the process, the ERC helped me a lot in filing my stories and pictures to foreign news outlets. Even in the middle of the night, the ERC was opened. This was an exciting moment and very important for the elections."

Ahmed Jalazon

text coverage of key campaign rallies, electoral events, voting, vote counting and results announcement.

In addition, the LMC's website (www.lmcliberia.com) became the first Liberian website to produce graphic images of the electoral process, including more than 2,000 photos and videos of political campaigns, rallies, and the unfortunate violence of November 7. The website registered the highest number of hits on Google Analytics during the heat of the elections season with 3.8 million hits (see the following section).

ICT equipment housed at the Center also allowed LMC monitors to track over 5,000 news reports for the period July to November 2011 covering newspapers, radio stations, television and community radio outlets as part of the *Because Accountability Matters* project mentioned in the previous section.

3.1.1.3. ONTIME RESULTS REPORTING

An important achievement of the Strengthened Media for Transparent Elections Initiative was the launching of an SMS information distribution system that was supported by the ICT tools put in place at the ERC and by the equipment and training provided to journalists in the field. The SMS platform was designed as part of CSML's 6th objective, which provides for the establishment of a "mobile phone based information distribution system" to "improve communication between the people and their leaders at the local level." Although Objective 6 was not designed specifically to support the elections, it had clear applications for providing support to journalists and citizens during the elections. The SMS platform piloted for the elections had two intended purposes: 1) Designated reporters used the system to text election results from selected polling centers to support the On-time Results Website and 2) Citizens used the system to text in concerns or issues on the elections to a server at the ERC.

IREX and the LMC worked with the two leading GSM companies during the elections to secure a short code (1011) through which information could be sent to the SMS platform for free. Information, including preliminary vote tallies from polling stations, was sent to the system by journalists and citizens via SMS. By using GSM technology to communicate information, rather than the internet, internet outages common in Liberia were avoided. Once information was received from the field, it was organized in a database housed on a server at the ERC. The information was verified, aggregated and posted to the LMC's website through an application created by a Liberian software company, MWETANA. The result was a public website containing preliminary election results gathered by journalists at polling stations around the country nearly as soon as the results were posted at each location.

The On-time Results Reporting Website was the first of its kind in Liberia; a similar independent elections results system was used in Nigeria by civil society actors to track polling tallies in their April 2011 elections. The system was supported by over 300 local journalists trained by the LMC, including 50 internal staff and a team of five consultants. Prior to its launch, the LMC facilitated a

Training of Trainers (TOT) for four SMS operators to conduct a series of regional training exercises in Bong, Nimba, Grand Gedeh, Lofa, Bassa and River Gee Counties. The training helped journalists and citizens understand how to use the SMS Platform to send elections related messages.

Not only did the system provide an opportunity for voters to express concerns about the electoral process, it also greatly reduced suspicion of vote rigging. In past elections in Liberia, fraud usually occurred when ballots and tally sheets were transported on poor and remote roads from polling stations to the county and district capitols for collection and verification. In the past, the citizens had to wait days before receiving official results from NEC. The system allowed journalists to convey the results directly from polling stations to an independent database at the LMC. Leading international news networks such as the BBC, ABC, CBS, CNN, Toronto Star, Reuters, AP, and others, all used the results in their reportage. Since the elections, national and international media organizations have hailed the LMC for enhancing community development and facilitating dialogue and access to information. The LMC was named Institution of the Year by four media organizations in Liberia for its contribution to the October 2011 Elections.

Following the elections the SMS Initiative was revised to return it to its original objective of improving communication between the people and their leaders. The information distribution system piloted during the elections at the ERC is being further developed to serve as a national platform for the enhanced system. It will be used to gather and distribute short news bits to journalists and citizens; to track development efforts and register complaints from citizens about development projects; and to facilitate public opinion polling on a variety of issues of interest. Additionally, there will be a number of regional mobile phone based information distribution hubs based at select community radio stations in CSML's 7 counties. These hubs will focus on information distribution at the local level.

3.1.2. ELECTIONS REPORTING VAN

Prior to the elections, CSML and the LMC met with journalists from around the country and asked them what support they thought they would need to adequately report on the elections in an accurate and balanced way. Along with needing training and equipment to facilitate their work, most of the journalists said that they needed transportation to elections events and to communities outside of Monrovia that feel that their interests and concerns are usually overlooked by the national government and press. Indeed, frustration in the counties with the lack of attention they receive by Monrovia is evident in most regions. Many media outlets do not have field reporters in the counties. In the past, some had to depend on the political parties and candidates for rides to political events in the counties, a practice that undermines the independence of the media.

To address this problem and get the journalists the resources they requested, CSML procured an 18 passenger van for the LMC to transport journalists to elections related events. Over the course of the campaign season and following the elections, the van made dozens of trips with Liberian and international journalists and media development practitioners. The van visited campaign events,

rallies, polling centers and other elections related activities and the NEC, debates (see below), and communities outside of the capital. The van was also able to cover incidences of violence occurring at the headquarters of the Congress for Democratic Change, the major opposition party.

As mentioned above, transportation infrastructure, including roads, is acutely underdeveloped in the counties. Therefore, there were many regions that the Elections Reporting Van could not reach. To overcome this problem, through the Initiative, the LMC was able to purchase 60 inexpensive motorcycles (50 with funding from CSML, and 10 with support from UNESCO) which it provided to community radio stations outside of Monrovia. The motorcycles assisted journalists from CRSs to reach the most isolated locales in Liberia, which was critical for collecting voting results from polling stations for the On-time Results Reporting Website.

3.2. THE LIBERIA WOMEN MEDIA ACTION COMMITTEE

A. Peace Actors:

Selection and training of 200 women and men from ten counties to serve as activists for peace in their various communities with the aim of mitigating violence during the elections.

B. The Mobile Platform:

Provision of a vehicle and broadcast equipment to LIWOMAC to be used by its radio, the Liberia Women Democracy Radio (LWDR), to visit hard to reach communities across the country and do live radio broadcasts.

It is often pointed out that women, and the issues they are most concerned with, do not receive enough attention in Liberia, either by the press or by traditional, local, and national leaders. Without a targeted focus on women and women's issues, this tendency would have very likely persisted during the 2011 Elections. Therefore, the Liberia Women Media Action Committee assumed a critical role in bringing the voices of women and other overlooked communities to the fore during the elections. LIWOMAC was able to engage women in elections discussions, and raised their profile and the profile of the issues they were most interested in to an unprecedented degree.

In planning its interventions, LIWOMAC designed a massive door-to-door peace campaign and recruited 200 "Peace Actors" from ten counties to facilitate the campaign. In the process, LIWOMAC consulted CSML's civil society partners WONGOSOL and WANEP, and the Congo Town Women Association and Dwan Town Women's Radio Listeners' Club to help with the recruitment of the Peace Actors. Each recruit is associated with one of the four groups.

3.2.1. VOICE FOR PEACE: THE REMARKABLE EXPERIENCE OF THE PEACE ACTORS

The mobilization of the Peace Actors was based on the assumption that many, if not most, Liberian citizens lack civic literacy, and that the elections could only be successful if informed voters participated and did not use violence. The Peace Actors were seen as a grassroots movement of ordinary citizens working together in their own communities to promote peace and support successful elections. They comprised 129 women and 71 men trained to educate citizens on the voting and electoral process; encourage voters to understand important policy and governance issues and make informed choices at the ballot box; and socialize communities not to discredit the elections or cause suffering by resorting to violence.

Each of the 200 Peace Actors participated in a comprehensive training program where they gained tools and skills to educate people on the elections and the need for nonviolence during the entire process. The trainer, an expert with decades of experience in using comedy and drama to conduct civic education, worked with two LIWOMAC facilitators to empower the Peace Actors over a 12 day period. The ten counties involved were divided into three different groups with each group undergoing four-day training. Topics covered during the training included:

- A Brief Historical overview of Elections in Liberia (1985, 1997 and 2005);
- The Role of Elections in Post Conflict Liberia;
- Identifying Issues that were Critical During the 2005 Elections;
- Introduction to Civic Education: Constitutional Review of the Doctrine of Separation of Power;
- Conflict Management;
- Identifying the Critical Issues Around this Year's Elections;
- Identifying Key Stakeholders in the Electoral Process;
- The Roles and Responsibilities of each of the Stakeholders;
- Critical Issues that could Undermine Citizens' Participation in the Electoral Process;
- Mapping Events that Could Lead to Violence During the Elections;
- Activities/Violence Reporting Through Mobile Phone to "Liberia2011.USHAHIDI.COM;"
- Identifying Roles and Responsibilities as Peace Actors; and
- Community Entry Strategies.

Following the training, a County Coordinator and Deputy Coordinator were nominated for each of the 10 counties in which the Peace Actors worked. Their role was to plan and monitor the activities of the Peace Actors from their county and report back to LIWOMAC and IREX. The Peace Actors formed teams that visited dozens of communities over the course of seven months. The teams developed action plans that included events and activities where they employed different approaches to voter education and peace messaging including: door-to-door outreach; town hall meetings, theater forums, snapshot, live cultural performances, town crier, talking drum, radio and storytelling, a practice of using traditional folklore or stories to demonstrate a point or send a message.

Peace Actors also produced broadcast messages and audio dramas, which were aired on LIWOMAC's radio station LWDR. The messages and dramas focused on the need for peaceful elections and presented alternatives to violence for resolving differences. These efforts were recognized by General Seth Obeng, ECOWAS's Special Representative to Liberia when he praised LWDR for leading the way in promoting peaceful elections and conflict sensitive reporting. In addition to voter education and peace messaging, the Peace Actors collected and submitted information on elections related events/incidents ranging from voter education activities to clashes between partisans in Monrovia, to the brutalization of a police officer by an angry mob in a campaign rally in Lofa County. The groups posted reports via SMS on elections related events on Ushahidi's Liberia2011.com website, a web portal used by many Liberian, West African and international organizations monitoring the elections, and to the LMC's Elections Reporting Website. Some of the reports (verbatim) provided by the Peace Actors are below:

Location: Yella, Lofa County. Date: September 30, 2011. Awareness on violence-free elections. A very big forum, held in Yella Town which brought together the elderly, the youth, women groups, aspirants and town chiefs. They were sensitized on how to tolerate one another despite their political differences. To the youth, not to be incited by their political candidates to destroy their opponents' properties, posters, stickers etc. Attendance: 150 plus people.

Totota Town, Bong County, Salala District. 14/10/2011. The election was peaceful; there was no violence during the process. Dramatized on the topic "Critical issues that could bring violence". Attendance: 400 persons.

Location: Fish Town River Gee County, Time: 3:00pm-5:30pm Held live forums with communities from in and around Fish town on election violence, told aspirants from our district to accept elections result. Told the youths that verbal assault can lead to election violence. Not to engage in unnecessary argument with other youths from different political parties and to consider Liberia above all else. Attendance: 300 people plus.

Location: Palepo-jaylipo. Time: 3-5:30pm. A very big forum brought together stakeholders in this community. The community people asked Senator Nathaniel Williams and other aspirants if they were reelected what would they do for their people? Others were given the chance to ask the aspirants questions that were on their minds for years unanswered. The town chief of this town thanked the aspirants for coming to the call of the ordinary people. Attendance: 520 people.

Location: ELWA Community, Paynesville, Montserrado County. A man believed to be a CDCian (member of CDC) and a Unity party Partisan got into an argument and the CDCian took a shovel and hit the other fellow on his head wounding him seriously. The man who hit his friend is now in police custody pending investigation.

Location: Paynesville, District 6; Unity Party headquarter in district 6, Paynesville was burned by unknown individual Saturday morning by . When we contacted residents of that community, there was no clue from them as to who burned the building.

A media house came under attack on Monday morning at about 3am; Love 105 FM on 10th Street Sinkor was allegedly attacked by unknown individuals in a red vehicle with tainted windshield. Petrol bomb was thrown on the building which set the building ablaze, burning the station's warehouse and one room before the Liberia Fire service helped to put off the fire. Two men were arrested in connection with the crime.

As the campaign season progressed, LIWOMAC and the Peace Actors noticed increasingly sharp exchanges between political rivals, which created a tense atmosphere and put many communities on edge. This was especially apparent in the days following the first round of voting. As the country prepared for the November 8 runoff, tensions were extremely high, and there were fears that violence between supporters of the leading parties was eminent. As a grassroots mechanism, the Peace Actors assessed the climate and determined that tensions were highest in several underserved slums in Monrovia. IREX, LIWOMAC and the Montserrado Peace Actors held a meeting to consider actions to encourage communities prone to instability to reject violence and recognize the legitimacy of the electoral process.

Community football (soccer) and kick ball tournaments commonly draw large crowds in Liberia and are recognized as an opportunity to project messages to a large number of people residing in a specific location. It was therefore decided that a series of athletic tournaments be hosted under the theme "Play by the Rules." The goal was to use sport to show citizens, and youth in particular, how individuals can participate in contests admirably and win or lose gracefully, and to promote respect for rule of law and non-violence. The tournaments were held in West Point, Old Road, New Kru Town and Duport Road, which are considered to be political battle ground communities. They are highly populated areas and where political parties often use youth to conduct campaigning.

The Peace Actors collaborated with "Right to Play", an international organization that uses sports and play to enhance child development in disadvantaged communities, to host the events. Performers were hired to use traditional or cultural dances to present peace messages to hundreds of spectators who had gathered for the games. The performers displayed cultural dances, depicting the country's political situation and the need for reconciliation, peace and non-violent elections. The Peace Actors, performing along with the dancers, acted out peace dramas and paraded around the field holding placards with:

"Liberia is the only nation we have. Say yes to peace & say no to violence"

"This is the last opportunity we have, so let's make the best use of this election"

"Violence has solved no problem"

“Respect the rules, vote right, vote your conscience”

3.2.2. MOBILE PLATFORM: LWDR’S OUTREACH AND ELECTORAL SENSITIZATION CAMPAIGNS

As noted above, Liberian media has often been criticized for neglecting women’s voices and communities outside of the capital. Additionally, the agenda for campaign coverage in Liberia is set by political parties and candidates. They drive media coverage, determining the issues, rallies, etc. to be spotlighted in the newspapers and on radio. For the most part, political reporting from the people’s perspective, especially those from rural communities, is rare in the Liberian media.

In order to make news coverage more equitable to underrepresented citizens during the 2011 Elections, and to provide an opportunity to the people to help shape campaign issues, LIWOMAC and its radio station, LWDR, created a Mobile Broadcast Platform. The Platform was essentially an all-terrain vehicle equipped with outside broadcast equipment, which allowed its journalists to report on issues that matter to women and voters in otherwise hard-to-reach communities outside of Monrovia.

LWDR’s Mobile Platform team identified a number of communities in which to hold live community forums. A technical team visited these communities to assess the reach of local CRSs that would broadcast the forum. Because the activity was in part an opportunity to encourage female journalists to more actively participate in elections coverage, LIWOMAC invited the Female Journalists’ Association of Liberia (FeJAL), a CSML beneficiary, to assign two of its members to work with the LWDR Mobile Platform team.

The team organized and held forums in various communities in 10 counties during the campaign season and post election period, giving visibility to rural citizens and their concerns. During this period, the Platform made three week-long journeys to upcountry communities where it hosted forums. Three counties were visited during each journey. In total, the team held 35 forums, all of which were broadcast live on LWDR and one or more local CRSs.

The forums were often emotionally challenging for participants who had never had an opportunity to share their feelings with an extended audience. Many participants spoke passionately about issues and their day-to-day frustrations which included: bad road conditions, high prices for essential goods, and the need for a non-violent electoral process. Though they freely discussed these issues, they were often skeptical that leaders in the capital would hear their concerns. “We are tired talking about these problems. But we beg those who will take power after the elections. If they will not do anything, we beg them to fix the roads,” one woman in Zwedru said. While in the field, the Platform also worked with Peace Actors to organize public voter education and peace meetings that were broadcast on LWDR and local outlets.

The Platform was a medium for amplifying the voices of citizens linking rural communities to the national elections, educating and informing the public about the electoral process, and promoting peace. In each community, the Platform team created a welcoming environment for women and encouraged their participation in the event and especially the discussions. For many rural women, participating in elections discussions live on the radio was unprecedented. Time and time again, the team was asked: “[a]re we being heard in Monrovia?”

3.3. THE PRESS UNION OF LIBERIA

A. *Taking the Candidates to the People:*

Selection and training of community radio journalists to conduct 66 debates across the country for candidates seeking to be elected to the National Legislature.

B. *Media Ethics Conference:*

Facilitation of a Media Ethics Conference to point out failures in news reportage and encourage journalists and their outlets maintain high standards and protect peace.

3.3.1. DIALOGUE FOR DEMOCRACY: TAKING THE CANDIDATES TO THE PEOPLE

Liberians have historically felt excluded from their leaders, policy making and governance. Seeing the 2011 elections as an opportunity to encourage interaction between candidates and the electorate, the Press Union of Liberia (PUL) conducted a series of 66 legislative debates throughout the country. The debates were a unique opportunity for voters to come face to face with current and future leaders as they never had before. Specifically, the debates allowed voters to draw attention to issues that matter to them, hear from the candidates about their positions and plans once elected, and to be able to hold those elected to their promises once in office.

The PUL developed a plan to train and maintain local debate teams in each county with each community radio station nominating a representative to the team. The plan was to hold the debates simultaneously across counties. County debate teams were necessary because poor road conditions during the rainy season precluded a national or regional debate team from reaching all of the target communities. An additional advantage to using local community radio journalists as moderators was that they live among the people and are familiar with the issues and players in each community. Therefore, they were better positioned to preside over a process to discuss the challenges and the possible solutions.

Electoral debates are new in Liberia; therefore, debate moderators required quality training to ensure that each debate was fair, appropriately focused on local issues, and avoided threatening peace. A Knight Fellow sponsored by UNESCO and the International Center for Journalists, volunteered to work with the PUL to develop a Debate Moderation Training. Following the first

Debate Moderation Training for Journalists in Gbarnga, she and the President of the PUL conducted the training in Tubmanburg for journalists from Bomi, Cape Mount and Gbapolu Counties. Two debate moderators from the Gbarnga training then conducted the training in Zwedru for journalists from Grand Gedeh, River Gee, Grand Kru, Sinoe, and Maryland counties. The final training was conducted in Buchanan for journalists from Grand Bassa and River Cess. In total, 34 CRS journalists were trained as debate moderators.

Over the course of two weeks, the PUL and the Debate Moderators hosted 66 debates in 13 of Liberia's 15 counties. The debates commenced in District #1, Tubmanburg, Bomi County on September 23rd and were conducted until October 9th, which was the official closing day of the campaign season. In total, 57 representative and 9 senatorial debates were conducted. The National Democratic Institute (NDI) conducted senatorial debates in 6 counties. In the counties where the NDI held debates, the PUL only conducted representative debates to avoid duplication.

The debates generated a high degree of interest and enthusiasm among the citizens even though candidates were not always available to participate in each debate due to multiple competing interests. It was often the case that when the debates ended the candidates and the electorate regretted that there was not more time to continue the discussions.

Two debates were cut short due to unusual circumstances that ironically highlighted the interest generated in the exercise. The first was a debate in Ganta, Nimba County, so well attended by citizens that it had to be stopped due to overcrowding. The second was a senatorial debate in River Gee that had to be halted towards the end when it was disrupted by incumbent Senator Nathaniel Williams, who had refused to participate in the debate, but showed up with his supporters shouting campaign slogans through a mega phone. Senator Williams was defeated in the elections.

3.3.2. MEDIA ETHICS CONFERENCE

The nature of the media business puts journalists in a position to influence any election. Contemporary history has proven that if the media is not conflict sensitive and measured in how it presents issues during tense times, it has the potential to intentionally or unintentionally incite people to violence. Kenya is a classic example in which journalists were accused of contributing to the 2007-2008 post-election violence that left more than one thousand people dead.

From the start of the campaign season, political parties and candidates were trading insults and accusations which contributed to a very tense atmosphere. It became clear very early in the season that some media institutions, particularly radio broadcasters, were enabling this behavior and fast becoming a part of the problem. Pundits accused some stations of partisan coverage. At the height of these tensions, stations began trading attacks and insults on each other rather than reporting the news or on issues, forcing the PUL to intervene before the situation escalated and threatened peace.

Cognizant of the fact that this lack of professionalism in the media runs contrary to CSML's goal of sustaining peace in Liberia, IREX and its partners held discussions on how to address the problem. IREX, the PUL and UNESCO agreed to organize an emergency conference under the theme: "Media Ethics and Conflict Sensitive Reporting." The PUL insisted on having the conference immediately due to the tense atmosphere at the time. Therefore, the event was planned and hosted in 4 days' time.

Nearly 150 persons attended including media managers and editors, community radio producers from all 15 counties, ECOWAS's Special Envoy to Liberia, Lt. General Seth Obeng, the Women Coalition for Peace, the Deputy Minister of Information, and a representative from the Public Information Office of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). A former professor of journalism at the University of Liberia, who is now Commissioner of the Liberia Telecommunications Authority (LTA), Lamini Warritay, served as the keynote speaker. At the end, delegates adopted a six count resolution, committing themselves to work to ensure that the elections were peaceful:

1. To abide by journalistic ethics by reporting accurately, fairly and impartially on news, including prior, during and after Liberia's elections.
2. To report in the public interest, reinforcing peacebuilding in our country in pursuit of the truth.
3. To adopt conflict sensitive language in reporting on the country's elections, and to be mindful of announcing preliminary results, unless based on NEC's results released by NEC officials at polling centers.
4. To cease the stereotyping of women candidates for political office, and to encourage and support equality of male and female journalists in the newsroom.
5. To not be subject to bribes in pursuit of news stories.
6. To educate the public and refrain from reporting news from unverified sources.

3.4.ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE CSOS AND CRSS

A. Referendum Forums

Provision of civic education to citizens on the referendum process and propositions

B. Voter Education Support by CSOs

Provision of funding and technical support to CSOs and CRSs to provide face to face voter education and peace messages directly to their communities through 51 small grants.

C. National Elections Symposium

Facilitation of a symposium that allowed NEC and other key actors supporting the elections to fully explain the electoral process and steps taken to ensure that they are fair.

3.4.1. REFERENDUM FORUMS

Although this report focuses primarily on activities conducted under the Strengthened Media for Transparent Elections Initiative, IREX felt that it could best leverage the impact of the CSML Program as a whole by focusing key activities planned for its other 7 objectives on the referendum and elections. This focus resulted from the recognition by IREX's Liberian partners that there was a tremendous amount of need with regards to supporting the referendum and electoral process and the unique opportunity the referendum and elections presented for civil society and the media to participate in activities supporting dialogue between citizens and their leaders.

In April 2011, two months prior to the General Elections, a National Referendum was held. The referendum included four propositions that would have amended the constitution by changing the residency requirement for presidential and vice presidential candidates from ten to five years; increasing the retirement age of the Chief Justice, Justices of the Supreme Court and Judges of subordinate courts of records from 70 to 75 years; changing the election date from October to November; and allowing legislative elections to be determined by simple rather than absolute majority. Three of these propositions would have directly impacted the elections, and opposition parties accused the ruling Unity Party of trying to manipulate the process to amend the constitution in its favor.

Activities supporting the referendum began in earnest in the spring of 2011 with the Media Development Forums (MDF). The MDF, part of CSML's 4th objective, were initiated to allow citizens in 20 communities (almost 3 in each of the 7 counties) to openly discuss important issues with leaders from civil society and government. However, as excitement and confusion mounted concerning the referendum, a decision was made within CSML to narrow the focus of the MDF to understanding the referendum.

The Referendum Forums were carried out in collaboration with LIWOMAC and LWDR radio and brought citizens face to face with government officials who had been part of developing the referendum items, NEC officials tasked with managing the referendum, and members of civil society who explained the impact the referendum items would have on their daily lives. Dozens of citizens participated in the Referendum Forums which were hosted in easy to access public places such as tea houses, near markets, or at city halls. Some of the forums were broadcast live on LWDR and CRSs to an expanded audience.

3.4.2. VOTER EDUCATION BY CSML'S CSOS

As concerns grew over the lack of information available to voters about the referendum and elections process, CSML held a consultative meeting with its largest civil society and media partners to discuss the lack of information, other threats to peace and possible responses. It was decided that CSML would dedicate its activity grants, part of CSML's 1st objective, to voter education and peace promotion for the referendum and elections.

CSML awarded two sets of grants to 23 CSOs for elections related activities. The first set of activity grants focused on voter education for the August referendum and totaled \$36,752. Through the activities they directly engaged more than 23,000 citizens in 131 communities. Additionally, many of the voter education events hosted through these grants were broadcast on community radio stations and reached an unknown number of listeners.

The second set of activity grants focused on the presidential and legislative elections, for which there were fears that some candidates' statements could lead to violence. There was also heightened attention on this event because the referendum results yielded a large number of invalid ballots, which resulted in controversy and allegations that the NEC favored the Unity Party. A total of \$52,498 was granted to 22 CSOs whose messages reached 58,584 voters and were also broadcast to thousands on CRS. Illustrative activities include:

The Association of Liberian Community Radio (ALICOR) received a grant to host its Annual General Meeting on the theme, "The Role of Community Radio in the Ensuing 2011 Elections." A discussion was led by the President of the PUL on the code of conduct for elections reporting, while a National Election Commission (NEC) representative spoke on its expectations of journalists during the election season. The three-day meeting was attended by 98 members from 49 radio stations.

The Development Education Network of Liberia (DEN-L) was given a grant for activities promoting a peaceful runoff election in Bong, Nimba, and Lofa Counties. The activities focused on the voting process, saying no to election violence, and reducing invalid votes. The messages were delivered in different ways before, during, and after kickball and soccer tournaments that involved 18 high schools and included the awarding of cash prizes. Over 3000 people attended the first tournament which was repeated three times.

3.4.3. SYMPOSIUM

Although the first round of the elections commenced smoothly and was deemed successful, CSML's civil society actors in the field noticed potential weaknesses within the process to be addressed before the presidential run-off. The electoral process and laws governing it remained unclear to many voters. For example, it was unclear which votes were valid and invalid, what happened to ballot boxes between the polling stations and NEC's office, and how official vote tallies would be validated and declared. Additionally, minor reports of isolated irregularities during the first round of the elections were noted by national and international observers, who generally agreed that the irregularities were not significant enough to call into question the integrity of the process.

Nevertheless, the irregularities, and complaints by opposition parties about the management of the National Referendum, were easily exploitable by parties wishing to discredit the process. Rumors abounded that certain parties were being favored by NEC in terms of campaign laws and media coverage, and that needed to be addressed if the second round of the elections was to be conducted as successfully as the first. Finally, civil society actors noted tensions between party supporters that they feared might turn violent.

Against this backdrop, the National Elections Commission (NEC) announced on October 25, that a runoff election would be held between the two leading parties, the ruling Unity Party (UP) and the Congress for Democratic Change (CDC), on November 8th, and preparations began for the runoff.

In recognition of the weaknesses noted above, IREX held a second consultative meeting with its largest civil society and media partners to share impressions of the electoral climate, information about problems they foresaw in their communities, and to propose activities to minimize the risk of violence or spoiled elections. At the meeting, it was observed that misunderstanding of the electoral processes and distrust of NEC was an important threat to peace. This was also noted in a report released by the International Crisis Group on peace in Liberia ahead of the elections in August⁶. The group considered ways to promote understanding of the process and defuse the growing tension between those tasked with conducting the election and party supporters.

It was agreed that CSML and its partners would host a National Symposium that would explain the electoral process step-by-step and be broadcast by TV and radio stations. The Symposium, entitled “Road to the Run-Off: Understanding the 2011 Electoral Processes,” was hosted by the Press Union of Liberia (PUL) and the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) at the University of Liberia on November 1st with the participation of the political parties, NEC, and national and international elections observers.

Speakers included the NEC’s Acting Chairwoman (NEC’s Chairman had resigned earlier in the week), the President of the Press Union of Liberia, the Regional Coordinator of WANEP, elections observers from The Carter Center, and the IREX CoP. Explanations of each step of the electoral process were presented by NEC in simple English, using Power Point projections and were followed by adequate time for questions and answers. Specific topics discussed included ballots and voting, vote counting and results certification, and complaints and appeals. Each session was followed by a lengthy question and answer period.

“This event has helped me understand the electoral process, which I did not understand before, even though I am a university student. Also, it became clear to me how vulnerable those who do not have the opportunity to educate themselves on our laws are. Illiteracy is really a disease.”

University of Liberia Student

⁶ The International Crisis Group. Liberia: “How Stable is the Recovery?” August 19, 2011.

This allowed NEC to provide a detailed explanation of how the electoral process was designed and how it would commence, which the NEC appreciated.

Of the 181 attendees, 52 represented CSOs working in voter education, 40 represented CRSs from around the country, and 33 represented other print, television, and for profit-radio. In addition, several representatives of political parties attended, including a presidential candidate who was defeated in the first round, a representative of the Information Ministry, a member of the House of Representatives, and officials from the European Union and UNMIL.

Having recently witnessed post-election violence by two of its neighbors, and being prone to instability itself, there was great fear that misunderstandings during the elections process could threaten peace in Liberia. Therefore, promoting violence free elections became a paramount concern for all.

4. OVERVIEW OF RESULTS

4.1. OUTREACH TO THE ELECTORATE

Although large investments were made in the media sector during the Strengthened Media for Transparent Elections Initiative, the primary audience of the intervention and CSML's other election related activities was the electorate, including the political parties, their candidates and supporters. This also included non-voters who may have been too young to vote or who chose not to vote but still had the agency to disrupt the electoral process through unruly acts or violence. CSML believed that if it could educate voters to make informed decisions, exercise their civic duty by supporting the electoral process, and rejecting violence, the electoral process would run smoothly and be perceived as legitimate by the country and the international community. This would represent a significant step in democratic development in the country.

4.1.1. THE REFERENDUM

Through the MDF's, communities were able to ask questions to lawmakers who were involved in developing the propositions, officials from NEC who would facilitate the process, and members of civil society that could explain the potential impacts of the referendum on communities. Many citizens attending the forums mentioned that they had never heard of the referendum prior to the event. The impact of the MDFs, therefore, was that thousands of voters who attended the event, and an untold number of those listening to the event on radio, had a greater understanding of the referendum process and propositions and were encouraged to participate in the referendum.

In addition to the MDFs, 22 CSOs received grants to conduct voter education projects to explain the referendum in their communities. The events they hosted served a similar purpose and impact as the MDFs, but the CSOs who hosted them used a variety of techniques, including town hall/palava hut style meetings, radio talk shows, radio announcements and jingles, sports tournaments, town

criers, flyers, street theatre and mobile musical outreach to help clarify the referendum and encourage participation. These events attracted thousands of citizens throughout CSML's 7 counties.

4.1.2. THE ELECTIONS:

Prior to the first round of the elections, LIWOMAC trained 200 Peace Actors from 10 counties to deliver voter education and peace messages to communities, and to report elections related events and issues they encountered in their communities. The Peace Actors used methods similar to those employed by the CSOs during the referendum period, but they were able to broaden the Initiative's reach to new communities and additional counties.

One important outcome of their work was that they were able to visit communities near their homes and encourage voters to consider and discuss important issues that typically drive elections in mature democracies, rather than following personality cults or voting for the candidates that "gave rice." They visited thousands of communities to encourage discussion on elections issues, encourage political and civic awareness, explain the voting process and encourage participation, and to promote peace in communities.

However, the most important impact of the work of the Peace Actors was that their presence in communities opened up a space for constructive discussion on socio-political issues surrounding the elections. This space linked the people and their concerns with politicians and policy makers. Another important impact of their work is that they were able to encourage greater participation from women in the dialogue, whose voices received much less exposure in the media during the elections according to *Because Accountability Matters*. Finally, the Peace Actors sensitized citizens to the elections being contested and implored citizens not to resort to violence. Many citizens interviewed following contact with the Peace Actors mentioned "rejecting violence" as a key message they received from the Peace Actors.

In addition to the activities described above, the Peace Actors also helped organize the various community forums for LWDR's Mobile Platform, which afforded LWDR the opportunity to produce high-quality, live broadcasts from very remote locations in 10 counties. Typically, the Peace Actors would mobilize the community and contact speakers or panelists ahead of the Mobile Platform's arrival.

The combined efforts of the Peace Actors and the Mobile Platform had several effects. They informed voters of the electoral process and encouraged them to participate in the process peacefully. More generally, it encouraged civic literacy by helping citizens understand how they could contribute to social and political processes in their community.

LWDR was praised by General Seth Obeng, ECOWAS's Special Representative to Liberia, for being a leader in conflict sensitive reporting and educating the public on the electoral process.

Significantly, a majority of the Peace Actors, 129, were females from a variety of age groups. The events gave them the opportunity to demonstrate their ability to be leaders in their communities and to facilitate professional, informative, and high quality events that are beneficial to all. Because this opportunity allowed CSML to help women find their voice in their communities during an election season, the Peace Actors were able to highlight issues that are of particular importance to women, where print and broadcast media had been unable to do so. This promoted participation and engagement during the campaign season.

Citizens that encountered the Peace Actors reported having a very positive impression of them in terms of the information they were able to provide on the election and their unbiased approach to voter education. A number of audience members felt encouraged to participate in the election following interactions with the Peace Actors. Others felt that the Peace Actors “helped restore peace during the elections.” Those surveyed had several suggestions for how the role of the Peace Actors might be expanded following the elections, such as conducting civic education on other topics and in other communities, expanding their reach to all of the counties, and including representation from all tribes among the Peace Actors.

Those surveyed about their encounters with the Mobile Platform had nearly as high an impression as they did with the Peace Actors in each of the four survey questions. As with the Peace Actors, respondents also suggested that the Mobile Platform continue to visit communities and facilitate discussions on a number of socio-political issues and that the reach of the Platform be extended to all of Liberia’s regions.

A series of grants were provided to CSOs to convey voter education and peace messages to citizens. Small Grants were given to 22 CSOs and eight CRSs. Through the grants, the CSOs were able to convey messages to voters through face-to-face interactions at football tournaments, door-to-door outreach, or street theatre to almost 30,000 citizens. The radio stations, on the other hand, were able to create civic education and peace programming and broadcast these messages to an untold number of listeners. The impact of these efforts was that voters who were exposed to the messages understood the voting process, how to make informed decisions when voting and that violence should play no role during the elections.

4.1.3. THE DEBATES:

One of the most industrious activities of the Strengthened Media for Transparent Elections Initiative was the training of 34 journalists to moderate debates and to host no fewer than 66 legislative debates in 14 counties in just a couple of weeks. This was an effort that was unprecedented in Liberia and brought dozens of candidates face to face with thousands of voters who were very anxious to hear from the candidates for themselves. One difficulty with hosting debates was that they are typically seen as opportunities for lesser known challengers to distinguish themselves. Therefore, it was difficult to get incumbents to agree to participate in debates. Two hundred sixty (260) Candidates participated in the 62 debates hosted by the PUL. Of those that

participated, only 12 were incumbents. Twenty-Five (25) of the candidates that participated in the debates won their elections. Only four of the 12 incumbents who participated in the elections won their elections.⁷

The largest and most immediate impact of the debates was that voters could see their candidates speak about important elections topics, which were mindfully chosen by the trained moderators. The debates encouraged voters to vote for candidates based upon issues in their communities and not on personalities. It is hoped that a secondary impact of these events will be that voters, now familiar with their candidates' platforms, will be able to hold those elected to the promises they made and the policies they proposed during the debates now that they are in office.

"The Elections Reporting Center was a key and major player that touched everyone, including our president Ellen Johnson-Serleaf. She followed the site developed by the LMC and we are convinced all the major parties followed the site."

Norris Tweh
Deputy Minister of Information

The debates received the highest marks from audience members surveyed about their impact, scoring just higher than the Peace Actors. Many respondents said that the event allowed them to vote based on issues rather than friendship. They also commented that they came away from the event feeling that they had a sense of the candidate's plans as well as their track records. They also felt it was important to see their candidates face-to-face. Finally, audience members said it encouraged enthusiasm and excitement in the electoral process about the opportunity to participate in the elections.

4.1.4. THE ELECTIONS REPORTING CENTER

The On-time Results Reporting Website (www.lmcliberia.com) was the ERC's primary public face during the elections and unquestionably received the broadest exposure and fanfare of any of CSML's Strengthened Media for Transparent Elections Initiative activities. The website had two purposes -- to host news and information on the elections and campaign, and to host on-time preliminary elections results reporting tabulation. The latter of the two was followed widely in Liberia and abroad by media institutions, voters, and politicians and parties alike. This independent tabulation was made possible by a team of over 300 reporters who collected voting results as soon as they were posted at polling centers around the country and SMS'd them to the ERC. The results were verified and placed on line.

Following the first round of elections, the site received over 3.8 million hits in the days following the elections. This was a phenomenal achievement considering that there are only about 1.7 million voters. The impact of the website was compounded exponentially by CSML and non-CSML radio

⁷ Of the 66 debates hosted by the PUL, statistics on participation were unfortunately not reported by organizers of the 4 debates hosted in River Gee. Therefore, the stats in this paragraph omit those debates.

stations and print media in Liberia and abroad, which frequently referred to the site in their news reportage as the results were updated. Because the results were collected and verified by reporters in the field, and because the results were taken from a representative sample of polling stations, the program could be confident that the preliminary results that were posted were accurate.

This had several impacts. First, it served as a truly independent source, non-governmental, for tabulated elections results. Because the results matched NEC's official tabulation very closely, it helped to legitimize the official results released by NEC, boost confidence in the electoral process, and discourage allegations that NEC allowed the governing party to manipulate the results of the elections. Second, it prepared citizens for the official results once they were released so that they knew what to expect, thereby avoiding confusion. Third, and related to the second, it discouraged partisans and political parties from spreading baseless rumors about the integrity of the results. Finally, although the NEC showed no intention of manipulating the results, the existence of the independent election results reporting website would have discouraged any party from doing so.

Those who visited the site generally found the website to be useful. A high majority of those who used the website reported that they found it useful in providing background about the elections and said that it helped them to make an informed decision in the elections. A common sentiment voiced about the site was that the website convinced them that the elections were free and fair. Finally, some reported that the website encouraged them to vote, even though they had planned to abstain.

It should be noted that some risk was involved with this activity. Had data collection or the matrix yielded results that were significantly different from NEC's, the activity would have caused a great deal of confusion that would have surely resulted in rumors and speculation. Also, had NEC's official results been inaccurate, the activity would have delegitimized the electoral process. In either case, if the unofficial results had not matched NEC's official results, there would have been a significant danger of conflict and violence. This activity should be replicated with great care.

4.2.SUPPORT TO REPORTERS

The main assumption underpinning the Strengthened Media for Transparent Elections Initiative was that if media were able to report in an accurate, balanced and transparent manner, a better informed electorate would participate in the election peacefully. In order for journalists to provide the kind of improved information needed to support this assumption, significant technical assistance was required to ensure journalists and media outlets had the tools and training required. Thus, peaceful election by informed voters was the goal, and largely achieved through considerable aid to the media sector. Therefore, the Initiative not only benefitted the Liberian people at large, but journalists and media outlets in particular. The first opportunity for the media sector to benefit from CSML's election-related activities was through a series of four elections and conflict sensitive reporting trainings. These trainings set the groundwork for the interventions that followed.

4.2.1. THE ELECTIONS REPORTING CENTER (ERC)

Following the trainings, the LMC established its ERC in Monrovia, which served as a base for elections reportage, and the collection of elections related media. The impact of the Center was that it provided dozens of journalists with access to computers, high speed internet, and specialized trainings on ICT, media coding and other relevant topics. The Center became a hub where Liberian and international journalists, and media development professionals could meet, gather the latest news, and assess the performance of the media and the security climate. During the elections period, hundreds of media professionals visited the ERC, which suggests that the ERC was highly valued by journalists and others involved in the elections process.

An important function of the ERC was to collect and assess the quality of elections reportage among major media outlets. The Center assessed the quality of thousands of media products covering the elections and reported on their quality in two publications released in September and November entitled *Because Accountability Matters*. The intention of the publications was to grade media institutions on several aspects of the quality of their elections coverage and to encourage them to improve when they were not living up to industry standards.

On the whole, comparison between the two issues of the publication did not show that the media's performance had improved from the period of July-August to September-October, and in some cases declined. This suggests that the publication, while an important means of assessing the media industry in and of itself, did not have a positive impact on the quality of reportage during the period of July-October.

In particular, media coverage focused too heavily on Montserrado at the expense of the rural counties. It ignored female candidates, and focused on personalities rather than substantive issues. Media outlets also tended to provide more favorable coverage of candidates and parties that purchased advertisements from their outlets. This habit evenly resulted in vitriol between media outlets seen to favor opposing candidates. Although the comparison between the two issues of the publication did not show any improvement in the media's performance, the reports could serve as an important tool to guide media development experts in designing election related media trainings in the future. A consolidated version of the two reports is expected to be released later this year.

In addition to the ERC, journalists traveling to the field received a series of tools intended to aid them as they pursued stories. Among those tools, journalists received ICT equipment, such as computers, smart phones, voice recorders and cameras, and were trained on their use. Additionally, an SMS platform and Caller User Group were set up so that journalists could communicate with each other and with the ERC for free. These activities had three effects: first, and most importantly, they allowed the journalists to report with greater speed and accuracy on the elections than ever before. Reporters were able to use these resources to gather information, stories and images that assisted them in generating quality news and information for citizens. Second, and also important, these resources allowed them to send information to the ERC to be

posted to its website, which played a major role in distributing accurate information, ensuring transparency, and preventing misinformation and rumors during voting and vote counting. During voting, the journalists both supported the website by providing information to it, and benefited from it as they were able to use the sites polling tabulations in their reportage. Third, the media created by the journalists that used these resources was posted to the Online Media Resources Clearinghouse that was hosted by the PUL.

CSML provided an Elections Reporting Van to the ERC to carry journalists to political rallies and other elections related events. The van made several trips to cover campaign events, polling and other events from which election stories were produced. One positive, but unintended outcome of the van was that reporters traveling on board the van felt it legitimized them and protected them from intimidation and manipulation by political candidates and party supporters as they pursued stories.

Noting the increasingly contentious media climate in mid-September, and fearing that it could lead to violence if not checked, CSML and UNESCO brought together 150 journalists and others from around the country to a Media Ethics Conference. The purpose of the conference was to point out ethical infractions noticed in the media during the elections period, to remind them of their commitment to report in a fair, balanced and conflict sensitive manner, and to ask them to renew their commitment to those ends. As noted above, the conference was organized in only four days in response to the increasing threat of violence and, unfortunately there was not time to develop indicators to measure its impact. However, the *Because Accountability Matters* publication for the period of September and October suggests that the media's performance over this period did not greatly improve. In particular, several media outlets received poor marks for producing biased stories which often favored the politician who owned or purchased advertising time or space at the outlets. Similarly, the media outlets failed to focus their reportage on substantive campaign issues. The report noted that media institutions were "accused of dabbling in embellishments, inducement and sensationalism." Importantly, it also states that "[t]his period under review was characterized by a sharp division within the media landscape despite an ethics conference convened by UNESCO and IREX to address the problem."

4.3.SUPPORT FOR THE PROCESS

The combination of outreach to the electorate and support to journalists was intended to support the electoral process as a whole. However, the Strengthened Media for Transparent Elections Initiative also enabled CSML to offer direct support to NEC. Along with the voter education efforts of IREX and other organizations, two activities in particular clearly impacted the NEC's ability to establish itself as a capable, independent and transparent body.

The first activity, mentioned in detail above, was the On-time Results Reporting Website. Because the Initiative put technology in place to independently collect and tally vote totals from polling stations around Liberia, and because the results tabulated by CSML and the NEC were nearly

identical, this assured voters that the polling and vote tallying process was fair and transparent (see section 2 of this report). This effort certainly discouraged most parties that fared poorly during the elections from spreading rumors about foul play as was widely feared. The impact of this was that confusion among the electorate was manageable and widespread violence was avoided.

The second activity of the Initiative intended to support the electoral process was a day-long symposium entitled “Road to the Run Off: Understanding the 2011 Electoral Processes.” The symposium, hosted by WANEP and PUL, was held one week after the Chairman of NEC had resigned and just a week before the second round of the elections. At that time, many rumors were circulating that the electoral process had not been transparent and unfairly favored the ruling UP party. Therefore, the symposium was hosted to clearly explain each step of the voting and vote counting process in full and explain how official results would be arrived upon fairly and transparently. The event was attended by 181 people and was broadcast on TV and radio. While this was an excellent opportunity for the NEC and its Acting Chairperson to clarify the process and establish its legitimacy, the second round of the election that followed the symposium was boycotted by the opposition party. Therefore, the impact of the activity is difficult to ascertain. It is noteworthy that no serious, credible complaint was lodged by the opposition party following the election, although this does not speak to the impact of the symposium.

“This [symposium] helped me understand the electoral process, which I did not understand before, even though I am a university student. Also, it became clear to me how vulnerable those who do not have the opportunity to educate themselves on our laws are. Illiteracy is really a disease”
Student

5. LESSONS LEARNED

5.1. LIBERIA MEDIA CENTER

Several lessons were learned through the *Because Accountability Matters* project. All sectors of the media must improve on ethical reportage and professionalism by producing quality and balanced news that is confirmable and does not sensationalize events or present misinformation. The LMC has already held three conferences to publicize the findings of media monitoring to the industry. Although some media outlets cited for professional and/or ethical transgressions have expressed dissatisfaction with the exercise, a majority of the media institutions acknowledged that the media monitoring exercise has positively impacted Liberian media practitioners and institutions. Media monitoring will continue into the future.

One lesson learned during the project’s implementation had to do with the Elections Reporting Van. First, poor road conditions precluded the van from traveling to many up-country regions, which significantly limited the van’s effectiveness in reporting on up-country issues. This is evidenced by the *Because Accountability Matters* publications, which indicated that only a small

percentage of elections reportage came from or covered issues outside of Montserrado. Additionally, the changing schedules of the parties made it difficult for the LMC and journalists to plan trips to campaign events. Finally, many journalists complained that, while they appreciated free transportation, they did not have access to per diem for long daytrips or overnight trips, which limited the distance reporters were willing to travel in search of stories.

5.2. LIBERIA WOMEN MEDIA ACTION COMMITTEE

One complication experienced by LIWOMAC that became a learning experience had to do with the purchase of the outside broadcast equipment for LWDR's Mobile Platform. There was significant delay in the equipment being delivered on time by the U.S. supplier. To ensure that the delay did not impact its work, LIWOMAC used a telephone interface device, borrowed from LMC, to do live broadcasts from communities across the 10 counties. The device allowed the OB (outside broadcast) team to use a telephone line to transmit audio from the field.

An important lesson learned through LIWOMAC's experience in the communities is that many voters are still eager to sell their votes for handouts rather than by voting for representatives who will protect their interests. For many voters, the elections season was "chopping time." Food is often called "chop" in Liberia, and "chopping time" refers to a period of time in which one can receive free handouts. Some politicians and political observers accuse some journalists of also exhibiting this attitude by taking bribes, or kato, from politicians in exchange for favorable media coverage. Correcting the willingness of citizens to sell their vote, and journalists' willingness to give up their professional integrity for money, will require a sustained and systematic effort. For example, during the elections, western media reported that Prince Yormie Johnson, the candidate winning the third highest number of votes during the first round of the presidential election, "lambasted the sitting president for corruption, while an aid fretted about running out of cash to pay off journalists for good coverage"⁸.

A positive lesson learned by LIWOMAC was that empowered citizens can engage in national processes, affect positive change and achieve significant outcomes in Liberia. During the elections, the Peace Actors were very effective in motivating citizens to participate peacefully in the elections, thereby furthering democratic development. Many who encountered the Peace Actors suggested that the Peace Actors broaden their activities by conducting civic education and outreach for communities on a greater variety of issues. The majority of Peace Actors themselves came away from the experience feeling that they had greatly contributed in the communities they reached.

The final lesson learned was that radio has tremendous potential to amplify the voices of citizens and include isolated communities in national debates. Greater opportunity to extend participatory

⁸ The Economist. "African Democracy: A Glass Half-full." March 31, 2012.

live radio discussions into communities has the potential to significantly further democratic participation in Liberia. Additionally, journalists' skill in moderating participatory live radio discussions should be enhanced to ensure that the country's political and development agenda is informed by its citizens.

5.3.PRESS UNION OF LIBERIA

In organizing the debates, the PUL experienced many delays due to circumstances beyond their control. During the referendum, voters rejected an important proposition governing the electoral process that would have allowed for a simple majority to determine winning candidates in the legislative elections. The outcome of this referendum was contested in the Supreme Court by the Chairman of the Unity Party, and it was eventually ruled that a simple majority would be enough to win. However, during these weeks, many candidates were focused on the court case and were not available to participate in debates resulting in a delay in starting the debates.

Boundaries for electoral regions determining how political aspirants registered their candidacy and ultimately what communities the candidates would campaign in were late in being drawn. This also resulted in the delay of the debates, because some political aspirants were unclear where exactly their constituency was located geographically and what debate they should participate in.

There were also many difficulties in coordination between the PUL, the parties, and NGOs involved in other election related activities. Therefore, competing events [including campaign rallies], prevented some candidates from attending debates in some districts. Other candidates did not feel inclined to participate in the debates because organizers failed to follow up with them and secure their buy-in to the event.

Other lessons learned were foreseeable by the PUL and managed as best as was possible. For example, because there is no history of electoral debates in Liberia, it was particularly difficult to find a debate trainer to train moderators and organizers for the debates. This delayed the debate schedule and increased pressure on the PUL to conduct a large number of debates in a short period of time.

Similarly, because there was little experience with organizing debates in Liberia, several of the debates were inadequately planned and managed. One significant problem, mentioned above, was controlling the crowds that attended these popular events. This problem was exacerbated by the limited amount of time for planning resulting from the above mentioned reasons. Unfortunately, bad road conditions upcountry made it impossible for some debate planners to receive assistance from the PUL on the ground.

6. PART TWO: IMPACT ASSESSMENT SURVEY

This portion of the report details the results of a survey conducted to determine the impact of the various activities carried out by CSML partners under the Strengthened Media for Transparent Elections Initiative. It examines the outcomes of the various trainings that aimed at preparing journalists and Peace Actors for their roles in the 2011 Elections. It also provides insight into stakeholders' perceptions of the CSML activities.

Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected to measure the impact of CSML activities. The results of interviews and surveys with over 300 journalists, Peace Actors and community stakeholders suggest that CSML-facilitated activities were successful in helping the media and civil society sector bring information about the elections to Liberians.

While many of the activities focused on election information, it is clear that there is interest for some activities to continue in different forms to strengthen the media and civil society in Liberia. Enhanced access to technology and transportation can help improve general news reporting. The Peace Actors and Mobile Platform could address other non-election topics such as human rights and women's issues. The PUL moderators could facilitate other types of community debates and strengthen a culture of civil discourse in communities.

6.1.METHODOLOGY

6.1.1. METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The Impact Assessment Survey included three major dimensions. The first sought to better understand the extent to which the computers, mini-van and other ICT media technologies at the Elections Reporting Center enhanced reporting of the elections.

The second dimension of the survey asked Peace Actors and key community stakeholders that participated in programs facilitated by the Liberia Women Media Action Committee (LIWOMAC) to share their perceptions and experiences.

The final component of the Impact Assessment Survey inquired about the impact of the debates. The survey asked journalists of the Press Union of Liberia (PUL), who were trained in election debates to rate and describe their experiences. To measure the impact that the debates had on Liberian citizens, CSML interviewed people who attended the debates.

In total, the data from random surveys with over 300 people involved at some level in the elections provides a well-rounded picture of the impact of CSML efforts to support media and civil society during the election period.

6.1.2. RESEARCH DESIGN

The qualitative and quantitative results provide insight into the impact of CSML efforts. A stratified sampling technique was used to collect the data for the surveys. The data were gathered from participants of CSML trainings and from the Liberian citizens who had direct contact with media and civil society actors during the elections. The goal was to measure the experiences and performance of the three main partners—LMC, PUL and LIWOMAC. Nine (9) different survey instruments were developed to assess Objective 8. Over 30 enumerators were recruited and trained to conduct random surveys in Montserrado, Bong, Lofa, Nimba, Grand Bassa, Bomi, and Grand Gedeh Counties. The surveys were administered to four separate types of target groups that CSML believed would be key to successful elections.

Target group one included journalists and editors who had benefitted from the LMC’s On-time Elections Reporting Center, mini-van and ICT reporting trainings.

Target group two included journalists who were trained as debate moderators and a sample of audience members who attended the debates.

Target group three included community members such as chiefs, youth and women leaders who could speak to the impact of the election activities on their community.

Target group four included the Peace Actors trained by LIWOMAC to deliver peace and voter education messages during the elections.

6.2. IMPACT ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

6.2.1. ELECTIONS REPORTING CENTER (ERC)

6.2.1.1. JOURNALISTS’ AND EDITORS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THE ERC’S ON-TIME RESULTS

As noted earlier in this report, the ERC’s On-time Results program provided timely and reliable information to a variety of groups. Media representatives could visit the ERC or access information through the website.

Thirty-six (36) Journalists and editors were asked about their experiences with the On-time Results Website. The questions included open and closed ended questions. The question scales included five-point Likert questions based on agreement to the statements below. A score of 1 represented strong disagreement to the statement and a score of 5 represented strong agreement. Mean/average scores above 3.75 were treated as agreement to the statement.

All of the journalists and editors’ answers to the survey questions garnered a mean score above 4.0 meaning that the respondents agreed or strongly agreed to the statement. Journalists and editors’ perceptions of the ERC and the On-time Results Website were overwhelmingly positive.

QUESTION	MEAN SCORE
The Elections Reporting Center (ERC) helped my organization to better report on the election.	M= 4.22
Without the Elections Reporting Center (ERC), I would not have been able to provide effective coverage of the elections.	M= 4.00
I found the content reported by the Election Reporting Center (ERC) through the LMC's website to be useful.	M = 4.31
We found the on time results data provided by the LMC's website to be unbiased and credible.	M = 4.25
We used the LMC's results website to inform the public on what was happening with the elections results.	M = 4.33
Without the LMC's results site, our community would not have been well informed about the elections results as we awaited NEC's official results.	M = 4.17
In my opinion, it is safe to say the LMC's ERC results site filled a void during the elections.	M = 4.36

In the open-ended portion of the survey, the journalists and editors were asked to provide examples of the most useful part of using the ERC for elections coverage.

“Collecting elections results regularly, and updating the public with results.”

“My organization used the ERC through the LMC website for elections reporting.”

“Fast and easy way to access elections results and do stories on time.”

“The ability to access results at any time from the ERC was very useful.

Generally, most journalists and editors viewed the Liberian public as the main beneficiary of the program.

“It helped us to adequately inform our audience.”

“The benefit was informing the public on the elections.”

“My organization was to report results fast and easier for the public.”

The journalists and editors were asked to provide an example of how the ERC's On-time changed people's perception about the elections. Their answers suggest that on time results helped prevent the spread of misinformation, violence, and helped build trust in the electoral system.

“It reduced speculations on the election results.”

“People got their results on time without doubts in their minds.”

“It changed people’s minds toward not being violent during this period.”

“It changed the people's perception because the ERC's on time results were good.”

“People couldn't discredit NEC results anymore because similar results were given by LMC.”

“It made people believe that their results were not tampered with.”

Editors and journalists provided some excellent suggestions about what aspects of the ERC could be improved. Space and access to technology were the most frequently noted suggestions.

The findings suggest that the LMC-run ERC emerged as the main source of information on the Liberian elections for all media organizations in Liberia and the world. The ERC efforts allowed local and international media to report reliable results.

6.2.1.2. AUDIENCE PERCEPTIONS OF ELECTIONS REPORTING CENTER SURVEY

To better understand how the ERC impacted Liberians, citizens were interviewed about audience perception and elections reporting center.

The CSML survey team conducted interviews with 77 Monroviaans asking about their experiences in receiving information from the ERC. The respondents were mainly male (62%) with 38% females answering questions. The average age of the respondent was 30 years old. Over 93% of the respondents reported that they voted in the last election.

Because many Liberians did not have direct access to the LMC On-time Results Website, they consulted local and national media that disseminated the results. The survey respondents were asked which specific source they used to receive the ERC’s early results during the 2011 Elections. Truth FM appeared as the radio station most used for early election results (75%). Only two other radio stations were regularly mentioned (UNMIL (9%) and Veritas (12%). Approximately 40% of the participants tuned to Real TV for election updates. Four (4%) percent turned to Sky TV. Twenty-three (23%) percent of the respondents reported that they went to the LMC’s On-time Reporting Website for information. One newspaper, the Democrat, was cited as being used for learning about early election results by 17% of the respondents in the survey.

Monroviaans were also asked to identify how much they agreed that the ERC provided useful services during the elections. The Likert scale questions provided a five-point scale with 1 meaning strongly disagree and 5 meaning strongly agree. The answers for all 77 respondents were averaged. Scores above a 3.75 indicate general agreement to the statement posed on the survey.

QUESTION	MEAN SCORE
I found the LMC website was timely in announcing the 2011 elections results.	M = 3.45
I found the content or results reported by the Election Reporting Center (ERC) to be useful in providing background about the election issues.	M = 4.32

The ERC provided unbiased information about elections results in our community.	M = 3.64
The ERC helped me and my community to make more informed decisions in the elections.	M = 4.26
Without the ERC, our community would not have been well informed about the elections.	M = 4.17

The second part of the questionnaire included open-ended questions asking respondents to elaborate on their answers. Respondents were asked how the early announcement of the preliminary 2011 national election results affected them. CSML was interested in knowing if and how the early announcement had a positive or negative impact on Liberians. Overwhelmingly, the survey participants provided positive comments about the early announcements. Three general themes emerged from their open-ended answers. Each theme and some representative quotes are provided below.

Theme 1: Timeliness of Results Was Appreciated and Helped Minimize Violence

Timeliness emerged as the most common comment.

“Because the results were on time, it helped me positively because I knew the other candidate’s results and who’ll win.”

“It impacted me positively. It provided me an opportunity to know the results.”

“It affected me positively because we were told to remain calm.”

“ERC information is important because it made us know the election does not need to have violence.”

Theme 2: Early Results Created Transparency, and Assured Voters that the elections were Free and Fair

Respondents indicated that the On-time Results Reporting Website brought a semblance of greater transparency to the vote counting process and helped people believe that the elections were free and fair. Amidst growing mistrust and questions about the integrity of the process, the On-time Results provided some measure of confidence that the elections were fair. One respondent noted, “people thought the process wasn’t going to be free and fair but it was.”

Theme 3: The ERC’s Campaign Informed Voters

Many respondents noted that they received information about voting from the ERC. The information helped them understand how to vote, where to vote and encouraged them to make informed choices.

“The information helped us make good decisions by informing us on election issues.”

“It helped people change their perception from not voting to voting.”

Survey participants were asked to give an example of how they (or their community) used the information from the ERC to help make decisions in the elections.

“Our community made better, peaceful decisions.”

“The ERC information helped Liberians make good decisions for our community.”

“We now know how to go to the polls.”

“We learned how to vote correctly and responsibly.”

Respondents were asked to provide example of how the ERC changed people’s perception about the elections. Many focused on how the ERC made them believe that the election results were credible and accessible to people across the country.

“The results were on time so people’s idea of cheating was erased.”

“They continued preaching this peace message all over Liberia.”

“They should extend to rural areas to report the results as well.”

Finally, the survey participants were asked for recommendations for the On-time Results Reporting Website. The participants had many suggestions, usually on timeliness (increasing staff and reach), accuracy, and the involvement of other media.

“I suggest that the ERC program be carried out through majority of the media channels.”

“They should bring in more staff for the work to move faster.”

“They should give the results in all of the languages.”

“They should report from all over the country not only Monrovia.”

“The on time results should be edited properly before given to the public.”

“Journalists working with the ERC should not identify with any party.”

“To create more awareness ahead of time.”

Overall, Liberian editors and journalists valued the ERC’s On-time Results Reporting Website. The main beneficiaries of the ERC’s efforts, the Liberian public, also appreciated having access to reliable information during a time of uncertainty. The ERC helped build trust in a system that had been plagued with mistrust. CSML’s efforts to support its partner in the development and operation

of the ERC helped support civil society during the elections. The CSML strategy to increase information about the elections also benefitted from the use ICT.

6.2.1.3. ICTS FOSTER MORE TRANSPARENT ELECTIONS

Fifty (50) journalists participated in the ICT training. Nine (9) journalists were randomly selected to participate in the interviews. The interviewees were all men who worked in the print (78%) or radio sectors (22%). The journalists had an average of six years of experience working for the media. The group can be considered experienced media professionals.

Technology Use in Elections Reporting

Journalists were asked to identify the ways they used technologies at or in communicating with the Elections Reporting Center (ERC) during the elections.

- 56% used the Internet at the ERC to check facts for news stories.
- 56% used the Internet to send information to the ERC.
- 33% used the Internet to receive information from the ERC.
- 78% used SMS to send information, mostly election results, to the ERC.
- 67% used SMS to receive information from the ERC.
- 44% used computers and smart phones to post information to social media such as Facebook, and Twitter.
- 78% frequently visited the LMC’s Election Monitoring Facebook page.

Perceptions of the Training

The journalists were asked to evaluate how much they agreed that the training helped them improve elections coverage. The Likert scale questions provided a five-point scale with 1 meaning strongly disagree and 5 meaning strongly agree. The answers for all 9 of the interviewees were averaged. Scores above a 3.75 indicate general agreement to the statement.

QUESTION	MEAN SCORE
I found the content of the ICT trainings in computers, smart phones, cameras, and voice recorders to be useful in covering the elections.	M = 4.11
The equipment helped me to be an effective reporter during the elections.	M = 3.78

The answers show that the equipment and training were valuable. However, 2 survey questions failed to receive general agreement to the questions. The answers fell between neutral and agreement.

QUESTION	MEAN SCORE
The ICT training prepared me to be an effective reporter during the elections.	M = 3.56
I found the quality of the ICT training to be very professional.	M = 3.22

The low scores are due to two of the participants strongly disagreeing to the statements above. Both journalists identified equipment problems and the need for more training as hindering their work in elections coverage. Some noted that the camera portion of the training could be improved and that more time should be dedicated to teaching each technology.

The open-ended portion of the survey asked journalists to explain some of the ways that they applied the training or used the ERC technologies during the elections. Two themes emerged in their open-ended answers.

Theme 1: Improved Accuracy of Information

“The training enabled me to check my facts before reporting”.

Theme 2 improved speed in election reporting.

“[The training explained] how to properly send SMS and post stories to Facebook. This kept me well informed.”

Most interviewees did not mention any specific obstacles to using the new technologies during the elections. A few noted that there were system failures with the equipment. For some reporters, using computers in the field was a new experience, so these types of start-up issues are to be expected.

Overall, the participants were pleased with the training program and equipment. One summed up the benefits of the ICT training this way: “It has added to my professional career and given me an advantage in elections coverage.”

The ICT training and equipment provided the Liberian media with new opportunities to report on the elections. The provision of an elections reporting van also helped journalists during the election.

6.2.1.4. ELECTIONS REPORTING VAN USER PERCEPTIONS

Dozens of journalists used the elections reporting van during the elections. Fourteen (14) journalists were randomly selected to participate in the interviews. The interviewees were mostly men (86%), with two women responding (14%). The journalists were evenly split between the print (50%) or radio sectors (50%). Their experience working for the media ranged from 2-10 years with an average of five years’ experience. The group can be considered experienced professionals.

On average, survey participants used the elections reporting van for newsgathering 3.64 times during the elections with some using it up to 10 times. The comments were positive. More than half (50%) agreed that without the van, they would not have been able to visit the different counties.

“The ER van helped us follow candidates on their campaign trail to rural Liberia.”

“The most useful part of using the ER van was on election day to get to polling centers.”

The journalists were asked to evaluate how much they agreed that the ER van helped them in election coverage. The Likert scale questions provided a five-point scale with 1 meaning strongly disagree and 5 meaning strongly agree. The answers from all 14 of the interviewees were averaged. Scores above a 3.75 indicate agreement to statements.

QUESTION	MEAN SCORE
The van helped me to better report on the elections.	M= 3.79

The van allowed the reporters to cover events in a timely manner. They did not have to rely on the candidates for rides.

“[The van] helped me avoid politicians’ manipulation and influence... [and] enhanced my ability to collect on the spot information.”

The journalists had three suggestions for how the van service could be improved. They noted that the air conditioning could be improved, snacks and food provided for long trips, and a better system could be put in place for reserving a space on the van. There seemed to be some concerns about the logistical operation of the van but most interviewees did not identify any areas for improvement.

6.2.2. VOICE FOR PEACE: THE REMARKABLE EXPERIENCE OF THE PEACE ACTORS

The Peace Actors’ survey sought to gather information from the Peace Actors on their training perceptions and the impact of their work in their home communities. A total of 57 Peace Actors participated in the survey. The Peace Actors came from all over the country: Voinjama (5%), Saclepea (12%), Gbarnga (19%), Monrovia (10%), Zwerdu (12%), Buchanan (16%), Tubmanburg (12%) and Klay (12%). The Peace Actors surveyed for this report were mostly women (61%).

6.2.2.1. TRAINING PERCEPTIONS

The Peace Actor training program played a crucial role in the success of the activity. Peace Actors needed to know and be able to explain every detail about the elections. They also needed to have the ability to deal with potentially violent people and situations. For many women, participation in the Peace Actor program was an opportunity to take a leadership role in their community. The respondents were asked a series of Likert scale questions intended to measure their perception of the training. The five-point scale measured strength of agreement with 5 meaning strongly agree to 1 meaning strongly disagrees. Scores above a 3.75 indicate general agreement to the statement.

QUESTION	MEAN SCORE
I found the <i>content of the Peace Actor training</i> to be useful in providing me with	M= 4.68

the background to educate others about preventing election violence	
I found the <i>quality of the Peace Actor training</i> to be very professional.	M= 4.65
The <i>Peace Actor training prepared me to be an effective</i> activist for peace.	M= 4.56

Overall, the Peace Actors appeared to be satisfied with the training. One part of the training helped them to prepare for working with local media, especially community radio stations, in the counties.

6.2.2.2. PEACE ACTORS' EXPERIENCES WORKING WITH LOCAL MEDIA

Community radio was vital to the 2011 Elections. In many rural areas, it is the only access citizens have to news and information. The Peace Actor respondents were asked a series of Likert scale questions on their work with local media. The five-point scale measured strength of agreement with 5 meaning strongly agree to 1 meaning strongly disagrees. Scores above a 3.75 indicate general agreement to the statement.

QUESTION	MEAN SCORE
It was very easy to work with the local radio station to create opportunities to share my information with the audience.	M = 3.60
I was given enough time on the radio to address people's questions.	M = 3.04
It was easy to facilitate discussions on the radio with callers.	M = 3.33
As a Peace Actor, I was able to help women better understand election issues.	M = 4.54

It appears that more work needs to be done to help facilitate the relationship between Peace Actors and community radio stations. Future CSML projects should create relationship-building opportunities between civil society groups and community radio.

In the open-ended portion of the survey, the Peace Actors were asked to give an example of when they were able to have an impact on a person or the community. The answers can be categorized into four themes. Sample quotes from the respondents are included below.

Theme 1: Peace Actors Prevented Violence

The Peace Actors overwhelmingly noted that their work helped to reduce violence in their communities.

“I was able to talk to people about violence and tearing posters.”

“After the town hall meeting, we engaged people and told them to stop violence.”

“People saw a reason to have peaceful elections after the dramatizations.”

“We told people not to be involved in violence.”

“Because of the Pas (public service announcements), the youth were involved. Our involvement made a huge impact on them not becoming involved in violence.”

“I told my people to not fight during elections.”

“I spoke to youth and made them understand that a violence free election is good.”

Theme 2: Peace Actors Worked With Radio Stations

The data from the Likert scale showed that many Peace Actors had difficulty working with their local radio stations. Yet, many Peace Actors reported that they felt like the time spent appearing on the radio stations was useful.

“We used the community radio to sensitize people about elections and our work.”

“I promoted peace through radio talk show, promos, and awareness at public places.”

Theme 3: Peace Actor Information Promoted Informed Voting

The quantitative scores showed that the Peace Actors were pleased with the training and felt prepared to help their communities. The quotes below add further context to the numbers.

“I was able to sensitize people in my community to take part in run off.”

“I met people arguing along party lines but I intervened and brought them together.”

“Yes, I had impact on my community by telling them what to do during the election.”

Theme 4: Women Empowering Women

The Peace Actors believed that they were able to help women better understand election issues. This model of “women helping women” appears to be powerful and could be used to support for future elections initiatives.

“A woman was told to not vote by her husband, but I educated her to vote.”

“I was able to tell my women about their rights to vote and not to stay away from the polls.”

Additional open-ended questions asked the Peace Actors to provide suggestions for future versions of the Peace Actor program. Approximately 70% of the open-ended responses identified financial assistance, increased compensation or some type of financial compensation.

“We need financial support-- an office space should be available as a point of contact.”

“We need financial and logistical empowerment”

“LIWOMAC should work to ensure we work with community radio to improve our work.”

“A stipend and material should be provided.”

“More needs to be done in terms of compensation.”

The second most frequent suggestion was to keep the program going and extend its reach.

“To continue sensitization process to develop the country.”

“I suggest that we try to go in rural areas to carry on awareness.”

Finally, the respondents were asked to identify the main obstacles to being an effective Peace Actor during the elections. The main obstacles appeared to be transportation, compensation, being accused of working for President Johnson-Sirleaf, and having no established organizational identity to legitimize their work.

“We were accused of receiving money for President Sirleaf’s campaign.”

“Lack of food, transportation and other essentials.”

“No funding for logistics, not compensated, no feeding for peace actors.”

“No transportation to get to communities.”

“No mobile phones, scratch cards, finance, or flyers.”

“No time on the community radio.”

“Lack of genuine identity, scratch cards, communication with LIOWAC.”

“Lack of pictorial materials for citizenry.”

“Lack of identification at polling center, not being recognized by observers.”

“Materials for reporting were not available.”

“Peace actors were not fully empowered to carry on the job.”

The quantitative and qualitative findings show that the Peace Actors were well trained and believed that they had an impact on their communities. The obstacles identified by the Peace Actors are not unusual for such a program and provide information that can be used to make future programs more effective. The next section asks the community members about their perceptions of the Peace Actor program.

6.2.2.3. STAKEHOLDERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF PEACE ACTORS SURVEY

Key stakeholders (community leaders, chiefs, CSOs) were queried about how they came in contact with the Peace Actors and how they perceived the work of the Peace Actors in their communities.

There were many ways that a stakeholder could interact with a Peace Actor. The results show that about 45 percent of the stakeholders who were interviewed had come in contact with Peace Actors through either face-to-face communication (20.8%) or by listening to the speaker on radio (24.3%). Interpersonal interaction and radio communication are vital in the dissemination of information in Liberia. Town criers (5.1%) and speeches at school or community center (4.3%) were the least frequently channels for stakeholders to come into contact with the Peace Actors.

Stakeholders' Contact with Peace Actors	
	Responses
	Percent
Had face to face communication with a Peace Actor	20.8
Listened to the speaker on the radio	24.3
Listened to a Public Service Announcement from the Peace Actors	10.0
Attended a forum facilitated by Peace Actors	11.1
Attended Town Hall Meeting	10.3
Viewed dramatization or public skit	14.1
Met a Town Crier	5.1
Attended a speech at school or community center	4.3
Total	100%

The community members were asked a series of questions about their contact with the Peace Actors. The five-point scale measured strength of agreement with 5 meaning strongly agree to 1 meaning strongly disagrees. The data below show that the Peace Actors program was valuable to the community stakeholders.

QUESTION	MEAN SCORE
I found the <i>content of the Peace Actor information</i> to be useful in providing background about the election issues.	M = 4.47
Peace Actors provided unbiased information about election questions in our community.	M = 4.29
The Peace Actors helped me and my community to <i>make more informed decisions in the election.</i>	M= 4.44
Without the Peace Actors, our community would not have been as well informed about the elections	M= 4.06

Respondents were asked to give an example of how they (or their community) used the information from the Peace Actors to help make decisions in the elections.

“From peace actor’s info, we were encouraged to vote.”

“The election was free and fair because the voters were taught to vote wisely.”

“It encouraged me and others to put Liberia first.”

“I got encouraged from the drama acted on stage.”

“By organizing forum at shops where young people can go and talk.”

“After the peace actor’s awareness, we were motivated to go and vote wisely.”

“We were educated by listening to the talk show.”

“They said that we should vote our choice and not to be misled by others.”

“It helped to restore peace during the elections.”

The community stakeholders provided hundreds of examples of how the Peace Actors changed people's perception about the elections.

"The peace actor message helped me understand the importance of voting."

"They told people not to stay away from the process."

"It made people to get involved in the referendum and the general elections."

"They made us to understand that every ballot should be marked properly."

"People started changing their minds about violence."

"We did not depend on others to decide for us."

"It changed our minds about elections."

Suggestions for future Peace Actor programs included:

"The people should come back to make more awareness."

"Continue at least three months ahead of elections."

"Please continue to educate people."

"To visit my community at least twice a month to conduct more awareness."

"Education should not only be during elections period."

"Get more women into the process."

"All schools should be a part of the process."

"To involve community members."

"To involve the radio stations."

"To increase the number of peace actors to educate more people."

"Peace actors should be in every county."

"The inclusion of various tribes in the process to make it a vibrant one."

"To include all tribes in the process for the sake of transparency."

"They should not be about elections only but for civil responsibility."

Finally, interviewees were asked if they would welcome Peace Actors back to their communities on other topics in the future. The answer was an overwhelming "yes." There is substantial interest in having LIWOMAC Peace Actors continue to work on community issues. Another project by LIWOMAC, the Mobile Platforms, also has great potential to continue to strengthen civil society during non-election periods.

6.2.3. MOBILE PLATFORM: LWDR'S OUTREACH AND ELECTORAL SENSITIZATION CAMPAIGNS

Key stakeholders, such as youth and women's leaders in the community, were selected for interviews to ascertain the effectiveness of LIWOMAC's Mobile Platform. Each stakeholder was asked series of questions on how they interacted with the mobile platform.

The data shows that a comparatively larger percentage (30.5%) of the stakeholders interacted with the Mobile Platform by listening to the community radio followed by about a quarter (25.45%) of the stakeholders who had face-to-face communication with the Mobile Platform in the marketplace. Town Hall Meetings accounted for the smallest fraction of how stakeholders interacted with the Mobile Platform.

Distribution of how stakeholders interacted with LIWOMAC's Mobile Platform	
	Responses Percent
Had face to face communication in the market	25.4
Listened through our community radio	30.5
Attended a forum where the Mobile Platform was used	11.5
Attended Town Hall Meeting	2.0
Viewed dramatization or public skit or role play	6.1
At school	3.2
Attended a speech at a community center	12.4
	100.0

6.2.3.1. STAKEHOLDERS' PERCEPTIONS OF MOBILE PLATFORM

Mobile technologies were employed during the election across the country to give people updated information about election laws, regulations, and information. The CSML team conducted a random sample of 77 males and 101 females to find out how LIWOMAC's Mobile Platform helped Liberians to prepare for and participate in the elections. The average age of respondents was 33.25 years old. Over 87% reported voting in the recent election.

The respondents were asked Likert scale questions measuring agreement to a series of questions about the Mobile Platform. The five point scale measured strength of agreement with 5 meaning strongly agree to 1 meaning strongly disagree. The data below show that the LWDR mobile platform was valuable to the respondents.

QUESTION	MEAN SCORE
I found the Mobile Platform to be useful in giving me a chance to express my views during the elections.	M= 4.35
The Mobile Platform helped to promote violence free elections.	M= 4.32
The Mobile Platform helped me and my community to make more informed	M= 4.25

decisions.	
Without the Mobile Platform, our community would not have been well informed about the elections.	M= 4.03

The respondents were asked to give an example of how they (or their community) used the information from the Mobile Platform to help make decisions in the elections. The open-ended answers showed that the Mobile Platform provided motivation to vote, helped reassure voters that election violence was not inevitable, and educated the voters.

“I wasn't willing to vote, but the Mobile Platform educated me to vote.”

“It stopped people from staying away from voting and going out to vote.”

“We were taught to accept the results after elections.”

“It was useful because it educated us on the entire elections process.”

“Some never wanted to go to the polls, but by the teaching of the platform we went.”

“From some of the live forums of the LWDR Radio it helped people transform their minds.”

“I got encouraged by the Mobile Platform that voting is my right.”

“I used the platform to educate my brothers and sisters about staying away from violence.”

Some Liberians had uncertainty about elections in general. Many feared that the elections would be marked by voter fraud or that violence would follow. The respondents were asked to give an example of how the Mobile Platform changed people’s perception about the elections. Some of the representative answers are below:

“The Mobile Platform changed our minds from being violent.”

“Elections are not for rich people alone but for all.”

“The Mobile Platform changed my perception of unfair elections process.”

“The Mobile Platform took away negative thinking from people.”

“We thought voting wasn't free, LWDR made us know that voting is our right.”

“The platform stopped us from preaching hate messages.”

The Mobile Platform was an innovation in Liberia. The respondents were asked to provide suggestions about using the Mobile Platform program during future elections.

“There should be more mobile platform programs for any elections in Liberia.”

“I suggest that every county has its own mobile platform team.”

“I suggest that the Mobile Platform recruit people from all tribes.”

“I suggest that there should be more drama to educate people about the elections.”

“They should start early so that people will benefit in expressing their views.”

“Focus more on students during the civic education.”

“Include more young girls.”

“Encourage more women to take on leadership.”

Finally, the respondents were asked if they would welcome the Mobile Platform on other topics in the future. Overwhelmingly, their answer was “yes”.

“Education for girls and programs to combat prostitution.”

“Empowering media and other civil society organizations.”

“HIV AIDS.”

“Human rights.”

“Teenage pregnancy.”

“To train more women in advocacy.”

“Rape laws, FOI, and children's laws.”

“Any law passed by the government.”

Overall, LIWOMAC’s Mobile Platform was a success. It helped communities to make more informed decisions about the elections and it helped to minimize election violence. The activity helped to build the capacity of LIWOMAC’s radio, LWDR and showed that this type of outreach may have other post-election uses that empower people and build communities. Another CSML activity, PUL debates, provided complementary information about the elections.

6.2.4. DIALOGUE FOR DEMOCRACY: TAKING THE CANDIDATES TO THE PEOPLE

The PUL journalists were trained to moderate debates in the election season. The number of debates that they moderated ranged from 1-10 with most averaging about 4 debates. Overall, the PUL journalists appreciated the moderator training. The respondents were asked a series of Likert scale questions based on their agreement to a series of statements about the training and moderation of the debates. The five-point scale measured strength of agreement with 5 meaning strongly agree to 1 meaning strongly disagrees. The data below show that the debate training was valuable to the respondents.

QUESTION	MEAN SCORE
I found the content of training for facilitating debates to be useful.	M = 4.62

I found the quality of the training for facilitating debates to be very professional.	M= 4.54
The training prepared me to be an effective debate moderator	M= 4.69

Open-ended questions asked the journalists to explain the most useful part of the training. Answers generally reflected the value of the debates to discussing issues and laws.

“The most useful part of the training was discussing issues and not personalities.”

“The most important part is the debate conducted in our county with lawmakers.”

“The most important part is how to moderate debates in town halls.”

“The most useful part was the practical aspect during the training.”

“The most useful part of the training was giving candidates equal right to speak.”

“Accuracy in both time balancing statements from panelists.”

“The town hall debate was very useful.”

“The part that focused on how to be an effective debate moderator.”

“The independence of the moderator.”

Respondents were asked which part of the training could be improved. The answers suggest that they wanted more practical training.

“One part that could be improved is conducting debate live on radio.”

“The knowledge on how to design questions needs to be improved for future debates.”

“For journalists to know how to moderate debates and be equipped.”

“The training needs to be practical.”

“The training of facilitating effective debates.”

The final survey question asked if the journalists would continue to moderate debates in the future. The 14 journalists expressed their willingness to continue to do so. The experience was positive for the journalists.

6.2.4.1. AUDIENCE PERCEPTIONS OF PUL DEBATE MODERATION

A total of 164 Liberians took part in the debate perception survey. They represented towns from across the country. Approximately 50% of the respondents came from Monrovia, Buchanan in Grand Bassa County Gbarnga in Bong County, Zleh Town and Zwedru, Grand Gedeh County.

About 62% of respondents who attended the PUL debates were males, while 38% were females. The average age of the respondents was 33 years old with most of the respondents in their late 20s and early 30s.

The respondents were asked a series of Likert scale questions measuring their agreement to a series of questions about the debates. The five-point scale measured strength of agreement with 5 meaning strongly agree to 1 meaning strongly disagrees. The data below show that the debates were valuable to the respondents.

QUESTION	MEAN SCORE
I found the debates to be useful in providing background information about the election issues.	M= 4.43
The moderators of the debates were professional.	M= 4.18
In the future, there should be more debates so that citizens can learn about the candidates.	M= 4.50

Community members were asked to give an example of how they (or their community) used the debates to help make decisions in the elections.

“It helped me to know in detail about the candidates, thereby helping me to vote right.”

“It made us to know what a representative should do when elected.”

“It created the chance for us to know the candidates and ask them questions.”

“The debates helped us cross examine our candidates and know their future plans.”

“We used the debates as a yard stick to choose.”

“The debate brought the candidates to us. We asked them questions about development.”

“We, the women, were encouraged to vote because of the debates.”

“I voted based on development and not friendship.”

“I understood some things about the candidates.”

“I found out the track records of candidates.”

“The debate enabled me know the plans of my leaders.”

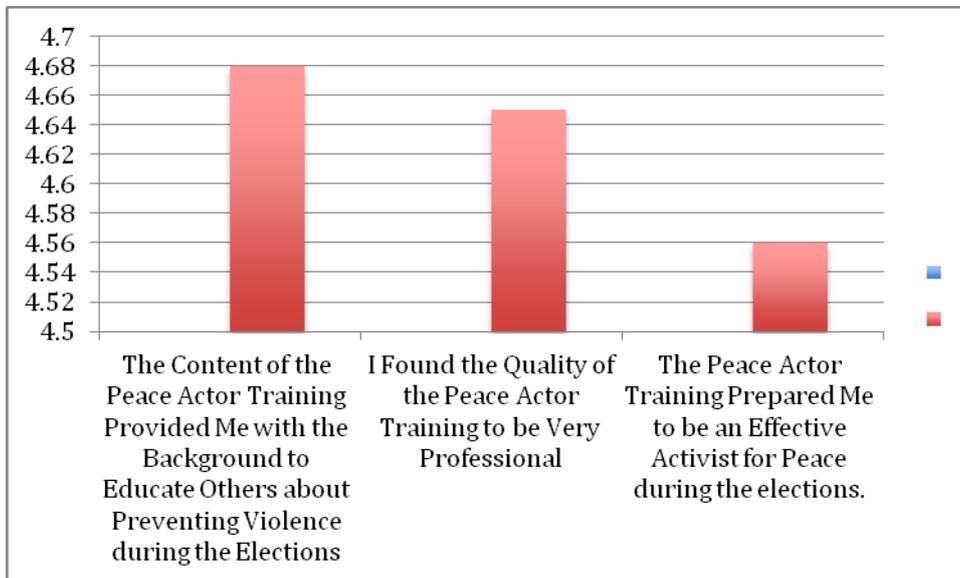
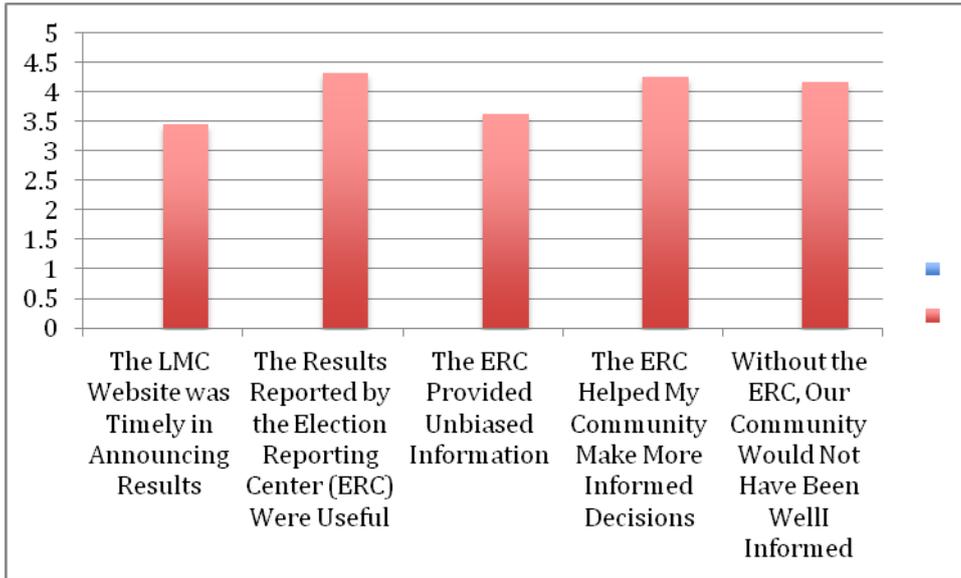
“This debate made us to take the right people as our leaders.”

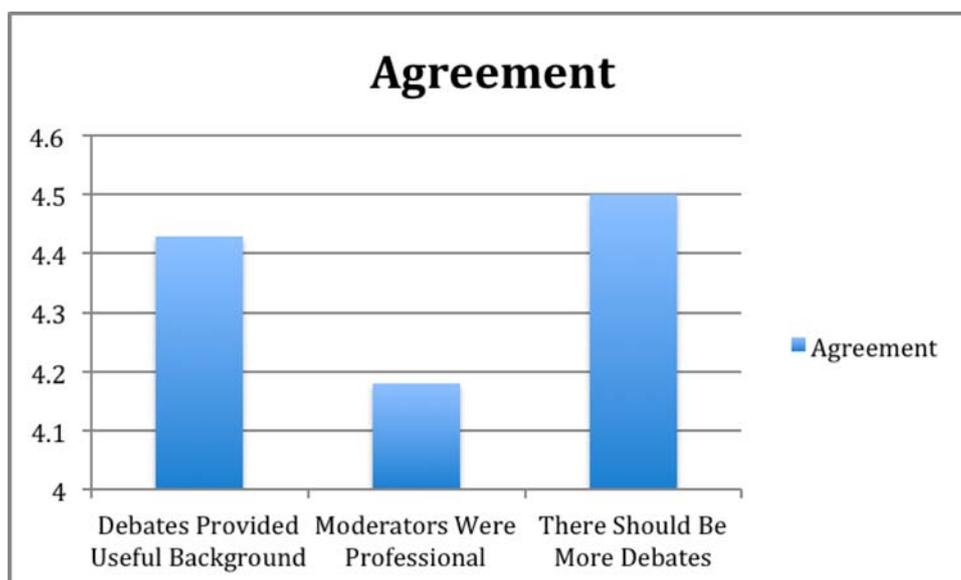
“The importance of the debate is to allow us to see the candidate face to face.”

“The debate helped us to decide on the best people to lead us.”

Overall, it appears that people who attended debates appreciated the opportunity to learn about the candidates. The debates appeared to be a success and should be continued in future election seasons.

The charts below provide a visual summary of the respondents’ answers.





7. CONCLUSION

7.1. THE MEDIA'S ROLE IN LIBERIA'S NEW DEMOCRACY: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

Prior to the 2011 Elections, which saw the single largest media development investment in the sector, the media in Liberia had been struggling. Poor financial base, weak managerial and administrative systems, low market and advertising base, low skill levels and high staff turnover have all but crippled the industry. Symptoms of the problem were clearly visible during the elections, raising concerns that much is still required in spite of gains that have been made thus far.

The problems with the media in Liberia today are not unique. From the Balkans to Northern Ireland, media in transitional societies struggle with these problems as it tries to redefine its purpose, while at the same time performing its traditional role of informing the people. In redefining its purpose, the media carves out a space for itself as the watch dog of new emerging democracies and a guardian of peace. In this section, we look at how the Liberian media is faring in this role despite its many problems. The analysis is based on our work with the media during the elections through the Strengthened Media for Transparent Elections Initiative.

7.2. POLARIZATION

Through concerted donor support, the media was able to generate an impressive array of content from the elections in 2011, which kept an anxious population continuously informed about happenings across the country.

The media provided civic education on the National Referendum and drove the voter registration exercise. Through stations like the Liberia Women Democracy Radio (LWDR), citizens were effectively engaged on issues of peace, electoral violence and voting.

Overall, the media's performance culminated into the landmark collective display of rural and urban journalists who relentlessly fueled the On-time Results Reporting Website. Nevertheless, there were challenges and we intend to discuss these as part of a reflective exercise on where the media went wrong and how current efforts can be sustained and new measures put in place to improve the sector.

From the beginning of the electioneering process it was clear that the Liberian media was indeed politically polarized. As indicated in the LMC's media monitoring report on the electoral process, even some of the most established newspapers were seen biasedly reporting for or against rival political parties. It was further established that there existed a strong correlation between favorable media coverage for one candidate and the volume of advertising being carried for the candidate by the outlet. The lesson drawn from this experience is that even strong and established media outlets can lose their ground in a high octane political advertising environment.

Media ownership was also a major contributing factor to the polarization. Some observers noted, for example, that the tone of the coverage of Truth FM, owned by a member of the Unity Party's Campaign team, favored the Unity Party. On the other hand, King's FM, which is owned by CDC's founder and Vice Presidential candidate shaped its coverage in favor of the CDC. Other stations with sympathies for one political party or the other also appeared to be taking sides, and at one point this led to a war of words on the airwaves with stations trading insults. All of this worked to heighten the simmering tension and provided the pretext for the November 7, 2011 media shut down

Polarization resulting from partisan coverage of electoral activities can influence the peaceful outcome of the process, and hence the media must at all times remain sensitive to this likely outcome. Media experts argue that in post conflict societies, the media must remain aware of the need to be conflict sensitive in its reportage and commentary during tense times. If partisan and other interests supersede the national interest during such periods, it is very likely that the media ends up helping to lay the foundation for a return to conflict.

A cause of concern also, was two major cases of state interference in the media activities around the elections that reinforced the need to address critical communication policy reforms to ensure this does not reoccur.

The Liberia Broadcasting System, the state run media institution, appeared to be making an effort to open up its usual state-dominated programming by instituting steps to ensure the playing field was level for all political parties. These efforts were effectively aborted when the Director General was indefinitely suspended by President Johnson Sirleaf following controversial live broadcast

coverage of a press conference organized by the Congress for Democratic Change. The reason for the suspension was not announced, but the coincidence and muted reaction from the Executive Mansion generated widespread criticism.

Even more alarming was the Government's action to shut down three radio stations in November 2011 following the election violence of November 7 (Bloody Monday) involving the opposition Congress for Democratic Change. The stations, widely considered pro CDC, were shut down during the run-off elections and opened two weeks later following a court case. The stations were charged with inciting violence. The judge found them guilty but pardoned the outlets and allowed them to reopen. The Press Union of Liberia filed a Freedom of Information request to the court seeking permission to review the evidence the state submitted. The court acknowledged receipt of the request but failed to make the evidence available.

All of these developments summarized the problem with media in transition. Limited capital and poor infrastructure for media expansion leaves media owners more susceptible to becoming subtle loyalists paving way for a full blown polarized coverage of sensitive national processes with potential to generate conflict. It also highlighted the weakness of nascent democratic regimes in tolerating dissent and providing the space for the exchange of ideas and views.

While the success of the electoral engagement exercise might have overshadowed these shortcomings, the aforementioned developments tested the government's tolerance levels and presented a different set of challenges in addressing media freedom, access to information and unfair state regulation.

7.3.RECOMMENDATIONS

The media has played and continues to play an important role in consolidating peace and democracy in Liberia in concerted efforts with other stakeholders. Notwithstanding these gains, there are still challenges. Some laws and policies governing the sector are weak or non-existent. Media sustainability is under threat with the imminent drawdown of UNMIL (highest media advertiser) and community radio stations face grim challenges as key donor projects fold up.

Therefore, a three-prong approach is necessary. First, is the need to position media development as a central but stand alone agenda item in the evolving "Five Year Development Plan" of the government. Effectively factoring media development within this policy framework is a strategic entry point for state support to be directed to media development efforts in the short-medium term. The argument here is that the media is a crucial sector of society and a relevant tool for the sustenance of peace and the development of Liberia's democracy. Its development must not be left to donors and international partners. It must be a collaborative endeavor and must form a part of government's strategic development plan. Some may say that government's support for media development may compromise media independence. However, the Liberian media is in a dire state.

The lack of requisite skills continues to frustrate efforts for the media to effectively contribute to the development of Liberia's young and fragile democracy. Media development organizations and the government must find a way to balance the need for media independence with the need for government's support for capacity building amongst journalists.

Crucial also is the need to address the policy and legal regulatory challenges facing the sector, especially with the new government demonstrating the desire to work with civil society in advancing the policy debate. There is very little argument that Liberia has improved drastically in terms of media tolerance and freedom of expression. Immediately after the 14 year civil war, the transitional Government accorded ample space and tolerance for the cross-fertilization of ideas and opinions, a novelty hardly experienced in past successive regimes. Today, critical reports, comments and analysis and critical public speaking about government and its activities are at an unprecedented high level. Nevertheless, free speech has been brought to the test on a number of occasions and media independence has been questioned. Hence, for the media to effectively perform its role and gain public trust, much more is required in addressing the conditions under which media operates in Liberia. Media advocates must lobby for the passage of implementing regulations to establish the Independent Broadcast Regulatory Commission, endowed with the authority to regulate the broadcast sector and prevent interference from government. The Liberia Broadcasting System (LBS) must be transformed from a government entity to a public service broadcaster, also through an act of the legislature.

Finally, emphasis should be placed on including Conflict Sensitive Reporting in the curricula of schools of journalism at the various universities. Journalism students must be taught the correlation between conventional journalism and their role in sustaining peace and promoting Liberia's democracy. Emerging from a post conflict status is a long and arduous process. Even more challenging is the process of sustaining peace in a society where memories of the war, its atrocities and other consequences are forever present. Therefore, journalists must be taught ways to deal with the prevailing realities and how to use the right language and style to avoid returning Liberia to chaos.

8. APPENDIX A: PEACE ACTORS' DRAMA SCRIPT (WRITTEN IN LIBERIAN PARLANCE)

Introduction:

A group of Community residents assemble to discuss the wave of violence being experienced among them.

- SAMMY: My people, what is this new thing in town now, everywhere you pass, everybody talking about violence?*
- KONAH: Oh Sammy, you don't know what is violence?*
- SAMMY: Konah, I may be I know it. But I don't understand it.*
- KONAH: Anyone here understand violence?*
- KPANNAH: Konah, I beg you ya ma! Please tell us.*
- SEKOU: People can HA ha ha! Konah let me tell you all, violence is some kind of musical instrument the white play.*
- SARAH: If you don't know about something; it is good to ask question Sekou. Violin is different from violence.*
- KPANNAH: Don't mind this boy. Konah please tell us about this violence thing. I have heard people talking about it.*
- SAMMY: Yes, I agree with you Kpannah. Konah, tell us about this violence business.*
- KONAH: In the simple way. Violence is any action you take that can hurt or harm another person, in this community or our society.*
- SEKOU: Wait Konah, I understand when you say any action to hurt or harm another person. But how can I hurt or harm the community or society?*
- KONAH: Sekou, you can harm the community or society when you take action that can spoil other public property, when your action make us afraid to sell or buy in the market, stop us from moving freely in the streets and actions that will cause one or more persons to die.*

<i>SARAH:</i>	<i>Is it right for anybody or group of people to take action that can cause violence?</i>
<i>KONAH:</i>	<i>No Sarah! It is not right .It is wrong to take action that leads to violence.</i>
<i>KPANNAH:</i>	<i>What makes violence wrong?</i>
<i>KONAH:</i>	<i>Any action or decision you take that can cause another person to get hurt or harm the community or society from carrying out their business correctly is wrong.</i>
<i>SAMMY:</i>	<i>Those who can take actions or decisions that can cause people to get hurt or die and harm the community, they can just go free?</i>
<i>KONAH:</i>	<i>Sammy, that big question you asking me to answer but I'll try. Those that bring hurt or harm to people, the community or the society are supposed to be arrested by the police, charged with a crime and sent to court for prosecution.</i> <i>If the magistrate or Judge finds them guilty, they will be send to jail for certain period of time according to the law.</i>
<i>SEKOU:</i>	<i>Wait, wait, wait Konah! We are talking about violence, than your bring law business again?</i>
<i>KONAH:</i>	<i>Yes Sekou, it is the laws of this community or society that can help to stop people from hurting or harming others. The courts of law can tell all of us when our actions or decisions are "Right or Wrong "and give punishment for those that can take wrong or bad actions that can hurt or harm others or the community or society.</i>
<i>SARAH:</i>	<i>So what kind of punishment the courts of law can give those that are found guilty of hurting or harming others, the community or society?</i>
<i>KONAH:</i>	<i>The first punishment is to be arrested and handcuffed by the police.</i>
<i>SAMMY:</i>	<i>But Konah, you call that one punishment?</i>
<i>KONAH:</i>	<i>Yes Sammy, because no good citizen that respect the rule of law should be arrested and handcuffed like a criminal.</i>
<i>KPANNAH:</i>	<i>OH! Ok! Konah tell us the main punishment.</i>

<i>KONAH:</i>	<i>The Magistrate or Judge in the courts of law will send you to jail. Depending on what action you took, you could go to jail from one to six months or even for life time if your action causes others to die.</i>
<i>SARAH:</i>	<i>But then –this violence thing is not good. If I will be treated like a criminal and sent to jail than, I don't want to be a part of it.</i>
<i>SEKOU:</i>	<i>Yes Oh! If that's the way it's looking, then violence is not for me yah....</i>
<i>KPANNAH:</i>	<i>For me, I will advise all the people I know not to take part in violence.</i>
<i>SAMMY:</i>	<i>The way I like myself, I should be treated like a criminal? Violence is not for me. I will not take part in any violence action.</i>
<i>KONAH:</i>	<i>Ok yah...my people as you leave from here let's spread the news. Violence is wrong and against the law. Law breakers can never be good citizens.</i>

Spot Messages (Written in Liberian parlance)

Script 1

<i>Male Voice</i>	<i>What! Who put this party's poster here? Ok, I will tear it to pieces now, now!</i>
<i>Female Voice</i>	<i>Stop, my young man!</i>
<i>Male Voice (breathing heavily)</i>	<i>Why should I stop? This party poster is not my party poster.</i>
<i>Female Voice (In a calm mood)</i>	<i>I agree, it is not our party poster, but this is all what democracy is about. Our party has the right to put up our poster. And that's the same way other parties have their rights to put their own of poster too. Remember, tearing of party poster can bring confusion; confusion can bring fighting; fighting can bring war and war can bring killing. Do you want another war in Liberia?</i>
<i>Male Voice</i>	<i>What! War? No way! "God forbid-self". We are tired of running, spoiling our country and killing ourselves. Sister, thank you yah; for the love of Mama Liberia, I will never tear any party poster.</i>
<i>Both</i>	<i>Yes, fellow Liberians, show love to your country by not doing anything that could lead to violence-Let's have a violence free elections in Liberia!</i>

Script 2

<i>Voice</i>	<i>My fellow Liberians, remember we have no other place to call home besides Liberia. Let's keep her safe and secure by having a free, fair, transparent and a violent free elections. Remember, when mama Liberia is sick, we will be sick, when she's well, we will be well, when she suffers, we will suffer, and when she prospers we will prosper. When she cries, we will cry and when she smiles, we all will smile. Only we, Liberians, can make Liberia a sweet or a bitter country. Remember, what affects Liberia, affects us. So, let us stop doing things that could affect Liberia.</i>
--------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

ABOUT THE IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

Liberia Media Center (LMC)

The Liberia Media Center is the leading research and communication for development organization currently in Liberia. It has expertise in conducting research, training, and providing consultancy in developing professional and technical competence in media and communication related disciplines. LMC works in all but one of Liberia's 15 counties fostering local development through the use of communication resources. Through its numerous media development programs, LMC works with 80% of community radio stations across the country and has worked directly with 17 local stations in eleven of Liberia's 15 counties. During this period LMC has worked to assist these stations with technical and professional support in the broader context of enhancing freedom of expression, public participation in national decision making, good governance and economic growth and development. The Center has trained more than 500 journalists in the last three years in a wide variety of interventions. LMC has collaborated with several national, regional and international organizations in the design and execution of programs around media development and post-conflict reconstruction.

Liberia Women Media Action Committee (LIWOMAC)

The Liberia Women Media Action Committee (LIWOMAC) is a media development organization dedicated to the promotion of women's rights and development in Liberia. LIWOMAC works to empower women in poor grassroots communities through the media, skills development, research and advocacy. In the years since its founding, it's worked diligently to give women access to information aimed at empowering them, and to improve the status of women working in the media.

In its efforts to effectively use the media to empower women, LIWOMAC sought and obtained funding from the United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF) to establish the first women's radio station in the country. The Liberia Women Democracy Radio (LWDR 91.1) was launched in 2010 in partnership with UN Women and YWCA- Liberia. Since then, the organization has built the capacity of more than 30 journalists, mostly women, to staff the station.

LIWOMAC is also working with IREX to advance women in the media. In 2010, it spearheaded efforts to organize the first national conference on advancing women in the media. The gathering eventually led to the Advancing Women in the Media Strategy, which seeks to increase the number of women in newsrooms, build the capacity women to assume leadership roles in the media, and to give women access to information.

Press Union of Liberia

Founded in 1964, the Press Union of Liberia (PUL) is the umbrella organization of journalists and media institutions in the country. It works to improve the wellbeing of journalists by building their capacity and advocating for their welfare.

During the protracted Liberian crisis and the preceding years when almost every strata of the Liberian society was divided along factional and political lines, the PUL stood as a nonpartisan institution that challenged the status quo in spite of the associated risks.

The Union is currently managed by five elected officials: President, Vice President, Secretary-General, Assistant Secretary-General and Financial Secretary. Seven standing committees are appointed by the elected leadership, and together with the elected officials, they make up the Executive Committee (EC).

This report was made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development. The contents are the responsibility of IREX and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.