

News from The Carter Center

THE
CARTER CENTER



Welcome to the first monthly newsletter from The Carter Center in Liberia. We have created this forum to help partners stay informed of our work and that of our partners as we continue to support the government's implementation of the PRS. The first issue offers an overview of current work, including recent and forthcoming activities. We welcome all questions and suggestions.

Vol. 1, Issue 1
December, 2008

The Carter Center is located four compounds east of the Mamba Point Hotel and our Project Manager, John Hummel, can be reached at 06 452 022. We also have field offices in Harper and Gbarnga.

In 2006, The Carter Center (TCC) was asked by the **Ministry of Justice (MoJ)** to join the effort to create a working and responsive justice system consistent with Liberia's needs and human rights. Working under a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry, we work particularly in rural areas and with historically marginalized people. Through offices and staff in Monrovia, Maryland and, more recently, Gbarnga, TCC assists Liberian partners to: **strengthen the administration of justice** through direct support and training at the Ministry; **increase public awareness of law and improve access to justice** by conducting public education and awareness campaigns and supporting a network of rural community legal advisors; and, **give voice to the marginalized** by working with the **Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA)** and the **Ministry of Gender and Development** to provide leadership and rule of law training to traditional leaders and help bridge differences between traditional practices and national policy.

Current Civil Society Partners

- Catholic Justice and Peace Commission (JPC)
- Bong Youth Association (BYA)
- Modia Drama Club
- Southeastern Women Development Association (SEWODA)
- Inter-Religious Council of Liberia (IRCL)
- Traditional Women United for Peace (TWUP)
- Crusaders for Peace
- Flomo Theatre Company

Strengthening Administration of Justice and Increasing Legal Literacy

TCC helps the MoJ and others to **fill key short-and long-term capacity needs** by providing practical support for their everyday work and by conducting training for a wide range of legal officials. Assistance includes providing the MoJ with a senior Liberian lawyer to help the Minister on a day-to-day basis; helping the MoJ establish a **SGBV Crimes Unit** to prosecute sexual offenders; and providing **legal training** for County Attorneys, City Solicitors, Judges, Magistrates and Public Defenders.

Increasing Awareness of the Rule of Law

Improving public trust in the justice system is a critical challenge for peace building as Liberia enters the development phase. Many citizens lack knowledge of their rights and changes in the laws. Through civic education, TCC and its partners hope to increase popular awareness of the law and give people tools to protect their rights. **CSO partners are conducting extensive civic education** throughout the Southeast and in Bong County, and are now expanding to Nimba and Lofa counties.

Improving Access to Justice

With the formal justice system not yet at full capacity, transitional local alternatives are necessary. TCC provides support and training to the **Catholic Justice and Peace Commission's County Monitors** to offer community-based legal advice, referral and mediation. The County Monitor's have worked for a year in five Southeastern counties and are expanding to Bong, Nimba and Lofa, **filling gaps and building bridges between the formal and traditional systems** at the local level through alternative dispute resolution, advocacy, and mediation.

Giving Voice to the Marginalized

Traditional people, women, and youth historically have had little say in the political and legal processes that have shaped the nation, leading, in part, to the divisions that caused the war. At the invitation of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the National Traditional Council and traditional women's groups, TCC has facilitated a number of events that **provide training and information on current legal reforms to traditional leaders** and that allow open discussion of traditional practices as they relate to the law.



Flah Cooper, a JPC County Monitor, educates people about the rule of law in River Gee County. Issues discussed include rape and inheritance laws, Sassywood, bond and court fees and land disputes

TCC's Access to Justice work is or has been supported through grants from Humanity United, UNHCR (through the UN Peace Building Fund), OSIWA, DfID, and Irish Aid.

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Mental Health Program Visits Liberia

For over thirty years, former U.S. First Lady Rosalynn Carter's active leadership in the field of mental health has helped to bring the topic to prominence as a vital component of overall health and wellness. Since 1991, TCC's Mental Health Program (MHP) has worked to **reduce stigma and discrimination** against people with mental illnesses and to influence mental health policy in the United States and around the world.

In August 2008, **Dr. Thomas Bornemann, Director of the MHP visited Liberia**, accompanied by Dr. Florence Baingana of Makerere University. The visit aimed to understand the **Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (MoHSW) and Ministry of Education's (MoE) priority areas for addressing the immediate and long-term mental health needs of the Liberian population**. The team discussed potential opportunities in which program areas of expertise may be of assistance to and compatible with the needs and priorities of the MoHSW pertaining to mental health. The team also met with the **Ministry of Gender and Development (MoGD) and the Ministry for Information, Culture, and Tourism (MICAT)**, as well as, key non-governmental organizations and leaders. The Mental Health Program has developed internal documents to be circulated to The Carter Center leadership that outline the discussions with the Liberian Ministries and the potential for collaboration. Internal discussions related to the documents will be held in the near future. MHP looks forward to continuing the dialogues with the relevant Ministries that were initiated in August.

Access to Information Project Visits Liberia

TCC has worked to promote access to information (ATI) regimes for almost a decade in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. ATI serves both governments and their citizens. For governments, an ATI regime **increases citizen confidence** as decision-making becomes more transparent. It helps public administration become more efficient and effective as recordkeeping systems are organized, retrieval procedures established, and public officials can more easily access the documents that they and their colleagues hold. This, in turn, allows scarce **resources to be properly applied**, and increases foreign investment. For citizens, ATI allows fuller engagement in public life, clearer understanding of government policies, and an increased capacity to help determine public priorities.

In late October, TCC's **Access to Information Project Manager, Attorney Laura Neuman** visited Liberia at the **invitation of Minister of Information Lawrence Bropleh**, House Leadership and members of the Legislative Committee on Information, and with the welcome of civil society, Ms. Neuman spent a week meeting with interested groups, presenting a **public lecture at the University of Monrovia**, and providing a number of media interviews. The objectives of this first trip were to meet with key stakeholders to better understand their goals related to access to information; to **share the international experience and lessons learned** regarding the establishment of a vibrant right of access to information; to identify ways to engage the issue of access to information in ongoing Carter Center initiatives in Liberia; and to consider potential areas for support and collaboration. At present, a **draft freedom of information act** is being considered by the Legislative Committee and a mandate for its passage is included in the PRS. **Cllr. Neuman will be providing the Committee with a commentary**. But passage of the law is only the first step it also must be implemented, enforced and used. The Carter Center looks forward to working with Liberians to advance the shared commitment to the right of access to information.

The Month Ahead

The Carter Center is preparing to **expand activities in support of the MoJ and MIA**. We are currently working in Bong and the Southeast (Grand Gedeh, River Gee, Maryland, Sinoe, and Krand Kru). Beginning now, we will expand activities into Lofa and Nimba counties. In addition to increased legal training and civic education, we are increasing support and training to the JPC's County Monitor community legal advice program, including the addition of mobile monitors. In December, we will complete a nationwide leadership curriculum for traditional leaders in consultation with the MIA, National Traditional Council and other partners. The Centre for the Study of African Economies (CSAE) at Oxford University, which is conducting an **external evaluation** of our activities, will also be in Liberia to train our partners on Monitoring and Evaluation as a follow-up to an **extensive baseline survey** they conducted in September.

Activity Tracker

Training for County Attorneys,
Zwedru October 29 – 31.

Judicial Training Institute's Magisterial training November 5 - 7 and
November 28 - 29.

Public lecture on Access to Information at the University of Liberia,
October 23.

JPC Monitors Training in Pleebo,
November 18-20.

Sponsored the TRC Thematic Hearings on the Role of the Media in the Civil War, Monrovia, October 28 –30.

Draft SGBV Training Manual delivered to Ministry of Justice,
November 25.

Celebration of Mama Tormah, City Hall, Monrovia November 25.

Formalized grant agreements for civil society partners, totaling over \$300,000.

Carter Center Staff in Liberia

John Hummel, Attorney
Project Manager

Monrovia

Pewee Flomoku
Project Coordinator

Cllr. Lemuel Reeves
Senior Legal Associate

Johannes Zlahn, Attorney
Senior Legal Officer

Sean MacLeay
Project Officer

Harper
Jeffrey Austin
Project Officer

Yah Pay-Bayee
Project Officer

Gbarnga
Bindu Kromah
Project Officer

Nyan Flomo
Project Officer

Emmanuel Kwenah
Project Officer

On the Air

The Carter Center sponsors weekly radio shows on LUX Radio, 106.1:

Thursdays, 5pm –
Rule of Law Hour

Fridays, 5pm –

