

News from The Carter Center

THE
CARTER CENTER



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Welcome to the fifth newsletter from The Carter Center in Liberia. This forum is to help partners stay informed of our work and that of our civil society partners as we continue to support the government's implementation of the PRS. The Center provides technical capacity support to the Ministry of Justice and Judiciary, and works in partnership Ministries of Justice and Internal Affairs and civil society organizations (see side panel) to educate Liberians on the rule of law. The Center also supports a Community Legal Advisor service in the North and Southeast in partnership with the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission. We welcome all questions and suggestions.

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The Carter Center is located on UN Drive in Monrovia, four compounds east of the Mamba Point Hotel. Our Project Manager, John Hummel, can be reached at 06 452 022. We also have field offices in Harper (06 452 682) and Gbarnga (06 558 429).

Carter Center Civil Society Partners Meet with Minister of Justice

On October 13, The Carter Center facilitated a meeting between our civil society partners and Minister of Justice Christiana Tah. As noted in the last newsletter, The Carter Center works with civil society organizations to educate rural Liberians on the legal system and their legal rights and obligations in partnership with the Ministry of Justice. Periodically, the Center convenes meetings between government officials and civil society partners to talk about mutual challenges and the situation on the ground. These meetings provide an important linkage and can inform both policy-making and grassroots action.

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A Look at the Center's Community Legal Advisor Program

With the backing of the Ministry of Justice, the Carter Center and the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission (JPC) have worked together since 2007 to develop a legal services program now operating in eight counties in the Central and South East regions. Thirty-two specially trained JPC Community Legal Advisors (CLAs) provide free information and advice about the laws that impact their daily lives to any citizens with a problem. They can also negotiate these disputes or refer cases as needed to lawyers or other authorities. The CLAs currently fill a gap between the formal justice sector in rural areas and traditional fora. The project was developed in response to requests made by rural citizens to civic educators for just such practical services. Mobile CLAs travel by motorbike within the eight target counties, helping to expand access to justice in all corners.

In helping to find peaceful, practical and voluntary solutions to people's problems, the JPC CLAs work with citizens, local justice officials and customary leaders,

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Centre for the Study of African Economies Conducts Evaluation

In September and October of 2009, Oxford University's Centre for the Study of African Economies (CSAE) conducted a follow-up survey in over 800 households in 80 villages in Maryland and Grand Gedeh Counties as part of a two-year randomized impact evaluation of the Center's mobile Community Legal Advisor program.

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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
- Special Emergency Activity to Restore Children's Hope (SEARCH)
- Flomo Theatre Company



Traditional Zoes from Grand Cape Mount County visit the Carter Center office after a training on SGBV.

The Carter Center's Access to Justice work is or has been supported through grants and other support from Humanity United, UNHCR (through the UN Peace Building Fund), OSI, OSIWA, DfID, Irish Aid, DRL, and UNMIL LJSSD.

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Civil society representatives from the Bong Youth Association, the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, and the Special Emergency Activity to Restore Children's Hope, hailing from Bong and Nimba counties, relayed several areas of concern to Minister Tah. Notable concerns included police soliciting transportation fees to investigate crimes outside of Gbarnga, officials performing duties reserved for other government offices, and a lack of food in the Zwedru correctional palace.



Gerald Dolo, Executive Director of the BYA, talks with Minister Tah

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contributing to a more even and accurate implementation of the law. A recent example is of a group of students in Zorzor, Lofa County, who reported to a CLA that their school administration, along with a man in charge of local scholarship program funded by an international NGO, refused to release scholarship funds intended for use for their national exam fees or other academic costs. The students said that a senior government official had already paid for their exam fees and that the administration was keeping the scholarship money that was intended for the students. They lobbied that the money paid by the NGO be given to them to pay for uniforms, books, and other school related expenses. When the school administration rejected their demand the students reported the case to the CLA. The CLA convened a meeting between the parties involved and the case was mediated. The students received the money that was paid by the NGO and the case was resolved. So far, the CLAs have helped resolve over 568 cases.

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As the household members interviewed this fall are the same as those interviewed last fall, CSAE will be able to track several issues over time, including: access to the formal and traditional justice systems, attitudes toward formal and traditional law in Liberia, dispute frequency, and outlets for dispute resolution. CSAE hopes to assess the overall impact of the mobile Community Legal Advisors in the communities where they operate. The final impact evaluation is planned for the Spring of 2010.



CSAE researchers in the field.

Briefly Noted...

- The Carter Center welcomes Legal Fellow Peter Chapman to our Monrovia office. Peter will be assisting with our work on customary justice, among other things.
- The Judicial Institute, with assistance from the Carter Center, conducted a three-day training for Public Defenders. This included several sessions where County Attorneys also attended—the first time defense and prosecution have been trained simultaneously in Liberia since the conflict.
- As part of our ongoing efforts to boost civil society capacity, the Center conducted a two-day long financial management training for CSO partners on September 17 – 18.
- The Carter Center provided support to Liberia Democracy Watch (LDW) to conduct an unofficial tally of polling station results immediately following the November 24 Montserrado County bi-election run-off. The effort was aimed at furthering confidence among all parties in the final results. LDW's unofficial tally, announced 24 hours after the election, was within 2% of the NEC's official final totals.
- Laura Neuman, manager of the Center's access to information project, visited Monrovia and met with government, media, and civil society leaders to discuss issues related to the draft freedom of information bill and possible future programming.

Activity Tracker

- Community Legal Advisor Training, - Harper, September 15-17
- Financial Management Training for CSO partners - Zwedru, September 17-18
- CSOs meet with Minister Tah - October 13
- Legal Working Group meets - Zwedru, October 15
- Public Defender Training - October 28-30
- Community Legal Advisor Training, - Gbarnga, November 9-11

Carter Center Staff in Liberia

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On the Air

The Carter Center sponsors weekly radio shows on Star Radio:

Wednesday, 11:00am;
Repeating Saturday, 3:30pm –
Rule of Law Hour

Friday, 3:30pm –
County Attorney Half Hour