

# REPORT

*‘CEDE Holds Dialogue with Liberian Civil Society on the African Peer Review Mechanism’*

(A One-Day Workshop 7 November 2006)

Sponsored by  
Partnership Africa Canada

## **Introduction**

The Center for Democratic Empowerment participation at the June 26-28 2006 “strengthening civil society: ensuing compliance with African and International standards on Human Rights and good governance” in Banjul, The Gambia, proved invaluable and insightful. Amongst other things, the African Peer Review Mechanism was central to the discussion. This provided the Center additional opportunity in generating more appreciation and understanding issues around the APRM.

Since the end of the Banjul conference, mainstreaming the APRM into CEDE governance program area was under serious consideration. In the face of this consideration, the Center for Democratic Empowerment engaged Partnership Africa Canada (PAC) on the possibility of implementing a project in Liberia around the APRM. PAC welcomed the idea of creating awareness and sensitization around the APRM within the ranks and file of civil society. Based on this understanding, it was agreed the objective and goal of the workshop represent the following:

- Understanding the role and responsibility of the APRM
- Organize a local core group
- Jump start the process of Liberia membership
- Sensitization and awareness about the APRM

These goal and objectives informed the conduct of the workshop, particularly aimed at creating a level of sensitization and awareness that would lead Liberia in the process of signing up to the APRM. Therefore, in the wake of reaching basic objectives, the need for a two weeks research was adopted into the workshop plan of action.

Central to the idea of the research was collating materials and facts on the APRM process and to develop an informative background paper for the workshop. A background paper that could facilitate and expedite the process of awareness amongst civil society actors at the workshop.

More specifically, the outcomes of the research were in two folds. Firstly, the research immensely contributed to the development of the background paper. For example, it historicized the APRM as a provision of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), the time it came into force, it mandates as well as its expectations. On the other hand, the research underscored in the background paper the number of African countries signed up to the APRM process, specifically in West Africa. Additionally, the background paper detailed the commitment and obligation of civil society within the framework of the APRM. Notwithstanding also, it featured the government responsibility as significant and a major player in the conduct of the APRM.

Secondly, the research informed a written press release that was circulated to the print and electronic media. On 6 November 2006, a leading Liberian daily, The Inquirer, carried the press release under he caption: “CEDE Holds Dialogue with Civil Society

Organization on the APRM process.” At the same time, radio stations broadcasted the press release.

## **Workshop**

More than 28 civil society organizations were in full attendance for the workshop held under the theme: “Liberia Civil society Dialogue of the APRM process.” The program was held in the Conference Room of the Center for Democratic Empowerment. Besides the presence of civil society representatives at the workshop, government officials present included: Hon Saywah Dunah, Member, House Standing Committee on Governance and Hon. Conmany B. Wesseh, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs for International cooperation and Economic integration.

*Welcome and Introductory Remarks-Aaron B. Weah  
Program Associate Center for Democratic Empowerment*

The exercise commenced with CEDE Program Associate, Aaron B. Weah making the welcome and introductory remarks. In his statement, he warmly welcomed the delegates for expressing their enthusiasm in such an awesome manner as evidenced in the huge and massive turnout for the occasion. Speaking further he informed the delegates that the program was carried out basically in two folds:

- One, that it is in furtherance of CEDE program in governance
- And secondly, that CEDE was committed to the conclusion reached at the Banjul conference

Amongst other things the Banjul meeting called for civil society to begin the process of APRM awareness, especially in the countries that were yet to sign up thereby soliciting government goodwill in the wake of signing up to the process.

*Urias Teh Pour, Programme Associate CEDE- Overview and Objective of APRM  
Workshop*

In his statement containing the overview and objective of the workshop, he made the following observations:

- That this workshop is being organized as a way of fostering civil society engagement on governance issues
- Since the restoration of peace in September 2003 as a result of the United Nations intervention the subsequent election of democratically elected government there has been lot of policy prescriptions as a road map to Liberia recovery process, the dialogue is intended to assess these cross cuttings in the context of the APRM
- The overarching objective is to popularize the African Review Mechanism Declaration and to seek Government’s accession to its MOU

*Hon. Saywah Dunah, Member of Parliament on House Standing Committee on Governance-Keynote Address*

Addressing the Workshop, as Keynote Speaker was Hon. Saywah Dunah, Member of Parliament, House Standing Committee on Governance. He said the APRM is the formula to advance good government in Africa and a framework that holds an African ownership. Unfortunately, Liberia being Africa's oldest country could not participate during the inception of the idea due the war at the time, he mentioned. Notwithstanding, however, this initiative is welcomed because the governance issues of Liberia's problem is very enormous and at such need a robust international instrument such as the APRM

Additionally, in his elaborate address, he directed few of his statements at some critical issues. These issues included:

- Land reform
- Corruption
- And law reform.

He asserted that all were in the purview of the APRM mandate. He particularly underscored the need to reform Liberia's law in a way that it is compatible with the agenda of the APRM.

At the climax of this address, Hon Dunah informed delegates that in as much there may be prevailing misconception about the Legislature commitment to their constituent, there should be a sustained and continued engagement, he asserted. This proactive stance could reverse the situation, he further noted. Along this line, he appealed to the delegates to engage the legislature in order to adopt new mindset in dealing with the perception about legislature especially considering the need for Liberia membership with the African Peer Review Mechanism. Finally, he recommended the following:

- that civil society organization present at the workshop form networks with all major committees and sub committee on governance at the national legislature
- that resolution adopted at this workshop be shared with parliamentary committees on governance
- And he pledged on behalf of the Parliamentary on governance full support and corporation following the development of civil society initiatives around the APRM process
- He said once the recommendation is taken seriously civil society would definitely appreciate the legislature commitment.

*Hon Conmany Wesseh Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs for International Corporation and Economic Integration*

In a brief statement by the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs for International Corporation and Economic Integration, Hon Conmany Wesseh defined the APRM as a catalyst for Liberia's recovery, in this post war situation. He said the paradigm for Human Rights in Liberia has seriously shifted since the inauguration of Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. Speaking further he mentioned that this government will not be the one

that would torture, murder or commit other violations. Rather this administration has a political-will, which run counter to historic traditional Human Rights abuses and violations. It is therefore in this light that I find the effort of this workshop creative, useful and progressive, the Minister asserted. He also said, the lack of government will to sign up to the APRM process may have some Human Rights implications and it is therefore civil society responsibility to call attention and provide reason why government should sign up to such process. Against background, we should begin to remodel our advocacy in a way that it resonates with the current realities of competing human development needs. The APRM is one of such vehicle capable of remedying post war governance need, he concluded.

*Ezekiel Pajibo- Director Center for Democratic Empowerment  
Mainstreaming the APRM in Liberia Governance*

During the opening of his presentation he said, “for once in a life time Liberia have got the opportunity to make meaningful contributions to the governance process-this new dispensation presents a great platform.”

Talking about new dispensation, he said the current political climate promotes economic growth-one that should add value to exports while for political stability, he mentioned that the peace in Liberia would be entrenched and democracy would significantly enhance.

For the APRM to feature prominent within the framework of our governance agenda we must first take a cursory look at priority areas of intervention. Continuing he said, this required mainstreaming the APRM in a way where it generates an overarching effect and impact on governance generally. Along this line, he stated that the APRM would be strategic in dealing with the Liberian Debt situation. The cancellation of Liberia’s debt is central to the country’s economic recovery. We as civil society practitioners motivations about Liberia’s membership with the context of the APRM should be underpinned by this fact-in the sense that Liberia need debt cancellation.

*Malcolm Joseph-Director Center for Media Studies and Peace Building  
Media and the Promotion of Good Governance/APRM*

The Director of the Center begins by recounting key elements of governance. He said some key elements of good governance include: access to information, rule of law, the fight against corruption, independence of the judiciary, respect for Human Rights and greater participation of citizens in decision-making process. He said through unfettered reportage analysis and advocacy services offered by independent and pluralistic media, increased public awareness and debated are generated around these vital elements, thus enhancing the prospects for the attainment of good governance.

The need for increased access to information by citizens is even more pronounced for a country like Liberia, an impoverished post war nation, where the literacy rate staggers around 30% of the population.

Consequently, he insisted that the media is confronted by daunting challenges. Based on his conclusion he made the following observations:

- It must keep citizens informed about policies, plans as well as pitfalls of government
- Additionally issues of corruption must be exposed including other vices that like Human Rights violation the undermine good governance

In conclusion he stated these are very ambitious characteristics of good governance, especially in the case of Liberia's nascent democracy. Liberia's nascent democracy needs to be checkmated with the APRM.

## **Conclusion**

Following the deliberations and exchanges at the workshop around the APRM three basic observations can be used to measure the expected outcome:

Firstly, participating organizations gave credit to CEDE and PAC for the collaboration of the Workshop. Most alluded to the fact that this initiative breaks new ground in the business of civil society advocacy. This impression is significantly anchored in the recommendations of the Member of Parliament who have asked civil society organization to include in their networks Standing House Committee of governance.

Secondly, there is a general impression that the workshop has largely deepened the understanding around issues of the APRM process, especially where best practice of other countries experiences were distributed through the APRM Monitor and Between Hope and Skepticism. Additionally, judging from the short supply of the literatures generated more room to appreciate participants' reception toward the exercise.

Lastly, other civil society actors present recognized the workshop effort of advocacy around the APRM as a complimentary gesture consistent with Liberia's new dispensation.

Owing to all these, the prospect for Liberia's membership of the APRM must be seen in three contexts. One, the presence of the government officials at the workshop demonstrates a strong political will; two, the enthusiasm of civil society remains a rallying point for the advancement of the APRM; and finally, Liberia being a post-conflict state creates an urgent need for membership, for as a country emerging from conflict, the enormity of governance issues cannot be overemphasized. Notwithstanding, in discerning the possibilities within this context, one must be cognizant of the mutually reinforced relationship within these three contexts. In order words, Parliament may not act without civil society engagement. In further interpretation, what this suggests is that, for the ultimate outcome of the civil society APRM agenda to be achieved, there must be sustained engagement, where government commitment toward the process can be tapped. Until this is recognized through action, the new paradigm explored above may dissipate before it is even realized.

# Center for Democratic Empowerment

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## *Civil Society Dialogue on the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM)*

**November 1, 2006**

### *List of Participants*

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6	Patrick Gogba	Coalition for Democracy in Liberia	Via Town, Monrovia	
7	Morris Barclay	Civil Society Movement	Broad & Benson Street	
8	Joseph J Seedee	W.P.S.G	Township, West Point, Monrovia	
9	Sunday Jarпка	SEDPA	National Human Rights Center, Monrovia	
10	Ralph N. Harris	Center for Democracy and Development	Benson Street, Adjacent Ministry of Defense	
11	Horace P. Nagba	United Methodist University Student Union	Ashmun Street, Monrovia	
12	Ahmed M. Paasewe	Liberia Democracy Watch	Ashmun Street, Monrovia	
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14	Kwame E. Ross	University of Liberia Student Union	Capitol Hill	
15	Malcolm Joseph	Center for Media Studies and Peace Building	Benson & Buchanan Street, Mon	

16	J. Madison Harris	Liberia Community Network	CEDE House	
17	Mohammed L. Sow	Liberia Civic Initiative	Broad Street	
18	Andrew S Nyeswah	ACOHD	Carey & Johnson Street, Monrovia	
19	Samuel S. Pearson	Liberia Civic Forum	Ashmun Street, Monrovia	
20	Isaac J. Weah	NAHRIM	Carey Street Monrovia	
21	P. Comince Nimley	PROCOM	National Human Rights Center, Monrovia	
22	Baw-wah Brownell	Association of Environmental Lawyer Association	Crown Hill, Monrovia	
23	Conmany B. Wesseh	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Capitol Hill, Monrovia	
24	Saywah Dunah	House of Representative	Capitol Hill, Monrovia	
25	J. Kofa Torbor	Liberia United to Expose Hidden Arms Inc	Camp Johnson Road, Monrovia	
26	Ahmed Sheriff	Heritage (Newspaper)	Benson Street, Monrovia	
27	A. Saydee Monboe	Center for Trauma Healing and Conflict Resolution		
28	Christian T.L. Peah	Liberia Institute of Public Opinion	Randall Street, Monrovia	
29	George Toe	Community Development Foundation	Carey Street	
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