

An Inclusive Dialogue to Sustain Peace and Development

The Liberia Country Team Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (CSPPS)

Press Statement November 29, 2022

(Monrovia, November 29, 2022): On Thursday, November 24 2022, the Government of Liberia through the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MFDP) and the European Union (EU) delegation to Liberia held a one-day policy dialogue to review the portfolio of the EU programs in Liberia in order to identify challenges, lessons learned and make recommendations to support the effective implementation of the Pro-poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development (PAPD) for the benefit of the Liberian people.

The Liberia Country Team of the Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (CSPPS), comprised of various organizations involved with governance, peacebuilding and the rule of law, welcomes the policy dialogue between the Government and the EU delegation and congratulates the delegation for the level of support to Liberia's development agenda.

In order to engender a spirit of inclusion and participation, the EU Mission to Liberia initiated consultations with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) which, under Dr Nick Westcott, Managing Director for Africa in the European External Action Service (EEAS), on June 21, 2012 culminated into the launch of a structured and regular dialogue between the EU and Liberia, as set out in article 8 of the Cotonou Agreement, and the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. The latter recognizes that each country has the primary responsibility for its own development progress, emphasizing that development assistance must be country-led. The launch of the political dialogue accordingly provided a space for inclusivity in which CSOs were active actors in the formulation and implementation of different discussions and activities.

We further note that this initiative is strengthened by the 'New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States', which is a mechanism to help Liberia refocus on its underlying and salient root causes of fragility in a structured way. Considering that the history of Liberia is replete with governance structures of exclusion, oppression, over-centralization, ethnic divide and conflict, such mechanism is critical for the consolidation of peace and stability in Liberia. The New Deal was therefore not only introduced to support inclusive governance but to reduce parallel systems, facilitate closer coordination, and promote better access to current funds and instruments for implementation in more critical areas of reform.

Against this backdrop, the framework on Aid Effectiveness, with specific emphasis on peacebuilding and statebuilding, acknowledges the pivotal role of Non-State Actors regarding the provision of a balance in the administrative and operational framework of aid delivery. The Liberia CSPPS Country Team therefore reminds the Government and the EU delegation to keep track of this trajectory and ensure that there are no deviations from all aspects of the Paris Declaration. Considering the importance of the unique arrangement and relationship with the OECD-DAC through its International Network on Conflict and Fragility and other OECD policy communities in ways that have played a critical role in amplifying the voice and influence of countries and translated country ownership and leadership into meaningful practice, CSOs in Liberia strongly believe that the EU delegation is best suited to translate global policies and practices at the country level as part of a broader effort aimed at facilitating exchange and dialogue on what is needed to advance inclusivity in the promotion of peace and sustainable development in Liberia.

When the Structured Dialogue was launched, the forum raised a range of initial internal and external subjects, including political reconciliation, strengthening of democratic institutions, development priorities, the implementation of the TRC findings, and regional peace and security. While Liberia has made some progress in terms of successfully conducting three democratic elections and sustaining peace and stability, CSPPS notes that in the context of Liberia, the principle of free and fair elections is still subject to neo-patrimonial ties based on influences through patronage practices. It is worth pointing out that rising inequalities continue to weaken links between elites and grassroots, where people are feeling neglected by those in power. Obviously, where governance issues prevail, tensions are inevitable, especially when processes used to identify and decide upon peacebuilding strategies and developmental priorities are neither inclusive nor transparent – leaving certain communities or segments of the population to feel that their interests are not being taken into consideration.

The CSPPS country team in Liberia therefore believes that considering the current state of affairs in Liberia and West Africa which, among others, encompass persistent socio-economic challenges as a result of COVID-19 and the Ukraine-Russia War, coupled with the challenges of the 2023 presidential elections in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Nigeria, amid other deplorable domestic circumstances (such as high unemployment, rampant corruption, violence against women political aspirants, etc.), the need to prioritize Government-CSOs partnership on critical national matters and strengthen dialogue engagement in these critical times cannot be over-emphasized.

Moreover, the importance of strengthening partnership with CSOs is acknowledged in the Government-NGO Policy which highlights that the alignment of donor funding to national development priorities is of primary importance in promoting peacebuilding and statebuilding as emphasized in the New Deal. CSPPS therefore trusts that the Government of Liberia (GOL)-EU Dialogue which seeks to identify challenges and lessons learned and makes relevant recommendations to improve the implementation of EU programs in Liberia for future collaboration needs to go beyond ‘tokenism’. This is essential in order to demonstrate that the Government truly recognizes and values the important contribution that local and international NGOs have made and continue to make for the recovery and rebuilding of Liberia.

Similarly, we call on the Government and the EU to consider the challenges faced by CSOs with the imperative need to take actions that will strengthen the capacities of Liberian CSOs to promote participation in ensuring effective management and sustainability of EU programs in Liberia, and vice versa support the effective implementation of the Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development (PAPD).

At the same time, we strongly ask that measures are taken by all parties to maximize the value of CSOs contributions to such dialogue. Such measures should include the National Civil Society Council of Liberia (NCSCCL), engaging in constructive policy dialogue and also reactivating CSOs- EU Structural Dialogue. Finally, this should also, among others, include CSOs working professionally through their umbrella institution to organize themselves in the most efficient and representative way possible to receive financial and technical support from external donors.

Done jointly on November 27, 2022 by Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (CSPPS)- Liberia and the National Civil Society Council of Liberia (NCSCCL).

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