

# County Social Development Funds Reform Advocacy Most Significant Change Story

## Author

Partnership for Sustainable Development-PaSD  
2<sup>ND</sup> Floor  
Jetty Trading Corporation Building  
24<sup>th</sup> Street  
Sinkor  
Monrovia-Liberia



## Contact:

Phone: +231-776-053-594 or 776-582-878  
Email: [cuppadlinc@yahoo.com](mailto:cuppadlinc@yahoo.com)  
Web: [www.cuppadl.org](http://www.cuppadl.org)

## 1.0 Introduction or the Problem

The County Social Development Funds (CSDF) is the combination of the Government of Liberia annual allocation of 200,000 to each county development and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)



concessions operation in the county social contributions to each county economic, social and infrastructure developments. The funds were derived as the government idea to decentralize social, infrastructure, economic development and national growth to rural communities of the country as a means of making rural dwellers to feel directly part of the country, equally to ensure they benefit from the country's natural resource thus promoting the sustenance of the peace and security of the country in the way that leads to general poverty reduction.

Since the introduction of the funds, the management and expenditure of monies have been characterized by conflict amongst and between elected officials of Government and the people for whom the funds was initiated. Separate audits of the funds by the General Auditing Commission of Liberia in various counties reported misused, mismanagement, misapplication of funds and abused of financial management procedures. These situations compelled the former Government of President Ellen Johnson Sireleaf to place Moratorium on selected counties funds and the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning was constrained to delay selected counties disbursements. Critics, international and nationally credible investigation of the funds

blamed the misused, mismanagement, misapplication of funds and abused of financial management procedures on the poor governance and management arrangements.

Therefore, in an attempt to avert the negative consequences of the poor management arrangement, in 2016 PaSD and seven relevant national civil society organizations separately sought funding from the USAID/Liberia Accountability and Voice Initiative (LAVI). Following rigorous vetting of civil society proposals, LAVI and civil society agreed the project “Thematic Window Programming Grants-Collaborative Problem Solving: Natural Resource Management (NRM) and Concession (civil Society). The intervention was initially a 12 but later extended to 24 months’ action in all fifteen (15) political subdivisions of the country of which PaSD led three counties (Montserrado, Margibi and Grand Bassa). The project was designed to gather data and information on the county social development fund, trained civil society, community based organizations, engage them in advocacy to influence national and local government authorities reform the CSDF management framework. As a means of accelerating the realization of the project goal to improve the management, transparency, accountability and participation in the CSDF, the seven national civil society organizations and Partnership for Sustainable Development formerly CUPPADL established a join advocacy “**Civil Society County Social Development Fund (CSDF) Reform Initiative**”.



## 2.0 Activities

To facilitate the attainment of the “**Civil Society County Social Development Fund (CSDF) Reform Initiative**” aim at improving the management, accountability, transparency and participation of the CSDF, several activities were designed and implemented by the seven national civil society organizations and the Partnership for Sustainable Development notable among which are as follow:

**2.1 Information Gathering and Documentation:** An Information Gathering process was conducted to identify issues, deepen understanding, and inform advocacy and planning. Community-based research was initiated through several research methods (Desk Study, KIIs, FGDs and Surveys). The IG facilitated the gathering and documentation of policy, management, transparency, accountability, participation, information sheering and other relevant issues to the CSDF processes. Following the Information Gathering and Documentation exercises, a National

IG Report that covers the fifteen counties, each of the 15 Counties specific IG Reports and a Policy Brief were derived, published, disseminated and used to inform advocacy and planning on CSDF.

## **2.2 Communities, CSOs, CBOs, Concessions and Local Authority's Relationship Building Joint Meetings:**

Several relationship building meetings involving CSOs, CBOs, concessions and local authorities were planned and implemented per county. The objective of the meetings was to discuss the implementation of the CSDF, challenges and opportunities and to identify relationship issues emerging between communities, concessioner and local governments. Through those meetings civil society, concessioners and local government authorities got to understand challenges, established opportunities and relationship issues that confronted the CSDF management and found appropriate method of addressing them. Additionally, through the meetings, the PaSD, IREED, NEYMOTE, P4DP, DEN-L, RHAP, LMC and SDI advocacy engagements on one hand and on the other hand local authorities and concessioners planning for the County Social Development Funds (CSDF) were informed.

## **2.3 Convened Petition Actions:**

Hundreds of civil society, youth, women, community and other traditional leaders were converged at various public offices to petition the various line ministries, agencies, local government offices and the National Legislature. Petitioners demanded reform in the management arrangement of the CSDF. At each petition action, petitioners presented statements representing their opinion and call to decision makers on the extent of the reform needed in the CSDF management, transparency,



accountability and participation frameworks. Petitioners key messages were published in various print and electronic media and disseminated to key decision makers for their appropriate action. Key among petitioners demands to decision makers included but not limited to: 1. Legislature should Amend section 9 of the National Budget Law provisions on participation, account holders and mandates, County Sitting arrangement, CSDF funds disbursement, accountability of disbursed funds and adherence to national procurement requirements 2. The Legislature Should Develop and legislate a Standalone Law on CSDF Management as a long-term management improvement mechanism.

## 2.4 Lobby Meetings, Press Conferences, Media Campaign and Attended Budget Hearings:

Civil society, youth, women and community leaders who were trained at the various skills building workshops were engaged in advocacy to influence reform in the CSDF management



arrangements. Through face to face meetings with policy and decision makers, CSDF implementers and media campaigns (talk shows, press conferences and issued press releases) civil society demanded and secured amendments to Section 9 of the National Budget Law provisions on participation, account holders and mandates, County Sitting arrangement, CSDF funds disbursement, accountability of disbursed funds and adherence to national procurement requirements. Additionally, civil society was able to influence the Legislature development of a Standalone Bill on CSDF Management as a long-term management improvement mechanism.

Selected well-informed trained non-state actors were sent to various media institutions, lobby meetings with relevant decision makers, budget hearings and address press conferences to articulate the project advocacy key messages aim at influencing actions.

## 2.5 County-Wide CSDF Reform Debates in Grand Bassa and Margibi

There were two Inter High School Debate competitions planned and implemented in Grand Bassa and Margibi counties respectively. The debates were organized in a manner that fetch out Students perspective on the CSDF reform call of civil society and disseminate their perspective widely to decision makers. The objective of the debate was to create the space for students and school authorities to input into the CSDF reform and secure the support of Margibi and Grand Bassa Counties legislators to champion, introduce to the legislature, and secure the passage into law of the proposed National CSDF Act of 2018. Through the CSDF Inter High School Debate, nine (9) school's students from Grand Bassa and Margibi inputted into the finalization of the standalone Bill. 5 schools (3 from Margibi and



2 from Grand Bassa) particularly openly declared their support for the standalone CSDF Management Law and call on their local governments and legislators to champion the passage of the Bill in the Legislature when introduced.

Prior to the CSDF Debate amongst students, their voices were not heard in the planning and advocacy for the improvement in the management of the CSDF. They additionally did not have the space to participate in the development, introduction and advocacy for passage of a CSDF standalone legislation. Through the debate, especially the argument delivered and published in the media, the proposed Bill was brought to the attention of the local government officials and legislators of Margibi and Grand Bassa by student leaders.

## **2.6 CSDF Town Hall Meetings in Grand Bassa and Margibi**

Several CSDF Community Town Hall Meetings were organized and implemented in Grand Bassa and Margibi Counties, 205 relevant CSDF Stakeholders were opportune to meet face to face with decision makers to dialogue on the civil society proposal for reform in the CSDF management framework in Session 9 of the National Budget Law. Through the meetings and other activities, stakeholders made input to a reform management arrangement and demanded their elected and appointed officials of Government to implement the reform. Through the meetings, relevant CSDF stakeholders included legislators, local government authorities, 2017 general elections legislative candidates, political parties, civil society, media reporters and editors signed on to pledge cards committing themselves to lobby, advocate and take action to effect reform in CSDF management framework.

## **2.7 CSDF Rural Women Road-Map Conference in Grand Bassa County**

Three Days Rural Woman Road-Map Conference on CSDF was planned and implement in Grand Bassa County, 50 relevant women leaders from 50 women organizations, 25 from Margibi and 25 from Grand Bassa attend and had the space to meet face to face with decision makers and demanded from them reform in CSDF management that considers gender issues. The 50 women leaders had the opportunity to input gender perspectives into the civil society proposal for reform in the CSDF management framework in Session 9 of the National Budget Law. Through the conference, the Buchanan Declaration a



statement that represented the over 50 women leader's issues, perspectives and recommendations were endorsed at the conference. The declaration was presented to elected and appointed

