In Liberia, after decades of military rule, civil unrest and political instability, a lot of socio-political and economic changes have taken place, especially as it rebuilds and rehabilitates post-war institutions and frameworks. Today, like in many other parts of West Africa, Liberia is undergoing a constitutional review process. This is to help ensure its tenets meet its present day needs, post-conflict, and to solidify the rules for how Liberia should be governed in a contemporary context.

Seeing a prime opportunity for citizens’ involvement, the Liberia Media for Democratic Initiatives (LMDI), who champion themselves as mobilizers for grassroots voice and participation in national issues and decision-making processes, implemented two activities to engage the broader public in reviewing and informing on the constitutional review process. At the onset of the project, LMDI discovered that an estimated 98% of Liberians have never seen copies of the constitution, let alone read or talked about its various provisions. Their project was therefore not only necessary, but also the first project of its kind in the country. And the results have, so far, been noteworthy.

Six months before the Ebola outbreak, LMDI organized a series of forums that directly implicated over 10,000 people across 31 locations. At an indirect level, they involved more than a million people nationwide through the broadcasting of forums across 45 national and rural community radio and TV stations. Through these direct dialogue forums and community outreach, including the “Way to Peace” radio drama series interspersed with informative jingles, Liberians have had the opportunity to both speak and hear about polemic issues in the constitution and suggest possible ways forward. Previously taboo topics, such as citizenship, land and resource ownership, the tenures of elected officials and issues of decentralization were all broached and stimulated much debate – especially among rural populations.

“...to say that we have no right to values under the land that we own is a denial of our God-given right. And so we have to change Article 22b that denies us all the resources on and under our land,” explains Robert Doe, a land-owner from Tuzon Town, Grand Gedeh County.

Peter Siawaye, from ITI, Rivercess County, talked about the importance of citizenship rights. “When non-negroes or white people are allowed to be citizens of our county, the kind of poverty in our country will make them buy all our land and we will become slaves to them. So we need our government to first empower us, then we can talk about opening up our citizenship (to outsiders).”

The topic of imposing term limits was also contentious. As Sakajebio Sieh explains, “Our Senators stay just too long in power and do very little for us. We have no way to get rid of them and so the review exercise will give us the opportunity to cut their time in power down. I mean, nine years is just too much for one person to hold on to power and do nothing for us.”

While the Ebola outbreak took a heavy toll on the country, the public consultations around the Constitutional Review Committee have resumed.

Liberia Media for Democratic Initiatives (LMDI)
Citizens, the constitution & collective engagement in Liberia

Public discussion in Liberia as part of LDMI activities.

Radio show as part of LDMI activities.
Jeune Cellule pour le Développement (JCD)
Empowering local mining communities in Guinea

If a country's wealth was measured by its natural resources, Guinea would be among the world's richest. Unfortunately, this is hardly the case. Though it holds a quarter of the global bauxite reserves – the ore used to produce aluminum metal and chemical products – and vast quantities of diamonds, gold and other precious minerals, Guinea hovers in the bottom ten countries on the Human Development Index (HDI). While the contribution of mining resources to the State budget is estimated at 30%, poverty (defined as those living off less than a dollar a day) continues to rise, affecting more than half the country's nearly 12 million people. Much of this is due to corruption, the poor management of resources by government officials and the lack of knowledge or understanding at the local level (including by elected representatives, women and youth).

Jeune Cellule pour le Développement (JCD), started by a group of university students in 2006, has been working in the area of democratic governance and social justice. Over the years, they have collaborated with several partners, including the European Union (EU) and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), to produce reports on the extractive industries, the state of civil society and the management of resources by government officials. JCD's work is also notable in how it complements the extractive industries at the local level (including by elected representatives, women and youth).

JCD was launched by a group of Guinean students in 2006. The two organizations have met to discuss how they can improve synergies. The joint efforts of JCD and ADREMGUI, another key CSO in Guinea that focuses on improving governance and fiscal literacy in the country's lower mining region, has been used to build schools, markets, health centers and renovate local council offices.

In 2013, JCD launched a project aimed at sensitizing the redistribution of revenues generated from the mining sector. They worked in 16 localities to help create consultative committees with authorities, mining companies, CSOs and citizens to build collaboration by raising knowledge, facilitating dialogue and easing access to public information. Through this project, they reached an estimated 1475 people. They worked with local officials and CSOs in three localities in Faranah, where there are large iron ore deposits, and in Siguiuri, where there is heavy gold mining, so they could learn how to evaluate budgets and contracts. As a result of these efforts, and the increased understanding of procedures and taxes owed by mining companies, CSOs were able to convince Bellzone, a mineral extraction operator in Guinea, to pay taxes directly to affected communities instead of to the government administration, where it can disappear. They have currently paid nearly $200,000 USD. This money has been used to build schools, markets, health centers and renovate local council offices.

JCD's work is also notable in how it complements the efforts of ADREMGUI, another key CSO in Guinea that focuses on improving governance and fiscal literacy in the country's lower mining region. The two organizations have met to discuss how they can improve synergies.

Revenue Watch International (RWI)
Guiding Guinea’s mineral resource management

In 2007, Guinea marked its foray into the Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative (EITI), the global standard that ensures transparency and accountability in the management of natural resources. However a year later, following the 2008 military coup, the country suspended its own membership, citing socio-political challenges that were impacting on the regular reporting of mineral sector payments and revenues. Four years later, and nearly two years into President Alpha Conde’s leadership, Guinea once again rejoined the EITI in July 2012. As a compliant country, Conde’s government must, among other aspects, produce annual EITI reports covering data from the previous year. This requires the active collaboration of key stakeholders, such as parliamentarians, civil society and the media, who all have important roles to play – particularly when it comes to ratifying and adopting laws, monitoring the execution of contracts or public action and communicating this information to the larger population. Unfortunately, one of the main problems is their lack of capacity. The extractive sector is a sensitive, technical, elitist and secretive arena where opacity and complexity abounds. It is hardly an arena inviting of citizen participation, let alone facilitating clear or coherent understanding among primary stakeholders.

In 2013, Natural Resource Governance Institute (NRGI) then Revenue Watch International (RWI) began a project to help equip three main actors implicated in the management of Guinea’s mineral resource sector: parliamentarians (including the National Transitional Council), civil society (including Publish What You Pay-Guinea) and the media (both public and private radio, TV and print outlets). The media and parliamentarians were given practical training in Conakry, while CSOs participated in contract-monitoring sessions in Kindia. These workshops allowed participants to better understand otherwise elusive processes, such as how to analyze mining legislation on contracts; how to review decrees on implementing the Mining Code; effective ways of elaborating and disseminating EITI reports; and concrete ways to contribute to the drafting of decrees.

By targeting these three groups, the NRGI project took a multi-pronged approach to capacity building, ensuring understanding was not solely confined to one group. This also had a positive ripple effect in helping build synergies, trust and improved collaboration across these three sectors.

Aside from the training, a trio of NRGI guides were produced. With the civil society PWYP training specifically, practical workshops enabled them to play an active role in the elaboration and dissemination of the EITI reports that eventually contributed to Guinea’s 2014 EITI compliance status. These NRGI guides are currently used by researchers and students interested in Guinea’s mining sector. RWI has further proposed introducing the guide into Cameroon’s francophone regional summer school program.
In 1996, Senegal's government proved its commitment to deepening the decentralization process by passing the 96-06 Law on March 22, 1996. This marked a laudable step forward in strengthening local governance process. In 2013, under the leadership of President Macky Sall, Senegal went one step further by launching another set of decentralization reforms known as “Act III”. This Act would, among other aspects, harmonize communalization, help rebalance powers between local authorities, promote local development by territories, promote regional economic dynamics, increase citizens’ participation in governance issues and help redefine the administrative boards across Senegal’s 14 regions.

While less overtly visible in the same ways as economic or electoral reforms, decentralizing powers from one branch of government has profound and varied impacts on the entire social, political and economic landscape of a country. But maximizing full benefit from a decentralized legislative process can also be a long and complicated process. There are varying technical, administrative, fiscal and political facets to consider. To achieve more democratic and accountable management of local resources and services, local authorities and citizens must have the capacity and skills to effectively manage their new self-governing obligations.

In 2014, the Collectif des Organisations de la Societe Civile du Senegal pour les Elections (COSCE), working under the NGO 3D, embarked on a one-year project set to reinforce local good governance practices. They implicated civil society and local citizens in ongoing policy and institutional reforms taking place in their respective departments and constituencies. COSCE organized a national consultation with relevant CSOs working on political governance and decentralization to include their contributions to the reform process. A recommendation document was produced and shared with the reform committee and an advocacy and media campaign was conducted to ensure effective implementation.

To help create an environment conducive to dialogue and citizen’s participation in decision-making, COSCE organized three main activities over the course of the year. These included lobbying and institutional reform projects with civil society in the form of a shared “collective agenda”, which was translated into local languages; the publication of an illustrated guide to promote and disseminate the ongoing decentralization of Act III reform; and the contribution towards capacity building of locally elected officials.

This multi-pronged approach allowed COSCE to reach several groups of people simultaneously and encourage their contribution in the local governance reform process, which is still on-going today. This project has been noteworthy in the way it has harmonized and transmitted the reform committee’s recommendations into the new decentralization code and produced simplified guides for newly elected local authorities.
In 2012, after devastating floods swept through 27 of Nigeria’s 36 states, over 300 lives were lost and over two million people displaced. The floods destroyed farmlands, livestock and other means of livelihood. The government’s inability to prevent the flooding, and their poor management post-disaster has remained a source of concern for many Nigerians.

Their lack and inefficient response indicates that neither the federal, state or local governments had (or have) clear disaster plans in place to deal with crises of such magnitude. Temporary camps, a national emergency fund campaign and private sector groups were all set up to raise support funds. But the insufficiency of relief materials and the inadequacy of accommodation facilities, coupled with incidences of security infractions and criminal attacks in the camps, all compromised efforts to help the flood victims.

One of the key recurring concerns has been the lack of transparency and accountability in the use of the government’s allocated relief funds given to affected states post-floods. In October 2012, over three months after the floods began, President Goodluck Jonathan released N17.6 billion ($109.1 million USD) – all “category A” states were intended to receive N500 million each, “category B” states N400 million, “category C” states N300 million and “category D” states N250 million. While there is a website (www.nigeriainfodrelief.org) developed by the relief committee, there is virtually no information showing how the funds have been used.

In response to the opacity surrounding the use of money, the Citizen Budget Information Technology Network (commonly known as BudgIT) embarked on a yearlong project to monitor the use of funds allocated and raised under the Flood Relief and Rehabilitation Program (initiated by the Federal government). The project worked with affected communities to help citizens learn more about how much was raised from donations and government funding, how these funds were disbursed and how much was actually received by flood victims.

The personal stories of directly affected individuals highlighted the poor management of relief programs across many states, as well as the pittance that were paid to persons who had lost their homes and means of livelihood. These stories were widely broadcasted on social media and the project’s website portal, and further published in “Flood Relief and Rehabilitation Funds - A Case For Accountability”. This report has helped raise wider public awareness on the issue. Perhaps one of the most remarkable features of this project is the innovative use of an info-technology powered platform (www.followfloodmoney.org). This tool allows citizens - and especially those from flood affected communities - to tell their own experiences and interact with targeted state relief and rehabilitation committees.

As a result of this project (and following the launch of the report), concerned government agencies have sought closer interactions with BudgIT on key recommendations. Specifically, the Office of the Auditor General of the Federation (OAGF) has established the Committee-Audit of 2012 Flood Disaster Related Aid. This group is auditing the relief funds processed and raised through the Aliko Dangote-led Presidential Committee on Flood Relief and Rehabilitation. The OAGF Audit committee is liaising closely with BudgIT and will rely on the personal stories of those affected (and other research findings from the BudgIT report) in the course of its work. The Audit Committee’s work is expected to last between 6 and 9 months.

The OAGF project’s report revealed that despite the state governors’ acknowledgement that they received monies and distributed it to flood victims, the funds remained unaccounted for. When victims did receive funds, it was late and uncoordinated. The report further revealed that states where camps were managed by private organizations were better run than those managed by the government. Equally disturbing, the report indicates that relief materials, such as medical supplies meant for victims, were reportedly embezzled by middlemen. Affected persons had other levels of complaints relating to the insensitivity of government despite the non-provision of relief for affected persons. In Abia State for instance, a resident named Kalu Uke testified in the course of interactions with BudgIT in January 2014 that despite not receiving anything from the government, he was still expected to pay a government imposed infrastructural development levy of N7000 ($35USD).

BudgIT’s project engagement with the OAGF, and specifically the Committee–Audit of 2012 Flood Disaster Related Aid, will potentially impact how relief funds are used in the country. This is also the first time that the OAGF is embarking on the audit of emergency relief funds (in this case for flood relief) released, raised and managed by the Federal Government and the Presidential Flood Relief and Rehabilitation Committee.
Embracing people-driven change in Nigeria

Say No Campaign

Since Nigeria returned to democratic rule in 1999, the country’s civil society has been growing at impressive rates. They play a strong role in a range of key governance challenges, chief among them is fighting corruption and impunity. Their level of active engagement was prominently demonstrated in January 2012 during the infamous fuel subsidy removal protests. The nationwide event was incited by Nigeria’s civil society, and fervent campaigns took place attracting millions to the street and eventually leading to the government’s reversal of the earlier announced increased fuel price.

Over a year after these January 2012 protests, the fight against depravity – especially in the oil and violence and other governance challenges in Nigeria. That same year, Say No Campaign embarked on a 15 month campaign aimed at mobilizing Nigerians nationwide to embrace people-driven and non-violent forms of crusades and protests. This is no easy task in a nation of over 173 million people.

Since it began, the Say No Campaign is slowly, but surely meeting its goals. They have various projects, key of which is the setting up of mobilization hubs in four geo-political zones (South-East, North-Central, North-West and South-West). These hubs have attracted a high level of citizen engagement, particularly around campaigns such as those calling for the resignation of the Minister of Interior over the Nigerian Immigration Service (NIMS) recruitment scandal that led to the deaths of many unemployed youths across the country. Similarly, there were widespread calls for the removal of the (now former) Minister of Aviation over her alleged complicity in defrauding the country. The Presidency has also failed to demonstrate a readiness to confront the issue of high level corruption by government and elected officials.

In the spring of 2013, a platform of Nigerian activists formed the Say No Campaign, a committee dedicated to fight corruption, impunity, poverty, violence and other governance challenges in Nigeria. They push for administrative, legal, policy and legislative changes that will improve the democratic landscape of their country, and they do so by organizing national and sub-national campaigns, press conferences, advocacy engagements, media campaigns and even street protests.

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Over a year after these January 2012 protests, the fight against depravity – especially in the oil and gas sector – has not yielded the desired results. To date, the nation’s energy company (NNPC) has not opened itself for further scrutiny regarding its alleged complicity in defrauding the country. The Presidency has also failed to demonstrate a readiness to confront the issue of high level corruption by government and elected officials.

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With the discovery of oil in Ghana in 2007, citizens expected this to be a significant moment that would propel the country forward and push it into middle-income developing status. But as exemplified time and again across countless resource-rich nations, the discovery of natural wealth often, in a twist of ironic fate, forecasts tougher times ahead, not economic boon.

The resource curse – where countries abound with natural wealth are more prone to high poverty levels, less diversified economies, and are overall more fragile than they would otherwise be – is well-known in West Africa. In Ghana’s case, the increase in commercial oil production (which netted the state $1.3bn between 2011 and 2013) has been accompanied by numerous documented cases of poor governance, in revenue generation and expenditure, as well as outright corruption.

The African Center for Energy Policy (ACEP, www.acepghana.com) is a relatively new Think Tank focusing on the governance of the energy sector in Ghana, has been thoroughly engaged since 2013 in the drafting of a new Petroleum Bill to repeal the old PNDC Law 84, which has governed the oil and gas sector since 1984. The new Bill looks to address a number of deficiencies in the previous one. Most notably, it seeks to ensure key transparency and accountability terms, open contracting processes, beneficial ownership disclosure, environmental accountability and protection, review of discretionary powers by certain government institutions, and improved fiscal rates and terms.

ACEP has been working with relevant stakeholders, including parliament, the Ministry of Petroleum (formerly the Ministry of Energy), civil society organizations, traditional leaders, the media, youth, religious bodies and the diplomatic community to sensitize on the Bills’ deficiencies before it is passed into law. These engagements were preceded by a comprehensive analysis of the new Bill, drawing on best global practices. ACEP also presented the challenges with the Bill to the diplomatic community, namely ambassadors, in the process of communicating their support of open contracting to the president.

Additionally, ACEP is tackling another key problem in Ghana’s oil and gas sector: corruption. They are working to reduce incentives and increase the punitive cost for perpetrators. They are increasing the reporting on oil and gas related corruption, building the capacity of anti-corruption institutions (to identify, investigate and prosecute corruption cases in the oil and gas industry) and campaigning for framework conditions that promote anti-corruption in the oil and gas industry.

There is great potential for Ghana’s oil and gas industry to drive the economy in a positive way. But this will only happen if this emerging industry is fully integrated into the local economy and the menace of corruption vigorously and holistically tackled along the entire value chain with greater emphasis on revenue generation, revenue management and efficient institutional development to monitor the industry.