



Institutional and Operational Capacity Assessment of Five **County Service Centers** and Citizens' Feedback on the Quality of Services Accessed

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ACRONYMS

CCs	County Councils
CDF	County Development Fund
CBO	Community-Based Organization
CEDA	Community Enterprise Development Agency
CSA	Civil Service Agency
CSC	County Service Center
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
CT	County Treasury
DP	Development Partners
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EU	European Union
GC	Governance Commission
GOL	Government of Liberia
IAA	Internal Audit Agency
IEC	Information, Education, and Communication
IFMIS	Integrated Financial Management Information System
LDSP	Liberia Decentralization Support Program
LGA	Local Government Act 2018
LLA	Liberia Land Authority
LRA	Liberia Revenue Authority
MACs	Ministries, Agencies and Commissions
MFDP	Ministry of Finance and Development Planning
MGCSP	Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection
MIA	Ministry of Internal Affairs
PAPD	Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development
RSA	Revenue Sharing Act
Sida	Swedish International Development Agency
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

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1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Naymote, Partners for Democratic Development, with funding from SIDA, commissioned this rapid assessment of the organizational capacity of Five County Service Centers (CSCs) as well as soliciting the perception of end-users of the quality of services they received from the CSCs. The assessment was conducted in Bong, Lofa, Nimba, Margibi, and Grand Bassa counties for a period of two weeks, April 15–25, 2024. Five county coordinators of the CSCs were interviewed on the institutional and operational capacity of the CSCs, while questionnaires were developed for three hundred and one respondents (the sample is broken down in the methodology) to solicit their feedback on the quality of services accessed at the CSCs.

The outcome of the assessment of the county service centers shows that CSCs are highly relevant to citizens in rural parts of the country, with 86% of respondents reporting contact with the centers in the past year. Despite the drawbacks of some services at the CSCs, with service centers offering an average of 13 out of 21 services, the assessment shows that some services, once exclusively obtained in Monrovia, are being accessed at the county level, thereby reducing transportation costs to travel to Monrovia to access services and lowering the physical risk of traveling long distances by road. 65.12% of the respondents (end-users) say that they have not given bribes or gifts to obtain a service at the CSCs, which makes the CSCs less burdensome to access services.

Operational Capacity: There is a common trend of the challenges facing the CSCs including limited operational funds, inadequate office supplies and equipment, as well as inadequate supply of electricity.

Organizational Capacity: The organizational capacity of the county service centers is currently challenged. This is because the employment status of County Coordinators, staff members and volunteers of CSCs is not regularized, in addition to staff attrition and limited capacity building interventions in management and the overall concept of local government and decentralization.

Management: Oversight by the Ministry of Internal Affairs is poor, with irregular staff meetings and the absence of workplans and yearly operational plans.

Financial Management: There is no system and procedure in place for the authorization of payments. At the same time, there is no petty cash system in place and CSCs do not conduct monthly bank reconciliation. This could create a window for financial impropriety.

Recentralization of services: Services offered are not consistent across CSCs and some services such as vehicle registration and issuance of driver's license have been centralized. This defeats the purpose of the decentralization program.

Efficiency: The level of efficiency at CSCs is low due to limited and irregular disbursement of financial resources by the central government to the CSCs. Additionally, some services are not processed on-site and require processing and approval from Monrovia. This contributes to prolonged delays in providing services to citizens.

Sustainability: CSCs lack financial autonomy, despite generating substantial resources. Full implementation of relevant Acts and regulations is necessary for sustainability. Most respondents (73%) support revenue sharing between central and local governments.

Operational linkage with other decentralized structures:

There is no operational linkage between CSCs and other decentralized structures such as Ministries, Agencies and Commissions (MACs), and County Councils are not fully functional.

Tracking end-users by age, gender and PLWDs:

There is no harmonized system to track and document end-users by age, gender, and minority groups, and LISGIS is not fully operational at all CSCs.

Strategic Information: None of the five service centers has an active website and internet connectivity. Without a functional website, branding and visibility becomes low. Similarly, productivity at the CSCs is low without internet connection.

Citizens Feedback Mechanism: Citizens feedback mechanism systems have been installed at CSCs by UNDP but are not operational, and there is no evidence of how feedback from end-users is currently solicited.

Information on cost to access services: Service costs are not readily available, leading to potential financial shortfalls for citizens. While services offered at the CSCs are displayed, their costs are not.

Mobility: CSCs, excluding Bong County, have motorbikes but they are in deplorable conditions.

Handling of Depreciated Fixed Assets: There is no standardized system in place at the CSCs for managing depreciated assets, risking abuse of equipment provided by development partners.

Recommendations: The following recommendations are advanced to address gaps in institutional and operational capacities as well as feedback from end-users of the CSCs.

Institutional Capacity:**FOR GOVERNMENT:**

- That the Service Centers are supported to institutionalize the implementation of relevant policies for the effective management of the centers.
- That MFDP and LRA provide capacity building support to the service centers in financial system development and administrative management including development of a system for the documentation and management of assets.
- That the Governance Commission conducts evaluations of the centers and provide them with technical support in soliciting feedback from citizens on the quality of services that are provided by the centers.
- That the Internal Audit Agency provides technical support to the service centers in developing an internal system for financial management.

FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS:

- That CSOs continue to monitor the performance of the service centers in the effective and efficient delivery of services.
- That CSOs engage with the service centers to identify areas where some minimum capacity development interventions, such as, the development of workplan and formulation of annual budget can be made.

FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS:

- That the visibility and branding of the service center is increased through the establishment of a website at each functional center.

Operational Capacity:**FOR GOVERNMENT:**

- That the government makes the County Service Centers more functional by regular disbursement of financial resources for operational and administrative costs.
- That the government delegates some of its authority to the County Service Centers authorizing them to perform certain services including traditional marriage certificates, vehicle registration and driver's license.
- That the MACs delegate some of their authority to the County Service Centers authorizing them to provide certain services including traditional marriage certificates, vehicle registration and driver's license.

FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS:

- Advocate to make the service centers autonomous institutions. This will enable them to receive direct budgetary allocation and be aligned with other decentralization schemes and structures. These will further deepen the country's decentralization effort.
- Advocate with the MFDP and the MIA for the swift and full implementation of the Regulation to operationalize the Revenue Sharing Act.
- That the government delegates some of its authority to the County Service Centers authorizing them to perform certain services including traditional marriage certificates, vehicle registration and driver's license.

FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS:

- Support the service centers to develop a short, medium and long-term capacity development program so that trainings and other interventions are responsive to the needs of the centers including IT support.
- That a coordination mechanism is put in place for collaborative interventions and more resource coordination to maximize results.
- That LISGIS is engaged to provide technical support to the service centers to develop a system to track and document users of the centers, disaggregated by gender, age and minority groups.

Limitations to the assessment: The following challenges posed limitations to the conduct of the assessment, but did not, however, undermine the quantity and quality of the data collected and analyzed that led to the findings:

- Unavailability of relevant documents including progress reports and financial records from the CSCs.
- The assessment was done during the political transition wherein new county superintendents were appointed but not inducted to enable them to exercise their official function. As such, interviews were not conducted with the Superintendents who provide oversight of the CSCs.
- Identifying end-users to serve as respondents for the survey was difficult because they were not easily accessible. This required extra time and effort.

2.0 INTRODUCTION:

The centralization of political and fiscal authority has been a perennial governance challenge that has for many years undermined inclusive growth and development of Liberia. It has also adversely affected the effective participation of citizens in decision-making processes and limited citizens' access to affordable and quality public services. These problems have reinforced forms of social and economic inequalities, structural factors that have the potential to contribute to conflict and weaken social cohesion. The long years of war further weakened public administration and the delivery of services.

The 1986 Constitution¹ provides the legal framework that supports an overly centralized governance structure. Rather than addressing this fundamental constitutional impediment through constitutional amendment, successive governments since 2005 have chosen the formulation of policies and the enactment of statutes to deal with the issue of centralization of political and economic power.

The first intervention was under the administration of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. In 2007 the national legislature passed the law establishing the County Development Fund (CDF) as a part of the government's decentralization initiative. The CDF is captured in the budget law as a source of funding to facilitate developments at the county level through a participatory means in identifying projects to be funded by resources from the CDF.² In the 2007/2008 budget, the government apportioned US\$ 66,666 for each county without taking into account demographic and geographic factors. The same amount was provided in the 2008/2009 budget year. Based on complaints from the counties that the amount was not adequate to respond to their development needs, the CDF was increased to US\$200,000.00 per county and this amount has not changed. This well-meaning intent did not achieve its desired results as the implementation and management of the funds became politicized.

In 2012, a National Policy on Decentralization and Local Governance was launched as a means of establishing a framework for effective and efficient service delivery at the sub-national level. The Policy was also intended to enhance participatory decision-making, to engender peace-building and social cohesion as well as strengthen local planning, monitoring, and management capacity. The establishment of four County Treasuries in Nimba, Bong, Margibi, and Grand Bassa Counties has reduced payment time to local vendors.

The Policy set the framework for the establishment of County Service Centers (CSCs) across the fifteen counties was done on a gradual basis. In 2015, five CSCs were established and the remaining ten were established in 2017. The CSC serves as a "one-stop shop" that would enable citizens to access a variety of government services under one roof across the 15 political subdivisions. This Policy was a positive action in advancing the government's de-concentration effort as a first step in the roll-up of its decentralization reform. Twenty-one (21) services from different Ministries, Agencies and Commissions (MACs) were earmarked to be provided by the CSCs.

In 2018, President George Weah signed into law the Local Government Act (LGA). One of the primary objectives of the LGA is to devolve some political, administrative and fiscal authorities to the county level. The appointment of superintendents by the President remains

¹ Art. 54d of the Constitution gives the authority to the President to appoint Superintendents, county officials and officials of other political sub-divisions.

² Allocation of funds to counties commenced in the budget year of 2007/2008

unchanged. One key administrative structure under the LGA is the establishment of County Councils in each county.

Chapter 2.2 of the LGA calls for the establishment of CCs in each county with specific functions to include among others promulgating County ordinances, imposing local taxes, authorizing the issuance of certain licenses, approving development plans and annual budgets, etc. The Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) developed a ten-year national plan that serves as a roadmap for the implementation of the LGA. To implement the actions contained in the plan, relevant state institutions need to possess the requisite administrative and technical capacities and skills to achieve the desired results.

In 2020, the government adopted the National Policy on Decentralization and Local Governance (NPDLG). With funding from the embassies of Sweden and Ireland, the Liberia Decentralization Support Program (LDSP) II (2020-2024) managed by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) has been supporting the implementation of the NPDLG as well as operationalizing the LGA. The programme targets the decentralization of administrative and political governance in line with the fiscal decentralization component implemented by the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MFDP).

Consistent with Chapter 4 of the LGA, the Liberian government in July 2022 enacted a Revenue Sharing Act (RSA). This law, compliments the LGA, seeks to promote equitable revenue sharing between central government and the counties. Under this scheme, each county is to receive a portion of revenues generated at the local levels to advance service delivery and improve economic and social development.³

The RSA deals with the issue of sustainability of CSCs an institutional strengthening requirement for sustained and improved service delivery at the subnational level. Section 10.1 of the RSA mandates the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MFDP) to develop a regulation on the schedules and methods of transfers of revenues to local governments and sub-local governments. In response to the mandate, UNDP supported the past government in developing a draft regulation but it was not endorsed by the then Minister of MFDP. This is an outstanding piece of administrative instrument that is necessary for a full implementation of the RSA.

While some progress has been made through the establishment of the CSCs and creation of the CCs across the country in keeping with the Decentralization Policy and LGA, respectively, these institutions face enormous organizational challenges that hinder their ability to implement their core mandate and functions. The model of the CSCs has a huge potential to generate local revenue, increase citizens' access to public services and to bring the people closer to the government. This can be achieved if the CSCs are managed in a sustainable, effective and efficient manner. Similarly, the CCs have the potential to increase participation in decision-making and mainstream the voices of citizens in the local governance process. Like the CSCs, these structures have limited capacity to implement their statutory mandate and responsibilities.

2023 was a distractive period as the elections caused a distraction from development to politics and electioneering thereby weakening local governance structures such as the CSCs and CCs in implementing their functions. With a peaceful political transition, the new government has the opportunity to place decentralization at the core of its development programs. Adequate

³³ Chapter 7.2 of the RSA states that 40% of all revenue generated from CSCs must be retained by local governments for its operationalization.

laws are in place. What is needed is the political commitment to enforce and implement them. Structures exist at the subnational level. What is needed is the financial support from the government to make them functional, sustainable, less prone to corruption, effective, and efficient in the delivery of public services.

At the same time, under Pillar Four (Governance and Rule of Law) of the Unity Party plan, the government has committed itself to the process of national decentralization for equitable development. Despite this commitment and past efforts that have been made to bring the government closer to the people through the establishment of CSCs, it is unclear what is the current operational capacities, status of these CSCs and the quality of service they provide. It is against this background that this rapid assessment was done in five of the fifteen counties (Bassa, Margibi, Bong, Lofa and Nimba).

This report, which outlines the findings of the assessment is divided into three inter-related sections. Section one highlights findings from the Organizational Capacity Assessment (OCA) of the CSCs. Section two deals with qualitative analysis of the operational processes and modalities of the CSCs. The last section provides an overview of feedback and perspectives of citizens about the quality of services that they access from the CSCs. The findings are presented under these categories and are followed by concrete recommendations to build on the gains that have been made over the years to increase citizens' access to public services.

I. 3.0 METHODOLOGY:

This assessment was both qualitative and quantitative and due to limited resources, the field work targeted the five counties mentioned above. Nonetheless, the findings from these five CSCs will provide a general outlook on the operational trends and patterns as well as some of the common institutional challenges they are faced with on a daily basis that impede their ability to fulfill their core functions.

The assessment had the following specific objectives:

- To document services provided by the CSCs and identify institutional capacity gaps that hinder their ability to deliver public services in an efficient manner;
- To assess the level of coordination among and between other county level structures;
- To solicit feedback from end-users of the CSCs on the quality of services they received from the CSCs.
- To advance recommendations for improvements.

To achieve the above objectives, the following tasks were completed:

Literature Review: All relevant legal and policy documents related to Liberia's decentralization process were reviewed. The outcomes of the review provided useful information to frame the tools for the assessment.

Formulation of tools: Three data collection tools (two quantitative and one qualitative) were developed. The first tool was a questionnaire for gathering data on the Organizational Capacity Assessment (OCA) of the CSCs. The second tool was a questionnaire on soliciting feedback from citizens on the quality of service they have received from the CSCs. The third tool was a set of qualitative questions to conduct Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with Coordinators of the CSCs on their operations.

Training: Ten data collectors (2 females and 8 males), two per county, underwent a two-day training on the basic ethics of research, data collection proceedings including customizing the questions for local use and the use of digital systems for data collection. The training also

included simulation and pilot testing of the questionnaire in selected communities in Gbarnga, Bong County where the training was held.

Administration of the tools: The OCA tool was administered to each of the coordinators of the named CSCs. Similarly, the KIIs targeted the coordinators of the five CSCs. The questionnaire on the feedback was administered to citizens who have accessed services at the CSCs.

Sample size: The sample was targeted, meaning citizens 18 years and above who have used the CSCs before. The sample size was three hundred and was based on an estimate of the number of persons who have accessed each service center over the past year.⁴

COUNTY	# of persons who accessed CSCs	SAMPLE SIZE
Bong	1200	95
Bassa	1000	81
Nimba	520	41
Lofa	530	42
Margibi	520	41
TOTAL:	3770	301

Data Analysis:

In the analysis of the data, responses from the KIIs, where appropriate were used to provide some explanations to the answers from the OCA. In this way, general findings were to a large extent validated and authenticated. The three data collection tools served different purposes so information generated was useful in facilitating the triangulation of the findings. Each finding is accompanied by a recommendation for improvement.

4.0 FINDINGS:

The findings below were reached based on analyses from the three primary sources, responses from the coordinators of the CSCs on the organizational capacity assessment, operational assessment and perception of end-users of the CSCs. Secondary source included a review of the legal and regulatory frameworks guiding the operations of the CSCs.

4.1 Institutional Capacity Assessment: The findings under the institutional capacity assessment are grouped under the following five components:

1. Management
2. Human Resource
3. Financial
4. Fixed Assets Management
5. Strategic Information

Management:

4.1.1 Management structure: All of the five CSCs that were targeted during the assessment have been operating between seven to nine years and none of them has an institutional organogram that highlights the structure of the management team that outlines the chain of decision-making with clearly defined roles and responsibilities.

4.1.2 Institutional Policies: Bong County Service Center has financial and procurement policies in place while Bassa Service Center has financial and personnel policies. The other

⁴ These estimates of the number of persons who accessed the CSCs over the past year was provided by the Coordinators

service centers do not have any institutional policy. They follow the policies of their line ministry, thereby reinforcing administrative centralization.

4.1.3 Staff Meetings: The conduct of staff meeting is not consistent across the five service centers. Three of the service centers (Bong, Margibi and Nimba) organize monthly staff meeting while Lofa organizes staff meeting twice a year and Bassa service center does not organize staff meetings. The irregular conduct of meetings denies staff members the opportunity for information sharing, finding collective solutions to emerging challenges, soliciting feedback from staff and participating in decision-making on the management of the centers.

4.1.4 Compilation of progress report: Overall, the Service Centers compile progress reports. For the exception of the Bassa County service center, the other four service centers indicated that they compile quarterly progress reports. The reports are sent to the Superintendent for onward submission to the Minister of International Affairs. This is a good management practice as the reports provide an update on the types of services that citizens access, the services frequency accessed and income generated on a quarterly basis. Except for the Bassa Service Center, the other Centers mentioned that they get feedback on the reports that are submitted.

Human Resource:

4.1.5 Existence of a human resource policy: Two of the five service centers assessed (Bong and Margibi) mentioned that they have a human resource policy in place. Nonetheless, staff at all of the Service Centers have written job descriptions.

4.1. 6 Human Resource Capacity:

Projected number of staff needed to run each center	Current number of staff	M	F	Staff gap
Bong: 63	33	25	8	30
Bassa: 59	58	47	11	1
Lofa: 33	26	22	4	7
Margibi: 34	30	19	11	19
Nimba: 44	19	18	1	25

Grand Bassa Service Center appears to have the needed staff to manage the operations of the Center and the current size of the office is high yet staff meeting is not conducted. Managing such a number of staff without conducting regular staff meeting raises questions about the effectiveness of the services provided to citizens. Women are grossly under-represented as staff members at all of the service centers assessed. This could be attributed to the lack of a gender-sensitive approach in the recruitment of staff. Compared to other counties, Bong and Nimba, the two highly populated counties next to Montserrado have staff deficit in terms of the required number of staff members that are needed to run the centers.

4.1.7 Level of education attained: All of the staff members at the service centers have attained high school education. Other qualifications include the attainment of Associate and Bachelors Degrees. These levels of qualifications means that staff members have the requisite knowledge to make the centers effective and proficient in the delivery of services.

4.1.8 Skills acquired through on the job-training: Skills acquired through on-the-job training include management, accounting and computer literacy. These are essential skills that if properly applied can contribute to the effective management of the centers.

4.1.9 Performance Review: Appraisal of staff performance is done at the end of every year. This is a good management practice and a tool for investing in the growth and development of staff members.

4.1.10 Existence of a capacity building program: All of the five centers mentioned that they do not have any capacity building program. Trainings that are provided by external development partners need to be responsive to the particular needs of each staff informed by a capacity building program or plan.

4.1.11 Existence of an operational plan: Yearly operational plans have not been developed by the five centers. Operational plans are important management tools that define activities that need to be carried out, expected outcomes, and clearly defined roles and responsibilities. They are also useful in building a team and enhancing institutional productivity. Operational budgets are developed from the operational plan and if such a plan is not developed, it is difficult to identify budget gaps.

Financial:

4.1.12 Allotment from Central Government: In 2023, disbursement of funds by the central government to the service centers was not regular and consistent. For instance, Bong County Service Center received \$6,600 and L\$988,000.00 as compared to Nimba County that did not receive any funds out of a budget of US\$13,300.00. Of the \$6,600 received, 60% was in US\$ while the remaining 40% was in Liberian Dollars. For Margibi County, the service center receives what central government agrees to provide and amount is irregular.

4.1.13 Other sources of funding: There is no other sources of funding for the service centers. However, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) provide logistical support and office equipment including desks, computers and solar panel.

4.1.14 Financial skills: The service centers in Bong and Nimba use excel to keep its financial records while the other three centers use manual processes for financial management.

4.1.15 Petty Cash and financial documentation: Other than the Grand Bassa County Service Center that has a petty cash threshold of US\$300.00, all of the other centers do not operate a petty cash system. Nonetheless, financial transactions are documented at all of the service centers.

4.1.16 Authorization of expenditure and payment: There is a pattern in the expenditure and payment are authorized. The number of signatories include the Superintendent, the Fiscal Superintendent and the Coordinator. The only variance is in Nimba County where the Finance Officer of the Ministry of Internal Affairs is a signatory to the account even though this person resides in Monrovia.

4.1.17 Monthly financial bank reconciliation: Service centers in Bong, Margibi and Lofa Counties carry out monthly financial bank reconciliation while this practice is not done in the other two counties. No tangible explanation was provided for not doing monthly bank reconciliation. Without monthly financial reconciliation, it is difficult to ascertain or verify accuracy in monthly financial banking transactions.

4.1.18 Compilation of monthly financial report: Service centers in Bassa and Nimba Counties do not compile monthly financial report. This may be due to the lack of skills or equipment to compile the report or both. Without the compilation of financial reports, issues of transparency and accountability in managing resources can be questioned.

4.1.19 Revenue during the period 2023: There are variances in knowledge related to revenue generated during the period of 2023. Bong County Service Center generated US\$ 33,333 and L\$ 7,500,006.77 and Margibi County Service Center generated USD 38.94.1 LD 3,480,772.89. The Service Center in Grand Bassa could not provide any information on the amount generated. No information was received from the Service Center in Lofa County because the coordinator asserted that he did not have record on income because all financial transactions are done through the Liberia Revenue Authority (LRA). The coordinator could not provide data for the full period. However, he mentioned that the first and second quarters of 2023, documented revenue amounted to US\$18,488.00 and LR\$5,416,345.00. Despite the variations among the figures and partial information, the fact remains that the county service centers are sources of revenue generation.

4.1.20 Audit: Except for Lofa County Service Center, the other service centers mentioned that they have gone through external audits conducted in 2019 for Bong, November 2023 for Bassa, September 2023 for Margibi and March 2023 for Nimba. Copies of the audit reports could not be accessed for independent verification particularly so when in 2023 the focus of the country was on a politics and the conduct of elections.

Fixed Assets:

4.1.21 Functional Computers: The number of functional computers in each of the service centers varies from one location to another. The service center in Bong County has two functional computers, five computers each in Lofa and Nimba, thirteen at the service center in Margibi County and none in Grand Bassa County service center. Without having any functional computer, the delivery of service in an effective and efficient manner is greatly hindered. At the same time, the two computers at the Bong County Service Center seems to be grossly inadequate to respond to the service needs of the size of the population of the county.

4.1.22 Functional printers: The Bong County Service Center has five functional printers as compared to two computers. Grand Bassa Service Center does not have any functional printer while Lofa Service Center, Margibi Service Center and Nimba Service Center have 3, 5, and 4 functional printers, respectively.

4.1.23 Mobility: None of the service centers has an institutional vehicle for mobility. The service center in Lofa has a motorbike for operational purposes.

4.1.24 Handling of Depreciated Fixed Assets: Each service center has a slightly different system for handling depreciated assets. At the Bong County Service Center, depreciated assets are sent to the General Services Agency (GSA). For the service center in Grand Bassa County, depreciated assets are repaired by the service center. At the service center in Lofa, the assets are kept in the store room until an instruction is received from the MIA. The service centers In Margibi and Nimba Counties have no system for handling depreciated assets. However, depreciated assets are kept in their respective store rooms.

Strategic Information:

4.1.25 Visibility: None of the five service centers has a website. The service centers generate income so they are a form of business. Without a functional website, branding and visibility become a challenge and citizens may not be aware of the services that are or are not available at the centers.

4.1.26: Development of workplan: Except for the Service centers in Bong and Grand Bassa Counties that do not develop workplans, the other centers do and they indicated that workplans are developed on a yearly basis.

4.1.27 Development of a Monitoring and Evaluation plan: This is an important organizational tool that set the basis for developing a system for documentation and assessing programmatic performance and tracking results. Despite its importance, none of the five service centers has a developed monitoring and evaluation plan (M & E). The three common reasons provided included the following: (i) lack of institutional capacity; (ii) no trained staff to manage; and (iii) there is no budgetary support for M & E.

4.1.28 Feedback Mechanism: Soliciting feedback from end-users provides valuable information to the service centers on how they can improve the quality of services they provide to citizens. All five service centers, other than Grand Bassa County asserted that they solicit feedback from end-users of the centers. While they indicated that they solicit feedback from end-users, there was no clear explanation on how feedback is received. One center mentioned that the radio is used to solicit feedback but since 2023 the radio show has been off the air due to the lack of funding. UNDP has developed a Feedback Mechanism System (FMS) to solicit feedback from end-users and it was interesting to note that this FMS was not mentioned by any of the service centers assessed.

5.0 Operational Framework of the CSCs:

This section of the report focuses on the operational framework of the CSCs. Information generated for this section was done through the conduct of Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) that targeted the county coordinators of the CSCs.

5.1 Services offered by CSCs:

On average, CSCs offer between 12-15 services and the common services across CSCs include the following: These services include: Birth Certificate (0-12), Traditional Marriage Certificate, issuance of national identification card, Business Registration, Deeds Registration, and school operational licenses. CSCs in Lofa and Margibi County carry out registration of vehicles. Issuance of driver's license is done at the CSC in Margibi while no other center offers this service. Similarly, other than the CSCs in Margibi and Lofa Counties, no other center offers vehicle registration service and the issuance of traditional marriage certificate is no longer happening at the service centers. Interviewees asserted that these services which are vital to citizens in the counties were relocated to Monrovia. According to interviewees, the decline in services started in 2022 and it was accelerated during the 2023 electoral period with a sharp decline during this period in the number of persons who enrolled to access services. Non-functional office equipment such as printers and computers and limited internet connectivity were additional reasons that contributed to the decline in services that were provided by the centers.

5.2 Relevance of the CSCs:

KI interviewees across the five service centers recognized the relevance of the centers and how they have brought services closer to the people and helped to reduce financial burdening for citizens to wish to seek services but were constrained to travel to Monrovia. In the words of one interviewee: "Before the establishment of this county service center, citizens were going to Monrovia to access services but now they can do that right in the counties. So, we can say the presence of the county service center is really important for our people".

Another interviewee asserted that the conduit for decentralization is the County Service and it has given the people of Nimba a sense of inclusion in national government's decentralization effort and reduced the stress of traveling to Monrovia to access basic public services. Moreover, the centers are sources of revenue generation.

5.3 Difference the CSCs is making:

Interviewees stated that one important difference the CSCs is making is that it has afforded citizens the opportunity to access documents at the county level that were previously exclusively available from the national government in Monrovia. An interviewee noted that that before the Center came into being, women could only consummate their marriages with the exchange of animals, but through but centers, they can register their marriage and wait for the certificate to be printed in Monrovia and sent to the centers. Apart from the reduction in cost of traveling to Monrovia to access services, interviewees also mentioned that the establishment of the centers has reduced accident risk of traveling to Monrovia and increased democratic dividend due to a sense of belonging.

5.4 Linkage of the CSCs to other decentralization structures:

While the CSCs serve as channels for the provision of basic services it is also a medium of domestic revenue generation. Interviewees mentioned that the county councils which are the legislative arms of the county to develop ordinances for the running of the county as well as to approve budgets for the smooth working of the county administration are yet to be fully functional though established. The Revenues Sharing Act (RSA) which authorized the national government to share revenue generated from the County Service Center in each county will help the county authority including the county council to generate revenue for local interventions, including domestic support to the County Service Center for its operations. However, the Act is yet to be implemented. An interviewee reiterated that: “When the RSA becomes effective it will contribute to the income of the County which will be a means of support to the county service centers based on revenue generated”. In the absence of the functionality of the County Councils and the implementation of the RSA, relationship between the CSCs and these mechanisms is not active.

5.5 Relationship between CSCs, county leadership and MIA:

Relationship between the CSCs and the county leadership and MIA is mixed. With the exception of Grand Bassa County where the interviewee expressed a lack of interest by the leadership of the MIA and the county in the operations of the CSC, interviewees from all of the other centers mentioned that relationship with their direct line of supervision has been cordial. This cordiality has created a channel of communication that has facilitated the submission of reports to the Superintends for onward submission to the MIA. By hosting the CSC within the county administration building creates an opportunity for engagement between the county leadership and CSCs.

5.6 Challenges that hinder the ability of citizens to access services:

Common challenges identified by interviewees across the five centers included the following:

- The service center was meant to be a one-stop center but this is not the case. The lack of constant supply of essential office supplies, lack of working equipment (computers and printers) and constant electricity caused delays in responding to the needs of citizens.
- The provision of some services takes longer than expected. For instance, the centers do not issue traditional marriage certificates. The issuance is centralized because it has to be printed and signed from the MIA before sending it back to the Centers and this causes delays up to a month and citizens lose interest and patience.
- The SCs are located in the capitals of the counties and poor road connectivity between the capital cities and district makes it difficult for citizens in other parts of the county to access services. This means people who ordinarily access the services live in the capitals of the counties and the surrounding communities.

- Sometimes people come for services only to realize that the money they brought can't afford the service they are seeking. This is because of limited awareness on the cost citizens need to pay in accessing certain services.
- Not all of the services contained in the guideline developed by the MIA are available at the service centers due to the absence of some ministries and agencies and this creates frustration for citizens who come to access services.
- Limited operational capacity contributes to the intermittent closure of some service centers and this makes citizens disinterested in coming to the centers for service.
- Limited mobile service delivery means that citizens in other parts of the county who cannot afford the cost for travel cannot easily access services.

5.7 Tracking end-users by age, gender and PLWDs:

There is no harmonized system in place for tracking and documenting end-users of the service centers disaggregated by age, gender and minority groups including People Living with Disabilities (PLWDs). At the service centers in Nimba and Lofa, there is no mechanism in place to track these categories of citizens mentioned above. However, interviewees mentioned that MACs that have presence at the service centers have their own way of tracking particulars of people who come to access services. For example: the Ministry of Health has its own way of documenting the number of children that have accessed birth certificates. At the same time, in Margibi County, LISGIS is responsible for data collection on end-users of the centers. At the Bong County Service Center there is an excel database system that tracks only the total number of people who access services and their gender.

5.8 Factors undermining the effective operations of the CSCs:

From the interviews conducted, the challenges facing the CSCs are similar although there are slight differences. Similar challenges include:

Delay in the delivery of office supplies, materials and equipment.

- Limited budgetary allocation and in other instances untimely and irregular disbursement of approved operational funds over the past three years leading to a reduction in the performance of the centers.
- Lack of awareness among communities of the services that can be accessed at the service centers and their respective costs.
- Issuance of birth certificates for adults is difficult because there is no internet network connectivity.
- Limited access to mobility particularly motorbikes to attend to administrative and operational matters.

Unique challenges faced by the CSCs include:

- At the Bassa Service Center, there is no electricity and staff capacity gap in IT management.
- At the Bong Service Center, office spaces for MACs are limited.

5.9 Level of support from government and partners:

Overall, interviewees mentioned that support from government (financial, administrative and logistics) has been very limited and this has declined over the past three years. They further indicated that oversight supervision of the performance of the service centers by the MIA has been weak. Engagement with the service centers has been by UNDP and USAID essentially with the provision of office equipment and capacity-building training for staff.

5.10 Sustainability of the CSCs:

- The establishment and operations of the CSCs are not backed by law. Because the institutional framework is under the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) so this makes it difficult for the centers to be independent. Even in the event where the Revenue Sharing Act is enforced and portion of the revenue generated by the centers are remitted to the counties, the management of the centers will still not have a greater say in how such resources are managed because the institutional framework is controlled by the MIA through the office of the Superintendent. To make the centers independent and more effective, key informant interviewers indicated that the centers be legislated so they can become autonomous. As an autonomous public institution backed by law, sustainability can be better guaranteed.
- Another intervention that could engender sustainability is investment by the government in the construction of a new facility for the service centers enable to create more office spaces for MACs which has the potential to generate additional revenue, from which a portion will be distributed to the counties to cover operational cost in running the service centers.

6.0 Feedback from end-users of CSCs: This portion of the report presents findings of the quantitative survey to capture the views and perspectives of citizens on the relevance and quality of services provided by the CSCs.

6.1 Distribution of revenue generated from CSCs: Despite the passage of the RSA to give back a portion of revenue generated from the counties back to them, revenues generated from the CSCs go through the Liberia Revenue Authority (LRA) into the government's consolidated account and no sharing takes place. An overwhelming majority of respondents (73%) support the idea that portion of revenues generated from the CSCs should remain at the Centers for operational cost. Of this number, 51% of females are in agreement with this view as compared to their male counterpart with 49% (See charts 1 and 2 below).

Charts

Chart #1: Revenue generated from the County Service Center should go to the central government

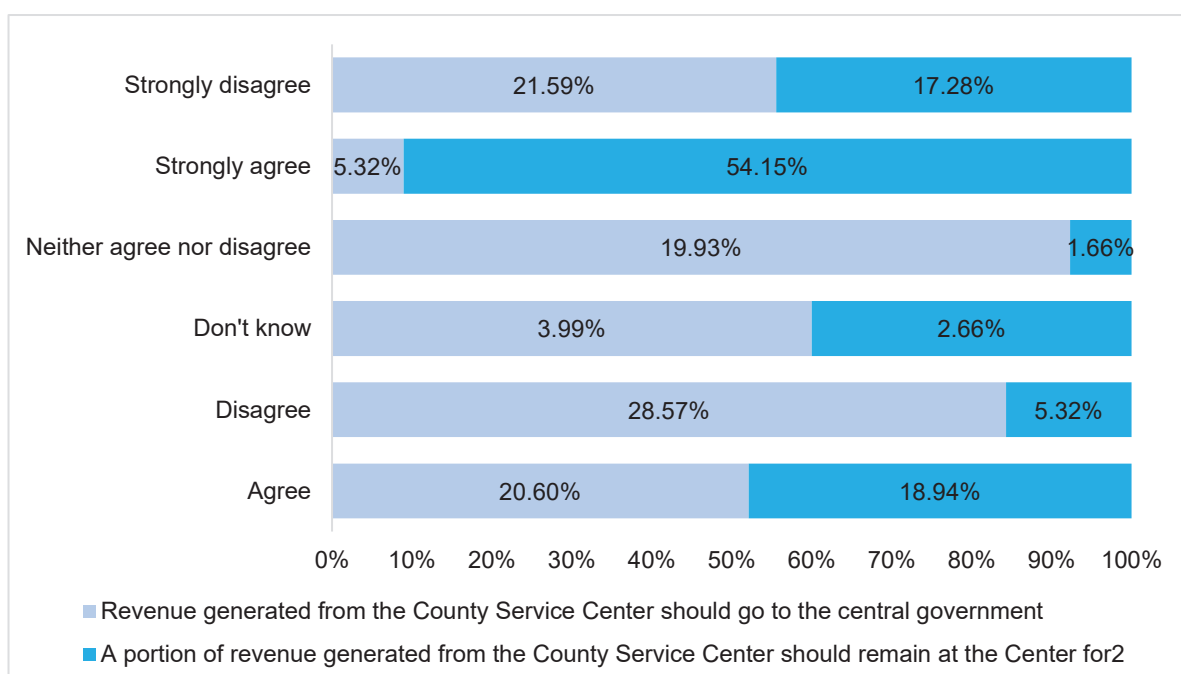


Chart # 2: Revenue generated from the County Service Center should go to the central government by gender

Revenue generated from the County Service Center should go to the central government				A portion of revenue generated from the County Service Center should remain at the Center for2			
Female	%	Male	%	Female	%	Male	%
35	12%	27	9%	33	11%	24	8%
42	14%	44	15%	5	2%	11	4%
9	3%	3	1%	7	2%	1	0%
30	10%	30	10%	3	1%	2	1%
8	3%	8	3%	83	28%	80	27%
29	10%	36	12%	22	7%	30	10%
153	51%	148	49%	153	51%	148	49%

6.2 Contact made with the CSCs: The relevance of the CSCs as mentioned by the coordinators of the centers is aligned to the feedback provided by the end-users. A majority of respondents (86%) say that over the past year they have had contact with the service centers. More women (44%) as compared to men (42%) made contact with the service centers (See charts 3 and 4).

Chart # 3: In the past 12 months, have you had contact with the Service Center?

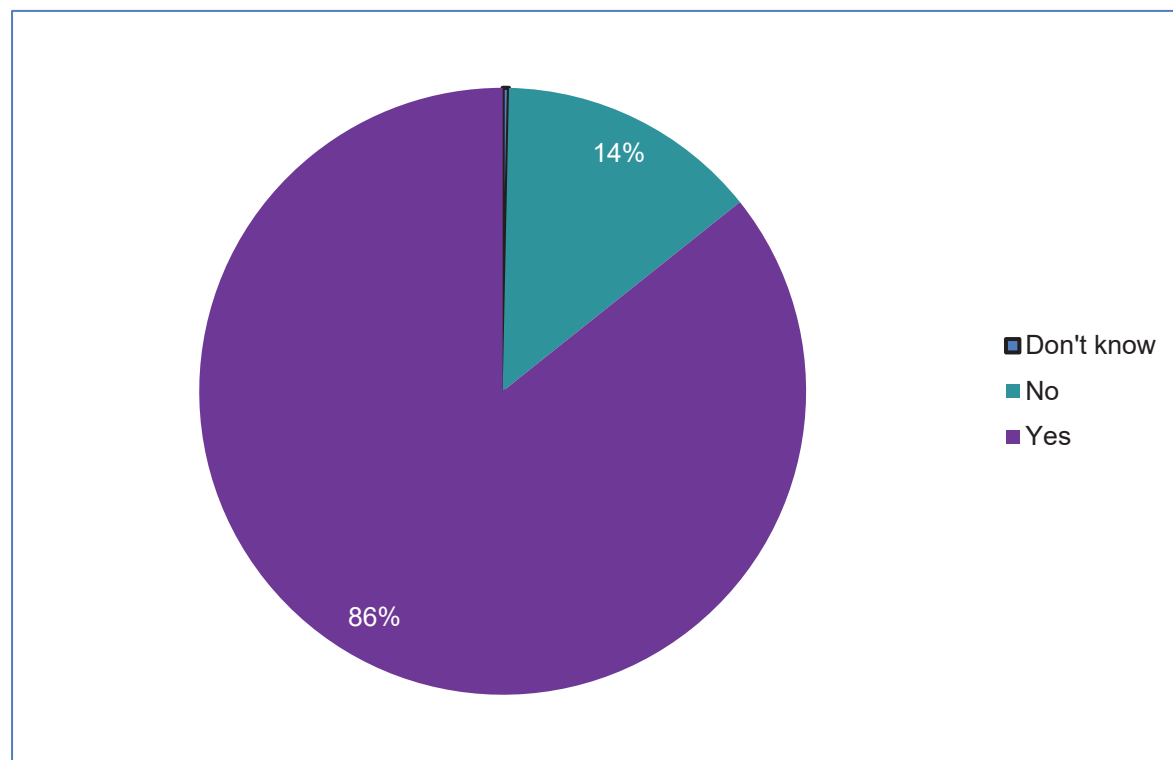
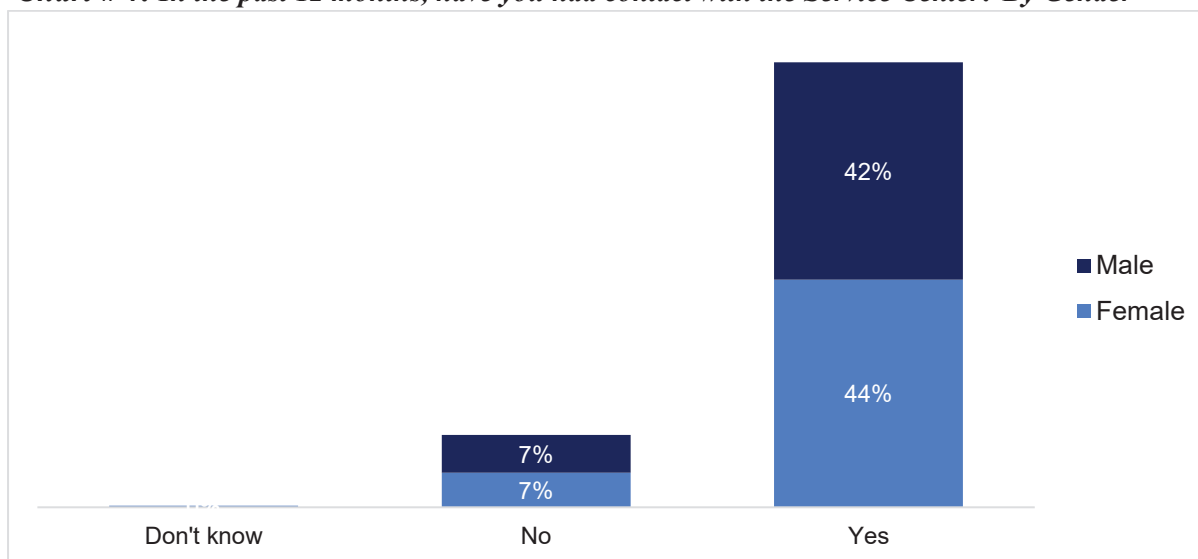
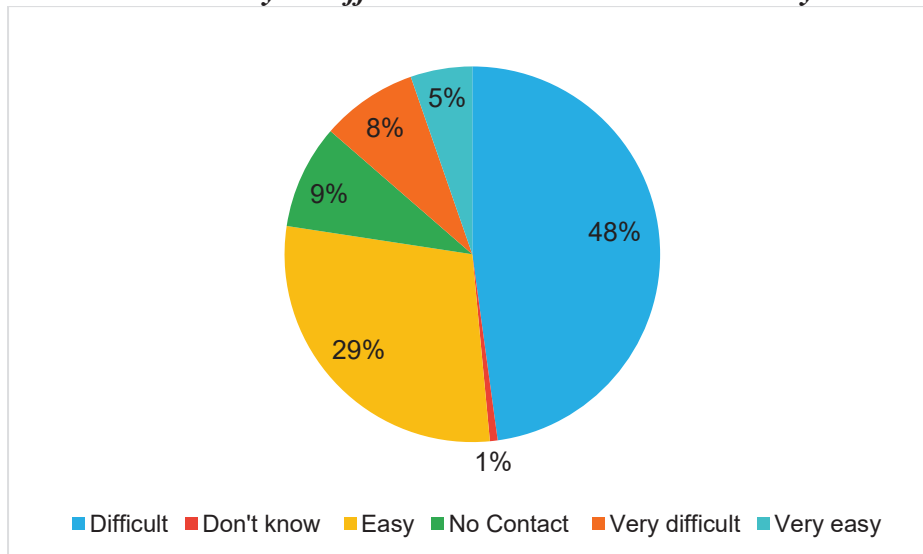


Chart # 4: In the past 12 months, have you had contact with the Service Center? By Gender

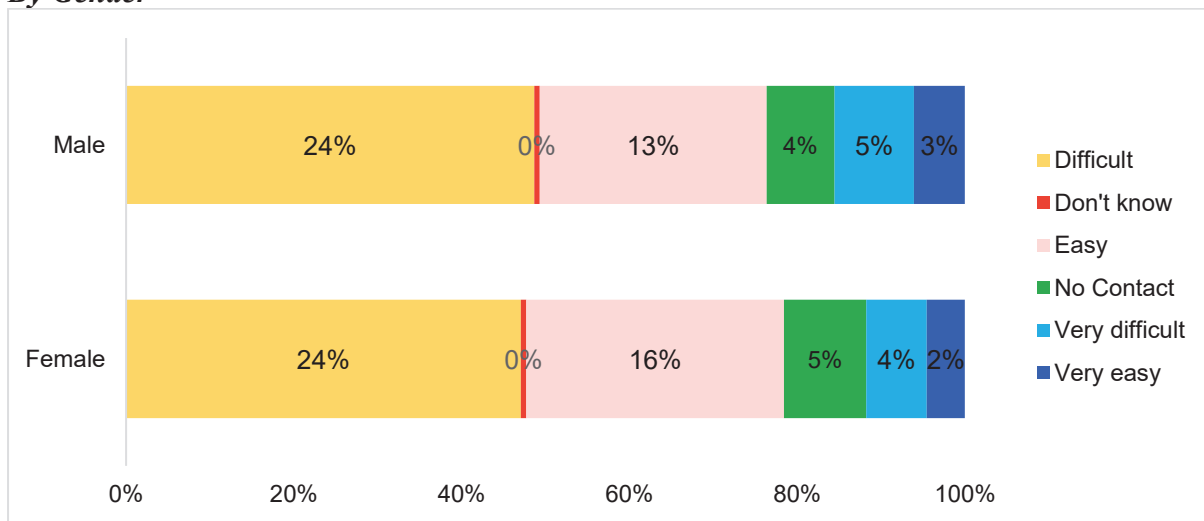


6.3 Accessing CSCs: Accessibility is a key factor in defining the quality of services that are accessed by citizens. Almost half of the respondents (48%) say that accessing the CSCs is difficult. There was no significant difference in the views between males and females (See charts 5 and 6).

Chart # 5: How easy or difficult was it to obtain the services you needed from the Center?



**Chart # 6: How easy or difficult was it to obtain the services you needed from the Center?
By Gender**



6.4 Obtaining documents over the past one year: Accessing the CSCs is primarily to obtain services mostly documents. Close to 80% of respondents say that over the past 12 months, they tried to obtain documents including national identification card, birth certificates, etc. At the same time, 44% of respondents say it was difficult to obtain the documents they needed (See charts 7 and 8).

Chart # 7: Count of 15A. In the past 12 months, have you tried to obtain documents such as an identity card, birth certificate, etc.

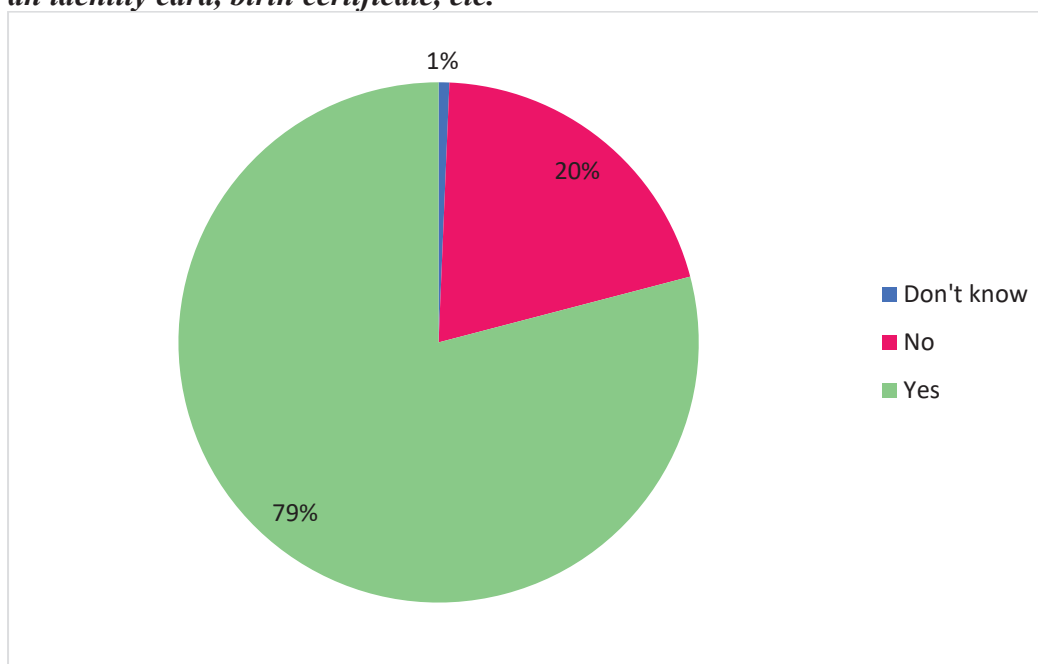


Chart # 8: In the past 12 months, have you tried to obtain documents such as an identity card, birth certificate, etc.

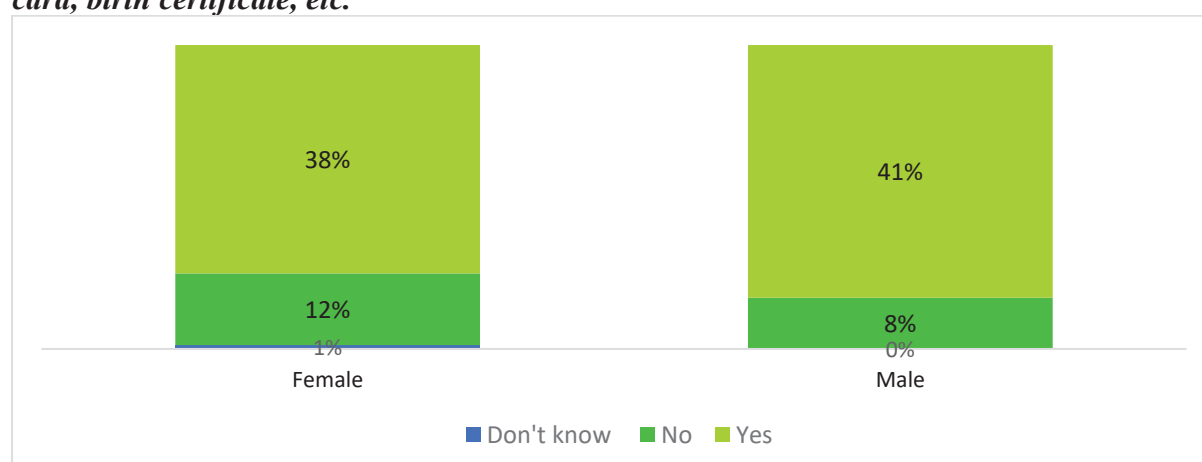


Chart # 9: In the past 12 months, have you tried to obtain documents such as an identity card, birth certificate, etc. By Gender

If yes, how easy or difficult was it to obtain the document you needed?		
Difficult	133	44%
Easy	68	23%
No Contact	38	13%
Very difficult	38	13%
Don't know	15	5%
Very easy	9	3%
Grand Total	301	100%

6.5 Un-ethical conduct to access service: Bribery and extortion are common un-ethical practices in Liberia to obtain public services. Sometimes unnecessary barriers are created to induce the giving of bribes or gifts to public officers to perform their official duties. However, this is not the case at the CSCs as more than half (65.12%) of the respondents say that they have not given bribes or gifts to obtain a service even though they say that accessing services is difficult (see chart 10 below).



Chart # 10: And how often, if ever, did you have to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favor to obtain a service?

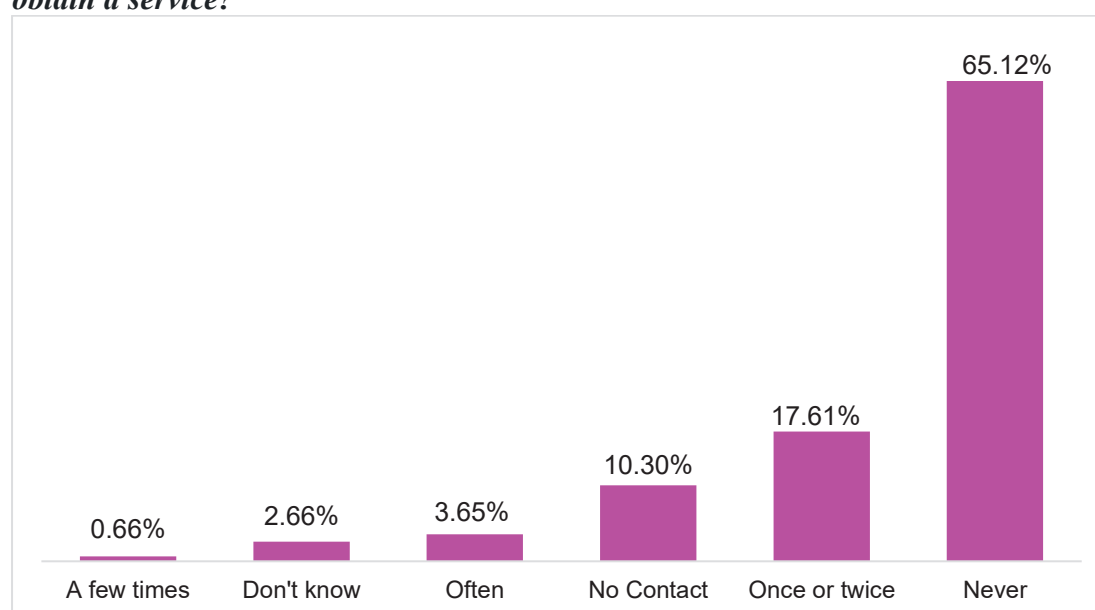


Chart # 11: pay Bribe by Gender

And how often, if ever, did you have to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favor to obtain a service? By Gender

	Female		Male	
A few times	1	0%	1	0%
Don't know	5	2%	3	1%
Never	102	34%	94	31%
No Contact	14	5%	17	6%
Often	7	2%	4	1%
Once or twice	24	8%	29	10%
Grand Total	153	51%	148	49%

6.6 Payment for quality of service: Since 2006, successive governments in Liberia have instituted policies such as free health care services for children at public health facilities and free primary education. Nonetheless, citizens have complained that accessing these services has not been totally free which have made some citizens to desire paying fees in order to acquire quality services. However, in accessing services at the CSCs, 57% of respondents say it is better to pay lower cost for services and obtain quality as compared to 40.86% who say it is better to pay higher cost for services to ensure that the quality is high (See chart 12 below).



Chart 12: Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement 1 or Statement 2.

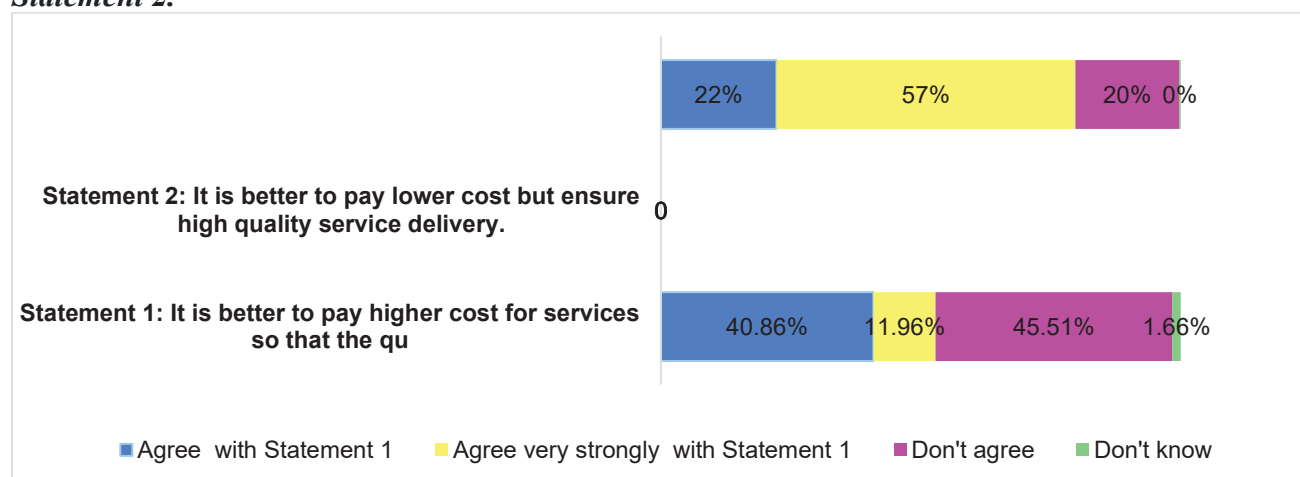


Chart # 13: Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement 1 or Statement 2. By Gender

	Statement 1: It is better to pay higher cost for services so that the quality is high		Statement 2: It is better to pay lower cost but ensure high quality service delivery.	
Female	153	51%	153	51%
Male	148	49%	148	49%
Total	301	100%	301	100%

6.7 Knowledge on fees that are to be paid to access services and how government uses revenue generated: Access to information on fees for accessing public service can be a challenge across multiple sectors. Similarly, access to information on how government uses public resources is equally a challenge. With reference to the CSCs, 63.46% of respondents say that it is easy to find out the fees that they are supposed to pay to access services while a fair bit of respondents (35.22%) say it is difficult. In the same vein, 74.75% of respondents say that it is difficult for them to find out how the government uses revenue generated from the CSCs (See chart 14 below). There was no significant difference in the responses between males and females (See chart 15 below).



Chart # 14: To find out the fees you are supposed to pay for services at the Service center.

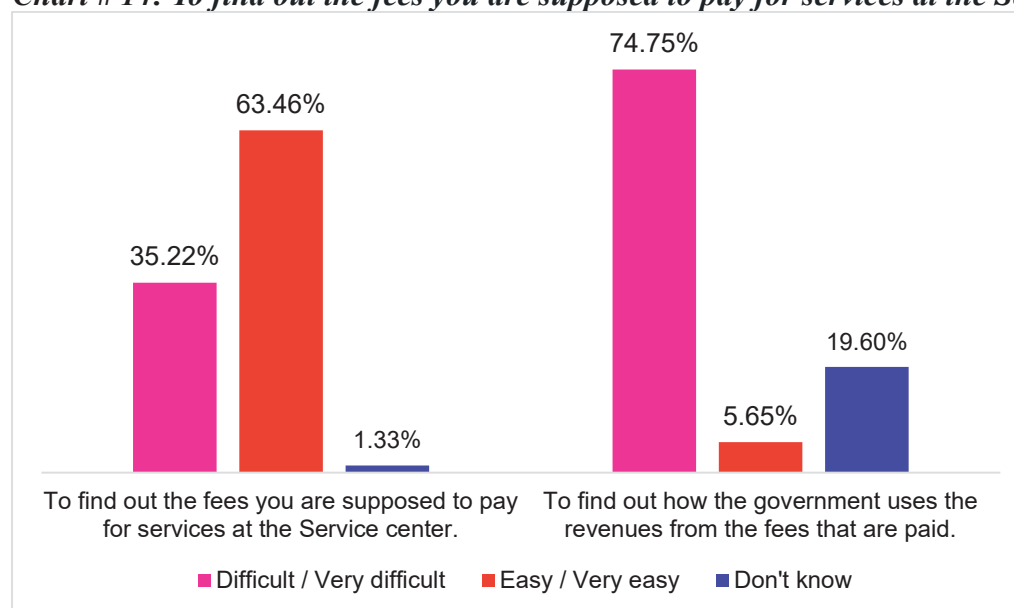


Chart # 15: To find out the fees you are supposed to pay for services at the Service center. By Gender

	Difficult / Very difficult	Easy / Very easy	Don't know
To find out the fees you are supposed to pay for services at the Service center.			
Female	17%	33%	1%
Male	19%	30%	0%
To find out how the government uses the revenues from the fees that are paid.			
Female	36%	3%	12%
Male	39%	6%	7%



Chart # 14: To find out the fees you are supposed to pay for services at the Service center.

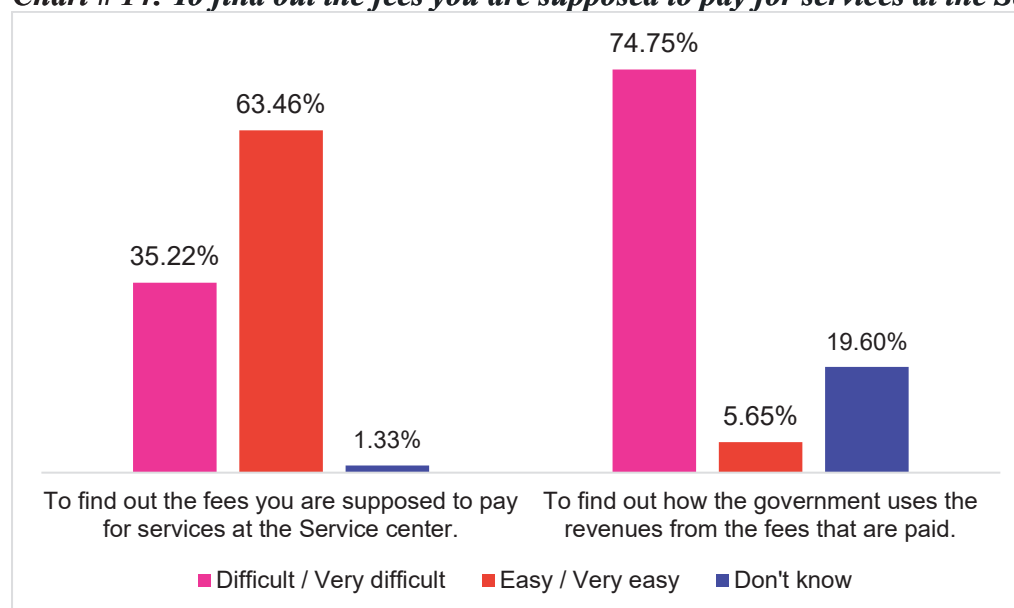
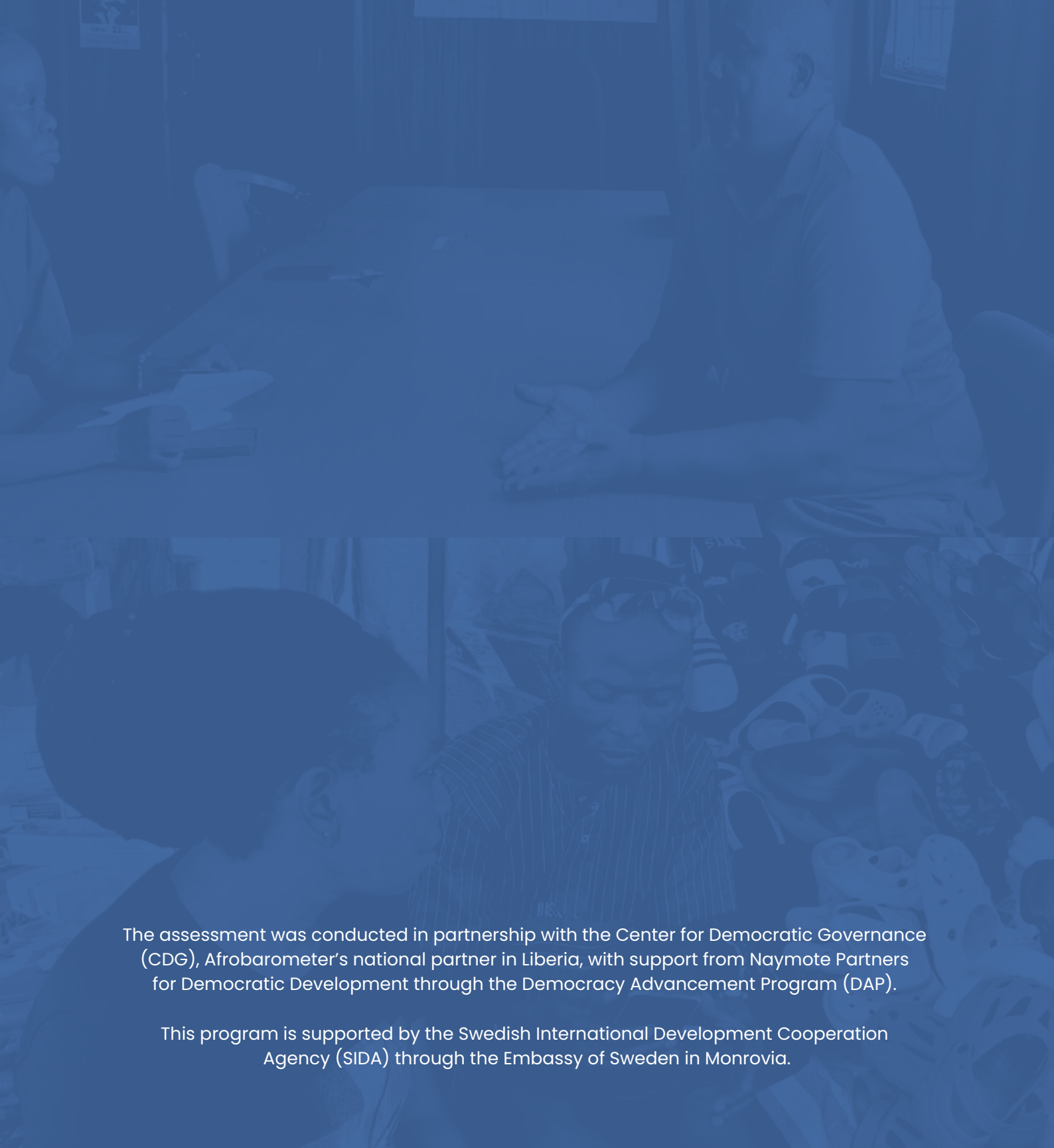


Chart # 15: To find out the fees you are supposed to pay for services at the Service center. By Gender

	Difficult / Very difficult	Easy / Very easy	Don't know
To find out the fees you are supposed to pay for services at the Service center.			
Female	17%	33%	1%
Male	19%	30%	0%
To find out how the government uses the revenues from the fees that are paid.			
Female	36%	3%	12%
Male	39%	6%	7%





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