



European Union

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Policy Brief on Inmate's Access to Communication

Liberia is a founding member of the United Nations, and as such, the government of Liberia has signed numerous of UN International human rights instruments including the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners. However, the implementation or adherence to these instruments, which Liberia has acceded to, are yet to be fully realized.

In recognition of the foregoing, the Rural Human Rights Activists Programme (RHRAP), the Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia (AFFEL) in collaboration with the Finn Church Aid (FCA) and funded by the European Union designed the project "*Providing Access to Justice and Gender Sensitive Legal Awareness at Grassroots Level*". A component of the project is to provide communication (cell phones) to three prisons (Gbarnga, Voinjama, and Sanniquellie Prison facilities). The Project implementing partners have continued their engagement with the government through the Bureau of Correction and Rehabilitation at the Ministry of Justice to initiate the process. The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners provide for inmates to have access to communication to keep in contact with the outside world.

Therefore, for inmates to keep contact with the outside world, Rule 58 of the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners provides for:

1. Prisoners shall be allowed, under necessary supervision, to communicate with their family and friends at regular intervals:
 - (a) By corresponding in writing and using, where available, telecommunication, electronic, digital and other means; and
 - (b) By receiving visits:

In line with the above, RHRAP, AFFEL, and FCA engaged the Ministry of Justice, during the inception of the project, to accept the introduction of the use of phones within the prison facilities, especially in the counties where the action is being implemented. The Assistant Minister for Correction and Rehabilitation (BCR) at the Ministry of Justice at the time cited security concerns but later, following couple of engagements, the recommendation was accepted.

Since then, three prisons in Bong, Lofa and Nimba are being supported for the first time with the provision of three telephones through project implementing partners in collaboration with FCA, which has resulted into improved access to family support and lawyers including other social services by inmates at the facilities. The results of this are further shown in the frequency of phone usage based on data collected from the prison logbooks as described in the table below.

Frequency table describing phone usage based on data collected from the prison logbooks as of June 30, 2018			
Prison Facility	Frequency of Phone Usage (Male)	Frequency of Phone Usage (Female)	Reasons
Lofa	1122	123	Family support (moral support, financial, food); legal aid and legal representation, counselling)
Bong	1424	51	Family support (moral support, financial, food); legal aid and legal representation, counselling)
Nimba	1357	129	Family support (moral support, financial, food); legal aid and legal representation, counselling)

Now therefore and in view of the foregoing information, and for the purpose of sustainability, the project team is currently engaging the BCR and various actors responsible for the prisons to see reason for the continued support of this initiative through a more sustainable actions beyond the project implementation. The project partners recommend the following actions to be taken by the Bureau of Correction:

1. For a long-term sustainability, it is recommended that the Bureau of Correction continue to support this initiative through budgetary allocation.
2. That the Bureau of Correction join the project team to engage and lobby with the two GSM companies (Orange and Lonestar) for the opening of the phone lines as part of their corporate social responsibilities.

About RHRAP

Rural Human Rights Activist Program (RHRAP) is a local human rights organization with over 15 years’ experience working on the promotion and protection of human rights and rule of law in Liberia.

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