LIBERIA

MID-TERM ASSESSMENT OF THE EXCELLENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION LIBERIAN DEVELOPMENT (EHELD) PROJECT

LIBERIA MONITORING & EVALUTION PROGRAM (L-MEP)
CONTRACT NO. 669-C-00-10-00181-00

FINAL REPORT

May 2014

This publication was produced by the Mitchell Group, Inc. (TMG) and is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under the Liberia Monitoring & Evaluation Program (L-MEP) Contract Number 669-C10-00-00181. The authors' views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AfT	Agenda for Transformation
AOR	Agreement Officer's Representative
ARD	Associates in Rural Development
CASD	College of Agriculture and Sustainable Development
CoE	Center of Excellence
COP	Chief of Party
AOR	Agreement Officer's Representative
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
CU	Cuttington University
EHELD	Excellence in Higher Education for Liberian Development
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GoL	Government of Liberia
HEEAP	Higher Engineering Education Alliance Program
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HESP	Higher Education Strategic Plan
IR	Intermediate Result
KNUST	Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology
LAC	Liberia Agricultural Company
LEAG	Liberia Engineering and Agriculture Group
L-MEP	Liberian Monitoring and Evaluation Program
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NCHE	National Commission on Higher Education
NCSU	North Carolina State University
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PCV	Peace Corps Volunteers
PMP	Performance Management Plan
PRS	Poverty Reduction Strategy
RFA	Request for Application
RTI	Research Triangle Institute
SO	Strategic Objective
SWOT	Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities Threats
TMG	The Mitchell Group, Inc.
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education Training
UL	University of Liberia
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research, data-gathering, analysis, and writing of this mid-term assessment report took place from January 1, 2014 through March 14, 2014. A five-person team consisting of a Senior Assessment Specialist and Team Leader, Tertiary Education Specialist, Liberian Education Context Specialist, Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist (Liberia-Monitoring and Evaluation Program, L-MEP Representative) and a Logistics Coordinator contributed to conducting the assessment.

- Dr. Pamela Allen, Team Leader, Assessment Specialist, Development Consultant
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- Mr. Mark T. Bassie, Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist, L-MEP
- Ms. Mariama Koon, Logistics Coordinator, Consultant

The Assessment Team wishes to express appreciation to all of the respondents for taking the time to be interviewed and/or for providing in writing their views and opinions about the Excellence in Higher Education for Liberian Development (EHELD) project. Two United States Agency for International Development (USAID)/Liberia officials in particular provided documentation, names and contacts, which were crucial to the team. Casey McHugh, Education Program Specialist, provided documents and responded to requests promptly, as well as spending time with the team in meetings. Mardea Nyumah, USAID EHELD Agreement Officer's Representative (AOR), provided contact information for key respondents and spent valuable time in meetings with the team as well. EHELD and Research Triangle Institute (RTI) International also provided support for the activity. Nicole Jacobs, RTI International Team Leader and Project Administrator, promptly responded to requests, and when possible spent several hours answering our interview questions. Yarkpazuo Kolva, EHELD Chief of Party (COP), also responded to requests and took time to meet with the team for a lengthy interview. Mardea Varkpeh, EHELD Pipeline Specialist, was very responsive to the team's request for information and would always get back to the team in record time. Julia Richards, Education Team Leader, provided overall direction and support of the assessment, as well as a detailed review of the second draft.

Without the effort and support of these individuals, the Assessment Team would have been hard-pressed to complete the work in the field within the specified timeframe.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A. INTRODUCTION

This is a mid-term assessment of the USAID/Liberia-supported "Excellence in Higher Education for Liberian Development" (EHELD) project. The overall objective of the EHELD project is to build regionally recognized and competitive academic Centers of Excellence (CoEs) that produce graduates who become leading professionals and entrepreneurs in the fields of engineering and agriculture in Liberia. The EHELD project's overall objectives are to:

1. Develop a pipeline of secondary school students to increase access and attract talented students into the engineering and agriculture fields, with a focus on females;
2. Assist the faculty and leaders of University of Liberia (UL) and Cuttington University (CU) to develop their capacity to create CoEs for the engineering and agricultural sciences; and
3. Develop public-private partnerships for informing and supporting the CoE programs and the transition of their graduates into the workforce.

EHELD is a U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded five-year project implemented under a Cooperative Agreement by Research Triangle Institute (RTI) International and its Consortium partners, Rutgers University, the University of Michigan, North Carolina State University (NCSU), Associates in Rural Development (ARD) [1] and the Ghana-based Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST). The RTI-led Consortium is implementing EHELD in cooperation with two host country Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), the University of Liberia (UL) and Cuttington University (CU), and the Government of Liberia (GoL) and private sector partners.

The purpose of the assessment is to provide information to USAID, RTI and its Consortium partners, and stakeholders including the GoL, the universities, and the private sector about how well EHELD's strategy and related activities contribute to achieving the expected outcomes and to provide guidance for the project's implementation for the time remaining to assist in ensuring achievement of those outcomes and their sustainability. The assessment will also generate some lessons learned about the project to date and make recommendations to inform future decisions about the project's design or about similar projects in the future (Please see Annex I for the Scope of Work (SOW).

To achieve these purposes, the Assessment Team used a mixed methodology to gather information from documentation and a purposive sample of 81 key respondents who are most closely associated with the project, including (a) a review of academic literature and project related documentation and data; (b) one-on-one interviews with key stakeholders; (c) Focus Group Discussions (FGDs); (d) surveys; and (e) observations of project supplied inputs and assets. The assessment was conducted in Monrovia and its environs and in Suakoko, Bong Country during a three-month period, January-March 2014.

[1] EHELD is now beginning to engage ARD for greenhouses. EHELD had engaged Vets Without Borders to provide the short courses for CU instead of ARD based on issues of feasibility.

B. KEY FINDINGS

The assessment findings are organized and presented below under the main topics provided by USAID to the Assessment Team for investigation.

1. PROJECT PERFORMANCE

It was noted in the literature review that there are significant challenges in working with and building the capacities of inadequate systems that are themselves dependent on other inadequate systems in order to function or improve. This post-conflict context challenges all institutional capacity development initiatives. Even given these contextual challenges, the EHELD project has implemented most of the expected EHELD project activities and deliverables.

Examples of these deliverables include reaching 1,000 secondary school students through Smart Start school visits to inform the students about careers in engineering and agriculture, and also providing outreach to 1,500 students (high school and college) through the Pipeline programs, Fast Start and Summer Start, to aid in the transition for university study. The interest expressed in careers in these fields has skyrocketed from 964 applicants for study at the baseline to over 4,000 by Year 3 of the project. Scholarships are helping students from underserved or disadvantaged groups to access higher education in these fields, up to 97 students by Year 3 of the project. Challenges remain in the pre-university academic preparations of the students, especially in math and science, and in attracting and retaining an equitable number of females into these fields.

EHELD support for developing CoEs at CU and the UL has included revision of the curricula for both engineering and agriculture, both of which have been endorsed by the UL and CU faculty senates, respectively. The success in revising the curricula early in the project is underscored by the importance of these programs to demonstrate their quality and relevance in preparing students for employment opportunities. The project is currently supporting nine contract faculty to provide the experiential instruction for the new curricula, while 11 future faculty are studying for advanced degrees abroad.[2] Integration of the future faculty into the existing local faculty to teach the new curricula has still to be planned. EHELD also has purchased or facilitated the donation of thousands of books that complement the revised curricula, provided instructional facilities and equipment to support experiential instruction, as well as support for administration at CU College and the UL Department levels.

Furthermore, establishing partnerships with employers has been promoted through guest lectures and consultations on revising the new curricula. This engagement has translated into student vacation jobs and internships for some EHELD-supported students. EHELD is planning to promote internships through the creation of internship/career service centers at both universities. Peace Corps volunteer teachers have also been successfully engaged with the Pipeline program during the summer. The GOL/National Council on Higher Education (NCHE) has not been actively engaged.

Despite considerable success under difficult circumstances, substantial issues remain that must be addressed, if the program is to be successful.

[2] One student has already graduated, making the total number thus far 12.

2. MANAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

The EHELD project has been providing inputs and development to two very different universities, and two very different disciplines. EHELD determined that many of the local faculty members were unable to meet the teaching demand for courses across the entire subject areas required, especially for the revised curricula that includes experiential learning. In the short term, the need for additional capacity was met through contract and visiting faculty from outside of Liberia. The impact of the decision to focus on contract faculty and training new faculty was two-fold. On the one hand, the students taking the classes from the contract and visiting faculty are impressed and grateful for the quality of instruction and attention they receive from these instructors. On the other hand, the existing local faculties at the two universities have not fully engaged with the EHELD program or the CoE concept. Existing personnel at the universities are described as treading with caution and reservation in spite of all the inputs. Additionally EHELD points at problems of regular attendance of some local faculty. Local faculty perceive that they are not seen as integral to the EHELD-supported program and, in some cases, are concerned about their place at the University when the future faculty being trained abroad return.

3. SUSTAINABILITY AND OWNERSHIP. EHELD'S COMMUNICATION WITH PARTNERS AND STAKEHOLDERS HAS BEEN SOMEWHAT UNEVEN

Concerns about top-down communication from the EHELD project, a lack of input from stakeholders, and the lack of transparency about activities, beneficiaries, plans and budget are seen to be limiting the appreciation for, and buy-in from many of these stakeholders. Project transparency and two-way communication are critical elements in international development work, especially in fragile and post-conflict countries. The lack of participation and ownership by many of the stakeholders at the universities and private sector, particularly at the operational levels, may compromise the expected outcomes, that is, utilization of the inputs and application of outputs for increased development and performance. These are preconditions for stimulating the ownership that is needed to sustain the improvements already made, and as pre-requisites for creating the CoEs.

4. GENDER

A comprehensive Gender Assessment was conducted by EHELD that was prompted by concerns about female students' academic performance and dropout rates in the programs. The assessment analyzed obstacles to gender equality in the engineering and agriculture programs and formed the basis for the initial recommendations to address these issues within the EHELD project, including employment of a gender specialist to teach new courses on gender for one semester each at the UL and CU, such as "Rural Development, Gender and Society". The assessment also stimulated changes at CU, including adding safety and security measures specifically for females. The assessment was made available to the UL, but it was not widely distributed by UL and no related actions were reported.

5. PROJECT AND FOLLOW-ON DESIGN

The remaining nearly two years of implementation will be a crucial period for the EHELD project. Notably, key findings indicate that the project's deliverables are on track, but achieving a heightened sense of ownership among key stakeholders will be a decisive factor for project sustainability. The Assessment Team urges EHELD to use the mid-term assessment as an opportunity to step back from focusing primarily on providing inputs to producing and measuring outcomes, that is, utilization of what has been provided. It is critical for key stakeholders to begin to develop a sense of ownership for these resources. In order to engender such a change in attitude, perceptions, expectations, and assumptions the project's current approach will have to be carefully assessed. Based on findings from this assessment, strategies will need to be devised to increase trust in the eyes of key stakeholders, notably faculty that should include revisiting the issues of resource allocation and communication. Starting to foster a sense of ownership and empowerment lies at the heart of the revised strategies and is con-

sidered the single most important prerequisite to ensure sustainability of the project's benefits and any continued investments beyond the current life of the project.

C. PRINCIPAL LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

LESSON LEARNED: Overly ambitious scope. It appears that the original Request for Application (RFA) was overly ambitious in scope. Since CU had a pre-eminent agricultural program and the UL had the only engineering department in Liberia and is the principal public Higher Education Institution (HEI), it is understandable that USAID/Liberia selected both for EHELD support to develop Centers of Excellence. In retrospect, it may have been more cost-effective and politically manageable to select only one discipline at one university as a pilot.

RECOMMENDATION: It is important to empower the stakeholders to ensure institutionalization and sustainability. For the remainder of the project, EHELD should focus resources as much as possible on developing ownership and sustainability for those components of the project that are (a) showing results and (b) are acknowledged and supported by the host university or other stakeholders.

LESSON LEARNED: Focus on inputs and outputs alone does not deliver outcomes. It should be recognized that the Performance Monitoring Plan (PMP) is necessary, but not sufficient for monitoring the success of the EHELD project, i.e., the degree to which the beneficiaries value and are using project deliverables. As a necessary prerequisite to establishing CoEs, EHELD has focused on addressing the PMP and meeting its targets. However, some beneficiaries and stakeholders, especially local faculty at both universities, do not feel ownership due to the lack of participation in many of the activities that are being carried out by the contract faculty or consortium members.

RECOMMENDATION: The creation of a CoE will take a team effort and should include all stakeholders and beneficiaries. From this point forward, EHELD needs to focus on outcomes, i.e., utility and ownership by the universities, and not just focus on achieving the PMP's targets. The PMP helps to monitor inputs and outputs, but EHELD needs to consult with all of the faculty more closely to help them understand, address, and support the utility of what has been delivered. This will go a long way to engender ownership by the faculty and, therefore, the university.

LESSON LEARNED: Uneven engagement of the Private Sector. The private sector's engagement with EHELD has been uneven. Private sector representatives reported that continuity in their relationship to EHELD activities is lacking. Ad hoc requests are made for engagement and the requests are sometimes too late for the private sector to contribute due to other commitments. Updates on the status of EHELD's accomplishments are also lacking. They would like to be involved at the planning stage of activities so they can play a more substantive role.

RECOMMENDATION: The private sector should be engaged on an ongoing basis and be part of the planning process for activities so they will know when to provide relevant input to the university academic programming and Summer Start, as well as planning for internships. EHELD should reach out to new directors or presidents of relevant private sector companies and other participating organizations to introduce and orient the person(s) to EHELD, its purpose and relationship to the organization, e.g., Firestone. As with other stakeholders, EHELD should maintain regular communication about the project's accomplishments. The development of the Liberia Engineering and Agriculture Group (LEAG) to work with EHELD and the universities' Student Career Services Centers to develop internships may address these issues in part.

LESSON LEARNED: Lack of integration and sustainability plan for returning future faculty. The integration of the returning future faculty with advanced degrees at UL or CU (as local faculty) should not be assumed but should be carefully planned. The universities and EHELD need to develop an integration and sustainability plan for the

returning future faculty to ensure the high level of interest as evidenced by students with regard to the contract faculty.

RECOMMENDATION: This plan should be initiated in the short run, as the first influx of returning future faculty from abroad is scheduled for the spring of 2014.[3] Mentoring by contract faculty (or local faculty where possible) should be considered as one way to help the newly returned future faculty members adjust to teaching in the new experiential context, as well as to adjust to all of the changes that have occurred in his or her absence. Furthermore, it is important to identify ways to keep these newly graduated faculty engaged and productive. A formal capacity needs assessment should be conducted to determine if there are redundancies within skill sets of all the faculty, i.e., newly returned faculty, local, and contract. If there are redundancies, the newly trained faculty may be directed to focus more on practical applications to apply up-to-date experiential teaching methods.

LESSON LEARNED: Transition plan needed for project. The lack of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or similar strategic or transition plan between EHELD and the universities indicates that the universities are not obligated to buy into the project's strategy or its implementation. This situation does not bode well for the universities to take on full responsibility for the assets which have been developed and delivered by the project.

RECOMMENDATION: MOUs should be signed, even at this stage of the project, that outline what steps each party will take to hand off the project to the universities, i.e., for the universities to take on full ownership of the project's inputs, including funding recurrent costs for returning future faculty, facilities and equipment.

D. CONCLUSION

The EHELD project has made commendable progress delivering many of the foundational components needed to improve the agricultural and engineering programs at CU and the UL, two very different Higher Education Institutions in Liberia. This is the first higher education project to be implemented in Liberia since the end of the civil war and the project's achievements to date should be appreciated in this postwar and resource scarce environment.

Greater emphasis is now needed at this juncture of the project on fostering ownership and institutionalization among partners to fully use, support and sustain the assets that have been put in place with project support.[4] The Assessment Team hopes that this mid-term assessment will help to highlight some of the efforts that are needed to improve the prospects of achieving meaningful outcomes and results for the EHELD project and its university partners.

[3] As mentioned earlier, one has graduated already and is teaching as a lecturer at CU.

[4] For example, the team was informed after the completion of the mid-term assessment data collection that the project has plans to hold consultative meetings in mid-May 2014 with each university to develop strategies and ownership and sustainability plans.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE MID-TERM ASSESSMENT

This is a mid-term assessment of the "Excellence in Higher Education for Liberian Development" (EHELD) project. The overall objective of the EHELD project is to build regionally recognized and competitive academic CoEs that produce graduates who become leading professionals and entrepreneurs in the fields of engineering and agriculture in Liberia. The EHELD project's overall objectives are to:

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EHELD is a U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded five-year project implemented under a Cooperative Agreement by Research Triangle Institute (RTI) International and its Consortium partners, Rutgers University, the University of Michigan, North Carolina State University (NCSU), Associates in Rural Development (ARD)[5] and the Ghana-based Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST). The RTI-led Consortium is implementing EHELD in cooperation with two host country Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), the University of Liberia and Cuttington University, and the Government of Liberia (GoL) and private sector partners.

The purpose of the assessment is to provide information to USAID, RTI and its Consortium partners, and stakeholders including the GoL, the universities, and the private sector about how well EHELD's strategy and related activities contribute to achieving the expected outcomes and to provide guidance for the project's implementation for the time remaining to assist in ensuring achievement of those outcomes and their sustainability. The assessment will also generate some lessons learned about the project to date and make recommendations to inform future decisions about the project's design or about similar projects in the future (Please see Annex I for the SOW).

B. MID-TERM ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

The EHELD mid-term assessment involved analyzing the context of higher education in Liberia, EHELD implementation status and results to date, including challenges and opportunities, from the perspectives of the implementers, beneficiaries and other stakeholders. The mid-term assessment's design and methodology included a purposive sample of interviewees. Since the mid-term assessment addressed the status and results at the two universities, it was necessary to interview the people who were most closely associated with the project. The Assessment mid-term report reflects the views of the Assessment Team, which are based solely on the data the Team collected, analyzed, and results reported.

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[5] EHELD is now beginning to engage ARD for greenhouses. EHELD had engaged Vets Without Borders to provide the short courses for CU instead of ARD based on issues of feasibility.

The Assessment Team that conducted the EHELD Mid-Term Assessment included the following relevant expertise: *Team Leader/Senior Assessment Specialist* with training, extensive technical and leadership experience in USAID project design and implementation in developing contexts, project-related assessment and documentation, and higher education; a *Tertiary Education Specialist* with research and assessment experience on the development of higher education, including in Liberia; a *Liberian Education Context Specialist* with knowledge of the history, status, challenges, and institutional dynamics of higher education in Liberia; a *Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Specialist* with knowledge of USAID's monitoring and evaluation expectations and standards in Liberia; and a *Logistics Coordinator* to facilitate the teams movement to engage with 81 respondents in multiple locations in a limited time period.

None of the members of the Assessment Team had any affiliation with the EHELD project agreement or any of its contractors. TMG, the organization that carried out the assessment, under the L-MEP USAID/Liberia contract to TMG, is independently contracted by USAID for monitoring and assessment of its projects, including EHELD and its contractors. TMG is an independent contractor with no affiliation to the EHELD contractors.

The Assessment Team members began work on January 1, 2014 with a review of project related documents provided by USAID and other scholarly literature on creating Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in developing countries. The literature review was provided to USAID prior to beginning the field work, to ensure the Assessment Team had an understanding of the context and expectations for developing HEIs.

Based on the complexity of the EHELD project and the numerous partners and stakeholders involved, as well as the fact that the implementing partners and other stakeholders are located in a number of different places within and outside of Liberia, a mixed methodology was required. The methodology included: (a) a review of project related documentation (please see Bibliography) and data that were provided at the onset by USAID and EHELD and later in response to additional questions that arose in the course of conducting interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs); (b) interviews, based on questionnaires comprised of a standard set of questions that were developed and used with key respondents who are most closely associated with the project; (c) FGDs, based on a Strength, Weakness, Opportunity and Threat (SWOT) analysis guide that was developed and used with representative groups of stakeholders, such as faculty, students, and private sector representatives; and (d) surveys that were developed and sent by email to representatives of the Consortium partners residing in the U.S., individuals who aspire to become faculty at the UL and CU who are currently studying for advanced degrees abroad with EHELD support, and University of Michigan graduate students who worked with the Summer Start program. As mentioned above, the key respondents represented a purposive sampling of individuals associated with the project in order to obtain the most direct and accurate information about the project, including their experiences with, and perspectives on it.

The interview questionnaires, FGD guide, and surveys (Please see Annex II) were developed to address the assessment questions put forward by USAID and also were informed by the literature review. A list of key respondents was provided to the Assessment Team by USAID prior to the data collection. The list of respondents, 81 in all, is provided in Annex III, including which data collection method was used with each person or group.

The assessment data collection began in Liberia on January 20, 2014 and was completed by February 8, 2014. The UL Engineering Department is located near Monrovia on the Fendall Campus. Cuttington University is located in Suakoko, Bong County, which is approximately 120 miles from Monrovia. The assessment team split into two data collections teams: P. Allen and H. Wilson remained in Monrovia to collect data at the UL, while the other team, J. Pye and M. Bassie, collected data at CU. Data collection at these two sites included interviews,

FGDs, and observations of project supplied inputs and assets, such as new facilities, office support equipment, and demonstration activities, such as the irrigation system at CU. Interviews and FGDs also were conducted with other stakeholders outside of the UL and CU in Monrovia and its environs. After the Team returned from Suakoko, a new team of three was formed comprised of P. Allen, J. Pye, and H. Wilson who travelled to the Fendall campus on its opening day, following the holidays and a two month shutdown due to a strike by the faculty. A second trip to the Fendall campus was required to gather information from respondents who had not been present during the first visit. Surveys for key informants outside of Liberia were electronically sent and received during this period.

Data from the interviews, FGDs, surveys and project documents were analyzed and triangulated for consistently identified achievements, challenges, opportunities, and trends and to identify where there were divergent experiences and perspectives on the project. These findings were further analyzed against the literature review, in terms of what may be reasonably expected when developing HEIs in developing countries, including some of the opportunities and challenges associated with the intervention choices that were made by USAID and EHELD, namely, focusing on developing Centers of Excellence. The assessment's findings, lessons learned, and recommendations are based on these data and analyses.

C. CONSTRAINTS TO UNDERTAKING THE MID-TERM ASSESSMENT

Some constraints were encountered in the course of conducting the mid-term assessment. Adjustments were made for most when they became known to the Assessment Team.

1. The Assessment Team was unable to test the instruments for interviews and FGDs or the surveys because of the limited time that was made available for conducting the data collection from 81 individuals in multiple locations. It was discovered during the assessment that there were some redundancies embedded within the instruments, which made them longer than necessary. The redundant questions were ignored. This was seen as an improvement in efficiency and was not seen as affecting the data collection or the quality of the data.

2. The time available for data collection from such a large list of respondents in multiple locations also affected the ability of the team to solicit additional follow-up information from some sources. As expected in conducting this type of assessment, when data became available to the Team from the interviews and FGDs, additional questions arose. While the Team was able to follow-up with new, additional questions from EHELD representatives, it was not possible to meet again with other key informants or to reconvene respondents for FGDs.

3. The Assessment Team requested a roster of the UL engineering students from EHELD in order to randomize a selection of respondents, but the list was not forthcoming. The engineering students interviewed for the assessment were identified by EHELD, which may have introduced some bias. The Dean at the CU College of Agriculture assisted the Assessment Team in identifying students and professors for interviews. The selection of students at CU did not appear to be a targeted selection, but depended on which students were available for interview.

4. The Terms of Reference (TOR) indicated that at least one team member would depart at the end of the data collection activity. While this person remained available to write and provide input, this was done

virtually. Since only two people were contributing to the writing of the report, TMG added a third person after the first draft to assist with editing the second draft.

D. STRUCTURE OF THE MID-TERM ASSESSMENT REPORT

This Assessment Report is organized in four sections: (1) Background, which examines Liberia's context in terms of the war and its impact on education and particularly higher education, the GoL's higher education strategy, USAID's response, and a description of the EHELD project; (2) Findings including Project Performance, Project Management and Implementation, Sustainability and Ownership, Gender, Project and Follow-On Design, and Summary of the above; (3) Lessons Learned and Recommendations; and (4) Conclusions.

II. BACKGROUND

A. COUNTRY CONTEXT

Liberia has just celebrated 10 years of peace and, while the country is moving through recovery to development and security, it remains fragile in many ways. The effects of the 1989-2003 civil war on Liberia's productive capacity and physical infrastructure were far-reaching and continue to hamper the country's attempts to launch and sustain a long-term development process. A demolished education system has left an entire generation without access to educational services, seriously hampering the country's capacity for national development. Moreover, many of Liberia's educated elite left the country during the civil war accentuating the nation's pervasive capacity gaps.

The four pillars of Liberia's Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) 2008-2011, i.e., national security, governance and rule of law, infrastructure, and economic revitalization laid the ground work for reinvesting in the major growth sectors of agriculture, mining and forestry for reactivating the economy. The most recent plan for revitalization, Liberia's Agenda for Transformation (AfT) (2012-2017), is now focused on areas that the PRS was unable to achieve within the given timeframe, including low levels of human capacity development. Because of the war, the necessary education and skill sets for development have yet to be re-developed. As jobs are created that require specific skills in areas such as mining and agriculture processing, these deficiencies will become more evident.

B. EDUCATION IN LIBERIA

Sixty percent of Liberians are under 30 years old and as many as 80% of these youth are unemployed, in large part due to low levels of basic skills and literacy.[6] This situation is reflective of Liberia's education system to continuously struggle to recover from the effects of the country's civil war and, most importantly, to ensure equal access to high-quality, free and compulsory basic education, post-basic education and training opportunities that lead to an improved livelihood and/or tertiary education.

A multitude of challenges continue to stifle the country's capacity to systemically address the sector's shortcomings, most prominently, inadequate financial and human resources. Additionally, the centralized system is characterized as being inequitable, inefficient and unaccountable to beneficiaries. Both Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) and tertiary education sub-sectors are fragmented and under-resourced, and are failing to provide the kind of training, knowledge and skill levels their students need in order to play a key role in propelling Liberia's socioeconomic development.

The reconstruction of this sub-sector faces many challenges. Before the war, Liberia's higher education system "had an emerging higher education system with functioning and contributing undergraduate programs, fledgling quality graduate programs, and a promising intellectual tradition."[7]

Today Liberia's higher education system is characterized by severely degraded institutional and administrative capacity. Physical and social infrastructure is badly deteriorated and is seriously affecting the sub-sector's capac-

[6] USAID. (2007).Liberia: Twenty-year-old trade standards modernized, creating employment opportunities for youth

[7] National Commission on Higher Education. (2012). Higher education strategic plan for Liberia. Phase 1. (p.2)

ity to produce qualified graduates. Curricula and instructional methods are outdated, coupled with severe skill and knowledge gaps among faculty and administrative staff. Hands-on, practical learning rarely occurs, often due to the lack of technology, laboratories and materials as well as instructors' inability to teach using these tools. Reliable internet connectivity continues to be limited. Modest managerial and administrative capacity that is coupled with financial constraints provides hostile conditions for lasting change to occur. The absence of institutional links with the country's growing private sector provide limited opportunities to benefit from the sector's specialized know-how, financial and non-financial resources and networks.

While the many challenges described above limit the sub-sector's capacity to address Liberia's needs for the rapid development of human resources, this situation has not affected demand for higher education. The demand is being met by a rapid increase in the country's private and faith-based institutions.[8] The public sector has implemented a policy of decentralization making public higher education accessible to more potential students throughout the country. The total enrollment in higher education, according to the latest census data, is 43,843 with 27,585 males and 16,258 females.[9]

With limited independent capacity to address issues of quality assurance, the sector remains mostly unregulated [10] with questionable quality of instruction at most of these institutions. This is reflected in a decision in 2008 by the GoL not to recognize degrees from some of these schools.[11]

The increase in demand for higher education raises concerns about the imbalance between the skills required by the labor market and educational qualifications. It also hints at the growing need for information and incentives that will direct young people in Liberia into subject areas for which there is demand in the labor market.

As President Sirleaf stressed at the 93rd Commencement Convocation of University of Liberia:

"As I review the list of graduates, I foresee some difficulty in finding jobs for many of you graduating today. We have made our Medical, Agriculture and Teachers Colleges free, yet our young people do not enter these colleges in sufficient numbers. Today, for whatever reason, there's not a single doctor who is graduating. There is one pharmacist who is graduating in a post-conflict country that desperately needs engineers, scientists and teachers. Today, 925 of you are coming out of Business College, compared to 146 graduating from the College of Science and Technology, 106 from Agriculture and 65 from the Teachers College."[12]

Additionally, there are continuous concerns about the quality of graduating students, as reflected by the initiatives of the private sector to develop its own internal training programs. This also hints at the ongoing struggles related to the quality of incoming students who habitually display weaknesses that range from speaking and writing English to major gaps in math and the sciences. This was illustrated when in 2013 the University of Liberia raised the standards for the admission exams and all 25,000 students failed!

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[8] Census 2012. Status of Higher Education Institutions. National Commission on Higher Education.

[9] Idem.

[10] MOE. Liberia's Education Sector Plan. (p.148).

[11] USAID. (2008). Liberia Higher Education Assessment, Draft. (p.3)

[12] "The Indispensable Role of Tertiary Education in Liberia's Post-Conflict Development" Address by Her Excellency Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf President of the Republic of Liberia And Visitor of the University of Liberia At the 93rdCommencement Convocation Samuel Kanyon Doe Sports Complex Paynesville, Liberia Wednesday, December 19, 2012 President Sirleaf's Address to University of Liberia's 93rd Commencement.pdf

In addition to the many challenges outlined above, the political situation at the nation's flagship university frequently provokes school closures, often without warning, that have a detrimental effect on student progression, e.g., the latest school closure at the end of November 2013 lasted for 2 months.

The University of Liberia, one of West Africa's oldest and largest degree granting public institutions with a history of educating the nation's clergy and public officials, had an enrollment of 23,837 students in 2012 (NCHE, 2012, Status of Higher Education: Census Survey of Institutions). Composed of three campuses, the institution's engineering department is located on the Fendall campus, 14 miles northeast of the center of Monrovia.

The Cuttington University campus is situated in rural Suakoko, Bong County, 120 miles north of Monrovia. Established in 1889 by the Episcopal Church of the United States, the 4-year degree institution is the oldest private college in sub-Saharan Africa. With its six colleges, including the College of Agriculture, student enrollment was 2,564 in 2012. (NCHE, 2012, Status of Higher Education: Census Survey of Institutions). The College of Agriculture's enrollment was about 200 at the beginning of the EHELD Project. It has since increased to 601 students. Contrary to the UL, Cuttington University does not have the history of strife and protests that the University of Liberia continues to experience.

C. THE GOL STRATEGY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The GoL considers higher education to play a key role in national socioeconomic development[13] and transformation in the country's post conflict era and has placed a high priority on revitalizing the higher education subsector.

'Liberia's future depends upon a quality higher education system to produce leaders for the nation.…Higher education extends the possibilities of society and guarantees the intellectual capital for development and sustained wealth and poverty reduction (p.1). '[14]

The first 10-year national higher education strategic plan prioritizes the need to improve the quality and relevance of its programs for national, social, political and economic development.

There is equally a recognition that such development needs to be accompanied by opportunities for equitable access to quality higher education and that research, innovation and enterprise development need to be a major pillar within the strategy. In order to contribute to the alignment of the subsector to international standards; the strategy emphasizes the need for independent accreditation and quality assurance mechanisms. Additionally, Liberia's Agenda for Transformation, Steps towards Liberia Rising 2030 assigns a specific role to the National Commission for Higher Education (NCHE) to partner with the private sector to expand post-secondary opportunities, especially in underserved regions.

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[13] "The Indispensable Role of Tertiary Education in Liberia's Post-Conflict Development"; Address by Her Excellency Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. President of the Republic of Liberia And Visitor of the University of Liberia at the 93rd Commencement Convocation Samuel Kanyon Doe Sports Complex Paynesville, Liberia Wednesday, December 19, 2012. Accessed February 6, 2014 at http://www.emansion.gov.lr/doc/20121219_President%20Sirleafs_%20Address_to_University_of_Liberias%20_93rd_Commencement.pdf

[14] National Commission on Higher Education. (2012). Higher education strategic plan for Liberia. Phase 1.

D. USAID PROGRAMS IN RESPONSE TO THESE PROBLEMS

1. USAID's Country Development Corporation Strategy (CDCS)

USAID's CDCS strategy is focused on supporting Liberia's gradual move to self-sufficiency; i.e., "*to lead, manage and finance its own development process,"* (p.5) while *"shifting the agency's strategic focus from post-conflict stabilization and recovery toward transformational and sustainable long-term development"* (p.5).[15] For the tertiary education sub-sector this approach translates into strengthening both human and institutional capacity at selected Liberian universities with a particular emphasis on the quality and relevance of their education and training. Building Centres of Excellence at these institutions to supply technically skilled graduates in fields such as agriculture, engineering, health and life sciences by placing emphasis on technological innovation, teaching, entrepreneurship, research, and job promotion are at the heart of USAID's approach to address Liberia's sustainable long-term development needs. A clear concern for equity underpins the above.

2. Where the EHELD project fits into the CDCS

The $18.5 million dollar 5-year project "Excellence in Higher Education for Liberian Development" (EHELD) that is being implemented by the Research Triangle Institute[16] started in February 2011. The financial and technical support for the development of the two Centers of Excellence, one in engineering at the University of Liberia and the other in agriculture at Cuttington University, is at the center of EHELD's design and reflects USAID's CDCS. Both universities continue to struggle to provide the nation with a high qualified workforce in these key areas of development, and the project is actively working to address this key concern. Its main thrust is directed towards targeted capacity development, the upgrading of curricula and facilities, development of a pipeline of qualified secondary school students and sustainable ties with the country's private sector.

E. DESCRIPTION OF EHELD

1. Overview

The EHELD project aims to establish two CoEs in line with international best practice in the fields of engineering and agriculture with the objective to prepare professionally accomplished male and female graduates to meet Liberia's current and future labor market demands. To achieve this, the project concentrates on targeted human and institutional capacity development in two prominent higher education institutions, the University of Liberia and Cuttington University. The project's objective for the UL's engineering department and CU's College of Agriculture and Sustainable Development (CASD) is to develop practical, experience-based, and labor market-aligned educational and research programs within an overall institutional environment that is conducive to learning. A focus on experiential learning, service-learning and internship opportunities is meant to increase job readiness and job placement of its graduates.

2. Program Components

At the heart of the project lie extensive curricula updates and revision, as well as course development. At CU the curricula revisions are particularly concerned with issues such as reviving traditional agricultural sector; food security; crop protection and storage; production intensification; water management and natural resource management. The introduction of the practical business side of agriculture and entrepreneurship underpins the cur-

[15] Country Development Cooperation Strategy. Liberia. 2013-2017.

[16] For more information go to http://www.rti.org/

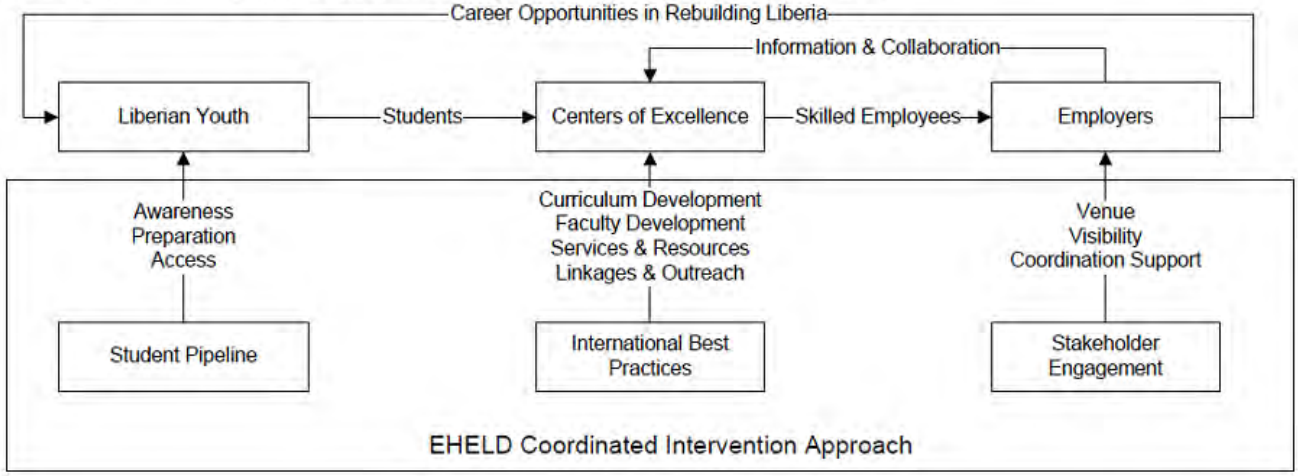
ricula. At the UL a comprehensive curricula review paved the way for revisions of the curricula, course teaching syllabi and materials.

A range of faculty and staff development initiatives (i.e., demand driven short courses, Master's degree programs for faculty and aspiring faculty at leading African and US higher education institutions, mentoring and shadowing opportunities, study tours, tailored training courses in specific areas such as library sciences for key staff) are being devised over the life of the project to ensure the institutions are in a position to sustainably implement the new curricula and make use of the new facilities.

Supported by its international Consortium members,[17] the project coordinates the integration of international contract and visiting faculty at both institutions to fill teaching gaps and provide role models for the regular faculty. Additionally there is a strong focus on the creation of sustainable linkages between the universities and employers. Furthermore, the development of a pipeline of secondary students through a combination of activities, composed of a social marketing campaign ("Smart Start"), a non-residential academic program for 10-12 graders("Summer Start"), and a targeted bridging program for incoming freshmen (Fast Start), all aimed at attracting and preparing motivated, top-performing male and female students to the fields of agriculture and engineering and to prepare them for studies. Finally, to increase and broaden access to both programs, EHELD provides merit-based scholarships that especially target women and underserved groups.

These initiatives are accompanied by the provision of key inputs, notably four first-rate laboratories for hands-on learning (two at the UL and two at CU), learning and instructional resources, student career services and a general upgrade of teaching and key administrative facilities.

Exhibit 1: RTI'S Coordinated Approach to EHELD Interventions

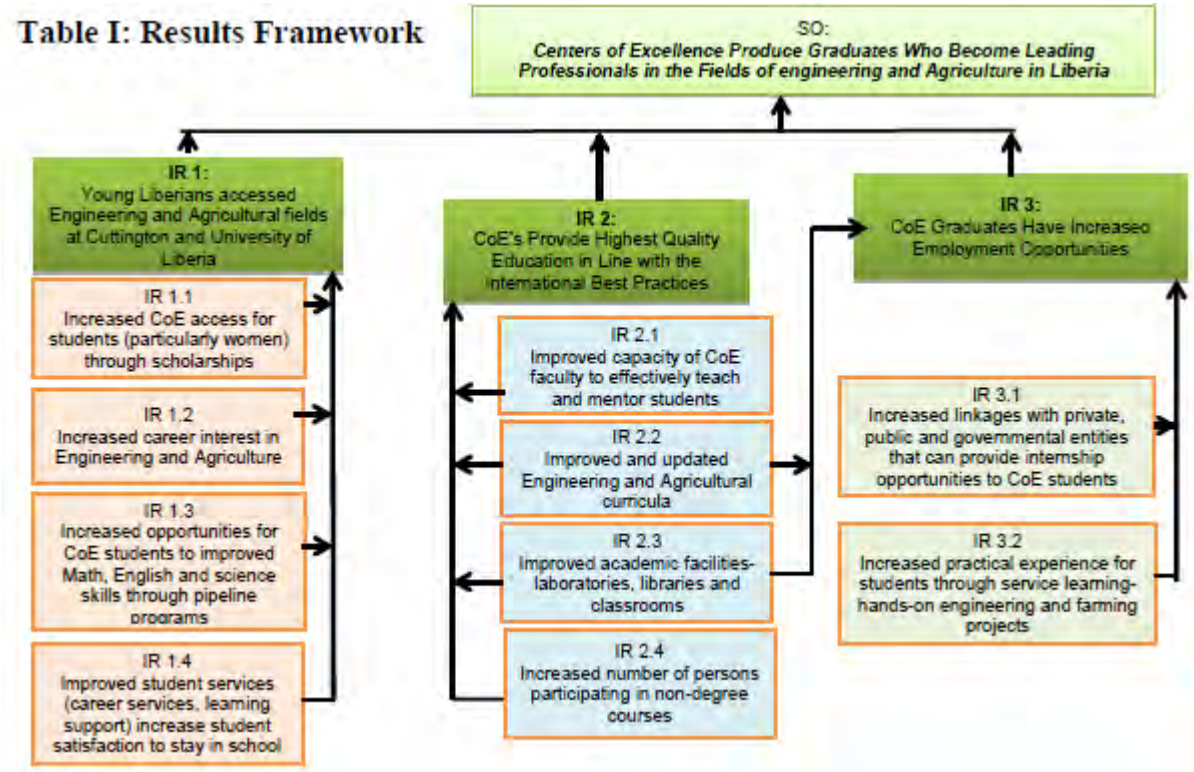


[17] Consortium members are Rutgers University, University of Michigan, North Carolina State University, Associates in Rural Development and Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Ghana.

3. Expected Outcomes

The project's expected outcomes are structured around the key concerns of access, quality and increased employment opportunities for the CoE students, i.e., Intermediate Results (IRs) 1, 2 and 3.[18] All three main outcomes are directly relevant to reaching the project's Strategic Objective (SO) implying that their achievement at the project's end in February 2016 constitutes a necessary precondition for achieving the SO: "Centers of Excellence produce graduates who become leading professionals in the fields of engineering and agriculture in Liberia".

IR 1 refers to young Liberians accessing Engineering and Agricultural fields at CU and the UL. IR 2 focuses on the CoEs providing the highest quality education in line with the international best practices, and IR 3 is concerned with the increase in CoE graduate employment opportunities (see also Table I Results Framework). Reaching EHELD's SO will depend on the changes, i.e., new attitudes, skills or knowledge acquired or deliverables received at the project's IR level as a result of the implementation of the activities outlined above. Each of the three main IRs has additional IRs to contribute to the main IRs.



18 EHELD Performance Management Plan, Latest version January 2014.

III. FINDINGS

PROJECT PERFORMANCE

This section begins with an overview of project performance using data from the PMP dashboard made available by EHELD to the Assessment Team. [19] The project has generated a substantial pipeline of students interested in studying engineering and agriculture, beyond expectations, although the academic performance of project-supported students who enrolled at the universities is less than expected. The curricula in these two programs at CU and UL has been revised to meet new standards of excellence and contract faculty are in place to implement it while future faculty are being trained for the longer term. Internships for the students studying under the new curricula and their subsequent employment after graduation will take place in Years Four and Five of the project. [20]

SUPPORT FOR YOUNG LIBERIANS TO ACCESS THE ENGINEERING AND AGRICULTURAL FIELDS

This component of the project was intended to generate awareness and interest among Liberian secondary school students for degrees in engineering and agriculture and to prepare them for entry and academic start-up at the UL or CU, with scholarship support for selected students to complete their degree programs.

The interest expressed among prospective students (IR1.2.1) in studying engineering and agriculture has skyrocketed from 964 applicants at the baseline to over 4,000 by Year 3, compared to the target of 701. By Year 2, EHELD had conducted 84 promotional activities (IR1.2.2), exceeding their Year 2 annual target. In Years 3 and 4, fewer promotional activities (42) were conducted, which no doubt reflects the surge in interest that far exceeds the universities' intake capacities and EHELD's scholarship program.

The pipeline programs in secondary schools or equivalent non-school based settings are intended to increase opportunities for prospective students to improve their math, English, and science skills (IR 1.3). These programs (Smart, Summer, and Fast Start), described more fully later in the report, are exceeding expectations with 2,068 students (71% males, 29% females) being assisted by these programs in Year 3, compared with a target of 650.

The number of individuals in secondary schools from underserved or disadvantaged groups that received EHELD scholarships, who are now enrolled in tertiary education (IR1: 3.2.2.4.1. and IR1.1.1), reached two-thirds of the expected target in Year 2 (48 scholarships provided out of a target of 72), which was the first year for enrollment in the scholarship program. By the next year (Year 3), the number of project-supported students from these groups met the target of 97, with a 15 percent increase in male enrollment, which was more than expected (55 for a target of 48), and 15 percent fewer females enrolled than expected (42 for a target of 49). The current year shows a drop-off of enrollments for males, from 55 to 43, and a decrease for females from 42 to 28. The shortfall for the current year, as explained by an EHELD representative, was because students failed to meet the

[19] It is important to note that what is referred to as Year 1 for the project is a 7.5 month period (Feb. 10-Sept. 30, 2011) during which the project was establishing its foundations and partnerships for engagement in the upcoming academic year which is captured in Year 2 reporting (Oct.1, 2011-Sept. 30, 2012).

[20] In the literature review, the Assessment Team noted the challenges in working with and building the capacities of inadequate systems that are themselves dependent on other inadequate systems in order to function or improve. This post-conflict context challenges all institutional capacity development initiatives.

GPA requirements (more females than males) and, therefore, dropped out of the scholarship program. EHELD reports that they are using affirmative action to address this shortfall by selecting female students who do not meet the academic performance criterion, which has implications for their success at the university level. EHELD reports that they still have funds to provide scholarships up to the end of the project.

EHELD has established four student service centers (I.R.1.4.1), which have been defined to include any one of the following: career service/internship centers/offices, resource rooms, libraries, and computer labs.

As demonstrated by the data above, project support for young Liberians to access the engineering and agricultural fields is generating a very high level of interest and the pipeline of prospective students has grown. However, many of the students selected for scholarships are not meeting university academic requirements, as evidenced by the drop-out rates, especially for female students.

DEVELOPING CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE AT CUTTINGTON UNIVERSITY AND THE UNIVERSITY OF LIBERIA

This project component is focused on improving the quality of education at each of the two universities in the engineering and agricultural sciences to meet international or at least regional standards of excellence. This includes revising the curricula, upgrading the knowledge and skills of faculty to implement the revised curricula, and providing infrastructure, equipment, supplies and teaching-learning materials to support and sustain the improved programs.

Within Year 2 of the project, EHELD completed revision of six engineering and agriculture curricula, with an experiential focus and with private sector input, which were endorsed by the UL and CU faculty senates. The success in revising the curricula early in the project allows these programs to demonstrate the quality and relevance the curricula have in preparing students for employment opportunities.

IR 2.1 addresses the improved capacity of CoE faculty to effectively teach the new curricula and mentor students. There are three project-supported, aspiring faculty members who are expected to graduate with advanced degrees (IR 2.1.1) by the end of 2014. All of the aspiring faculty members studying abroad, including three females, are expected to graduate within the project's time frame. The number of faculty participating in non-degree training programs (short workshops, trainings and tours that are expected to add professional value to faculty staff, (IR 2.1.2) greatly exceeded expectations by Year 3, i.e., 52 over a target of 17, and is on track to meet or exceed expectations in Year 4.

The number of contract faculty hired (IR 2.1.3) to supplement the existing local faculty for teaching the new curricula has been more or less half of what was expected each year. For 2014, the number of contract faculty hired is 4.5, compared to the target of 10, with the .5 representing a one semester commitment by a female contract faculty member. All other contract faculty are males. EHELD is hopeful that the four contract faculty will remain through the next term, and the project will surpass the target of 10 with new contract faculty hires.[21] The number of non-degree courses provided, i.e., specialized courses/trainings which do not require earning a degree, and the number of persons attending the courses is reflected in IR 2.4. During October 2012 through September 2013, 10 non-degree courses were provided, compared to the target of 14. Since October 2013 one non-degree course has been offered, compared to the target of 15. EHELD reports that there are several short courses in the pipeline and the project, therefore, plans to meet its target and may exceed it. Not surprisingly, the number of persons (12) attending the one course falls short of the attendance target of 339. In the previous

[21] The revision to the PMP indicator definition mentions that the target for contract faculty was inadvertently increased to 45 contract faculty members in a previous PMP, but that the project technical proposal indicated that only 14 person-years would be completed. Due to cost and difficulty in sourcing persons with the right qualifications, RTI proposes to revise the indicator target to 34 contract faculty.

year, however, while missing its attendance target (322), a large number (243) did attend the 10 courses that were provided.

The number of improved and functional facilities in use for academic purposes (IR 2.3), as reported by EHELD, considerably exceeded targets in Years 3 (18/7) and 4 (21/7). Many of these facilities were observed by the Assessment Team members and will be further described in the text box below.

These data represent expected progress in establishing the foundations for improved programs towards standards of excellence, including revised curricula; contract teachers as short term supplements to existing faculty for implementing the new curricula; advanced degree study for aspiring faculty to continue quality teaching and mentoring for the longer term; and an array of professional development activities for existing faculty. Supporting infrastructure, equipment, supplies and teaching-learning materials also have been delivered to the universities.

INCREASING EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR GRADUATES OF THE CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE

Several aspects of developing quality academic programs that aspire to excellence require linkages with external partners. For example, engagement with private sector representatives in economic sectors that utilize engineering and agricultural science can support the quality and relevance of academic programs by providing input to the curricula and practical learning opportunities for the students. These contributions can boost the likelihood that graduates of these programs will be considered job-ready by employers.

The revised curricula provides for private sector internships to be based on completion of six semesters of study, which is at the upper junior level or lower senior level. Given that the curricula were just revised last year, no internships have been provided to date under the project[22]. For the sophomore class, there are 84 students of which 25 students are current beneficiaries of an EHELD scholarship. The EHELD project anticipates these 25 students will access the internships and meet the annual target of 80% beginning in June 2015. In the meantime, EHELD is working with the College of Agriculture to provide internships to current junior and senior students. At the UL, the EHELD project is behind schedule because of a one year pre-engineering requirement that was put into place to vet students' academic abilities due to the large increase in enrolment, following EHELD's implementation.

During year three, EHELD provided demonstration plots or pilot projects (IR 3.2) for 35 students (five over target), comprised of 21 males and 14 females.

The number, relevance and quality of internships that are planned for the CU and UL students will be the best evidence of the private sector's effective engagement and a good predictor of the student's employability after graduation. This is yet to be seen at this stage of the project because, as mentioned above, eligibility for internships will not occur until June 2015.

SUMMARY OF ACHIEVEMENTS

The revision of the curricula for both engineering and agriculture, which was endorsed by the UL and CU faculty senates, is a remarkable success. The project has also purchased or facilitated the donation of thousands of books that complement the revised curricula. Additionally, the provision of scholarships has provided opportunities that would not have been available to engineering and agriculture majors before EHELD and has created a sense of competition among the students that did not exist previously. The project also has delivered outreach

[22] The targets were set at 10% last year and at 20% this year but the revision of the curricula makes these targets moot.

to 1,500 students (high school and university) through EHELD's Pipeline programs. Over 1,000 students were reached through Smart Start school visits. Furthermore, progress on partnerships with employers has been achieved through input into curricula revisions and guest lectures. EHELD is planning to promote internships through the creation of internship/career service centers at both universities. The Career Center at the UL is scheduled to begin operations in March 2014.

Additionally, a comprehensive gender report that analyzed obstacles to gender equality in the programs of engineering and agriculture has formed the basis for initial recommendations on addressing these issues within the EHELD project, including employment of a gender specialist to teach new courses on gender such as "Rural Development, Gender and Society" one semester each at UL and CU. Additional inputs and outputs are listed in the text box below.

University of Liberia, Engineering Department	**Cuttington University, Agriculture College**
Faculty:23 • Contract Faculty (6) and Visiting (2) Faculty, i.e., short term technical assistance • Equipped and renovated faculty housing • Furnishing contract faculty offices with desks, chairs, AC • Internet • Faculty lounge for general use with refrigerator, microwave, water cooler, and table and chairs • Photocopier	Faculty:24 • Contract Faculty (3) and Visiting Faculty (1), i.e., short term technical assistance • Equipped and renovated faculty housing • Furnishing contract faculty offices with desks, chairs, AC • Refurbishment and furnishing of department chair offices (desks, chairs, AC) • Scratch cards for Contract Faculty for internet use • Faculty common room with chairs, tables, printer/photocopier, small kitchenette with coffee and tea makers, a microwave oven and secure lockers.
Aspiring Faculty: Pursuit of advanced degrees abroad for aspiring faculty (degree courses in the US)	Aspiring Faculty: Pursuit of advanced degrees abroad for aspiring faculty (degree courses in the US and Ghana)
Trainings Workshops: • Electrical engineering course abroad	Trainings Workshops: • Short courses (Examples: Poultry management and disease control and trans-boundary animal disease.)
Resource Rooms: • Circuit Engineering Lab for experiential learning with hundreds of pieces of equipment (metal door for security) • Electronics Conversion Engineering Lab for experiential learning with hundreds of pieces of equipment • Energy Conversion Engineering Lab • Computer Lab with 34 desktop computers in-	Resource Rooms • Multi-purpose Lab • Computer room with new desks, chairs, projector, whiteboard and networked computers with software such as Teeal- a digital library for excellence in agricultural research and education 1993-2009 and other ebooks, Windows 7 on all computers • Establishment of resource room with library

[23] Number of faculty interviewed.

[24] Number of faculty interviewed

University of Liberia, Engineering Department	Cuttington University, Agriculture College
stalled with Microsoft software • 50 Computer tables and chairs • Library/Resource Center including shelves, special library tables and chairs, two office desks and chairs for the librarians, five laptops with connection to internet service • Career Services Center furnished and equipped	covering all thematic areas addressed in the new curriculum (air conditioning, book-shelves, computers, new desks, chairs etc.)
Students: • Full student scholarships	Students: • Full and partial student scholarships
Classrooms Refurbished: • Two classrooms refurbished • 50 armchairs • White boards • Overhead projectors • Fans	Classrooms Refurbished: • Refurbishment of classrooms • New lighting • Whiteboards • Overhead projectors • Desks and chairs • Fans
Infrastructure: • Painting front edifice, front entrance, lobby and engineering building sign • ACs for reading room, faculty lounge, electrical labs and contract faculty offices • Repaired Associate Dean's office roof • Bus (30 seats)25	Infrastructure: • Secure tools storeroom • Shed on demonstration site • Improved security measures on windows and doors • Replacement of asbestos roof • Establishment of experimental farm for students to undertake research composed of student research plots, a pond and a swamp area • Fenced goat paddock • Plant nursery • Fully equipped multipurpose laboratory with shower • Increased gender awareness: Separate bathrooms for male and female students, improved lights on campus • Irrigation system with water tower, pump and sprinklers • Aquaponics system • Biogas digester (to be converted into a compost pit) • Bus (30 seats)

[25] Awaiting an MOU before it can be used

A. PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

EHELD and its Consortium partners have established a number of foundational components that comprise the project's effort to develop Centers of Excellence with two very different universities in Liberia, the University of Liberia and Cuttington University, in the subject areas of engineering and agriculture. This accomplishment has occurred in a difficult context given that Liberia still suffers from lack of resources and capacity even after 10 years of peace. The project's components include a pipeline program for remedial preparation for secondary and freshman college students with an emphasis on attracting female students to these two traditionally male-dominated disciplines. Advanced degree programs are being provided to train future faculty both in the U.S. and Ghana who will return to provide up-to-date instruction in these subjects. EHELD-supported contract and visiting faculty currently fill needed subject matter gaps to deliver the newly developed curricula. Consultations with the private sector for development of the new curricula and in anticipation of future internships and employment also have taken place.

Numerous inputs and outputs have been provided, meeting targets and schedules, as indicated in the Project Performance section. However, despite considerable success under difficult circumstances, substantial issues remain that must be addressed if the program is to be successful. Implementing a project in a post-conflict, resource-scarce country such as Liberia is no small task and is a long-term endeavor. It requires ongoing review and may require frequent adjustment and revision as well.

"Implementation: the process of realizing objectives by enacting the activities designed in the planning process; it is the operationalization of the proposal. Implementation involves regular progress reviews with adjustment of activities if necessary".[26]

When it comes to achieving credible track records, stakeholders' expectations, perceptions and assumptions need to be managed carefully to ensure their continuous engagement in reaching the project's objectives and goals. Failure to recognize their powerful role in defining how stakeholders perceive their environment, define success and engage with the project can lead to underrating their impact on project implementation.

"Individuals can easily have expectations that are either too low (they are unresponsive to positive signals of change)—or too high (they hold unrealistic expectations and are easily disappointed)". [27]

Achieving such track records also implies developing inclusive accountability and transparency mechanisms as a way to build trust among all partners. As part of the process of building a trusting work environment, increased partner engagement and partner accountability for the project's key inputs, outputs and outcomes are important. Additionally, project resource allocation is a sensitive issue in fragile environments, and failing to address it in the process of implementation may imply that stakeholders will lose faith. Careful assessment of who gets what should be assessed to ensure key stakeholders do not get the impression of being left out.

'Until questions of who gets what are addressed in an acceptable way, trust may remain an elusive prize'.[28] It appears that a cohesive, systematic, and inclusive approach to implementation needs to be established. Such an approach takes into consideration the need to provide orientation to and the timely monitoring of project inputs, activities, and outputs on a regular basis to monitor progress and identify what problems may be occurring and to determine a means to address them. This approach should take into consideration all partners and bene-

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[26] Conflict-sensitive approaches to development, humanitarian assistance and peace building tools for peace and conflict impact assessment/Chapter 3. Saferworld.org.uk. (p.2)

[27] Idem

[28] http://internationalbudget.org/blog/2012/08/06/how-to-build-budget-transparency-accountability-and-participation-in-fragile-states/

ficiaries involved in the overall project, keep them informed and engaged according to the findings of the ongoing consultations and assessments. With this in mind, findings on project Implementation and Management are presented as they pertain to the project results framework, followed by overarching findings.

SUPPORT FOR YOUNG LIBERIANS TO ACCESS THE ENGINEERING AND AGRICULTURAL FIELDS

Consistent with the USAID/Liberia Country Development Cooperation Strategy (2013-2017), RTI proposed increasing access for a larger population of students, including women, ex-combatants, persons with disabilities, and others coming from disadvantaged groups and schools, by developing a pipeline of students who are prepared, trained and motivated to be successful in the CoE programs. This effort includes Smart Start, a social marketing campaign to increase awareness and interest in agriculture and engineering among prospective secondary students, especially women; Summer Start, a non-residential program that targets secondary students interested in engineering and agricultural education that engages students in interactive engineering and agricultural education, while reinforcing math, language and science skills; Fast Start that targets incoming freshman with the same objectives as Summer Start; and scholarships, with priority given to women, underserved students and ex-combatants.[29] Findings from interviews and FGDs suggest that the Summer Start program is very popular among the beneficiaries, though CU students indicated that there was not enough content related to agriculture.

The Student Pipeline into University

It is through the Summer Start program that high school students with a 3.0 average are assessed to determine scholarship eligibility. Using the pipeline activities is thus considered an effective means to identify top-performing male and female scholarship candidates. EHELD confirms that an affirmative action policy has increased the proportion of female students to these programs than otherwise would be the case in these traditionally male dominated fields.

Peace Corps/Liberia reached out to EHELD to suggest that they participate as a partner in the Smart Start and Summer Start pipeline components through Peace Corps Volunteers (PCVs) teaching in secondary schools. Their participation in awareness raising about studying engineering and agriculture and motivating students to participate in the programs has been strategic and beneficial in several ways. PCVs teach courses in math and science which are essential subjects for the engineering and agricultural fields. PCVs become involved early in the process, assisting with recruitment of the high school students. The PCVs are reportedly energized by this activity, as the motivation and achievement of pipeline students are much higher than those whom they normally teach. Secondary principals reported that their engagement in the activity is transparent, collaborative, and effective.

Another partner involved in the pipeline activities is the Liberia Agricultural Company (LAC). They sponsor one of the Summer Start programs at one of EHELD's camps. They report that they enjoy contributing to the activity because it is different from their normal work and find it rewarding to work with such energized students. To a large degree, this partner appears to reflect the goal that EHELD is trying to achieve with the private sector. LAC is proactive and appreciative of EHELD's efforts in this regard.

The Assessment Team also reached out to the implementers of Summer Start to gain a perspective about their experience. These are graduate students from University of Michigan (a Consortium partner) who come to teach, live on campus and support faculty from the University of Michigan. The comments from the two respondents refer to the summer of 2013. In terms of their teaching experiences, the graduate students indicated

[29] EHELD Quarterly Report April 2013. p.3

that they were extremely fulfilling and rewarding. They enjoyed the Liberian people and their culture. However, one of the University of Michigan graduate students mentioned observing visible tension between the University of Michigan faculty and CU faculty due to the visitors' impatience with the lack of timeliness of actions, issues with punctuality and the state of support infrastructure, which were problematic for them.

This enthusiasm was in spite of reports that preparation done by EHELD to receive and position them upon arrival was inadequate. One graduate student came with a group to stay in Monrovia before departing for CU, and the other was driven directly to CU upon arrival. In both cases, there was no formal or informal orientation provided by EHELD or the university, though the student who was driven directly to CU stated that an orientation was not necessarily needed since she/he had been briefed at the University of Michigan before departure. The other student stated that transportation to and from Cuttington University was routinely problematic, i.e., there was no transport readily available to drive them. Once on campus, the females in the group ended up being placed in the living quarters of the female students, which was on the other side of the campus from the men's quarters, so reviewing the day's work and preparing for the next day's work as a group was logistically difficult.

There also were reported concerns for personal safety and security. While these concerns were brought to the project's attention, no corrective action was taken until thieves broke in and passports, money, and personal effects were stolen. It was reported that, as a result of the incident, EHELD worked with the CU administration to place bars in the dorm windows and provided 24 hour guards. This report was corroborated by one of the Consortium members. Over time, the women were eventually provided with their own lodging closer to the visiting men's quarters, which relieved much of the safety concern.

It should also be noted that one respondent at CU commented that without financial support from outside, the pipeline component of the EHELD project will likely not be continued after the close of the project. Another respondent indicated that it will likely not be continued by the universities due to lack of UL faculty participation. Similar to the graduate student's comment above, the respondent noted that the UL and CU faculty have had limited involvement in Fast or Summer Start. He believes the local faculty should learn from the consortium members who teach, and then the local faculty should teach with the Consortium members providing a supportive mentoring role, since this arrangement would provide more support for sustainability.

Scholarships at University

RTI included in its framework the need for increased CoE access for students (particularly women) and provided for scholarship support for qualified students. The implementation of the scholarship program has been ongoing and student recipients, both male and female, commented on the benefit of having these scholarships. By the end of the project, EHELD is expected to provide approximately 216 scholarships, 121 for males and 95 for females. Even with the increase in interest and support in preparation to study in these fields, many of the students selected for scholarship support are not meeting university academic requirements, as evidenced by the drop-out rates, especially for female students.

The drop-out rates for female scholarship recipients, due to not being able to maintain the required GPA, tended to occur more frequently in the third year, and were investigated by a gender assessment team from Rutgers, one of the Consortium partners. While the implementation of this activity and related recommendations will be addressed later in the report, it was determined that females drop out for a number of reasons, often related to the needs of their families. Other reasons for dropping out included safety and security fears associated with being on campus, especially in the dorms, and travel to and from campus.

An added concern for EHELD-supported students is whether they will continue to receive their scholarships to complete their studies if the EHELD project ends before their graduation date. EHELD is working with USAID to ensure continued support for students currently receiving scholarships until the scheduled completion of their academic programs. Similar to the pipeline activities, sustainability of the scholarship program beyond the scope of EHELD is a serious concern for all stakeholders. Private and public sector institutions have shown reluctance to fund scholarships through the project, since they believe that their contributions may not be publicly recognized as a social responsibility contribution (EHELD, Q2 July 2013). Information describing what students should expect after EHELD funding for scholarships ends should be presented in clear detail to any scholarship students to allay any concerns they may have about continued support.

In addition to concerns about the continuity of support for the scholarship students are concerns about perceptions of other students studying in these fields without scholarship support. While the scholarship students appreciated the new curricula as taught by contract faculty, the non-scholarship students were unaware that the new curricula existed, although they were aware of EHELD. The non-scholarship students' perception of the EHELD project in general was positive, but they naturally want EHELD to expand services so that it includes them. EHELD does provide support to the program that will benefit them, but they seemed to be unaware of it. For example, they stated their understanding that only scholarship students would be allowed to access the Career Services Center when it begins operation in March-April 2014. The contract faculty professor overseeing the Career Services Center indicated that this is not true, which contradicts the perceptions of the non-scholarship students.

The non-scholarship students also indicated that they are not aware of any new labs, though the scholarship students are aware of the labs. Overall, from the non-scholarship students perspective, there now exists a distinction between EHELD related activities and the status quo, and they perceive that the scholarship students had formed a privileged clique that benefits from special treatment. As one respondent stated, when asked if he or she had heard of Summer Start, "*I have heard of Summer Start. I feel I'm not a part of EHELD. It remains isolated from us. We don't know everything it does. Students are not exposed."* Another respondent said the following: *"Most students don't know about it. They should have an EHELD week for more awareness. Feels like it's a secret."*

Aside from the scholarships provided by EHELD, non-scholarship students will benefit in the same way as the scholarship students, e.g., access to labs, resource center, computer lab, and Career Services Center (junior and seniors). However, the perception by non-scholarship students that they will not benefit suggests that the project has not reached out in a cohesive manner to ensure that all students have been oriented to the purpose of the EHELD project and its support services. EHELD should consider conducting ongoing monitoring of its project-supported program and services to ensure their mutual understanding and use by all partners and beneficiaries and to avoid misperceptions that can foster feelings of exclusivity among peers.

DEVELOPING CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE AT CUTTINGTON UNIVERSITY AND THE UNIVERSITY OF LIBERIA

Developing higher education CoEs focuses on high-impact changes most needed to support economic growth and development. It does not specifically tackle comprehensive reform for higher education across an entire system. The CoE approach is considered more focused and likely to achieve a breakthrough, rather than a general reform effort (Hergnyan M., & Williams, H., 2012). In Liberia, the CoE approach is expected to address the inter-related needs for infrastructure development that currently constrains economic growth, agricultural innovation and development needed for food security, and improved governance of institutions of higher education through the CoE examples.

There are common challenges to this approach, which should inform the strategy and plan for developing CoEs as economic drivers in developing countries, including:

1. For students, there are few support services, living conditions can be problematic, classrooms overcrowded, inadequate libraries, laboratories, and available technology.

2. For a host HEI, faculty often do not perceive personal incentives to upgrade curricula, conduct research, or improve teaching methods, as pay is commonly pegged to length of service, rather than performance, so that the teaching content is often outdated, and rote learning is commonly used.

3. For the private sector, business leaders are not consulted on an adequate basis to inform HEI academic programs so that many educational services in the developing world are largely disconnected from the labor market.

These challenges are fully reflected in Liberia. As RTI has noted in their technical application, "urgent institutional needs include up-to-date engineering and agriculture curricula; intensive faculty development; better university-employer connections resulting in more practical and relevant training, employment readiness, and job placement; and improved teaching, laboratory, and library facilities to enable both academic and experiential learning" (RTI Technical Proposal, 2011, p. 17).

As noted above, EHELD has made expected progress in establishing the foundations and standards of excellence for improved academic programs in spite of a difficult environment that still reflects many deficiencies due to such a long civil war. These project supported inputs include revised Consortium-led curricula; contract faculty as short-term supplements to existing faculty for implementing the revised curricula; advanced degree study for aspiring faculty to continue quality teaching and mentoring for the longer term; and an array of professional development activities for existing faculty. Both universities have new labs, furniture, fans, some new air conditioners, a common room at CU and a faculty lounge at the UL, and they each have been provided with a new bus for field trips.[30]

Two issues related to developing the CoEs came up quite frequently during the assessment: (1) the concept of what a CoE means varies from person to person, and (2) the project's outcomes expected by establishing CoEs are not necessarily known or being well-monitored.

With respect to the concept issue, one respondent commented that, "This name (CoE) is troublesome." Another respondent stated that, "CoE was an unfortunate name. Means different things to different people. We started calling it "CoE Performance" to get away from the image of a shiny glass building. Tried to explain that it's more about the output, that better lab equipment was the only thing that they were going to get that was tangible." This perception is evident in responses especially from respondents at the UL. They reported that, "The vision is there but nothing concrete. No sign that a CoE has been established." Another respondent commented that Centers of Excellence should mean people with terminal degrees are involved in research, and that more Masters level students would be graduating from it. As will be described below, the lack of a common vision most likely accounts for the varying perspectives by providers, beneficiaries and other stakeholders about the priority and value placed on some of the project-led initiatives.

Development of New Curricula

[30] Although a dispute about a MOU has resulted in the UL bus not being utilized as yet, and the faculty lounge at UL is not used often because it was reported that the refrigerator is broken and the air conditioner does not work.

Based on discussions with EHELD, curricula development began in the first year of the project at a three-day consultative event with all of the partners. Findings from the assessment indicate that the curricula that have been revised thus far are well-received by the contract and local faculty at CU, and by the contract and some local faculty at the UL. The fact students can now specialize in three different areas in agriculture at CU is seen as an important contribution of the new curricula. Similarly, the scholarship students at the UL stated that they appreciate the new curricula because it does not present a rote approach to learning.

Questions have been raised, however, about the continuous engagement of all of the partners in the curricula's ongoing development, including those who were expected to use the curriculum (local faculty) or benefit from it (private sector).[31] The Assessment Team discovered through inquiries that local faculty did provide input into the curricula development, although it was reported that there was limited systematic engagement, i.e., solicitation for inputs. This has led to concerns that the Liberian perspectives about issues with the curricula may not have been taken into consideration. The curricula development process also was apparently impacted by cultural differences, e.g., it was reported by persons closely associated with the project that some EHELD Consortium faculty were sometimes impatient when the Liberian faculty wanted to voice their opinions, because the Consortium faculty were eager to maintain the curricula development schedule without ongoing consultations and debate, which might create delays.

Professional Development of Faculty

EHELD's design for creating CoEs revolves around strengthening capacity within the CoEs to ensure the Centers and their faculty will be equipped with the right knowledge and expertise to produce high performing students who are prepared to contribute to Liberia's development challenges in the fields of engineering and agriculture. For the COEs to be sustainable, both short and long term faculty support and strengthening must be addressed. Notably, contract faculty and visiting faculty from a range of African and non-African countries and institutions addressed some of the short-term capacity needs, with additional responsibilities to serve as mentors to local faculty and to provide good practice examples with a particular focus on experiential learning. In conjunction with the short-term efforts, the advanced degree training programs in Africa and the U.S. directed at aspiring faculty from within the College of Agriculture and the Engineering Department is seen as a long-term measure to build institutional capacity. Upon their return, these aspiring faculty are expected to form a critical mass at both institutions of qualified, young faculty to further the idea of excellence in teaching, research and extension. The findings regarding these two groups of faculty, i.e., contract and aspiring, are discussed below and followed by the findings regarding the existing local faculty.

Contract Faculty

The identification of contract faculty by EHELD with the right qualifications continues to be challenging, as reflected by the lower than expected number of contract faculty hired to date. While the identification of appropriate candidates with the right skill sets and experience willing to accept established salary levels, benefits and terms of employment continues to present ongoing challenges, the contract faculty's academic contributions have been welcomed and appreciated, particularly by the students. Overall the contract faculty have emphasized their openness and availability as a resource and as mentors, demonstrated their unwavering commitment to student learning, and their reliability, punctuality and regularity when it comes to classes and field work. At CU, the students highlighted the consistent exposure to practical work: every Saturday students are expected to

[31] As will be described in a section below, private sector respondents did not know that the curriculum had been completed and implemented. So, it is not clear whether or how their insights and information on the knowledge and skills needed in the workplace were incorporated into learning standards for the revised curriculum. The expected benefit to the private sector from the revised curricula is better trained graduates for employment.

do field research and contract faculty are always accessible to help out, as well as to help build up writing and research skills.

At the UL, it also was reported by students that contract faculty are good teachers. An example was offered in which a contract faculty member broke down a particularly large class into several sessions, a measure that was appreciated by both scholarship and non-scholarship students. It emerged; especially during FGDs at the UL that the presence of the contract faculty has created heightened awareness among students about the behavior and attitudes of local faculty, i.e., the local faculty do not create an atmosphere conducive to learning. "*Local professors do not want their students to learn for fear they will know as much as them. You cannot talk to some of the local professors. They don't know how to interact and encourage."*

As part of the project's original intention, the contract faculty should not only expect to play a role as "gap fillers",[32] but they should also be role models. It has become clear that contract faculty do not necessarily perceive themselves in this latter role. EHELD has reported addressing this issue by setting and enforcing clearer performance standards for contract faculty that refer more explicitly to their function as role models in both institutions.

There is an issue about supporting externally sourced contract faculty at CU and UL that is related to the benefits that they are receiving, i.e., substantially higher salaries than local faculty, renovated and well equipped housing. These additional benefits have created a degree of divisiveness among contract faculty and local faculty, even though they may be considered reasonable when compared to the contract faculty's living conditions in their home environments. The contract faculty's inter-group comparisons extend further, and the CU contract faculty believe that their working and housing conditions are worse when compared to contract faculty's working and housing conditions at the UL.

The local faculty consider that with these benefits comes full accountability for project implementation - a perception which also contributes to the local faculty's feelings of detachment from the project's implementation. This sentiment is reinforced by the fact that local faculty are aware that the project appears to consider many of them to be close to retirement age, and they are being passed over with respect to substantial professional development opportunities and involvement in project-supported activities.

An additional issue that has provoked some ongoing controversy is a rule that no Liberian national can apply for a position of contract faculty. According to EHELD, this rule came from USAID. EHELD reports that this rule has been reviewed and, in fact, one Liberian has been hired as a contract faculty member. Additionally the project has discussed the possibility of using qualified Liberian engineers who have returned to their home country as contract faculty. EHELD is acutely aware that this could lead to more divisiveness among local faculty and newly returned future faculty. Most notably, issues of remuneration and employment conditions will have to be addressed.

Aspiring Faculty

As part of the project's long-term vision for faculty capacity development, the implementation of the pipeline approach to prepare a nucleus of a future generation of faculty members is on-going. As noted in EHELD Quarterly Reports "…in the long term, a pipeline for new Liberian faculty members will be developed. This long-term need will be addressed, in part, by identifying the most promising students interested in a teaching profession and seeking opportunities for them to continue their education in either top regional or US institutions, while serving in the interim periods as teaching assistants in the CoE." (Q1, 2013, p.10). To avoid confu-

[32] The role of contract faculty as gap fillers still tends to dominate as is shaped by a post-conflict approach to development.

sion with the term pipeline as regards the pipeline of students for the Smart, Summer and Fast Start programs, the term "aspiring" or "future faculty" will be used with respect to those students identified by EHELD to study abroad for advanced degrees.

Notably, aspiring faculty are being selected for study abroad to build their knowledge, skills and expertise to join the departments of both the CU and the UL upon gaining their degrees. The project experienced some initial setbacks because of the difficulties in identifying committed and academically promising candidates, due to a limited pool of qualified applicants at both universities. However, the selection process of promising future faculty, while challenging, has been completed and one graduate has already returned to CU as a lecturer. Currently, 11 men and women (eight from CU and three from the UL) are currently studying abroad in top regional African and US institutions. Three others will be graduating this year. All 11 are contractually obligated to join their respective departments for a minimum of three years upon completion of their studies. Those that responded to the electronic surveys expressed eagerness to return to their institutions to teach, and all expect to be promoted to a faculty position.

List of Aspiring Faculty Studying Abroad with EHELD Funding

STUDENTS	HOST UNIVERSITY	AREA OF STUDY	FUNDING SOURCE
Male	Rutgers University, USA	Civil Engineering	Rutgers Scholarship
Male	Rutgers University, USA	Civil Engineering	Rutgers Scholarship
Male	University of Michigan	Engineering	EHELD
Male	Rutgers University, USA	Agriculture, Soil Science and Natural Resource Management	Rutgers Scholarship
Male	Rutgers University, USA	Agriculture, Soil Science and Natural Resource Management	Rutgers Scholarship
Male	University of Cape Coast, Ghana	Agricultural Extension and Agro-Forestry	EHELD
Female	University of Cape Coast, Ghana	Agricultural Extension and Agro-Forestry	EHELD
Male	University of Cape Coast, Ghana	Agricultural Engineering	EHELD
Female	Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Ghana	Animal Health and Welfare	EHELD
Male	Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Ghana	Entomology/ Pest Management	EHELD
Female	North Caroline State University, USA	Animal Nutrition	EHELD
Male (graduated 2013)	Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Ghana	Agronomy (Rice Breeding)	EHELD/Rutgers leveraged fund from AGRA Environmental and Laboratory Services

A number of respondents voiced their concern about the effectiveness of the model of sending aspiring faculty to study abroad. At CU, the respondents referred specifically to the urgent need to start devising a package of

financial and non-financial incentives for these future faculty to remain at the College of Agriculture after their contractual agreement ends, because low salaries may discourage these future faculty from committing to careers at their respective institutions. Discussions with both institutions will have to be intensified to devise concrete measures. The Assessment Team would also encourage the universities to intensify institutional engagement with the aspiring faculty abroad. One possible focus for such engagement could be the development of joint research proposals that involve local faculty.

To exemplify the need for an integration plan, respondents gave the example of one faculty member outside of the EHELD project who had recently returned to CU and currently occupies two full-time positions, one at CU and one at a local research institution. So far it appears that the university administration has taken no action to address it. This example highlights a potential issue for returning faculty that the project should anticipate and be prepared to respond to. Similar concerns were raised among stakeholders at the UL.

Current Local Faculty

Respondents from EHELD agree that opportunities for local faculty have been limited. Respondents from the UL reported that no professional development training has been provided for the local faculty since the project's inception, although the Assessment Team spoke with a local faculty respondent who confirmed that he had received outside training in the U.S. Another local faculty member mentioned that EHELD asked individual questions about capacity in the engineering department, but that no formal assessment of their capacity had been undertaken. It was also mentioned that no report was shared with regard to any findings.

Reactions from some respondents at CU revealed frustration: *"No one empowers local faculty and there has been little development of local staff*." At the same time, the PMP shows that 10 non-degree courses were offered last year and one thus far this year (October 2013-September 2014). Furthermore, one EHELD representative reported that the CU local faculty desired to teach some of the short courses. EHELD agreed, asked for applications and, to date, EHELD has received only one application. When asked about the reason for not applying, there were no responses provided by the CU local faculty. Given this disconnect between short courses provided, efforts by EHELD for more inclusiveness of local faculty, and the limited number of capacity development opportunities perceived to be offered, it emerged during the FGDs at CU that local faculty have only engaged at modest levels for their own capacity development. Failure to take advantage of opportunities presented by EHELD for peer teaching, mentoring, joint research and the aforementioned short course teaching has led to growing concerns about the effects of continuous disengagement with project ownership and sustainability by the universities. Their responses reveal that some project outputs documented in the PMP, such as the number of persons trained in the short courses, are not being perceived as credible track records, suggesting that the project may have misjudged local faculty expectations from the outset.

To provide a further illustration of this, one of the two[33] planned indoor laboratories at CU has recently been completed, which EHELD considers to be one of the major outputs so far. However, so far none of the local faculty has taken any initiative to use the new facility. When they were asked about the status of the improvements to date in the college, their response was that few improvements have been made.

[33] The second indoor laboratory is planned to specialize in student study and research in animal, soil, and plant sciences. EHELD QR, Oct-Dec. 2013

Regardless, in the future it will be important to address more openly such concerns with the faculty. Most notably, the lack of motivation and buy-in should be carefully assessed with regard to their effect on sustainability. Besides, it is important to be cognizant of the fact that such differences in perception may contribute to eroding trust among implementing partners.

It further emerged at CU that the project's strategy for engagement of local faculty appears to be failing to address a range of faculty expectations, in spite of major improvements. CASD has a new multipurpose laboratory, a new fully equipped common room, refurbished classrooms, a new resource center, and a computer laboratory, and the revised curricula places a strong focus on experiential teaching and learning. Even so, the local faculty continue to be resistant to change and openly refuse to acknowledge most of the improvements. This mentality has been mirrored in EHELD reporting, '*Local faculty stick to their habitual manner to which they are accustomed rather than taking up new, challenging tasks such as establishing laboratory and demonstration plots*' (EHELD, Quarterly Report Jan.-March 2013). They continuously display negative attitudes vis-à-vis new teaching methods; their motivation to buy into the idea of the CoEs and use of the new facilities is low; and they are reluctant to engage and to learn from international contract faculty.

Related findings indicate that local faculty do not see themselves as active stakeholders in the project's implementation. While they believe that the project depends on them for implementation, they voiced concern about the limited consideration the project has paid them so far. Decisions are not seen to have been made collectively. Furthermore, personal benefits are seen to accrue exclusively to contract faculty, raising issues of resource allocation. The above is reflective of findings that local faculty do not consider themselves to be key targets of project interventions.

The Assessment Team faced initial difficulties at the UL in gathering local faculty for a FGD. Given the timing of the assessment, right after the three month closure at UL, this did not come as a surprise. However, findings from the UL also point to a limited engagement of local faculty in the project. It is difficult, however, to assess the extent to which their limited engagement in the project may be a direct result of the closure, since this situation may have prevented local faculty from staying attuned to the progress made, notably with the installation of the circuit laboratory, which is a major achievement of the project. At the time of the assessment the laboratory was nearly completed and ready to be used.

Suggestions by local faculty at CU on how the project can make a meaningful contribution to their professional lives and the College of Agriculture have been limited. However, the frequent reference during FGDs and interviews to EHELDs failure to provide targeted capacity development initiatives indicates that such initiatives may be welcomed. In this context, the idea of a study tour was raised, together with additional hands-on training on grant writing. Local faculty at both universities stated they would like the salaries between themselves and the contract faculty to be more in line with each other, and that they would appreciate professional development opportunities. Additionally, the reference to an overall lack of empowerment suggests that more bottom-up approaches to decision making related to project inputs should be devised. In this context, local faculty at both the UL and CU expressed concern with regard to the future management of the laboratory equipment - an instance the Assessment Team views as an opportunity for EHELD to meaningfully engage and empower local faculty.

It also should be noted that EHELD has been cognizant of the low levels of engagement reflected by explicit references in their reports. *'Despite all of the changes and opportunities EHELD is introducing at CASD and the inputs from staff, personnel still seem to be treading with caution and reservation. Hence, it is very difficult to identify staff who will quickly champion specific aspects of EHELD's implementation (e.g. student-led enterprise, internship, laboratories). Overall, faculty members tend to operate in the habitual manner to which they are accustomed rather than taking up new challenging tasks.'* (Quarterly Report, January-March 2013)

'Regular attendance of some local faculty remains a problem. The university must take action on this matter if there is to be any element of sustainability in the EHELD outcomes. The EHELD team is willing to assist in identifying strategies and has an STTA visit planned that will look at incentives (not necessarily financial). However is would be beneficial if UL supported this initiative more completely.' (Quarterly Report, October-December 2012)

Some possible solutions have been put forth and include EHELD assisting in identifying strategies and paying for short term technical assistance (STTA) to look at incentives for faculty. Some specific measures put forth by EHELD relate to reviewing the long-term faculty plan, exploring financial and non-financial incentives for local faculty, e.g., providing monthly pre-paid phone cards. While it is understood that salary issues at the university are beyond the scope of EHELD, it is clearly an issue that EHELD needs to address with the universities, given the assessment's findings relating to their adverse effect on project implementation. Discussions during the assessment reveal, however, that there has been limited progress made on addressing these negative perceptions.

Facilities, Equipment and Supplies

EHELD is acutely aware of the importance of developing the faculty's capacity to include scientific laboratory work within the new curricula and the need for the faculty to champion the establishment of the laboratories. The assessment revealed that so far at CU no concrete actions have been taken to address the utilization of the lab by the local faculty. Notably, plans to recruit a contract faculty to work with lecturers to incorporate laboratory activities in their work, supervise laboratory work and train laboratory technicians and student assistants have not been confirmed. Given the overall non-collaborative working environment, it is advisable to use great care when selecting this person. For example, EHELD could use the hiring process as a way to actively engage local faculty in the process by jointly reviewing the applicant's terms of reference. Alternately, using a short-term technical advisor to train a local faculty member to assume this role could foster greater buy-in and sustainability.

With regard to the UL, a similar disconnect has occurred between the implementation of a very expensive circuit lab and its use. It was reported that both students and professors are invited to visit the lab to learn about its use and that hours are set aside for this purpose, but very little interest has been shown. On the day the Assessment Team visited, one student showed up. There is no register to record who visited the lab, their purpose and, more importantly, no formal inquiry has been made among the local faculty and students as to why they are not interested in learning about it.

Regarding this same lab, the assessment team noticed that the room was warm and asked about the air conditioner. The respondent explained that it is important to maintain the temperature at 25 C so that no condensation will occur on the instruments, and at the same time ensure that no one sweats on them. The person responsible for establishing both the electric lab and the circuit lab is leaving in March 2014, and would like to hire

a lab technician whom he has already identified as being well qualified, but does not know how to go about it. As mentioned earlier, MOUs have not been established with the two universities and, consequently, the universities' hiring processes are unknown.

The lack of participation and ownership by the local faculty is evidenced by another example. Consortium-led, short-term activities by the University of Michigan's Blue Lab were undertaken on the CU campus during the Summer Start program in 2013. The Blue Lab is a student-run organization that works toward sustainable solutions to development problems and coordinates teams of undergraduate students to develop environmentally, culturally and economically sustainable technologies.[34]

As a cost sharing activity, a Blue Lab student group, under the supervision of a University of Michigan faculty member, spent four weeks on the CU campus and constructed three pieces of infrastructure: a biogas digester, an irrigation system and an aquaponics system. Findings indicate that to date neither local nor contract faculty at CU have displayed any buy-in for the three projects. Conflicting responses from different stakeholders during the assessment make it difficult to determine the exact extent of institutional, and more specifically, faculty consultation and collaboration during the design and construction stages. One respondent commented that, "*It was an African jamboree for the students*."

While it emerged during the interviews that the use of local materials was a priority, none of the three projects are currently fully functioning. While the irrigation system functions intermittently, both the aquaponics system and the biogas digester have not been used since the departure of the Michigan student group. Based on discussions with EHELD, the biogas digester will be converted into a compost pit. The well for the irrigation system needs to be dug out further to solve recurring issues of low water levels.

INCREASING EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR GRADUATES OF THE CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE

Using a CoE approach to transform higher education programs into economic drivers requires implementation of linkages between the educators and the principal actors in the most productive economic sectors. In Liberia, the key growth sectors include agricultural, extractive, and shipping industries, as well as government with its interests in infrastructure development. Creating collaborative, multi-sectoral partnerships among these stakeholders can provide the foundation to improve the relevance and quality of higher education programs.

There are several roles for the private sector in this partnership that improve the relevance and quality of the academic programs, the employability of its graduates, and the competiveness of the businesses themselves for accessing this newly trained workforce. For example, consultations with business leaders can identify key junctures where workforce capabilities can lead to increased productivity. Ideally, this process does more than inform the educational institutions about what knowledge and skills are needed, but also leads to continued engagement of the private sector in curricular upgrading and development, including provision of guest lectures, development of certification programs, internships, and on-the-job training. (C. Williams, 2012).

EHELD commented that currently they were not very engaged with the private sector, except for employer forums that are held two to three times a year. The purpose of these fora are to bring the Liberian employers, government ministries and agencies, companies, non-governmental organizations, and members of the public and private sectors together to address varying issues revolving around multi-sectoral partnerships and relevant elements of the project, including possible funding for scholarships, employment-responsive curriculum, intern-

[34] http://bluelab.engin.umich.edu/

ships, and eventual employment. EHELD stated that their engagement with the private sector partners will increase this spring (2014) when they begin preparations to place students as interns with various private sector partners. They stated that they will help these partners understand the value that employers receive from having interns. EHELD plans to promote this understanding by, in part, developing a public-private-education community outreach initiative called Liberia Engineering and Agricultural Group (LEAG) to align the academic programs with the job markets through advisory roles for representatives of the private sector, as well as linkages among the sectoral partners to create a "*more real work student learning experience, service learning opportunities, and exposure to the practical world of work for CoE students that will ultimately facilitate their job placement*," (RTI Technical Proposal, 2011, p. 16).

The Assessment Team asked EHELD how LEAG works on the ground. They reported that its purpose is to bring employers together, and they plan to initiate it in April 2014. The Liberia Agricultural Company (LAC) and Firestone, among others, will introduce the idea of an employer/paid intern feedback via an evaluation process and will set expectations for both parties, as well as to determine how many internships can be provided. EHELD reported that LEAG will meet regularly and will also include a guest lecture program, including informational speeches for the students. It is planned that students will receive credit for internships at the UL, but not CU, although internships are still a requirement at CU. When questioned about its sustainability, EHELD commented that while LEAG may not formally remain beyond the end of the project, they believe that the relationship between the universities and employers will continue, once the employers become involved and see how interns can benefit them.

The idea of the employer/paid intern feedback evaluation represents a potential monitoring tool that can be beneficial in a number of ways. To be so, it will be important to clarify how the information will be reviewed, by whom and how it will be used.

Based on discussions with the private sector and with the Peace Corps, however, there is some disconnect about how EHELD and these partners view their relationship. The partners commented that they were not engaged on a regular and systematic basis, apart from employer fora. However, the partners commented that there is a need for inclusion in the EHELD planning processes to avoid their inability to assist on an ad hoc basis due to previous commitments when requests from the EHELD project are made, i.e., "…*need for more lead time for engagement*," as one respondent stated. The example cited was that EHELD called for teachers to assist with pipeline summer activities, but since the project did not make the call until the summer, the teachers had already left for vacation and were unavailable.

Another point that the private sector partners made is that the jobs they need to fill are at the level of tradesman or technician. One respondent mentioned that they provide a one year apprenticeship program to train potential employees. This respondent added that the apprenticeship program is intentional…*"It's a company's mind set. They do not need Masters and Ph.D.s, they don't want to pay for that - there's only, maybe, one position requiring those kinds of skills in Liberia."*

Another private sector respondent commented that they train their employees for one year, even if they graduate from college. (It will be interesting if they see a difference in the quality of the job readiness of EHELD-supported graduates, if that is to be monitored). Another respondent stated that EHELD should engage the policy makers within the private sector, commenting that he was not a policy maker who could make some of the decisions requested by EHELD, but that he was the only one engaged with the project.

The suggestion was made on a couple of occasions that the engagement needs to be institutionalized. Given EHELD's description of the upcoming LEAG, perhaps its initiation will provide the vehicle for institutionalization.

Based on comments by a UL respondent, the approach taken by EHELD to include the private sector was poorly conceived. This person indicated that much of the private sector in Liberia is run by graduates from the UL and CU and who are, therefore, affiliated with their alma maters in terms of alumni support and input. When EHELD reached out to various private sector entities, they diverted some ongoing support from the universities. As the respondent observed, "*Suddenly, LAC is with EHELD instead of UL or CU. Check the letterhead."*

The scenarios above suggest that EHELD may have missed an opportunity to create a more robust relationship with the private sector from the beginning, although this can still be addressed, especially with the onset of the LEAG. While the employer fora are a laudable idea, how the discussions translate into action is unclear. For example, if curriculum issues are discussed and ideas put forth during these events, as indicated by EHELD, it would seem that the Consortium members contributing to the curriculum development should be present to hear and participate in the discussion. Routinely assessing context, human resource capacities, and any current or potential conflicts that project components may contribute to can help avoid, mitigate, or at last manage some unintended negative perceptions about project inputs and activities.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The implementation of a monitoring system is critical for all development projects. EHELD currently does not have an M&E Specialist on board. EHELD has had three M&E Specialists, none since December 2013. Additionally, in between the first two persons holding the responsibility for EHELD's M&E, there was an eight to nine month gap in filling the position. These turn overs and absences have undoubtedly affected the ability of EHELD to provide proper monitoring and evaluation of the project.

EHELD is cognizant of this need and indicated that they have identified a person for the M&E position and are preparing an offer. At the same time they are promoting an individual from within the EHELD project to create an M&E team.

Up until now, based on the assessment, it appears that EHELD has focused primarily on monitoring inputs and outputs and ensuring that their PMP definitions continue to accurately match what these inputs and outputs represent as the project progresses. RTI redefined some indicators in the revised PMP that was approved by USAID in February 2014. Some respondents indicated that they believed that there has not been sufficient monitoring of project activities throughout these first three years of the project. An example of M&E oversight was described by a project person who would be the contact person for the M&E specialist working at CU. This person reported that there has been no interaction with an M&E specialist since July 2013. This was confirmed by another administrator.

Another respondent recalls being part of one M&E workshop. He also states that monitoring has been irregular ('not timely') in the past, and interactions with the M&E specialist mainly took place via the phone (about five times) and two-three times with data transmission through email communication.

Many of the respondents that were interviewed believe that this mid-term assessment is too late to have any impact on the manner in which the project is being implemented. As regards the UL, local faculty reported that they had never had any monitoring by EHELD, until these mid-term assessment interviews.

OVERARCHING MANAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION FINDINGS

Interviews with EHELD project staff, as well as with university, private sector partners and participants, indicate that implementation of the project's deliverables on schedule has compromised inclusion and participation and, at times, introduced – or not addressed – conflicts among groups within the collective enterprise, signalling a

gap in the ability to move from delivering project inputs and outputs to achieving the outcomes and results necessary for creating sustainable CoEs.

Project Influence over Delivery and Change

In a discussion with EHELD, it was clarified that the project has no legal basis to direct the universities or faculty to change their behaviors or take specific actions; faculty cooperation is dependent on their own good will. EHELD reported that it informs the Deans of what is taking place and expects the Deans to relay the information to the faculty. One EHELD respondent indicated that this is changing and that EHELD is now sharing minutes from their staff meetings with all university personnel involved in the project, including contract and local faculty. There are also meetings held between EHELD and the university presidents, but one respondent said not much is accomplished - in other words, the effectiveness of this type of communication has been uneven. Even with these meetings taking place, EHELD states it has no ability to influence the university's administration in areas that support project implementation, e.g., hiring practices of faculty, performance management of local faculty, and salaries. Without some kind of Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the universities, the need for which may not have been recognized at the onset of the project, and in the absence of including faculty and administrators extensively in the design, development and implementation of project activities, it is not surprising that at times administrators and faculty do not readily accept or adopt project inputs on a case-by-case basis.

The Oversight Committees

The oversight committees ('Advisory Committees') have been struggling to fulfil their roles. Composed of senior management with decision making power within both institutions, the oversight committees are expected to take on key decision-making roles with regard to project implementation and project milestones.

In the first stages of implementation at CU, EHELD was described as functioning in isolation and that the oversight committee was not sure about its role. "*The committee was told what to do and responded accordingly*." It was believed that at CU the oversight committee should have been more proactive about monitoring the project, but it was not clear to the committee how to go about making monitoring a part of its responsibilities. While the committee at CU meets regularly every four to six weeks, the committee at the UL only meets intermittently and serious doubts remain as to whether it is fulfilling its function at this stage, a concern which may also be a result of the UL closure.

Transparency and Accountability

Project transparency is a critical element in international development work, especially in fragile and post-conflict countries. It is an important factor in developing effective partnerships. Many of the respondents at the higher university administrative levels and local faculty are unhappy that the portion of EHELD budget support for their components is not shared with them. The local faculty at the UL, for example, indicated that no budget information was shared. Some of the respondents indicated that they know how much the overhead is, and that Liberia did not receive $18 million as a result, that it is likely to be closer to $9 million. It appears that the lack of relevant budget information fuels speculation about the budget and seems to feed distrust about EHELD's appropriations from the budget. The argument put forth is that key stakeholders cannot gauge the magnitude of their contribution if they do not know what the budget will support for given activities. In this

context EHELD voiced that it is a two way street and that the project does not know the universities' budgets, which indicates a gap in an important part of the project-university planning process.

The lack of transparency in this regard feeds resentment and distrust among the partners who EHELD is most dependent upon for cooperation, the universities. Moreover, it is seen to contribute to a limited shared understanding of what stakeholders, i.e., the institutions, are supposed to be accountable for. Most importantly perhaps, it has created challenges for the project team to build stakeholder accountability for project results.

Additionally, several stakeholders at CU commented on the failure of the project to communicate project objectives and milestones to all stakeholders, which appears to have come to be understood as a lack of transparency on the part of EHELD.

It should be noted that sharing budgets with host government counterparts is a common practice. EHELD may want to reconsider sharing activity budgets with the universities so that they can anticipate, know, and complement input and process activities that will occur with them. This sharing of budgetary information need not include salary and overhead costs, since it may create confusion and additional resentment. However, activity costs should include all costs related to the delivery of that activity or input to the site, including transportation, training costs, and the cost of any expendable or non-expendable items. This has been done by other donor-funded projects in the past.

Communication

Thus far, the results of this assessment indicate that there is a need for a standardized system of communication. In discussing the project with EHELD staff, this omission was noted. For a project to be effective and ensure that its partners, participants, and beneficiaries, i.e., its target audiences, understand the role of the project and what it is to achieve, what and how they are expected to contribute and what benefits they are expected to realize, there should be a communication strategy. Instead, as one respondent stated, *"Information is not forthcoming from the various managerial levels of EHELD*."

There is limited evidence of a participatory process for sharing information on a regular basis. At CU, a respondent thought it important for people on campus to be in the know about the project, hinting at the risk of creating false expectations unless project goals and objectives are communicated to the entire university community. *"You are creating a parallel world that can create friction on campus, which would not be beneficial to the college and its focus on excellence."*

EHELD shared its quarterly report with the university presidents for the first time this past quarter, based on a practice that was introduced by the new COP. (It should be noted here that USAID has reported that the change to a Liberian COP has been well-received).[35] The dissemination of the quarterly report to the university presidents should be applauded, but it should be considered as part of routine information dissemination. The focus on delivering inputs and outputs, without the apparent intent to assess outcomes or progress toward results, appears to have limited the project's focus on identifying certain needs and gaps, such as standardized communication practices.

Consortium Model

The Consortium Model used in the EHELD project thus far, has provided significant support through its partners at Rutgers, the University of Michigan, North Carolina State University (NCSU), and the Ghana-based Kwame

[35] In addition to the recent COP change there have been recent changes in the Deputy Chief of Party (DCOP) the USAID Agreement Officer's Representative (AOR) and the RTI Team Leader and Project Administrative Manager

Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST). The revised curricula represent one advantage of such an approach.

EHELD has also demonstrated that the Consortium Model is effective as an academic and technical resource pool. For example, EHELD has confirmed that it can access support from faculty and graduate students in their expected roles and that they have been able to send aspiring faculty to study at Consortium institutions.

Communication within the Consortium appears to be effective. Consortium respondents indicated that the partners maintain regular communication even when traveling. However, the respondents did indicate that there were issues with communication between EHELD and the universities, and that improvements are needed.

The EHELD project oversees an elaborate system of lines of reporting that reflects the complex design of the Consortium Model. Stakeholders on the ground in Liberia stated that reporting lines had raised some concerns related to issues of accountability. While contract faculty report to Rutgers University and EHELD, they provide their services exclusively to the Department of Engineering and College of Agriculture at the UL and CU. In this context the multiplicity of stakeholders that contract faculty are asked to interact with was equally described as a source of confusion. The administration at CU considers that contract faculty, similar to regular faculty, should also be accountable to the institution and not just to the College of Agriculture, Rutgers and EHELD. Management of the engineering departments is concerned about a disconnect between UL and EHELD, and raises the question about who is providing what to the institution.

With regard to whether this type of model is appropriate for a project such as EHELD, it is not apparent that there is a synergistic value from bringing these Consortium members together to advance their individual understanding of higher education in Liberia. This synergistic aspect may still be something that the Consortium may aspire to, especially if there is an EHELD extension, to reflect on EHELD and to design a more robust and sustainable model for the extension.

A. SUSTAINABILITY AND LOCAL OWNERSHIP

CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

The project has focused its investments in capacity development at the universities primarily on contract faculty and future faculty who are currently pursuing advanced degrees outside of Liberia. The lack of engagement of many of the local faculty is serving as a barrier to acceptance of project inputs and activities as local faculty perceive that they have not been included in, or supported by the project. They feel their future roles are unknown, given the revised curricula, and the prospect of returning aspiring faculty.

EHELD reported that a faculty capacity assessment was conducted, although it was informal and there was no resulting documentation. The assessment was to identify gaps in faculty degrees in areas needed for the revised curricula. A more formal assessment may be beneficial at this time to determine specific skill sets among the local faculty as they relate to the new curricula, as well as other components of the project that are expected to be sustained by the universities. This is particularly true in the context of the new curricula that are more demanding for faculty to teach, since new content is being introduced with emphasis on experiential learning with which the local faculty have limited experience at best. Skill sets that require upgrading can be the basis for identifying or designing non-degree and short courses and for identifying the appropriate faculty for each course.

As an example of developing faculty capacity for other components, two respondents integral to the Summer Start Programs mentioned that local faculty should be more involved in the delivery of the Summer Start programs. If EHELD believes, whether based on an analysis or observation, that these faculty are not capable of con-

tributing in full to the program, this is a serious constraint to the sustainability of this activity, as well as teaching in general. The project may want to consider addressing this inclusion for the next Summer Start, perhaps through co-teaching, for the purpose of building the local faculty's skill sets and to build team work.

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT

EHELD's communication approach has primarily been top down. For example, the project engages with leadership at the universities at the highest levels and expects that communication to be disseminated by those at the administrative level to those at the operational level. Communication with the private sector has been somewhat ad hoc. When activities related to the private sector arise, representatives are contacted for input or support. Additionally, because the non-scholarship student body in engineering at the UL is so large, EHELD has not always provided project updates to this beneficiary group. EHELD should review its communication strategy and address gaps where necessary. Information dissemination should be routine. All stakeholders need to know the planned activities for the upcoming period, including their respective roles and expected benefits, how the project is progressing, what has been achieved (with accolades to partners where possible) and where it may be lagging. EHELD recognizes this is a challenge that needs to be addressed.

PARTICIPATION AND PARTNERSHIP

The inception and initial implementation of the EHELD Project was top down, e.g., *"Local faculty are onlookers*", as one respondent expressed it. After three years there continues to be uneven contribution to EHELD. Contract faculty teach their courses, but are not mentoring or co-teaching with the local faculty as described in RTI's technical application, i.e., *Strengthening the capacity of existing faculty through mentoring, research opportunities, training and degree programs is a priority* (p. 24). When the contract faculty at the UL tried to co-teach, they were met with resistance. The EHELD project states that it cannot change the local faculty's behavior. The outcome of this lack of partnership building, however, will negatively affect sustainability. A positive response to, and acceptance of appropriate and high quality project inputs and processes may be forthcoming, but should not be assumed.

As mentioned above, EHELD is aware of this challenge. '*Regular attendance of some local faculty remains a problem. The university must take action on this matter if there is to be any element of sustainability in the EHELD outcomes. The EHELD team is willing to assist in identifying strategies and has an STTA visit planned that will look at incentives (not necessarily financial). However it would be beneficial if UL supported this initiative more completely*.' (Quarterly Report, October-December, 2012). However, based on interviews with administration level respondents, involvement at the operational level does not occur with the EHELD project.

RESPONSIVENESS OF EHELD TO THE LOCAL CONTEXT

It is important for Consortium members who come to Liberia to know what to expect regarding culture and the post-war context. RTI should provide briefings and videos of EHELD activities on the ground for a better understanding of what to expect when working in the country. This familiarization will help to build teamwork and avoid misunderstandings about punctuality and infrastructure, as examples. Team building with the local faculty could set an example for their integration into the project activities, and in working with the contract faculty. Design mechanisms for oversight of Consortium-led activities need to be reviewed with regard to engagement of local stakeholders to assess feasibility in the Liberian context, and to ensure the necessary buy-in from key stakeholders to build ownership from the outset and to sustain such projects in the future.

INSTITUTIONALIZATION

EHELD has begun initial discussions about sustainability of key project components among stakeholders. These discussion are occurring in advance of business planning exercises to be conducted in the coming year to ensure a successful transition of the CoEs to the universities.

It is important to ensure that the future faculty returning from advanced degree programs outside of Liberia are assigned appropriate and funded university positions that will allow them to implement those aspects of the new curricula that require their newly acquired knowledge and skills. The focus to date on these future faculty has been on ensuring that these external programs are identified and that the aspiring faculty enroll and complete their programs as intended and on time. Planning now for their return should preclude the possibility of them returning to their university without a funded position and defined role.

Utilization and maintenance of the EHELD-provided facilities and equipment also must be addressed. Several respondents reported that the organizational, technical and financial requirements for fully utilizing and maintaining facilities and equipment have not yet been articulated or agreed upon. A transition plan should be developed so EHELD and the universities understand what steps need to be taken for hand-over. An MOU that details the requirements, timing, and preparations for hand-over can aid in facilitating this process. The MOU should also address what kind of commitment the universities can make to pay for this maintenance, including recurrent costs of supplies.

Similarly, scholarship students are unsure whether they will continue to receive their scholarships from another source when the EHELD project ends. Similar to the student pipeline activities, sustainability of the scholarship program beyond the scope of EHELD is a serious concern for all stakeholders. However, it does not appear that the private sector is willing to provide scholarship awards to complement EHELD's efforts, because they will not get the credit for doing so. *"Most private companies hold the notion that anything they do with our project might not promote their own standing of being socially responsible."* (Quarterly Report 2, July 2013. p. 4).

With less than two years remaining for the EHELD project, it may become apparent to the universities that they will continue to need contract faculty. A formal meeting between USAID, EHELD and the universities to ascertain what needs may exist at the end of the project, including faculty expertise, should occur now. The subject of how the universities can leverage funds to pay for these potential needs should also be determined.

The University of Liberia has already taken on the cost of paying for its career services coordinator. Cuttington University should begin to identify a funding source for their coordinator prior to his or her hiring.

The private sector should be engaged on an ongoing basis and be part of the planning activities so they can know when to provide relevant input to university academic programming and Summer Start, as well as planning for internships and apprenticeships. When new directors or presidents of the private sector come on board at their companies, EHELD should ensure that they are oriented about the project, the past and ongoing relationships among the company, the university and EHELD, and what to expect from the program that they are being asked to contribute. Their inclusion, periodically and on an ad hoc basis, based on the project's needs as they arise, was reported by private sector respondents as an ineffective means for engendering these partners' input and recommendations.

EHELD noted that the Liberian Engineering and Agriculture Group (LEAG) may not formally remain beyond the life of the project; they believe that the relationship between the universities and employers will continue, once the employers become involved and see how interns can benefit them.

INFRASTRUCTURE

The EHELD project should develop a maintenance and sustainability plan and MOU for handing over facilities and equipment during or at the close of the project.

B. GENDER

Within the design of EHELD, priority is given to gender issues. More specifically, the design is reflective of a mainstreaming approach, i.e., gender perspectives and attention to the goal of gender equity are reflected in a range of activities. The proposed initiatives that include a gender focus are: the hiring of contract faculty; sending aspiring faculty abroad for advanced degrees; targeted scholarship programs; the curricula with new courses focusing on gender issues; and the selection of Summer Start participants. Accordingly, most data within the PMP are gender-disaggregated to indicate progress in these areas.

The student pipeline activities, such as Fast and Summer Start programs have addressed some of the challenges female students experience when preparing for their university studies. Student FGDs revealed that the Summer Start program has allowed academically promising female candidates to further develop life skills that are appropriate to the university and work setting, such as time management and interpersonal skills, to familiarize themselves with university education and to gain confidence in applying to male-dominated academic areas such as agriculture and engineering. Through FGDs with principals and teachers, it emerged that they, the principals and teachers, are sensitized to the gender issues at stake and readily work at the selection of scholarship candidates to ensure gender parity in the lists provided to EHELD.

Engineering and agriculture programs at both universities have continuously had low female enrollment, a fact that EHELD's design is attempting to address through its targeted scholarship program.[36] The project strives for a 50/50 ratio in allocating the scholarships. The scholarships are well received by students and different respondents, including female students, believe they effectively address the major school related monetary barriers they face in accessing higher education.

The inability to allocate scholarships to as many female as male students is apparent and indicates that in hindsight the 50/50 goal may have been too ambitious, a fact which has been recognized in EHELD's first annual report.

"Targets of 50 percent female participation are difficult to achieve, considering that the obstacles to women's empowerment commence at home at a preschool age, continue through primary school with the presentation of gender stereotypes, and culminate in higher education and in the workplace where, often, the prevailing attitudes provide further obstacles." (EHELD, First Annual Report, 2011)

Another concern that has arisen for the scholarship program is that female scholarship recipients are not performing as well academically and, therefore, a number of female students are unable to remain in the scholarship program. This throws a critical light on the project's affirmative action approach.[37] While increasing access

[36] The EHELD scholarships are awarded for the duration of the student's course of study provided the student maintains a satisfactory academic performance. Hence, scholarship awards will be renewed at the end of each academic semester to ensure that each EHELD scholarship recipient complies with all scholarship requirements. Based on EHELD Project Scholarship Committee Meeting Report, Cuttington University Campus, Suakoko, Bong County, Liberia. September 15-18, 2011.

[37] As it is a cooperative agreement, RTI can propose a ratio other than 50:50 as a goal based on their experience to date. In an attempt to achieve this goal of 50:50, the scholarship committee awards scholarships to young Liberian women who have potential, but do not meet the prescribed scholarships grade point. Hence the committee selects students with the highest grade point in descending order until the required number of female candidates was reached to meet

for female students through affirmative action in the selection of candidates is considered an effective means to increase gender parity, it is equally important to ensure that female students are being academically supported with additional tutoring if needed throughout their university career in order to guarantee that they complete their education. Research in the African context alludes to the danger of affirmative action outcomes of *"providing a piecemeal strategy to gender equity. "*[38]

This suggests an urgent need to better understand both monetary and non-monetary barriers female students face in the Liberian context, issues that were addressed in detail within EHELD's major gender assessment that was conducted in 2013.

The gender assessment was triggered by a range of issues that emerged during 2012, notably concerns related to increased female drop-out rates from the scholarship program, based on input from diverse sources at both universities. *" Through input from a variety of sources in the past 12 months including contract faculty at the universities, it is apparent that in the next 12 months a much deeper study is required to address the day-to-day gender issues faced in higher education in Liberian society"(Annual Report, 2012).*

The assessment was undertaken during 2013 by a team of researchers from the Center for International Social Work and the Center on Violence against Women and Children at the School of Social Work at Rutgers University, a Consortium member.

The assessment analyzed obstacles to gender equity in the engineering and agriculture programs "investigating the factors that prevent or aid women in pursuing and completing these bachelor-level engineering programs in Liberia"[39].

This comprehensive assessment is considered the basis for initial recommendations on addressing gender issues within the EHELD project. One issue of particular relevance is a key finding that respondents feel the rigidity of EHELD scholarship's GPA requirement is problematic in the current environment within the students' respective programs. This environment, such as unethical teaching practices, e.g., sex for grades, insufficient resources such as books, and the lack of access to laboratory materials, tools, equipment, computers (men push to get to the limited equipment first). These factors tend to affect women more than men, when it comes to maintaining a GPA of 3.0 every semester.[40] EHELD expects that these and other challenges the study encountered will be addressed with the support of a U.S.-based gender specialist who is scheduled to spend six months at each institution in 2014/2015.[41]

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the female quota. Based on EHELD Project Scholarship Committee Meeting Report, Cuttington University Campus, Suakoko, Bong County, Liberia. September 15-18, 2011.

[38] Onsongo, J. (March 2009). Affirmative Action, Gender Equity and University Admissions--Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. London Review of Education, 7(1), p71 -81.

[39] Winter, S., Postmus, J. & Johnson, L. Examining Barriers and Persistence Factors for Female Students in the Engineering and Agriculture Degree Programs at the University of Liberia and Cuttington University. A Joint Project between Rutgers University, University of Liberia and Cuttington University. (2013).

[40] Winter, S., Postmus, J. & Johnson, L. Examining Barriers and Persistence Factors for Female Students in the Engineering and Agriculture Degree Programs at the University of Liberia and Cuttington University. A Joint Project between Rutgers University, University of Liberia and Cuttington University. (2013).

[41] Similar to the 50:50 male/female goal, as this is a Cooperative Agreement, RTI may considering lowering the GPA requirement for female student to reflect their experience to date.

The Cuttington University leadership shared the gender assessment report with a range of internal stakeholders, including the faculty senate, and proactively addressed a range of safety issues raised in the report. For example, illumination on the CU campus was improved and solar lights were installed (with CU funds). As far as transactional grading is concerned, CU management expects the new "Exam Ethics Marshal International" program to address some of the major concerns raised by the report. The system is meant to limit the interaction between students and teachers, once the students have taken their exams. It is intended to limit concerns of corruption, sex and payment for grades. However, the Team noted that for now the College of Agriculture does not appear to be part of this recent CU-wide initiative.

It emerged during this assessment that the gender report also provoked a substantial degree of unease on the CU campus. Notably, a broad range of respondents, including some in university management, expressed their doubts about some of the findings and questioned whether they had been sufficiently contextualized within Liberia's culture. Some faculty respondents at CU mentioned that the report does not provide any "proof". One female respondent stated with regard to the findings, *"I don't think it was what it seemed"*. She also questioned the timing of the report, which was during exams, and underlined the fact that the researchers were not familiar with Liberian culture. Even though the faculty had concerns about the gender assessment team's familiarity of the Liberian culture, the gender assessment team had previously worked in Monrovia and at CU for approximately 10 days in February 2012, and again in May that same year conducting a study for another consortium headed by IBIS on Violence against Children in Schools.

The plans for the return of the gender specialist in 2014 were equally questioned and doubts were raised as to whether it would be a good idea to have gender assessment team leader back on campus. One respondent also thought that it would be better to have a local gender specialist perform the work. However, the CU-EHELD oversight committee decided to have her return to experience the realities on campus first hand and provide her with another opportunity to make observations and draw conclusions.

This Assessment Team was unable to determine whether any follow-up to the gender assessment report was provided at the UL. Contract and local faculty at the UL indicated they did not see the final report.

Finally, another important aspect that emerged during the FGDs conducted by the Assessment Team relates to male perceptions of female students in the programs. At both CU and the UL, male students thought there were now more female students in the program. One student indicated that he does not mind having female students in the program receiving scholarships, as long as they are competent female students. Another male student at the UL stated that the increase in gender equity is a positive contribution of the EHELD project.

C. PROJECT DESIGN – MONITORING AND FOLLOW-UP

The remaining year and a half of implementation will be a crucial period for the EHELD project. Notably, key findings indicate that project deliverables are on track, but that achieving a heightened sense of ownership among key stakeholders will be a decisive factor for project sustainability.

Therefore, the Assessment Team urges EHELD to use the mid-term assessment as an opportunity to step back from a priority focus on providing inputs to producing and measuring outcomes, that is, achieving results and impact. The team considers this to be an opportune moment for the EHELD project to re-think a new role for itself as a facilitator over and above being a driver of implementation.

Facilitators focus on those elements that empower their stakeholders. As facilitators, attention is directed towards the stakeholders' engagement in project activities, their levels of satisfaction, morale, involvement and

related accomplishments. As drivers of implementation, such concerns tend to move into the background, while execution of activities and deliverables move to the forefront.

The underlying message of the findings hints at a pressing need to engage key stakeholders in ways that stimulate their willingness to openly review and acknowledge the project's track record that has brought substantial resources to their programs, including new faculty capacities in key areas, students who are better prepared and supported for their studies, improved curricula, laboratories, resource centers, and other improved facilities and equipment. More importantly, it is important for key stakeholders to begin developing a sense of ownership for these resources as their resources. In order to engender such a change in attitude, perceptions, expectations and assumptions will have to be assessed more carefully to devise strategies that increase trust in the eyes of key stakeholders, notably faculty, including revisiting issues of resource allocation and communication.

Concrete actions in line with this renewed approach include defining the meaning of "engagement" in a fragile environment such as Liberia, and identifying and using approaches and tools, including incentives that are based on an understanding of the attitude and behavior of each stakeholder group. It also means fostering inclusive decision making processes that reflect a clear move towards bottom-up and participatory approaches to decision making. Finally, it also implies enhancing communication among all partners with a view to transparency and accountability. Fostering a sense of empowerment by focusing on outcomes, i.e., utilization of project inputs and activities, lies at the heart of these actions, and is considered the single most important prerequisite to ensure sustainability of the project's benefits beyond its lifetime.

III. LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The EHELD project was designed and implemented in Liberia as a capacity development intervention for higher education in two disciplines, the engineering and agricultural sciences. These disciplines are expected to provide substantial employment or self-employment opportunities for graduates, while making direct contributions to the recovering Liberian economy. The focus of the EHELD project is to provide assistance to accelerate improvements in the agriculture and engineering programs at CU and the UL respectively, with a vision of both becoming CoEs and drivers of economic development. It should be noted that improving academic programs and developing COEs as HEIs are inherently long-term endeavors, especially in a post-conflict, resource scarce context.

The following lessons learned and recommendations are based on the findings of the Assessment Team, with reflections on the literature review, and other project-related documentation to provide guidance to improve the prospects for success of the EHELD project.

1) Lesson Learned: Overly ambitious scope

It appears that the original Request for Application was overly ambitious in scope. Since CU had a pre-eminent agricultural program and the UL had the only engineering department and is the principal public HEI, it is understandable that USAID/Liberia selected both for EHELD support to develop Centers of Excellence. In retrospect, it may have been more cost-effective and politically manageable to select one discipline at one university as a pilot. Implementing such a complex project in two institutions that are quite different from each other may have spread project resources too thinly, undercutting the extensive consultation needed for the participatory planning and implementation that is recommended throughout this report.

Recommendation: It is important to empower the stakeholders to ensure institutionalization and sustainability. For the remainder of the project, EHELD should focus resources as much as possible on developing ownership and sustainability for those components of the project that are (a) showing results and (b) are acknowledged and supported by the host university or other stakeholders.

2) Lesson Learned: Focus on inputs and outputs alone does not deliver outcomes

It should be recognized that the PMP is necessary, but not sufficient for monitoring the success of the EHELD project, i.e., the degree to which the beneficiaries value and are using project deliverables. As a necessary prerequisite to establishing CoEs, EHELD has focused on addressing the PMP and meeting its targets. In so doing, EHELD has demonstrated that inputs can be delivered and outputs can be achieved in a post conflict, resource poor country, which is a remarkable accomplishment. This effort includes the delivery of expected inputs and outputs at the partner universities, which is by itself an impressive achievement in such a challenging environment. Foundational requirements such as revising the curricula with inputs from academic faculty from Consortium universities; provision of facilities and equipment; sending future faculty from CU and UL to receive advanced degrees abroad; and establishing a Pipeline of students for these upgraded programs, including providing scholarship awards, have been achieved.

As mentioned above, however, some beneficiaries and some stakeholders have not appreciated or bought into the project, especially local faculty at both universities. While EHELD has attempted to provide support to the

local faculty, the faculty members do not feel ownership due to the lack of participation in many of the activities that are being carried out by the contract faculty or Consortium members.

Recommendation: The creation of a CoE will take a team effort and must include all stakeholders and beneficiaries. From this point forward, EHELD needs to focus on outcomes, i.e., utility and ownership by the universities and not just achieving the PMP targets. The PMP helps to monitor inputs and outputs, but EHELD needs to consult with all of the faculty more closely to help them understand, address, and support the utility of what has been delivered. This will go a long way to engender ownership by the faculty and, therefore, the university.

3) Lesson Learned: Focus on building capacity

A significant trade-off for meeting USAID's schedule for deliverables has been a lack of engagement with the beneficiaries and stakeholders. Based on the perspectives of many of the beneficiaries, especially the faculty, there has been a lack of consultation at many levels. Contract faculty perceive they are directed to execute certain assignments within a demanding timeframe without consultation, and local faculty believe they are being ignored for the most part. This lack of team building and inclusiveness may compromise the expected outcomes, that is, utilization of the inputs and application of outputs for increased development, performance, and outcomes.

Recommendation: From this point forward, the EHELD PMP timeline and or targets should be revisited through a lens of engagement. In other words, it is important to identify what type of engagement is needed, by whom and how much time is needed at the development and implementation stages to achieve the outcomes. For example, as a lab is being established, who will be capable of using it and the outcome of its use among the students' should be considered and communicated to these stakeholders and beneficiaries. In this regard, a short-term technical advisor to train a local faculty member to assume this role could foster greater buy-in and sustainability. It is through this type of engagement that project-supported activities can result in the universities' buy-in so they will assume ownership and sustain the activities as inherent to a CoE.

If CU or the UL believes the local faculty are incapable of being able, or unwilling, to learn from the contract faculty, their roles in the changing environment need to be clearly defined. A mapping of university-level roles and responsibilities should be conducted (using a Strength-Weakness-Opportunities-Threats, or SWOT, analysis, for example) to identify which individuals in their current or future roles will have an interest in supporting the EHELD approach to developing CoEs. The mapping should also identify which individuals may feel threatened by the changes and innovations introduced by the project, those who may be sitting on the sidelines but could otherwise be champions or supporters of EHELD. The results of the mapping would be used to help shape the types of engagement and capacity development activities that are most likely to increase their participation of these individuals, garner support for the project and decrease perceptions of isolation and withholding of support.

4) Lesson Learned: Insufficient buy-in at the universities

Buy-in and ownership by some critical partners are not occurring to a degree that will ensure sustainability. The lack of appreciation for many of the deliverables expressed by persons in both leadership and academic positions at CU and the UL indicates that many of the inputs are perceived as belonging to the project rather than belonging to the university as building blocks for a CoE. This sentiment can be attributed to prioritizing the meeting of project deliverables and PMP targets on schedule over the engagement and participation of the universities, which is necessary if they are to begin taking the lead for this initiative, rather than acting as recipients. Granted, university academic calendars and annual enrollment intakes dictate the project schedule to a large degree, but sacrificing one semester or one year for inputs that are embraced by the universities as their own may be a preferable choice.

Recommendation: Overall, improvements in bottom-up approaches to decision making related to project inputs should be devised, accompanied by two-way (as opposed to one-way, top-down) scheduled communication and transparency are needed. Partners and stakeholders should receive routine information about the project's approach, accomplishments, and challenges that are being addressed at each stage of an activity, such as status of future faculty pursuing advanced degree programs outside of Liberia, lab facilities and farming equipment or products (such as curricula or agricultural demonstrations). EHELD should begin this process with the universities to provide a reorientation to project activities, accomplishments and an orientation to any new activities.

Quarterly or at least semi-annual visits to Fendall and Cuttington should be made by USAID and the EHELD M&E staff member to meet with the Deans and faculty in order to gauge their perceptions of the effectiveness of the interventions, including observing various inputs and their utilization such as the labs, demonstrations, and equipment. Trip reports should be written and distributed to all faculty and the Deans, the USAID Education Team, and EHELD. Quarterly EHELD reports, or at least summaries, should be shared with the University Presidents, Deans, contract and local faculty.

The budget should be shared with partners insofar as it relates to their participation in the project. This would include costs associated with implementing activities, e.g., purchase, transport, construction, workshops, etc. to demonstrate the cost of replicating the input or activity for future planning, but also to show where and how much of a university's cost-share within the life of EHELD is most needed or can have the greatest effect. Shared project activity costs do not need to include project administration, salaries or overhead information. Sharing donor budgets with host government counterparts is common practice and it has been done by other donor funded projects in Liberia.

If the capacity of interested local faculty is insufficient, steps need to be taken to upgrade capacity through mentoring or to determine and inform the local faculty what their role is in relation to returning future faculty and contract faculty. This is especially true at CU.

5) Lesson Learned: More remediation needed for students.

The pipeline program has generated an enormous level of interest among prospective students, but faculty report more remediation in math, science and English is needed in preparation for academic success in the engineering and agriculture university programs.

Recommendation: The use of the Pipeline program for prospective students should place more emphasis on remediation courses. For example, summer programs may be doubled in length each year for secondary school and university students. The programs at the secondary level should include the use of a standardized test in each subject to get a true picture of the level of learning that the students have achieved before facing university entrance exams and performance expectations at that level. At the university level, more attention to remediation needs should be placed at the beginning of the freshmen year at CU. At the UL the first year of the five year engineering program is now used to gauge and identify which students can qualify for the engineering program. It is still to be determined whether the sophomore year students may still need remediation for the engineering classes.

6) Lesson Learned: Limited communication leads to exclusion

The emphasis by EHELD on the scholarship students at the UL has created a sense of exclusion among non-scholarship students. The unexpected increase in the size of enrollments at the engineering department at the UL appears to have overwhelmed EHELD's ability to communicate effectively with all engineering students about the program. EHELD support for scholarship and non-scholarship students at CU was understood by students to be more uniform. Those students reported an appreciation for the EHELD program and, more specifically, for

the contract faculty, improved curricula and pedagogy, and other student services. Scholarship students at the UL expressed similar appreciation. While non-scholarship students at the UL appreciated the contract faculty, they differed from their counterparts with scholarships in that that they were unaware of some aspects of the project, or unaware that they would be able to access them, for example the new labs, the Career Services Center, and opportunities for internships with the private sector.

Recommendation: On behalf of the non-scholarship students at the UL, EHELD should consider alternative forms of communication with the department to address misperceptions about its activities. Bi-monthly updates in the form of memos or announcements could be delivered to the campus and pinned on the announcements bulletin board in the lobby. A project description announcement should be included every time, in case they have been removed. Implementing a project such as EHELD in two very different contexts, such as UL and CU, may necessarily require two different communication strategies for such different sized student populations.

7) Lesson Learned: Uneven engagement of the Private Sector

The private sector's engagement with EHELD has been uneven. Private sector representatives reported that continuity in their relationship to EHELD activities is lacking. Ad hoc requests are made for engagement and the requests are sometimes too late for the private sector to contribute due to other commitments. Ongoing status updates as to EHELD's accomplishments are also lacking. They would like to be included at the planning stage of activities so they can play a more substantive role.

Recommendation: The private sector should be engaged on an ongoing basis and be part of the planning activities so they can know when to provide relevant input to the university's academic programming and Summer Start, as well as planning for internships. EHELD should reach out to new directors or presidents of relevant private sector companies and other participating organizations to introduce and orient the person(s) to EHELD, its purpose and relationship to the organization, e.g., Firestone. As with other stakeholders, maintain regular communication about EHELD's accomplishments. The development of the Liberia Engineering and Agriculture Group (LEAG) to work with EHELD and the universities' Student Career Service Centers to develop internships may address these issues in part.

8) Lesson Learned: GoL is an untapped asset

The GOL, as represented by NCHE, is aware of the EHELD project, although they are not engaged with the project. NCHE is an untapped asset for advocating for the CoEs and convening and supporting the principal stakeholders beyond the life of the project. If the GoL is not brought into the project to play its rightful role of developing and articulating policies to support higher education innovation and setting agendas, sustainability of the investment in the CoEs will be threatened.

Recommendation: Call for semi-annual meetings between USAID, the GoL/NCHE and the universities to discuss status and to provide for Q&A. In order to ensure regular attendance, provide organizational and logistical support for their participation.

The NCHE also could help engage legislative representatives to champion the concept of the CoEs and to advocate for more GoL funds for this purpose. The Association for Liberian Universities (ALU) could be a key partner in this initiative.

At the professional level, consider having the GOL/NCHE provide some support to EHELD to engender a better understanding and support for the concept of CoEs among the universities to improve buy-in and ownership of the project. For example, they could co-host (with EHELD) a symposium focusing on developing CoEs with the UL and CU representatives presenting what has been accomplished and what further plans they have for develop-

ing their CoEs. An invited external speaker could make a presentation on global experience regarding the development of CoEs, and serve as a discussant for the UL and CU presentations, which would allow all participants to see the EHELD Project and its university partners in a more favorable light.

9) Lesson Learned: Positive gender strategies but poor receptivity

Capacity development activities and inputs at the HEIs must be gender sensitive. The EHELD project was astute in attributing the dropout of female scholarship students to gender related issues, and in conducting an assessment to identify gender issues at each university, including what factors were contributing to the high drop-out rates for female students. While the findings in the Gender Assessment report were questioned by some stakeholders, it had a positive impact at CU, which implemented recommended changes such as installing lights on the campus for safety and separate bathrooms.[42] Additionally, one of the gender assessment team members has been hired to teach gender sensitization courses for one semester each at CU and UL.

Recommendation: Given that the Gender Assessment Team's findings were met with a lack of receptivity by many at CU, EHELD may decide to hire a Liberian gender specialist to co-teach the course with the person currently hired by EHELD. This may help to improve awareness and receptivity for the gender issues, as well as to provide a role model for team teaching. However, in order to overcome the resistance to gender issues in general, the universities should consider hiring an ombudsman to look into gender discrimination and to work with staff and students to address concerns, issues, and gender related incidences.

10) Lesson Learned: Lack of integration and sustainability plan for returning future faculty

Reintegration of the returning future faculty with advanced degrees at the UL or CU as local faculty should not be assumed, but should be carefully planned. The universities and EHELD need to develop a sustainability and integration plan for the returning future faculty. The performance and acceptance by the students of the contract faculty have demonstrated their importance in implementing the new curricula and the productivity of the academic programs. The future faculty, who are studying abroad for advanced degrees, are expected to fill roles of the contract faculty upon their return. It is not clear even at this stage how those studying abroad will be integrated into the faculty to sustain the high level of interest as evidenced by students with regard to the contract faculty.

Recommendation: This plan should be initiated in the short run, as the first influx of returning future faculty from abroad is scheduled for spring 201443. Mentoring by contract faculty (or local faculty where possible) should be considered as one way to help the newly returned future faculty members adjust to teaching in the new experiential context, as well as to adjust to all of the changes that have occurred in his or her absence. Furthermore, it is important to identify ways to keep these newly- graduated faculty engaged and productive. A formal capacity needs assessment should be conducted to determine if there are redundancies within skill sets of all the faculty, i.e., newly returned faculty, local and contract. If there are redundancies, the newly trained faculty may be directed to focus more on practical applications to apply up-to-date experiential teaching methods.

It also is important for EHELD, in conjunction with partners at the universities, to discuss and determine whether any benefit or incentive can be made available to the newly returning future faculty, for example a joint research project with another regional university that involves obtaining grants.

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[42] Faculty interviewed at UL had not seen the Gender Assessment Report.

[43] As mentioned earlier, one has graduated already and is teaching as a lecturer at CU.

11) Lesson Learned: Transition plan needed for project

The lack of an MOU or similar strategic or transition plan between EHELD and the universities has signaled that universities are not obligated to buy-in to the project strategy or its implementation. The varying levels of participation and utilization by the intended beneficiaries at the universities lead back to how these activities and other deliverables have been designed and implemented, and to what degree the intended beneficiaries participated in them, especially in their design. This situation does not bode well for universities taking on full responsibility for the assets, which have been developed and delivered on the project. A specific example is the lab equipment at UL, among other inputs, that is especially expensive, as well as sensitive. The lab equipment needs to remain within a particular temperature range, and have continuous maintenance. This support will be needed during and after the hand-over in order to maintain the value of this input.

Recommendation: MOUs should be produced, even at this stage of the project, outlining what steps each party will take for the project to hand off and for the universities to take on full ownership of the project inputs, including funding recurrent costs for returning future faculty, facilities and equipment. Executing and performing an MOU by each university should be a qualifying criterion for participation in any extension of the EHELD project. If an extension is to occur, the stakeholders need to be a part of the discussion, especially following implementation of this five year project that directly affects them and their faculty and students. A joint activity between USAID, EHELD and the stakeholders to discuss potential designs can engender a sense of ownership and commitment to the success of a new initiative and the success of the current one that it will build upon. While not all suggestions from the stakeholders have to be incorporated into the design, it is essential that their contributions to the discussion are heard.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The EHELD project has been meeting its performance criteria with regard to inputs and outputs. This is a remarkable feat, given the difficult working environment and the complexity of the project, e.g., working at two very different universities. Based on the lessons learned, it has become evident that the project needs to shift gears, as much as possible, to focus on being more inclusive and communicative with all partners and stakeholders on a regular basis. This includes the GoL, the universities at all levels, including contract and local faculty, and the private sector. Without this inclusiveness there is a lack of buy-in and ownership, especially among the local faculty, but also with other university representatives and the GoL itself. Additionally, non-scholarship students at the UL should be informed about the EHELD project activities. It may be that the RFA for the EHELD project was simply too ambitious, which created a focus on deliverables within a tighter schedule than one might have expected for developing an institution of higher education. Perhaps one university should have been selected for a pilot and then expanded to another partner, based on those lessons learned.

EHELD has achieved a major milestone by revising the engineering and agriculture curricula with an experiential focus, and to have it endorsed by the faculty senates at both universities. Additionally, its delivery is complemented with newly developed learning labs and students at both institutions expressed their appreciation for the new curricula and the contract faculty who deliver it. However, the capacity of some local faculty to deliver the revised curricula within the lab context is unknown. A clear understanding of how the local faculty and returning future faculty are to transition into the CoE environment, and the transitioning out of the contract faculty, needs to be articulated by the project. The pipeline for the Summer Start and Fast Start programs and its delivery also has been a major success. Awareness of the two disciplines of engineering and agriculture has increased and enrollments are up, including among females. The programs have highlighted the need by students for remedial assistance, especially in math and science, and especially with regard to females, in order to be better prepared for succeeding in their studies to the point of graduation. This lesson needs to be addressed by the universities in order to better ensure the most optimal outcome for the CoEs now and in the future.

Providing assistance for persons to receive advanced degrees in the two disciplines is a key component of the EHELD project and one that will directly affect the quality of the CoEs. Plans to integrate these future faculty need to be developed as soon as possible, since the first influx of future faculty are scheduled to return in the spring of 2014. The integration should focus on helping them to transition into an environment that has changed dramatically since they left and to identify where they can be most effective, as well as providing support in their new teaching role with the revised experiential curricula. Moreover, ways to keep them motivated to remain at the universities, rather than seek outside employment, should be addressed in these plans.

To date, it appears that EHELD engages with leadership at the universities at the highest levels, which does not lead necessarily to effective communication or action at the operational levels. EHELD and USAID need to determine ways to involve university representatives more at the operational level, if the CoEs are to be realized. MOUs should be executed with the universities, outlining what steps each party will take with respect to handing off of the project and for the universities to take on full ownership of the project inputs, including funding recurrent costs for returning future faculty, facilities and equipment. The MOUs may also facilitate more working level engagement and communication. Executing an MOE should be a qualifying criterion for participation in any extension of the EHELD project.

At this juncture of the EHELD project, the mid-term assessment's findings and lessons learned point to the importance of making a strategic transition in implementation and management. The EHELD project should place greater focus on including the stakeholders in the planning process at the operational level and helping them to take more of a leadership role in decision-making. This change in focus will help to foster greater buy-in, ownership, and institutionalization of the accomplishments to date. The recommendations are intended to provide guidance to effectively make this transition for EHELD to succeed in meeting its overall objectives. In so doing, substantial and sustainable improvements can be realized in the engineering and agriculture programs, in line with the concept of the Centers of Excellence.

V. ANNEXES

ANNEX I: CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE EXTENSION OF EHELD PROJECT

EHELD has produced a number of activities and deliverables toward developing CoEs in a difficult working environment. Additional accomplishments can be anticipated over the course of the next nearly two years before the close of the project, especially if the focus shifts more to outcomes, ownership, and institutionalization. As mentioned in the report, however, the establishment of CoEs in any context, and certainly one such as Liberia, is an inherently long term endeavor. It is important to take this fact into consideration when trying to determine the stages of achievement toward developing CoEs.
In determining whether continued investment in HEIs in Liberia is likely to approach the creation of COEs, USAID may want to consider whether the following assumptions for success, none of which are fully in place, can be confirmed prior to the close of the current EHELD project:

Assumptions

- The GoL/NCHE is an enabling partner for the EHELD project.
- The private sector provides support to the engineering and agriculture programs to improve their relevance and experiential leaning opportunities.
- UL and/or CU are willing to sign MOU agreements that outline their financial contributions for (1) salaries and support for contract or new faculty, (2) equipment and maintenance, (3) infrastructure.
- Returning aspiring faculty have been appropriately integrated.
- Remedial courses in math and science are planned for first year engineering and agriculture students due to their low capacity.
- Human capacity levels are adequate or planned where support and buy-in is needed at the universities, and among faculty.

  If these assumptions can be met, then the following elements are recommended to be included in the extension.

Staff assessment. Conduct or update a faculty profile that matches up-to-date knowledge and teaching ability of each faculty member to deliver the new curricula, identifying gaps that must continue to be filled by contract faculty and/or for which existing or aspiring faculty will be supported to take on. Continued support for advanced degree study that is explicitly targeted to the new curricula may be included. If contract faculty are needed, it may behoove EHELD and the universities to consider seconding faculty from Historically Black Universities and Colleges (HBUCs) or other African universities that have had similar experience.

1. These faculty are often faced with similar constraints that faculty face at UL and CU, e.g., lack of resources and engagement.

2. Practical, technical skills. Consider that the new curricula be augmented by courses in technical areas or that the experientially based components of the curricula give greater emphasis to technical skills. Private sector representatives reported that there is a greater need in their sectors for technicians than for holders of higher academic degrees. Ideally, this knowledge and these skills are built

into practicums within the new curricula, but supplemental technical courses may well increase graduates' employability. If possible these types of technical area components should be included in Summer Start and Fast Start programs as well, if this activity is to be continued.

3. Soft skills. Career Service Centers should introduce supplemental short courses on workplace skills. While the new curricula are expected to provide the knowledge and hard skills needed to perform the functions and tasks in their respective sectors, these short courses should provide the soft skills to enter and perform in the *workplace*, e.g., planning, time management, team work, listening skills, writing skills, gender sensitivity. These skills will increase students' employability as well as their productivity. As the saying goes, "workers get hired for their hard skills and fired for their soft skills." Short courses on starting a business and business planning also should be offered for students who may decide to be self-employed or start their own business after graduation.

4. Applied research. Research, especially applied research, should be emphasized among local and new faculty. This emphasis will allow faculty to keep their knowledge up to date as well as to continuously consider the private sector applications of their academic subjects, which should benefit students and employers alike. Ideally, quality proposals and a growing track record of publication and consulting will allow faculty to successfully solicit private sector funding for their research and development activities. Another avenue for funding could be USAID, i.e., a set of research topics of interest to USAID and its implementing partners could be outlined in the EHELD extension for which the faculty could apply for funding.

   As part of this effort, an extension should consider providing technical assistance to the College or Department to develop a business plan that supports faculty in marketing their expertise. It should also include establishing an overhead rate or a rate by which faculty buy their time away for research or consulting, contracting, and planning to use these new revenues for further development or, for example, payment of certain operational and recurrent maintenance costs. Ideally, some of the funds recovered from faculty consulting can be used to pay for contract staff and/or funding of some of the student scholarships.

5. Scholarship program review and revised. The continuation of providing scholarships for engineering and agriculture must be carefully reviewed. Whether there is still a need for scholarships to attract students to these disciplines needs to be assessed. If a need does exist, USAID should consider a means testing approach to identifying candidates with the requisite GPA. Given that capacity in math and science may be low, if remediation courses are in place, these would aid in helping all students, including those less fortunate, to benefit from a scholarship program.

6. Twinning with another university. Identify another university that has established a CoE to learn about its development process as well as the standards and benchmarks that signal what has been accomplished and next steps needed, should be a consideration. Again, it may be beneficial to identify an HBCU or other African universities that have had similar experience that could work with CU and UL through a seconded faculty member with a leadership role in the development of his or her own CoE. He or she could make periodic visits to provide guidance for the development process and coaching on organizational issues that arise as part of the development process. Exchange visits between the twinning partners also can be helpful for observations and sharing of lessons.

Summary:

Liberia remains a resource poor country even after 10 years of development activities. The effort to address higher education needs is a tall order. There has been momentum under EHELD. The fact that the interventions have targeted two very different universities situated apart from each other and two different disciplines in each school was ambitious.

If USAID, given political considerations, can consider concentrating on one university for the next phase, it would appear that concentrating on CU may be a more effective and productive approach. With all resources concentrated in one institution that has shown greater involvement and responsiveness, the chances of maintaining a focused approach that includes the necessary consultation among stakeholders, appears to be more achievable. The number of returning aspiring faculty at CU are three times greater that UL, thereby providing opportunities to utilize new skills across aspects of the revised curricula. CU may also lend itself to more and varied types of Liberia-related research studies with the ability to use demonstration plots and controls. The campus is more close-knit than UL as well, which bodes well for the opportunity for more frequent communication and exchanges. Finally, as a private university, it is expected to have fewer constraints on innovations that will be needed in the pursuit of excellence. Moreover it suffers less from political motivated disruptions.

These are additional considerations USAID may want to review.

ANNEX II: EHELD MID-TERM ASSESSMENT SOW

SCOPE OF WORK
Excellence in Higher Education for Liberian Development
Midterm Assessment
USAID/Liberia

Project Title: Excellence in Higher Education for Liberian Development (EHELD)
Project Number: AID-669-A-00-11-00035
Project Dates: February 10, 2011 – January 31, 2016
Project Funding: $18,499,559
Implementing Organization: Research Triangle Institute (RTI) International
Agreement Officer's Representative (AOR): Mardea Nyumah
Alternate AOR: Julia Richards

I. Assessment Purpose and Use

USAID/Liberia requests the Liberia Monitoring and Evaluation Project (L-MEP) to conduct a midterm assessment of the "Excellence in Higher Education for Liberian Development" (EHELD) project. The overall objective of the project is to build regionally recognized and competitive academic Centers of Excellence (CoEs) that produce graduates who become leading professionals and entrepreneurs in the fields of engineering and agriculture in Liberia. The project seeks to achieve these objectives by pursuing three distinct but related areas of activity. First, EHELD develops a pipeline of secondary school students to attract, enthuse, and adequately prepare equal numbers of young Liberian women and men to agriculture and engineering CoE programs. Second, EHELD works with the leaders and faculty of Cuttington University (CU) and the University of Liberia (UL) to create CoEs in agriculture and engineering. Third, leaders within government, business, and the donor community are engaged and empowered to engage the private sector into the EHELD initiative.

The findings of the assessment will: inform USAID, the implementing partner Research Triangle Institute (RTI) International, and sub-partners as well as other stakeholders, including the host country universities, the Government of Liberia (GOL), and private sector partners on how well the project's planned activities and strategy are contributing to the achievement of its expected results; provide further guidance for effective project implementation over the remaining period to help ensure the achievement of the project results and the sustainability of those results; generate lessons learned; and inform future decisions about the project or the design of similar projects in the future. The following set of objectives will inform the mid- term assessment of the EHELD project:

1. **Performance** (40%): Evaluate current performance of the project to learn about:
    a. What is going well, what could be improved, and what can be adjusted to increase prospects for progress, long-term impact, local ownership, and sustainability; and,
    b. Evaluate effectiveness of implementation approaches, activities, and management structure of the EHELD project.
2. **Ownership and sustainability**(25%): Evaluate the potential for UL and Cuttington to sustain and demonstrate ownership of different aspects of the project.

3. **Follow-on design**(25%): Identify lessons learned and best practices related to the project design, implementation and management to inform the design and implementation of a follow-on project or new higher education activity.
4. **Gender**(10%): Evaluate the capacity of RTI, UL and Cuttington to implement core recommendations from the Gender Assessment[44] (July 2013).

The mid- term assessment is anticipated to take place over a period of approximately six weeks in the fall of 2013.

The main participants in the assessment will be: beneficiaries (students, faculty, and partner institution staff at UL and Cuttington), the Government of Liberia (GOL) officials, and private sector partners. The principal audience of this assessment will be USAID/Liberia, and RTI and its sub-partners to use the results to make any adjustments during the last two years of implementation, if needed. The assessment will provide these parties, as well as GOL and academic institutional counterparts and other donors with information that they can use to adjust and plan for future programming designs in higher education development.

II. Background

Since the country's peaceful elections in 2005, private investors and overseas Liberians have returned to invest in the country. Liberia's real gross domestic product grew by 11.2% and 8.4%, respectively, in 2006 and 2007 (LISGIS Data File) and by 7.1% and 4.6% in 2008 and 2009, despite the world economic crisis (World Bank). Large-scale commercial activity in telecommunications, mining, and agriculture—especially rubber and palm oil—has resumed, with leading companies ArcelorMittal and Equatorial Biofuels making significant investments. Modernization of the agricultural sector, which employs about 70% of the total labor force (FAO Agriculture Assessment, May 2008), has great potential to contribute to food security, job creation, and poverty reduction.

Company managers, farmers, government officials, nongovernmental organization (NGO) leaders, and donor representatives alike point to Liberia's critical need for improved education, skills, and labor force capacity as the principal challenge to sustaining the momentum of development. Today, institutions of higher learning are functioning, students are attending classes, and teachers are teaching, but conditions are less than ideal: curriculum is outdated, faculty are nearing retirement and have not received training for decades, buildings are still in various states of renovation and disrepair, classrooms are often overcrowded, there are few laboratories with functional equipment or up-to-date textbooks, and due to limited and erratic educational opportunities throughout the war and low admission requirements[45], students often lack the foundational knowledge to succeed in the programs in which they enroll.

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[44] EHELD's consortium partner, Rutgers University's Gender team, conducted a Gender Assessment of the program based on fieldwork conducted over three weeks in May 2013. The report was produced by Judy Postmus, Samantha Winter and Laura Palumbo. The overall goal of the study was to investigate the factors that prevent or aid women in pursuing and completing bachelor-level agriculture and engineering programs in Liberia.

[45]This year the University of Liberia hired an independent consultant to administer the entrance exam to help facilitate a more transparent and standardized entrance exam; the results for this year were not curved as has been done in previous years. Liberia made international headlines when all 25,000 applicants who took the University of Liberia entrance exam failed. After consultations with the university and other high level officials, it was determined that top 1,800 applicants will be accepted on a provisional basis and required to take remedial English and Math courses.

http://www.voanews.com/content/liberia-university-admission-exam-mass-failures/1737581.html

The **EHELD** project seeks to equip top-performing young Liberian women and men for professional careers as leaders, managers, extension agents, researchers, and small business owners in the two of the most critical current development sectors in the country—agriculture and engineering. EHELD is implemented by an RTI-led Consortium including: Rutgers University, University of Michigan, North Carolina State University, and Associates in Rural Development.

The EHELD project's aim is to assist the leaders and faculty of Cuttington University (CU) and the University of Liberia (UL) to create academic **Centers of Excellence** (CoEs) in agriculture and engineering that employ sufficient numbers of faculty, utilize up-to-date curricula, employ best-practice teaching methodologies and materials, and do so in facilities that are conducive to learning.

EHELD's strategy includes developing a **pipeline** of secondary school students to attract and prepare equal numbers of young Liberian women and men for Agriculture and Engineering CoE programs. Lastly, utilizing a public-private-education community outreach initiative, through the *Liberia Engineering and Agriculture Pact (LEAP),* the EHELD project has endeavored to engage leaders in business, government, and the NGO community in order to build key employer **linkages**. EHELD thus seeks to create a real-world student experience, service learning opportunities, and constant exposure to the practical world of work that will, ultimately, it is hypothesized, facilitate job placement for CoE graduates. Specifically, these CoEs will:

- Improve the success rate of students entering the higher education system through remedial programs and summer learning opportunities;
- Ensure broader access to degree programs through targeted outreach and scholarship programs aimed at female students and underserved populations;
- Improve graduate placement from the engineering and agricultural programs by linking the academic programs with priority economic sectors such as mining, agriculture, and infrastructure construction (energy, water and sanitation systems, roads, and bridges);
- Support national development priorities by increasing the availability of qualified entrants to the workforce in key economic growth sectors;
- Promote self-employment opportunities through professional and entrepreneurship training; and,
- Create linkages with U.S. and regional university programs through faculty exchanges, joint research projects, and shared resources.

In addition to creating a highly qualified workforce in agriculture and engineering that will contribute to addressing Liberia's national development priorities, EHELD's long-term vision is to create a blueprint for replicating the development of Centers of Excellence in other disciplines and with other Liberian institutions.

By implementing the three coordinated approaches—building a pipeline of men and women students who are interested in the fields and prepared to meet the Centers' academic challenges; creating the Centers of Excellence; and building linkages with government, the private sector, and local communities—USAID has proposed that through EHELD's support the project may **significantly improve Liberia's ability to meet its critical development challenges.** Consequently, at project's end there will be a more highly qualified workforce in agriculture and engineering who are finding solutions to Liberia's national priorities, a resurgence of crucial agricultural sectors leading to greater food security, and the blueprint for replicating the development of Centers of Excellence in other disciplines and with other Liberian institutions. The partnerships built through EHELD's implementation it to assure sustainability, promote

access to higher education for women and disadvantaged populations, and maintain the relevance and quality of the Centers of Excellence programs into the future. For additional information on the EHELD approach, see the project Results Framework on page 12 of this document.

Gender Disparities and Imbalances

Gender disparities and imbalances are common in every sphere of Liberian life, and in most cases, it is women that are disproportionally disadvantaged by these disparities and imbalances.[46] To reduce poverty and accelerate post-conflict development, there is no question that Liberia must more effectively engage the female half of its population. Women and girls play a central role in Liberia's economy as consumers and producers. Currently, these roles come principally through the informal sector; agricultural production and petty trade of goods and services in local marketplaces.

There is a clear gender inequity in those studying and working in the engineering and agriculture sectors. The female population is being underutilized, with the result that the nation neglects the potential that exists in this sector. The objective of EHELD's gender activities is to redress this imbalance increase gender equity in the selected engineering and agricultural departments so the full potential of the female population can be realized. Other currently known gender issues at the universities include poor student enrollment rates for females; a culture of "sex for grades" in both universities; financial and family issues affecting attendance, retention and completion; and a lack of "student-center" or gender-sensitive teaching pedagogy[47].

III. Midterm Assessment Questions

It is expected that the assessment team will bring their own creative approach to the design of the field evaluation questions that will guide the assessment. However, at the end of the process, the midterm assessment report should directly answer the following five (5) key questions that address five overarching areas:

1) **Project Performance:** Is the EHELD project on track to meet its overall objectives and intermediates results?
2) **Project Management and Implementation:** How effectively has EHELD engaged with the three main groups of stakeholders: partner universities, private sector, and government (via National Council on Higher Education), and how receptive have they been to the project?
3) **Sustainability and Local Ownership:** How sustainable are the different components of the EHELD project? To what degree is there local ownership and how can this be improved upon?
4) **Gender:** To what extent has the project integrated gender strategies and considerations into its activities?
5) **Project and Follow-on Design:** How effective, reliable and valid are the approaches, materials and tools being used to monitor and evaluate the project? What specific, actionable recommen-

[46] Liberia National Gender Policy, Ministry of Gender and Development, Liberia 2009

[47] Postmus, J., Winter, S., and L. Palumbo. Examining Barriers and Persistence Factors for Female Students in the Engineering and Agriculture Degree Programs at the University of Liberia and Cuttington University: A Joint Project between Rutgers University, University of Liberia and Cuttington University. USAID/EHELD. July 2013.

dations regarding the nature and scope of a possible follow-on award or new higher education activity can be made based on the lessons learned and best practices?

Additional questions and specific topics that could be examined in further detail in order to answer the above questions include, but are not limited to, the following:

1) **Project Performance:**
   - **a)** What adjustments or changes are recommended for improving the project's likelihood of meeting the project's objectives and expected results?
   - **b)** How effective were both the EHELD project's design and its implementation (thus far) in identifying and responding to challenges in the Liberian higher education context?
   - **c)** What, if any, were the unexpected obstacles in the universities, private sector or GOL's response to the program?
   - **d)** To what extent is the contract faculty building local faculty capacity to assume responsibility when the EHELD project ends?
   - **e)** Out of all the areas and activities pursued by the project to date, which ones can be considered priority for EHELD and USAID to focus implementation during the remainder of the project, so as to meet project objectives?

2) **Project Management and Implementation:**
   - **a)** How collaboratively, transparently, and effectively has EHELD engaged with University of Liberia and Cuttington University leadership and faculty? What recommendations can be made to improve engagement as well as to encourage greater university ownership, leadership and accountability?
   - **b)** What approaches led to the most effective relationships with the private sector, both in general and through the Liberia Engineering and Agriculture Pact (LEAP)? What recommendations can be made to improve private sector engagement?
   - **c)** How effectively has EHELD engaged the GOL (National Council on Higher Education (NCHE), Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Public Works)? What recommendations can be made to improve this relationship?
   - **d)** What is the effectiveness of the consortium model in the implementation of the project to date? What are the challenges and how should these be addressed moving forward?
   - **e)** What are the university leadership and faculties' views on the appropriateness, relevance, receptivity, and impact of the revised curricula?
   - **f)** Are students satisfied with the activities (Summer Start, Smart Start, Fast Start) and other support they received? What are students' perceptions of the quality of the programs? Were activities appropriate for female students?
   - **g)** What are private sector partners' (or potential partners') views on the appropriateness, relevance, receptivity, and impact of revised curricula?
   - **h)** What implementation successes and challenges have been documented in implementing the EHELD components?
   - **i)** Are there programmatic or organizational gaps that hinder the achievement of results?
   - **j)** Is the program being implemented and managed in a cost effective manner?
   - **k)** How effectively is EHELD addressing underlying institutional, policy and systemic weaknesses that impact capacity to deliver CoE?
   - **l)** How receptive have the universities and private sector partners been to the EHELD intervention design, objectives, and outcomes?

m) What are the Peace Corp's (director and volunteers) views on its participation in the EHELD project to date (Smart Start, Fast Start and Summer Start) and the possibility for continued linkages in the future?

3) Sustainability and Local Ownership:

a) To what degree is there university ownership, leadership and accountability for providing quality education at the CoEs in Liberia?

b) What role have the university administrations played in supporting the EHELD goals and helping ensure sustainability of (expected) project results?

c) What systems and structures have been put into place to ensure sustainability of the CoEs at the universities?

d) Are there areas of assistance that could be phased out, because they have achieved a sufficient level of success and sustainability, or continued assistance would yield diminishing or limited returns, or because they are too costly?

e) Is the current scale and scope of the project appropriate to ensure sustainability? Should certain aspects or components be prioritized or limited?

f) What are the prospects for achievement and sustainability of the (expected) results produced by this program?

g) What (expected) results appear to be less sustainable and why? What recommendations can be made for improving these?

h) What are the estimated implementation costs of the major activities if the universities were to continue project activities upon EHELD close-out? Are the universities aware of the recurrent costs they would have to assume?

4) Gender:

a) What is the effectiveness of EHELD's approach to increasing women's access to and participation in the higher education? What are the prospects that these efforts will be sustained?

5) Project and Follow-on Design:

a) Is the original program design framework still valid, or have framework parameters changed, and why? Are the expected results still applicable in each of the component areas? What unexpected opportunities and/or challenges have surfaced?

b) What are the constraints, challenges and lessons learned from the project implementation thus far?

c) What are the best practices emerging from this project? Are there successes that could be replicated for follow on programs or future projects in other contexts?

d) In designing a follow-on award or new higher education activity, which types of interventions appear most appropriate and feasible and which could build on EHELD's current efforts. Also, which types of interventions which show less promise and should be avoided?

e) What is in place for evaluation, learning and feedback for the program and the institutions?

IV. Data Collection and Analysis Methods

It is anticipated that the final methodology will be developed collaboratively with the assessment team, USAID/Liberia Education Team, EHELD and appropriate University or GOL officials if/as appropriate.

It is anticipated that the EHELD assessment will include qualitative data collection from a purposive sample of key individuals and stakeholders, with selection criteria clearly articulated.

Specific Tasks

The midterm assessment will include a literature review and a series of meetings/interviews and site visits. The literature review, which shall be conducted prior to the field visit will, at a minimum, consider: the EHELD program description and modifications, and relevant program documents such as quarterly reports, data quality assessments (DQAs), work plans, Performance Management Plans (PMPs), newsletters, and importantly, the recent Gender Assessment (July 2013) of the project. The review should also include reports and information created by the Liberian National Council on Higher Education as well as Government of Liberia's Poverty Reduction Strategy II-Agenda for Transformation. Plan. The USAID Mission in Liberia will assist in collecting background documents on USAID's strategies and the EHELD project for the assessment team and will share those documents with the team no later than two weeks in advance of the field work. L-MEP is required to gather and provide to the assessment team outside studies, analysis, articles, etc. to orient the team to Liberia and its Education sector.

Building on the literature review, the next step of the midterm assessment will take place during the field visit, which will include discussions with key stakeholders including USAID, RTI and its Consortium; EHELD staff; faculty, staff, administration and students of University of Liberia and Cuttington University, as well as EHELD supported contract/visiting faculty; current and potential private sector partners including *Liberia Engineering and Agriculture Pact (LEAP)*; the World Bank; and the National Council on Higher Education as well as other relevant GOL Ministry officials. Outside of Liberia, the lead faculty point of contact at each Consortium institution as well as students who assisted with student pipeline activities must be consulted. The RTI home office should also be consulted.

Site visits to the EHELD CoEs at the University of Liberia in Monrovia and Cuttington University in Bong County, must take place. USAID/Liberia will also prepare a preliminary list of contacts for donors, civil society, and government officials to be shared with the team prior to their travel to Monrovia. L-MEP is responsible for providing the assessment team with the contact's details, including phone numbers, email and physical addresses, as well as other contact information, as needed, for logistics. The assessment team Logistics Coordinator will take responsibility for all administrative and logistical requirements of the team, including coordinating meetings with the contacts mentioned above.

The assessment team should plan on a conference call with USAID/Liberia prior to arrival in country. An out-briefing and draft summary report of the key initial findings and recommendations will be required prior to the team's departure from Liberia for the Education Team. A presentation of the findings to EHELD and to the partner universities will also be required at the end of the field visit.

In order to ensure the maximum value for learning and use, a description of the proposed assessment methodology should include, at a minimum:

1. Study design (e.g., cross-sectional descriptive studies, quantitative and qualitative retrospective comparisons, etc.) and plans for data analysis
2. Methods of data collection (e.g., qualitative interview guides, key personnel interviews, unobtrusive or observational methods, quantitative survey questionnaires, secondary data analysis), how such tools will be developed and with whom, and the scope and time line for data collection, and key characteristics of data collection instruments (e.g., sample questions or an outline of interview guide topics)
3. Measures and plans undertaken in order to ensure protection and confidentiality during data collection

The project evaluators should consider a range of possible methods and approaches to collecting and analyzing the information required to evaluate likely causal connections between activities and outcomes, and make programmatic recommendations. Before embarking on any in-country fieldwork or data collection, the evaluators will review and justify their choice of methodologies through the USAID/Liberia Agreement Officer's Representative (AOR) and the Program Office (e.g., the CLA Coordinator and/or Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist).

The approach may be relatively simple or more complex approaches as appropriate. For example, the extent to which participatory appraisal methods, focus groups, workshops, etc., are used to elicit information and engage ultimate customers and implementation partners in the midterm assessment process will be determined by the assessment team in consultation with the Mission. USAID anticipates a collaborative participatory assessment with EHELD; the assessment team will hold consultations with EHELD/RTI throughout the assessment process including an initial in-brief upon arrival in Liberia as well as debrief at the end of the fieldwork.

Information on the project can be obtained from the following available source documents, to be sent to the assessment team at least two weeks prior to arrival in country:

- Program Description
- Performance Management Plan (PMP)
- Quarterly and Annual Reports
- Annual Work Plans
- Data Quality Assessment Report (2011)
- EHELD produced reports and studies (including the baseline report and EHELD's Gender Assessment)

Additional relevant documents developed by the National Council on Higher Education that must be reviewed include:

- Diagnostic Paper for Higher Education in Liberia
- Higher Education Strategic Plan for Liberia (HESP)
- Status of Higher Education: Census Survey of Institutions.

The assessment team may request other relevant documents as available.

V. Assessment Team Independence and Qualifications

The proposed composition of the Assessment Team includes: a Team Leader/Senior Evaluation Specialist, a Tertiary Education Specialist, and a Logistics Coordinator. If an alternative composition of the assessment team is desired, LMEP must provide justification for the adjustments and receive approval from USAID/Liberia before modifying the SOW.

The assessment team should include:

- **Team Leader/Senior Evaluation Specialist:** S/he will be responsible for coordinating the activities of the assessment team, and have the authority to make budgetary and programmatic decisions regarding the assessment subject to final TMG/HQ written approval. S/he will serve as the main point of contact between USAID and the assessment team's headquarters. The Team

Leader will approve the final assessment design, oversee the development of evaluation instruments, integrate the findings of different team members and coordinate the preparation of the final reports.

The Team Leader/Senior Evaluation Specialist will have at least ten years of experience in the administration of multi-faceted education projects in developing countries - preferably in West Africa. S/he should have experience in managing multi-disciplinary teams and developing and conducting qualitative and/or performance evaluations, the ability to conceptualize and structure evaluation activities and write clearly and concisely. An MA or PhD in education administration, planning, economics of education or similar field is required. Experience working in and/or conducting evaluations post-conflict and transition settings is preferred.

- **Tertiary Education Specialist (Administration/Institutional Development):**She/he will be responsible for assessing governance issues in higher education, including transparency and accountability in financing and managing higher education; institutional arrangements within University of Liberia and Cuttington University, including working relations between the implementing partner and the partner institutions. S/he will provide expert technical advice on assessment of higher education projects to the assessment team. The Tertiary Education Specialist will hold an advanced degree in Higher Education Administration, Public Administration, Educational Research and/or Statistics and have extensive experience in assessing tertiary education programs. S/he will have at least ten years of experience working with educational projects in developing countries, preferably in post-conflict environments.

- **Logistics Coordinator:** S/he will serve as the main logistical coordinator for the midterm assessment, and work with local partners to plan travel, data collection, interviews and assessment activities as required.

The team may also include:

- **Liberian Education Context Specialist**: Context Specialist may be seconded from L-MEP staff or engaged locally by L-MEP in collaboration with the USAID Education DO Team. The local consultant shall have experience and knowledge about the education context in Liberia, particularly in higher education. Experience in agriculture and/or engineering sectors preferred. S/he will work closely with expatriates and assist them during evaluation.

- **Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist (L-MEP Representative):** This **position will operate under the direction of the evaluation t**eam leader, **and will be the key L-MEP Representative on the team, and will** assist **with and participate in all aspects of the evaluation as a full** member.
  Concerns or issues regarding responsiveness or performance of the L-MEP Representative should be directed to the L-MEP COP and the USAID AOR/COR of the activity being evaluated for resolution. Key Tasks will include: 1) *Evaluation Planning:* Participate in evaluation planning exercises (meetings) at the Mission when feasible; review and provide suggestions on draft SOW; and review and provide suggestions on project design framework and methodology; 2) *Fieldwork:* Collect and analyze project monitoring data from PIDS and other sources; participate in site visits if it is part of the design/methodology; participate in data collection and analysis efforts; and analyze data gaps and provide inputs on data quality issues if any; 3) *Reporting:* Write assigned portion of draft report; review draft report and provide comments and inputs; and participate in out-briefs; and 4) *Dissemination:* Lead dissemination of findings, to local stakeholders

if USAID has a specific plan to do so. The Team Leader is required to have demonstrated expertise in evaluation methodology.

Collectively the team members must have experience in conducting both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. Prior to their arrival in Liberia, all team members are required to familiarize themselves with USAID's Evaluation Policy, with USAID's publication outlining a good evaluation report, and with USAID's checklist for assessing an evaluation report. Additionally, all team members should possess a strong familiarity with the political, economic, policy and educational context in Liberia, particularly since the end of the civil war.

VI. Assessment Timeline and Logistics

Prior to arrival in Liberia, the Assessment team should first complete a desk study to understand the higher education and policy context of Liberia, and how EHELD activities address these challenges. This review should pay special attention to how the program fits into the USAID/Liberia Mission's Country Development and Cooperation Strategy (CDCS) strategy, the USAID Global Education Strategy, as well as the GOL's Agenda for Transformation. To support this review, two weeks prior to the field visit, USAID/Liberia will provide electronic copies to the Assessment team of all USAID-specific documents to be reviewed. The Assessment team Logistics Coordinator will take responsibility for all administrative and logistical requirements of the team, including contacting, setting and coordinating meeting with the interview contacts. Ideally, the team would commence background review and preparation research starting in Fall 2013. Upon arrival in country, the work plan shall be further refined with USAID/Liberia, as necessary. The USAID Agreement Officer's Representative (AOR) for the EHELD project and/or other USAID staff may join the Assessment team in selected assessment study data collection and analysis efforts.

VII. Level of Effort (LOE)

The following level of effort is expected for the assessment:

Tasks	Time (work days)/ Person
Background preparation and literature review (prior to arrival in country, includes draft of an initial work plan)	5 days
Round trip travel (US-Liberia-US)	3 days
In-country assessment of EHELD, including an out-brief presentation with USAID/Liberia and EHELD. Summary document of initial key findings, lessons learned and recommendations (assumes 6 day work week)	18 days
Draft Midterm Assessment Report due (Full draft report, including executive summary). Draft should incorporate USAID feedback on summary report and out-brief presentation	7 days
Final Midterm Assessment Report due (following USAID feedback on the Draft Report)	3 days
Total LOE	36 days

VIII. Deliverables:

The assessment team will produce the following deliverables:

a. **Work Plan:** Upon completion of the desk study/literature review, a detailed work plan must be completed by the Team Leader within two weeks of the award of the contract and presented to the AOR. Upon arrival in country, the work plan shall be further refined with USAID/Liberia staff, as necessary. A first meeting or conference call will be held with USAID/Liberia and the assessment team to clarify responsibilities, logistical support, and additional secondary documentation sources before the assessment begins. The work plan should include a timeline and matrix of the study design (including key questions and the methods and data sources used to address each question), draft questionnaires and other data collection instruments and field testing of interview protocol, selection criteria of respondents (including beneficiaries and non-program beneficiaries), an explanation of how ethical conduct of research involving human subjects[48] and the protection and confidentiality of data will be ensured, and known limitations to the assessment design.

b. **Oral Briefings**: The assessment team will meet with USAID/Liberia upon arrival in Monrovia. The team will also provide an oral briefing of its key initial findings and recommendations to USAID/Liberia Education Office as well as senior management and other technical office/Development Objective (DO) Team as appropriate prior to departure from Liberia.

c. **Field Work:** Fieldwork for the assessment, including the out-briefing for USAID Liberia, is estimated to *take 18 working* days in country and will be conducted according to the approved work plan.

d. **Summary Report of Initial Key Findings, Lessons Learned and Recommendations:** A draft summary report of the assessment team's initial key findings, lessons learned and recommendations will be submitted to the USAID/Liberia Education Team for review and comment prior to the assessment team's out-briefing with mission management and departure from Liberia.

e. **Draft of Assessment Report:** A draft written report, in English, with an executive summary and body of *between [30–40] pages*, will be submitted electronically to USAID/Liberia no later than 10 working days after the completion of the field visit. The draft report and its executive summary shall include the assessment's methodology, analysis, findings, and recommendations and will incorporate and/or address specific issues raised during the Mission out-briefing. Analysis and findings must be substantiated and supported by data.

USAID/Liberia will have ten working days to submit its comments on the draft report. The Assessment Report, which shall follow USAID branding procedures, must include:

[48]Data collection should conform to the Common Federal Policy for Protection of Human Subjects in research (i.e., "Common Rule;" see **22 CFR 225**, Annex B, part 1, and http://www.access.gpo.gov/nara/cfr/waisidx_06/22cfr225_06.html) and ensure the ethical conduct of research involving human subjects—e.g., by certifying compliance through filing a Federal-Wide Assurance (FWA) with the Office of Human Research Protections at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) or the Liberia Institute of Biomedical Research, as appropriate.

- A description of the assessment purpose (including a clear articulation of the assessment questions addressed in the report)
- Information on the assessment team
  - How the independence of the assessment team was protected and identification of any objectivity and potential conflict of interest addressed, including sources and amount of funding for the assessment
  - The alignment of assessment team members' expertise with the assessment purpose and study design methods
  - The participation by national counterparts and evaluators in the design and conduct of the study
- A detailed account of the assessment study design (including a clear description of the hypotheses, scope, and underlying assumptions addressed in the assessment)
- A detailed description of the data collection methods (including the sampling and/or selection criteria used)
- Data analysis and findings by objectives (including acknowledgement and disclosure of any data limitations)
  - An assessment of any differential outcomes and anticipated impacts on males and females
  - Statements of differences (if any) regarding significant unresolved difference of opinion by funders, implementers, and/or members of the assessment team
- Lessons Learned and Recommendations for project implementation through end of project(these must be supported by the data analysis and findings, and presented as action-oriented recommendations appropriate to the assessment purpose)
- Efficiency, sustainability and replicability
- Annex(es), which should include:
  - Section on recommendations for follow-on award, extension or other future work on higher education in Liberia
  - A copy of the Assessment SOW
  - Data collection instruments
  - Sources, sites, sampling frame, individual/focus group interviews, etc. included in data collection
  - Disclosure of conflicts of interest forms for all assessment team members, either attesting to a lack of conflict of interest or describing existing conflict of interest
  - A Summary Briefer of the assessment report (approximately 5 pages) for public consumption

f. **Final Assessment Report:** The assessment team will have three working days after receipt of USAID's comments to submit the final assessment report electronically to USAID/Liberia. Upon USAID final approval and guidance, LMEP will submit the final Assessment Report to the DEC.

Table I: EHELD Results Framework

SO:

Centers of Excellence Produce Graduates Who Become Leading Professionals in the Fields of engineering and Agriculture in Liberia

IR 1:

Young Liberians accessed Engineering and Agricultural fields at Cuttington and University of Liberia

- IR 1.1 Increased CoE access for students (particularly women) through scholarships
- IR 1.2 Increased career interest in Engineering and Agriculture
- IR 1.3 Increased opportunities for CoE students to improved Math, English and science skills through pipeline programs
- IR 1.4 Improved student services (career services, learning support) increase student satisfaction to stay in school

IR 2:

CoE's Provide Highest Quality Education in Line with the International Best Practices

- IR 2.1 Improved capacity of CoE faculty to effectively teach and mentor students
- IR 2.2 Improved and updated Engineering and Agricultural curricula
- IR 2.3 Improved academic facilities- laboratories, libraries and classrooms
- IR 2.4 Increased number of persons participating in non-degree courses

IR 3:

CoE Graduates Have Increased Employment Opportunities

- IR 3.1 Increased linkages with private, public and governmental entities that can provide internship opportunities to CoE students
- IR 3.2 Increased practical experience for students through service learning- hands-on engineering and farming projects

ANNEX III: DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

A. INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRES

EHELD **Date: _____**

1. Project Performance:

1.1) What components of the EHELD project are on track to meet its overall objectives?

1.2) What components of the EHELD project are not proceeding as expected

Prompts:

- What about faculty in non-degree courses?
- Contract faculty hired?
- Visiting faculty hired

1.6) What adjustments are recommended for improving the project's likelihood of meeting the project's objectives and expected results (with a focus on those indicators/activities that are lagging)? Prompts: Maintain progress? Improve on lagging items?

1.9) How effective was the EHELD project's design and strategy (thus far) in identifying challenges in the Liberian higher education context? Please identify significant challenges that were identified and what the project did to respond to them? (Prompts: obstacles at the universities; linkages with the private sector; GOL's response to improving the program; the students' interests; the consortium members' contributions?

1.10) How effective was the EHELD project's implementation (thus far) responding to challenges in the Liberian higher education context?

1.12) What challenges were identified; what actions were taken and what were the results?

1.13) What challenges were not adequately addressed and what was the effect on the project?

1.14) Have faculty at (UL/CU) taken on responsibility for components or elements of the project as expected?

1.15) If yes, what components or elements have UL/CU faculty taken responsibility for?

1.16) If no, what components or elements still require attention for local capacity development?

2) Project Management and Implementation

	Do you agree with the following statements:	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Strongly Agree 4
2.1	EHELD has **effectively**[49] engaged with the partner universities				

[49] "Effectively" is operationally defined as to whether each partner has assumed the expected EHELD role by making resources available, participating as expected, and adopting agreed upon practices or behaviors.

	Do you agree with the following statements:	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Strongly Agree 4
2.2	EHELD has **effectively** engaged with the private sector				
2.3	EHELD has **effectively** engaged with the GoL (via NCEH)				

	Do you agree with the following statements:	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Strongly Agree 4
2.7	EHELD has **collaboratively**[50] engaged with UL Leadership				
2.8	EHELD has **collaboratively** engaged with UL Faculty				
2.9	EHELD has **collaboratively** engaged with CU Leadership				
2.10	EHELD has **collaboratively** engaged with CU Faculty				

	Do you agree with the following statements:	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Strongly Agree 4
2.11	EHELD has **transparently** engaged with UL Leadership				
2.12	EHELD has **transparently** engaged with UL Faculty				
2.13	EHELD has **transparently** engaged with CU Leadership				
2.14	EHELD has transparently engaged with CU Faculty				

	Do you agree with the following statements:	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Strongly Agree 4
2.15	EHELD has **effectively** engaged with UL Leadership				
2.16	EHELD has **effectively** engaged with UL Faculty				
2.17	EHELD has **effectively** engaged with CU Leadership				

[50] "Collaborative" is defined as joint planning, mentoring relationships, open communication, responsiveness to challenges and issues.

2.18	EHELD has **effectively** engaged with CU Faculty				

What recommendations can be made to improve engagement with:
2.19) UL leadership

2.20) UL faculty

2.21) CU leadership

2.22) CU faculty

What recommendations can be made to encourage greater:
2.23) UL ownership

2.24) UL leadership

2.25) UL accountability

2.26) CU ownership

2.27) CU leadership

2.28) CU accountability

What approaches led to the most effective relationships with the private sector: (Prompt: which private sector partners have been most engaged? Which least engaged?)
2.29) In general

2.30) Through the Liberia Engineering and Agriculture Pact (LEAP)?

2.31) What recommendations can be made to improve private sector engagement?

	Do you agree with the following statements:	**Strongly Disagree 1**	**Disagree 2**	**Agree 3**	**Strongly Agree 4**
2.32	EHELD has effectively engaged the GoL				
2.33	EHELD has effectively engaged the NCHE				
2.34	EHELD has effectively engaged the Ministry of Agriculture				
2.35	EHELD has effectively engaged the Ministry of Public Works				

What recommendations can be made to improve this relationship with the:
2.36) GOL

2.37) National Council on Higher Education (NCHE)

2.38) Ministry of Agriculture

2.39) Ministry of Public Works

2.40) What is the effectiveness of the consortium model in the implementation of the project to date?

2.41) What are the challenges of the consortium model in the implementation of the project to date?

2.42) What steps should be taken to address challenges moving forward?

2.60) What successes have occurred by implementing the EHELD components? (Prompts: Smart Start, Summer Start, Fast Start)

a) Students' reactions?

b) Were activities appropriate for females?

2.61) What challenges have occurred by implementing the EHELD components?(Prompts: Gender, equipment, tools)

2.62) Are there program design gaps that hinder the achievement of results?

2.63) Are there organizational gaps that hinder the achievement of results?

2.64) Is the program being implemented in a cost effective way? (Prompt: are there project funds being spent on ineffective activities that could be better spent on other activities?) If so, which activities? (Prompt: How could it operate differently to achieve more with its resources?)

How effectively is EHELD in addressing challenges to developing a CoE:

2.66) Institutionally-related:

2.67) Policy-related:

2.68) Other systemic issues?

	Do you agree with the following statements: The universities have been receptive to:	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Strongly Agree 4
2.69	The project design				
2.70	The goals and objectives				
2.71	The outcomes, e.g. new curricula, equipment, faculty receiving training				

	Do you agree with the following statements: The private sector partners have been receptive to:	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Strongly Agree 4
2.72	The project design				
2.73	The goals and objectives				
2.74	The outcomes, e.g. students learning more relevant skills				

3) Sustainability and Local Ownership:

3.1) Which EHELD project components are most sustainable? Which are fragile or will require continued support? (Prompt: How can this be improved upon?)

	Do you agree with the following statements:	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Strongly Agree 4
3.4	The university(s) take ownership for providing quality ed at the CoEs				
3.5	The university(s) take leadership for providing quality ed. at the CoEs				
3.6	The university(s) take accountability for providing quality ed. at the CoEs				

3.7) What role have the university administrations played in supporting the EHELD goals

3.8) What role have the university administrations played in helping ensure sustainability of (expected) project results?

3.9) What systems have been put into place to ensure sustainability of the CoEs at the universities?

3.10) Are there areas of assistance that could be phased out?

3.11) If yes, what are the reasons (Prompts: sufficient level of success and sustainability have been achieved, continued assistance would yield diminishing or limited returns, or they are too costly?

3.12) Is the current scope of the project appropriate to ensure sustainability?

3.14) Should certain components be either prioritized or limited?

3.16) What are the prospects for sustainability of the (expected) results produced by this program?

3.17) What (expected) results appear to be less sustainable?

3.18) What are the reasons?

3.19) What recommendations can be made for improving these?

4) Gender:

4.1) What gender strategies has the project developed and used?

4.3) Have there been changes in **attitudes** of EHELD participants about gender issues? (Prompt: By male, female students? male, female professors?)

4.4) Have there been changes in **behaviors** of EHELD participants?(Prompt: By male, female students? male, female professors?)

4.5) What is the effectiveness of EHELD's approach to increasing women's access to these HE programs?

4.7) What are the prospects that these efforts to support women's participation will be sustained?

5) Project and Follow-on Design:

	Do you agree with the following statements	**Strongly Disagree 1**	**Disagree 2**	**Agree 3**	**Strongly Agree 4**
5.1	You find the approaches to monitor the project to be effective				
5.3	You find the tools being used to monitor the project to be effective				

	Do you agree with the following statements	**Strongly Disagree 1**	**Disagree 2**	**Agree 3**	**Strongly Agree 4**
5.4	You find the approaches to evaluate the project to be effective				

What are your specific, actionable recommendations regarding the:

5.15) Scope of a possible follow-on award or new higher education activity can be made based on the lessons learned and best practices

5.16) Is the original program design framework still valid?

5.17) Or have framework parameters changed? If so, what are the reasons?

5.19) Are the expected results still applicable in each of the component areas?

5.20) What unexpected opportunities have surfaced?

5.21) What unexpected challenges have surfaced?

5.24) What are the main lessons learned from the project implementation thus far?

5.25) What are the best practices emerging from this project? (Prompt: Are there successes that could be replicated for follow-on programs or future projects in other contexts?)

5.30 Also, which types of interventions which show less promise and should be avoided?

What is in place for:
5.31) Assessment for the program?

5.32) Assessment for the capacity and sustainability of the CoEs?

5.33) How will the assessment strategies promote learning, for the program?

5.34) How will the assessment strategies promote learning, for the institutions?

GoL **Date:_____**

National Council on Higher Education, MoA, MpW, MoE (Circle)

1. Project Performance:
1. What adjustments are recommended for improving the project's likelihood of meeting the project's objectives and expected results (with a focus on those indicators/activities that are lagging)? Prompts: Maintain progress? Improve on lagging items?

2. How effective was the EHELD project's design (thus far) in identifying challenges in the Liberian higher education context? Please identify significant challenges that were identified and what the project did to respond to them? (Prompts: obstacles at the universities; with the private sector; GOL's response to the program; the students; the consortium members?

3. How effective was the EHELD project's implementation (thus far) responding to challenges in the Liberian higher education context?

4. What challenges were identified; what actions were taken and what were the results?

5. What challenges were not adequately addressed and what was the effect on the project?

6. Have faculty at (UL/CU) taken on responsibility for components or elements of the project as expected?

7. If yes, what components or elements have UL/CU faculty taken responsibility for?

8. If no, what components or elements still require attention for local capacity development?

2) Project Management and Implementation

	Do you agree with the following statements:	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Strongly Agree 4
2.1	EHELD has **effectively**[51] engaged with the partner universities				
2.2	EHELD has **effectively** engaged with the private sector				
2.3	EHELD has **effectively** engaged with the GoL (via NCEH)				

What approaches led to the most effective relationships with the private sector:

2.29) In general

2.30) Through the Liberia Engineering and Agriculture Pact (LEAP)?

2.31) What recommendations can be made to improve private sector engagement?

	Do you agree with the following statements:	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Strongly Agree 4
2.32	EHELD has effectively engaged the GoL				
2.33	EHELD has effectively engaged the NCHE				
2.34	EHELD has effectively engaged the Ministry of Agriculture				
2.35	EHELD has effectively engaged the Ministry of Public Works				

What recommendations can be made to improve this relationship with the:

2.36) GOL

2.37) National Council on Higher Education (NCHE)

2.38) Ministry of Agriculture

2.39) Ministry of Public Works

2.60) What implementation successes have occurred by implementing the EHELD components? (Prompts: Smart Start, Summer Start, Fast Start)

a) Students reactions?

b) Were activities appropriate for females?

[51] "Effectively" is operationally defined as to whether each partner has assumed the expected EHELD role by making resources available, participating as expected, and adopting agreed upon practices or behaviors.

2.61) What challenges have occurred by implementing the EHELD components?(Prompts: Gender, equipment, tools)

2.62) Are there program design gaps that hinder the achievement of results?

2.63) Are there organizational gaps that hinder the achievement of results?

How effectively is EHELD in addressing challenges to developing a CoE:
2.66) Institutionally-related:
2.67) Policy-related:
2.68) Other systemic issues?

	Do you agree with the following statements: The universities have been receptive to:	**Strongly Disagree 1**	**Disagree 2**	**Agree 3**	**Strongly Agree 4**
2.69	The project design				
2.70	The goals and objectives				
2.71	The outcomes, e.g. new curricula, equipment, faculty receiving training				

	Do you agree with the following statements: The private sector partners have been receptive to:	**Strongly Disagree 1**	**Disagree 2**	**Agree 3**	**Strongly Agree 4**
2.72	The project design				
2.73	The goals and objectives				
2.74	The outcomes, e.g. students learning more relevant skills				

3) Sustainability and Local Ownership:

3.1) Which EHELD project components are most sustainable? Which are fragile or will require continued support? (Prompt: How can this be improved upon?)

	Do you agree with the following statements:	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Strongly Agree 4
3.4	The university(s) take ownership for providing ed. At the CoEs				
3.5	The university(s) take leadership for providing ed. At the CoEs				
3.6	The university(s) take accountability for providing ed. At the CoEs				

3.10) Are there areas of assistance that could be phased out?

3.11) If yes, what are the reasons e.g., sufficient level of success and sustainability have been achieved, continued assistance would yield diminishing or limited returns, or they are too costly?

3.12) Is the current scope of the project appropriate to ensure sustainability?
Deleted 3.13
3.14) Should certain components be either prioritized or limited?

3.16) What are the prospects for sustainability of the (expected) results produced by this program?

3.17) What (expected) results appear to be less sustainable?

3.18) What are the reasons?

3.19) What recommendations can be made for improving these?

4) Gender:

4.1) What gender strategies has the project developed and used?

4.3) Have there been changes in **attitudes** of EHELD participants about gender issues? (Prompt: By male, female students? male, female professors?)

4.4) Have there been changes in **behaviors** of EHELD participants?(Prompt: By male, female students? male, female professors?)

4.5) What is the effectiveness of EHELD's approach to increasing women's access to these HE programs?

4.7) What are the prospects that these efforts to support women's participation will be sustained?

5) Project and Follow-on Design:

	Do you agree with the following statements	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Strongly Agree 4
5.1	You find the approaches to monitor the project to be effective				
5.3	You find the tools being used to monitor the project to be effective				

	Do you agree with the following statements	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Strongly Agree 4
5.4	You find the approaches to evaluate the project to be effective				

What are your specific, actionable recommendations regarding the:

5.15) Scope of a possible follow-on award or new higher education activity can be made based on the lessons learned and best practices?

5.16) Is the original program design framework still valid?

5.17) Or have framework parameters changed? If so, what are the reasons?

5.19) Are the expected results still applicable in each of the component areas?

5.20) What unexpected opportunities have surfaced?

5.21) What unexpected challenges have surfaced?

5.24) What are the lessons learned from the project implementation thus far?

5.25) What are the best practices emerging from this project? (Prompt: Are there successes that could be replicated for follow-on programs or future projects in other contexts?)

5.30) Also, which types of interventions which show less promise and should be avoided?

Pipeline Secondary Schools

Date: _____

PS1) How were you first informed about EHELD?

PS2) Were you asked to be a feeder school or did you volunteer?

PS3) Is the program working the way you were informed it would work?

PS4) What challenges did you experience?

PS5) How were these addressed?

PS6) Has the relationship with the EHELD project been transparent?

PS7) How is the communication between the EHELD project and you?

PS8) How is the communication between the university and you?

PS9) Do you have regular communication with the project?

PS10) How do the students react to the Fast Start program?

PS11) Have you seen an increased interest in the Smart Start Program over time?

PS12) Have you seen an increased interest by the girls?
PS13) Are there any changes you could recommend for the two programs?

Private Sector

Date: _____

1. Project Performance:

1.6) What adjustments are recommended for improving the project's likelihood of meeting the project's objectives and expected results (with a focus on those indicators/activities that are lagging)? Prompts: Maintain progress? Improve on lagging items?

1.9) How effective was the EHELD project's design and strategy (thus far) in identifying challenges in the Liberian higher education context? Please identify significant challenges that were identified and what the project did to respond to them? (Prompts: obstacles at the universities; linkages with the private sector; GOL's response to improving the program; the students' interests; the consortium members' contributions?

1.10) How effective was the EHELD project's implementation (thus far) responding to challenges in the Liberian higher education context?

1.12) What challenges were identified; what actions were taken and what were the results?

1.13) What challenges were not adequately addressed and what was the effect on the project?

1.14) Have faculty at (UL/CU) taken on responsibility for components or elements of the project as expected?

1.15) If yes, what components or elements have UL/CU faculty taken responsibility for?

1.16) If no, what components or elements still require attention for local capacity development?

2) Project Management and Implementation

	Do you agree with the following statements:	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Strongly Agree 4
2.1	EHELD has effectively[52] engaged with the partner universities				
2.2	EHELD has effectively engaged with the private sector				
2.3	EHELD has effectively engaged with the GoL (via NCEH)				

What approaches led to the most effective relationships with the private sector: (Prompt: which private sector partners have been most engaged? Which least engaged?)

2.29) In general

2.30) Through the Liberia Engineering and Agriculture Pact (LEAP)?

2.31) What recommendations can be made to improve private sector engagement?

	Do you Private Sector agree with the following statements	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Strongly Agree 4
100	You find the EHELD proj. to be appropriate				
200	You find the EHELD proj. to be relevant				
300	You find yourself receptive to the EHELD project				

2.50) What is the impact of the revised curricula?

2.60) What implementation successes have occurred by implementing the EHELD components? (Prompts: Smart Start, Summer Start, Fast Start)

a) Students' reactions?

b) Were activities appropriate for females?

2.61) What challenges have occurred by implementing the EHELD components?(Prompts: Gender, equipment, tools)

2.62) Are there program design gaps that hinder the achievement of results?

2.63) Are there organizational gaps that hinder the achievement of results?

[52] "Effectively" is operationally defined as to whether each partner has assumed the expected EHELD role by making resources available, participating as expected, and adopting agreed upon practices or behaviors.

How effectively is EHELD in addressing challenges to developing a CoE:
2.66) Institutionally-related:

2.67) Policy-related:
2.68) Other systemic issues?

	Do you agree with the following statements: The universities have been receptive to:	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Strongly Agree 4
2.69	The project design				
2.70	The goals and objectives				
2.71	The outcomes, e.g. new curricula, equipment, faculty receiving training				

	Do you agree with the following statements: The private sector partners have been receptive to:	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Strongly Agree 4
2.72	The project design				
2.73	The goals and objectives				
2.74	The outcomes, e.g. students learning more relevant skills				

3) Sustainability and Local Ownership:
3.1) Which EHELD project components are most sustainable? Which are fragile or will require continued support? (Prompt: How can this be improved upon?)

	Do you agree with the following statements:	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Strongly Agree 4
3.4	The university(s) take ownership for providing ed. At the CoEs				
3.5	The university(s) take leadership for providing ed. At the CoEs				
3.6	The university(s) take accountability for providing ed. At the CoEs				

3.10) Are there areas of assistance that could be phased out?

3.11) If yes, what are the reasons e.g., sufficient level of success and sustainability have been achieved, continued assistance would yield diminishing or limited returns, or they are too costly?

3.12) Is the current scope of the project appropriate to ensure sustainability?

3.14) Should certain components be either prioritized or limited?

3.16) What are the prospects for sustainability of the (expected) results produced by this program?

3.17) What (expected) results appear to be less sustainable?

3.18) What are the reasons?

3.19) What recommendations can be made for improving these?

4) Gender:

4.1) What gender strategies has the project developed and used?

4.3) Have there been changes in **attitudes** of EHELD participants about gender issues? (Prompt: By male, female students? male, female professors?)

4.4) Have there been changes in **behaviors** of EHELD participants?(Prompt: By male, female students? male, female professors?)

4.5) What is the effectiveness of EHELD's approach to increasing women's access to these HE programs?

4.7) What are the prospects that these efforts to support women's participation will be sustained?

5) Project and Follow-on Design:

	Do you agree with the following statements	**Strongly Disagree 1**	**Disagree 2**	**Agree 3**	**Strongly Agree 4**
5.1	You find the approaches to monitor the project to be effective				
5.3	You find the tools being used to monitor the project to be effective				

	Do you agree with the following statements	**Strongly Disagree 1**	**Disagree 2**	**Agree 3**	**Strongly Agree 4**
5.4	You find the approaches to evaluate the project to be effective				

What specific, actionable recommendations regarding the:

5.15) Scope of a possible follow-on award or new higher education activity can be made based on the lessons learned and best practices?

5.16) Is the original program design framework still valid?

5.17) Or have framework parameters changed? If so, what are the reasons?

5.19) Are the expected results still applicable in each of the component areas?

5.20) What unexpected opportunities have surfaced?

5.21) What unexpected challenges have surfaced?

5.24) What are the lessons learned from the project implementation thus far?

5.25) What are the best practices emerging from this project? (Prompt: Are there successes that could be replicated for follow-on programs or future projects in other contexts?)

5.30 Also, which types of interventions which show less promise and should be avoided?

RTI **Date: _____**

Name:_____
Position:_____
Role on the Project:_____
January 23, 2014

In conducting the EHELD Mid-Term Assessment we are seeking input from EHELD project personnel as well as students, professors, the private sector, GoL and other stakeholders. As an RTI Consortium member we are requesting that you respond to the survey below with TYPED answers. Please ignore the ordering of the question numbers as it is part of a coding scheme. Your responses will be aggregated with others during the analysis and therefore will remain anonymous. Please return your responses by January 29. If you have any questions, please email me at pjaflage@yahoo.com. Thank you in advance for your assistance with this request. We hope this information will provide a basis for confirming those aspects of the project that are working well and for identifying opportunities for further improvements.

Pamela Allen: Team Leader

1. Project Performance:

1.6) What adjustments are recommended for improving the project's likelihood of meeting the project's objectives and expected results (with a focus on those indicators/activities that are lagging)? Prompts: Maintain progress? Improve on lagging items?

1.9) How effective was the EHELD project's design and strategy (thus far) in identifying challenges in the Liberian higher education context? Please identify significant challenges that were identified and what the project did to respond to them? (Prompts: obstacles at the universities; linkages with the private sector; GOL's response to improving the program; the students' interests; the consortium members' contributions?

1.10) How effective was the EHELD project's implementation (thus far) responding to challenges in the Liberian higher education context?

1.12) What challenges were identified; what actions were taken and what were the results?

1.13) What challenges were not adequately addressed and what was the effect on the project?

1.14) Have faculty at (UL/CU) taken on responsibility for components or elements of the project as expected?

1.15) If yes, what components or elements have UL/CU faculty taken responsibility for?

1.16) If no, what components or elements still require attention for local capacity development?

2) Project Management and Implementation

2.60) What successes have occurred by implementing the EHELD components? (Prompts: Smart Start, Summer Start, Fast Start)

a) Students' reactions?

b) Were activities appropriate for females?

2.61) What challenges have occurred by implementing the EHELD components?(Prompts: Gender, equipment, tools)

2.62) Are there program design gaps that hinder the achievement of results?

2.63) Are there organizational gaps that hinder the achievement of results?

2.64) Is the program being implemented in a cost effective way? (Prompt: are there project funds being spent on ineffective activities that could be better spent on other activities?) If so, which activities? (Prompt: How could it operate differently to achieve more with its resources?)

Do you have any other comments based on your experience with EHELD that may be useful to share at this stage of the project?

Thank you for your responses.

UL/CU CIRCLE **Date: _____**

1. Project Performance:

1.6) What adjustments are recommended for improving the project's likelihood of meeting the project's objectives and expected results (with a focus on those indicators/activities that are lagging)? Prompts: Maintain progress? Improve on lagging items?

1.9) How effective was the EHELD project's design and strategy (thus far) in identifying challenges in the Liberian higher education context? Please identify significant challenges that were identified and what the project did to respond to them? (Prompts: obstacles at the universities; linkages with the private sector; GOL's response to improving the program; the students' interests; the consortium members' contributions?

1.10) How effective was the EHELD project's implementation (thus far) responding to challenges in the Liberian higher education context?

1.12) What challenges were identified; what actions were taken and what were the results?

1.13) What challenges were not adequately addressed and what was the effect on the project?

1.14) Have faculty at (UL/CU) taken on responsibility for components or elements of the project as expected?

1.15) If yes, what components or elements have UL/CU faculty taken responsibility for?

1.16) If no, what components or elements still require attention for local capacity development?

2) Project Management and Implementation

	Do you agree with the following statements:	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Strongly Agree 4
2.1	EHELD has **effectively**[53] engaged with the partner universities				
2.2	EHELD has **effectively** y engaged with the private sector				
2.3	EHELD has **effectively** engaged with the GoL (via NCEH)				

	Do you agree with the following statements:	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Strongly Agree 4
2.7	EHELD has **collaboratively**[54] engaged with UL Leadership				
2.8	EHELD has **collaboratively** engaged with UL Faculty				
2.9	EHELD has **collaboratively** engaged with CU Leadership				
2.10	EHELD has **collaboratively** engaged with CU Faculty				

	Do you agree with the following statements:	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Strongly Agree 4
2.11	EHELD has **transparently** engaged with UL Leadership				

[53] "Effectively" is operationally defined as to whether each partner has assumed the expected EHELD role by making resources available, participating as expected, and adopting agreed upon practices or behaviors.

[54] "Collaborative" is defined as joint planning, mentoring relationships, open communication, responsiveness to challenges and issues.

2.12	EHELD has **transparently** engaged with UL Faculty				
2.13	EHELD has **transparently** engaged with CU Leadership				
2.14	EHELD has **transparently** engaged with CU Faculty				

	Do you agree with the following statements:	**Strongly Disagree 1**	**Disagree 2**	**Agree 3**	**Strongly Agree 4**
2.15	EHELD has **effectively** engaged with UL Leadership				
2.16	EHELD has **effectively** engaged with UL Faculty				
2.17	EHELD has **effectively** engaged with CU Leadership				
2.18	EHELD has **effectively** engaged with CU Faculty				

What recommendations can be made to improve engagement with:

2.19) UL leadership

2.20) UL faculty

2.21) CU leadership

2.22) CU faculty

What recommendations can be made to encourage greater:

2.23) UL ownership

2.24) UL leadership

2.25) UL accountability

2.26) CU ownership

2.27) CU leadership

2.28) CU accountability

What approaches led to the most effective relationships with the private sector: (Prompt: which private sector partners have been most engaged? Which least engaged?)

2.29) In general

2.30) Through the Liberia Engineering and Agriculture Pact (LEAP)?

2.31) What recommendations can be made to improve private sector engagement?

	Do you agree with the following statements:	**Strongly Disagree 1**	**Disagree 2**	**Agree 3**	**Strongly Agree 4**

2.32	EHELD has effectively engaged the GoL				
2.33	EHELD has effectively engaged the NCHE				
2.34	EHELD has effectively engaged the Ministry of Agriculture				
2.35	EHELD has effectively engaged the Ministry of Public Works				

What recommendations can be made to improve this relationship with the:

2.36) GOL

2.37) National Council on Higher Education (NCHE)

2.38) Ministry of Agriculture

2.39) Ministry of Public Works

2.40) What is the effectiveness of the consortium model in the implementation of the project to date?

2.41) What are the challenges of the consortium model in the implementation of the project to date?

2.42) What steps should be taken to address challenges moving forward?

	Do you (Univ. Leadership) agree with the following statements	**Strongly Disagree 1**	**Disagree 2**	**Agree 3**	**Strongly Agree 4**
2.43	You find the EHELD proj. to be appropriate				
2.44	You find the EHELD proj. to be relevant				
2.45	You find yourself receptive to the EHELD project				

2.46) What is the impact of the revised curricula?

	Do you (Univ. Faculty) agree with the following statements	**Strongly Disagree 1**	**Disagree 2**	**Agree 3**	**Strongly Agree 4**
2.47	You find the EHELD proj. to be appropriate				
2.48	You find the EHELD proj. to be relevant				
2.49	You find yourself receptive to the EHELD project				

2.50) What is the impact of the revised curricula?

2.60) What successes have occurred by implementing the EHELD components? (Prompts: Smart Start, Summer Start, Fast Start)

a) Students' reactions?

b) Were activities appropriate for females?

2.61) What challenges have occurred by implementing the EHELD components?(Prompts: Gender, equipment, tools)

2.62) Are there program design gaps that hinder the achievement of results?

2.63) Are there organizational gaps that hinder the achievement of results?

How effectively is EHELD in addressing challenges to developing a CoE:
2.66) Institutionally-related:

2.67) Policy-related:

2.68) Other systemic issues?

	Do you agree with the following statements: The universities have been receptive to:	**Strongly Disagree 1**	**Disagree 2**	**Agree 3**	**Strongly Agree 4**
2.69	The project design				
2.70	The goals and objectives				
2.71	The outcomes, e.g. new curricula, equipment, faculty receiving training				

	Do you agree with the following statements: The private sector partners have been receptive to:	**Strongly Disagree 1**	**Disagree 2**	**Agree 3**	**Strongly Agree 4**
2.72	The project design				
2.73	The goals and objectives				
2.74	The outcomes, e.g. students learning more relevant skills				

3) Sustainability and Local Ownership:
3.1) Which EHELD project components are most sustainable? Which are fragile or will require continued support? (Prompt: How can this be improved upon?)

	Do you agree with the following statements:	**Strongly Disagree 1**	**Disagree 2**	**Agree 3**	**Strongly Agree 4**
3.4	The university(s) take ownership for providing ed at the CoEs				
3.5	The university(s) take leadership for providing ed. at the CoEs				
3.6	The university(s) take accountability for providing ed. at the CoEs				

3.7) What role have the university administrations played in supporting the EHELD goals

3.8) What role have the university administrations played in helping ensure sustainability of (expected) project results?

3.9) What systems have been put into place to ensure sustainability of the CoEs at the universities?

3.10) Are there areas of assistance that could be phased out?

3.11) If yes, what are the reasons (Prompts: sufficient level of success and sustainability have been achieved, continued assistance would yield diminishing or limited returns, or they are too costly?

3.12) Is the current scope of the project appropriate to ensure sustainability?

3.14) Should certain components be either prioritized or limited?

3.15) What are the prospects for achievement of the (expected) results produced by this program?

3.16) What are the prospects for sustainability of the (expected) results produced by this program?

3.17) What (expected) results appear to be less sustainable?

3.18) What are the reasons?

3.19) What recommendations can be made for improving these?

4) Gender:

4.1) What gender strategies has the project developed and used?

4.3) Have there been changes in **attitudes** of EHELD participants about gender issues? (Prompt: By male, female students? male, female professors?)

4.4) Have there been changes in **behaviors** of EHELD participants?(Prompt: By male, female students? male, female professors?)

4.5) What is the effectiveness of EHELD's approach to increasing women's access to these HE programs?

4.7) What are the prospects that these efforts to support women's participation will be sustained?

5) Project and Follow-on Design:

	Do you agree with the following statements	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Strongly Agree 4
5.1	You find the approaches to monitor the project to be effective				
5.3	You find the tools being used to monitor the project to be effective				

	Do you agree with the following statements	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Strongly Agree 4
5.4	You find the approaches to evaluate the project to be effective				

What are your specific, actionable recommendations regarding the:

5.15) Scope of a possible follow-on award or new higher education activity can be made based on the lessons learned and best practices?
5.16) Is the original program design framework still valid?
5.17) Or have framework parameters changed? If so, what are the reasons?
5.19) Are the expected results still applicable in each of the component areas?
5.20) What unexpected opportunities have surfaced?

5.21) What unexpected challenges have surfaced?

5.24) What are the main lessons learned from the project implementation thus far?

5.25) What are the best practices emerging from this project? (Prompt: Are there successes that could be replicated for follow-on programs or future projects in other contexts?)

5.30 Also, which types of interventions which show less promise and should be avoided?

What is in place for:
5.31) Assessment for the program?

5.32) Assessment for the capacity and sustainability of the CoEs?

5.33) How will the assessment strategies promote learning, for the program?

5.34) How will the assessment strategies promote learning, for the institutions?

USAID **Date: _____**

1) Project Performance:
1.1) What components of the EHELD project are on track to meet its overall objectives?

1.2) What components of the EHELD project are not proceeding as expected
Prompts:

- What about faculty in non-degree courses?
- Contract faculty hired?
- Visiting faculty hired

2) Project Management and Implementation

2.40) With references to project documents describing expected and actual inputs from consortium members, what is the effectiveness of the consortium model in the implementation of the project to date?

2.41) What are the challenges of the consortium model in the implementation of the project to date?

2.42) What steps should be taken to address challenges moving forward?

2.64) Is the program being implemented in a cost effective way? (Prompt: are there project funds being spent on ineffective activities that could be better spent on other activities?) If so, which activities? (Prompt: How could it operate differently to achieve more with its resources?)

5.16) Is the original program design framework still valid?

5.17) Or have framework parameters changed? If so, what are the reasons?

5.19) Are the expected results still applicable in each of the component areas?

5.20) What unexpected opportunities have surfaced?

5.21) What unexpected challenges have surfaced?

B. FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION (FGD) GUIDE

EHELD Assessment Guide

Group:_____ Date:_____ Time:_____

Participants:_____

_____

Introduction. In this activity, we will focus the group discussion around the five thematic areas of interest using a SWOT analysis framework for information gathering and analysis by conducting an internal/external assessment of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. The purpose of the ***internal*** assessment is to identify and analyze the internal aspects of the project from the perspective of this group of participants or stakeholders and, based on this assessment, to pinpoint strengths and weaknesses.

We'll then lead the group to scan the ***external*** environment influencing the project and the participation of the group members. The external environment that influences the project may not be under the control of the project, such as the political, social and economic context along with emerging trends in education that affect the stakeholders and participants. The external situation affecting the project, from the perspective of the group, should be considered in terms of which opportunities and threats are most affecting their experience with the project.

PLEASE NOTE: *Don't confuse "external opportunities and Threats" with "strengths and weaknesses". An*

Internal Strength or Weakness is something over which the organization and the people within have direct control (location, staff, hours, policies, procedures, etc.). If you can do something about it, it is an internal strength or weakness. If it is not something over which the organization and the people within have control -- if you can't do something about it -- it is an External Opportunity or Threat (population shifts, the economy, people's value system, competition, women returning to the work force, etc.).

Instructions: As we begin our review process, we need to identify internal strengths and weaknesses of the project. Let's discuss five areas of interest, one by one, from your perspective: (1) Project performance, (2) Project Management and Implementation, (3) Sustainability of ownership, (4) Gender Issues, and (5) Project Design. Let's take 10 minutes to discuss each areas of interest.

As we discuss each area of interest, we'll list the two strengths (A) and two weaknesses (B) you agree as most important to consider for making this program a successful experience for you.

FOR EACH STRENGTH, PLEASE CONSIDER HOW TO PRESERVE AND MAINTAIN THEM (C); THEN, CONSIDER HOW EACH WEAKNESS CAN BE ADDRESSED (D)?

Area of Interest: _____

A. STRENGTHS (Internal)	C. HOW THE PROJECT CAN MAINTAIN THESE STRENGTHS?
B. WEAKNESSES (Internal)	**D. HOW THE PROJECT COULD TACKLE THESE WEAKNESSES?**

Next, in the left column below, list the recent or future external trends and changes – opportunities (E) and Threats (F) - that you think will have the greatest impact on the project and your experience over the next 3 years. In the right column, list possible responses over the next three to take full advantage of the external changes and trends?

Area of Interest: _____

(E) Opportunities (External)	(G) HOW THESE OPPORTUNITIES CAN BE UTILIZED?

(F) THREATS (External)	(H) HOW THESE THREATS CAN BE MITIGATED?

Finally, for each SWOT identified, identify from your perspective, who has primary responsibility for actions on strengths and weaknesses (individuals or the project) and for opportunities and threats (institutions or the enabling environment)

Area of Interest: _____

(A) Strengths	Individual or organizational level	(B) Weaknesses	Individual or organizational level
E. Opportunities	Institutional- or Enabling level	**F. Threats**	Institutional- or Enabling level

C. SURVEYS

Consortium Members **Date:_____**

Name:_____
Position:_____
Role on the Project:_____
January 25, 2014

In conducting the EHELD Mid-Term Assessment, we are seeking input from EHELD project personnel as well as students, professors, the private sector, GoL and other stakeholders. As an RTI Consortium member we are requesting that you respond to the questionnaire below with TYPED answers. Please ignore the ordering of the question numbers as it is part of a coding scheme. Your responses will be aggregated with others during the analysis and therefore will remain anonymous. Please return your responses by January 29. If you have any questions, please email me at pjaflage@yahoo.com. Thank you in advance for your assistance with this request. We hope this information will provide a basis for confirming those aspects of the project that are working well and for identifying opportunities for further improvements.
Pamela Allen: Assessment Team Leader

Questions:

C1) Describe in your own words the objective(s) of the consortium approach.
C2) Describe your role within the consortium.
C3) What are your primary responsibilities for the project?
C4) How have you fulfilled these responsibilities thus far?
C5) Is the consortium approach working from your perspective?
C6) What aspect(s) of the consortium is/are working most effectively? i.e., is achieving what was planned to achieve.

1.6) What adjustments are recommended for improving the project's likelihood of meeting the project's objectives with regard to the consortium approach (with a focus on those indicators/activities that are lagging)?
1.7) Are there changes that need to be made to:

- Maintain progress?
- Improve on lagging activities?

1.9) How effective has the consortium approach been in addressing challenges in the Liberian higher education context? Examples, placing contract professors, visiting professors, students attending schools outside Liberia, faculty attending schools outside Liberia, curricula development, etc.
1.10) How effective was the EHELD project's implementation (thus far) in responding to challenges in the Liberian higher education context?
1.11 Were those responses to identified challenges effective?
1.12 If yes, what were the challenges, what actions were taken, and what were the results?
1.13 If not, what was the effect on the project?
1.14) Have faculty at (UL/CU) taken on responsibility for components or elements of the project?
1.15) If yes, what components or elements have UL/CU faculty taken responsibility for?
1.16) If no, what components or elements still require attention for local capacity development?

2.60) What implementation successes have occurred by implementing the EHELD components? e.g., Smart Start, Summer Start, Fast Start, Library, Equipment)
2.61) What implementation challenges have occurred by implementing the EHELD components? (e.g., gender issues, equipment, tools)
2.62) Are there program design gaps that hinder the achievement of results?
2.63) Are there organizational gaps that hinder the achievement of results?

3.1) a) Which EHELD project components are most sustainable?
b) Which are fragile or will require continued support?
3.2) To what degree is there university:

- Ownership for providing quality education at the CoEs?

- Leadership for providing quality education at the CoEs?
- Accountability for providing quality education at the CoEs?

3.7) What role(s) have the university administrations played in supporting the EHELD goals?
3.8) What role(s) have the university administrations played in helping ensure sustainability of CoEs?
3.9) What systems have been put into place to ensure sustainability of the CoEs at the universities?
3.10) Are there areas of assistance that could be phased out?
3.11) If yes, what are the reasons e.g., sufficient level of success and sustainability have been achieved, continued assistance would yield diminishing or limited returns, or they are too costly?
3.12) Is the current scope of the project appropriate to ensure sustainability?
3.17) What (expected) results appear to be less sustainable?
3.18) What is limiting the sustainability of these results?
3.19) What recommendations can be made for improving their sustainability?

4.1) To what extent has the project effectively integrated gender strategies?
4.3) Have there been changes in attitudes of EHELD participants about gender issues?
4.5) What is the effectiveness of EHELD's approach to increasing women's participation in HE?
4.6) What are the prospects that these gender responsive efforts will be sustained?

C7) Has sending graduate students to teach at the Summer Start program in Liberia been an effective component of the Consortium? (Please ignore if already mentioned).
C8) Have there been any challenges with regard to this component?
C9) If yes, what are they?
C10) What was done to resolve them?
C11) Were they successful in resolving them?
C12) Do you have any other comments based on your experience with EHELD that may be useful to share at this stage of the project?

Thank you for your responses.

Graduate Students attending universities outside of Liberia

January 25, 2014
In conducting the EHELD Mid-Term Evaluation we are seeking input from EHELD project personnel as well as students, professors, the private sector, GoL and other stakeholders. We are requesting that you respond to the survey below with TYPED answers. Your responses will be aggregated with others during the analysis and therefore will remain anonymous. Please return your responses by January 29. If you have any questions, please email me at pjaflage@yahoo.com. Thank you in advance for your assistance with this request. We hope this information will provide a basis for confirming those aspects of the project that are working well and for identifying opportunities for further improvements.
Pamela Allen: Team Leader

Questions:

G1) What is your academic major in what department?
G2) When did you arrive for your study?
G3) What were your expectations about how this portion of the program would be executed?
G4) How has the communication with other members of the EHELD consortium been to date?
G5) How has communication with your home university (UL, CU) been to date?

G6) Have you experienced any unexpected challenges?
G7) If so, were these addressed? If yes, how? If no, what has been the effect on your participation in the program?
G8) What components of the EHELD consortium do you find to be most effective?
G9) What component of the EHELD consortium do you find to be least effective?
G10) Have you made suggestions or recommendations regarding the program?
G11) If yes, can you describe your suggestions, to whom they were made, and when?
G12) If yes, were these effectively addressed?
G13) What job do you hope to attain upon returning to Liberia, or will you return to your former position? Please explain.
C14) Do you have any other comments based on your experience with EHELD that may be useful to share at this stage of the project?

Thank you for your responses.

Summer Start Graduate Students

January 25, 2014
In conducting the EHELD Mid-Term Assessment we are seeking input from EHELD project personnel as well as students, professors, the private sector, GoL and other stakeholders. We are requesting that you respond to the survey below with TYPED answers. Your responses will be aggregated with others during the analysis and therefore will remain anonymous. Please return your responses by January 29. If you have any questions, please email me at pjaflage@yahoo.com. Thank you in advance for your assistance with this request. We hope this information will provide a basis for confirming those aspects of the project that are working well and for identifying opportunities for further improvements.
Pamela Allen: Team Leader

Questions:
SS1) What is your degree program?
SS2) What motivated you to participate in the Summer Start Program?
SS3) Was this your first experience living and working overseas? In Africa?
SS4) When did you work at the Summer Start program?
SS5) What was your role in the program?
SS6) What was your orientation to the program? e.g. written, presentation, other?
SS7) What type of *personal* preparation did you make prior to departure? e.g., selection of appropriate clothing for the climate, etc.
SS8) What type of *professional* preparation did you make prior to departure, e.g., research, curricula development, course notes?
SS9) What type of orientation did you receive when you arrived?
SS10) How did you find your accommodations? Were they as you expected? Unexpected?
SS11) What did you learn while you were at Summer Start?
SS12) Please feel free to provide any other information that would be relevant to the assessment.

D. OBSERVATIONS

Campus:_____ **Observation Check List** **Date_____**

EHELD Mid-Term Assessment

Introduction (Will request inventory from RTI/EHELD of all facilities, building and upgrades, furnishings and equipment.

Buildings: The purpose of observing the condition of buildings revolves around primarily safety. Is the building safe to work or live in, e.g., asbestos, pest infestation, cracked or broken windows, broken doors, etc. Also, locks for doors and windows.

Dormitories: There was mention that the dorm rooms were not safe for the women at UL. Statements were made that the windows were not secure, lighting poor, and guards located near the men's dorms instead of close to the women's dorms. It will be important to observe these for this purpose. Both men's and women's dorms should be examined.

Laboratories? How many? Safety equipment for the students, eye protection, cloaks, etc.

Computer rooms? How many computers. All working? How are they assigned?

Classrooms: In addition to the above type observations, look at the quality of the condition of the desks, chairs, chalk board, any equipment. Lighting.

Equipment: With regard to equipment determine type and quality, if it is working and being maintained, if possible. This will range from computers to a tractor and farm tools.

Chemicals: Determine if they are in good supply, if there are back up supplies when the ones currently being used are finished. Other agricultural inputs, e.g., seeds, fertilizer, etc.

Transportation (buses): There should be two buses. See if they are in good condition. Running regularly, on schedule?

Item being Observed	Description	Comments
Buildings		
Eg. Engineering Classroom building	*Fair*	*Front door broken* *Cracked front window*
Dorm Rooms		
Eg. Women's dorm rooms near street	*Poor*	*Broken windows (3)* *No screens*
Men's dorm room		
Classrooms		
Equipment		

Item being Observed	Description	Comments
Chemicals		
Transportation		
Other		

Classroom
Equipment

ANNEX IV: DISCLOSURES OF CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The EHELD Assessment involved analyzing the context of higher education in Liberia, EHELD implementation status and results to date, including challenges and opportunities in this context, from the perspectives of the implementers, beneficiaries and other stakeholders. The assessment design and methodology included a purposeful sample of interviewees. As the assessment addressed the status and results at the two universities, it was necessary to interview the people who were most closely associated with the project. The Assessment Report reflects the views of the assessment team and based solely on the team's data collection methods, analyses, and results reporting.

The Core Assessment Team that conducted the EHELD Assessment included the following relevant expertise: *Team Leader/Senior Assessment Specialist* with training and extensive technical and leadership experience in USAID project design and implementation in developing contexts, project-related assessment and documentation, and higher education; a *Tertiary Education Specialist* with research and assessment experience on development of higher education, including in Liberia; a *Liberian Education Context Specialist* with knowledge of the history, status, challenges, and institutional dynamics of higher education in Liberia; an *M&E Specialist* with knowledge of USAID's monitoring and evaluation expectations and standards in Liberia; and a *Logistics Coordinator* to facilitate the teams movement to engage with over 70 respondents in multiple locations in a limited time period.

We certify that no member of the Core Assessment Team described above has any association with the EHELD project; and that TMG and L-MEP are independent contractors and have no direct affiliation with EHELD.

ANNEX V: SUMMARY BRIEFER FOR PUBLIC CONSUMPTION (TBD)

ANNEX VI: BIBLIOGRAPHY

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