

## LOCAL EMPOWERMENT FOR GOVERNMENT INCLUSION AND TRANSPARENCY (LEGIT)

### Work-planning and Technical Project Start-Up

Trip Dates: April 12 – April 27

---

#### **Objective of Trip:**

Visit county and city officials to gain a better understanding of their potential needs to inform the LEGIT work plan, as well as to collect evidence to inform the county and city selection criteria. Meet with other donors and other USAID projects to inform them about LEGIT and identify potential areas for collaboration. Meet with Government of Liberia (GOL) representatives from the central level to understand key issues and challenges.

#### **Tasks:**

- Conduct meetings
- Travel to three counties and capital cities
- Draft work plan GANTT chart
- Draft county and city selection criteria

---

### COMMENTS AND OBSERVATIONS

#### County Superintendents:

We met with three Superintendents— Joseph Dannah of Grand Bassa, John Buway of Margibi, and Samuel Brown of Bomi County. Some of the main capacity challenges among County staff that they pointed to are: low customer service skills, lack of computer / technology skills (even as simple as typing skills or using Excel), and using GOL systems like IFMIS. Recommendations for training include results-based management and planning, monitoring and evaluation of services, and report writing. There is a need for across-the-board staff training because many Superintendents complained that simple things, like getting someone to write a report, are very difficult.

In addition, County Superintendents told us that they have a difficult time making key decisions on county administration and services because they must always wait for instructions or consultation from the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA). This reliance on central decision-making from MIA and other Ministries, Agencies, and Commissions (MACs) hampers their ability to work independently at the local level.

Many counties are very poor and rely on the County Development Funds (CDF) and Social Development Funds (SDF) to pay for key projects. However, Superintendents are frustrated with national legislators because they feel like the elected officials meddle with the Funds in order to gain favors. Superintendents would like to see the funds better managed by counties so that they can better oversee which projects are funded (and also make sure that projects that get started are actually completed). The process of receiving the funds allocated to the counties is also riddled with problems—for example, in Bomi County which is one of the poorest in Liberia, the Superintendent Samuel Brown said that they had not received their \$200,000 CDF allocation in the last two years (*n.b.: this may be a problem in most, if not all, counties*). Bomi has about \$2.5 million in an escrow fund but they have only been able to use about \$1.8 million of that to implement projects. Mr. Brown

said that he would really like to see the Budget Law updated to give more authority to county officials.

Mr. Brown also noted that the County Superintendents do not have much control over the CDF decision-making process. As part of this, there is a County Sitting which is managed by a Project Management Committee (PMC) and, in practice, it is the Chairman of the PMC who is really ‘in charge’ of deciding which projects move forward. According to Mr. Brown, the County Superintendent is just a ‘spectator’ and has no actual mechanism for providing oversight of the PMC process.

Another problem facing counties is that many of the projects that County Superintendents are asked to address are not within their full control or mandate. For example, road and bridge construction is supposed to be led by the Ministry of Public Works (MoPW) but, because of MoPW’s own challenges in funding and slow implementation, counties allocate CDF funds to pay for road and bridge projects to try to speed up the process. Citizens also complain about water issues (supposed to be handled by Liberia Water and Sewer Corporation [LWSC]), security issues (supposed to be handled by the Liberian National Police [LNP]), and electricity (supposed to be handled by the Liberia Electricity Corporation [LEC]).

#### County Service Centers (CSC):

Both of the CSC Coordinators we met with—Mr. Sagacious Gardoe in Grand Bassa and Mr. Sam Atticus in Margibi—were very enthusiastic about their work and clearly cared about what they were doing. They were also both young (seemed to be in their early 20’s) and very energetic. Mr. Atticus is currently only ‘volunteering’ so he is not being paid, and it is unclear what Mr. Gardoe’s payment/payroll status is. (*Note: we visited the Margibi CSC two days before its official opening so, they were still doing prep work on the building and had not begun providing services there.*)

In Grand Bassa, the CSC has been operational for 9 months and has already processed almost 4,000 documents and generated over 2.2 million Liberian Dollars in revenues. However, those revenues go directly to the Liberia Revenue Authority (LRA) so, the counties do not get to keep any percentage of the revenues generated locally. [*Aside: I believe that the Draft Local Government Act would allow counties to keep a portion of their locally-generated revenues; we can look into that further.*] One of the biggest revenue sources has been from petty traders who were not previously registered; they have now been brought into the formal system. The prices for each service are clearly posted in multiple places to reduce opportunities for bribes or corruption.

The Grand Bassa CSC is serving citizens of not only Grand Bassa, but also Rivercess, Sinoe, Margibi, and Montserrado Counties. The other CSCs are expected to do the same. This helps reduce trips to Monrovia for citizens, even if their county does not have a CSC, because they can visit a CSC in a neighboring county.

In the Deconcentration Platform, fourteen MACs were designated to provide services at CSCs. The Ministry of Transportation (MoT) is the only MAC which has not yet rolled out its services in Grand Bassa. MoT probably will not do so in the other CSCs either (in Margibi, they were unsure when MoT staff would begin working). It is unknown when MoT will be ready to provide services at the CSCs. We heard that they are struggling just to keep up with demand in Monrovia.

The Grand Bassa CSC has done a survey about the services provided. According to their results, the effectiveness and efficiency of the CSC was graded well. Mr. Gardoe also told us that they are doing electronic archiving of documents at the Grand Bassa CSC and they produce reports each week about their statistics—number of users, number of birth certificates, number of marriage licenses, etc. They also have weekly meetings (every Monday morning) to discuss the reports and issues, performance, etc. They have developed a standardized reporting template for sharing data with the County Superintendent, MIA, and other MACs.



City Mayors:

*Note: Each city in Liberia is governed by a 'City Corporation' which includes the Mayor's Office and governs key services, develops city ordinances, etc.*

We met with two city mayors—Mrs. Julia Bono of Buchanan (Grand Bassa County) and Mr. Eddie Murphy of Kakata City (Margibi County). The mayor of Tubmanburg in Bomu County turned out to be unavailable when we arrived.

Some of the main revenue sources are:

- Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) for waste collection
- Public toilets (collect a small user fee which supports maintenance)
- Parking lots
- Business operating licenses and fees
- Health inspection fees
- Fines / violations
- Cemetery fees

Some of the key services that cities should provide according to mayors:

- Clearing market shops from being too close to the road and blocking sidewalks (which forces people to walk in the street and then creates both pedestrian and vehicle congestion)
- Mowing grass (most cities have a crew of men with machetes who hack away at vegetation instead of using more modern equipment like lawnmowers)
- Public spaces like parks and playgrounds
- Replanting trees and beautification efforts

Waste collection is a major issue that each city is tackling. In Margibi and Grand Bassa Counties, both had PPPs with 'NC Senator' for this. [The Mayor in Margibi said that they would have preferred to use 'Zoomline' for the PPP but, they were too expensive]. Margibi only has one truck while Grand Bassa has two. From the city perspective, we heard that it was difficult to enforce fee collection and that they needed more waste collection trucks / equipment (like dust bins and compactors). However, in meeting with civil society representatives in Margibi, we were told that, in fact, people had initially paid the fees but then the city contractor never came to collect their waste. So, the citizens were forced to pay third party groups to haul away the waste. That's when residents stopped paying the city waste collection fees because the service proved not to be reliable.

In addition to waste collection, the Mayor of Margibi also highlighted the need for plastic recycling. He said that this has become a major issue in and around the city, and it is especially affecting farmers as plastic bags are littering fertile agricultural lands near the city.

The City Mayor of Buchanan, Mrs. Bono, seems to be adept at managing revenues (something we did not see or hear in other cities). In addition to the 50,000 USD annual allocation she gets from the central government, she said that they were able to raise an additional 100,000 USD in the last 6 months. She used these funds to renovate her offices and construct a new city hall and banquet center (the banquet center can be rented for weddings and offers an additional income source). Other City Mayors did not seem as concerned with raising and managing their own revenues; they had very low income generation from own-source revenues. Mrs. Bono said that she also sends the Buchanan City Corporation staff to Monrovia for specialized training.

Working with GOL partners:

We were told from multiple sources that capacity is very low among GOL staff at the county and city level (and even in Monrovia).

The impression that I got from meeting with County Superintendents and City Mayors is that their enthusiasm for 'getting things done' varies greatly. Some seem genuinely motivated to make service improvements to benefit their citizens. Others used the right rhetoric but, there seemed to be a lack of genuine belief or desire to implement major changes.

Many MACs use GOL's Information Management Information System (IFMIS) and we have heard that it works generally well. It could be an important reporting and information tool for our GOL partners. There are questions with IT security and data security though, especially as it is rolled out to more MACs and decentralized actors. Another IFMIS recommendation is that reporting should be shared across counties; the data should not just be sent centrally to Monrovia.

*Outreach and citizen engagement:*

Conducting outreach at markets seems to be a good way to reach citizens and share information. At present, County Superintendents and City Mayors seem to mainly share information with clan leaders, paramount chiefs, and other traditional leaders. They then rely on them to spread the word to their communities. However, one CSO told us that they have developed an innovative way of sharing information—they travel to markets or other areas with large speakers and play music to attract people's attention. After 10-15 minutes of playing music, they make announcements and hand out pamphlets/information (often in cartoon form with pictures). They then play more music but also answer people's questions and continue to hand out information. They said that playing music is important because the typical town crier, who uses a megaphone to shout messages to people, does not attract as much attention as the music does.

Jingles on the radio were mentioned as another potential method of outreach. However, one CSO representative told us that while radio messaging is okay, it is better to do person-to-person outreach. This allows people to ask questions to better understand the information that is being shared with them. One-sided messaging, the CSOs believe, is not as effective as two-way messaging.

Another CSO representative also questioned the results of previous M&E work done by the counties, in relation to CSCs. They believed that the results had been 'faked.'

Overall, almost all CSO representatives suggested that town halls and other outreach meetings are 'stage managed' and that real engagement does not happen there. They feel that County Superintendents or City Mayors simply call on the people that they know will be positive or favorable. Active CSOs felt that they were not called on during Q&A sessions or allowed to speak because the GOL representatives were afraid of what the CSOs might say. According to the CSOs, county and city staff do not open themselves up to receiving real criticism or having to answer difficult questions. CSO representatives want to see CSOs have better one-on-one relationships with County Superintendents or City Mayors so that they can be stronger advocates for citizen needs.

*Infrastructure / Equipment Problems:*

Electricity is a major problem everywhere. While visiting the Grand Bassa CSC, their generator actually caught on fire and power was out for several minutes. The CSC Coordinator told us that they regularly overspend on their budget for generator fuel (*aside: while visiting the building, they were pumping freezing cold A/C into rooms that were not being used and, in some offices, they were running the A/C at the same time that the windows were open—simple improvements in efficiency could probably help them cut down on the amount of energy they spend*). Several people mentioned that they would like to harness solar electricity.

Two of the five meetings that we were supposed to have at public buildings were not held in the public officials' offices—one was held on a porch and another was held at a private home. The first was held on the porch because neither the official nor any of his staff were working at the office and, when the official did arrive, he did not have a key to his own office. The second meeting was held at a private residence because, we were told, everyone leaves the office around 11am because there is no A/C and it's too hot to work indoors after that. In one other case, when we arrived at a public building, all of the staff were sitting outside on the porch (looking down at their phones or listening to music). It was only when we arrived that they went inside to sit behind their desks but, as we were leaving, they just returned to sit outside (and this was a building that did have A/C). So, in addition to

infrastructure and A/C issues, there seems to be a generally lax attitude about getting work done quickly and efficiently.

Many Superintendents and Mayors also pointed to problems with mobility. Most do not have official government vehicles or motorcycles, which makes it difficult for them to travel around to do citizen outreach. For example, the CSC Coordinator in Grand Bassa said that he would really like to do ‘road shows’ to markets about the services that the CSC offers, but he doesn’t have a vehicle to do so. The Ministry of Health (MoH) has done some ‘teams on wheels’ activities to issue birth certificates, so Mr. Gardoe thought that the MoH’s activities and lessons learned could be replicated by other MACs if they had a vehicle or motorcycle.

#### Coordination with Other USAID Programs

*USAID/Governance and Economic Management Support (GEMS):* Vicki Cooper, Chief of Party (COP) of GEMS, highlighted the ‘convening power’ of a USAID project. She said that when a USAID project calls a meeting, representatives from the MACs will attend—simply getting people into the room and starting the conversation about an issue is important. Then, we will need to work carefully to make sure that the relevant GOL entities actually do the follow-up that they have promised. She also noted that one can never underestimate how contentious certain topics will be (and decentralization is likely one of those topics), and that everything proceeds much more slowly than expected. Movement and progress on an issue takes a lot of time and energy. However, it is important for the USAID projects to provide a safe space for GOL partners to share their concerns and then identify ways to resolve them.

*USAID/Land Governance Support Activity (LGSA):* I met with Mark Marquardt, COP, and Zyck Baggett (DCOP) who highlighted their challenges in working with the GOL. They are still a newer project and their challenges and issues are pretty specific to land, but they are planning on rolling out grants to local partners soon. It may be interesting to follow up with them after they have implemented more activities to see what their lessons learned are.

*National Democratic Institute (NDI):* We met with Laura Nichols, Resident Director, and Courtney Hess, Program Officer. NDI is primarily carrying out elections support activities. One area for potential coordination and overlap with NDI is on constituency outreach and messaging—for example, it would be excellent if we could create awareness around decentralization as an election issue, help voters understand candidates’ positions, and explain to voters how progress toward greater decentralization could affect them. Laura gave us a toolkit on using ‘step-down’ or ‘cascading’ approaches for citizen outreach and engagement. Laura and Courtney mentioned that NDI will be doing some opinion research and Focus Group Discussions around the elections in May and June; they promised to share the results of that research with USAID partners. Laura also suggested that we should get a copy of the ‘Conflict Assessment Report’ that USAID has put together when it’s available. Lastly, Laura suggested that Ross could meet with Thomas and other NDI staff members after he arrives because they may have more insights to share.

#### Governance Commission

The key takeaway from our meeting with the Governance Commission (GC) is that it will be important that we do not duplicate the efforts of other projects, in particular the Liberia Decentralization Support Program (LDSP). Katelin Maher, the LEGIT Contracting Officer’s Representative (COR), also attended this meeting and highlighted that LEGIT would support greater experimentation and learning than other projects have. The GC mentioned they would like a detailed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) put into place. It was also suggested that perhaps Ross should become a member of the LDSP Technical Committee—that would be worth following up on.

After the meeting, Katelin Maher suggested to us separately that LEGIT may want to follow the ‘GEMS Model’ of MOUs—their MOUs are essentially like annual workplans that delineate which



activities each partner should undertake, timelines for activities, etc. So, the process of developing the MOUs with GC, MIA, and our county and city partners may need to be quite comprehensive.

## GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Perhaps the most interesting exchange that I observed (which I later realized was typical of how the GOL works overall) was at a 'Budget Disaggregation Stakeholders Meeting' facilitated by the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MFDP). The GOL had failed to meet its 'trigger' of disaggregating the budgets of three ministries (Ministry of Health [MOH], Ministry of Education [MOE], and Ministry of Internal Affairs [MIA]) to the county level. This meant that they forfeited a \$1 million tranche of budget support from the EU.

When discussing why this happened, the MoH Decentralization Unit representative stated that they needed a roadmap with timelines, a common planning cycle, manuals or procedures, more meetings to discuss issues, guidance for participatory budgeting, and clearer information on what exactly was expected from each Ministry in order to achieve proper budget disaggregation. [*NB: the representatives from MOE and MIA who were invited did not attend the meeting*]. However, instead of agreeing to discuss which roadmaps, timelines, or manuals were needed, the MFDP representative repeatedly asked "Do you or do you not support Liberia's decentralization initiatives?" which then became almost a competition for who could make the most supportive statements. Rather than actually discussing how to move forward, this turned into everyone asserting their *support* for decentralization without coming up with specific measures that they would take to *implement* these initiatives.

The end result was essentially that everyone proclaimed their enthusiastic support for decentralization writ large and decided to meet again at some future point to discuss budget disaggregation (with no specific dates or follow-up confirmed).

**For our project to succeed, we need to make sure that these types of meetings and decentralization initiatives move beyond rhetoric and into action.**

Another critical problem is the lack of coordination at the county and city levels. County Superintendents and City Mayors do not really interact and share lessons learned with their counterparts in other counties and cities. There is a County Superintendents' Council and a City Mayors' Council but, these are apparently ceremonial and do not meet regularly. We should support the GOL to formalize these meetings and expand communities of practice to other key county and city staff. For example, when talking to Mr. Atticus (the Margibi CSC Coordinator), we asked him if he had ever spoken with Mr. Gardoe (the Grand Bassa Coordinator) but Mr. Atticus did not even know who Mr. Gardoe was.

**There should be better decentralization coordination mechanisms in place, especially among front-line staff.**

Overall, the attitude toward deconcentration and decentralization initiatives undertaken by the GOL is very positive. Liberian citizens have realized real benefits from services, such as those provided at the CSCs, and people understand that it is important to continue making gains. It was refreshing to see that, in general and especially among Liberian citizens, **there is real enthusiasm and support for decentralization.**