

# USAID/OTI Liberia Field Report

Jan - Mar 2007

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## Program Description

In September 2006, USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) launched the Building Recovery and Reform through Democratic Governance (BRDG) Initiative in Liberia. This new initiative follows the two-and-a-half-year Liberia Transition Initiative that began in 2003 as part of the U.S. Government's effort to support the Liberian political transition and helped consolidate peace after 14 years of civil war.

Until September 2007, BRDG/Liberia will provide strategically targeted support for activities that help the new Government of Liberia (GOL) gain traction and consolidate legitimacy as it undertakes the formidable challenges of national transformation. The new approach will help further three specific objectives:

- Assist the Government of Liberia and other key actors to improve capacity in such areas as effective planning, budgeting, communication, and coordination with relevant counterparts;
- Assist the Government of Liberia and other key actors to mount effective political responses to high-visibility issues; and
- Support regional activities aimed at strengthening the Mano River Union.

## Country Situation

**Legislative Branch in Turmoil** - Members of the national legislature continued to debate the constitutionality of holding sessions outside the Capital Building, which is currently undergoing renovations funded by the U.S. Government. Following the resignation of the former House Speaker Edwin Snow on February 15, 2007, House members have continued to debate the rules that govern succession; the Acting Speaker currently seeks to remain in place, pursuant to the rules reportedly adopted by the 52nd Legislature. These debates have resulted in an impasse, overshadowing other legislative work. During her anniversary speech on January 16, 2007, President Johnson-Sirleaf expressed concern about the leadership crisis within the House and its potential impact on GOL operations.

**Role of Independent Media Confronted** - Willis Knuckles, the former Acting Minister of State for Presidential Affairs, resigned from his post following the publication of explicit photos in the Independent newspaper. Despite outcries from the Press Union of Liberia, the GOL announced the immediate closure of the Independent for one year. After expressions of concern by the international community, the GOL removed the physical barriers from the Independent premises; and, the Liberian Supreme Court ruled against the GOL ban. The legal status of the Independent remains unclear as the GOL has advised the paper that it can resume its other business activities but may not publish.

**Addressing Regional Stability** - President Johnson-Sirleaf traveled to Guinea in late February where she and Sierra Leone President Tijan Kabbah met with embattled President Lansana Conte to discuss avenues for diffusing the unstable situation in Guinea. The situation is particularly troubling, as the combatants could seek to recruit non-Guinean youth from the Mano River Union (MRU) countries as mercenaries. In addition, potential refugee movements to Liberia and Sierra Leone are a concern, as is the potential for igniting opportunistic religious conflict in the subregion.

## USAID/OTI Highlights

### A. Narrative Summary

Over the past 3 months, OTI and implementing partner Development Alternatives Inc. have made significant progress in terms of fine tuning management systems, hiring for all vacant positions and developing grant activities and short-term technical assistance (STTA) according to the BRDG program strategy and a rolling analysis of political and operational realities. During the reporting period, BRDG was modified to address administrative issues and to add \$2 million in incremental funding.

At the end of March, Africa Team Leader Konrad Huber, Deputy Team Leader Donna Kerner, and Acting Deputy Director Jason Aplon participated in a four-corner BRDG implementation review session during which the team reviewed overall program progress and strategic focus. Monitoring and evaluation specialists Richard Blue and Beverlee Bruce also participated in the review session during the second phase of their STTA assignment to ensure the development and utilization of an effective implementation and impact system. The two experts also assessed the tools and processes that they developed in December 2006, providing staff training and elaborating a set of key-actor case studies. Senior Advisor Patrick Fn'Piere provided technical assistance to the Ministry of Labor, while Senior Media Advisor John Langlois reviewed and expanded BRDG's independent media portfolio.



A student from Cuttington University presents her arguments at a public debate on the "Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Role: Mercy vs. Justice."

While the BRDG program remains focused on its original three main objectives, an emphasis on anti-corruption and civil society development emerged this quarter. Last year, several civil society organizations (CSOs) in Liberia united to work on transparency in the extractive industries, and the coalition now has 17 member organizations and a steering committee. The Liberia Extractive Industry Transparency International (EITI) coalition, led by Green Advocates, will now be able to launch a coordinated advocacy effort with a new BRDG-supported resource center, specialized training, and capacity building measures that will strengthen the skills of individual members and coalition organizations. EITI is a worldwide initiative that has recently been endorsed by President Johnson-Sirleaf. Meanwhile, EITI member CENTAL launched an anti-corruption awareness campaign that encourages national and local officials to publicly declare their assets.

BRDG continues to support Star Radio's expansion of its affiliate pilot program, which currently has community radio stations in Gbarnga, Buchanan, and Tubmanburg. The organization is working to add five stations to give it a linked network of eight community radio stations across the country. Star Radio will soon relocate its current studio to a more cost-effective downtown location that will allow the station to continue its broadcasts to the greater Monrovia area. Recent BRDG-supported programming has focused on the message that the GOL and its international partners are taking positive steps to end the corrupt practices of the past. These efforts have brought interactive community theater productions about the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Program (GEMAP) to all of Liberia's 16 counties. In addition, Star Radio has translated the official "GEMAP Year One Report" into Liberia's 16 local languages, blending the translations with commentary from top-level government officials. The organization also disseminated a program that explored the perceptions of rural women and children about the GOL's first-year performance on key social and economic issues.

Recognizing that many young people in Liberia lack the skills required to peacefully engage in persuasive argumentation and political discussions - a deficit that has been responsible for violent student protests - BRDG provided technical assistance and support to the Federation of Liberian Youth to organize a debate camp for students from all six of Liberia's accredited universities. The debate trainer and volunteers from the U.S. Embassy and international partner organizations also worked with university leaders in debate coaching and judging to build their capacity to develop an organic university debate structure. The activity culminated in a public debate on January 26, 2007, at the University of Liberia that was attended by 400 students. Since then, students have been using their new skills to initiate spontaneous debates on university campuses about issues of political and academic importance.

Building on the recent success of the Liberian Amputee Football Team, which took second place in last month's Africa competition and was elected to the presidency of the league, OTI will provide resources for the team to

conduct outreach via peer contact and radio interviews to organize amputee youth soccer teams. These teams will promote leadership development in the marginalized amputee community, which is composed primarily of youth and individuals who are presumed to be ex-combatants, and provide a positive model for aggressive amputee panhandlers in six Monrovia neighborhoods.

In March, artists, musicians, and dancers from Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Cote d'Ivoire gathered in Ganta to perform in a weekend-long international peace festival that drew local leaders from across the region to share culture and traditions. The festival gave Liberians an opportunity to receive, on their soil, representatives of communities that hosted them during the various phases of the Liberian conflict and rebuilding process. USAID and U.S. Embassy officials attended the event along with U.S. Ambassador Booth, Minister of Information Bropleh, U.N. officials, and county superintendents.

President Johnson-Sirleaf and other GOL officials have cited the need for a national unifying identity as a key prerequisite for maintaining the fragile peace in Liberia, and in response, BRDG partners launched a series of activities designed to create space for the discussion of national identity via the words and art of children.

## B. Grant Activity Summary

Objective	New Grants in this Quarter		Total Committed	
	Grants	Amount	Grants	Amount
Assist GOL and other key actors to improve capacity	11	\$388,241	25	\$943,209
Assist GOL and other key actors to mount effective political responses to high-visibility issues	10	\$308,914	16	\$490,548
Support regional activities aimed at strengthening the Mano River Union	5	\$228,900	7	\$326,637
<b>Totals</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>\$926,055</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>\$1,760,394</b>

## C. Indicator of Success

**Speed** – Following the publication of the GOL's "Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper" and the United Nations Development Programme's "2006 National Human Development Report," BRDG provided funds for a consultant to assist the GOL in preparing its national human capacity development strategy framework. The need for a national capacity-building strategy is cited as a key prerequisite for designing appropriate post-transition development interventions.

**Re-targeting/Flexibility** – Recent instability in Guinea has the potential to undermine Liberia's post-conflict peace, as history has shown that conflicts in the region are often interrelated and young men and women will cross international borders to participate. In order to offset this emerging dynamic, BRDG partnered with three local nongovernmental organizations that will work along the Guinea border to openly address factors contributing to this movement and discourage youth participation in the Guinean conflict through community discussions, drama, and radio outreach.

In response to the recent impasse over succession in the legislature following the resignation of the Speaker, BRDG is working with the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission (JPC) to monitor the performance of all national legislators for 5 months. Each month, JPC will produce a report card that scores each legislator in terms of attendance, timeliness, participation, voting record, and visits to constituents. The reports will be circulated through

print and broadcast mediums. At the end of the 5-month period, a cumulative report will be issued so that citizens can evaluate the performance of their legislators and, if necessary, hold them accountable. The report card will also provide the public with insight into the ongoing leadership crisis in the legislature.

**Resource Leveraging** – BRDG has provided significant support to two of the major entities involved in public sector reform in Liberia, the Civil Service Agency (CSA) and the Liberia Institute of Public Affairs (LIPA). BRDG provided CSA with assistance in developing job descriptions for Senior Executive Service positions for 21 government ministries. In addition, a compensation and benefits expert assisted with the reconciliation of director-level allowances for all of the 35 government ministries and semi-autonomous agencies that participated in the development of the GOL's 2007-2008 budget. Another senior consultant worked with LIPA to develop a 5-year strategic plan for training public sector employees, pursuant to the GOL proposed reform agenda. The outcome of these consultancies will directly inform Department for International Development partners as they launch a 3-year public sector reform program in April 2007.

**Policy Leveraging** – A senior forensic accountant completed the first phase of a forensic examination of the financial records of former National Transitional Government of Liberia officials, who were indicted pursuant to the 2005 Economic Community of West African States investigation. The investigative work was hampered initially by actions challenging the use of search warrants to obtain records. However, as a result of efforts by both the Office of the Solicitor General and the BRDG consultant to obtain financial records, the Supreme Court ruled on the legality of the use of search warrants, establishing case law on this increasingly important issue as the GOL moves towards strengthening its anti-corruption capacity.

## D. Program Appraisal

BRDG responsiveness enabled OTI to reinforce its role as a catalyst for assisting key government and civil society actors to lay the foundation for longer term capacity development and reform via short-term technical assistance. The use of implementation and information processes led to two significant lessons: (1) the greater the client's involvement in defining the scope of work, the more successful the outcome of the consultant's work and work product; and (2) including the client in planning as well as the final "outbrief" session increases the likelihood of establishing priorities for follow-up.

BRDG significantly increased programming to assist key actors in civil society to mount effective political responses to high-visibility issues. The focus on civil society was in response to the following trends identified by the OTI country team. First, other donor assistance programs were seen to be playing a larger, more significant role, thus obviating the need for "gap-filling" by BRDG. Second, BRDG was well-positioned to address a number of key issues in an agile and politically relevant fashion by partnering with civil society. Extending its technical assistance focus to support key actors in civil society improves the capacity of CSOs generally, and enhances the ability of CSOs to engage appropriately and work more effectively with the government. A dynamic civil society is essential for effective governance.

By refining assistance to the GOL and other key actors, BRDG was able to focus on emerging issues in the first quarter of 2007. These issues will continue to form the basis for second-quarter programming that will promote government accountability and transparency, develop anti-corruption capacities, and discourage the youth of the Guinea-Liberia-Sierra Leone border region from participating in the Guinean conflict.

## NEXT STEPS/IMMEDIATE PRIORITIES

- Field test and fine tune monitoring and evaluation tools and processes designed to gauge BRDG progress and impact.
- Plan for administrative closeout.
- Expand focus on MRU.