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Democracy & Governance: Democratic Political Process

The political processes strengthening program (2007-2008) built on USAID-provided support for the 2005 elections and has moved into the next phase of support to elections and political processes.

Accomplishments:

- National Elections Commission and localities assisted with targeted technical assistance, training, selected commodity procurement and materials;
- Domestic civil society participation in elections and other political processes encouraged; debates facilitated among candidates contesting in all the bye elections since 2006;
- Technical assistance and training provided to Liberia's political parties and issue-based campaigning promoted to build a more representative and competitive multiparty system in Liberia;
- Separate, very well attended orientation working sessions conducted with Senate and House of Representative members; substantive and operations training provided to staffers of both houses; and
- Strategic plan development of the Women's Legislative Caucus co-facilitated; support provided for their official launch with a keynote by President Johnson-Sirleaf.

Plans/Current Priorities:

USAID's program further strengthens political party development and capacity of the National Elections Commission and the legislature, and builds civic awareness and political participation. The program will:

- Support electoral systems and preparations for local, and municipal and bye elections; support construction or refurbishment of a building to house the electoral commission in Buchanan.
- Continue to assist county level parties to be more visible and viable between elections; support political parties to finalize adoption of new party constitutions and to develop action plans; conduct a nationwide public opinion poll to assess public attitudes about political processes, political parties, and government effectiveness; train political parties to do such polling.

- Promote and support citizen-legislator relations through public meetings and through radio programs; support civic education through radio programming;
- Continue support to the Legislative Modernization Committee and full legislature to finalize rules and procedures; assist the House to finalize a five-year legislative development plan; support key committees. A proposal to provide a full-time technical staff person for each house is being considered.
- Provide training and coaching to legislators on representation/constituent relations, lawmaking, oversight and the importance of modeling transparency and accountability in their activities;
- Support a study tour for the Women's Legislative Caucus for them to build expertise on legislation and women's issues, to be followed by support on crafting legislation responding to Liberian women's priority concerns;

Partners:

- The CEPPS Partners – IFES, IRI and NDI. Other donors include the European Union, UNMIL and the World Bank.

Challenges:

- Costs of upcoming elections are estimated at \$18 million; costs of boundary demarcation are estimated at \$6 million. It is not realistic to think that the Government of Liberia can cover these costs.
- President Sirleaf is pushing for local elections because she believes the Liberian Government will not be complete unless local government is in place. A 50% plus one rule applies to all elections based on the Liberian Constitution. As a result, elections are very expensive. The constitution may be changed to a simple majority requirement; however, the need for different tribes to cooperate to win elections, which is driven by the 50+1 rule, would be sacrificed.
- Criteria for determining whether a locality is a city and therefore deserving of government resources are being applied. Localities are being required to amalgamate. USAID is advising civic leaders of the change and working through the implications of amalgamation with them, e.g., the loss of salary to local leaders previously treated as cities.
- UNDP is responsible for chairing donor coordinating meetings but is not effectively fulfilling that responsibility.