

USAID/OTI Liberia Field Report

January - March 2006

Program Description

The Liberia Transition Initiative (LTI) advances prospects for an inclusive, peaceful, political transition in Liberia in the context of the 2003 Comprehensive Peace Accord. By increasing public understanding of key political transition issues and promoting participatory community reintegration and peaceful resolution of conflict, LTI is helping to build the momentum for peace in Liberia through:

- Running the Youth Education for Life Skills (YES) program, a community-focused reintegration activity with the goal of enhancing peace through non-formal education. YES helps youth, one of the largest and most war-affected populations of Liberia, become productive members of their communities.
- Linking the YES program with small grants through a participatory process that reinforces community cohesion, assists in reconstruction and rural development, and facilitates youth leadership development.
- Awarding small grants to national organizations in the fields of justice, media, conflict management, good governance, and human rights.
- Giving technical assistance to the Ministry of Education and USAID/Liberia's Accelerated Learning Program (ALP).

Creative Associates International Inc. implements the LTI program of small grants and technical assistance, while Mercy Corps and a consortium of World Vision, Action Aid and Search for Common Ground implement the YES program.

Country Situation

Historic Inauguration – On January 16, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf was inaugurated as the 23rd president of Liberia. Sirleaf's inauguration marks the end of the transition under the 2003 Comprehensive Peace Accord as well as the beginning of a new political dispensation.

150 Day Strategy Launched – President Sirleaf announced a "150 Day Strategy" to demonstrate tangible progress before June, the end of the fiscal year in Liberia. While Liberia faces enormous challenges over the long term, the most immediate in the next six months will be to meet and manage increasingly unrealistic expectations.

Charles Taylor Arrested – The Government of Liberia formally requested the hand-over of former president Charles Taylor to the Special Court in Sierra Leone. Following an attempt to flee Nigeria, he was captured at the Cameroon border. Taylor was flown to Liberia and subsequently turned over to UN and Special Court officials. A number of factors represent windows of opportunity as well as vulnerability for the new government. First, the installation of a democratically elected government provides a critical window of opportunity for consolidating peace in Liberia and attracting support from the international community.

Second, unlike the defeated Congress for Democratic Change, President Sirleaf's party generally did not galvanize the most potentially volatile youth sub-population of ex-combatants, the unskilled, unemployed and the out-of-school. As youth constitute the largest segment of the population and can thus greatly influence the consolidation of peace in Liberia, the new government must seize the opportunity to demonstrate early, and on a sustained basis, its willingness to: engage youth, accept youth as key contributors to the discussion of national priorities, and cultivate them as a positive force in Liberia.

Third, Taylor's removal to the Special Court raises (Government of Liberia) GOL vulnerability because supporters

and ex-combatants who fought for the former president's rebel movement as well as his government remain in Liberia and the sub-region. These factors exacerbate the pressure already generated by the "150 Day Strategy" on the new government and donors to show results. Ensuring that youth engagement activities are available to the most volatile is a continuing imperative. Accordingly, LTI is responding by expanding the Community Youth Education Program (CYPEP) to peri-urban areas along the borders with Guinea and Cote d'Ivoire, where there is confirmation that youth are being recruited as mercenaries and ethnic tensions remain high. As the government seeks outreach with youth, CYPEP could provide an avenue for doing so.

Another continuing imperative is to increase public access to factual information about GOL official policies, realistic priorities, and eventual progress over the next six months. Political appointments and allocation of resources have the potential to exacerbate latent ethnic tensions while unrealistic expectations or inaccurate information about allocation of resources could stir up discontent. Public perception of progress and equity could lay the foundation for stabilization and success or it could result in political conflict and crisis. Coupled with the potential fall out from Taylor's arrest, the confluence of sources of vulnerability indicates a need for the development and implementation of a strategic communication and outreach effort to coincide with the "150 day plan". OTI technical assistance will be utilized to support GOL activities in this regard.

USAID/OTI Highlights

A. Narrative Summary

In order to provide an avenue for continuing youth engagement in the new political dispensation, three LTI partners led young people through a consultative process that enabled them to better understand common issues that unite youth across class, ethnicity and religion. As an outcome, participants decided to make a tangible and symbolic contribution in order to demonstrate that young people can and do play a positive role in Liberian society. OTI supported their initiative to clean the city of Monrovia prior to the historic inauguration of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. Nearly 2,000 young men and women volunteers participated in the two week citywide clean-up that demonstrated positive youth action, and involved formerly disinterested young people in improving their communities. Activities culminated at the Palm Grove Cemetery in central Monrovia as a sign of respect for their elders and other deceased friends and family members.

Their efforts drew the attention and admiration of President Johnson Sirleaf, US Ambassador Donald Booth, UNMIL SRSG Mr. Alan Doss, as well as religious leaders, ministry officials, and Non-governmental Organizations' (NGO) representatives who attended to show appreciation for the volunteers' work.

These officials also recognized and supported the youths' need for education, jobs, and health care. The new Minister of Youth and Sports has recognized the value of continuing youth engagement activities of this sort and has identified a number of projects where the LTI approach may be appropriate.

Additionally, LTI is implementing over 300 grants with varying levels of community contributions in YES communities. Activities supported include the construction of community halls and schools for skills training in agriculture and



OTI-supported youth group member is congratulated by the first elected female president in Africa for participation in a city-wide clean-up preceding her inauguration.

animal husbandry. They are intended to provide an avenue for reintegration and to foster productive, collective activity between youth and the broader community.

B. Grant Activity Summary

FOCUS AREA	New Grants in this Quarter		Total Committed	
	Grants	Amount (\$)	Grants	Amount (\$)
Civil Society Org. Support			16	\$245,470
Community Impact Activities	9	\$65,605	389	\$3,714,226
Conflict Management			28	\$661,625
Justice/Human Right			18	\$430,122
Media			14	\$359,558
Good Governance			38	\$1,027,836
Reintegration			2	\$16,642
Totals	9	\$65,605	505	\$6,455,479

C. Indicator of Success

Speed – A recent shift in the small grants materials procurement and delivery procedure by Creative Associates has made the grants implementation process more efficient. Approximately 200 of 325 grants have been completed and closed. The small grants generated by these communities through participatory methodologies are now being used to serve a wide range of needs, from bolstering local markets to providing space for conflict resolution activities.

Re-targeting/Flexibility – Youth are a significant force in the democratization and development processes of Liberia. OTI has, therefore, made a strategic programmatic approach to engage young people. LTI utilizes these approaches and activities with partners to maintain the youths' interest and participation. For example, under its modification, LTI partner Mercy Corps recently launched "Yes to Soccer" in response to the need to improve the delivery of HIV/AIDS information in the larger YES program. This innovative project utilizes soccer to increase youth and community understanding of HIV/AIDS in two pilot counties, Sinoe and Grand Gedeh. In addition to being in the remote southeast of the country where GOL and donor -sponsored activities are few, these two counties voted overwhelmingly for the Congress for Democratic Change in the second round of the elections. Engaging youth in both areas enables the USG to deliver resources in this traditionally neglected area.

In February, the WAS consortium (comprised of **World Vision**, **Action Aide**, and **Search for Common Ground**) conducted a mid-term reflection session which helped them make some strategic changes in their community grant structure and implementation strategy. Action Aid Liberia opened a field office that has increased supervision and other administrative support to the field staff.

In addition, implementing partners of CYPEP, the abbreviated urban version of the YES program, successfully completed the second phase of training in Buchanan and Monrovia. LTI, along with CYPEP partners, have reached approximately 10,000 youth in six major cities including Monrovia. In early March, LTI held a reflection meeting with key partners and graduates to review lessons learned and generate new ideas to improve the program while reaching out to other strategic peri-urban areas with a significant presence of idle youth. Furthermore, LTI restructured the Program Management Unit to better support YES and the realities of a more comprehensive CYPEP program that covers additional key strategic areas.

Resource Leveraging – The Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) has played a significant role in ensuring that over-age youth have an opportunity to obtain a basic education. During the reporting period, 152 teachers from both faith-based and community/public primary schools received training in improved teaching methodologies. The teachers also received kits of basic instructional materials for teachers and pupils. Creative Associates' ALP team is collaborating closely with UNICEF, the Ministry of Education and other NGOs providing technical and material support for teachers and schools. During the reporting period, the World Food Program (WFP) donated books to ALP schools.

Policy Leveraging – Through the CYPEP program, OTI has provided support to various youth organizations, including the Federation of Liberia Youth (FLY), the official GOL umbrella organization for young Liberians. The President of FLY, Mr. George Wisner, recently traveled to the US to promote youth issues where he relied on informal coaching and mentoring from OTI in order to prepare his speeches and handouts for this important opportunity.

D. Program Appraisal

YES training is continuing to make incremental but steady changes in both the lives of individual participants and their communities. The small grants were originally intended to provide youth an opportunity to practice skills and knowledge acquired from the training as well as an opportunity to show how the YES program impacted them. However, the small grants have shifted the focus from the primary purpose of engaging youth to a program that provides development opportunities for the entire community. The community grants were also meant to enhance participation and involvement, with communities providing all locally available materials and unskilled labor. Unfortunately, the culture of dependency that has permeated Liberian communities from years of humanitarian relief has left some communities renegeing on their contribution with sometimes significant cost implications. To avoid this, it has been decided that no infrastructure community grants will be approved in the second cycle of the training.

In extensive reflection and consultation with YES implementing partners, LTI has determined that there was a failure in the program design in understanding the impact of introducing resources into communities which are at survival level. Originally envisioned as an avenue for reinforcing YES training, the grants have, instead, taken on a life of their own that overshadows the training with little or no direct linkage. Collectively, LTI and its partners have consequently decided to pursue alternative ways of utilizing resources earmarked for community grants that support "projects". Rather, efforts are underway to work with communities to implement activities which directly reinforce the content of the training.

NEXT STEPS/IMMEDIATE PRIORITIES

- Restratgeize community grants approach to reinforce YES curriculum during Cycle II
- Ramp up second phase of the CYPEP program