

USAID/OTI Liberia Field Report

October - December 2007

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 initiative followed the two-and-a-half-year Liberia Transition Initiative (LTI) 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 December 15, 2007, BRDG/Liberia provided strategically targeted support for activities that helped the new Government of Liberia (GOL) and other organizations gain traction as they undertook the formidable challenges of national transformation. This approach furthered three specific objectives, modified in June 2007:

- Assist the Government of Liberia and other key actors to improve capacity with an emphasis on communication systems;
- 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

Local Elections - The National Elections Commission organized the first senatorial by-elections on December 4 in Gbarpolu County, which resulted in a run-off election on December 18. Unity Party member J.S.B. Theodore Momo won the first by-elections since the inauguration of the Sirleaf administration.

Debt Relief - In mid-November, the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) announced that member countries had pledged sufficient financing to provide debt relief to Liberia. Donor countries, including the United States, have pledged an initial \$842 million to begin the debt relief process. According to the World Bank, Liberia's total arrears to international financial institutions amount to \$1.5 billion, including \$458 million to the World Bank, \$772 million to the IMF, and \$233 million to the African Development Bank.

NTGL Corruption - Former leader of the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) Gyude Bryant was taken into custody and appeared in court on December 11 to face allegations of economic sabotage during his tenure as chairman. In August, the Supreme Court ruled that members of the NTGL are not entitled to immunity from prosecution. Bryant had petitioned the court for immunity based on his status as a former head of state. The GOL argued successfully that the NTGL was an extra-constitutional measure and, consequently, Bryant is not immune under the Constitution. Bryant is currently released on bail. A trial is anticipated.

USAID/OTI Highlights

A. Narrative Summary

OTI closed out a successful 15-month program in Liberia on December 15, 2007. This concludes nearly 4 years of OTI involvement in Liberia, beginning with the LTI in February 2004 and concluding with the BRDG-Liberia program. The BRDG-Liberia program completed 99 critical short-term technical assistance and small-grant activities with ministries, other GOL entities, civil society organizations, and media groups.

Presidential Radio - OTI's final grant in Liberia, "Linking the President to the People," supported the construction of a mobile radio and TV studio in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The studio will provide independent media outlets in Liberia with greater access to the President's press conferences and public addresses. The new facility will allow President Sirleaf to address the nation from her office suites instead of traveling 30-45 minutes across town to the state-owned radio station. It also will allow her to resume her weekly call-in program, "Conversation with the

President," which had been cancelled due to time constraints. This grant caps off OTI's media strategy that focused on strengthening the capacity of independent media and the GOL to conduct strategic communication campaigns about key policies, procedures, and reforms.

Strategic Communication and Awareness - During this final reporting period, OTI focused on strategic communications campaigns. First, the Liberian Ministry of Health and House of Freedom, a local drama troupe, produced printed materials and staged dramatic performances to clarify the steps necessary to obtain a birth certificate. The activities sought to make the process more transparent and reduce some of the corrupt measures employed to obtain official documentation. Second, the Liberia Institute for Statistics and Geo-Information Services (LISGIS) launched an awareness-raising campaign in preparation for the upcoming national census. To reach the minority Muslim population, LISGIS worked with the Organization of Liberian Muslim Youth to design a special outreach program to dispel rumors about the census and encourage participation in Muslim communities.



The House of Freedom drama troupe informs market women of their rights and responsibilities under the Liberian Marketing Association constitution through creative dance, song, and skits.

In addition to providing the National Passport Office with a new server, specialized software, and scanning equipment that will improve the office's ability to issue and track Liberian passports, OTI funded a strategic communications campaign through Flomo Theater. The campaign educated citizens about the procedures and fees associated with legally obtaining a passport. The Ministry of Internal Affairs collaborated with BRDG local partners ARS and RECEIVE to inform rural citizens - in English and all 16 local languages - about the GOL's District Development program, and the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs and the Ministry of State worked with local BRDG partners to design and disseminate materials promoting county-level consultations that will result in dialogue about the nation's development agenda as articulated in the Poverty Reduction Strategy. Finally, the BRDG program, in collaboration with the Office of the Vice President, sponsored community dramas in local markets across Monrovia to inform market women about the constitution of the Liberian Marketing Association and how it affects their work and livelihoods.

Star Radio: Future Work - OTI Senior Media Advisor John Langlois visited Liberia on a 3-week temporary duty, during which he visited the network of six Star Radio regional community radio stations and explored how best to commercialize Star Radio, which has primarily relied on donor funding. OTI also funded a community radio consultant, Sam Howard, who worked extensively with the community radio stations to train their managers and staff about financial management and revenue generation through the "Hands Across Liberia: Solidifying Community Radio Networks" grant.

Dialogue through Sports - With support from OTI, the National Association of Youth Promoting Transparent Elections launched an inter-party sports league designed to foster dialogue between the leading political parties in Liberia. The chairman of the Unity Party and officials representing the Congress for Democratic Change attended the matches, during which the United Party women's kickball team won by a single goal and the men's soccer game ended in a draw. The inter-party sports games closed on October 5 after reducing internal tensions; promoting a sense of unity, peace, and reconciliation; and facilitating active partnership and coordination among the parties.

Civil Service Reform - OTI collaborated with Adam Smith International, the U.K. Department for International Development, the United Nations Development Programme, and the GOL to provide further technical assistance for civil service reform. Consultant Doug Grube worked with the Liberian Institute for Public Administration to advance an organizational development process toward the development and implementation of a 5-year strategic plan initiated under a previous OTI grant. The Deputy Minister of Instruction, a key player and relative newcomer to the Ministry of Education, benefited from executive coaching and management expertise provided by consultant Dan Edwards through OTI support. The USAID Education Office is considering providing additional resources for this activity and will make its determination based on the results of the consultancy.

Mano River Union - OTI continued to support the Mano River Union Youth Parliament (MRUYP) through program close-out. The MRUYP officially opened its second session on November 12 in Buchanan, and Deputy Minister of Youth and Sports Sam Hare delivered the keynote speech. Representatives from both the MRUYP and the Liberian Children's Parliament spoke at the BRDG closing celebration, attesting to OTI's prominent role in advocating for

youth issues.

Program Closing Celebration - The closing of BRDG-Liberia was officially marked by a celebration held on December 4 at the BRDG offices in Sinkor. Attendees traveling to Liberia to attend the close-out gala included USAID Bureau of Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance (DCHA) Assistant Administrator Mike Hess, Special Assistant to DCHA Dr. Reuben Brigety, OTI Acting Director Rob Jenkins, OTI Africa Team Leader Konrad Huber, and OTI Africa Deputy Team Leader Donna Kerner. During their visit to Liberia, the officials were able to meet with BRDG beneficiaries, stakeholders, and partners and participate in other DCHA-related activities.



The BRDG closing celebration was led by BRDG staff member Mimi Johnson (left). Speakers included (seated from left to right) Ambassador Donald Booth, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, DCHA Assistant Administrator Mike Hess, and Acting USAID Mission Director Rick Scott.

While Mr. Hess was in Liberia, he was able to observe a cross-section of OTI program activities and meet with President Sirleaf, relevant U.N. officials, and counterparts. He visited the Ministry of Lands, Mines, and Energy and its Government Diamond Office, where the hardware and software provided by OTI allowed for the successful implementation of the Kimberley Process Certification for diamonds. He attended the official opening of the Bureau of Passports and Visas, which was also attended by the President. Finally, Mr. Hess toured the presidential media center and was interviewed during a live broadcast on Star Radio.

During the period, OTI concluded an in-depth After Exit Review and Final Evaluation of the Liberia program.

B. Grant Activity Summary

Objective	New Grants in this Quarter		Total Committed	
	Program Activities	Amount	Grants	Amount
1) Assist GOL and other key actors to improve capacity	10	\$288,859	58	\$2,276,550
2) Assist GOL and other key actors to mount effective political responses to high visibility issues	3	\$83,536	34	\$843,721
3) Support regional activities aimed at strengthening the Mano River Union	0	0	10	\$391,187
TOTAL	13	\$372,395	102	\$3,511,458

C. Indicators of Success

Speed - Although the President's weekly talk show, "Conversation

with the President," received tremendous acclaim from Liberians - African heads of state rarely communicate interactively with the public - the President's Office had to cancel the show due to time and resource constraints. President Sirleaf, reluctant to eliminate this essential and strategic communications tool, sought assistance from USAID so she could more easily communicate with the Liberian people. It took less than a month for BRDG to respond to President Sirleaf's request for assistance and establish a media center within her offices.

During the short timeframe, BRDG procured specialized radio and TV equipment, collaborated with the Ministry of State for Presidential Affairs to design and construct the center, and provided basic training to staff on how to use the new equipment. The presidential broadcast studio and media center will serve as a focal point for press conferences and media briefings - establishing a central location where the President and visiting dignitaries can meet with journalists and providing independent media outlets with greater access to officials.

Resource Leveraging - At the request of the USAID Mission's Education Office and Liberia's Ministry of Education, BRDG funded an expert consultant to provide executive coaching services to the Deputy Minister of Instruction. This activity provides additional benefits to the Mission, as it will be able to consider the value of the approach over the long term. Once the activity is complete, the Mission will be able to evaluate the outcome of OTI's intervention and determine if coaching is a best use of resources among competing demands.

Policy Leveraging – The GOL and the international community have worked together over the past 2 years to establish the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS), which serves to guide, manage, and coordinate Liberia's development process. Over the past few months, the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs conducted a series of consultations in each of Liberia's 15 counties to plan community dialogues about the nation's development agenda. A key component of these discussions will be to evaluate the PRS and its implementation. The county consultations, which have been attended by community leaders, local government officials, and citizens, are providing members of the PRS core organizing team with grassroots-level feedback and putting a human face on an ongoing process that has involved stakeholders at the highest levels of decision making. Given the large numbers of people expected at the dialogues, OTI has provided funding for the development and dissemination of PRS communication materials (pamphlets, stickers, posters, billboards, and banners) that outline PRS objectives in language and terminology accessible to the average Liberian citizen.

D. Program Appraisal

During this reporting period, BRDG concluded a successful program that effectively delivered critical short-term technical assistance and small-grant activities to ministries, other government entities, civil society, and media groups, contributing to overall U.S. Government objectives in Liberia.

Next Steps/Immediate Priorities

- Finalize the Liberia database.
- Wrap up outstanding financial and administrative matters.
- Apply lessons learned in Liberia to other OTI programs.



President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (center) delivers a special New Year's message to the nation from the new media center. (Executive Mansion photo courtesy of the GOL via its Web site, <http://www.emansion.gov.lr.>)