

USAID/OTI Liberia Annual Summary Report

Oct 2006 - Sept 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 will provide strategically targeted support for activities that help the new Government of Liberia (GOL) and other organizations gain traction as they undertake the formidable challenges of national transformation. The new approach will help further three specific objectives, most recently 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

Diamond Sanctions - Signaling that the GOL has made significant progress toward Kimberley Process compliance, the U.N. Security Council voted on April 27, 2007, to lift sanctions that had been in place for the past 3 years to stem the flow of so-called blood diamonds. Liberia gained acceptance into the global Kimberley Process in early May, and legally exported its first batch of diamonds on September 5, 2007.

Legislature - After a year marked by controversy, the national legislature finally adjourned its 2007 session on October 4, following a series of extensions. During her anniversary speech on January 16, 2007, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf expressed concern about the leadership crisis in the House and its potential impact on GOL operations. Following the resignation of House Speaker Edwin Snow on February 15, 2007, House members engaged in debate regarding the rules that govern succession. Alex Tyler was eventually elected Speaker. Members also debated the constitutionality of holding sessions outside the Capitol Building, which was undergoing renovations funded by the U.S. Government. These debates spawned a series of impasses, overshadowing other legislative work.

Mano River Union - Liberia served as Chair of the Mano River Union (MRU) this year. The MRU, an international association comprising Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea, was formed to foster economic cooperation among the countries. President Sirleaf traveled to Guinea in late February where she and the President of Sierra Leone met with Guinean President Lansanah Conte to discuss avenues for diffusing a possible conflict in Guinea. A conflict has the potential not only to induce combatants to recruit non-Guinean youth as mercenaries and drive refugees into Liberia and Sierra Leone but also to stir up religious discord in the subregion.

Under the BRDG program, efforts are underway to support activities aimed at strengthening practical cooperation between MRU countries. OTI has supported the following MRU-focused activities: a joint delegation from all three countries to the innovative Songhai Center in Benin to explore agribusiness as a means for tackling youth unemployment; Mano River Union Youth Parliament elections; cross-border conflict mitigation activities in a variety of forms, including community discussions, drama, and radio outreach with youth; and a meeting of government environment officials and conservation-focused nongovernmental organizations to initiate the development of strategies to preserve protected areas.

USAID/OTI Highlights

A. Narrative Summary

Program Strategy - At the end of March 2007, Africa Team Leader Konrad Huber, Deputy Team Leader Donna Kerner, and Acting Deputy Director Jason Aplon participated in an inclusive 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 assignment to ensure the development and utilization of an effective implementation-monitoring and impact evaluation system. Senior Advisor Patrick Fm'Piere provided technical assistance to the Ministry of Labor, while Senior Media Advisor John Langlois reviewed and expanded BRDG's independent media portfolio over the course of a series of field visits.

On June 25, 2007, OTI/Liberia, including the BRDG team, participated in a strategy review session during which it clarified program objectives, reviewed program successes, and identified activities and partners through program close-out scheduled for mid-December 2007. While BRDG remains focused on its original three objectives, the team decided to narrow the program's first objective, choosing to concentrate primarily on communication systems, and expand its third, deciding to place more emphasis on activities that strengthen the Mano River Union.

Star Radio - One of Liberia's leading independent radio stations providing news, information, and entertainment to greater Monrovia, Star Radio has been a strategic and long-term BRDG partner. To date, Star Radio has received institutional support – in the form of equipment, training, and subsidies – that has helped it establish affiliate stations in Tubmanburg, Gbarnga, Buchanan, Voinjama, Zwedru, and Harper. The enlarged network covers nearly the entire country and serves as a source of independent, accurate, and timely information that is essential to the democratic process. To reduce operational costs and enhance its financial sustainability, OTI recently assisted Star Radio as it relocated its studio to a new site in Monrovia. BRDG also partnered with Green Advocates to provide Star Radio with technical support. The station used Green Advocates' technical expertise to summarize and translate Liberia's "National Budget Guide" into the 16 local languages and Liberian English. In addition, the assistance has allowed the station to disseminate other high-visibility political messages generated by a number of BRDG partners.

Legislative Report Card - BRDG worked with the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission (JPC) to monitor the performance of the members of the House of the Representatives and the Senate. JPC collected data on each member's attendance, punctuality, and visits to constituents, and kept a tally of bills introduced. JPC issued a cumulative report and the "report card" was broadcast in 11 counties via Star Radio's 6 affiliate stations and 19 community radio stations. In addition, Star Radio distributed the legislative report cards to all 15 of Liberia's counties. JPC also worked with television stations to record the national legislature and broadcast the proceedings in one hour sessions twice a week. The high level of public interest generated by the report cards and the media coverage has prompted legislators to improve their attendance and pay greater attention to their behavior in the parliament.

Independence Celebration - In the weeks leading to Liberia's Independence Day celebration, Radio Gbhezohn and Radio Bomi aired programming on inclusiveness and engaging youth, as the theme for the celebration was "Liberia at 160: Reclaiming Our Future." Broadcasting from Buchanan and Tubmanburg, the two stations held off-site events with interviews and call-in programs. They also held essay and other contests. The stations relayed reports and speeches from Buchanan, where the GOL held the country's official celebration from July 24 to 26. BRDG provided the stations with equipment, broadcast materials, and awards for the winners of various competitions. More than 400,000 people in the region tuned in to the broadcast.

Peace Parks - The past two decades of political instability in Liberia have been marked by periods of adversarial relationships with its neighbors: Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Cote d'Ivoire. One important source of tension has been the forested areas along the countries' shared boundaries. These forests are incredibly rich in minerals, fauna, and wildlife, but they have also provided a haven for armed groups seeking to destabilize the MRU. As peace returns to the region, the countries have decided to re-start efforts to preserve protected areas in the forested regions, for economic reasons as well as to encourage peaceful coexistence. In response, BRDG partnered with the Forestry Development Authority (FDA) to develop a structure for establishing peace parks.

A short-term consultant was engaged to provide input and review key documents on peace parks, on peace park security issues, and on the establishment of trans-boundary protected areas (TBPA). The consultant also assisted the FDA Technical Committee on Trans-boundary Forest Conservation with its analysis of World Conservation Union/IUCN Good Practice Guidelines within the Liberian context. In addition to supporting the FDA, the consultant participated in two workshops: the TBPA workshop to train conservation stakeholders on planning and organization,

and the 40-participant Protected Area Network Meeting in Ganta. As a result of the consultant's work, the FDA has improved its capacity to develop the necessary administrative and programmatic systems for supporting trans-boundary peace parks within Liberia's borders.

Kimberley Process - Since the United Nations lifted its sanctions on diamond mining and sales in Liberia, the government has been eager to fully participate in the Kimberley Process Compliance Certification (KPCC) scheme, a process that allows Liberia to legally mine and sell diamonds on the international market. To facilitate the country's emergence as an exporter of legal diamonds, BRDG provided a short-tenure consultant – a Kimberley Process expert – to the Ministry of Lands, Mines and Energy (MLME). The consultant worked with the ministry to streamline the processes and procedures that ensure compliance with the international regulations. The consultant also worked with key stakeholders to inform the public about the legalities and illegalities of mining and purchasing diamonds.

To reach the mining community, BRDG initiated a drama project to help miners understand the benefits of the Kimberley Process. The grant provided funding for a community theatre group to dramatize the process in simple English to miners who might not see the value of the bureaucratic requirements. The group, House of Freedom, traveled to remote communities throughout the country to perform the dramatization. In addition, BRDG provided resources to the MLME to disseminate information on the KPCC through a Web site, a hotline, and print media. BRDG also provided equipment upgrades to the Government Diamond Office.

Budget Transparency - A nation's budget affects all residents of a country and Liberia is no exception. Liberia's National Budget is normally printed and distributed by the Bureau of the Budget (BOB). Due to limited resources, however, the BOB was only able to print 350 copies of the budget – enough for distribution to government offices and parliament, but not enough to appease the tremendous interest in the document across the country. To address this interest, BRDG provided additional resources to the BOB, so it was able to print 250 additional copies for distribution to community leaders, civil society organizations, local and district governments, universities, and other key institutions. It is estimated that more than 30,000 people benefited from the discussions and debates that the additional copies made possible.

Liberian Identity - President 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. The Governance Reform Commission (GRC) has affirmed the need for Liberians to re-evaluate prevailing views of Liberian identity in the new light of a post-war, forward-moving country. The GRC has also recognized that this discussion is best initiated with children, whose lack of political motives helps to depoliticize the issue. Exploring and promoting a sense of Liberian identity has been a unifying theme throughout the BRDG project, and BRDG supported the YMCA to replicate the top 13 award-winning art pieces created by young people who participated in a variety of BRDG identity grants across the country. In addition, BRDG is providing materials, paint, resource persons, and transportation to facilitate the painting of large murals that depict the winning art pieces in Monrovia and other key cities.

BRDG has also worked with CHF International, Marion Cassell Ministries International (MACAMI), and the United Muslim Women Advocacy and Empowerment Organization (UMWAEO) on identity-related projects with children. The MACAMI grant supported a Unification Day children's concert held on May 14, 2007. The concert showcased multiethnic choirs from five neighborhoods in Monrovia. Each choir performed songs in Liberian languages followed by a group song in English. The concert displayed the diversity of Liberia's culture and allowed the children to interact and enrich their identity through the powerful medium of song. The UMWAEO grant employed a successful YMCA model that involves discussions, debates, games, and artwork to engage children in thinking about a diverse yet unified vision of Liberia. UMWAEO's activities were centered in the Jacobstown neighborhood of Monrovia and in Nimba County, home to many of Liberia's



The Children's Choir from Central Monrovia performs at the Unification Day Concert.

Muslim communities.

Youth Empowerment - Due to poor economic conditions and limited resources, there are few employment or advancement opportunities for the youth who flooded into Monrovia during and after the war. Consequently, BRDG is supporting Youth Action International (YAI) to mentor, motivate, and empower youth through positive messages. YAI is a renowned international organization specializing in implementing post-conflict programs that alleviate youth suffering. The organization is led by Kimmie Weeks, a young Liberian activist who was named Liberia's National Orator for this year's independence celebration. YAI will produce a bi-monthly radio show that broadcasts robust messages on youth self-empowerment and self-improvement. To attract young people, the organization will enlist local musicians to write and perform songs with positive messages. In addition, YAI will incorporate talk segments, call-in discussions, and interviews into its broadcasts. The program will also promote the resolutions made during the Mano River Union Youth Parliament's second session, which was held in Monrovia.

The Mano River Union Youth Parliament (MRUYP) is a subregional network of young people within the Mano River Basin that advocates for peace, human rights, and the development of young people and their communities. The Liberian chapter of the MRUYP is recovering from a political division, and BRDG has worked with the MRUYP to reinvigorate the organization. The first phase of this grant provided for the free and transparent election of 30 youth parliamentarians (2 from each of Liberia's 15 counties), which took place at the Federation of Liberian Youth's National Congress in Gbarnga on May 23, 2007. These legitimately elected and recognized representatives subsequently participated in the Liberian Youth Parliament session.

During Liberia's last election, politicians used many tactics to promote their various agendas, including divisive politics that left great rifts between the political parties. These rifts have polarized the dialogue between the parties and created conditions that are not conducive to the nation's post-war recovery. To promote constructive discourse, BRDG has enlisted the National Youth Movement for Transparent Elections – Partners for Democratic Development (NAYMOTE) to facilitate interaction between members of the country's five major political parties. NAYMOTE promotes democracy and governance and encourages citizen participation. To this end, NAYMOTE has organized football and kickball tournaments between the parties. A ceremony held before the kickoff game reminded players and observers of the purpose of the event, and these messages have been repeated at the beginning of each game.

Songhai Study Tour - Soon after project launch, BRDG sponsored a study tour of the Songhai Integrated Agricultural System Center in Benin. During the week-long tour, the participants – government officials and civil society leaders from Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Guinea – worked directly with the Songhai teachers and youth agriculturalists to fully understand the center's operations, philosophy, and the lessons learned that have evolved over the center's 20-year history. Representatives from Sierra Leone expressed a strong desire to replicate the center in their country. They requested assistance with conducting a feasibility study and developing a concept paper as an initial step in establishing the Songhai methodology there.

With BRDG assistance, Songhai Director Fr. Nzamujo Godfrey visited Liberia to lay the groundwork for a center in Bensonville, Liberia, in collaboration with several key ministries including Agriculture, Youth and Sports, and Commerce. The program is also providing support so Fr. Godfrey can travel to Sierra Leone to assess the feasibility of a Songhai-inspired center.

Transparency in the Extractive Industries - Last year, several civil society organizations in Liberia united to work on transparency in the extractive industries. The Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) coalition now includes 17 member organizations and has established a steering committee. On June 25, the coalition formally launched its resource center, which will be used to engage with the GOL on the EITI process, to train civil society members, and to organize advocacy campaigns that promote anti-corruption in the forest and mining sectors. The regional coordinator for Publish What You Pay, an organization that helps citizens hold government accountable for revenues derived from natural resources, recently conducted a workshop with coalition members to begin addressing the issue of coalition governance. BRDG provided additional capacity-building and organizational development support to the coalition through a short-term consultant who worked directly with coalition members.

Institution Development - Early in the program cycle, BRDG supported a consultant team to work for 2 months with the Ministry of State for Presidential Affairs. The team introduced a performance improvement program that was endorsed by President Sirleaf. BRDG supported similar internal management reviews at the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Labor.

B. Grant Activity Summary

Objective	New Grants in this Quarter		Total Committed	
	Program Activities	Amount	Grants	Amount
Assist GOL and other key actors to improve capacity	11	\$378,697	48	\$2,135,570
Assist GOL and other key actors to mount effective political responses to high-visibility issues	6	\$103,446	31	\$813,888
Support regional activities aimed at strengthening the Mano River Union	0	0	10	\$399,362
Totals	17	\$482,143	89	\$3,348,820

C. Indicator of Success

Speed – The election for a new Speaker of the House provided an excellent occasion for Liberians to interact with members of the legislature. To facilitate this avenue of communication, BRDG aired a 2-hour interactive program that was simulcast on both radio and television 24 hours after the three candidates for Speaker announced their candidacies. During the first hour of the program, the candidates were questioned on major issues of concern to the Liberian people. They were also asked about their credentials and ability to lead the legislature. The second hour of the program was dedicated to interactions between the candidates and the general public, who submitted questions via phone and text messages. The station received more than 75 phone calls and text messages, and more than 300,000 people tuned in for the program. The response to the simulcast demonstrated the Liberian people's eagerness to engage in the democratic process and made the candidates realize that the successful candidate would need support beyond that of the legislature. The initiative provided Liberians with access to their elected officials and a chance to address the candidate who ultimately received the majority vote in the House of Representatives.

Re-targeting/Flexibility - Responding to internal weaknesses and problems within the legislature, BRDG worked with the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission (JPC) to monitor the performance of all national legislators. JPC collected data and published a monthly report card in newspapers, providing objective scores noting attendance, timeliness, participation, voting record, and visits to constituents. The information was also broadcast via radio. As the legislative sessions were extended on an irregular basis, JPC continued to issue report cards each month, and will publish a cumulative report to inform citizens about the work of individual legislators. The report card project broadened public knowledge about the leadership crisis in the legislature by spotlighting legislators' actions and frequent delays.

Resource Leveraging – In order to ensure that GOL and donor resources were being applied appropriately, the Truth and Reconciliation-International Contact Group on Liberia Working Group requested a financial review of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) expenditures over the past 12 months. BRDG responded by hiring two experts from the Ghanaian firm of Boateng, Offei & Co. James Sraha and Daniel Hughes began reviewing the TRC's financial documents on May 21 and conducted a comprehensive briefing on their findings. In addition to TRC and BRDG-Liberia, representatives from the U.S. Embassy, the European Union, the U.N. Development Programme, and the Open Society Institute for West Africa attended the session. The findings revealed areas of concern, provided recommendations for establishing improved processes, and were taken into consideration by donors as they decided how to allocate funding to the TRC.

Policy Leveraging - Concurrent with the lifting of diamond sanctions on Liberia, BRDG placed an international expert, Paul Temple, with the Ministry of Lands, Mines and Energy (MLME) to review and refine Kimberley Process compliance systems, which have been designed to monitor and regulate the rough diamond industry in Liberia.

While U.S. Government assistance to Liberia was instrumental to the lifting of the sanctions, the long-term technical assistance contract ended just as Liberia began to operationalize a complex set of chain-of-custody and certification processes. BRDG recognized this immediate need and stepped in to provide critical support to the MLME as it worked toward its first certified-diamond export. Mr. Temple's first month in Liberia was so successful that he was asked to accompany the MLME to the Kimberley Process Intercessional Meeting in Brussels from June 10–16, 2007. The Kimberley Process board was so impressed with Liberia's strategic communication initiative to put flyers in all in-coming travelers' passports that it now has this activity listed in its Best Practices Guidelines.

D. Program Appraisal

During this reporting period, as BRDG prepared to wind down on critical short-term technical assistance and small-grant activities with ministries, other government entities, and civil society and media groups, the team undertook a systematic analysis of project results based on feedback and observations. This analysis has prompted OTI to narrow program focus to strategic ministries and partners that have thrived with past OTI assistance.

NEXT STEPS/IMMEDIATE PRIORITIES

- Conduct programmatic and administrative close-out,
- Support final evaluation, and
- Perform After Exit Review in mid-December.