

USAID Leadership and Democracy Program (LEAD)
Total Funding: US\$ 1,250,000
Implementation Period: April 2013- April 2015

I. SUMMARY

In Guyana, the International Republican Institute (IRI) will implement the USAID Leadership and Democracy Program (LEAD) with the overall objective of supporting Guyanese stakeholder efforts to promote effective and responsive democratic institutions in Guyana. The LEAD program will strengthen political and consensus-building processes and skills through four program components: 1) In a non-partisan manner work jointly with all political parties in enhancing the functioning of the National Assembly as an effective, representative deliberative body, 2) Strengthen the National Assembly and boost citizen engagement with and understanding of Parliament, 3) Motivate youth and women to be more engaged in political and civic processes, and 4) Support civic and voter education efforts to support the implementation of local government reforms and local elections. The conduct of activities will be subject to the availability of funding.

The International Republican Institute (IRI) is a nonprofit, non-partisan organization that works to strengthen democratic political processes and institutions, support open elections, increase democratic governance, and increase the participation of marginalized groups in political and civic processes, including women and youth. IRI has conducted programs in more than 100 countries and, along with its Women's Democracy Network, is currently active in more than 80 countries.

II. PROPOSED ACTIVITIES

IRI, as USAID's implementing partner, will consult closely with key stakeholders in the Government of Guyana and with political party leaders to develop and carry out activities under this program. The implementing partner will work closely with other diplomatic and international donors present in Guyana, including the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).

Specific programs and activities will be developed, which are inclusive of input from Guyanese stakeholders. Program implementation will begin with extensive consultations with Guyanese stakeholders. The LEAD Program's Resident Country Director, program staff and consultants/trainers will follow an approach that is inclusive in nature.

Consistent with its global commitment to encourage marginalized groups' involvement in the political process, the LEAD program will seek opportunities to encourage the involvement of marginalized groups, including women, in all activities. The implementing partner, IRI, will also utilize its Global Women's Democracy Network to offer opportunities and non-material resources and best practices for women to be more engaged in the political process and in civic activities.

Consultations: Through the course of the grant, the IRI will engage in regular consultations with government officials, party leaders, legislative staff, civil society organizations, and elections officials to advance this program. Through these informal meetings, IRI will offer ideas and seek input for the development and implementation of activities.

Component 1: Strengthen political stakeholders to engage in consensus-building in the National Assembly and more effectively interact with citizens to address key issues

The LEAD program will offer (non-material/non-financial) technical assistance to all democratic political parties and coalitions in Guyana in a non-partisan, inclusive manner. Illustrative activities are described below:

Intra-Party Negotiation

Cross-party negotiation workshops: The LEAD Program will host bi-monthly workshops on political negotiation, featuring experts in the field. These workshops will be offered to all parties in one setting. The program will be conducted in this multi-party format to foster interaction between the parties outside of the formal parliamentary setting, encouraging them to take part in mock negotiation sessions with their counterparts. These sessions have proven to be successful in other countries, and this model can be adapted to the environment in Guyana.

Quarterly “Speaker Evenings”: Every quarter, the Program will host an evening event featuring a high-profile speaker on specific topics. An important aspect of the events, which will feature a dinner, is not necessarily the topic, but instead the act of gathering the political community itself. Practiced in other countries, IRI uses the “Speaker Evenings” series to allow for political stakeholders to socialize and encourage friendly, low-profile discussion away from political matters, and foster more collegial relationship-building.

Consensus Building Processes

To address citizen demands, political parties need to develop more effective methods of collaboration. The LEAD Program will convene both consultative sessions with party groups and organize formal monthly or bi-monthly workshops with members and committees to develop members’ ability to debate, deliberate and negotiate legislative initiatives. The implementing partner will pay particular attention to ensure that participation in the sessions is inclusive and that agendas for such session are agreed among key stakeholders. An essential step in planning these activities will be the selection of topics that provide the most benefit for all of the parties involved. Thus, the LEAD Program will seek input from all parties on what they believe are relevant topics that will assist in efforts to build consensus in the National Assembly.

Issue-based Policy Development

In order to improve the parties’ engagement in Parliament, the Program will host workshops to review techniques in researching and analyzing constituent concerns and developing policies to address those concerns.

Through these workshops, the Program will share tools for addressing constituent concerns. The Program will also organize multi-stakeholder discussion groups for engagement with citizens, civil society, the private sector, among others, to provide input for developing legislative priorities. Support will be provided for the development of policy proposals, mostly through the creation of policy-making working groups, that will be used to inform legislative agendas and initiatives (see Component 2).

IRI will also offer (non-material) assistance to strengthen the research capabilities. Training sessions will be organized to build research capacity. Through all of these efforts, IRI will help parties build capacity to offer solutions and as a result, improve the effectiveness of the National Assembly.

Citizen engagement

Citizens in general are not often aware of who their elected representatives are at the national level. The LEAD Program will facilitate opportunities for political stakeholders to meaningfully engage with citizens within the confines of the current electoral laws. Proposed activities include:

Town Hall Meetings: The Program will facilitate opportunities for parties to meet with citizens through various public forums, such as town halls to better understand citizen concerns, offering opportunities to gain citizen insight into policy and legislative initiatives, while building stronger connections between parties/elected officials and citizens. The Program will provide training on effective communication so that through these (and other) public forums, policy positions are effectively conveyed to citizens and the input of citizens is fully considered in policy making.

Multi-party Issue Forums: The LEAD Program will also facilitate multi-party issue forums to discuss specific issues and discuss public policy where parties nominate a representative to present the party's position on an issue and allow for public questions and comments. These dialogues may be done in the form of public forums and if possible be broadcast online, and/or radio or television. These will be carefully moderated to ensure even playing fields for all participating party representatives and will employ methods to mitigate the possibility of non-constructive interactions between party representatives during the dialogues.

The Program will also help parties play a role in providing civic education to build citizen understanding of their roles and responsibilities and what their expectations should be of political parties and elected officials in regard to direct interaction with constituents.

Component 2: Strengthen the National Assembly and boost citizen engagement

The LEAD Program will seek to strengthen both the institution of the National Assembly and the capacity of individual Members of Parliament and staff to enhance effective legislative functions in Guyana. A legislative expert will be hired and be seconded to the National Assembly for a minimum of four to six months to provide intensive consultative advice and training to Members of Parliament and National Assembly staff. The Program's Chief of Party and other technical experts/consultants from the region, the United States, Canada and a country with similar processes and political conditions *such as* Barbados, or Trinidad & Tobago will also provide more specialized technical expertise throughout the program. Program activities will range from regular and intensive consultative sessions to formal workshops and training on a broad range of topics to strengthen the National Assembly. The Program will also arrange for select exchanges for Guyanese political stakeholders to travel to one or more countries to examine other best practices and exchange comparative experiences. Illustrative activities are described below:

Legislative Research and Drafting

With the limits on the time Members of Parliament can devote to specific issues and with no individual staff, Members are significantly hampered in their ability to effectively analyze pressing issues facing the country, understand constituent concerns, and research solutions that can shape legislative agendas. While the National Assembly employs staff, their primary focus and skills are limited to providing logistical support for the daily operations of the National Assembly.

The LEAD Program will seek to strengthen the capacity of Members of Parliament and National Assembly staff to 1) investigate and research issues, 2) draft legislation, and 3) conduct analysis of legislative initiatives introduced by Members or the executive branch. The Program will help strengthen connections with the existing parliamentary staff that provide legislative research to Members of Parliament, to improve through workshops and consultations, utilization of this in-house research tool. Such a mechanism is currently lacking, and its development could enhance the legislative drafting process. The Program will also work with individual committees to support the development of specific policy proposals that can evolve into legislative initiatives drawing on emerging institutional services, such as research capabilities, to develop these policy proposals into legislation. The Program will work with Members of the National Assembly and its committees to enhance technical understanding of National Assembly rules and processes to effectively introduce and amend bills and legislation. Building on an enhanced understanding of the components necessary to develop viable, issue-based legislation, international experts will support legislators as they research, draft and propose legislation in order to strengthen the overall ability of the National Assembly to develop constructive, relevant and issue-based legislative initiatives.

The Program will conduct supplemental training to identify methods of legislating in a transparent manner. This will include actions such as updating the Parliamentary website with

current proposed legislation and schedules of committee hearings to facilitate the participation of experts, civil society and interested citizens.

To ensure that the legislative process is conducted in a transparent manner, the Program will encourage committees to update debate schedules and public hearings on the Parliamentary website. Essential to this comprehensive methodology is the ongoing support of experts, which will be provided to the National Assembly.

“Developing Legislative Agendas” Workshops

Building upon party engagement through Component 1, the Program will organize roundtables which will include party members from all political parties. These roundtables will be led by expert IRI facilitators to facilitate members in finding common ground and identifying areas of consensus among the disparate factions, utilizing skills developed during activities described above. A primary goal for these workshops will be for legislators to use training techniques in the legislative planning process to more effectively articulate a coherent legislative agenda and implement legislative/policy strategies. The LEAD Program will conduct follow-up interviews to assess the value and impact of legislation and policies that were devised and implemented.

Women’s Parliamentary Caucus

Upon consultation with the Speaker, women Members of Parliament, and the respective leadership of all political parties in the National Assembly, the LEAD Program will provide support for the establishment of a “Women’s Parliamentary Caucus” consisting of women Members from each of the parties represented in the Assembly. The over-arching goal of the caucus is to provide a forum for the discussion of women’s issues in Guyana and to bring forward those issues to the Assembly. Such a caucus will help foster non-partisan discussion and build consensus between representatives from the different political parties on issues of mutually-shared common interests. The Program’s implementing partner, IRI has substantial experience in this subject, most recently in Peru.

Increasing Citizen Engagement

While voter turnout is comparatively high in Guyana, most voters have little knowledge of the inner-workings of their National Assembly. The LEAD Program will coordinate closely with the UNDP to work with National Assembly staff to maximize the effectiveness of its existing website and introduce or support other technology and/or media to disseminate information to the public about the workings of the National Assembly. This could include creating a program that can broadcast via the Internet, television or radio that covers committee hearings, legislative debates, and general parliamentary proceedings. The Program will also coordinate with the National Assembly on ways its members can more effectively solicit and receive feedback from citizens. The Program will support specific technology assistance to the National Assembly based on consultations to identify relevant technical support needs, the input of other donors, and is the sustainability of such initiatives.

The Program will work with legislators and staff to develop these initiatives and will also convene multi-stakeholder roundtables to allow for feedback from government, civil society, citizens, and the private sector, among others, to provide input into the development and sustainability of these initiatives.

Oversight mechanisms

The National Assembly has mandated constitutional authority to provide oversight of the executive branch. However, the Assembly may benefit from constructive suggestions for how to fulfill this constitutional role more efficiently and effectively. The LEAD Program will work with all Members and staff of the National Assembly and committees to provide examples and tools for how to more effectively engage in parliamentary oversight. The Program will help develop new methodologies based on international best practices by providing practitioners from countries in the region such as Uruguay and Brazil, which offer useful models for legislative oversight. These experts will work with committee leadership to develop tailored methods to enhance oversight procedures and cultivate their interest in new oversight measures. For example, the Program will encourage committees to hold public hearings and seek to build committee skills in using hearings to debate legislation and draw on expert advice and testimony on issues and proposed legislative initiatives under discussion.

Component 3: Motivate and better equip Guyanese youth to constructively engage in political and civic processes.

It is critical for young citizens to understand their roles and responsibilities in a democracy so they can participate constructively in the political process and become more engaged as citizens in civil society. The LEAD Program will implement a series of program activities aimed at increasing youth interest in politics and civic affairs, while also building leadership skills among youth. The Program will work with youth groups and civil society organizations to conduct civic education campaigns and events to generate broader interest among the youth in politics and government and in engaging in fruitful civic and community Programs. Public-private partnerships will be fostered to increase the probability of sustainability and marketing opportunities for youth, not only in government and civil society, but also in the private sector. Illustrative activities include but are not limited to those described below:

Youth Debate Clubs

The LEAD Program will work with existing non-partisan debate clubs for young people, collaborating with interested university and secondary school students. The Program will conduct debate training and form teams from the training programs to participate in a series of debates. The Program will then help organize debates that will focus on key issues facing the country and local communities. These debates will allow young persons to develop and demonstrate leadership skills and civic awareness, and hone communication and debate skills to advocate for their positions. The training and debates will prepare these students to publicly engage in discussing possible solutions to issues of national and local concern.

Youth Civic Education Festivals

The LEAD Program will partner with a local civil society organization to organize at least three Youth Civic Education Festivals to educate youth on involvement with democratic institutions in their communities through such activities as public debates, community activism, and volunteering in their communities.

These festivals will bring together civil society, private businesses, government entities, health and other social community organizations to provide a platform to demonstrate their services and commitment to youth and democracy. The Youth Festivals will have plenary sessions, competitions, interactive booths and activities. Presentations and events at the festival will emphasize fun and active learning connected to civic education and leadership development objectives. Activities at such festivals could include debate contests, mock voting, fundraising training and competitions, petition drive training and competitions, and public speaking. The Program will link with other program components, including utilizing youth debate club members to participate in a public debate during the festival. Private sector sponsorship will be sought for these events.

Component 4: Civic and voter education on the implementation of local government reform and local elections.

The LEAD Program will work in partnership with stakeholders to enhance citizen education in regard to recently approved local government reform legislation, the role of local government, and the rights and responsibilities of citizens and elected officials. The Program will also conduct voter education initiatives to educate citizens and poll workers on the electoral process. IRI has extensive worldwide experience in this area. Illustrative activities could include: 1) Civic education on Local Government: i.e. working with stakeholders to develop materials and information on the new local government structures and disseminating this information through media, etc. 2) Supporting voter education awareness through development of signs, posters, etc for display in paper, at events, through media, etc., including encouraging voter registration, and supporting public outreach for GECOM. 3) Providing training and non-material assistance to election officials on the election process and training of potential election observers.

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