



## GOVERNING JUSTLY AND DEMOCRATICALLY

Liberia emerged from 14 years of civil war in 2003 and successfully held presidential and legislative elections in 2005, inaugurating the first African female head of state in 2006 for a five-year term. As the country rebuilds, strengthening the practice of democracy, governance, and justice is critical to securing the peace and laying the foundation for well-being and economic prosperity. Decades of exclusion, corruption, impunity, and overall poor governance drove the conflict that spread to neighboring countries. Stability and democracy in Liberia also contributes to regional security. Expectations are high, but capacity is weak.

### THE CHALLENGES

Liberia has to transform a weak justice sector and an inexperienced legislature that was traditionally cowed by the executive, overcome centuries of impunity by elites, ongoing corruption, and restore a war-torn social fabric.



The effective rule of law in the formal and customary sectors and respect for human rights is a priority. Weak judiciary and prosecutorial systems have provoked mob violence as citizens believe redress through formal systems is futile. Rule of law is also necessary to enable economic activity and private investment to take root and generate critically needed employment for a large and idle population of unskilled youth that can threaten long-term stability. Violence against women, specifically rape, is high.

The historic 2005 elections resulted in a national legislature with a large number of members ill-equipped to effectively represent the interests of their constituents or collectively perform their proper governance role.

The government has prioritized enhancing citizen participation and ownership of government policy as a key Poverty Reduction Strategy objective. Having worked in the last decades predominantly compensating for non-performing government services, community groups, faith-based and non-governmental organizations possess limited capacity to play an effective advocacy role in governance. A weak, resource-starved media does not play an effective watchdog and public information governance function. Civic participation is further inhibited by a high rate of illiteracy and poor road and communications infrastructure that isolates sectors of the country.

### USAID PROGRAMS IN DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE

In 2008, USAID is planning new programs that will build on earlier support to judicial, legislative, and electoral processes and place greater emphasis on cultivating respect for human rights, increasing access to justice, strengthening the capacity of legislators and magistrates, and expanding and deepening civic education and participation in all sectors of the country's development in cooperation with other USAID programs. In FY 08 funding is over \$17 million USD.

DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE PROGRAM	
FY2008 ESTIMATES	US\$ (MILLIONS)
Rule of Law and Human Rights	6,086,000
Good Governance	13,251,000
Political Competition & Consensus-Building	1,472,000
Civil Society	1,472,000

## **RULE OF LAW AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

USAID is working to increase access to justice through legal aid, victim support, training in alternative dispute resolution and handling cases of gender-based violence. USAID is funding the creation and operation of six legal aid clinics with free service provided by recent law school graduates, a support center for victims of gender-based violence, mediator training for alternative dispute resolution, capacity building and cooperation with the Louis Arthur Grimes School of Law, Liberian National Bar and the Liberian Judges Association. A new Judicial Training Institute will train over 200 magistrates, judges and other judicial sector personnel in the impartial administration of justice and to deepen knowledge of Liberian laws.

## **DEMOCRATIC AND GOOD GOVERNANCE**

The National Elections Commission (NEC) receives technical assistance from USAID to strengthen its ability to conduct local elections and prepare for the presidential elections in 2011. The NEC is completing a boundary harmonization exercise for municipal and chieftaincy districts that is instrumental to the decentralization plan in the GOL's Poverty Reduction Strategy. USAID's Liberia Community Infrastructure Program (LCIP) is rehabilitating and renovating a building to provide a permanent base of operations for the commission by 2009. In the coming year, LCIP also will have completed the rehabilitation and renovation of ten County Administration buildings in support of local government operations.

USAID funded renovation of the Capitol building, collaborated on the preparation of a legislative strategic plan, and provided technical assistance to the Joint Modernization Committee that leads the reform agenda. Now USAID aims to strengthen the legislative process by building the individual and collective capacity of legislators to perform oversight of the Executive branch, manage constituent relations and gain practical skills to facilitate their daily work, for example, in computer literacy. Staff will receive training and technical assistance in research and archiving and in executing the functions of key legislative committees, for example, Budget.

Recruitment incentive programs, the Senior Executive Service (SES) and the Transfer of Knowledge through Expatriate Nationals (TOKTEN), receive USAID funding to increase the pool of competent civil service managers and employees and lay the basis for civil service reforms.

## **CIVIL SOCIETY**

An inclusive political system is an important element for blocking one of the triggers of the past conflict. USAID is planning a program to increase ownership and participation in the implementation of Liberia's Poverty Reduction Strategy. Assistance to non governmental actors will build their capacity to develop real linkages with citizens. Public education will increase awareness of how to constructively engage elected and appointed local officials.

An effective, vibrant, responsible media is essential to strengthening democracy in Liberia. Without financial sustainability, it is difficult for the media to assert its independence and to fulfill its watchdog role in governance. USAID is cooperating with the US Embassy's Public Diplomacy Section on a training plan for print, radio, and TV news media outlets to strengthen their financial viability.

### **Key USAID Partners in FY 2008:**

- Government of Liberia: Ministry of Justice, Governance Commission, National Legislature (Joint Modernization Committee)
- Donors: The World Bank, UNDP, US Department of State (Justice Sector Support for Liberia)

### **Projects:**

- American Bar Association-Rule of Law Initiative: Support for a Human Rights Culture in Liberia 2007-2009
- Consortium for Elections and Political Party Strengthening (CEPPS) 2004-2008:
  - National Democratic Institute (NDI): Legislative Strengthening Legislative Capacity and Constituent Relations
  - International Republican Institute (IRI): Political Party Strengthening
  - International Foundation for Elections Systems (IFES): Electoral Process Strengthening