



# REBUILDING LIBERIAN COLLABORATIVE CAPACITY

## END OF PROJECT REPORT

**Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars  
Project on Leadership and Building State Capacity**

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UNITED NATIONS PEACEBUILDING FUND  
Liberia



## **UNDP End of Project Report**

### **Rebuilding Liberian Collaborative Capacity**

***“[I] believe that of all of the challenges we face as Liberians, peacebuilding is the most challenging because without peace nothing else is possible. What you’re doing here is the important part. Without reconciliation and peace, we will go back to square one. Your effort is important to the rebuilding process.”***

- President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf’s message to workshop participants as delivered by Dr. Momo Rogers, Director General of the Cabinet/Assistant to the President, November 2009.

***“If all Liberian leaders could be exposed to this kind of workshop, then the governance and reconciliation agendas would be well served.”***

- Dominic Sam, UNDP Resident Representative, at final workshop closing.

***“I sincerely hope you will continue your work.”***

- Eugene Nindorera, UNMIL Director for Human Rights.

#### **A. Context**

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In July 2009, the Project on Leadership and Building State Capacity (hereafter referred to as the Leadership Project), with financial support from the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund via the United Nations Development Programme in Liberia, launched an 18-month training program to foster collaborative decision-making and negotiation skills among key Liberian leadership. The objective of this program was to build a network of Liberian leaders from across the political, functional, regional and societal spectrum that would work towards a shared vision and commitment for the country through collaborative, rather than competitive, means in order to manage the recovery, governance, and development of Liberia.

As a capacity-building initiative, the program is designed to strengthen relations and cooperation among participants of differing backgrounds, and to enhance their conflict management, communication, and negotiation skills. The skills and toolsets developed in the workshops enable Liberian decision-makers to work together within the structures of the state and in harmony with civil society to strengthen state capacity for peace consolidation. Target participants for the project included Executive and Legislative branch leadership, opposition political party leaders, and County Superintendents.

The program is based on similar work carried out by the Leadership Project in Liberia in 2006-7 and included in its participants some of the Liberians who had earlier been involved. In all, 90 other Liberians from a broad political, ethnic, regional and sociological spectrum were involved (a list of all participants is contained at Annex 1). Participant selection was made through Consulting Director Steve McDonald's consultations with the President's Office, Governance Commission, Project Board, and other Liberian contacts, as well as with the key advice and assistance of Program Officer Jean Hannah-Thompson.

## **B. Project Activities Summary**

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The Wilson Center carried out 10 project activities during the time frame of the grant, including a preliminary assessment mission, a training mission, two full retreat workshops, four follow-up workshops, a Project Board meeting, and a Monitoring and Evaluation project.

1. July 2009 Preliminary Assessment Mission  
Beyond meeting with a wide range of stakeholders in government, civil society and political parties/factions, this visit included the establishment of the Project Board for guiding the project.
2. October 2009 Training Mission  
This mission focused specifically on enhancing the capacity of our Liberia Program Officer, Jean Hannah-Thompson, in project management.
3. November 2009 Follow-Up Workshop  
This first workshop was designed to bring together a selection of past participants to renew the Liberian Leadership Network and launch the project. The event was co-sponsored by the West African Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) and facilitated by Emmanuel Bombande, Founder and CEO of WANEP. The 38 participants had all taken part in WWICS workshops in 2006-07.
4. April 2010 Full Retreat  
Twenty-six new participants were involved in the first retreat, including County Superintendents for the first time. The Senior Trainers were Elizabeth McClintock of CMPartners, Boston, and Ricardo Perez Nuckel of Alter Négo, Paris, both conflict transformation professionals who have worked extensively in Africa, and, in Ms. McClintock's case, in Liberia since 2006. The Wilson Center decided to focus more on County-based issues of conflict, specifically land issues, development, administration, and coordination of government at all levels.
5. May 2010 Follow-Up Workshop  
Twenty-Five participants from the Liberian Leadership Network the Wilson Center began in November, 2009 were present.

6. November 2010 Second Full Retreat  
 In response to the April workshop participants' request to bring the training to more local levels of leadership, WWICS held the next workshop in Gbarnga, Bong County and brought together participants from four main conflict-affected counties—Lofa, Nimba, Bong and Bomi. There were 26 participants, including the four County Superintendents (or their Deputies); their Superintendents for Land Commission, Education and Development; as well as Paramount Chiefs, elders and civil society representatives. Also present were the Deputy Ministers of Internal Affairs and Education, Assistant Minister of Health, and the Chairman of the Land Commission.
  
7. November 2010 Follow Up Workshop  
 This workshop was specifically a follow up for the April 2009 Retreat participants and 22 individual leaders were able to take part.
  
8. January 2011 Final Project Workshop  
 This was the “wrap up” workshop, bringing together 41 participants from all prior workshops representing multiple political parties, religious, civil society, local, county, and national government leaders. The purpose was to create a literal “toolbox” based on learned craft and applied to real life situations as identified by the participants. A goal of the workshop was to strengthen the network of participants, as well as provide the opportunity to convene a planning session for them to give guidance to the Wilson Center as to how this project could be strengthened and expanded to ensure a stable and peaceful transition for Liberia in the future.

### **3. Impact of Project**

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Project impact has been measured in several ways. First, there was formal monitoring and evaluation (M&E) throughout the program's activities, and a final independent evaluation completed following the last workshop in January 2011. We also have encouraged participants, both at the follow-up workshops and through correspondence, to keep us informed of how the project has helped them in their work and everyday lives. Finally, we have continuously spoken with outside observers who witness the behavior and interactions of participants and can note changes or transformations. This section outlines some of those and then tries to distill a number of the impacts.

1. Formal Monitoring and Evaluation  
 Throughout the program, the Leadership Project polled participant views and impressions at the end of every workshop. These evaluations were focused on the methodology, logistics, and pertinence of pedagogy, asking the participants to rank order them and to also comment on the usefulness of the skills, tools, and relationships built in their daily professional and personal lives. Annexes 2-5 contain examples of the evaluation tools that were used. The results have

continually shown a positive trend among participants, in terms of using conflict resolution and negotiation skills gained from the workshops.

For the project termination, a full evaluation was conducted by a consultant who interviewed a group of participants strategically selected across a wide spectrum of ethnicity, political linkages, government and non-government employment, regional locations, religious affiliation and gender criteria. The group also included someone from each of the four intakes of participants since the projects inception in 2006. The evaluation covered four major areas of the training:

- a. Participant expectations of the workshops;
- b. Application of the skills acquired;
- c. The establishment and sustainability of the participant network; and
- d. Identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the overall program.

The findings of this exercise were positive and constructive. According to 95% of the respondents, the workshop met their expectations. Seventy percent of the respondents stated that they have started applying those skills in their various communities, while 95% attested to having built relationships with colleagues from other parties and organizations. There was also a high demand for future workshops in order to ensure the sustainability of the skills and toolsets provided.

## 2. Testimony and Feedback About the Effectiveness of the Project

Through the course of the workshops, and in both solicited and unsolicited exchanges with past participants, we have received a number of testimonies about how the workshops have helped them in their everyday work:

- a. One traditional leader said: “The group work and the way it was presented got our minds to understand that as we leave from here we can go out and apply what we have learned.”
- b. A senior staff member of the House said in an e-mail: “Accept my compliments...I have indeed improved on my conversation with respect to listening more and talking less, positioning myself in the situation or the position of the other party and negotiating from a position of fairness and mutual respect. I attended two training exercises and found the tools and experience useful...When I think or re-read my notes and handouts from the workshops I get better at looking at the other side of the story.”
- c. An e-mail from an elected municipal official in Gbarnga said: “I have been very basic with the Four Quadrant Tool [in solving]...three issues to settle between the locals on farm land and community participation.”  
*Comment:* The Four Quadrant Tool is an analytical framework for problem-solving that was part of the curriculum of the workshops.
- d. An e-mail sent by current House Member: “Let me firstly thank you and the rest of the guys at the [Wilson Center] for the level of work in the area of peace building at those workshops and follow-up as well. I've been working using the Four Quadrant Tool in resolving conflicts and

protecting the peace in my community. However, I will be in the race for the seat of Representative for my District in Monrovia, Liberia. We look forward to seeing you.”

- e. From a County Superintendent for Development: “What I learned is that if we look at each other as one group, we are the people who own the land. I think that we, as Liberians and Africans, should look at each other with respect, regardless of which tribe or clan we come from, or whether someone is rich or poor; we are all African.”
- f. One participant thanked the facilitators and organizers for teaching them conflict resolution principles and seeing that there are different ways to approach issues and contentious situations.
- g. Another participant found the workshop mixture of local, county and national level leaders to be valuable “since they all play a part in maintaining peace and stability throughout the country.”
- h. Said another: “These workshops have linked us, from government to local NGO, for working with the community and allowed us to find our common objectives.”
- i. A workshop participant, at the end of a day-long simulation exercise: “This made me think about 1997 when rice was used to buy votes in the election - this made me think about the problems in the Red Region. Instead of offering a resource to simply solve a short term problem, we should involve the people in the process of problem-definition and problem-solving processes. That will produce more durable solutions.”

### 3. Identifiable Impacts

While it is difficult to measure or establish quantifiable benchmarks for the changes in human behavior and relationships that are at the core of Leadership Project program objectives, there were some impacts that can be identified and some changes of behavior that are noted by outsiders who have observed the daily conduct of participant relations:

- a. The Liberian Leadership Network was called upon to help brief a recent U.S. Congressional delegation that visited Liberia in May 2011. The purpose of the visit was to assess economic, educational, and political progress in Liberia. Wilson Center Program Manager, Jean Hannah-Thompson, arranged for an extensive program for the Congressional delegation and put together meetings with several groups of project alumni, including 6 Members of the Liberian Congress, a group of women in peace building, and a government Minister. A number of other meetings, while not including project alumni, were able to be arranged because of the network and reputation the Wilson Center had built with Liberian leaders.
- b. A senior UNDP official expressed his surprise at the camaraderie and positive “body language” that he had witnessed from the Liberians while observing a workshop. He was impressed with the diversity of participants and the commitments that he had heard to Liberia and its

recovery. “If all Liberian leaders,” he said, “could be exposed to this kind of workshop, then the governance and reconciliation agendas would be well served.”

- c. A senior person close to the President told us: “I have seen a change in the tone and effectiveness of communications between cabinet ministers and Members of Congress since being involved in your workshops. In fact, even the mode of discourse on radio has changed with these individuals.”
- d. One County Superintendent asked permission to use the name “Woodrow Wilson Peace Ambassadors” to establish a group of workshop participants in his County who could jointly address local issues using the conflict resolution strategies and tools from the workshops.
- e. After the Gbarnga four-county workshop in 2010, three participants went on radio talk shows to address different issues arising from the workshop procedures and discuss possible solutions with the public. They informed their constituents about the participants who attended the workshop and separately raised issues affecting their communities, namely non-parental support for children, student failure in schools, and teenage pregnancy.
- f. From these initiatives and public outreach, one participant who is a municipal officer has proposed a Marital Awareness Education and Training Program to be taught in schools by religious and traditional leaders, civil society leaders, and other leaders in the community to promote understanding of the responsibilities involved in having a family.
- g. Another set up a sensitization meeting with all key community stakeholders to establish and implement regulations that will protect students and also provide motivational support for them to stay in school.

#### **D. Lessons Learned**

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The lessons learned iterated below are from both participants, and our own observations:

1. Without the rebuilding of trust, the collaborative capacity to work together, and an understanding of their interdependence, society leaders from all levels will not be able to work effectively on governance, development, poverty reduction, education, and recovery issues.
2. The strengths of the program that were identified by participants were the Four Quadrant Tool, the reconciliation exercise, and the interactive pedagogic format of the trainings. It was felt that the best way forward was to train Liberians to facilitate these exercises because only in that way will there be a sustainable ownership of the process by Liberians.
3. In the same vein, it was recommended that more youth be brought into the process to be trained and mentored in applying the skills and toolsets learned at the workshops to their own demographic.
4. A lesson identified by a participant: “It is important to diagnose the causes of a problem before jumping to solutions - this is especially important in resolving

- land issues. The deed is only one part of the possible solution. Also it is necessary to engage people in a dialogue to find a sustainable solution.”
5. Insight from a participant in the workshops: “The more complicated and the more deeply-rooted the issue is, the more emotional the issue, the more difficult the negotiation. I’ve learned that conflicts over resources are less difficult to solve than conflicts over beliefs or identity. I used to think that land was a resource. What I learned was that land is more of an identity. In my research, I found out that when a child is born, that child is directly from the land because the umbilical cord is buried in the land. Now I understand why land issues are so difficult to resolve. It is about identity. The nature of the issue determines the complication level of the negotiation.”
  6. “What is happening in Liberia, when confusion arises over land, the parties have nowhere to go. Community influence can get you both on and off track. It causes confusion. The dispute gets blown out of proportion and so the party might go above the community. The land commissioner is thinking he/she will give a certificate that will resolve the issue because it will not be resolved at the local community. (So we learned that) the most appropriate level (for resolution of land conflicts) is at the community level.” From a civil society leader in Gbarnga.
  7. While the project intended to involve country-wide participation with representation from both regional and rural constituencies, it succeeded only in staging workshops in the Montserrado and Bong Counties, and reaching out mainly to constituencies in the Central and Northwestern regions. Any expansion or extension of the project would need to include the Southeastern region of the country, particularly the counties of Grand Kru and Maryland, where a number of land disputes are extant.

### **E. Building Local Capacity**

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In its work in Liberia and elsewhere in Africa, the Woodrow Wilson Center has always been cognizant of the fact that peace and development are only sustained by the people of that country. In post-conflict situations, like that of Liberia, when still dealing with populations that are deeply divided by ethnic, regional, political and personal factors and grievances, there is a preliminary role for third party facilitators as the society comes to grips with rebuilding trust, overcoming conflict causes, and fashioning a collaborative, interdependent mind set. We therefore feel strongly that using international facilitators who are professional, highly experienced, and have regional and country-specific knowledge is not only wise, but much more effective in building a platform of reconciliation. However, we understand that the role for outside facilitators will eventually disappear, as Liberians form the relationships, networks, capacities and the will to move the process forward themselves. Only then do we truly achieve success.

We would like to give a brief comparative example of how this has worked successfully in Burundi where we began our work in 2002 in much the same way as we did in Liberia in 2006. We utilized outside facilitators and targeted a high-level group of leaders from across the political, ethnic, regional and socio-economic spectrum. In time, as suspicions



dropped away and relationships formed, we were able to begin integrating Burundians into the training and administrative processes so that now our entire project is run by Burundians. In fact, we are currently engaged, at the behest of the Ministry of Education, in developing a curriculum in conflict resolution for teaching in the secondary schools, so that our methodology and impact becomes imbedded in societal norms. All of this has been accomplished by intensive training of trainers, mentoring, coaching and monitoring programs, and reaching out to an ever-widening universe of stakeholders. To this day, beyond the 360 high-level leaders with whom we continue to work, we have trained over 50 Burundians as professional mediators, negotiators and facilitators; 80 teachers in the pilot phase of the curriculum project; and 20 field grade military officers who work in the Military Academy. They, in turn, have trained over 6,000 community leaders and 350 military officers. This is capacity-building as the Woodrow Wilson Center envisions it.

This just-completed phase of the Leadership Project work in Liberia from 2009-2011 has not taken us to the same point as in Burundi yet, in terms of local-capacity building. It has always been our intention, with continued funding, to be able to follow the Burundi model, and our past funding proposals, as well as any future one, will take this into account. This means expanding the administrative and logistical capacities for the local office, a step that we fully support in order to make the project most effective; and, of course, fashioning training of trainers, mediators and negotiators so that Liberians can take the lead in building and sustaining peace in their own country.

We do think that local “ownership” means several things, one of which we accomplished in terms of responding, in the structuring of our workshop curriculums, to the needs as defined by our participants. All case studies and negotiation exercises were based on real life experiences, as provided by the participants themselves. Letting Liberians “set the agenda” is imperative in making the impact of the workshops pertinent and real. This we will continue to do in any expanded or extended work we do in Liberia. It is also important to underline the fact that program activities were all located in Liberia, as well as all expenses incurred, including the purchase of all training supplies and use of local conference facilities. This contributed significantly to the support of local businesses.