



REBUILDING LIBERIAN COLLABORATIVE CAPACITY END OF PROJECT REPORT

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UNDP End of Project Report

Rebuilding Liberian Collaborative Capacity

1. Context

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. Target participants for the project include Executive and Legislative branch leadership, opposition political party leaders, and County Superintendents. The Leadership Project originally planned to host two major training workshops, guided by expert conflict resolution facilitators, and seven follow-up workshops. The focus of the project expanded in response to participant evaluations and sentiments shared by a number of our high-level Liberian stakeholders. The objective of this project was to build a network of Liberian leaders from across the political, functional, regional and societal spectrum which has the collaborative capacities, shared vision, and commitment to manage the recovery, governance, and development of Liberia. This is done by re-establishing their mutual trust, effective relationships and communication skills and creating an agreement on the way in which governance is affected through a sense of common interests and interdependence. This contributes to the broader goals of the Peace Building Fund of strengthening state capacity for peace consolidation.

The project is a capacity-building initiative, designed to strengthen reconciliation among participants of differing backgrounds and to enhance their conflict management, communication, and negotiation skills and their collaborative decision-making capacities. Workshops are not decision-making forums. However, the relationships and skills developed are designed to make it easier for Liberian decision-makers to work together within the structures of the state and in harmony with civil society to advance Liberia's post-war reconstruction.

The training methodology employs a non-traditional, interactive pedagogy, with trainers who are skilled in the techniques of institutional and conflict transformation, and who have extensive experience working with both private sector and public institutions to create more cohesive and effective structures. Training techniques are designed to address four political imperatives of sustainable post-war reconstruction: enabling former belligerents to shift from a zero-sum paradigm of winners and losers to one that recognizes interdependence and common ground; developing trust and confidence among key leaders; strengthening the skills of communication required for effective collaboration; and re-building a consensus on the "rules of the game," i.e., on how power will be organized and decisions will be made.

All of this requires more than “book learning” and a cognitive understanding of concepts. A paradigm or mindset can not be taught; it must be experienced. The same is true of trusting relationships that develop only over time and involve personal emotional investment. Likewise, an appreciation of the importance of process will emerge only through direct experience with others. What the training provides is an opportunity for experiential learning – through interactive exercises, simulations, and role-playing – all designed to enable the participants to learn and build upon their skills, not only through lectures and reading but also through their own experiences.

Workshop exercises are designed both to demonstrate the power of conditioning on perceptions and to strengthen participants’ communication skills. They also seek to transform the way in which the participants define and understand their “self-interest,” such that they come to see their long-term security and welfare as being not in opposition to, but directly dependent upon, the larger society of which they are a part. The objective is to enable the participants to comprehend that collaboration with others is not a matter of altruism or of adherence to some abstract notion of “good governance,” but is a matter of enlightened self-interest. This requires understanding the concept of “interest-based negotiations,” in which decision makers distinguish between their “positions,” or idealized aspirations, on the one hand, and their underlying “interest,” or fundamental needs, on the other. Sustainable decisions are far more likely to result from a decision-making process that turns not on attempts to impose one’s position on others but, instead, on the search for means of satisfying the core interests of all.

2. Project Activities Summary

WWICS 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-ups, a Project Board meeting, and a Monitoring and Evaluation project.

Based on similar leadership capacity work done by the Center in Liberia in 2006-7, Leadership Project Consulting Director Steve McDonald began in early 2009 to review Liberia’s current political fault lines and correspond with his government, civil society and international community contacts in the country to assess the value of restarting this effort. This led to the staging of a full assessment mission in July 2009.

3. Project Activities Report

1. July 2009 Assessment Mission

Conducted from July 8 - 23, 2009, the in-country assessment mission held over 40 meetings with Liberian Senators and House of Representative members, key opposition political party leaders, Truth and Reconciliation Commission executives, other civil society and NGO representatives, and senior personnel in UNDP, USAID, UNMIL, and the US Embassy. Through these meetings, the Leadership team gained perspective on current issues and concerns for Liberian governance and stability. As this process had begun in 2006, with other donor support, past workshop participants also met with the

Leadership team twice to discuss their views on Liberia's current political needs and give insight on how to manage the new project and where to focus, as well as pointing out shortfalls in previous workshops and ways to improve on the previous training initiative.

During the Assessment Mission, the Leadership Team and UNDP established a Project Board to oversee and help guide this process. The Board is made up key Liberian sector representatives from the President's office, the Governance Commission, and civil society, as well as UNDP officials, and is chaired by the Minister of Internal Affairs. WWICS works closely with the Board in its planning efforts. The most recent meeting of the Project Board was held on October 20, 2010.

2. October 2009 Training Mission

In October, 2009, WWICS staff member Gregor Young conducted a training mission for locally-based staff member Jean Hannah-Thompson. Ms. Hannah-Thompson was hired through a competitive process with the assistance of UNDP Liberia and has proved to be an invaluable asset to the progress of this current project.

3. November 2009 Follow-Up Workshop

From November 25 through November 27, 2009, the WWICS convened the initial follow-up workshop of its renewed initiative, Rebuilding Liberian Collaborative Capacity, with a diverse group of 39 Liberian government, civil society, faith-based, former armed faction, and youth leaders. The workshop was co-sponsored by the West African Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) and the Chief Facilitator was Emmanuel Bombande, the founder and CEO of WANEP. Participants had all taken part in WWICS workshops in 2006-07. This follow-up was designed to bring these past participants together to reinforce joint problem analysis and solving techniques, reinvigorate the network of previously committed Liberians, and expand the trust and cooperation of the network. Present were representatives of the Senate and House, both members and staff; the Executive Branch (Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Justice, Land Commission, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs); faith representatives, from Catholic, Protestant and Muslim communities; opposition party leaders (CDC, NDPL, LNP, NPP); and civil society groups. The participants exhibited a great commitment to the training process and maintained a core group of roughly 35 leaders for the entire workshop.

The workshop was very successful in that it provided a safe and open forum for leaders to discuss perspectives on Liberian national reconciliation across party and ethnic lines. The participants were asked to work together to analyze the core causes of conflict in Liberia, the obstacles and challenges for national reconciliation, and ways to overcome those challenges as a society. Main points of discussion focused on the most critical policy questions in Liberia, including the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, issues relating to decentralization of governance, and education reform. The general consensus from participants was that the workshop was very useful and would help them to formulate policy directives and make decisions more collaboratively and in consideration of a broader range of interests, historical grievances, and political factors. The WWICS and WANEP training provided leaders and stakeholders with the

communication and negotiation skills necessary to collaborate more effectively and build a stronger, stable, and more democratic Liberia.



4 & 5. April 2010 Full Retreat/May 2010 Follow-Up Workshop

The first retreat workshop, over five days from April 26-30, 2010, was convened at the Thinker's Village Hotel compound in Paynesville. This time, the workshop participants were recruited to reflect not only the divisions inherent in the Executive and Legislative branches relationship, but to bring in County Superintendents who are in the front line of development and reconciliation policy issues at the local level.

As with all past workshops, participant selection was made through Consulting Director Steve McDonald's consultations with the President's Office, the Governance Commission, the Project Board, and other Liberian contacts. Program Officer Jean Hannah-Thompson worked over the preceding months to ensure attendance by individual hand-delivery of invitations to county superintendents and others, and following up with e-mail and telephone contacts with invitees.



Participants in the April workshop, which included Senators, Representatives, Ministers, Deputy Ministers, an opposition party leaders, as well as County Superintendents, received training in negotiation and communication, and engaged in several simulation exercises designed to illustrate shared political interest, interdependence on a national level, and build trust and repair fractured relationships between them. Exercises included SIMSOC (a simulated society role-playing game) and the Four Quadrants conflict analysis tool. Senior Trainers Elizabeth McClintock, of CMPartners, Boston, and Ricardo Perez

Nuckel, of Alter Négo, Paris, both conflict transformation professionals who have worked extensively in Africa, in Ms. McClintock's case, in Liberia, facilitated this historic and timely workshop.

In consultation with UNDP Liberia Programme/Operations Specialist Ishmael Dodoo, workshop participants, and other stakeholders, at the end of the April workshop, the WWICS decided to restructure the project to focus more on County focused issues of conflict, most specifically land issues, development, administration, and coordination of government at all levels. County Superintendents in the April 2010 workshop uniformly agreed that coherence of policy and coordination at the County level are lacking. Their specific challenges are wide-ranging, including difficulty coordinating with Central Government Ministries (such as Defense, Agriculture, Lands and Mines, Finance, Energy, Internal Affairs, and Cultural Affairs), the application and management of development funds, the pursuit of land use and land tenure issues in mediation processes and court proceedings, community relations, village and traditional leaders, and the national reconciliation process in general. The County Superintendents were particularly enthusiastic about the WWICS training process, and conveyed the need for greater collaborative capacity building, communication and negotiation skills, and problem



solving skills, to increase their effectiveness, as Liberia works to further decentralize governance, reconcile, and rebuild.

WWICS also was motivated to carry out more County-focused workshops, due to the historical context of the conflict in Liberia, being closely linked to long-standing

perceptions that Liberian governance has commonly favored the Monrovia-based elite, and left the County people disenfranchised. Deficits in both allocation of resources and decision-making power and influence continue in many of the counties, and the perception of weak or ineffective representation persists. Compounded with the fact that the Superintendents themselves are Presidential appointees, WWICS believes that a visible, overtly County-focused process is the best way to take the current project forward, and serves the best interest of government collaboration and cohesion for the Liberian state.

In addition, a follow-up workshop was held on May 3, for the preexisting leadership network with whom the WWICS worked in November, 2009.

6. October 2010 Project Board Meeting

The WWICS Consulting Director visited Monrovia in mid-October 2010 to conduct a Project Board Meeting that brought together original Board members to consult on the details of the November 2010 workshops, as well as plans for the remainder of the year. Additionally, WWICS locally-based staff member took assessment trips in October to Gbarnga and Tubmanburg counties to determine where the next workshop venue.

7. 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 at the Catholic Compound from November 7-12, 2010 and brought together participants from four main conflict-affected counties—Lofa, Nimba, Bong and Bomi. The participants were comprised of Superintendents (or their Deputies), Superintendents for Land



Commission, Education and Development, and 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

Commissioner in attendance to represent Central Government, although the Chairman did not stay beyond the opening ceremony. UNDP had two observers at the workshop. Additionally, WWICS held a follow-up workshop from November 14-16, 2010 at Thinkers Village in Paynesville that attracted 22 participants from the April workshop, representing the Liberian Senate and Congress, and Government Ministers and Superintendents.

The new network of participants was provided with conflict resolution and negotiation skills and toolsets from the facilitators that they could take with them to their communities and apply in real situations. Issues that rose to the surface almost instantly involved local land disputes, ethnic tensions, and poor education standards. The facilitators took note of these discussions and tailored their simulations and exercises to situations that directly affected the participants in their leadership roles.

By the last day, the overriding feeling was that the workshop had been very valuable, particularly in bringing together the local-level leaders with upper-level officials from the various government ministries.

Whereas they desired follow-up workshops to expand their own skills and deepen the network that was begun here, it was also important to “take it even further to the district level” and conduct workshops in other counties where the leadership is faced with similar issues health and education, collaborating with local leaders like village elders, traditional leaders, NGOs and civil society leaders, and implementing policy on a community level such as settlement of land issues, when local officials had no experience or expertise in that area.



8. November 2010 Follow-Up Workshop

On November 14, 2010, the WWICS held a 2 day follow-up workshop at Thinkers Village in Paynesville, bringing back together the participants from the April workshop to reinforce their network, review progress and stumbling blocks they have faced, and deepen and strengthen their negotiation, communication and problem solving skills. This group was comprised of government ministers, deputy ministers and planning officers; the majority of the County Superintendents; leading members from the House of Representatives and Senate; and opposition political party leadership.

9. January 2011 Final Follow-Up Workshop

From January 20-22, 2011, The Wilson Center held its final workshop at Thinkers Village in Paynesville, Liberia. The purpose of this workshop was to reinforce skills and tools that have been imparted, 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 that will give guidance as to how this project can be strengthened and expanded to ensure a stable and peaceful transition for Liberia in the future. Participants from all prior workshops were present and represented multiple political parties, religious leaders, civil society leaders, local leaders, and national leaders. UNDP Country Representative, Dominic Sam, attended the closing session of this workshop, and told the participants how moved he had been with the interaction, frankness, and commitment that he had witnessed around the conference room.



10. January 2011 Monitoring and Evaluation Report

WWICS has, throughout the project, polled participant views and impressions at the end of every workshop. These evaluations have been 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. 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 has been conducted by a consultant who interviewed a group of participants, strategically selected across a wide spectrum of

ethnicity, political linkages, government and non-government, regional, religious and gender criteria, to also include someone from each of the four intakes of participants since the projects inception in 2006. The evaluation covered four major areas of the training:

- 1) Participant expectations of the workshops;
- 2) Application of the skills acquired;
- 3) The establishment and sustainability of the participant network; and
- 4) 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. Meanwhile 70% of the respondents stated that they have started applying those skills in their various communities. For example, according to one of the Traditional Leaders, the skills he acquired have been able to help him mediate land disputes in his County. 95% of the respondents attested to having built relationships with colleagues from other parties and organizations. Some of the strengths of the program that were identified by respondents were the Four Quadrant Tool, the reconciliation exercise, and the interactive pedagogic format of the trainings. Two areas for improvement the respondents cited were the absence of youth representatives as part of the participant demographic, and also the limited time frame available for the trainings. The evaluation found that the overall impact of the program is somewhat indeterminable due to the short time span of program itself, but that there is a high demand for future workshops in order to ensure the sustainability of the skills and toolsets provided.

4. Constraints

One major constraint that we faced during the planning stages of the trainings was trying to work around Liberia's rainy season. This prohibited us from doing anything outside of the metropolis area from March-September, and was one of the reasons why we weren't able to bring our workshops to the counties earlier on.

A second major constraint that we were confronted with at the workshops was consistent attendance from participants. Many of them held high-level government positions and often had their own obligations. Unfortunately, this meant that participants were often called out of workshops to attend to other matters. In one instance, President Sirleaf requested a meeting with all County Superintendents and they had to excuse themselves from the workshop en masse for a day. Another time, we had to cancel a planned workshop all together because of the calling of an unplanned Cabinet Retreat. This has a bearing mostly on just the high-level participants. As we look to shift focus to more county and district level workshops, we do not foresee this to be as much of a major issue amongst more local level leadership. However, the rainy season will affect this future planning.

5. Recommendations from Participants

There was an overwhelmingly positive response from participants on the tools and skills that the entire project provided them with and their applicability in real life. 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. Another found the mix of various levels of Liberian leaders to be valuable since they all play a part in maintaining peace and stability throughout the country.

What the participants would still like to see happen is the development of a follow-up report of how the tools have been put into practice by each of them, and then disseminated to everyone to continue to share their experiences. They recommended that the program expands their audience to include leaders of multi-national corporations, district commissioners, and union leaders, as they are all decision-makers within Liberia. They would like to see a greater Training of Trainers where the participants would become the facilitators and therefore, take ownership of continuing the process. Examples of comments made include:

“These workshops have linked us, from government to local NGO, for working with the community and allowed us to find our common objectives.”

6. The Future

In January, Program Director Steve McDonald engaged in meetings in Monrovia with the UNDP leadership, the new Joint Steering Committee of the UN Peace Building Commission (PNC), including the Ministers of Planning and Internal Affairs and the Deputy SRSG, and the American Ambassador and her staff. He had previously met in Washington with the State Department and USAID, joined by Dr. Momo Rogers, Chief of Cabinet and Special Assistant to the President, to make a presentation for the continuation of funding for the project. In all meetings, there was a receptive atmosphere, and guidelines were offered on how to apply for the extension and expansion of the project.

As this grant comes to a close, the Woodrow Wilson Center will be preparing to submit a new proposal to both the US Agency for International Development and the UN Peace Building Commission that will build off of the current training program, but make significant changes in its scope and direction. The Wilson Center is very hopeful that the network can continue, the hoped for county-focused workshops in other areas of the country can take place, and that we expand this work to other groups originally envisioned, including youth and women leaders, and to district level leadership. Training of trainers and local capacity-building will be a big focus of the proposed expansion, to include initiatives already undertaken by participants, such as the Woodrow Wilson Peace Ambassadors in Lofa County, initiated after the November 2010 workshop by county officials and paramount chiefs. The Wilson Center is fortunate to have President Sirleaf-Johnson’s full support in continuing the work.

We are also cognizant of plans for a national reconciliation and national vigilant exercise and are looking for ways to partner and/or coordinate with those efforts.