

**LIBERIA'S EDUCATION POOLED FUND:**

**A Case for Private Foundation Engagement  
in Post Conflict Education Recovery**

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The case study “*Public-Private Partnership for the Recovery of the Education Sector in Liberia. The role of the Open Society Institute in the development of the education sector in Liberia (2007-2010)*” was prepared for the seminar “Leveraging the Private Sector for Results in Education” for the session “Cross-border private donations and investments in education” held on March 31, 2010 at the World Bank in Washington, DC. The event was organized by the Human Development Network – Education of the World Bank. The study was up-dated based on the Education for All Fast Track Initiative Catalytic Fund Committee allocation decision of US\$40 million for Liberia on May 7, 2010.

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## Abbreviations

EC	European Commission
EFA	Education for All
EFA FTI	Education for All Fast Track Initiative
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
EPF	Education Pooled Fund
ESDC	Education Sector Development Committee
INEE	Inter-agency Network on Education in Emergency
LPERP	Liberian Primary Education Recovery Program
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGOs	Non-governmental organizations
OSI	Open Society Institute
PFMU	Project Financial Management Unit
RWCT	Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking
UNICEF	United Nation Children’s Fund

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## I Introduction

Delivery of aid to education in post-conflict or transition countries is not only a question of making funds available, but also one of strengthening education systems. In environments with weak state capacities aid needs to be delivered in a way that allows for flexible and quick disbursements and supports national capacity building, coordination of stakeholders and planning processes.<sup>1</sup> While the Education for All Fast Track Initiative (EFA FTI) has supported more than twelve countries in crisis or transition situations, the current global aid architecture has failed to provide a systematic funding and support mechanism for post-conflict and transition countries. The Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergency (INEE) highlights that ‘[i]n all contexts of fragility, [...] pooling funding wherever possible generally reduces transaction costs for governments and increases coordination and harmonization.’<sup>2</sup> Pooled funds or multi-donor trust funds (MTDFs) are instruments that can be used to meet these criteria and improve efficiency of working in the sector through more harmonized procedures and increasingly using country systems. Such mechanisms are currently under development and exist in Zimbabwe, Nepal, Southern Sudan and Afghanistan. The increased use of pooled funds is reflecting the need for coordinated approaches and predictable funding to meet the challenges of recovery and sustained development of the education sector in post-conflict countries. The creation of the Education Pooled Fund (EPF) in Liberia in 2007/2008 aimed at bridging the gap from emergency-type interventions to long-term sector development through a coordinated approach after 14 years of conflict.

The EPF illustrates a model for a multi-stakeholder partnership between the Government of Liberia, UNICEF, and the Open Society Institute (OSI), a private foundation. The EPF also established the institutional arrangements to engage a full range of donor and implementing partners active in the education sector and has set a path towards a partnership in support of the Liberian Primary Education Recovery Program (LPERP)<sup>3</sup> and sector development overall.

The EPF was created as a transitional funding instrument and a novel approach to delivering aid for the recovery of the primary education sub-sector in Liberia. OSI committed up to US\$5 million to the fund, to be disbursed on a 1:4 matching basis. The EPF was launched in May 2008 with an initial US\$16.25 million, including a US\$12 million contribution from UNICEF using the funds from the Government of the Netherlands and US\$4.25 million from OSI. Between June 2008 and March 2009, US\$12.25 million were allocated for three large-scale activities: (a) a materials procurement project that decreased the textbook-learner ratio from 1:27 to 1:2, (b) the construction of 40 new primary schools, and (c) the reestablishment of three Rural Teacher Training Institutes. In March 2010, UNICEF contributed an additional US\$3.2 million to the fund, enabling OSI to release its remaining US\$750,000 and complete the foundation’s US\$5 million commitment.

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<sup>1</sup> INEE 2009: 26.

<sup>2</sup> IIEP 2009: 4.

<sup>3</sup> Download the full LPERP from [http://www.educationfasttrack.org/media/library/Liberia\\_plan.pdf](http://www.educationfasttrack.org/media/library/Liberia_plan.pdf)

The 2008 OECD DAC Survey on Monitoring the Paris Declaration country report for Liberia recognized the EPF as an instrument to deliver aid in a more harmonized way in support of the Government's education priorities described in the LPERP.<sup>4</sup> During the INEE Global Consultations (2009) UNICEF presented the EPF as a 'fit-for-purpose' and flexible aid modality that has helped to increase implementation results and which has been more flexible and less bureaucratic than, for example, the MDTF in Southern Sudan.<sup>5</sup> A study by UNESCO IIEP and CfBT Education Trust found that '[...] the establishment of the EPF is an important step in moving towards long-term financing strategies to support the education sector at the systemic as well as the program level.'<sup>6</sup> The 2010 UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report acknowledges the EPF as an innovative private-public partnership being 'one of the first cases of a private foundation, and multilateral and bilateral donors pooling resources in support of a national education program'<sup>7</sup>.

In 2007, it was a matter of urgency to provide funding for Liberia, which had a national 'interim plan' in hand, the LPERP, endorsed by the in-country donors and the EFA FTI Partnership but lacking external funding for its implementation. The EPF has enabled the Government of Liberia to accelerate implementation of the LPERP). In this three-year action program it is stated that '[...] 20 percent of schools had been completely destroyed, while many of the remaining 80 percent were in urgent need of repair. [...] The quality of education is clearly in a critical state with the finding that the current pupil textbook ratio in public primary schools is 27:1.'<sup>8</sup> The LPERP also points out that about 62 percent of the teacher force at the primary level were not qualified.<sup>9</sup>

The EPF can be described as (a) an innovative way of delivering education aid to a post-conflict transition country, which (b) represents a unique public-private partnership in international educational development, and (c) places the strengthening of national capacity and systems as a top priority.

**(a) Delivering education aid innovatively to a post-conflict transition country.**

The EPF provides funding to the Ministry of Education (MoE) while supporting capacity development of its public financial management, planning and procurement systems. It was designed to allow for fast disbursements and quick responses to funding gaps that would have stalled the implementation of the LPERP. The EPF arrangements are based on a simple sector coordination structure, include a system of checks and balances between the pooling donors, engage the Ministry of Finance, and centers the MoE in all decision-making and planning processes.

**(b) Engaging with new partners.** The EPF is a multi-stakeholder approach to support the LPERP, the Government of Liberia's initial education strategy following its return to democratic governance. It represents a unique shift in which a private foundation has formed a partnership with a government to support its education budget and policies. It also provided a structure through which UNICEF, as the lead

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<sup>4</sup> OECD DAC 2008: 29-12.

<sup>5</sup> INEE 2009: 26.

<sup>6</sup> Brannelly; Ndaruhutse; Rigaud 2009: 195.

<sup>7</sup> UNESCO 2010: 232.

<sup>8</sup> Ministry of Education March 2007: 7.

<sup>9</sup> Ministry of Education March 2007: 7.

education development partner, could supplement its national annual programming with a long-term strategic engagement. Through its Education Support Program, OSI also provided long-term technical assistance to the MoE's senior management to ensure capacity building and the operationalization of the EPF. The value-added from OSI's engagement in the EPF are (a) its approach to education programming, flexibility, innovation and internal resources, and (b) readiness to take risks that other organizations are unable to take; making OSI a particular interesting partner in post-conflict contexts.<sup>10</sup>

**(c) Strengthening national capacity.** While the institutional arrangements of the EPF reflect the principle of government ownership, it also recognizes the challenge of low institutional capacity that is characteristic of post-conflict countries. The MoE chairs the governing entities of the EPF, and the arrangements are designed to support the MoE to develop capacity by liaising with the Ministry of Finance to strengthen financial management and procurement procedures and coordinating the engagement of all partners, including other government bodies, donors and national and international implementing partners. The architects of the EPF considered the EPF as an opportunity to prepare the MoE to design and implement a subsequent comprehensive, long-term education sector plan.

Although the Government made great progress towards achieving the goals set out in the LPERP and the Liberia Poverty Reduction Strategy, it still faces numerous challenges in the sector: According to the 2007/2008 Liberia National School Census, only 33 percent of children in primary school age have been enrolled in school.<sup>11</sup> There is insufficient data available about dropout, repetition and completion rates.<sup>12</sup> Girls, children in rural areas, and children from poor households are most affected of not being enrolled in primary schools; regional disparities in terms of access are estimated to be 31 percent<sup>13</sup> across the country. The gender parity index for children enrolled in primary school is 0.93.<sup>14</sup> Liberia is one of the countries off-track for achieving universal primary education by 2015 and is challenged with stagnating enrollment rates resulting in limited progress to decrease the number of out-of-school children.<sup>15</sup> According to UNESCO, 447,000 children are out-of-school; the number has increased by 180,000 since 1999 despite reconciliation of peace and stability.<sup>16</sup>

At the overall sector level, the Government together with its education development partners, completed its first joint education sector review in June 2009, developed a plan to further strengthen its planning capacity and sector coordination, and developed a costed and comprehensive education sector plan '*A Commitment to Making a Difference: A Program to Develop and Reform Education in Liberia, 2010-2020*'. This education sector plan was endorsed by the local education group and the EFA FTI Partnership and was granted US\$40 million for implementation support from the EFA

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<sup>10</sup> Oh, Srivastava 2009: 104.

<sup>11</sup> National School Census 2007/2008.

<sup>12</sup> UNESCO 2010.

<sup>13</sup> UNESCO 2010: 62.

<sup>14</sup> UNESCO 2010: 418. According to UNESCO, greater parity has been driven not by expansion of the education system but by decreasing numbers of boys enrolling in primary school. (UNESCO 2010: 65)

<sup>15</sup> UNESCO 2010: 6.

<sup>16</sup> UNESCO 2010: 57.

FTI Catalytic Fund on May 7, 2010. While the EPF will not be used for grant implementation, the institutional arrangements build on those developed for the EPF and have been used by the MoE and the local education group since 2007.

This paper focuses on the engagement of OSI, as a private foundation, in the establishment and management of the EPF. It presents the case and model of an innovative public-private partnership for educational development. Following a description of OSI and its Education Support Program, the paper details their specific interests in and approach to Liberia's educational recovery, presents a technical description of the EPF and the inherent partnerships with the Government of Liberia and UNICEF, and provides a discussion of some benefits and challenges of private foundation engagement in national educational development schemes.

## **2 Open Society Institute & Soros Foundations Network**

### **2.1 Open Society Institute – Education Support Program**

The Open Society Institute is a private operating and grant-making organization founded and financed by investor and philanthropist George Soros. OSI was created in 1993 to support foundations in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union as they aided transitions toward democratic and open societies. OSI has grown to encompass a network of 31 national and regional foundations and 26 international programs and initiatives, with an annual budget upwards of US\$500 million. OSI's mission is to create vibrant and tolerant democracies whose governments are accountable to their citizens, and shaping public policies is a key means through which it seeks to achieve this mission.<sup>17</sup>

OSI's Education Support Program (ESP) is shaped by its mission to promote *education justice*. Education justice provides a (largely political) lens which directs interventions toward issues of inequality and discrimination within the education sector while attending to inherent systemic, professional and resource challenges. Central themes include supporting education renewal in post-conflict countries, promoting equal education and inclusion for marginalized groups, strengthening critical thinking and education quality, and developing a progressive civil society engagement with national and regional education reform processes. This orientation is particularly useful in conflict-affected educational contexts, where effective partnerships and holistic approaches to rebuilding and renewing education systems are imperative.

ESP recently completed a review of the foundation's engagement in post-conflict educational recovery in 21 countries over the past 20 years. In addition to documenting the history of the program in post-conflict and fragile contexts, the review analyzed the role and added value of OSI and provided a framework to integrate the INEE Minimum Standards with ESP programming strategies and expected outcomes. Building on momentum from mainstream reform processes to combat social exclusion in the education sector and promotion of national systems and capacity building were found to

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<sup>17</sup> [www.soros.org](http://www.soros.org) - The 'foundation' refers to the comprehensive operations of the Open Society Institute and its various mechanisms, offices, and programs.

be the most dominant features of OSI's approach in conflict-affected settings.<sup>18</sup> The story of OSI's engagement in Liberia's educational recovery is reflective of this orientation.

## 2.2 Liberia Program

Given its mission, OSI's engagement in Liberia's development effort is not surprising. The foundation's commitment to the education sector is reflective of a broader institutional partnership with the Government of Liberia to support its recovery and reconstruction efforts. The Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), through its Liberia Country Office, has been actively supporting President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in her efforts to reestablish good governance and the rule of law, strengthen national systems, and rebuild Liberia after decades of devastating conflict and mismanagement. OSIWA has facilitated the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia, National Elections Commission, and the Governance Reform Commission. The foundation has also contributed, through UNDP, to the Liberia Emergency Capacity Building Support Project which supports institutional capacity development and promotes public sector reform particularly through capacity development of high-level government officials. OSIWA has also supported numerous civil society organizations, a characteristic approach of OSI.

Recognizing the centrality of the education sector to Liberia's long-term development, OSI's reform support package has included a US\$5 million contribution, through the UNICEF-administered Education Pooled Fund, to enable the MoE to implement its primary education policy. The foundation's role in the management of the EPF has been led by its London-based Education Support Program, in collaboration with OSIWA. OSI's engagement in Liberia's educational recovery came at the request of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who was the founding board chair of OSIWA and has a history of professional engagement with the Soros Foundations Network. This high level of political will, coupled with the focus and flexibility of the foundation, was essential in establishing the strength of the partnership and success of the EPF.

### Box 1: OSI's approach to education programming in Liberia

- *ensuring that education provision supports the country's overall development goals*
  - OSI's support to the implementation of the LPERP and the development of the new comprehensive Education Sector Plan (March 2010)
- *building consensus for all stakeholders on education strategy in the country*
  - Support to MoE to prepare the Joint Education Sector Review (June 2009)
  - Participation in the Education Development Partners' Group, ESDC Executive Board and the Advisory Board and the EFA FTI country-level process
- *building capacity of all parts of the education system*
  - particularly in the Ministry of Education at the senior management level
  - policy development, planning and EPF management and spending
  - grants to initiate new and strengthen existing education civil society organizations

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<sup>18</sup> Oh, Srivastava 2009.

In addition to the US\$5 million contribution, OSI's support agenda for Liberia's education sector in 2007 entailed teacher development, technical assistance, and support for civil society. OSI's Early Childhood Program has also formed a partnership with the MoE to develop a national early childhood development policy and model scalable early childhood development programs. While processes to establish the EPF were under way, the Education Support Program began implementation of its Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking (RWCT) program in Liberia. RWCT is a teacher training approach which centers on active learning and critical thinking methodologies. A year-long train the trainer program was initiated with 80 primary, secondary, and tertiary teachers in Monrovia. Graduates of the program are actively working with teachers and teacher trainers from the Monrovia Consolidated School System and the MoE to popularize the concept of critical thinking and its related teaching and learning strategies into the education sector.

### **3. The Case of Liberia's Education Pooled Fund**

#### **3.1 Funding Primary Education Recovery**

The EPF was established to enable the Government of Liberia to implement the LPERP, which was developed between February and March 2007 for submission to the EFA FTI in application for support from its Catalytic Fund. It was based on the *Priorities Program for Post-Conflict Recovery of the Liberia Education Sector (FY 2007/08 to 2010/12)* which was presented at the Liberia Partners' Forum in Washington, DC, in February 2007. With technical assistance from UNICEF, a broad range of government officials participated in the development of the LPERP, including senior officials from the MoE, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs, Budget Bureau, USAID and the Civil Service Agency. The LPERP was designed as a three-year action program (2007-2010) to transition from short-term emergency-type interventions to a comprehensive approach for the recovery of the primary education sub-sector. The interim strategy, which was costed at US\$70.6 million, covered eight components: (1) infrastructure expansion and improvement, (2) instructional materials and curriculum development, (3) teacher development, (4) accelerated learning program, (5) advisory, supervision and assessment services, (6) strengthening sector governance, (7) organizational capacity building, and (8) institutional and implementation arrangements for the LPERP. It was appraised and endorsed by the in-country donors, civil society representatives, and the EFA FTI Partnership in April 2007 and presented to the EFA FTI Catalytic Fund Committee in May 2007.

Although the Catalytic Fund Committee welcomed Liberia into the EFA FTI Partnership, largely in recognition of the necessity of the LPERP and the difficult circumstances under which it was developed and presented, it did not approve an allocation.<sup>19</sup> This was partly a response to the fact that the LPERP was limited in terms of data and the MoE had major capacity gaps, but also because a comprehensive sector

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<sup>19</sup> FTI Secretariat Minutes [http://www.education-fast-track.org/library/FTI\\_CATALYTIC\\_FUND\\_minutes23may07.pdf](http://www.education-fast-track.org/library/FTI_CATALYTIC_FUND_minutes23may07.pdf)



plan and a full Poverty Reduction Strategy had not yet been developed. Responding to Liberia's urgent need for external funding, the Government of the Netherlands, which is a member of the Catalytic Fund Committee, supported a proposal that a portion of its recent grant to UNICEF<sup>20</sup> for education in emergencies, post-crisis and transition countries be used to support the implementation of the LPERP. Three weeks prior to the Catalytic Fund Committee meeting, George Soros committed US\$5 million to the MoE to enable implementation of the LPERP, and all parties concerned envisioned an opportunity to develop a unique, sound disbursement mechanism that would support MoE ownership and capacity.

UNICEF, with its experience in such processes, took the lead in supporting the Government to develop a pooled fund mechanism. UNICEF has been the lead education development partner in Liberia; coordinating dialogue with the Government, the education development partners and the FTI Secretariat. Five factors encouraged the process to develop the pooled fund: (1) political will and improvements in governance, (2) LPERP endorsement by the in-country donors and the EFA FTI Partnership, (3) availability of UNICEF funds using the grant from the Government of the Netherlands, (4) the availability of the grant from OSI, and (5) UNICEF's leadership to assist the MoE together with OSI, the Ministry of Finance, and additional engagement from the World Bank, USAID, the European Commission and UNESCO in the process. The Minister of Education and the Deputy Minister for Planning, Research and Development took the lead on behalf of the Government of Liberia in the process. In addition to UNICEF's Liberia-based experts, the New York-based Public Sector Alliances and Resource Mobilization Office (PARMO) was central to the establishment of the fund.

Recognizing weak institutional capacity and low quality of the public systems at the time of its design, the EPF was set up as a transitional financing mechanism that:

- strengthens national systems,
- improves sector dialogue through strengthened government-donor partnership in the established sector coordinating bodies, especially the Education Sector Development Committee Executive Board (box 2) and donor-to-donor dialogue in the Education Development Partners Group,<sup>21</sup>
- increases inter-ministerial coordination, and
- creates institutional arrangements in preparation for a comprehensive sector wide approach and budget support in the medium-term.

The EPF was designed to enable the Government to expand access to and quality of primary education following years of conflict and mismanagement. The EPF process for accessing its resources is designed to 'give the Government of Liberia the option of funding un-funded components of the LPERP'.<sup>22</sup> Emphasis was placed on government leadership, capacity building, and the development of institutional arrangements to strengthen coordination and dialogue across government agencies, donors, implement-

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<sup>20</sup> UNICEF Press Release December 2006: [http://www.unicef.org/media/media\\_37867.html](http://www.unicef.org/media/media_37867.html)

<sup>21</sup> The Education Development Partners Group meets monthly without the MoE. It is chaired by UNICEF and engages all donor partners, the World Bank, UNESCO, the European Commission, WFP and OSI/ OSIWA, active in the sector.

<sup>22</sup> Letter of Agreement between UNICEF and the Open Society Institute, June 2, 2008.

ing partners, and civil society. The EPF reflects the Principles of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005) and the principles of EFA FTI.

The EPF was seen as an opportunity to prepare the MoE, including its systems and partners, to transition from the LPERP to a comprehensive sector plan. Emphasis was placed on the Ministry's capacity for planning, financial management, procurement, budgeting, donor coordination and service delivery. This includes the collaboration with the Ministry of Finance and the Project Financial Management Unit (PFMU) in the Ministry of Finance.<sup>23</sup> The PFMU has worked closely with MoE staff to support them develop capacity for procurement and financial management. In addition to supporting government systems, the collaboration with the Ministry of Finance and PFMU was a means to address a common 'trust gap' and encourage additional donor contributions.<sup>24</sup> This collaboration has been functioning for the past two years through the implementation of the LPERP and the operationalization of the EPF. Proved to be good practice, this arrangement will be used to implement the US\$40 million grant from the EFA FTI Catalytic Fund and aims at transferring the responsibility to manage funds to the MoE in the medium-term.

On May 22, 2008, UNICEF, the fund custodian, the MoE and the Ministry of Finance signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the EPF in the presence of the President of Liberia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. UNICEF, as the fund custodian, entered into agreement with OSI as participating donor through a Letter of Agreement signed on June 2, 2008. The MoU describes the decision-making process of the EPF, the role of the different governance entities and the flow of the funds.

The share of aid to education, particularly primary education, delivered through the EPF was relatively small. At the time of its launch, the EPF hold US\$16.25 million. The estimated costs of the LPERP were US\$70.6 million for three years.<sup>25</sup> Total EPF sources have hardly covered 25 percent of the total financing gap. In 2009, USAID allocated US\$12 million for teacher training, EGRA, girls' scholarships, and training programs to improve management and technical skills of mid-level professionals. WFP, in the same year, provided US\$10 million for school feeding. In 2009, the Ministry of Finance projected that the European Commission, France, Norway, UNICEF, USAID and WFP would disburse US\$44.5 million for education under the current Poverty Reduction Strategy.<sup>26</sup> Government education expenditure increased, from US\$7.3 million (2004/05) to US\$23.3 million (2007/08) and again has been planned to increase over 2009/10 to US\$37.8 million.<sup>27</sup> Annual education budgets have been too low to boost the recovery and development of the education system and indicate the Government's high dependency of external aid. The EPF was established to complement government spending and to close funding gaps where other donors would not allocate their resources.

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<sup>23</sup> See box 2.

<sup>24</sup> Sperling 2006.

<sup>25</sup> MoE 2007: 5.

<sup>26</sup> Ministry of Finance of Liberia: FY 09/10 Detailed Projected Disbursements by Pillar: Pillar IV, in: <http://www.mofliberia.org/Detailed%20Projected%20Disbursement%20by%20Pillar%20for%20FY%200910%20budget%20FINAL%20for%20web.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> Government of Liberia 2009: 2.

### 3.2 OSI as a Pooling Donor

Liberia has suffered from insufficient support for education reconstruction. Support by donor partners has been provided mostly through project-type support. Multi-donor trust funds, which are pooled funding instruments, can provide several advantages for donors: they spread fiduciary risk and reduce the cost of establishing new programs and providing support. For recipient countries, MDTFs can reduce transaction costs and provide delivery of urgently needed support.<sup>28</sup> Pooled funds are a potential instrument to improve aid predictability, to use available funds more strategically and to complement domestic funding, particularly for areas that are under-funded or for which funding is not easily available.<sup>29</sup> 'Experience in Liberia has shown that funds can be disbursed quickly to support reconstruction of education activities.'<sup>30</sup>

While the terms 'pooled fund' and 'multi-donor trust funds' are often used interchangeably, Liberia's Education Pooled Fund is technically not considered to be an MDTF. It differs from a typical MDTF in several ways: (a) funding is based fully on existing national policy and government priorities, (b) focus on capacity building, system strengthening, and alignment with national systems, (c) commitment to being 'fast and flexible', and (d) decision-making extends beyond pooling donors.<sup>31</sup>

The EPF represents a unique partnership for post-conflict educational recovery. The mechanism was collaboratively designed by the Government of Liberia and its donor partners, including those who did not contribute to the fund. While only the Government and pooling donors are engaged in the final approval processes for fund disbursement, the governance structure depends on the broader donor partnership to endorse all programmatic plans that will be financed through the EPF. The EPF was operationalized in May 2008 through a Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of Liberia and UNICEF, which acts as the fund custodian.

OSI then entered into a legal arrangement with UNICEF, specified through a Letter of Agreement that premises the EPF as the regulatory framework, rather than those of UNICEF. For accountability, the foundation therefore relies on the effective implementation of the institutional arrangements designed for the fund, namely the dialogue and collaboration between the MoE, Ministry of Finance, and donor partners.

Recognizing the need for capacity development and technical assistance, OSI seconded a long-term technical assistant to support MoE's Department of Planning, Research and Development, which bears the bulk of responsibility for planning, implementing, and monitoring the LPERP and the EPF. The technical assistant was based at the MoE for 18 months, providing direct support to the Deputy Minister for Planning and hands on capacity development for the planning department. This arrangement reflects OSI's focus on strengthening government capacity as well as its flexibility and responsiveness to identified capacity gaps.

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<sup>28</sup> UNESCO 2010: 246.

<sup>29</sup> IIEP Newsletter May-August 2009: 11.

<sup>30</sup> UNESCO 2010: 246.

<sup>31</sup> DANIDA 2008.

### 3.3 Operationalization

#### 3.3.1 Governance and Decision-Making

The EPF mechanism is based on a fairly simple process which allows the MoE through the Executive Management Team to present withdrawal requests to the Education Sector Development Committee (ESDC) Executive Board and the Advisory Board (box 2). The arrangements as described in the MoU have not yet been used to their full potential; reporting by the MoE and the Ministry of Finance (PFMU) does not take place as originally planned and the MoE has not exercised efficient leadership to make the envisioned sector coordination structure with the Education Sector Development Committee (ESDC), the ESDC Executive Board and the Advisory Board work. OSI is represented in all of these bodies. Although considerable steps have been taken to support the capacity of the MoE to manage the EPF, with direct support provided to the MoE, closer attention to governance procedures should be paid.

The ESDC Executive Board and the Advisory Board have worked efficiently to ensure quality implementation plans and budgets for EPF funding requests and to allow quick approval and disbursement for timely implementation (figure 1). However, the Advisory Board has not yet finalized and documented its position on outstanding governance issues such as the minimum threshold (all proposed disbursements above an established threshold require a *prior action no objection* from the Advisory Board), the possibility to use EPF funds to cover recurrent costs or to implications of the replacement of the LPERP through the new ten-year education sector plan.

It was initially envisioned in the MoU for the EPF, that the Executive Management Team would first present its Annual Plan of Action and LPERP implementation plans to the ESDC, the broadest configuration of education stakeholders, before submitting it for programmatic endorsement to the ESDC Executive Board. However, the two nine-month implementation plans, including the activities for which EPF funding was requested, were directly presented to the ESDC Executive Board because the ESDC had not been inaugurated before June 2009.<sup>32</sup> The Executive Board thoroughly discussed the presented proposals along with the budget plans before endorsement. Often, it required revisions to the plans by the Executive Management Team. The revised and endorsed plans including the suggested EPF activities were then presented for funding requests to the Advisory Board. This process guarantees the coherence of the initiatives in the primary sub-sector and broadens the 'ownership' of the EPF beyond the Government and pooling donors. The funding request includes the respective procurement plan which has to be in compliance with the PPCC Act.<sup>33</sup> The Advisory Board gives the prior action no objection for approval of the EPF allocation.

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<sup>32</sup> January – September 2008 and October 2008 – June 2009.

<sup>33</sup> The Public Procurement and Concessions Act establishes the Public Procurement and Concessions Commission with oversight responsibility to regulate and monitor all forms of public procurement and concessions practices in Liberia. The World Bank, EC, UNDP and Government have demonstrated their commitments and supports for the full implementation of the Act. Government of the Republic of Liberia. Brief Background of CMC & PPCC: <http://www.ppcc.gov.lr/content.php?sub=background&submenu=About>

<b>Box 2: EPF governance entities and sector coordination bodies</b>	
<b>Executive Management Team</b>	The Executive Management Team is the executive body of the MoE and is composed of the MoE, the three Deputy Ministers for Administration, Instruction and Planning, Research and Development and the Comptroller who is responsible for financial management in the MoE. It is the implementing agent of the EPF.
<b>Advisory Board</b>	The Advisory Board consists of representatives of the Government and the pooling donors (UNICEF and OSI) and oversees the Government's utilization of the EPF funds. It approves the withdrawal requests from the Ministry of Finance based on the ESDC Executive Board's approval of the Government's proposed implementation plans. <sup>34</sup>
<b>Education Sector Development Committee Executive Board</b>	The Executive Board is the executive arm of the Education Sector Development Committee (ESDC). Meetings are monthly and are chaired by the MoE, however, there were many "emergency" meetings called by the MoE in the past which focused on EPF funding requests. Members of the ESDC Executive Board are the Executive Management Team, officials from the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs and the Bureau of Budget and the donor partners (excluding international NGO partners).
<b>Education Sector Development Committee (ESDC)</b>	The ESDC had not been inaugurated before June 2009. The ESDC was envisioned as a 'deliberative and consensus building body' composed of the education development partners, representatives from international NGOs, the Executive Management Team and national stakeholders such as CSOs and parent teacher associations. <sup>35</sup> The ESDC was to function as a forum for consultations among stakeholders and for building national ownership of education sector reforms.
<b>Project Financial Management Unit (PFMU)</b>	The PFMU is a unit within the Ministry of Finance set up by the World Bank to provide financial management services for World Bank funded projects that are government executed. It provides financial oversight and technical support in financial management and reporting to selected externally funded initiatives. The PFMU has in place processes that ensure that EPF expenditures are authorized by the implementing agent, detailed in approved budget plans for LPERP implementation plans, are consistent with the Liberia Public Procurement and Concessions Commission Act (PPCC Act) and the EPF Financial Procedures Manual. It manages the local EPF bank account.

Based on the Advisory Board's approval the Executive Management Team requests the Ministry of Finance/ PFMU to request fund withdrawal from UNICEF Liberia from the off-shore trust account in New York. The funds were then released into the local bank account.

The Executive Management Team has been responsible for the management of the implementation of the EPF funded activities and for progress reporting to the ESDC Executive Board. The PFMU in the Ministry of Finance is responsible for financial reporting to the Advisory Board and the ECDC Executive Board, reviews the procurement documentation of the Ministry of Finance and provides supervision and capacity development for the MoE on financial management and procurement. The EPF arrangements define a set of detailed financial management rules including reports of disbursement, regular internal and external auditing and ex-post reviews which are mostly executed through the PFMU. The financial management procedures are defined in the 'Education Pooled Fund Financial Management Procedures Manual'. The ESDC Executive Board provides some semblance of a monitoring system through their monthly meetings where the implementation progress of the EPF projects is regularly discussed: the MoE is requested to report to the education development partners, not the pooling donors alone, on the progress on the implementation of the activities. Additionally, the PFMU is requested to provide quarterly financial reports to the ESDC Executive Board and the Advisory Board. However, so far the PFMU presented only two financial reports on EPF spending and the MoE has not scheduled regular Advisory Board meetings, leaving the ESDC Executive Board to be currently the only supervision body for the EPF projects. A progress up-date on EPF interventions was provided in the Education Sector Review in June 2009, since the EPF funded activities were the MoE's main sector interventions.

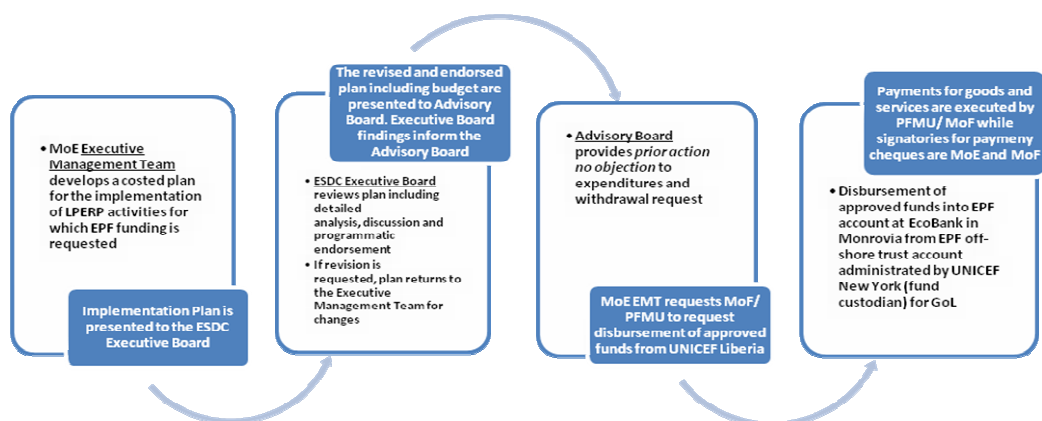
Through the established EPF governance and decision-making process, the government-donor dialogue has been considerably strengthened and institutionalized. One shortcoming in the past was that the ESDC had not been launched until June 2009, excluding civil society and implementing partners from decision-making processes. This will be addressed in 2010, reviving the technical working groups at this level of the in-country partnership. Another shortcoming was that donor and sector coordination was not effectively owned by the MoE although it has been chairing the ESDC Executive Board. In order to enable the MoE to take the responsibility to coordinate sector and donor processes and activities, the Ministry's capacity will be scaled up with the establishment of a sector coordination team. These two developments will increase the capacity of the MoE for sector and financial management.

### **3.3.2 Activities**

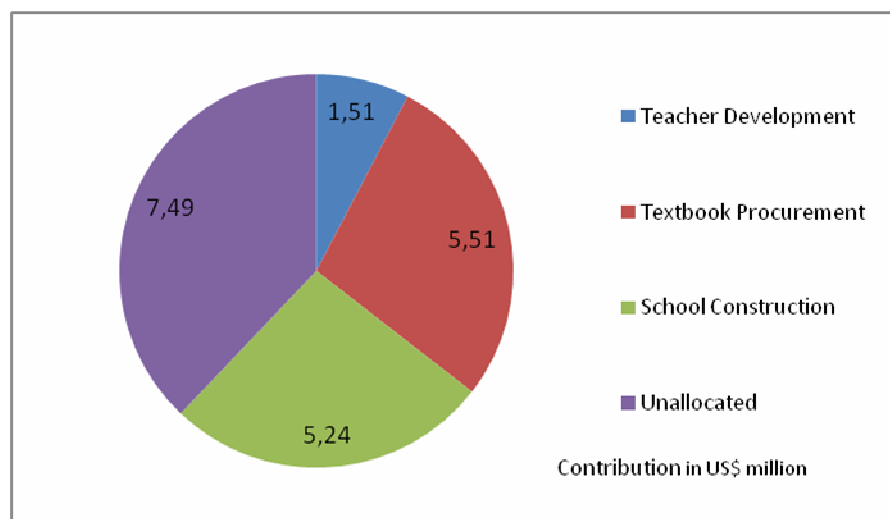
Within one year of operation, US\$12.25 million was allocated to three interventions with significant results: (a) the procurement of 1.2 million textbooks and teachers guides, which decreased the textbook-learner ratio from 1:27 to 1:2, (b) construction of 40 new schools, and (c) the opening of two newly-reconstructed Rural Teacher Training Institutes (RTTIs). Those activities addressed three components of the LPERP and responded to the urgent needs of access, teacher training and learning material in

the primary sub-sector. The EPF-funded activities were identified by the MoE/ Executive Management Team and are described in the LPERP. In fact, the MoE was given the opportunity to identify its program priorities and request EPF funding if no other donor resource was identified to cover an intervention. With regard to the devastating condition of the education sector after 14 years of civil war, each of the three interventions below were ‘emergency’ interventions. However, one of the weaknesses of the EPF is that the funding decisions were rather ad-hoc than embedded in a more strategic recovery response – which is a consequence of the lack of resources and planning capacity, typical for post-conflict environments. The pooling donors examined the coherence and soundness of the funding requests through the ESDC Executive Board and the Advisory Board.

**Figure 1: Simplified EPF Decision-making/ Allocation Process (2008-2009)**



**Figure 2: LPERP Activities funded through EPF, 2008-2009**



**Reconstruction of three RTTIs.** The objective was to ‘build capacity in the RTTIs to deliver both pre-service and in-service teacher training according to requirements’<sup>36</sup>. While the construction costs were covered by a USAID project, the MoE requested funding for furniture and supplies to enable two RTTI’s to begin training teachers. This intervention was in response to the high levels of attrition of qualified teachers during the civil war, the absence of any teacher training courses and the consequent appointment of untrained teachers to replace them. Additional support for this intervention was provided through UNICEF and UNHCR.

**Procurement of 1.2 million textbooks.** The objective of the activity was to ‘provide a basic instructional materials package for all public primary schools from grades 1-6, together with lockable storage’<sup>37</sup>. Initially the European Commission and UNICEF agreed to fund the procurement of the textbooks but the process stagnated because the Ministry of Education decided to select textbooks that are already in use in the region. The decision to reprint books already in use, rather than publishing new ones specifically for Liberia had direct implications for the procurement process. The selection of existing texts ties the Ministry to specific publishers and therefore prevents an international competitive bidding process to take place; which placed constraints on UNICEF to oversee the procurement. The MoE decided to procure the textbooks directly using EPF resources as an emergency measure given the severe shortage of textbooks and the Government’s intention to develop a new curriculum.

[...] There are only a few private booksellers operating in the country, who are selling outdated books. The Ministry also had storage facilities at the county level but these were looted during the civil war. [...] There is one printing house in Liberia, but no book publishers currently operate in the country.<sup>38</sup>

While it was a positive outcome that the Ministry would ensure the procurement of the textbooks directly, it was clear that the Ministry would need significant assistance to successfully carryout this task. In addition to the actual procurement of the textbooks, it was also imperative for the Ministry to establish clear plans for storage, distribution, and training for the textbooks. On that basis, OSI provided a long-term consultant to assist with the procurement process and commence the distribution country wide.

**Building 40 new primary schools.** The objective to build 40 new six-room schools was to ensure that school age children, especially girls, are able to access schools which are close to their homes, particularly in remote areas and to respond to increasing enrollment rates and future enrolments. With primary level class sizes targeted at no more than 45, this project is expected to enable access for nearly 11,000 students across Liberia; each of the 15 counties will get at least one new primary. Sites for school construction were based on school census data, and priority was given to areas with high levels of primary-age students and limited availability of classrooms in rural and hard to reach populated areas. The management of the school construction intervention was assigned to the Liberia Agency for Community Empowerment (LACE) and UNOPS. This arrangement is, in part, a reflection of the limited capacity of the Ministry of Education’s Department of Educational Facilities and also entailed a system of support.



### 3.3.3 Government of Liberia

Liberia has embarked on successful post-conflict recovery strategies in the past four years under the leadership of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. The interim Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) was succeeded by a full PRS (2008-2011) which is currently being implemented. Reconstruction remains a major challenge including reforms in the public sector and capacity building of national systems. The results of the 2008 OECD DAC Monitoring Report for Liberia shows that the weak country systems are used to a very limited extent; while 32 percent of aid delivered to government sectors uses public financial management systems (budget execution and financial reporting but not auditing), procurement systems are not used at all.<sup>39</sup>

The Government has committed itself to the reconstruction and development of the education sector. Ministries such as the Ministry for Finance or the Ministry for Planning and Economic Development have taken part in the ESDC Executive Board meetings and the Advisory Board meetings and have supported the Ministry of Education to achieve a range of goals. For the Government the EPF is a transitional financing instrument paving the way towards increased budget support. The Government of Liberia considers the EPF as successful in terms of the investments, minimal transaction costs, increased cooperation and dialogue with the education development partners particularly UNICEF and OSI.

While the institutional arrangements of the EPF reflect the principle of government ownership, it also recognizes the challenge of low institutional capacity that is characteristic of post-conflict countries. The MoE chairs the governing bodies of the EPF, and the arrangements are designed to support the MoE to develop capacity by liaising with the Ministry of Finance to strengthen financial management and procurement procedures and coordinating the engagement of all partners, including other government bodies, donors and national and international implementing partners. The architects of the EPF considered the EPF as an opportunity to prepare the MoE to design and implement a subsequent comprehensive education sector plan.

The EPF aims at supporting the MoE to develop capacity in core areas of planning, financial management, prioritization, implementation, procurement, coordination and also fund-raising. The MoE has been involved throughout the development process of the EPF, taking part in the decision of the governance structure, the decision-making process, the objectives, goals and the principles. The MoE chairs the ESDC Executive Board and the Advisory Board, it presents the funding requests and with that a proposal for the means of implementation. If the proposal does not sound feasible regarding the management capacity of the Ministry, for example in the case of the management of the school construction project, agreement is found with the education development partners.

While there has been progress achieved since 2008, the Ministry's lack of capacity for long-term planning and donor coordination, among other things, will continue to impede progress and systemic development in the sector if not effectively addressed. The Ministry's capacity needs have been particularly obvious with regard to the coordination efforts and resources around critical priorities, such as appraisal of the new education sector plan and timely development of implementation plans for the

EPF. In addition to the limited capacity for leadership and planning within the MoE, there is a critical need to enable the Government to carry-out its mandate for donor coordination in the sector.

The low level of institutional, individual and organizational capacity has impacted the effectiveness of EPF. The capacity of the Government to absorb the funds is limited. The implementation process of the three activities have taken time and are not finalized yet due to management and procurement constraints, lack of funding for recurrent costs, inaccessibility of remote areas, limited planning and technical capacity to monitor the distribution of textbooks, etc. The Ministry has not yet presented a proposal for EPF funding since spring 2009, due to the on-going implementation of the other activities and the various activities around the completion and appraisal of the new education sector plan.

With regard to governance processes, the Ministry often called for 'emergency meetings' rather than adhere to a structured agenda; that is true for both the ESDC Executive Board and the Advisory Board. The EPF arrangements have been a pilot exercise for all participants, particularly the pooling donors and the Government. The challenges in the education sector reflect the challenges the country faces overall. Nevertheless, all stakeholders in the partnership take joint responsibility to address the short-comings of the arrangement. It can therefore be asked, whether the pooling donors should have taken a stronger stand on addressing capacity gaps, since they pose the greatest effectiveness challenge on the EPF, and on demanding more accountability of the MoE to deliver the agreed Annual Plan of Action, the implementation plans, to improve the chairmanship of the ESDC Executive Board and the Advisory Board and finally, the implementation of the external audit, which has been pending since June 2009. The availability of the external audit has been a core criterion for other donor partners to consider contributing to the pooled fund. The pending external audit was one contributing factor preventing the use of the EPF as the primary modality for implementing the grant from the EFA FTI Catalytic Fund. The outstanding audit will begin in June 2010.

Government education expenditure increased, from US\$7.3 million in 2004/05 to US\$23.3 million in 2007/08. Since 2007 the government's allocation to the education sector has steadily increased from 8% to 14% in 2010. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf announced in her message to the National Legislature on the Annual Budget: 'The US\$37.8 million budgeted for the education sector will among other priorities be used to construct school facilities, recruit, train and deploy additional teachers to cope with the increased enrollment in the primary education program.'<sup>40</sup>

## **4. Conclusion & Outlook**

### **4.1 Conclusion**

First and foremost, the EPF provides a model of an effective and efficient funding instrument that prioritizes national systems and capacity building while enabling a government to accelerate implementation of its policies and priorities. The fact that it also presents a model for private foundation engagement in national educational

recovery programs increases its profile. This model of a public-private partnership is particularly timely as an increasing number of private foundations are committing significant funds to various initiatives for education reform in developing countries (i.e., the Novo, Gates Foundations, and Hewlett Foundations). It is safe to say that without the EPF, it is unlikely that the MoE in Liberia would have been able to launch the Government's first national textbook procurement project in over 20 years, initiate the construction of 40 primary schools, or open its Rural Teacher Training Institutes from which it graduated the first class of certified primary teachers in 20 years in June 2009.

**Box 3: Effectiveness of aid delivery through EPF**

**Coordination.** The EPF arrangements introduced a structure for sector coordination in 2008, while the LPERP has provided a framework for all education development partners. The sector coordination structure as envisioned in the MoU for the EPF has not been used to its full potential. Within the EPF process the MoE was tasked to lead the EPF governance entities which at the same time (except for the Advisory Board) function as sector coordination entities. The Education Sector Development Committee (ESDC), which was supposed to include education development partners and national stakeholders, had not been inaugurated before June 2009. The most active bodies have been the ESDC Executive Board and the Education Development Partners Group chaired by UNICEF. Both bodies exclude national stakeholders and international NGOs. In June 2009, the MoE organized a joint education sector review with all education development partners and national stakeholders. However, the MoE has not yet developed full leadership responsibilities because of capacity constraints. Efforts are currently under way to reinforce strengthening sector coordination, including the establishment of a sector coordination unit in the MoE. The development of the ten-year education sector plan under the leadership of the MoE, involved all education development partners and was informed by a nation-wide consultation process.

**State Building.** The EPF has been set up to ensure quality basic education service provision and to put it on a sustainable basis by rebuilding the education system to a robust level. The EPF was designed with the idea that the MoE would gradually build capacity through 'learning on the job' by utilizing the EPF mechanisms and working with the education development partners. The MoE is chairing all governing bodies of the EPF and has the responsibility for planning and implementing EPF funded activities. The EPF arrangements include the cooperation between the MoE and the Ministry of Finance/ PFMU regarding financial management and procurement of the MoE supplies. The availability of EPF funding has enabled the Government to implement three large-scale activities for the recovery of the sector, however, the MoE has not requested funding for activities to improve the governance of the sector, which is addressed in the LPERP. The EPF does not provide funding for recurrent costs. The EPF complements MoE's budget and external funding, but recurrent costs were planned to be matched by the MoE.

**Do-no-harm.** The LPERP is an interim action program for the recovery of the primary education sub-sector. The National School Census (2007/2008) reported that only 33 percent of primary school age children are enrolled in school. Data is missing for main education progress indicators. The EPF funded interventions aimed at the primary education sub-sector as whole.

In addition to the investment activities, the EPF provided an opportunity for the Government and its donor and implementing partners to experiment with institutional arrangements that will be adapted for implementation of the comprehensive sector plan based on dialogue and experience. Given this, with the lessons learned from its challenges, the EPF is a key factor in the transition to a well-coordinated sector wide approach to education reform in Liberia.<sup>41</sup> The implementation of the new education sector plan will be based on arrangements established through the EPF. Based on

lessons learnt over the past three years, a Sector Coordination Unit will be established in the MoE using the Catalytic Fund grant.

OSI's participation in the EPF and subsequent partnership with the MoE has also garnered some lessons for both traditional and non-traditional donors. OSI's 'flexibility' is often cited as a facilitating factor in the relative success of the EPF. Flexibility and ability to respond quickly is characteristic of foundations, which are often not held to the same restrictions as traditional donors. OSI's ability to respond quickly to identified capacity needs has been central to the operationalization of the EPF. When alerted to the critical need for technical assistance to the MoE's Department of Planning, Research and Development, OSI was able to place an expert within the MoE within two months. This person was the only long-term technical assistant based consistently at the MoE in 2007 and 2008. Similarly, when the MoE made the bold decision to fund the procurement of textbooks from the EPF, OSI was able to contract a technical assistant to support procurement, storage, and distribution of the textbooks. In addition to these long-term technical support related to the EPF, OSI has responded quickly to short-term capacity gaps and supplementary funding requests (i.e., for the national consultations for the education sector plan). There are also characteristic challenges to the engagement of private foundations in national education strategies. Foundations, and other non-traditional donors, are less likely to have the in-country presence and capacity that traditional donors enjoy.

## **4.2 Outlook**

'Liberia's experience raises wider concerns about the failure of aid systems. In countries recovering from conflict, the resources available to government are limited, so aid has a vital role to play. Aid donors were slow to support reconstruction in Liberia, despite the endorsement of the [LPERP] by the Fast Track Initiative'.<sup>42</sup> OSI's engagement in Liberia's Education Pooled Fund presents a model for the engagement of private foundations, who may be less risk averse than some traditional donors, to fund education recovery in fragile and post conflict contexts.

The anticipation of catalytic funding to support implementation of the new education sector plan and the experience of the EPF and LPERP implementation have highlighted a need to increase coordination across the education sector. Moving forward OSI, learning from its experiences is planning to support a sector coordination unit within the MoE.<sup>43</sup> In partnership with the World Bank, supervising entity for the Catalytic Fund grant, OSI's Education Support Program, will likely commit to three years of support for the sector coordination unit in the MoE. The aims of the unit are to increase synergy within the MoE, provide a structure through which long-term technical assistance will be provided, coordinate national and international funding in the sector, and better enable donor and implementing partners to support the MoE in its efforts to realize education reforms.

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