

# Partnership Paradox

The Post-Conflict Reconstruction  
of Liberia's Education System





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## The Post-Conflict Reconstruction of Liberia's Education System

Editors

*Christopher Talbot and Aleesha Taylor*

Foreword

*Ellen Johnson Sirleaf*

President of the Republic of Liberia

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**Education Support Program**



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# Acknowledgements

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Finally, thanks go to the many Liberia-based organizations and individuals who informed the authors, both for their generosity with their time and sharing of information. More than this, they deserve credit for their daily dedication to the cause of Liberian education.

\* In mid-2014 an Ebola epidemic struck Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. The resulting humanitarian crisis crippled economies and shuttered schools in ways that are reminiscent of the conflicts that each country has endured. Pupils in the already-struggling systems likely lost a full year of schooling. It has taken an immense level of effort and financing to not only reopen schools, but to strengthen the respective governance and education systems.

This book perhaps foreshadows the paradoxes of some of the partnerships that followed the Ebola outbreak. Regardless of whether it is rebuilding and reforming education in the aftermath of a war or an epidemic, this book is dedicated to those whose futures depend on us getting it right.

# Preface

Any serious effort to rebuild a country after years of conflict faces great difficulties; building a peaceful, fair, and open society after a protracted civil war in what was an already underdeveloped and poor country presents even greater challenges. The devastating effects of Liberia's two civil wars between 1986 and 2003 were huge, affecting infrastructure and all aspects of life and culture, leaving their mark on every community, school, and family.

*Partnership Paradox*, describes the efforts of Liberia and its international partners in the post-conflict reconstruction of education. As the title suggests, the partnership was a complex one, revealing inadequacies and strengths, collaboration and contradiction, innovation and rigidity, commitment and carelessness. The book thus sets out a range of vital lessons for building partnerships around the planning, financing, implementation, and monitoring of such educational reconstruction efforts, rooted in the lived realities of Liberia between 2006 and 2010. The youth of Liberia deserve an honest account of these efforts.

The Open Society Foundations are committed to building open and just societies, working to strengthen accountability by governments and participation by citizens. Our efforts have focused on supporting the rebuilding of education systems in several conflict and crisis-affected countries, strengthening critical thinking, promoting equal education and inclusion for marginalized groups, developing a critical political economy of education, and helping teachers, parents, students, and civil society groups work together to improve education quality. In addition to education justice and reform, the Foundations work in over 100 countries to advance public health, rights and equality, youth engagement, governance and accountability, and media and arts.

Hugh McLean, Director, Open Society Education Support Program





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# List of abbreviations

ADEA	Association for the Development of Education in Africa
AED	Academy for Educational Development
COTAE	Coalition for Transparency and Accountability in Education
CPC	Country Program of Cooperation
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DfID	United Kingdom Department for International Development
ECE	Early Childhood Education
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECSEL	European Commission Support to Education in Liberia
EDP	Education Development Partner
EFA	Education for All
EFA-FTI	Education for All—Fast Track Initiative
EMIS	Education Management Information System
EMT	Executive Management Team
EPDF	Education Program Development Fund
EPF	Education Pooled Fund
EQUIP	Educational Quality Improvement Program

ESDC	Education Sector Development Committee
GoL	Government of Liberia
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
IIEP	International Institute for Educational Planning (UNESCO)
INEE	Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
IP	Implementing Partner
IRC	International Rescue Committee
LACE	Liberia Agency for Community Empowerment
LET	Liberian Education Trust
LET-M	Liberian Education Trust—Monrovia
LIPACE	Liberia Institute for the Promotion of Academic Excellence
LPERP	Liberia Primary Education Recovery Program
LTPP	Liberia Teacher Training Program
MCID	Mississippi Consortium for International Development
MoE	Ministry of Education
MPEA	Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs
NGO	Nongovernmental organization
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OMEP	Organisation Mondiale pour l'Éducation Préscolaire (World Organization for Early Childhood Education)
OSIWA	Open Society Initiative for West Africa
PFMU	Project Financial Management Unit
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
RoL	Republic of Liberia
RTTI	Rural Teacher Training Institute
SADAD	Students Against Destructive Actions and Decisions
SWAp	Sector-Wide Approach
UNMIL	United Nations Mission to Liberia

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Source: U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, 2004. Retrieved from [www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/liberia.html](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/liberia.html)

# About the authors

**Yukhiko AMNON** developed a keen interest in early childhood education (ECD) shortly after the civil war in Liberia, when she was asked to teach in the post-war preparatory school program. She worked as a teacher in pre-school and lower basic classes and also served as an administrator, adviser in the establishment of pre-schools and facilitator in the training of pre-school teachers, caregivers and administrators. She worked with various local organizations in promoting the use of local traditional materials in ECD training and implementing activities. As an advocate for early childhood education and development, she participated in the development of the National Inter-Sectoral Policy on Early Childhood Development, and the Early Childhood Development Community Education Awareness Program. Yukhiko serves as the country representative for the World Forum on Early Care and Education, and is an affiliate member of the International Step by Step Association and the World Organization for Early Childhood Education.

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**Keith BURCHELL** has been an education textbook policy and distribution consultant for 20 years. Prior to that, he was an international book supplier with over 25 years' experience. Between 2007 and 2009, Keith worked in Liberia and was based within the Ministry of Education while implementing the ministry's textbook distribution. In 2011, on behalf of Charles Kendall Partners, he worked on textbook distribution for the UK Government's Department for International Development (DfID) in Kenya. This distribution involved the supply of textbooks to low-cost schools (sometimes referred to as "slum schools" in view of their location in the slums of Kenya's larger cities and towns). The distribution was undertaken by a small number of carefully selected booksellers. Between November 2011 and August 2013, he was on assignment in South Sudan where he undertook a contract for Charles Kendall Partners, who were acting for and on behalf of DfID as procurement agents. In conjunction with the Ministry of General Education and Instruction, the project sought to deliver textbooks, sup-



plementary instructional materials, and teacher guides to all primary schools in the country for Grades 1 to 8. The project involved the printing of 9.2 million textbooks and teacher guides, as well as 404,000 supplementary readers, dictionaries, and wall charts, procuring 90,000 plastic boxes in which to deliver the books to schools and having them shipped to Mombasa and transported on to Kampala and then distributed to schools in South Sudan.

**Mark GINSBURG** is a senior technical adviser for research, evaluation, and teacher education in the Global Learning Group at FHI 360 (formerly the Academy for Educational Development) and a visiting scholar in the International Education Program at the University of Maryland. He has served as a professor or visiting professor at the University of Aston (Birmingham, England), University of Houston (Texas, USA), University of Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania, USA), University of Oslo (Norway), Kobe University (Japan) and Teachers College, Columbia University (New York, USA). In 2010, he conducted a historical (documentation and interview) study focused on the Liberia Teacher Training Program (LTTP), and since 2013 has provided technical assistance to the LTTP Monitoring, Evaluation, and Research Team. In addition, he has supported projects in Afghanistan, Egypt, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Malawi, Pakistan, Peru, Rwanda, and Zambia and has conducted research focused on Cuba, Chile, Egypt, England, India, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Nicaragua, Romania, and the United States. He has published extensively on the topics of teachers/teacher education, education and social reproduction/transformation, globalization, policy/institutional reform, and policy/practice-oriented research and evaluation.

**Deborah HARDING** served in the Peace Corps from 1962 until 1979. In 1979–80, she directed the Cambodia Crisis Center in support of 19 U.S. private relief agencies. From 1980 to 1986 she served as the first executive director of the newly established Peace Corps Institute, and as the executive director of the National Women’s Political Caucus. From 1987 to 1989 she managed the German Marshall Fund’s Memorial Fellowship Program and from 1989 to 1996 the Political Development in Central and Eastern Europe program. Deborah came to the Open Society Foundations in 1996 as vice president overseeing some 30 international foundations in the Open Society network. In 2001, she was charged with developing network-wide civil society and Roma programs. She was a founder of the Baltic-American Partnership Fund, the Trust for Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe, the Decade of Roma Inclusion and the Roma Education Fund. Deborah was also a founding board member of the European Roma Rights Centre. She is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and has served on numerous international and domestic NGO boards. In 2006, she set up and now runs the Liberian Education Trust to help rebuild the basic education infrastructure destroyed by the civil war. In 2013, Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

named her Dame Grand Commander of the Liberian Humane Order of African Redemption for her support of the Liberian people over 28 years. In 2012, the president of Poland awarded her the Knight's Cross, Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland, for her support of Polish democracy.

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**Stella KAABWE** is a professional educator with secondary school and university teaching and research experience. She taught at secondary schools in Zambia from 1973 to 1978, at the University of Zambia where she headed the Department of Educational Administration and Policy Studies and was assistant dean for Graduate Studies from 1981 to 1993, and at the University of Natal, South Africa, from 1993 to 2001. Her research interests focus on gender, education management and development for girls and teachers, vulnerability and disparity reduction and program development, management and monitoring, and evaluation. She had published in these and other areas including co-authoring a research-based book entitled *Educating Tomorrow: Lessons from Managing Girls' Education in Africa* (2000). Between 2002 and 2011, she worked with UNICEF as chief of education and gender equity programs in Liberia, Mozambique, and Tanzania. Stella has experience in managing education in emergencies and post-crisis transition. She is currently an independent consultant based in Johannesburg, South Africa. A national of Zambia, she supports the Victoria Falls University, a private university in Livingstone, Zambia.

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**James Emmanuel ROBERTS** served as deputy minister for planning, research and development for the Ministry of Education in the first administration of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. In that capacity, he coordinated Liberia's post-conflict education recovery program, building a robust partnership of donors and the Government of Liberia and mobilizing around U.S.\$200 million, including U.S.\$40 million from the Education for All–Fast Track Initiative (EFA–FTI) in 2010. A former director for culture in the Ministry of Information during the administration of President William R. Tolbert, Jr., James is credited with innovations in the training and performances of artists of the National Cultural Center of Liberia. Under the nom de plume “Kona Khasu” he founded the Blamadon Theatre Workshop and ran an activist theater that incurred the wrath of both the Tolbert and Samuel K. Doe governments. In 1975, James was imprisoned in the notorious Belle Yala maximum security prison by the Tolbert government and, following the 1985 abortive coup d'état, miraculously escaped summary execution by death squad and was imprisoned at the South Beach Prison by the repressive Doe regime. James established the Blamadon Center for Arts and helped organize the Arts and Culture Council of Liberia. He has held fellowships from the African Scholarship Program of the American Universities, the British Council, and the Fulbright program. James authored several plays and a poetry collection and produced the first Liberian television series, *Kotati*. He has written, directed, and produced several documentary films, and writes and lectures on arts, culture, and education in development.

**Ellen Johnson SIRLEAF** is the 24th President of Liberia and the first elected female head of state in Africa. After decades of fighting for peace, justice, and equality in Liberia, President Sirleaf won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011 with two other women. In the past two years, President Sirleaf has chaired a number of high-level panels for the UN, the African Union, and the African Development Bank. She also chairs the Mano River Union. She served as minister of finance in 1979. Following the 1980 military coup d'état, she fled the country

and worked as a banker with Citicorp, the World Bank, and Equator Bank and was appointed head of the African Regional Bureau of the United Nations Development Programme in 1992. In 1997, she returned to Liberia and ran unsuccessfully for president against Charles Taylor. With the return of peace, she won the 2005 presidential election. She was re-elected to a second term in 2011. Among her distinguished honors are: France's highest award and public distinction, the Grand Croix of the Légion d'Honneur (2012), and the Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament, and Development (2012). In 2007, she received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian honor bestowed by an American president. She has been awarded honorary doctorates by 17 academic institutions. President Sirleaf has, throughout her career, demonstrated passionate commitment to hard work, integrity, and good governance, advocating for the rights of women and the importance of education to provide a better future for her country and its people. She has revived national hope by strengthening the institutions of national security and good governance, leading the revitalization of the national economy and infrastructure, and restoring Liberia's international reputation and credibility.

**Christopher TALBOT** taught in Australian and French high schools for 17 years. He also worked in curriculum development and teacher training, focusing on education for peace, human rights, and environmental and development education. From 1993 to 2002, Chris worked for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), based in Geneva. From 2000 to 2002, he was UNHCR's senior education officer, responsible for technical support and policy advice to the staff of UNHCR and its implementing partners on the education of refugees worldwide. Between 2002 and 2008, he worked at UNESCO's International Institute for Educational Planning, where he was responsible for a program of research, publications, training, and advocacy on education in conflict, emergencies, reconstruction, and fragile states. He commissioned case studies on these themes and developed a *Guidebook for Planning Education in Emergencies and Reconstruction*. In 2008–09, he established and led the UNESCO Section for Education in Post-Conflict and Post-Disaster Situations. In 2010, Chris was CEO of Education Above All (EAA), a Qatar-based policy research and advocacy organization, which aims to protect, support, and promote the right to education in areas affected or threatened by crisis, conflicts, and war. Since early 2011, Chris has been a consultant, specializing in education in emergencies, working for agencies such as the CfBT Education Trust, the Danish Refugee Council, GIZ, IRC, NORRAG, the Open Society Foundations, UNHCR, and UNICEF. He was a co-founder and active leader of the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies and of the Global Coalition for Protecting Education from Attack.

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# Foreword

*Ellen Johnson Sirleaf*

It is a source of great satisfaction to me to see this book in print. The post-war reconstruction of Liberia's education sector has been a passionate commitment of my presidency; indeed, it has been one of the strongest motivations of my political and personal life. The story of that reconstruction is told in these pages by people who lived through it, people who were in part responsible for the successes and failures of that effort. They forged partnerships locally, nationally, and internationally, partnerships that moved forward the process of rebuilding an education system that had been all but destroyed by years of bloodshed. The authors of this book recount the triumphs and difficulties that characterized those partnerships, hence the book's title, *Partnership Paradox*. I hope that those who read it, policymakers and educators working in Liberia and in post-conflict reconstruction around the world, will find inspiration and warning in the stories told here.

## A general description of the Liberian education sector in 2006

During my presidential election campaign in 2005, I was acutely focused on addressing the needs of Liberia's children. They were the most traumatized by the years of conflict—impoverished, many orphaned, illiterate, without much hope. They rarely smiled. The Unity

Party's platform included a focus on empowering people through education and training. In my 2006 inaugural address, I said, "We shall encourage families to educate all children particularly the girl child." One of my first acts as president was to reinvigorate the existing edict to increase access to schooling for girls. Soon afterwards, my government dropped all fees for basic education.

Once I became president in January 2006, I made education one of the two top priorities of my administration. Children, women, ex-fighters, men—all wanted to learn, go to school, and become literate. We needed to rebuild both the basic infrastructure and the education system. We needed to build hundreds of schools, recruit and train a teaching corps, develop a national curriculum and interim teaching materials, and to get our children, especially girls, enrolled in school. At the national level, we needed to construct the systems to manage a national school system and to source the funds to pay for it.

When I took office, we were faced with enormous constraints across the government. It was half way through our fiscal year; the annual national budget was a mere U.S.\$80 million. We did not have sufficient funds to meet present and recurrent needs let alone restore an education infrastructure. Where schools existed, they lacked books, equipment, and teachers. Liberia had a massive external debt and lacked international creditworthiness.

Thankfully, many of the major development organizations were operating in Liberia during the period of the National Transitional Government that was formed after the peace agreement was signed in August 2003. The UNDP, UNHCR, UNICEF, USAID, the World Bank, and the World Food Program were present and working to decommission rebel soldiers and place them into various programs, one of which was accelerated primary school education.

## Attracting donors back to Liberia and the establishment of the Liberian Education Trust (LET)

I knew we needed to attract all the help we could to focus on basic education. I had made many contacts over the years, particularly in the United States, and I travelled extensively to meet with them and raise awareness of our needs. As president elect on a visit to Washington, I asked one such friend, Deborah Harding, to set up a mechanism to raise funds to address our basic education needs. The Liberian Education Trust (LET) was established in December 2005 in Washington, D.C., as a U.S. initiative to do just that. LET's goals were to build 50 schools, train 500 teachers, and give 5,000 scholarships to girls for formal education and to market women for six-month literacy classes. Thanks to LET's rapid start-up,



and the first million dollars they raised in April 2006 from George Soros, we were able to begin to deliver on our commitment to Liberia's children and women.

## Encouraging Open Society to support the education sector

In January 2007, George Soros visited Liberia for the first time. I knew him, as I had been the chair of one of his foundations, the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), from 2000–2002. During my U.S. trip as president elect, Soros hosted a lunch for me in New York to meet business leaders. In a private conversation, he also offered his support in several other areas: topping up salaries of key members of my cabinet from the Liberian Diaspora who returned to work in our new democracy; and supporting the consultancy of a macro-economist to work with me. He was already supporting LET and during his visit he was introduced to a range of issues and individuals including those in the education sector. I made no specific education funding request of him.

## Invigorating a civil society response

Many international NGOs were already operating in Liberia during the time of the National Transitional Government, providing humanitarian assistance. We encouraged all of them to stay. They were providing services that the government did not have the capacity to address. This is often the case in post-conflict societies.

Liberia always had a vibrant civil society before the wars and despite the devastation and hardship at their end, many citizens started schools, orphanages, churches, market associations, community based organizations and NGOs. Liberians are entrepreneurial and many are committed to helping the needy.

International donors did not tend to partner with local NGOs by funding them to do their own work. Nor did international agencies tend to hire Liberians at the professional level to inform their operations. LET was an exception, as from its inception LET made grants only to local Liberian NGOs to help it to meet its goals and carry out its work. These NGOs were distributed throughout all the counties and not just in the capital city of Monrovia. Thus, Liberian civil society in very rural counties had a chance to serve and model service provision.

## Efforts to establish libraries in schools and communities

I was concerned about the lack of libraries very early on. Historically, Liberia had a National Library and public libraries around the country; government schools had reading rooms. All of the government schools built after the wars using a design of the Ministry of Education also had a reading room. Many had no books, however. Others had a mix of age-appropriate and age-inappropriate donated books. The reading rooms were usually locked up and not available to pupils or teachers. Usually, this had to do with fear that the books would disappear, or because there were no rules governing their use.

Although I raised the need for public libraries constantly during my first administration, nothing happened. Books were donated from abroad and textbooks were purchased with donor funds for distribution to schools. However, many schools lacked shelving and other basic furniture, as I learned personally when I visited schools in Monrovia. In such instances, the books were tossed on the floor and again locked up and inaccessible to children. We have worked with our donor partners to incorporate the adequate care and security of books into efforts to promote a reading culture across Liberia. For three or four libraries in Monrovia, I personally funded the shelving and materials necessary to get the books off the floor and into the hands of readers. LET has now established eight school libraries in rural counties and the Liberia Agency for Community Empowerment is building a ninth. In our national budget for 2013/14, we allocated funds for the design of a national library. There is also a Liberian NGO library in Monrovia, located in the offices of an NGO called WE-CARE.

## Persistent challenges in the sector

The single biggest challenge we face is lack of capacity. Without capacity, strategic vision is minimal; without capable leadership, systemic and programmatic implementation are lacking. I sought out Liberians from the Diaspora to lead many of our ministries. I thought I had identified the right leaders and was disappointed, as were our citizens and our donors, with some of my early choices.

Another challenge has been our public works infrastructure: lashing rains wash out our rural roads, making transportation and travel for oversight impossible; the rains also limit cell phone usage for many months of the year. Our civil servants are not able to communicate with or visit the districts; district education officers are not able to visit village

schools. We were not able to easily gather the data needed to undertake needs assessments. My government has addressed some of these issues but many continue to plague us.

Our schools also lack qualified teachers. We had to clear the salary lists of “ghosts,” and retrain and constantly upgrade our teachers. We have relied on American, Ghanaian, and Nigerian teachers in the classrooms to teach English, mathematics, and science. With unqualified teachers, we cannot have high quality graduates from our schools. Our teachers and students lack books, equipment, electricity, chalk, laboratories, and even furniture in some cases. We lack the infrastructure and systems to pay our teachers their salaries on a regular basis. There are few banks in the rural counties and few teachers have bank accounts.

Finally, corruption and abuse are as pervasive in the education sector as elsewhere. We had ghost teachers on the payroll. Some teachers demand money or sex in exchange for passing grades. We paid teachers through the district offices and some district officers extracted sums from teachers’ salaries. Corrupt administrators sometimes charged school fees when tuition was free. The West African Examinations Council examinations became corrupted early on. A lot of this corruption has to do with the lack of oversight from the ministry over the schools. We have failed to pay sufficient attention to the situation at the school level.

I hope that decentralization of the government’s decision-making authority will eventually ease some of these issues. Counties and districts will have the funds and authority to manage the schools within their areas. The fiber optic cables around Africa will allow us to introduce new forms of communication to our outlying areas and schools.

## International donors and foundations

Some international donors were able to start up quickly to help us meet some of Liberia’s educational needs; others were not. Resource flows were very slow from multilateral and bilateral donors, compared with foundations that were relatively quick. We did not have adequate data or the ability to collect it to support donor requirements to secure funding approval. We had a very small budget for education in the early years in relation to the overall budget. I wondered if donors felt we were not serious in our commitment to education. Today, education accounts for 14 percent of the national budget.

The Education Pooled Fund, a multi-donor pool of funds, capitalized by the Open Society Foundations and the Government of the Netherlands, was an innovative mechanism to support our critical needs. Most importantly, it funded needs against a plan that was developed and agreed to by the Ministry of Education, rather than having our needs determined from the outside.

The placing of foreign experts early on into the Ministry of Education through the Open Society Foundations and other funders was extremely helpful to fill our lack of capacity and to bring new and state of the art thinking to the team. Foundations are willing to take bigger risks, which in a post-conflict situation is very helpful. People want the government to deliver and if it takes two or three years to do so, that can destabilize a new government, if not paralyze it.

## My vision for the future of Liberia's education sector

One overriding goal in a post-conflict situation is a return to normalcy. Getting children off the streets and into schools that function well enough to keep them there is a primary step in this direction.

I see a technical education sector producing skilled men and women for future jobs in the petroleum sector, engineering, agricultural economics, and information technology. I want a system that produces well-qualified citizens who can enter our labor market with the skills needed to lift Liberia into the world of technology, engineering, modern agriculture, and other sectors vital to national recovery and development.

Such a system must make it possible for girls as well as boys to finish secondary school and go on to community colleges or university. To get there, we must invest in a higher quality corps of teachers. We must put textbooks and reading material in every school. And we must find ways through early childhood education for all children and a parallel literacy and numeracy program for their parents, especially the mothers, to introduce reading to all children before they enter school and commit to ensuring that children are able to read and comprehend what they read at grade level by the end of grade 6.

Finally, I see a top-rated university comparable to what we had before the wars; and community colleges throughout the counties so that students do not have to leave their homes and families to travel to Monrovia to study.

I invite all Liberians and our many friends and partners throughout the world to join with me in realizing this vision, for the sake of the nation's precious children and young people.

# Introduction

*Aleesha Taylor*

The main purpose of this book is to tell a story of the post-civil war reconstruction of Liberia's education system from 2006 to 2010, as experienced by the education practitioners who were responsible for a core component of that reconstruction. The story is set around the development and implementation of the Liberia Education Pooled Fund (EPF), a transitional funding mechanism established in response to the global aid architecture's inability to support a fragile state, and a reflection of the exuberance with which traditional and non-traditional development organizations approached the opportunity to support Liberia's transition to peaceful democracy. The book aims to provide insight into the characteristics of education reconstruction and reform in post-conflict settings and the types of partnerships and dispositions that are needed to encourage and sustain that reconstruction.

The original impetus and inspiration for the book arose from my work for the Open Society Foundations and the partnership we established with Liberia's Ministry of Education (MoE). On my first visit to Monrovia in August 2007, James Emmanuel Roberts, then deputy minister for planning, research and development and also Open Society's main counterpart, took me on a tour of the ministry building. At one point we came to a door marked, "Archives." He told me that this room would be emblematic of Liberia's tragic recent history and also help me to understand the difficult road that lay ahead. We walked in. There were no documents or cabinets in the room. After allowing a moment for my confusion to set in, he explained that the building had been occupied by displaced people during the conflict

period and that the archives had been used to kindle cooking fires and as toilet paper. It was in that moment that I realized that I was likely not prepared for what was to come and also wondered if there was any way that I could have been.

I had joined Open Society only months before, after completing my doctoral work and a brief foray as a faculty member in international development and education policy. I understood policy cycles and the development of policy frameworks. I had lived for several years in East Africa working with rural civil society and national education policy advocacy organizations. I had read all that I could about post-conflict reconstruction. I thought I could at least grasp the challenge ahead. What I could not grasp was how exactly a person, such as Deputy Minister Roberts, tasked with establishing, implementing and monitoring the policies and programs that would rebuild Liberia's education system, and for that matter Liberian society, could cope with such a task and reality. Here was the person leading a team tasked by the Government of Liberia to access external assistance for education, unable to put his hands on any data.

As I watched Deputy Minister Roberts and his colleagues navigate the challenges of those early days, I often found myself wondering what was “really” going through their minds and how they managed to remain motivated given the monumental task ahead. Beyond figuring out how to carry out my own institutional mandate and achieve the policy priorities that we shared, I tried to imagine the stories and experiences that lay beneath the sanitized interactions that come with funding relationships and development partnerships. I initially attributed this fascination to a vestige of my previous training in psychology, but soon realized that it was a reflection of my more recent academic preparation, which emphasized a qualitative or ethnographic approach to policy analysis. This approach pushes against the lack of reflexivity in policy studies and calls for a nuanced and ground-level perspective, holding that policies and development approaches exist not only as they are prescribed but primarily through the experiences of their recipients (Dubois, 2009). Some scholars contend that analysis of education interventions would benefit from tracing relationships and “linkages among local, national and international forces and institutions that together shape and are shaped by education in a particular locale” (Bartlett and Vavrus, 2009: 12). I recognized that what had been missing from my preparation and the canon of literature and guidelines on post-conflict education reconstruction were the narratives of those who are responsible for developing and implementing policies and rebuilding national systems. Technical reviews and guidelines on how policies should be developed and how processes should be carried out abound, but the voices of the people actually engaged in such work are often missing or used to buttress prescribed guidelines. The core objective of this volume is to document the experience of rebuilding Liberia's education system through narratives and analysis written by many of those who were directly engaged in the process.

The book provides an opportunity to show how different organizational priorities and individuals' perspectives and personalities influence an education reform process. The authors of the following chapters have written personal reflections on the tasks and partnerships that emerged around well-intentioned efforts to help Liberia get back on track through the development and implementation of the EPF, the mechanism initially identified as the means through which the MoE could “jump start” its reconstruction and establish the framework for future development and financing of the education sector. In addition to individuals whose work was directly related to the EPF—senior officials of the MoE, the United Nations, NGOs, foundations, and international consultants—the voices of other vital actors in ongoing efforts to strengthen education in Liberia are also included, as they provide additional insight into the missteps that may have occurred and perspectives that were overlooked at the time.

Collectively, the chapters do not constitute a single and harmonious narrative. There is sometimes considerable disagreement between chapter authors about the efficacy of their own contributions and efforts, how the various partnerships were constituted, how well they worked, and why. These disagreements occur between authors who worked for *different* organizations, but also between some authors who worked for the *same* organization, such as the MoE or UNICEF, at different levels or with distinct perspectives. This is quite deliberate, reflecting the reality that individuals bring their own values, perspectives, and experiences to the elaboration of their institutions' positions and actions. The task is to simply present the *paradox*.

The terms “development partners” and “partnership” are used throughout the book, and their usage represents their current prevalence in development practice. Consistent with the qualitative or ethnographic approach of this exercise, the chapters seek to avoid the tendency for partnerships to remain depoliticized and opaque in development discourse (Vavrus and Seghers, 2010). The terminology and discourse around “partnership” have been identified as a “salvation narrative” in education and current development practice (Popkewitz, 2001), which assumes benign arrangements and egalitarian relationships. Our interest is not in a “neat and abstract discourse,” but in the “contradictory, complex and paradoxical reality” that is evident in the narratives and lived experiences of the partners themselves (Cardini, 2006: 410). This reflection may highlight the differences between the rhetoric and practice of partnerships in development.

A useful working definition of “partnerships” relevant to the Liberian EPF and to attempts to carry out global education commitments is:

... the pooling and managing of resources, as well as the mobilization of competencies and commitments by public, business, and civil society partners to contribute to expansion and quality of education. They are founded on the principles of inter-

national rights, ethical principles, and organizational agreements underlying education sector development and management; consultation with other stakeholders; and on shared decision-making, risk, benefit and accountability. (Draxler, 2008: 31)

Formal definitions aside, the concept and practice of partnerships remain obscure and the rhetoric masks asymmetries of power among the individual and institutional stakeholders involved. While there is an understandable emphasis on the roles of institutions and organizations in partnership processes, this can limit the perceived significance of the roles and importance of the individuals who represent those organizations and bring their particular personalities, values, priorities, and experiences, for good and ill, to the “partnership” (Mosse, 2005; Shore and Wright, 1996). The importance of relationships, of understanding the positions, interests, needs, and concerns of all involved is a relatively neglected issue. Several of the authors speak strongly to this point in their chapters.

Before further exploring the interplay of concept, practice, rhetoric, and power imbalances among individual and institutional stakeholders in this particular development partnership, some background information on the educational impact of the Liberian civil war will provide the reader with the context needed to understand the partnerships that developed.

## The educational impact of the civil war<sup>1</sup>

While the civil war interrupted and weakened the functioning of the education system, it is worth remembering that the system was struggling even before 1989. According to Liberia’s 1988 *Education and Human Resource Sector Assessment*:

- ▶ [Of the] 4,872 teachers ... in public primary schools ... approximately 73 percent have high school education or less and are regarded by the MOE as underqualified.
- ▶ There has been a dramatic decline in students entering teacher education and a high attrition of students enrolled in those programs. Teacher education students who do graduate do not enter or remain in teaching.<sup>2</sup>

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1. I am indebted to Dr. Mark Ginsburg for much of the material in this section. For information on the historical background to Liberia’s civil war, see Appendix.

2. The sector assessment, however, reflected optimism about the expected benefits of a five-year USAID-funded Primary Education Project, which was initiated in 1987 (RoL/MoE, MPEA and USAID, 1988: 19; ch. 1). Unfortunately, this project was suspended when the civil war erupted in 1989.



- ▶ A major constraint on the MOE has been the reoccurring [sic] delays in salary payments to teachers. (RoL/MoE, MPEA and USAID, 1988: 19; ch. 1)

Whatever weaknesses existed in the system before 1989, there can be no doubt that:

The lengthy civil war in Liberia led to a virtually complete breakdown of the educational system; ... 80 percent of schools were destroyed in the period between 1989 and 1997. During the short window of peace in the late 1990s, some reconstruction took place ... However, between 2001 and 2003, the conflict re-emerged and further destruction and damage took place; ... 20 percent of schools [were] completely destroyed, while many of the remaining 80 percent were in need of repair. (AED, MCID and IRC, 2006: 9; see also Daniels, 1994)

Not only was there huge physical damage to schools (Shriberg, 2008; Stromquist *et al.*, 2013), but “many teachers were killed or fled to other countries” (Davidson and Hobbs, 2013: 284). Moreover, the Rural Teacher Training Institutes (RTTIs) were in various states of disrepair, depriving the government of even the basic infrastructure upon which to rebuild its education system and deliver on the global mandate and national policy to provide universal primary education to Liberian children.

The wartime destruction of Liberian education extended to the capacity of the MoE to plan and manage the system. During the war years, due to its global and national reputation, technical capacity and access to funding, UNICEF had become Liberia’s *de facto* ministry of education, as Roberts acknowledges in chapter 4. Understandably, this reality created discomfort and tensions for both UNICEF and the actual MoE. Both parties faced difficulties in reconstituting more normal institutional identities after the conflict.

In January 2006, when Ellen Johnson Sirleaf took office as Africa’s first female head of state, there was deep euphoria in Liberia, as she inspired the hearts and minds of millions who hoped for progress and change. She bore the promise and the burden of rebuilding Liberia after 14 years of civil conflict and the years of stagnation and institutional crumbling that preceded and immediately followed the conflict. A highly respected Harvard-trained economist, President Sirleaf generated optimism for the reconstruction of Liberia. Public and private institutions around the world rallied to express their commitment and support for her presidency, and Liberia was fully expected to be a success story for post-conflict reconstruction and democratic transition. Education, along with health and infrastructure, was identified as the core component of Liberia’s development agenda. President Sirleaf’s biggest challenge was to turn the rhetoric of political promises into reality in a post-conflict setting with shattered infrastructure, a still-divided polity, and institutional capacity for planning and management undermined by decades of neglect and war.

# Global mandates and post-conflict realities: Liberia approaches the Education for All–Fast Track Initiative for catalytic funding

In May 2007, the Ministry of Education, through UNICEF, put forward an application for funding from the then Education for All–Fast Track Initiative (EFA-FTI) to support its interim plan for educational recovery. The EFA movement’s stated commitment, articulated in the declaration signed at the World Education Forum in Dakar in April 2000, was that:

No countries seriously committed to education for all will be thwarted in their achievement of this goal by a lack of resources. (World Education Forum, 2000: 9)

Despite the government’s commitment and clear lack of resources and the donor community’s expressed commitment to supporting the education sector, Liberia’s request for funding was denied, highlighting a gap in the aid architecture for education as it related to fragile contexts and the need to find a more suitable financing mechanism (Turrent, 2011).

Following years of conflict and instability, and despite the political will in the donor community to support the government in its efforts, the government was not able to meet the stringent requirements imposed by the global aid architecture at the time (May 2007). While funding was not made available, Liberia was invited to become an EFA-FTI partner country and, as detailed by Cream Wright in chapter 2, those in attendance committed to supporting Liberia in other ways to deliver on its immediate program implementation efforts and to prepare a successful application for EFA-FTI catalytic funds in the near future. As Wright explains, UNICEF committed a portion of the U.S.\$201 million grant it had received from the Government of the Netherlands specifically for education in emergency-affected and post-conflict countries to fund the first year of implementation of the Liberia Primary Education Recovery Program (LPERP). In May 2007, Open Society committed U.S.\$5 million toward efforts to catalyze the recovery of the sector; these funds were used to create Liberia’s EPF. Open Society further undertook to provide the technical assistance necessary to fill gaps left by traditional donors, because, like the EFA-FTI, they anticipated that the donors would be unable to address some specific needs.<sup>3</sup> This was intended to ensure that the government could deliver a successful funding application, which did not occur until May 2010. Several of this book’s authors analyze these developments more fully, from different perspectives

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3. For more detail on Open Society’s participation in Liberia’s educational reconstruction, see the section entitled “Open Society’s engagement” later in this chapter.

(Cream Wright in chapter 2; Stella Kaabwe in chapter 3; James Roberts in chapter 4; Anthony Nimely and Eugene Jappah in chapter 5; and Batuhan Aydagül in chapter 6).

The EFA-FTI's inability to support the reconstruction of Liberia's education system was perceived as a failure of the system of international aid, and was a considerable embarrassment to the institutions concerned. Regardless of the level of understanding and goodwill and the extent to which the Ministry of Education had been encouraged to come forward for funding, the rejection reflected the rigidity of the aid architecture at the time. It seemed like a slap in the face from wealthy donors to an impoverished and shattered African nation that had recently conducted peaceful elections resulting in the exuberant appointment of the continent's first female head of state.

## The establishment of the Education Pooled Fund and other partnerships, 2006–08

The Liberia Education Pooled Fund was developed and launched in May 2008. While the primary purpose of the EPF was to provide transitional funding to enable the government to implement the LPERP, the mechanism was also intended to establish the institutional arrangements necessary to ensure government leadership, donor coordination, and effective civil society and stakeholder engagement in the sector (Schmidt and Taylor, 2010). In this early phase of post-conflict reconstruction and with the burden of re-establishing itself as the clear authority for the sector, the MoE was focused on establishing partnerships and coordination between partners, including donors and implementing partners (NGOs). In chapters 4 and 5, Roberts, Nimely, and Jappah analyze the complexities of those partnerships from the perspective of the MoE's Planning Department and their own experiences.

Efforts to develop effective partnerships and government ownership extended beyond EPF-related activities and institutional arrangements. The government was keen to assert its leadership in donor-led initiatives by encouraging the engagement of additional partners in an effort to diminish the tendency for individual donors to brand their projects, as noted by Roberts in chapter 4. The Liberia Teacher Training Program (LTTP) is an example of this. The LTTP was established with USAID funding in November 2006 to rebuild a teacher training system that had not produced any nationally certified teachers in nearly 20 years. For reasons explained by Mark Ginsburg and Brenda Arrington in chapter 9, the LTTP remained outside of the EPF framework, which caused difficulties for coordination of the program with other major educational initiatives.

Lack of clarity on the specific roles and responsibilities of key actors in the established partnerships caused confusion and delays in the implementation of major components of Liberia's education reforms. As an example of this phenomenon, in chapter

10 Keith Burchell outlines agonizing difficulties related to the development, procurement, and distribution of school textbooks. These processes were fraught with errors of judgment and extensive delays because of poor leadership and extraordinarily weak technical and managerial capacity in the MoE, and major misunderstandings between donors and MoE officials. The eventual achievements of the textbook program were more due to the efforts of key dedicated individuals than to the functioning of the Liberian education system and its associated partnerships.

## Open Society's engagement

The Open Society Foundations launched its regional initiative in late 2000 in response to the new wave of democratic change—and its accompanying demands and challenges—sweeping across the region. The regional foundation known as the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) is dedicated to supporting and advocating for the promotion of open society values in West Africa; it supports program work to achieve this mission in nine countries in the region. OSIWA provides grant support and implements internally generated initiatives with government and civil society partners. Recently, OSIWA has also begun to engage in proactive advocacy for policy reform. OSIWA's niche has been building capacity and creating space for participation by West African civil society and government institutions through support to catalytic and innovative initiatives as well as advocating for the core ideals of open society.<sup>4</sup>

As OSIWA's founding board chair, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was instrumental in establishing Open Society's mission in West Africa, and Open Society was later seen as an early partner of her administration for the restoration of peace and democracy in Liberia. It was through this context that Open Society became engaged in the education sector. In March 2007, weeks before Liberia's unsuccessful application for catalytic funds from the EFA-FTI would be considered, George Soros, Open Society's founder and chairman, rallied traditional and non-traditional donors to provide support for the government's efforts:

When it comes to an initiative as bold as Education for All, it is difficult for a private foundation like mine to make a meaningful contribution ... Obviously I cannot compete, but when it comes to individual countries, foundations like mine can play a role. Take the case of Liberia. I chose Liberia because, like so many, I admire the leadership

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4. I am grateful to Massa Crayton, Country Representative, OSIWA-Liberia, for contributions to this section.

of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who served as chairperson of Open Society Initiative for West Africa before she was elected president. I believe that it is crucial to develop public-private partnerships that seek to help her achieve Liberia's plan for their children.

The needs of Liberia are particularly acute as a post-conflict state, and its own budgetary ability to meet those needs correspondingly limited. By working to support a portion of President Sirleaf's plan, we will not be another donor to attend to, but a partner helping them achieve the plan that they have agreed on and which only they can ultimately succeed in implementing. On behalf of the donors, UNICEF is spearheading Liberia's five-year plan. The estimated amount needed for the first year is U.S.\$20 million. And against the gap of what is apparently still needed—U.S.\$10 million—I hereby pledge U.S.\$5 million. I will give that amount provided the official donors commit to covering the rest of a five-year funding program based on the assessment of existing needs.

This pledge and challenge from George Soros created a basis for the Liberian EPF, following the EFA-FTI's inability to approve funding.

Open Society explicitly engaged its resources with the intention of strengthening the role and position of the Government of Liberia and to accelerate the mobilization of external resources to the education sector (Schmidt, 2009). Part of that commitment was to provide a long-term technical assistant to support the MoE's Department of Planning, Research and Development (hereafter referred to as the "Department of Planning") in the implementation of the LPERP, which was intended to lead the work of all partners toward fulfillment of objectives set out by the government. Batuhan Aydagül took up that role in June 2007. He was not placed in a separate international consultant's office but sat in the office of the planning department, working directly with Liberian educational planners, which made his contributions far more effective. For detail on this, see chapter 6.

## Evolving partnerships and structures, 2009–10

By 2010, the EFA-FTI was well into a reform process, partly in response to its past inflexibility and in an effort to increase its ability to attract funding to the sector in the face of an ever-increasing funding gap for achieving universal basic education.<sup>5</sup> From 2009 to 2010,

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5. The EFA-FTI was officially reconstituted and rebranded as the Global Partnership for Education in November 2011.

the MoE and its partners in Liberia focused on a second application to the EFA-FTI Catalytic Fund. Determined not to be rejected again, they worked to ensure that the necessary markers of a functioning system were in place.<sup>6</sup>

The overarching goal of Liberia's education partners in 2009–10 was thus securing additional funds from the EFA-FTI, now the Global Partnership for Education (GPE). The EPF was partly viewed as a mechanism for obtaining that end, as a bridge to greater and more sustainable international financing. In this objective they were successful, as Liberia was awarded a GPE grant of U.S.\$40 million in May 2010 (GPE, 2014b). The working assumption was that a lot more money would make a bigger positive impact for educational access and quality in Liberia. But additional funding did not solve the long-term problems of Liberia's war-ravaged and mismanaged education system, as the authors of the following chapters make abundantly clear. Did the MoE and its partners pursue the wrong goal in focusing so strongly on funding, possibly to the detriment of other potential goals?

Leading up to 2010, Open Society also reflected on the extent of its partnership with the Ministry of Education and recognized that our resources would be best spent supporting a local team of technical experts. After three years of providing a series of long- and short-term technical assistants to fill specific gaps, we worked with the ministry and other donor partners to establish a sector coordination unit within the Department of Planning. This team has included planning specialists, a donor coordinator, financial management specialists, monitoring and evaluation specialists, and a special assistant to the minister. Our initial three-year commitment has been extended through 2015. Rather than focusing on one sub-sector or project within the MOE, the team works across the various departments and with a range of development partners to increase the ministry's capacity for long-term strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation, and coordination of sector funding and activities. The team works closely with those responsible for monitoring funding disbursements and activities related to the GPE grant, while maintaining a broader focus on the sector as a whole.

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6. These included: an annual sector review, a costed and comprehensive sector plan verified through national consultations, donor coordination capacity, monthly stakeholder engagement meetings, a school census, school mapping, payroll verification exercises, and increased engagement of the Ministry of Finance to improve financial management and disbursement mechanisms and analysis of sector financing scenarios.

# What have we learned from the implementation of the EPF and other education partnerships in Liberia?

Prior to 2011, the ministry and many of its development partners focused on attracting funding to the sector, which may have had some detrimental effects. Michael Weah notes the lack of necessary attention to meaningful engagement with and development of civil society partners. Several large-scale projects were being implemented by partners (e.g., European Commission, UNICEF, USAID) during the EPF period.<sup>7</sup> There was, perhaps, excessive attention on the LPERP and EPF relative to the level of donor-led activities, which may have led to a relatively limited comprehensive focus on developing the whole sector, beyond primary schooling. The ministry's intense focus on the EPF and later GPE funds, *vis-à-vis* those of other donors, may have been the result of limited donor coordination. There may also have been a sense among donors of ownership of funding and of activities in the sector that they supported. This possibly could have led to an incongruous focus on instruments that provided more perceived ownership. Open Society's stated intention prior to 2010 was to "help the ministry to access funding from the global aid architecture for education." Might we have been more effective had we pushed for a focus on how to encourage the education system to function for those with the greatest educational needs? Might a longer-term strategic focus have had a better long-term impact on the sector?

Greater attention to issues such as "how do we ensure plans are implemented most effectively and programs are delivered, and what types of partnership are necessary to encourage and facilitate those outcomes" or "what happens after money is approved and transferred" might have been helpful. Further, as of June 2015, there was still U.S.\$1.5 million remaining in the EPF account. While this is just a portion of the total fund, the fact that it remained unspent after seven years raises questions and points to potential lessons.

Many post-conflict and fragile settings can be characterized as chaotic. In a strange way, chaos begins to resemble normalcy. Paradoxically, it is enormously difficult for ministries and those agencies seeking to support them both to follow established processes and to implement change. The parties involved in the EPF attempted to establish sound institutional procedures that would strengthen the Liberian education system, but these procedures were continuously neglected, bypassed, and even usurped on occasion, processes described in the following chapters.

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7. For a comprehensive overview of donor engagement in Liberia's education sector at the time, please see the World Bank's Project Appraisal Document (World Bank, 2010).

The partners in the EPF sought to ensure that the MoE had decision-making authority and responsibility to implement programs according to its own defined priorities and plans. This was interpreted to mean leaving MoE officials in charge and adding relatively little external technical and policy direction. In this aspect the EPF differed from the pooled fund set up in the health sector, which was managed by external agencies and consultants to a much greater extent than the EPF. The Ministry of Health and Social Welfare brought in extensive international expertise from the very beginning, and then turned responsibility back to national officials after the system was re-established.

Many questions arise....

Did the education sector's emphasis on "keeping it local" actually thwart the potential progress in the sector, given the great weaknesses of Liberian capacity in educational leadership, policy development, technical skills, and management of implementation?

In their desire to empower Liberian officials and institutions, did the international education partners end up not empowering but enabling them, reinforcing the underlying patterns and cycles of dysfunctional behavior, thus perpetuating and exacerbating the problems?

What is the reality of "partnership" in circumstances such as those that afflicted Liberia soon after the end of its civil war? Were the educational actors in Liberia partners in name only? How can there be genuine partnership when every agency and many individuals want to be in charge and see their name and logo everywhere? In chapter 4, Roberts asks whether, given the unequal power relationships between weak governments and international development organizations, especially in post-conflict countries, there can ever be a real partnership of equals.

These questions go to the heart of both the real and ostensible purposes of partnership, pushing us to consider how the term "partnership" actually masks power asymmetries and the predominance of donor priorities.

Despite and partly because of its difficulties and failures, the Liberian EPF has impacted the global aid architecture, as developing country and donor governments and other stakeholders have absorbed various lessons of successful partnership in post-conflict settings (UNESCO, 2010: 232). While the main goal of the EPF's creation was to provide critical financing for the Government of Liberia's Primary Education Recovery Plan, it also sought to establish the institutional arrangements to govern the sector and coordinate the resources and activities of donor partners in the country. The EPF established processes for financial management and engagement of the Ministry of Finance, and a platform for dialogue and engagement of bilateral and multilateral donors, civil society, and local and international implementing agencies (or NGOs). The author practitioners in this volume rightfully question the apparent "success" of the EPF model, but certainly the Liberian EPF created a useful case study for donor engagement in post-conflict educational recovery.



In 2010, largely due to our experience in Liberia, Open Society was invited to work together with the Hewlett Foundation and the World Economic Forum to formally integrate private foundations into the governance structure of what would become the Global Partnership for Education.<sup>8</sup> The growing role and relevance of foundations in the global aid architecture for education is very encouraging, as is the development of the International Education Funders Group, an affinity group of over 60 private funding organizations that support education in developing countries (see [www.iefg.org](http://www.iefg.org)). It is also important to note that the GPE is now better able to respond to the needs of conflict-affected countries. Today, more than one-third of the countries supported by the GPE may be described as conflict-affected, and the GPE is remarkably able to quickly disburse resources to maintain learning activities during active conflicts and emergency situations (GPE, 2014a).

My own engagement in the management of this process over time has given me unique insight into the nuances of educational development. Though I have mainly managed Open Society's engagement from our London and New York offices, I had the added benefit of being embedded in the Ministry of Education on two occasions as an "adviser" to two Ministers of Education.<sup>9</sup> Of course, obvious questions stem from the ease of placing someone with little governance experience as an "adviser" to senior government officials; this occurrence speaks to the comparative influence of certain partners. My experience and other stories documented in this volume highlight the fact that while education sector stakeholders continue to focus on financing gaps, what is needed is attention to the nuanced personalities and partnerships that emerge through the process.

The post-conflict educational reconstruction of Liberia illustrates many of the paradoxes of education partnerships. In the following chapters, the author practitioners richly elaborate themes such as the multiplicity of meanings applied to the term "partnership" by different institutions and individuals, and the conditions for successful and unsuccessful partnerships in the especially challenging context of a post-conflict environment.

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8. Currently comprised of 10 private foundations and 11 private sector organizations, the Private Sector/Private Foundation constituency holds one of the 19 constituency seats of the GPE's Board of Directors.

9. The purpose of those deployments was to support the ministry's efforts to complete the comprehensive education sector plan (February through June 2009) that created the basis for the second, successful funding application and the development of the sector coordination unit (August through December 2011) that continues to form the core of the ministry's planning department.



# Ethnography of post-conflict financing: partnerships and the Education Pooled Fund in Liberia<sup>10</sup>

*Cream Wright*

## Financing against the odds—education in post-conflict Liberia

Liberia in 2007 was a post-conflict country, which donor agencies categorize as ineligible for normal development financing.<sup>11</sup> Liberia achieved peace in 2003, after 14 years of civil war that left the country with shattered infrastructure, non-functional institutions, precarious security, and collapsed service delivery, as well as an impoverished, displaced, and traumatized population (RoL/MoE, 2007a). Reconstruction efforts benefited from a new sense of optimism when successful national elections brought in Africa’s first woman president,

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10. The statements in this chapter are the views of the author and do not necessarily reflect the policies or the views of UNICEF or any other multi-lateral agencies, bilateral agencies or inter-agency groups.

11. This paper focuses on what is variously termed “normal financing,” “development financing,” or “normal development financing,” as distinct from financing for emergencies or humanitarian assistance.

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. Many qualified Liberians also returned from the Diaspora to contribute to development. Even so, in 2007 democratic characteristics such as fiduciary integrity, technical capacity, rule of law, transparency, and accountability were yet to (re)emerge in Liberia. Development partners were understandably ambivalent, desiring to reward democratic gains (Liberia Partners' Forum, 2007) but cognizant that post-conflict Liberia was unsuitable for normal development financing.

In 2007, international financing was changing in line with donor commitments to improve aid effectiveness and accountability. In addition to increased financing for emergency and humanitarian response,<sup>12</sup> for which Liberia was no longer eligible, new funding instruments were being created to improve development assistance. Program financing and sector budget support replaced restrictive project financing, enabling partners to collaborate with each other and with recipient governments to finance national priorities.

The Education for All–Fast Track Initiative (EFA-FTI) in 2007 was a global partnership committed to using its Catalytic Fund to fill financing gaps in credible national education plans that already had commitments of optimum funding from government and in-country donors. EFA-FTI was launched in 2002, and by 2007 eligibility for support from its Catalytic Fund had evolved from initial ambivalence to definitive criteria requiring “credible” sector plans. These plans had to be: linked to poverty reduction and national development; endorsed by in-country partners; assured of optimum funding by government and in-country partners; and aligned with an indicative framework of good practice (Internal Document #7, 2002). Given these criteria, the Catalytic Fund was a most unlikely source of financing for post-conflict countries, but in-country partners<sup>13</sup> encouraged Liberia to apply for support and the EFA-FTI partnership entertained Liberia’s application for Catalytic Funding!

## Exploring the paradox of financing for post-conflict Liberia

Liberia was simply not a suitable candidate for most international financing instruments in 2007, so it is intriguing that Liberia secured EFA-FTI financing, though not through the Catalytic Fund, for the Liberia Primary Education Recovery Program (LPERP). This paradox

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12. E.g. The United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund established in 2006 uses annual contributions from governments and the private sector to provide timely and predictable help to countries affected by disasters.

13. Technically, Liberia applied for funding. In practice this can only happen with the support and facilitation of the World Bank as the anchor of the EFA-FTI and manager of the Catalytic Fund.

could not be explained by loopholes or anomalies exploited by Liberia or special options that favored Liberia's quest for funding. Liberia is thus a valuable case study of how development partnerships function and affect post-conflict countries.

Options for financing Liberia in 2007 included project financing through non-governmental agencies. Direct funding to the government was an unlikely option, especially for the EFA-FTI, which involves rules and regulations of different partner agencies, in addition to Catalytic Fund criteria. So, why did the EFA-FTI partnership agree to consider Liberia's proposal for funding?

Partnerships may be more complex and dynamic than their rational-bureaucratic governance models suggest. When post-conflict Liberia encountered an evolving EFA-FTI, that global partnership's decision to consider and facilitate funding probably involved more than the prevailing eligibility criteria and approval procedures. So, instead of relying on partnership rules and regulations for explanations, it may be more productive to explore this paradox through an ethnography that illuminates organizational and partnership cultures.

## Ethnography as method and product

I have adopted a critical ethnography methodology that treats organizational/partnership cultures as heterogeneous, conflictual, negotiated, and evolving. It also assumes unequal power relations between organizations in any partnership, and asserts that ethnographic narratives are shaped by the interests and motivation of the researcher/author (Sociology Central, 2003). This approach allows me to embrace the constructive subjectivity of the narrative; I write as an insider, with the advantage of having been a participant and an observer in the processes leading to financing for education in Liberia. My narrative draws on recollections and reflections from multiple "insider roles"; in UNICEF, within the EFA-FTI partnership, and across the EFA community of practice (Wenger, 2006).

But such "retroactive ethnography" does not conform to standard practice in ethnographic research (Sociology Central, 2003). I contend that there are factors that validate retroactive ethnography. Ethnographic studies involve being a participant as well as an observer, *in order to* meaningfully describe/analyze events and experiences (Sociology Central, 2003; Hoey, 2013). I neither set out to become a participant-observer nor had an agenda to study donor financing for post-conflict countries like Liberia. So why is this anything more than ex-post facto recollections of an insider? What justifies this "retroactive ethnography"?

Firstly, as an outsider I had to be a "participant observer" when I joined UNICEF as global chief of education in April 2002, to meet the expectations of my new post, which entailed reflection on UNICEF's worldwide education performance vis-à-vis other agencies.

Secondly, as a professional from the developing world I constantly searched for meaning in organizations dealing with development. This personal life aspect of the researcher/author is important in ethnography. “Insiders” with influence can shape the organizations they inhabit, just as organizations can shape the outlook and practice of insiders. Ethnography has been acknowledged as a mutual product born of the intertwining of the lives of the ethnographer and his/her “subjects” (Hoey, 2013).

Thirdly, insiders can cite final documents and preceding drafts as validating products and processes to authenticate retroactive ethnography.

Finally, the motivation for retroactive ethnography is a conviction that individuals are embodiments of change, from their vantage platforms as (pro)active insiders in local communities, national institutions, international organizations, and development partnerships. There is an undervalued place for retroactive ethnography based on personal accountability.

Traditionally accountability has focused on and been directed to external authorities and funders. But for value-driven social innovators the highest form of accountability is internal. Are we walking the talk? Are we being true to our vision? Are we dealing with reality? Are we connecting the dots between here-and-now reality and our vision? And how would we know? What are we observing that’s different, that’s emerging? These become internalized questions, asked ferociously, continuously. (Patton, 2006: 5)

## Ethical issues in ethnography

This chapter protects identities and non-public sources. Individuals are simply designated as “senior officials” or “colleagues,” etc., to facilitate the narrative without unduly disclosing identities. Organizations are simply designated as “donor agencies,” “partner agencies,” etc., and are only named if the information revealed is already public. Documents unavailable in the public domain are cited as “internal documents.”

## Analytical frame of reference

The analytical framework for this chapter draws on organization theory, phenomenology, and grounded theory.

Firstly, the framework treats partnerships as entities intended to enhance effectiveness and efficiency by harmonizing efforts and resources of agencies working synergistically to achieve shared goals (Abt Associates Inc., 2011). Each agency brings its culture, priorities, resources, and management tools to the partnership, so trade-offs become inevitable as

consensus is forged. Boundaries also become inevitable for each organization to retain its identity within the partnership. Partnerships are therefore prone to tensions and ambiguities as well as uncertainties and turbulence. Moreover, organizations have different levels of power that shape the partnership, notwithstanding rhetoric about equal membership.

Secondly, the framework treats organizations as entities designed to achieve specified goals through individuals operating (and managed) by rules and procedures within the organization's culture. There is an inherent tension within organizations as they strive to maintain/safeguard the status quo in order to provide stability and avoid chaos while also seeking change in order to apply lessons learned and improve performance. Functionaries in most organizations can be categorized into two ideal-types. There are gatekeepers of organizational integrity, who maintain and enforce operational rules, work patterns, and management practices. Then there are change makers and risk takers who push the boundaries of conventional or tolerable work practices, and enhance organizational progress through innovations that may entail risks. The co-existence of these ideal types enables organizations to maintain credibility and integrity, while taking risks with progressive innovations.

Thirdly, the framework treats individuals as expert functionaries helping to achieve organizational goals to which they have become committed as "insiders" or acculturated role players. However, individuals also have personal goals and objectives, as well as beliefs, values, and perceptions of reality. Individuals' success will therefore depend in part on the symbiosis between their beliefs, values, and goals on one hand, and the organizational culture and goals on the other. On this basis, some individuals will regard what they do in an organization as a job or source of livelihood, while others will see it as a career that provides professional satisfaction, and others will treat what they do as their "reason for being," and the means of achieving their purpose in life.

Individuals, organizations, and partnerships interact in complex ways within a universe shaped by communities of practice.<sup>14</sup> So, the education and development community of practice constantly influences the individuals and organizations in the EFA-FTI partnership. This process plays out through meetings, workshops, seminars, and conferences; as well as multi-media information, communication, and advocacy mechanisms (Wenger, 2006). These interactions feed into an "environmental soup" of shared knowledge and experience that is constantly refreshed, to influence how individuals see reality in their work and what perceptions and knowledge assets they bring to decision-making processes in their organization and in wider partnerships.

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14. A community of practice is comprised of practitioners who share concern and passion for what they do in a specified domain of human endeavor (e.g., education and development), and engage in various forms of interaction that enable them to learn from each other and to do what they do better.

# Rhetoric and reality of an evolving EFA-FTI partnership

FTI represents the only post-Dakar program that links funding to agreed outcomes on a scale consistent with achieving EFA, and that has been able to bring together the full range of EFA partners. (World Bank, 2003: iv)

The introduction of the Education for All–Fast Track Initiative in 2002<sup>15</sup> signaled a positive shift in momentum of donor support for education, and became the missing link in the aid architecture for development. The EFA-FTI promised to be the practical manifestation of a rhetorical commitment by donors to support the Education for All goals.

As a member of the steering committee that planned the World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000, I was part of the bargaining process that put donors under pressure to commit to binding levels of funding for education in their Overseas Development Assistance. But World Bank evidence showed that education funds often remained unused due to poor planning, weak capacity, and lack of political will in recipient countries. Hence, donors agreed to the compromise commitment to ensure that:

No country that demonstrates political will and commitment to education, and has a credible education sector plan, will be allowed to fail for lack of resources.

This was piloted through the Dakar Forum and resulted in the often-repeated commitment that:

No countries seriously committed to education for all will be thwarted in their achievement of this goal by a lack of resources. (World Education Forum, 2000: 9)

Some stakeholders worried that such rhetoric would mask the need for increased and predictable education funding. But donors reiterated their commitment through compacts such as the Monterrey Consensus, and the EFA-FTI concretized this commitment. I had already been recruited by UNICEF but was still at the Commonwealth Secretariat in London when I participated in the introductory FTI meeting in Amsterdam.

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15. The meeting at which the FTI was first introduced was in Amsterdam in April 2002, but the official launch date is usually given as June 2002 (World Bank, 2003).



## Initial tensions around the EFA-FTI partnership

The initial pitch of the Fast Track Initiative by the World Bank and key bilateral agencies was impressive. It used research evidence (Bruns, Mingat, and Rakotomala, 2003) to highlight education expenditure patterns that correlated with achievement of universal basic education, and proposed a normative framework for assessing countries aspiring to achieve the EFA goals. The partnership would provide additional donor funding for countries to achieve their education goals. A major donor had already committed impressive resources to a Catalytic Fund for this purpose. But there were also problems that persisted over the years. The *normative* framework was opposed in favor of an *indicative* framework for countries to aspire toward. Support for good performance countries (winners) to demonstrate success was opposed in favor of support for countries with the highest numbers of out-of-school children and the lowest primary school enrolment rates. Partners debated these issues vigorously, while working constructively toward a viable partnership.

Five years later, the World Bank could still comment that:

While the Education for All Fast Track Initiative (EFA-FTI) remains a work in progress, it is steadily evolving into an effective partnership framework for addressing a wide range of education issues. (World Bank, 2007: 1)

In these early years, the World Bank consulted with donors and prepared a discussion document entitled *A Framework for the Fast Track Initiative* (World Bank, 2002). Responses from partners to this document, some of which I present in the following paragraphs, illustrate the turbulence generated within the EFA-FTI and the bargaining that characterized its decision making.

## A hierarchic partnership dominated by donors and the World Bank

It was evident that donors were driving the EFA-FTI, and the World Bank was pivotal in anchoring and shaping the partnership. Without these roles there could not have been an EFA-FTI partnership! But the partnership also needed less hierarchy to be credible as more than another donors' club or World Bank financing instrument. Donors worked consistently to democratize the partnership, and by the time of the Bonn meeting in 2007, the EFA-FTI was more representative (World Bank, 2007), with a steering committee that included deve-

loping countries and civil society for the first time, as well as having World Bank, UNESCO, and UNICEF as permanent members, and using a rotating co-chair arrangement involving G8 and non-G8 donors.

Democratization efforts continued and by 2013 there were 19 partners on the board of directors of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE)—the successor to the EFA-FTI.<sup>16</sup>

## Inclusiveness and the scramble for roles and relevance

Tensions around democratization concerned inclusiveness, agreed roles, and perceived “relevance” of different partners. The World Bank was pivotal in the partnership, but the more EFA-FTI appeared World-Bank-centric, the less meaningful were the roles for other multilateral organizations. At an internal meeting to consider the implications of the EFA-FTI, a multilateral partner suggested that:

The Bank has already placed itself in a leading role in financing the MDGs [Millennium Development Goals] at the Monterrey meeting and will continue to make itself as the money controller through Johannesburg, Doha round, and other consensus building processes. (Internal Document #12, 2002: 1)

There was concern that some partners could be marginalized, and access to donor funds could be reduced if funding were to be increasingly channeled through trust funds like the Catalytic Fund. It was asserted that each partner would “operate better as a full partner and not as a sub-contractor” (Internal Document #12, 2002: 3). Donors did not wish to portray the EFA-FTI as an education-financing window administered by the World Bank. Turbulence around this issue is reflected in the following redacted extracts from the responses and comments of various donor partner colleagues to the *Framework for the Fast Track Initiative* (2002) discussion document:

... It’s important to ... use the full name of EFA-FTI (not FTI) as it underlines to all concerned ... that FTI is not a stand-alone initiative ... but an integral part of the global efforts to meet the EFA goals agreed to by the international community. As well, use

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16. The board of directors includes 19 different constituencies from developing country governments, donors, civil society organizations, the private sector, foundations, multilateral agencies, and regional banks. For more information, see [www.globalpartnership.org](http://www.globalpartnership.org).

of EFA-FTI is more inclusive of the important role that we want UNESCO to play in the overall initiative. (Bilateral agency colleague, 2002)

One concern in addition to the common desire for due rigour in overall costing, is that civil society be integrated into the process of proposal development and the implementation of national plans. (Bilateral agency colleague, 2002)

... Current membership seems to be appropriate and should continue to seek broad participation from across the range of bilateral and multilateral donors and regional development banks. Equal say is important, though the group should remain one of donors and not become a lobbying point for agencies or organizations who are themselves seeking to market their expertise or programming. (Bilateral agency colleague, 2002)

## Tensions around purpose, scope and governance of the partnership

Partners' responses to various World Bank documents illustrate that tensions also arose over the purpose of EFA-FTI. Some partners emphasized its role in financing funding gaps, while others extended it to addressing data gaps and capacity gaps. The categories and numbers of countries to support were also contentious. Some partners argued for high performing countries that “deserved” support, while others favored countries that were most in need, and still other partners wanted no restrictions on countries to be supported.<sup>17</sup>

FTI as it stands is a flawed process and as such should not be expanded. What we need instead is an initiative which genuinely addresses the obstacles to achieving UPE in those countries that most need this help (not an initiative that is focused on pledging money to good performers). (Bilateral agency colleague, 2002)

The FTI is a pilot program to identify best practice approaches that can be replicated elsewhere to accelerate EFA progress and help close the gaps—in data, policies, institutional capacity, and financing—that currently constrain broader progress. (Bilateral agency colleague, 2002)

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17. The contentious nature of this issue resulted in an initial selection of 18 countries +5 that would be invited to apply for support from the EFA-FTI Catalytic Fund. The +5 were countries with large out-of-school populations that may have required technical rather than financial support from the partnership, e.g., India.

It is imperative, however, that the FTI not be confused with or supplant the broader EFA agenda. The FTI should not be a general effort to accelerate progress toward UPE for as many countries as possible. There should therefore be no presumption or forced imperative to continuously expand the pool of FTI candidates, without first evaluating both the pilot FTI experience in generating actual learning outcomes and results, and individual country performance in those areas judged necessary for accelerated progress. (Bilateral agency colleague, 2002)

The aim of FTI is to provide financing for all those countries seriously involved in achieving the objectives of EFA. On this basis, countries that may receive FTI financing should not be limited to the first 18 that completed their proposals. (Bilateral agency colleague, 2002)

Regarding the November meeting of donor partners, we support a focus on assessment of the status of the EFA and FTI processes, identifying both areas where there has been measurable progress, as well as factors that are constraining progress, rather than a ‘pledging’ conference. (Bilateral agency colleague, 2002)

These meetings should also hear the Bank’s views on how it intends to ensure EFA/FTI conformity with the Bank’s considerable research on the prerequisites for effective development assistance, particularly the crucial importance of a sound overall economic management, as well with as IDA’s [International Development Association] Country Policy and Institutional Assessments. (Bilateral agency colleague, 2002)

... ability to cope with the financing modality could be also needed. For example, budget management capacity especially if (direct) budget support is implemented. (Bilateral agency colleague, 2002)

On governance, the Catalytic Fund was being cast in the image of a World Bank Trust Fund, with accountability, transparency, and fiduciary guarantees. But this posed problems:

How does the Bank manage the inherent contradictions in its multiple roles in FTI—such as the need to respect the principle of ‘decision by consensus’ while exercising sufficient due diligence as trustee and main implementing agency? These issues are not unique to the FTI as a global partnership program but they impact on the Bank more forcefully because of the FTI CF implementation arrangements, which piggyback on IDA [International Development Association] staffing and processes. (World Bank, 2007: 1)

Despite these tensions, the use of World Bank processes was reassuring for most donors. These processes also resulted, however, in slow disbursement and burdensome

demands on recipient countries after funds had been approved for allocation. Some donors therefore preferred to channel funds directly to countries rather than through the Catalytic Fund, but this was not always feasible where the donor did not have a strong enough country presence to supervise fund use. This was certainly the case for fragile states, which posed the greatest concern and challenge for donors.

## The country-level/global-level dichotomy

Donors insisted that country-level processes must take priority over global processes in supporting preparation of education sector plans and assessing eligibility for catalytic funding. Global processes should support and guide in-country partners, providing light-touch affirmation of the in-country reviews of national plans. This approach clearly required high quality country-level processes that were participatory and conformed to the guidelines on EFA-FTI indicative framework and other quality assurance measures. A major donor suggested that plans submitted after due in-country processes should be accepted by the central EFA-FTI partnership only if:

... there is some assurance that the in-country assessment has been honest, frank, and courageous, not dodging difficult policy, capacity, and governance issues. One possibility would be the use of external consultants or a specification of the mandate of the FTI Secretariat in such a direction. (Bilateral agency colleague, 2002)

This led the EFA-FTI partnership to establish an Education Program Development Fund to help fill the capacity gap and also strengthen monitoring, evaluation and knowledge sharing in countries that could not deliver quality in-country processes. Some of the back-and-forth on this issue can be gauged from typical comments (redacted below) that various partners contributed in response to the World Bank consultation document on a framework for the EFA-FTI.

This is one of the flaws of FTI as it stands. Our rhetoric says that FTI is not about separate plans, but the reality is that countries think that this is what we are asking for—and then go ahead and produce them, putting financing at the centre. (Bilateral agency colleague, 2002)

We do not believe that the establishment of a rigid instrument to control the FTI process centrally is necessary. We would like to leave it up to the country donor community to decide. (Bilateral agency colleague, 2002)

Having a sector wide plan presents the same difficulties as the EFA statement of a ‘credible plan’. Who defines and who decides? It is clear ... that acceleration has to be within a (continually improving) local process and the structure of FTI has to enable the strengthening of this process rather than act as an added burden on an already over busy Ministry. (Bilateral agency colleague, 2002)

## Fragile states—the elephant in the room for the EFA-FTI partnership

Trends in early 2000s highlighted fragile states, with more countries affected by emergencies due to natural disasters and/or civil conflict that damaged infrastructure, disrupted institutions, and imperiled lives, as well as interrupting service delivery and reversing development gains. Hydro-meteorological disasters were becoming more intense, probably due to the worsening effect of climate change, and civil conflicts were becoming more violent due to widespread availability of lethal weapons and political sensitivities around issues of rights, resources, and governance. Civil conflicts also increasingly tended to involve non-state actors and to spill over into neighboring countries and affect whole sub-regions. For some countries civil conflict was also more persistent, leading to years of chronic conflict.

Given these trends, the critical challenge facing partnerships like EFA-FTI was what to do about the growing number of disrupted countries in which reasonable standards of normality no longer existed. It was not easy to discuss this seriously within a partnership designed to deal with development goals:

Historically, fragile and conflict-affected states have been treated as a sideshow when it comes to advancing global development. (Patrick, 2012: 2)

The EFA-FTI partnership could not afford to ignore fragile states as their numbers increased and it became clear that these countries would be the arena in which the international community would face the greatest challenges in supporting the Millennium Development Goals and EFA goals. There was a growing concentration of poverty, poor nutrition, and health, as well as lack of access to education and other basic services in these countries.<sup>18</sup>

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18. It has been estimated that by 2015 *half* of the world’s poorest people will live in fragile states. In 2012, these countries already accounted for 77 percent of all children not in primary school, 70 percent of global infant mortality, 66 percent of the world’s population without access to safe water, and 60 percent of the world’s undernourished (Patrick, 2012: 2).

While EFA-FTI partners agonized over how to support fragile states, the wider community of practice treated these countries as a new development challenge. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) continuously issued guidelines on working in fragile and conflict-affected states (OECD Development Assistance Committee, 2007, 2008, 2012), and the World Bank published recommendations on interventions in low-income countries under stress.

EFA-FTI partners were keen to address the problem of fragile states but apprehensive about using the Catalytic Fund, which was designed to fill financing gaps and not suitable for supporting post-crisis countries. A donor partner suggested that financing should be restricted in the case of poor performing countries and fragile states:

The in-country donor group should submit a report describing problems and reasons. Government would be asked to present an action plan to improve performance. The donors might help Government to design such a plan. If conditions beyond the scope of the Indicative Framework (war and conflict, overall governance problems, lack of transparency and accountability, etc.) have an impact on the education system, if the action plan does not appear satisfactory, or if Government fails to implement it, FTI-resources already committed should be redirected. No further commitments should be made. (Bilateral agency colleague, 2002)

EFA-FTI partners finally decided to set up a task team to make recommendations on a fit-for-purpose financing instrument for education in fragile states. This was challenging and protracted, so there were no recommendations for the EFA-FTI partnership to use in 2007, when it considered support for Liberia.

## Evolving realities of UNICEF as an EFA-FTI partner

By 2007, UNICEF was undergoing changes in response to United Nations reforms and internal pressures for change. Partnerships were cultivated with other agencies in different sectors and across sectors (e.g., dealing with HIV and AIDS, gender). There were changes in financing patterns through increased use of multi-donor trust funds (Internal Document #10, n.d.).

UNICEF also prepared a Post-Crisis Transition Strategy, endorsed by its executive board in June 2006, to address the challenges of fragile states. Financing was strengthened and diversified through private sector contributions (The Partnering Initiative, 2007) and more flexible donor funding. In addition to its regular resources and other resources,

UNICEF introduced thematic funding for donors to provide unrestricted funds for a specific thematic area (education, health, etc.). This made UNICEF more strategic, nimble, and flexible in how it invested resources to achieve results.

## A new take on partnerships

These changes were encapsulated in UNICEF's Education Strategy (Internal Document #4, 2007), developed in consultation with staff and partners.<sup>19</sup> The strategy consolidated work with other agencies and committed UNICEF to the following partnerships:

- ▶ The EFA-FTI, anchored by the World Bank;
- ▶ The United Nations Girls' Education Initiative, anchored by UNICEF;
- ▶ The Inter-Agency Standing Committee Cluster for Education in Emergencies, co-led by UNICEF and Save the Children;
- ▶ The Education for All Global Action Plan, which was a short-lived effort by UNESCO to regain priority control over the EFA movement.

With such changes, UNICEF was poised in 2007 to improve its partnership performance and address fragile states' challenges. For participant-observers, these changes in UNICEF policy and strategy provided potential opportunities for bold initiatives.

## Participant-observer insights

A participant-observer stance enables insiders to understand what is feasible and how to take risks in an organization like UNICEF:

- ▶ When Kenya declared free primary education (December 2002), the UNICEF Country Office sought help from headquarters. Meeting with senior management before leading an HQ mission to Kenya, I helped the UNICEF Country Office to secure U.S.\$2 million to support its work. Lesson learned: *if the need is strong enough, senior management in UNICEF will provide resources to deliver results, using discretionary "Reserve Funds" allocated by the Executive Director's Office.*

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19. At its Annual Session in June 2007, UNICEF's executive board endorsed the education strategy.



- ▶ After Sudan’s Peace Accord multiple donors contributed to a trust fund. A Comprehensive Education Assessment prepared plans for implementation. But delays in establishing the multidonor trust fund endangered the Go-to-School Campaign planned by UNICEF as a peace dividend for Sudan. World Bank officials indicated that funds could not be released until the multidonor trust fund was established. Donors emphasized that multilaterals must work as partners rather than compete for funds. But one donor agreed to provide UNICEF with funds for the Go-to-School Campaign.<sup>20</sup> Lesson learned: *if the cause is important, progressive donors will provide funding for results, without jeopardizing partnership solidarity.*
- ▶ Donors were prioritizing sector budget support but UNICEF had no clear policy on investing in national education budgets. It was not prohibited, but some donors were asking: “Why should we give funds to UNICEF, so it can put these funds into a country’s education budget?” Meanwhile UNICEF could not influence national policy and practice without investing in the budget and participating in sector reviews. I was invited to help resolve this quandary during an education consultation meeting in Nairobi. In response to World Bank enquiries, I committed UNICEF to investing in Kenya’s education sector budget. This was a mitigated risk since my recommendation for allocating global Thematic Funds to Kenya had already been approved by senior management. With no restriction on these funds as long as they were spent on education, UNICEF-Kenya could invest part of it in the national education budget. Lesson learned: *while policy and strategy usually guide practice, in times of ambivalence practice can determine policy and strategy.*

These developments created a favorable organizational culture for constructive risk-taking by UNICEF insiders who understand what is feasible in working for progressive change.

## Netherlands funding as a game changer

In 2006, UNICEF submitted a proposal to the Netherlands Government for funding to address the challenges of education in emergencies and post-crisis countries. This was the result of a year of informal discussions in the margins of the EFA-FTI meetings, followed

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20. This was facilitated by a senior donor official with experience in Sudan and appreciation for timely action.

by more formal consultations through telephone conferencing and email exchanges, culminating in a final consultative meeting in New York. The EFA-FTI Task Team established to recommend a financing strategy for fragile states had made slow progress, so informal discussions between the Netherlands and UNICEF generated some urgent but non-committal probing:

*If UNICEF had the funds how would it enhance the results it is currently achieving for education in fragile states?*

After brainstorming, senior UNICEF colleagues working on education in emergencies and post-crisis countries responded that UNICEF would use additional funds to: supplement emergency response funding; mount back-to-school campaigns; and support cross-sector interventions such as water and sanitation in schools or HIV and AIDS prevention campaigns in post-crisis countries.

These were not impressive responses, as the Netherlands was already contributing to such work through other channels of funding to UNICEF and the UN. Then senior colleagues from the Netherlands posed some game-changing questions:

- ▶ Instead of responding to emergencies can we help countries: prevent conflict; or predict (and even prevent) natural disasters; or at least be better prepared to mitigate the impact of conflict and natural disasters?
- ▶ Why do countries that have been embroiled in serious civil conflict take an average of almost 20 years to return to normal development? Can we help such countries to speed up recovery, reconstruction, and development?

These issues exercised the education team in New York and a small group spent several weeks developing an ambitious proposal in response to these challenges (Internal Document #8, 2006).

## Donor encounters with post-conflict Liberia

Crisis countries have high priority with UNICEF since the organization focuses on disadvantaged populations. Similarly, when countries achieve a breakthrough in policy or strategy they become priorities as UNICEF seizes opportunities to accelerate progress. In 2007 post-conflict Liberia was a priority for UNICEF, with the landmark elections signaling possibilities for systems-level work with a new government. By coincidence, UNICEF had secured funding from the Netherlands to help countries progress from post-conflict to development. Conflict-affected countries would obviously benefit from these funds. In particular, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone formed a compelling package for this fund.

Violent conflict had ricocheted back and forth across these four countries, so any education solutions proposed had to take this conflict-based linkage into account.

On this basis, in early 2007, I led a team to the sub-region to discuss with UNICEF colleagues, partner agencies, and governments strategies on education for transformation in countries affected by recurring conflict. While I was in Sierra Leone a video-conference was arranged to discuss urgent matters with UNICEF Liberia and the Liberian minister of education. It was during this video-conference that I first learned of the donors' conference planned for Washington. I was surprised to learn that Liberia was planning to request EFA-FTI Catalytic Funding to support the LPERP. After brief updates on post-conflict Liberia, the video-conference focused on support for UNICEF Liberia and additional funding sources for the government's education priorities.

## Enhancing support to UNICEF Liberia

Support to UNICEF Liberia was discussed in two categories. First, funding from various sources in UNICEF headquarters could be secured for the existing UNICEF country program, focusing on border communities (see Map 2). Second, additional resources would be allocated from the Netherlands fund for strategic initiatives that could facilitate transformation in education and development. Two such initiatives<sup>21</sup> were designed in conjunction with UNICEF country offices and governments in the four countries, and partner agencies were encouraged to join in these initiatives. Subsequently, major funding was allocated to UNICEF Liberia in support of its country program and for two strategic initiatives.

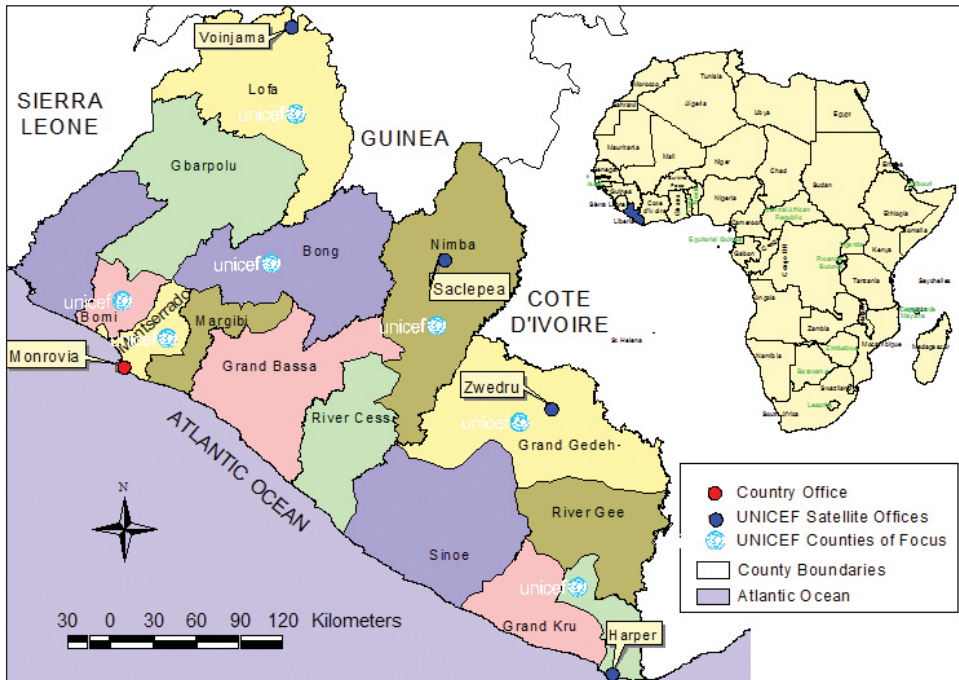
Despite generous funding, it proved difficult for UNICEF Liberia to make progress with these strategic interventions because the organization was pre-occupied with establishing and operating the pooled fund and implementing its existing program. I believe that opportunities for UNICEF Liberia and other partners to advance these strategic initiatives were compromised by the convergence of partnership efforts around government priorities that were being financed by the Education Pooled Fund (EPF). The partners essentially spent a disproportionate amount of time and effort on important but non-strategic interventions.

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21. One of these initiatives was "Learning Along Borders for Living Across Boundaries" (LAB4LAB), designed to use quality education to ameliorate the grievances of border communities that were regarded as incubators of conflict in the four countries of the sub-region. The second was the "Talent Academies" initiative to cater for youths who had been denied proper education opportunities. It involved an innovative approach based on harnessing and helping to develop the talents of these youths, rather than using a conventional vocational training approach.

To secure additional resources for the Liberian government’s education priorities, I agreed to organize a meeting in New York after the donors’ conference. This would enable the minister and his team to pitch their priorities to education partners who may not have been at the donors’ conference.

**Map 2—UNICEF offices and counties of focus in Liberia, 2007**



Source: UNICEF, 2007.

## Liberia donors’ conference

The donors’ conference was successful in terms of positive publicity and goodwill for democratic Liberia. However, concrete commitment of financial resources was limited to debt forgiveness (Liberia Partners’ Forum, 2007). The World Bank convened a side meeting on education in Liberia, to make donors aware of the LPERP and the intention of the Liberian government to request EFA-FTI Catalytic Funding. The positive vibrations at the donors’ conference probably created justifiable optimism in World Bank circles that donors would

not reject a funding application from Liberia. But during this education side meeting, some participants (including me) were pulled out for a special briefing. Fighting had broken out in neighboring Guinea and an emergency was in progress. UN intelligence sources indicated that different factions were already recruiting Liberian youths to fight in Guinea. This sobering development reinforced the sense of fragility concerning Liberia and the sub-region. It should have reignited doubts about Liberia's request for Catalytic Funding, but the process was in motion and work continued on Liberia's submission.

## UNICEF going the extra mile before Bonn

After the donors' conference, UNICEF hosted a meeting in New York for the Liberian minister of education and his team to meet with education partners and Friends of Liberia (Internal Document #1, 2007). The meeting was well attended and there was a positive response to the Liberian presentations. Participants promised support, including water and sanitation in rural schools, learning materials for schools, teacher training, scholarships, and textbooks.

UNICEF senior management endorsed these efforts to enable UNICEF Liberia and partners to contribute to achievement of the government's education priorities. Welcoming remarks by UNICEF senior management emphasized that:

We [UNICEF] will be playing an even more enhanced role in the post-crisis reconstruction phase, in particular with the help of a major grant we received recently from the Government of the Netherlands to fund education programmes precisely in such post-crisis countries as Liberia. (Internal Document #3, 2007)

UNICEF was gearing up to support Liberia through an enhanced country program and some strategic initiatives, in collaboration with other partner agencies and local communities. At this stage the priority focus for UNICEF was certainly not on the EFA-FTI funding request.

## Post-conflict Liberia meets an evolving EFA-FTI Catalytic Fund

The World Bank took a risk in facilitating Liberia's application for EFA-FTI Catalytic Funding. It invested expertise and time to facilitate preparation of an interim poverty reduction strategy paper and a modest sector plan for primary education recovery, within a short time

frame. Approval of the request would show that post-conflict countries could be part of the EFA-FTI with World Bank support. This would ease the pressure to search for alternative means of financing post-conflict countries. However, the May 2007 Bonn meeting of the Catalytic Fund Strategy Committee did not approve Liberia's request for funding.

## The understated drama in Bonn

On May 22, 2007, I arrived at the EFA-FTI Technical Meeting in Bonn after the first session with the Catalytic Fund Strategy Committee, which was restricted to donors and chaired by the World Bank as trustee. The committee approved the requests for funding from seven out of nine countries, for a total of U.S.\$265.7 million (World Bank, 2007). The committee rejected the requests from Albania and Liberia. During the break, senior donor agency colleagues met with me to discuss Liberia. I recollect the gist of this discussion as follows:

(Colleagues) We have a problem with rejection of Liberia's application. Given the positive political news about Liberia we could lose credibility with the public .... The press would not listen to complicated arguments about eligibility. Do you think UNICEF can step in to provide some of the funding required by Liberia ... at least for the first year?

(Me) UNICEF plans to increase support for Liberia. I am discussing additional funding for our country office. We have also helped the government to secure additional support from education agencies and Friends of Liberia at a meeting we hosted in New York.

(Colleagues) We are talking about funds to the government for their primary education plan, not about UNICEF's own program. In your proposal for Netherlands Funds you indicated that one of the bold financing initiatives you would implement is to support post-crisis countries that do not usually qualify for other sources of funding. Liberia seems to be a really good test case for UNICEF to act on this commitment .... Don't you agree?

(Me) Yes, in principle it would be a good test case for the type of bold financing we outlined in the proposal for Netherlands funds. But I would need to clarify this further with senior management back in New York.

(Colleagues) Well do you think there will be problems? It seems quite simple really. You stated clearly that this is the type of thing you would finance and you certainly

have the funds to do it now. So can we just say it is OK, and you will look into the details later in New York?

(Me) OK, I'll let you know once I get back to New York.

In a subsequent session, funding for Liberia was again raised for discussion and I was put on the spot. A senior donor agency colleague indicated to the chair that UNICEF had an important announcement to make about funding for Liberia. I tried to repeat the point that financing using Netherlands funds was feasible and would be explored with senior management in New York. Somehow “feasible” got lost in the discussion and the conclusion became “details will be sorted out later by UNICEF.” The World Bank’s *Back-to-Office Report* expressed the final decision as follows:

The CFSC [Catalytic Fund Strategy Committee] also rejected Liberia’s request, noting that basic CF [Catalytic Fund] eligibility criteria were not met (it does not yet have an approved PRSP [poverty reduction strategy paper] or a full, costed sector plan). Alternative arrangements for financing Liberia’s education sector plan were proposed, involving UNICEF with support from the Netherlands’ new fragile states fund. (World Bank, 2007)

## Managing the fall-out from taking risks

With this decision made public, UNICEF’s credibility was at stake, and it was essential to secure senior management approval. I did this through informal conversations and a debriefing on the Bonn meeting. I followed up with a formal note (Internal Document #2, 2008) used for a meeting to plan next steps. Arguments used to convince senior management included:

- ▶ Liberia typifies the bold financial investments UNICEF outlined in the proposal to the Netherlands, which secured the largest donation ever from a single donor (U.S.\$201 million). We must deliver on these ambitious promises.
- ▶ Publicly, Liberia and the donors are counting on UNICEF. We could not fail to go through with this, as a reliable EFA-FTI partner.
- ▶ UNICEF is only committed to the first year funding of U.S.\$12 million in the Liberia plan. This gives the government a chance to show it can use donor funds in a transparent and accountable manner to deliver results for children.

- ▶ There are matching funds from Open Society for U.S.\$5 million. UNICEF funds would leverage this additional support for the children of Liberia.

Senior management approval did not mean the process was easy. When I inquired about ways to transfer funds to the Government of Liberia, senior colleagues in finance (fiduciary gatekeepers for UNICEF) raised objections on the grounds that:

- ▶ Once donor funds have been allocated to UNICEF they become UNICEF money, to be spent in accordance with our procedures and criteria for allocating funds to country offices (not to governments).
- ▶ A donor cannot dictate how UNICEF uses such funds beyond what is specified in the agreement. It creates the wrong precedent to allow a donor to instruct that such funds be used for a specific country.
- ▶ If a donor wishes to support a specific country through UNICEF, the right procedure would be to provide *additional* funds, which UNICEF can transfer in an appropriate manner, and then work with the government to ensure the funds are spent properly.

These financial arguments did not prevail because we already had approval from senior management. However, there were attempts to throw doubt on the proposal and on my own credibility, with informal questions about whether I was Liberian or married to a Liberian!

## The long road from Bonn to an EPF in Liberia

Following senior management approval, a senior colleague from the fundraising division of UNICEF led the process of establishing the fund for Liberia. This colleague worked intensively with UNICEF Liberia and Liberia's ministries of finance and education, as well as with in-country and global partners, to design the pooled fund. This process took much longer than envisaged, partly because of frequent obstacles and questions about the robustness of what was being proposed. There were numerous drafts of letters of agreement (Internal Document #3, 2007) and procedures for operating the EPF (Internal Document #4, 2007), as well as frequent meetings in Liberia (Internal Document #5, 2002) and New York (Internal Document #6, 2007) to thrash out details. UNICEF endured these costly delays because it felt the extra effort would produce a pooled fund that most partners could support. The result was that, while the commitment was made in Bonn in May 2007, it was not until June 10, 2008, that UNICEF Liberia finally requested (on behalf of the Government of



Liberia) a transfer of funds from the Netherlands fund to the pooled fund account (Internal Document #11, 2008). Over this period I visited Liberia to help advance plans for UNICEF and other partners to use Netherlands funds for strategic initiatives (outside the LPERP) that would safeguard progress, complement government efforts, and help to transform Liberia. However, these efforts were encumbered by delays in setting up the EPF, as described in a letter I sent to the UNICEF Liberia office prior to a working visit:

As I informed you on the phone, the agreed funding from UNICEF ... to support the government's primary education ... program has already been allocated from our end. I suppose the delay now has more to do with the various agreements on the fund (with Soros and the Government of Liberia) than with the agreed funding from UNICEF. I hope to confirm today with [xxxx] that this matter will be sorted out before my visit, as I would not like to be distracted by the fund issues in discussions with the government. (Internal Document #1, 2007)

## Lessons on fit-for-purpose financing

The Catalytic Fund was never likely to be appropriate for all categories of countries. I consistently argued at EFA-FTI meetings that “countries are where they are” and we cannot impose unrealistic conditions on them for receiving Catalytic Funds. But there must be eligibility criteria for Catalytic funding, so there should be a different financing instrument to suit the realities of post-conflict countries that do not meet the eligibility criteria. There was justifiable opposition to having multiple gap-filling funds for different categories of countries. There was already an education program development fund to fill planning and capacity building gaps, so there was a risk of too many EFA-FTI funding windows.

Financing education in post-crisis Liberia was not a chance event that happened in Bonn. It was the culmination of happenstances and coincidences, as well as some innovative decisions. It all started when progressive senior officials from a major donor (the Netherlands) explored concrete ways to deal with education in fragile states.

The Netherlands was willing to risk funding education in fragile states in order to learn about what works and how the EFA-FTI partnership could responsibly finance such countries. This would generate financing strategies in a heuristic manner, using lessons from a range of fragile states. This grounded theory approach involves an iterative process of testing what works in different contexts in order to home in on solutions that reflect the reality on the ground. Such an approach suits UNICEF, which invests to make things happen and learns from doing, under difficult conditions. It may be why the Netherlands turned

to UNICEF as a partner through which it could provide resources for fragile states, with reasonable expectations of achieving results and learning lessons. On leveraging resources for shared goals in difficult contexts, the lesson is that *some partners will be more willing than others to take risks with investing their financial resources in the partnership. Equally, some partners will be more adept than others at taking calculated risks in using partnership resources to achieve results.*

Critically, *individuals* acting on behalf of donor organizations make these decisions on innovative approaches and investments that involve calculated risks. These individuals usually have the insight and capacity to push for innovative approaches, as well as an appropriate level of autonomy (Fukuyama, 2013) to make investment decisions for their organizations. These individuals are also usually able to win approval or secure clearance within their organizations for the decisions they make, while addressing any internal resistance to such decisions. The orientation of such individuals also influences their tendency to be innovative and take risks with resources, or to be gatekeepers for the status quo and be more risk-averse in committing resources. The lesson that came to light through the Netherlands' approach to investing in post-conflict countries is that *leveraging resources to support shared goals depends on the insight, capacity, autonomy, and orientation of participating individuals as much as on the mandates, resources, and culture of the organizations in the partnership* (Fukuyama, 2013).

A second lesson in fit-for-purpose financing comes from the Open Society Foundations' investment in the EPF. This "private" financing to support a fledgling government in a post-conflict country faced the same risks that EFA-FTI partners were keen to avoid in using public resources for which their organizations would be accountable. Open Society's offer of up to U.S.\$5 million as "matching funds" (not to exceed 25 percent of total investments from all partners) is instructive for a risky post-conflict context.

If other partners find it too risky to finance the government, then Open Society funds do not have to be invested but the organization retains the credibility of having made the offer.<sup>22</sup> However, if other partners take the risk of financing the government, then Open Society funds benefit from the resulting "spread" of the risks involved. This was classic hedge fund strategy by Open Society. Open Society was also leveraging up to U.S.\$20 million for education in Liberia by pledging U.S.\$5 million as a matching fund that should not exceed 25 percent of the funds provided by all partners. The lesson is that *"fit-for-purpose" financing in fragile states should involve multiple partners willing to provide funds to the government, in order to "spread" and manage the risks involved. Also, a less-encumbered partner like*

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22. The risk of losing the Open Society funds (as well as losing credibility as an EFA-FTI partner) was one of the arguments used to convince senior management in UNICEF of the need to use the Netherlands funds to support Liberia.

*Open Society can trigger fit-for-purpose financing by taking the lead with offers of “matching funds” to the government.*

Paradoxically, delays with the EPF put this strategy in danger of unraveling. During a working visit to Liberia, I had the privilege of a briefing meeting with the president of Liberia on February 14, 2008. The minister of education, senior officials, and the UNICEF Liberia senior team were present. The following account indicates problems caused by delays in setting up the EPF:

The president was briefed on the two initiatives which address issues outlined in the PRS [Poverty Reduction Strategy]. She was updated on the contribution of UNICEF and Soros to the pooled fund. The president commented that George Soros shared her concern of the lengthy process of the approval of the memorandum of understanding and mentioned he would be willing to fast track the funds in order to equip the Teacher’s Training Institute and commence the process of training teachers who were of critical need to Liberia’s schools. UNICEF emphasized that the funding plan would be under scrutiny by donors therefore there should be no ad hoc agreements but the pooled fund considered in its entirety once all legal arrangements are finalized. (Internal Document #9, 2008)

## Reflections on partnerships in education and development

This ethnography provides lessons from the EFA-FTI partnership and the in-country EPF partnership. Firstly, for complex partnerships involving diverse organizational cultures, *turbulence* is part of working together and making decisions on shared goals. Turbulence embraces uncertainty and therefore allows for innovative solutions that may involve risks. When there are no clear and safe rules of the game, it becomes imperative to chart new pathways for achieving results; these may involve taking calculated risks. These potential benefits could be missed if the partnership insists on treating turbulence as a problem between competing partners that can only be resolved when some partners win and others lose. In the case of Liberia, turbulence intensified concerns with organizational positioning. At global and country levels the partnerships became inward-looking and preoccupied with internal tensions, so priority focus was not on how to collaborate in supporting education in Liberia. *Form trumped substance; who controlled the pooled fund became more important than what the fund could achieve for education recovery in Liberia, or how partners could work together to expand the fund and enhance its impact!*

In Liberia, the opportunity to benefit from turbulence was overshadowed by the perception that some partners somehow “lost” when the proposal for Catalytic funding was rejected, while other partners “won” something when the pooled fund was set up with resources from an EFA-FTI donor. Consequently, despite appeals by UNICEF and other partners, the World Bank, in particular, could not make even a token investment in the pooled fund,<sup>23</sup> which would have encouraged others to contribute.

Normally, it is important in a partnership to establish regular patterns of roles and responsibilities for predictable operations and routine decision making. But the Liberia case study suggests that in post-conflict situations partners should be open to embracing turbulence as a potential trigger for innovative approaches and diversified roles and responsibilities within the partnership. A more fluid approach to diversified roles allows for the best possible use of the various strengths offered by each partner.

The lesson is that *turbulence may be at the core of how complex partnerships evolve and grow stronger, because turbulence creates space for risk-taking and for changes in roles, responsibilities, processes, and criteria that all partners embrace in moving forward to achieve results.*

Six years after the problems related to funding for Liberia, the GPE (formerly EFA-FTI) had made progress developing fit-for-purpose instruments to support fragile states and post-conflict countries using approaches that favor the diversification of roles and responsibilities. When the GPE board of directors approved an operational framework for effective support to fragile and conflict-affected states in May 2013, they also decided to initiate an eligibility expansion plan to allow more agencies to become a GPE managing entity at the country level (GPE, 2013d).

Another, related lesson from the Liberia case study is about *synergy*. The partnership in Liberia lacked synergy as it evolved in its support for education recovery. Synergy is critical for efficient partnerships, especially in fragile contexts where governments have limited capacity to address complex priorities. It means partners work together to achieve results that exceed the sum total of their individual efforts. As early as 2007, the community of practice was already aware of guidelines and requirements for intervening in fragile contexts, especially the 10 principles published by the OECD development assistance committee (2007):

Take context as the starting point; do no harm; focus on state-building as the central objective; prioritise prevention; recognise the links between political, security and development objectives; promote non-discrimination as a basis for inclusive and

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23. World Bank colleagues explained that there were technical and fiduciary constraints that prevented the bank from investing any resources in the pooled fund.

stable societies; align with local priorities in different ways in different contexts; agree on practical coordination mechanisms between international actors; act fast ... but stay engaged long enough to give success a chance; avoid pockets of exclusion.

At global and national levels the partnerships did not appear to be influenced by these principles, and were therefore not as strategic or synergistic as they could have been. *There is little point to partnerships if partners act mainly in their own interest while providing simultaneous support to the government's efforts.* In such situations, it becomes difficult to assess achievements in terms of synergy. What did the in-country partnership in Liberia achieve together, that is greater than the sum total of individual partner efforts?

Another lesson concerns balance between routine interventions for education recovery and strategic interventions for transformation of a post-conflict society. Most in-country education partners were opposed to investing in the EPF financed by UNICEF and Open Society. But these education partners concentrated energy and time on the government's priorities, which were at the heart of the pooled fund. This put EPF in competition with alternative funding provided by these partners, so it could never be a collective, rallying fund to help partners engage the government constructively. For the most part, activities supported by the pooled fund and also financed by competing resources of other partners were important but rather routine. They were more likely to ease Liberia slowly forward than to transform it by addressing its profound challenges. In the post-conflict environment there was so much to do, and so little capacity. Partners had to support Liberian experts returning from the diaspora, as well as recruit and deploy external experts to supplement national capacity. In addition, partners still had to implement their own education support projects. But all these efforts were invested in a narrow range of activities clustered around the pooled fund, raising questions such as:

- ▶ How many partner agencies does it take to help the Government of Liberia spend a total of around U.S.\$20 million in a transparent and accountable manner?
- ▶ What are the strategic interventions for healing, reconciliation, and empowerment that partners could make to accompany routine recovery measures in post-conflict Liberia?
- ▶ How can the fledgling Government of Liberia establish its credibility if partners prolong its dependency by clustering around the government's efforts to do things?

Answers to such questions suggest that education partners emphasized routine interventions for education recovery, such as procuring textbooks, renovating teachers' colleges, training teachers, and preparing teaching guides. But these *partners failed to give adequate*

*attention to strategic interventions for safeguarding education and development in post-conflict Liberia, such as: addressing concerns of the generation of young people involved in or affected by years of war; assuaging the resentment of aggrieved communities; and signaling new beginnings and a better future for deprived populations.* Such interventions will challenge a fledgling government, so they are the most strategic support that a strong partnership could have provided to Liberia. Some partners may have made efforts in this direction, but there is little evidence that partners made progress in these transformative areas, which essentially distinguish fragile states from normal developing countries.

## Partnership effectiveness and efficiency in post-conflict situations

We assume that partnerships are good for development organizations, but the evidence for such assertions is scarce (Abt Associates Inc., 2011). I have been an insider in reforms designed to enforce partnership in the UN and beyond. Reforms are highly complex, time-consuming, and resource-demanding, and generate turbulence among partners. Are partnerships worthwhile? Are UN agencies able to support development more effectively and efficiently as a result of partnerships? Are there discernible benefits of aid effectiveness in fragile states that are attributable to harmonization and alignment of efforts by partners? A major World Bank evaluation suggests such benefits have not been achieved in practice (Independent Evaluation Group, World Bank, 2011).

Effectiveness is about delivering results for the shared goals underpinning a partnership. In post-conflict Liberia, in-country partners (and the EFA-FTI by proxy) had to address two main goals. The first was to reduce the fragility associated with post-conflict governance, and the second was to facilitate service delivery in education. In both cases, I believe the in-country partners and the EFA-FTI partnerships could have done much better.

Reducing fragility requires interventions that enable Liberia to demonstrate it can use national and external resources in a transparent and accountable manner to achieve results. These may be modest goals but the challenge is to perform to expected standards. Governance can benefit from allowing Liberia to make its fair share of mistakes and learn from them, as it (re)establishes credibility with partners (Herbert, 2013). An effective partnership should balance respect for government autonomy and discretion with appropriate accountability for the pooled funds. Accountability without autonomy and discretion prolongs dependency, just as autonomy and discretion without accountability breed corruption (Fukuyama, 2013).

It seems that service delivery made progress in Liberia, but with significant and competing investments by various partners. Progress matters, whether it involves major support by partners or not. But partnerships are most effective in fragile states if they facilitate progress with diminishing levels of external support (Herbert, 2013).

Efficiency is about how well partners work together to deliver value for money in achieving results. Efficiency in Liberia was compromised by the negative response of in-country partners to the existence of the EPF. Because the pooled fund did not attract much additional funding, the potential strength of the partnership was compromised. This aspect of partnerships exposes petty rivalries as much as genuine concerns and uncertainties. It has never been clear to me why it was not possible for many more partners to invest even token amounts into the EPF. UNICEF did not regard the EPF as a permanent mechanism for education financing in Liberia, and openly declared that the EPF would wind down for a more robust sector funding mechanism. Despite not investing in the fund, partners clustered their interventions around fund activities. This made the pooled fund into a “honey pot” for technical support in post-conflict Liberia. One consequence was that the EPF paradoxically crowded out more strategic interventions through which partners could have supported transformation from post-conflict fragility to resilient development in Liberia.

The lesson is that *convergence of partners around a pooled fund and government priorities is highly desirable, but must be collaborative and combined with more strategic and transformative interventions* to complement government efforts and yield robust/sustainable progress. Also, when partners cluster too tightly around government efforts, they can pull the government in too many directions.

## Partnership impact on post-conflict transition programming

So, what has been the impact of partnerships on education in post-conflict Liberia? First, turbulence in the EFA-FTI partnership was transplanted to the in-country partnership. This compromised partnership effectiveness and efficiency. Second, the honey-pot effect of partners clustering around pooled fund activities and government priorities resulted in lost opportunities to invest in more strategic interventions to transform a post-conflict country. In general, partnership had a positive impact on education in Liberia, but could have been much better if the partners had collaborated more strategically and synergistically to exploit the pooled fund’s potential.

Paradoxically, post-conflict financing like the Education Pooled Fund in Liberia may have increased dependency, reduced accountability, and compromised progress! It has been

pointed out that, 10 years after the 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement that ended the civil war, Liberia is still one of the poorest countries on earth. Half of its population lives on less than fifty U.S. cents (0.50c) a day; life expectancy is only 57 years; illiteracy is over 60 percent; and the population is one of the least skilled anywhere (Glencorse, 2013). Such unpalatable truths may suggest that the country requires more significant levels of external financing for reconstruction and development. But billions of dollars have been invested in Liberia since 2003, with the UN spending U.S.\$500 million a year on peacekeeping, while overseas development assistance in 2011 alone amounted to U.S.\$765 million or 73 percent of the country's gross national income (Glencorse, 2013). So, is the problem really one of inadequate levels of external financing, or are there other factors to consider?

In 2007, UNICEF made a controversial decision to finance education in post-conflict Liberia, at a time when the country did not qualify for funding from the then EFA-FTI partnership. That decision, together with financial commitments from Open Society, resulted in an Education Pooled Fund of around U.S.\$20 million. The expectation was that this would at least cover the first year of expenditures for implementing the LPERP. Six years later, at a 2013 Open Society meeting in New York, senior Liberian officials confirmed that there were still unspent monies in the Education Pooled Fund! If over a six-year period Liberia had not been able to spend funds that were intended for one year, then evidently the problem is not simply inadequate levels of external financing. Indeed, it may be that with competing external financing, funds from some partners crowded out the pooled fund, and partnership turbulence reduced effective, efficient, and synergistic support for Liberia. Given a largess of competing external funds, the Government of Liberia may have become more accountable to external partners than to its own people. The scope for inappropriate use of resources may also have increased in these circumstances (Glencorse, 2013).

In general, progress in Liberia may have been inhibited by the multiplicity of partners competing for credit and influence within a flawed model of post-conflict financing for reconstruction development. Apart from bilateral and multilateral agencies, hundreds of international NGOs provided offices, resources, and staff to manage development projects in Liberia (Glencorse, 2013). Within this *mélange* of support from competing partners, the honey-pot effect gave priority to whose resources were associated with a limited set of core priorities of the government. The synergistic use of external resources to complement national priorities in strategic ways that address pivotal issues and bolster the fledgling capacity of a post-conflict country did not feature much in this flawed model.

Based on such trends, cynics have argued that progress in Liberia since the end of the war in 2003 has been largely in spite of, rather than because of, external financing partnerships (Glencorse, 2013). In the business of external financing for post-conflict countries, it would seem that the more things change in terms of more resources invested and more partners committed, the more things remain the same in terms of less efficiency gained,



poor accountability achieved, and slower progress realized. These countries can do with increased levels of external financing, but more important than that, they need smarter and more strategic ways of spending available national and external resources. Most of all, these countries need better financing and operational models that would promote greater transparency, accountability, and value for money on the part of their governments, as well as for the partners that purport to support post-conflict reconstruction and development. This is the key paradox that needs to be resolved in financing for post-conflict countries!

## Documents unavailable in the public domain: Internal documents from partner organizations and other sources

Internal Document #1. 2007. Letter to UNICEF Liberia Country Office on plans for visit to discuss funding and implementation of strategic initiatives by UNICEF and partners.

Internal Document #2. March 2008. UNICEF letter to Government of Netherlands on use of funds to support Liberia.

Internal Document #3. 2007. Draft description of roles in structure of pooled fund for education in Liberia—UNICEF draft for consultation.

Internal Document #4. 2007. *UNICEF Education Strategy*. Executive Board document for the Annual Session of 4–8 June 2007.

Internal Document #5. 2002. Draft—*The FTI: A shared vision for 4 million girls and boys*. Draft advocacy document for comments.

Internal Document #6. 27 August 2007. Agenda for meeting of World Bank, Open Society Foundations and UNICEF on ‘Arrangements for the Pooled Fund to Support Education Renewal in Liberia’.

Internal Document #7. October 29, 2002. Draft Guidelines for the Assessment of Education for All Fast Track Initiative Proposals.

Internal Document #8. September 2006. UNICEF HQ Education Section. *Proposal on Education in Emergencies and Post-Crisis Transition Countries*. Presented to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of the Netherlands.

Internal Document #9. February 2008. UNICEF Trip Report for Liberia visit February 12–15, 2008. *Facilitating Mission to Initiate Post-Crisis Programmes in 4 countries in West Africa*.

Internal Document #10. N.d. UN Country Team—*Multi-Donor Trust Funds (MDTFs)—Guidance Note to UN Country Teams*.

Internal Document #11. June 10, 2008. Letter to UNICEF HQ Finance from UNICEF Liberia Senior Management on: Request for Transfer of Funds.

Internal Document #12. May 1, 2002. *Note for the Record: Discussion on World Bank's "EFA Fast Tracking Proposal" and UNICEF's Core Competencies*.

# UNICEF'S role in the development and implementation of the Liberian Education Pooled Fund<sup>24</sup>

*Eleanor Stella Kaabwe*

## Introduction

On May 22, 2008, the president of Liberia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, launched the Education Pooled Fund (EPF) for Liberia at a colorful ceremony attended by government and international partners supporting education recovery in Liberia. This was exactly a year after the Catalytic Fund Committee of the Education for All–Fast Track Initiative (EFA/FTI, now the Global Partnership for Education [GPE]) had approved U.S.\$12 million, part of the Government of the Netherlands' grant to UNICEF, for the implementation of the Liberian Primary Education Recovery Program (LPERP). This chapter presents the writer's reflections on UNICEF's lead role in the multi-level partnership that delivered the fund, suggesting that

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24. The statements in this chapter are the views of the author and do not necessarily reflect the policies or the views of UNICEF or any other multilateral agencies, bilateral agencies or inter-agency groups.

better provision of information to the partnership on what UNICEF does and how it works might have been beneficial in terms of perceptions about UNICEF's effectiveness.

## What role?

The development and implementation of the EPF required UNICEF to lead a multistakeholder partnership in education (Ginsburg, 2012a). While partnerships are UNICEF's normal way of engaging with governments and NGOs, the EPF required a much more complex relationship than what UNICEF is used to. So what does UNICEF do and how does it work?

At the country level, UNICEF's relationship with governments is set out in a basic cooperation agreement signed by both parties when UNICEF establishes an office in a country, as was done in Liberia in 1966. UNICEF's contribution to government is based on the United Nations Development Assistance Framework developed with other UN country team members, which articulates the UN's support to national plans such as the poverty reduction strategy. UNICEF's support is through the Country Program of Cooperation (CPC), based on national plans outlining the priority areas of intervention to achieve children's and women's rights. The country program document and program plans have multiyear budgets for the duration of the CPC, normally five years. These budgets are financed by regular resources or UNICEF's core funds and from other resources, which come from voluntary contributions by governments, organizations, and individuals, solicited by UNICEF on the basis of the CPC. A regular CPC is the agreement between the government and UNICEF on priority programs for resource allocations. It is approved by the UNICEF executive board before the start of the program and is signed by both parties to provide support in the form of cash, supplies, travel, and technical assistance as agreed in annual work plans. In exceptional circumstances, such as those of Liberia from 2003 to 2007, additional funds are provided through a consolidated appeals process (UNICEF Liberia, 2007).

Partnerships with NGOs are based on program cooperation agreements for implementation of agreed plans. These arrangements place an imperative on UNICEF to continuously show and report results achieved with given funds. The global and local nature of the EPF partnership complicated this imperative.

During the civil conflict that lasted for 14 years in Liberia (1989–2003), UNICEF functioned as the *de facto* lead education development partner (EDP) providing services as the “provider of last resort.” With the return to relative peace and the election of a democratic government in 2005, UNICEF's lead partner role was confirmed. In this role, UNICEF's responsibility was to work with the government to coordinate education-related development efforts, to leverage financial and technical resources, and to avoid duplication of effort by

harmonizing as many of the resources meant for the sector as possible. The EPF presented an opportunity for UNICEF to build a partnership for leveraging resources in a coordinated manner framed by the organizing principles of the new aid modalities: country ownership, alignment, harmonization, managing for results, and mutual accountability (Agu and Laryea-Adjei, 2006). A partnership model where donors engage within national systems for planning, budgeting, financing, and monitoring was particularly appealing because the model aligns with UNICEF's upstream focus.

However, the aid modalities and available financing systems were more suited to countries operating in stable contexts than fragile environments like Liberia (UNICEF Education Section, 2006). Transitional funding mechanisms would better suit such countries by providing them the resources that would meet their needs and fit their conditions. The EPF was conceptualized as such a temporary financing structure that would evolve into a more preferred financing system.

## Why UNICEF?

UNICEF's global position as an honest broker or neutral partner, a critical observer, and independent monitor of progress on achieving results for children made it suited to leading the partnership. Initially created as a temporary organization dedicated to field operations responding to children's emergencies, UNICEF's status had changed by 1953 with the current name and increased program coverage. Viewed as a trusted convener of discussion forums for issues affecting children's rights, UNICEF became the natural choice to lead the partnership in education recovery in Liberia. The child friendly spaces provided during the emergency period had to give way to more systematic rebuilding and reforming of the education sector. The LPERP's focus on primary education was in line with UNICEF's and the global priority at the time.

Although UNICEF had not supported education programming until 1961, its leadership in using the life-cycle approach to guide national development operations has been widely acknowledged. Seen as one of the main political drivers of the EFA initiative, UNICEF had kept the education priorities on the agenda, demonstrating how the goals can be achieved through its programs at the country level (Jones, 2006). UNICEF's expanded support from project to policy level engagement was particularly suited to sector partner leadership.

UNICEF's presence in Liberia during and after the emergencies was so pervasive that some NGOs in Liberia remarked that UNICEF "held the fort" while the country was away (Kuruvilla, 2006: 11), providing health, education, and child protection services. In line with its mandate in education, UNICEF had established temporary learning spaces and

schools in camps in and outside the country and developed and implemented programs, some of which were consolidated by the new government that came into power in 2006. Annual Government of Liberia (GoL)/UNICEF education programs/plans were developed and implemented until 2007. The focus of the last one-year program was education recovery through infrastructure development, teacher education and development, provision of teaching/learning materials, planning/policy development, and implementation, all supported by valid data through an education management information system (EMIS) (UNICEF Liberia, 2007). Urgent funding was needed at a time when confidence in the capacity of the government to receive and account for essential resources was considered weak, and the global environment was severely impacted by triple crises of famine, finance, and fuel. This is the story of how partnerships were used to bring the comparative advantage of each actor to achieve strategic objectives.

## How UNICEF?

In September 2006, the UNICEF Education Section at headquarters in New York submitted a proposal for funding to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of the Netherlands. Entitled “Education in Emergencies and Post-Crisis Transition,” the proposal outlined support for an innovative program designed to improve education response and interventions in emergencies and in post-crisis transition countries. The purpose of the proposal’s core program was to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of education response in countries affected by sudden and chronic emergencies, as well as those in transition from post-crisis to a development phase. The process would also address the issue of “fit for purpose” financing instruments to deal with the requirements of these peculiar environments. It was this last aspect that embodied the principle of the EPF as a transitional funding mechanism. The rationale was that existing financing instruments for emergencies were inadequate and restrictive over the different phases of support to education in emergencies. Those financing instruments available for development did not apply to countries in emergencies and post-crisis transition at times when resources were most critical to restore confidence in government’s ability to deliver on promises of essential service provision.

The proposal was approved for U.S.\$201 million with an initial implementation/utilization period of four years (2006–2010). Unlike the normal release of funds that accompanies approved UNICEF proposals, the innovative nature of the approved program proposed a close engagement between UNICEF and the Government of the Netherlands in the execution, monitoring, information sharing, and evaluation of the program. A phased release of the funds was also agreed to, whereby annual reviews preceded allocations for the following

implementation year. Thus, although the funds were given to UNICEF, subsequently the Government of the Netherlands and UNICEF jointly decided on the amounts to be released in tranches based on proposals submitted by supported UNICEF country programs. The first allocation to Liberia was made in December 2006.

The approved funds were meant to support the achievement of four major program goals (UNICEF Education Section, 2006: 19):

- ▶ Improved quality of education response in emergencies and post-crisis transitions;
- ▶ Increased resilience of education service delivery (that also reduces the risks of slippage and promotes “turnaround” in chronic crises, arrested development, and deteriorating contexts);
- ▶ Increased education sector contribution to better prediction, prevention, and preparedness (the 3 Ps) for emergencies due to natural disasters and conflict;
- ▶ Evidence-based policies, efficient operational strategies, and fit-for-purpose financing instruments for education in emergencies and post-crisis situations.

Thus, although the EPF became the most prominent goal of the four and claimed larger allocations, UNICEF Liberia’s performance was judged on its total program success.

Among the notable steps leading up to the establishment of the EPF was the first school census in June 2006. Despite being conducted at the end of the school year, this census provided the only real data on the situation of education in the country since the conflict had started. The statistics were to prove invaluable for developing the plans and programs later submitted for funding to the EFA/FTI. The report showed the devastation that had been caused to the school system, particularly to the primary school sub-sector where over 80 percent of the classrooms had been destroyed and the learner to textbook ratio was estimated at 27:1.

In July 2006, the first Liberia Partners’ Forum was held in Monrovia. Following this the then Minister of Education (Dr. Joseph D. Z. Korto) wrote to the EFA/FTI Secretariat expressing interest in seeking funding for the system. The response from the secretariat underlined the importance of a full education sector plan, the development of which could be funded by the Education Program Development Fund (EPDF) through the World Bank as per procedure. In pursuing funding options further and in preparation for the second Liberia Partners’ Forum, held from February 13–15, 2007, in Washington, D.C., the Ministry of Education developed the *Priorities for Education Sector Recovery in Post-Conflict Liberia Education Sector, FY 2007/2008 to 2010/2012* (RoL/MoE, 2007c). It was at this forum that a side meeting on post-conflict recovery of the Liberian education sector was discussed. Liberia was encouraged to apply to the FTI for support from the Catalytic Fund with a program that could

be funded in lieu of the full sector plan, given the urgent need for funding. As applications to the FTI were only accepted twice a year (in March and October), Liberia opted for March, leaving only a month to prepare the program. The plan was to use the *Priorities* document to develop the program.

The LPERP was thus launched and appraised by in-country donors under the leadership of UNICEF (RoL/MoE, 2007a). It was then submitted to the FTI as both an application for admission to the partnership and for funding from the Catalytic Fund. The LPERP had eight main budgeted components ranging from infrastructure to teacher development and governance and institutional arrangements. It was a sound document given the time within which it was developed and the data sources used, mainly the 2006 *National School Census Report*. The LPERP requested an implementation budget of U.S.\$70.6 million (broken down as U.S.\$12.4 million for the first, U.S.\$26.7 for the second, and U.S.\$31.5 for the final year).

On April 27, 2007, Liberia was officially admitted to the FTI Partnership, opening the way for May consideration for funding of the application submitted on March 30, 2007. In a break of protocol, the UNICEF representative, rather than the Minister of Education, was invited to present Liberia's application for funding at the May 23–25, 2007, Catalytic Fund Committee meeting in Bonn, Germany. The application was rejected. The official reasons were that the basic Catalytic Fund eligibility criteria were not met—there was neither an approved poverty reduction strategy plan nor a full, costed sector plan. Unofficially, there were concerns about weak institutions unable to provide accountability for the use of funds, and the lack of a track record of capacity for utilizing funds. However, in a frantic effort to salvage the partnership and in view of the encouragement given to Liberia to apply using a program rather than a plan, (which would have been impossible given the lack of data and time to develop one), partners proposed alternative arrangements for financing Liberia's LPERP, although not from the Catalytic Fund. The Netherlands and UNICEF agreed to use some of the funds already given to UNICEF Education through the 2006 approved proposal to fund the LPERP implementation. The U.S.\$12 million requested for year one of the LPERP's implementation was approved for release. What remained for discussion was the manner in which the funds would be disbursed. A transitional funding mechanism such as an education transition fund, a funding window under the FTI, was discussed and suggested for Liberia. The EPF operationalized this suggestion.

Accompanying the approval of the U.S.\$12 million for the first year of the LPERP's implementation were recommendations from the FTI outlining the 14 "LPERP Next Steps" that had to be addressed before consideration for another application to the FTI could be accepted from Liberia. Key among these were: the need for the Ministry of Education (MoE) and development partners to set up a detailed implementation plan for the next six months with measurable "deliverables," costs and deadlines; a system of monthly meetings to be



set up by the MoE for the MoE and development partners to review progress on the Next Steps, review LPERP implementation, and obtain an overview of external financial inflows. The MoE was also expected to develop the full education sector policy and plan by the end of the year; to conduct research on demand-side interventions and disparity reduction; to conduct the next round of the school census with a revised and extended questionnaire and data inputted into a functional EMIS; and to develop a matrix of trade-offs based on a number of financing scenarios; and the MoE and development partners to engage with the Ministry of Finance on possible financial management and disbursement mechanisms (EFA/FTI, 2007).

The fact that by May 2011 almost all of the 14 Next Steps had been addressed is a measure of the extent to which the MoE, UNICEF, and other partners worked effectively. Two steps: (4) “The MoE sets up some interim capacity to integrate and coordinate externally funded activities to align with the LPERP,” and (5) “The MoE together with the Ministry of Finance and the Budget Bureau establish an appropriate budgeting system (if necessary, parallel to the present) that enable a clearer analysis of financial allocations to the subsectors of the education sector” (EFA/FTI, 2007: 1) became irrelevant in view of the reality on the ground. Firstly, although all EDPs supported and endorsed the LPERP, not all agreed to support primary education and pool their funds with those released for the purpose. Secondly, EDPs continued to fund preferred subsectors and within them aspects other than those funded and prioritized in the LPERP. This made it unnecessary to develop the structures recommended. This notwithstanding, the MoE sought the utilization of the Ministry of Finance’s already established Project Financial Management Unit (PFMU) which managed the pooled fund.

Establishing the EPF was a lengthy process as the donors needed reassurance that the funds would not only be used effectively and efficiently but that this would be done within the framework of the EFA/FTI, while at the same time adhering to the manner in which UNICEF works with government—through a basic cooperation agreement. The trade-offs of this relationship both facilitated and prevented a more successful performance of the role by UNICEF. For example, the establishment of the EPF allowed UNICEF to disburse more funds in a short time and therefore become more effective in education development than would have been possible under normal UNICEF procedures, which required the government to receive funds in quarterly installments as cash advance to government. Normal disbursements were based on an agreed annual work plan developed by the government and UNICEF using the CPC. In any year, disbursements depended on successful utilization of and reporting on the activities supported in a three-month period. The creation of the EPF provided the opportunity for UNICEF to disburse more money in one tranche than it could have done during the entire CPC of five years. However, this required modifying UNICEF’s

internal accounting and reporting procedures, which had implications for the MoE, leading to tensions within the partnership.

To receive the funds, Liberia's MoE and UNICEF entered into a number of agreements within and outside the country. At the time of developing the EPF only one other donor had made a commitment: George Soros of the Open Society Foundations, who, on May 2, 2007, had announced a U.S.\$5 million pledge to match any funds donated to primary education in Liberia. It was hoped that others would join, as the fund became a reality. Partners such as the European Commission/European Union at the time had large amounts of committed funding awaiting implementation and in-place arrangements prevented the use of the EPF modality. USAID was committed to funding teacher training and indicated up-front its inability to pool funds. The United Kingdom Department for International Development (DfID) was not supporting education in Liberia and the World Bank was concerned with Liberia's fiduciary risk, which had been shared with others, and at the time the bank had no in-country education program support. There might also have been misconceptions that pooling would have meant giving the funds to UNICEF to administer.

In line with its mandate, UNICEF moved quickly to support the MoE to establish the structure that would allow receipt of the funds. The EPF was suggested and examples of similar systems were sought. These did not help, as some, such as that for Somaliland/Puntland, had not worked well. Stable countries like Kenya and Tanzania did not offer lessons to a post-conflict transition Liberia. Nevertheless, UNICEF provided a consultant to the MoE to assist in the development of the fund and operationalizing it. The initial requirement was to establish an offshore trust fund account.

To that end, the Liberia Education Trust Fund was established at JP Morgan Chase Bank in New York as the holding account for all contributions. The support of the Public Sector Alliances and Resource Mobilization Office of UNICEF New York was significant in this process, as that office provided all the technical and legal advice and developed the documents. Once the offshore account was opened, another account had to be opened in Liberia. Again, the Public Sector Alliances and Resource Mobilization Office of UNICEF was instrumental in facilitating this; the deputy director visited Liberia twice to support the process. The EPF account was opened with the competitively selected Ecobank Liberia. Letters of Agreement/Authorization were signed between UNICEF and the Government of the Netherlands, UNICEF, and Open Society, with UNICEF and the MoE requesting UNICEF to be the fund custodian. A memorandum of understanding outlined the relationship among the parties: the Ministries of Education and Finance and UNICEF (RoL/MoE, 2008). Articles 1–8 and Annex I describe the roles and responsibilities of the parties to the agreement, while the PFMU manual describes the operational aspects of the fund. The 2005 Public Procurement and Concessions Commission Act, was used for procurement aspects.

Some new structures were established to deal with the operational/technical aspects of the fund as well as to begin to operate in a manner more aligned to the new aid modalities. The Sector-Wide Approach (SWAp) dialogue mechanism was established within the education sector; it required harmonizing some of the existing and establishing new structures as follows:

- ▶ Executive Management Team (EMT) of the Ministry of Education—the executive and implementing body of the MoE;
- ▶ Education Sector Development Committee (ESDC)—the deliberative and consensus building body of stakeholders;
- ▶ ESDC Executive Board—the executive arm;
- ▶ ESDC Advisory Board—the fiduciary board;
- ▶ Project Financial Management Unit (PFMU)—already existing unit established within the Ministry of Finance to provide financial oversight and technical support in financial management and reporting to selected externally funded development initiatives in Liberia.

The initial contributions to the fund were U.S.\$12 million from UNICEF through a grant from the Government of the Netherlands and U.S.\$4.25 million from Open Society. In true partnership spirit, UNICEF modified its procedure to facilitate allocating the entire amount. The normal UNICEF procedure required that an administrative fee be deducted from the amount allocated by UNICEF New York to country programs. The percentage of such a fee varies with the size of the allocation but it is larger with smaller allocations (below U.S.\$500,000) than with bigger ones. To avoid disbursing less than the U.S.\$12 million indicated in the letters of agreement, a situation that would have required major explanations and possible embarrassment to UNICEF (for deducting funds from itself), UNICEF Liberia requested that the percentage deduction be taken from its own allocation so that the government would receive the entire U.S.\$12 million of the first installment. This was possible because the other partner, the Government of the Netherlands, had funded the whole Education in Emergencies and Post-Crisis Transition program, allowing for flexible utilization at country level. Without this it would have been difficult for UNICEF Liberia to cover the deduction since all allocations had to be accounted for with activity reports showing utilization as per allocation purpose. Sometimes the same principles/core values that sustain the organization make it rigid and uncooperative. Partnership effectiveness requires managing in both transparent and unobtrusive ways.

Implementation of the EPF started in earnest in September 2008 with the first disbursement for rehabilitating the three Rural Teacher Training Institutes (RTTIs), followed

up with textbook procurement in November 2008 and school construction in April 2009. The first audit of the fund covered the period July 2008 to December 2009. Replenishments were made by UNICEF (U.S.\$2,976,000) and the Open Society Foundations (U.S.\$750,000) in January and May 2010, respectively. The step-by-step implementation process is described in Articles 1–8 and the accompanying Annex I (IV) of the memorandum of understanding (RoL/MoE, 2008):

1. The Executive Management Team (EMT) comprising MoE senior ministers and comptroller develops the annual plan of action; consults with the Education Sector Development Committee (ESDC) comprising the EMT, the EDPs, and the education implementing partners including NGOs and others identified by the Ministry of Education.
2. The EMT develops implementation/procurement plans using the approved annual plan of action on LPERP programs; these plans are taken to the ESDC executive board for discussions of the budget and technical/programmatic aspects. Members of the ESDC executive board are the EMT, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs (MPEA), the Bureau of the Budget, and the EDPs. If approved by this body, the plan is sent to the ESDC advisory board comprising contributors to the EPF and ministries of education and finance for consideration of the budget. If not approved, the plan is sent back to the EMT for revision.
3. When the ESDC advisory board approves the budget, the minister of education (who is a member of all the boards and committees) sends a request letter to the director of the PFMU of the Ministry of Finance. This letter asks the PFMU to write to UNICEF (the Fund Custodian) requesting the funds approved for plan implementation. The letter should be accompanied by the approved plan/budget with the minutes of the meetings of the ESDC executive and advisory boards who approved the plan and budget.
4. The PFMU director reviews the request letter and accompanying documents for consistency and, if satisfied, writes to UNICEF Liberia to request disbursement of the funds. The PFMU can determine how much of the funds are to be released at a time and can reject a request if not realistic or supported by required documents.
5. When UNICEF Liberia receives the fund request letter from the PFMU, UNICEF Liberia has seven days (using internal disbursement procedures) to request that UNICEF New York release the funds from the Liberia Education Trust Fund at JP Morgan Chase Bank. Once thus released, the funds are wire-transferred to the EPF account at Ecobank Monrovia.

6. The MoE can then withdraw funds by checks co-signed by the MoE and the Ministry of Finance and pay suppliers/vendors.
7. The PFMU provides quarterly financial management reports on the EPF disbursements to the MoE. These are reviewed by the EMT, which prepares progress reports for review by the ESDC advisory board on a quarterly basis. The EMT prepares annual reports using the financial management reports from PFMU as well as other implementation data. The annual reports are presented to the ESDC and serve as a basis for the development of the subsequent annual plan of action.
8. The PFMU manages an annual external audit of the EPF disbursements, providing reports to the ESDC executive and advisory boards.

In determining UNICEF's effectiveness in implementing the EPF, it is useful to keep this process in mind. While UNICEF raised the funds for the EPF in the traditional proposal process, its implementation required modifying UNICEF's financial management and reporting procedures. It was not UNICEF's role to plan, implement, and report on the activities supported by the fund as per normal practice. This role was assigned to the MoE's EMT specifically for capacity strengthening. UNICEF's role was limited to disbursing the funds once the request had been made by the PFMU. In fact, this was the main stumbling block to the EFA-FTI's suggesting the use of the EPF as a test case for an education transition fund. While the FTI and UNICEF encouraged support for the education transition fund as a simple, flexible quick fund that would allow the government to learn by doing (INEE, 2009), the donors expected UNICEF staff to work in the MoE office, preparing the plans and implementing and reporting on progress. UNICEF would have become a virtual employee of the MoE. This would not only have compromised the partnership relationship between UNICEF and the government outlined earlier, but would have gone against the objectives of the fund.

The quarterly reports from PFMU that provided feedback to UNICEF did not always include implementation reports, as these were the responsibility of the MoE. As UNICEF was not a signatory to the checks withdrawn from the EPF account, evidence of improper use could only be discovered months after the funds had already been spent. Rectifying this became tedious. While this situation made UNICEF seem like an ineffective partner, it was in line with the Paris Principles of Aid Effectiveness (OECD, 2005/08)—the government was in control and partners used government procedures to achieve mutually agreed national priority goals. The EPF was also meant to be a transitional funding mechanism, which would not only deliver urgent service but would also act as a training ground in effective and efficient financial management and planning to prepare the MoE to move forward to direct/general budget support. Although UNICEF succeeded in supporting the MoE to put

in place the desired structures for this purpose, it was less than fully effective in doing so due to the focus on the funded primary education subsector.

UNICEF’s effectiveness as a partner can also be judged in terms of the extent to which the EPF achieved its objectives, as outlined in Table 3.1.

**TABLE 3.1**  
**Objectives and achievements of the EPF, 2008–11**

Objective	Achievement
Accelerate transition from emergency response to sustainable development agenda in the education sector	LPERP used as basis for education sector input into the Poverty Reduction Strategy; ESP 2010–2020 developed with EPDF support; SWAp established; strengthened knowledge/skills in use of government procedures such as the Public Procurement and Concessions Commission Act; EPF successfully audited; sector review conducted; Accelerated Learning Program, Girls’ Education and School Fee Abolition policies developed; annual National School Census conducted
Promote tangible improvements on the ground	Key aspects of primary subsector developed: schools constructed and provided with requisite furniture, water and sanitation facilities, RTTIs rehabilitated/teachers trained, 1.2 million textbooks procured, Accelerated Learning Program enrolments increased, school grants for primary and junior secondary provided, curriculum printed for all primary schools and teachers, vehicles for supervision/monitoring procured
Strengthen alignment with government priorities articulated in the Poverty Reduction Strategy and LPERP	LPERP fully aligned with the Poverty Reduction Strategy
Provide “fit-for-purpose” sector financing mechanism to implement the LPERP while building national capacity, rebuilding local institutions and developing a comprehensive sector plan	All achieved

Objective	Achievement
Strengthen MoE's capacity to plan and deliver primary education	Achieved to some degree, success limited by high turn-over of senior staff in MoE requiring continuous training of new staff; changing priorities; some training in medium-term expenditure framework initiated
Attract new donors and expand funding from LPERP to new ESP	No new donors attracted to contribute to the EPF but the European Union and the Government of Japan funded aspects supported by the Government of the Netherlands through UNICEF; part of the U.S.\$8.5 million funding from the Government of Japan supported the LPERP 2010 plan to renovate 42 schools and construct another 60 using the EPF; school grant extended to basic education; EPF successfully replenished in 2010
Preparation for Direct/General Budget Support	Limited success due to focus on the funded primary education subsector development; capacity developed for four MoE staff working on EPF planning and finance management through scholarships leading to advanced qualifications; PFMU used the World Bank's "transaction-based" method of disbursement as outlined in the EPF financial procedures manual

## How well did UNICEF play the partnership role?

From my perspective, UNICEF played the partnership role well enough to facilitate the development and implementation of the EPF. Right from the beginning when it was identified as the lead partner, UNICEF started to build consensus among donors to support the national priorities. The appraisal and signing of the LPERP by 11 EDPs is testimony to this cohesion. Throughout the development of the EPF and its implementation, UNICEF ensured the full participation of all the partners through the SWAp. Key partners such as the the European Commission/European Union, UNESCO, USAID, the World Bank, the World Food Program, and local and international NGOs supporting education at the time had inputs into the establishment of the EPF. UNICEF instituted the EDP meetings to facilitate coordination and provided a full-time technical expert to coordinate the partnership. This structure was instrumental in coordinating the development and appraisal of the Education Sector Plan

(ESP 2010–2020), which received a U.S.\$40 million grant from the EFA-FTI in 2010. As the coordinating agency, UNICEF’s monitoring of progress on the LPERP Next Steps made the application possible. Earlier in 2007, having seen the MoE’s limited planning capacity, UNICEF negotiated with Open Society to place the planning expert that the latter organization funded in the MoE rather than in the UNICEF office. This expert proved invaluable to the MoE, assisting in operationalizing the EPF into annual and shorter implementation plans that utilized the EPF.

UNICEF’s effectiveness as a partner should also be judged in terms of the extent to which UNICEF maintained a healthy balance between supporting small-scale innovative projects generating policy lessons, and comprehensive education analysis required for engagement in the SWAp for system development. By working at both levels throughout the EPF implementation period, UNICEF was able to effectively accompany the government<sup>25</sup> to achieve agreed objectives. This required being present on a long-term basis, helping Liberia deal with prevailing threats, risks, and capacity problems as the country struggled to improve service delivery and system rebuilding. It meant not walking in front, which leaves the partner behind, nor being so far behind as not to see the issues/challenges faced by the partner. It meant coordinating all local and global partner inputs for the cause and assessing the cumulative effects of all partner contributions. Judged from this perspective, UNICEF played the partnership role well.

That no new partners contributed to the fund may have been due to the perception that Liberia presented a fiduciary risk to investing in education at the time. The EPF achieved its objectives and was recognized by the OECD Development Assistance Committee as an arrangement supporting the GoL to improve harmonization, to make progress toward direct / general budget support and to be “fit for purpose” in a fragile environment. It presented a new type of partnership between governments, UNICEF, and a private foundation within the framework of the new aid modalities (Schmidt, 2009).

Despite limitations, the partnership model around the EPF offers good lessons for resource leveraging for education. Some of these lessons are that:

- ▶ Contrary to rhetoric on multistakeholder partnerships in education that all partners should have an equal voice, value, and share of the risks and benefits, the reality is that a brave donor<sup>26</sup> is essential to kick-start a partnership. The Government of the

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25. “Accompanying the government” was the term preferred by Cream Wright, the former UNICEF global chief of education, for supporting government in education development.

26. I used the term “a brave donor” to refer to the Netherlands Government at the December 2008 Education in Emergencies and Post–Crisis Transition program review meeting at UNICEF House in New York.



Netherlands was such a partner in this case, its strategic decision strengthened by its position within the ETA-FTI.

- ▶ While agreements are essential, they are no substitute for communicating the core values that characterize each partner's organization. UNICEF did not pay enough attention to this aspect, leading to tensions around accountability and reporting on fund utilization on the one hand, and being too restrictive over access to funds already allocated to the government on the other.
- ▶ The design of the fund utilization should facilitate continuous monitoring, especially when government procedures are used. This gap in the EPF design limited effective fund monitoring by the fund custodian. It also revealed the temptation for financial mismanagement to be often labeled as corruption but which is, in fact, based on misunderstanding of procedures.
- ▶ Capacity strengthening is a long-term process, to which all partners should commit. Some partners seem to have underestimated the time required and were expecting instant results. The GoL denied the lack of capacity. While the high senior management staff turnover in the MoE affected capacity strengthening, high-level staff changes at UNICEF and the MoE led to changed priorities and attempts to flout procedures for accessing the EPF. For example, informal agreements between UNICEF management/head of office and the MoE led to the MoE requesting funding from the EPF through letters addressed to UNICEF and the PFMU directly rather than through the prescribed procedure. Such requests were rejected both by the PFMU and UNICEF at technical levels where the lack of supporting documents was cited. The need to then agree on the priorities, plan development, and approval would all take time. This led to unnecessary delays in disbursing the available funds, further leading to perceptions that no new replenishments were required.
- ▶ An effective EPF should fund the whole sector so as to facilitate the accompanying processes and to prevent the focus of government activity on the funded subsector. If this is not possible, government should commit to increased spending on unfunded subsectors. The EPF's impact was limited to the funded primary school level.
- ▶ The availability of flexible funds to the government is an empowering act in itself. This was obvious in the MoE's confidence in its ability to deliver education services, although it tended to lead to over-commitments, resulting in unresolved tensions at the national level. For example, promises to high level politicians to construct schools in all counties led to inequitable distribution of school sites, including in areas where schools were not initially planned but where vocal elected officials lobbied for the

service. This further delayed construction beyond the planned period as changes had to be effected prior to construction and budgets had to be revised to accommodate new sites.

- ▶ Partnerships require management, which in turn requires time and other resources. While this could have been achieved through dedicating a full-time manager to the secretariat, it is likely that it would have compromised the MoE's progress in capacity development leading to sustainability.

Effective communication is an essential tool in an effective partnership. This chapter argues that despite much excellent work done by UNICEF in its role as EPF fund developer and implementer, UNICEF did not effectively communicate to partners how and why it changed its rules and regulations to accommodate the innovative nature of this initiative. For example, the lengthy disbursement and reporting procedures, which seemed cumbersome to the MoE, served to reassure the partnership that the funds were being used for the intended purpose. In addition to communicating effectively, another lesson is that to engage successfully in such partnerships, UNICEF requires a technically sound country office team that can accommodate the essential need for UNICEF to balance its national and global education-related obligations.

# A partnership of unequal partners: rebuilding education sector governance in post-conflict Liberia

*James Emmanuel Roberts*

Given the unequal relationship between weak governments and international development organizations, especially in post-conflict countries, can there ever be a real partnership of equals in the dynamics of international development?

## The work environment at the Ministry of Education in 2006

In February 2006, I took up my appointment as Liberia's deputy minister of education for planning, research, and development. Walking into the Ministry of Education (MoE) in early February 2006 was like entering a dungeon. I felt like I was walking in a minefield, hastily planted by retreating rebel forces. There was no road map, no warning signs. We had to discover them, or make the maps ourselves. And there was no one to ask for information or directions. By the time I struggled in the dark hallways to reach my office on the fourth

floor, my lofty ideas and dreams had been considerably downsized. Locating a generator to supply electricity and water to clean up the stultifying stench that pervaded the building appeared to be a great accomplishment.

Dirt and filth greeted entrants to the building from the ground floor foyer, where the garbage was stockpiled at the bottom of the staircase and left to rot. How could anybody be expected to work in these conditions? The first task was to rehabilitate the spirits of the workforce and raise morale before tackling skills and building capacity.

There was no electricity in the MoE building. When I visited it before my appointment, the only light came from candles strewn at each level of the staircase. There was no furniture, no office equipment, and no stationery. The MoE's budget for that year was around U.S.\$5 million. But by the time we assumed office, it had been depleted, or budgetary transfers made to support government services deemed more important. Consequently, employees did nothing but sit around all day. The more assertive ones went to work at other establishments and returned to sign out at the end of the day.

## The workforce inherited from the war years

To improve the nation's education system, good education leaders, trained and experienced manpower, and robust funding would certainly be required. But even more importantly, the lethargic, demoralized staff would have to be reinvigorated and revitalized. They needed respect and recognition for their contributions and accomplishments like any other professionals, with self-confidence and belief that their work as teachers was as important as the work of doctors. Reconstructing a relevant, effective, efficient and sustainable school system demanded trained, experienced, and dedicated personnel at all levels of the system; confident people, committed to the cause of educating the youth of the nation. This would mean shifting the paradigm from leaving decision making entirely up to the donors and their agents to totally involving Liberian professionals at all levels of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

We began work in the MoE before the senate confirmed us. The administration was in a hurry to get its team started. I suggested to the new minister that we should request an orderly transition and jointly plan one with the outgoing minister and her team. We could use the interval between the confirmation and formal handover ceremony. I really did not expect him to take this advice. In the euphoria of the moment, not many people wanted to be engaged in that sort of serious exercise. Besides, this was not the practice at the national level and really was not a realistic expectation for our ministry. Had we done it, however, it might have given us a firm start to our daunting challenge.

The outgoing minister organized the turnover ceremony in early February 2006. Both sides delivered the expected perfunctory speeches, and made the obligatory promises to request advice and to give it whenever called upon. Everybody stared at each other during the first meeting of the new Executive Management Team (EMT), which comprised the minister and his three deputies.

I needed the following:

1. Information and data on the education system, especially data on school enrolment, lists of school infrastructure, numbers of teachers and principals and their qualifications, length of service, and deployment;
2. Information and data on the manpower of other MoE civil servants, apart from teachers and principals, their strengths, qualifications, experience, length of service, assignments and places of assignment;
3. Current or past plans of the ministry, ongoing projects, etc.

I wanted to highlight my vision that it was the primary responsibility of Liberians to identify the challenges that faced them at the beginning of the journey and to encourage them to assume their responsibilities and be accountable. Our international friends would give their support. The wartime habit of complacency and abdication of responsibility could be seen at all levels of the ministry. This resulted in the international community occupying the leadership role, further eroding confidence on both sides.

The MoE lacked the organizational capacity to undertake effective rebuilding of the education system. With few exceptions, most personnel at the national and regional levels were unqualified for the positions they held. Very few senior staff members of the MoE had actually specialized in education. Many who completed college majored in theology, law or business administration. Almost all learned on the job under unqualified and inexperienced political appointees. The political factions were “given” ministries or agencies of government as war booty. Thus, in the MoE most of the senior staff had been self-taught, and those in management positions had gained their assignment because of their political affiliations. Coupled with a weak system that turned out poorly educated graduates or dropouts, Liberia had a very disabled system run by an equally disabled staff.

There were virtually no educational leaders at any level. Those assigned to leadership roles did not seem to care about the responsibility they were given. There was rampant absenteeism and desertion of duties. Few trained staff from the “normal” times remained and those who did remain were marginalized and frustrated. Powerless, with no assignment and nothing to make them feel a part of anything significant, they languished in obscurity until, occasionally, their skills and experience were needed. They adapted to the situation

and found ways to provide for their families. Meager education resources were diverted for personal gains. Many bought teacher positions, irrespective of their lack of qualification. Others paid to be selected for participation in numerous “teacher training workshops” even though they were not teachers, and did not intend to become teachers. The Liberian workforce was uncommitted, demoralized, and did not seem to work toward a common goal. Many of the workers, especially the section heads, dropped in at the beginning of the day and then disappeared until closing hours. Assessment reports by Knight and Marcos (2007) and Mulkeen (2008) confirmed this crippling state of affairs in the MoE and its teacher corps.

It became most urgent to change the situation, as I knew I could not do anything with the prevailing belief that Liberians could not be trusted, and with the Liberian staff at MoE feeling that “people” would not allow us to handle the money. I requested that the minister convene a meeting of the EMT to discuss how we could deal with this situation. In the first place, planning was not highly regarded. The most important deputy in the structure was the deputy minister for administration. And it was considered normal that the deputy minister for administration would guide the education sector’s recovery. I demurred, arguing that the planning, research, and development deputy should coordinate the recovery, and all deputies, section heads, and specialists should be part of the structure. Besides, I was the only member of the EMT who had formal training and experience in educational planning. I also requested that the minister organize a meeting, lasting perhaps a week, for the outgoing deputies to brief the new team, especially since most of them were still working in the MoE. While the minister was communicating with the executive mansion and other places, I organized a number of briefing sessions with the planning department and its senior staff.

I did not go into the ministry with the intention of dismissing employees in the department of planning. My intention was to get to know them, all of them, and assess their strengths and weaknesses, and willingness and capacities to acquire new skills. The willingness of employees to change their attitudes toward work in the MoE was important. The first meeting was revealing. I was called out into the hall to speak to the minister and had to leave the meeting. The door was open and the attendees did not realize that I could hear what they were saying. I was amazed when they began to plot to frustrate me: “He comes with his Harvard degree? Okay. We will show him something. We shouldn’t give him any cooperation.” One of the voices I heard was that of the assistant minister for planning, who had worked in the ministry since the 1980s. Returning to the meeting, I informed them I had heard the discussion and could even identify voices in the conversation. However, I would not hold it against anyone. I realized I was an outsider and an unknown quantity for them. I wanted to give them a chance because I firmly believed we could make a good team once we learned to work together. We needed time to do that.

# The “150-day deliverables”

In a major post-inaugural speech in February 2006, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf challenged each ministry or agency to select projects that it could implement in the first 150 days of her administration. The Government of Liberia (GoL) would provide funding. The exercise would demonstrate the new government’s intentions, and garner public support for it. Without assured funding, the EMT of the MoE established guidelines and approved the four projects listed in Table 4.1.

**TABLE 4.1**  
**Ministry of Education 150-day deliverables guidelines and projects**

Guidelines	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Address access and gender equity issues</li> <li>2. Completion in 150 days</li> <li>3. Measurable outputs</li> <li>4. Modest budget requirements</li> <li>5. Relevance and complementarities to the larger education reconstruction</li> </ol>	
Projects	MoE Implementers
1. Establishment of nine pilot computer centers in nine counties	Department of Instruction
2. National School Census 2006/2007	Department of Planning
3. Payroll harmonization	Department of Administration
4. Renovation of three high schools: Tubman High, C. H. Dewey High and Gbarpolu Central High School	Department of Planning

I proposed we request funding from the international community, as it was the only immediately available funding source. This group included UN agencies, bilateral and multilateral organizations such as USAID and the European Commission, and international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs). As designated planner for this meeting, I called for hosting a meeting at the MoE, with Dr. Joseph Korto, minister of education, chairing it. In chairing the meeting, the minister would project a dynamic new role for the minister of education: champion of the education recovery. Additionally, hosting it at the MoE would

provide an opportunity for participants to experience the MoE work environment in post-conflict Liberia. Minister Korto disapproved of the MoE venue on the grounds that the building was too hot, too dirty, and lacked electricity for this high profile meeting. Even entering the building, which is surrounded by a bustling street market, would be too challenging, he argued. He proposed the Monrovia UNICEF headquarters as the appropriate venue. However, he consented to chair the meeting. Korto presiding over this important gathering would mark the new era in education. It would be a powerful symbol.

This first meeting of education partners was memorable because it foreshadowed the major characteristics and challenges that would confront the partnership during this period: (1) mistrust of the MoE leadership and reluctance to give up control of decision making in the sector; (2) flag waving or planting; and (3) education minister Korto's style of leadership. Minister Korto made a brief opening statement and then surprisingly deferred the chair to UNICEF Resident Representative Rozanne Chorlton. Dr. Jordan Ryan, second-in-command in the United Nations Mission to Liberia (UNMIL) spoke first, pledging UNMIL's continued support to education in Liberia. Heads of other agencies and NGOs also pledged their support. How could any speaker announce he or she would not support this new government?

Minister Korto requested funds to implement MoE's 150-day deliverable projects, and asked UNDP to donate one generator for MoE's central office. Responding to the specific request for a generator, Dr. Ryan regretted that UNDP could not donate a generator because it did not have a mandate to support education. Its mandate was to support democracy, governance, and the rule of law: army, police, immigration, and security apparatus. No one responded to Dr. Ryan's remarks, not even Minister Korto. With the minister's permission to respond, I said, "There are very few countries in the world where the military guarantees democracy. In Africa, they usually attack and destroy developing democracies. Besides, the ultimate guarantee for democracy in Liberia is an educated and informed citizenry. This is MoE's mandate, and it supports the UNDP's." I ended by saying, "If we are not careful, this very army being trained will overthrow this government." Everyone, including the minister, ignored my politically insensitive rejoinder. I felt like telling Dr. Korto that if the meeting had been held in our hot, dark MoE conference room, we would have secured their support without the long debate. UNICEF turned over four 10-KWA units purchased for county education offices to the MoE for use at its central office. Two days after the meeting, Dr. Ryan's office informed me that UNDP would lend the MoE a 60-KWA generator for three months. The generator stayed until we bought our own, six months later.

With the exception of UNESCO, no organization expressed support for a national school census. They wanted to continue doing what they had been doing for the past 20 years: teacher training, purchase of instructional materials, and distribution of free food. These were projects that brought direct benefits to students, they insisted. UNESCO endorsed the school census project, and pledged U.S.\$30,000 toward its budget. When no other



organization contributed, Minister Korto boldly announced that the census project would be conducted, even if the partners did not fund it. He also announced that the MoE would provide U.S.\$15,000 for the school census budget. I was elated over Minister Korto's surprising decisiveness at this critical moment. We had no idea where we would get the money.

I visited all heads of organizations present at the meeting to solicit support for the 150-day deliverables. The strategy was simple: find out which projects our partners had budgeted for and persuade them to reallocate the funds to our 150-day deliverables. If a partner budgeted for teacher training, I would ask how many teachers would be trained, for which schools and locations. If the project was school infrastructure, or instructional materials development, my questions were, "How many classrooms? For how many students? In which communities? How were the communities selected?" No partner could answer these questions because there were no credible answers at the time. The war completely destroyed about 33 percent of school buildings, and almost 39 percent had been rendered unusable without major repairs. The war had also contributed to a shift of population from rural to urban communities (RoL/MoE, 2007b).

Partners were concerned that MoE did not have the "specialists" to conduct a credible census, and they did not trust the internal MoE financial management structure. No one had attempted to conduct a national school census since the early 1980s. The census project objectives were modest and clear: "The overall aim was to: (i) capture quality baseline data which future performance in the sector could be measured; (ii) establish a solid foundation for an Education Management Information System (EMIS); and, (iii) provide accurate and current data to develop the LPERP" (Liberia Primary Education Recovery Program: LPERP, 2007).

My answer was simple and direct: this was a new breed of MoE leaders committed to honesty, transparency, mutual accountability, productivity, and quality. Our very hardworking data processing staff had worked with UNICEF during several data collection exercises, including UNICEF's rapid assessment of learning spaces. They were not novices, although not highly skilled either. My planning department staff and I welcomed this challenge as one opportunity to prove our skills, commitment, and passion for the task. The fact that we had not taken a school census in almost 20 years was a motivation, not a deterrent. With support from the Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services, we believed we could conduct a successful census. We certainly did not feel it had to be perfect to be successful. Besides, we knew no data collection is ever 100 percent error-free. If we did not conduct a census now when we needed it most, when would we?

After weeks of negotiations and resource mobilization, organizations began to make contributions. UNICEF donated U.S.\$75,000 and the European Commission lent the MoE three project vehicles in lieu of funding. There were other in-kind contributions such as stationery. The actual school census was completed on time although analysis and interpretation were not finalized until well after the 150-day deliverable deadline.

Going ahead with the census in the face of donor resistance signaled a new MoE. Before the next census planning began, organizations were lining up to fund it. Our modest but determined effort laid the basis for three highly successful censuses between 2007 and 2010. The 2007/2008 and 2008/2009 censuses were better managed and better financed, and the results published in beautiful glossy pamphlets (RoL/MoE, 2009a and 2010). In introducing the 2007/2008 school census, President Sirleaf declared that the MoE school census would henceforth be the official school data for Liberia. UNICEF budgeted for three successive school censuses, while USAID financed the renovation of the EMIS facility and equipment. When the long awaited European Commission-funded European Commission Support to Education in Liberia began in early 2009, it augmented the EMIS capacity with a specialist in data rationalization, and utilization by schools, educators, and MoE authorities. I felt a certain satisfaction when the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, considered then by many as the best financed and managed ministry, requested technical assistance from our EMIS staff for their health census. What a turn for a census project that no one wanted to support in 2006.

I learned several very useful lessons from this experience that helped me navigate the ambiguities of relying on international aid for national development. Mobilizing resources from education development partners (EDPs) would not be easy. But if one was confident, insistent and committed to the project, partners could be persuaded to commit funds. Although the 150-day deliverables provided some understanding of the challenges in forging the education partnership, it could not truly test the complicated process and uncharted course of coordinating international support to education reconstruction in Liberia. It exposed the arrogance of some of the partners, the weaknesses of the GoL, my own bold but risky gambles and over-confidence, and the collective strengths and various manifestations of the partnership paradox. It raised the question we would be confronted with throughout our work with development partners: Given the unequal relationship between weak governments and international development organizations, especially in post-conflict countries, can there ever be a real partnership of equals in the dynamics of international development? One thing was abundantly clear. If the MoE had the confidence to insist on implementing a justified project, the partners would support it even if it was not their priority. We thought we should build on this successful strategy.

## The local education development partnership: How it was constructed, how it worked

UNICEF was the *de facto* Ministry of Education for the Republic of Liberia in 2006. UNICEF spoke for education, not the MoE. UNICEF gathered and controlled information and data on education; Rapid Assessment of Learning Spaces is a good example. Anyone who wanted

information on education obtained it from UNICEF, not the MoE. There was a disproportionate emphasis on basic literacy and numeracy. While the health services received diverse funding, the education sector, along with the school system, languished in mediocrity and obscurity. Total school system (pre-primary to senior secondary) enrolment in 2005/2006 was 730,135. The proposed 2006/2007 budget (see Table 4.2) reflected operational costs with little or no long-term investments in human resource development targeting critical areas like early childhood and primary education, teacher training, school-based management, school construction, curriculum and textbooks, planning, monitoring, and evaluation.

Of the U.S.\$10,326,535 budgeted for education, U.S.\$2,555,535 was allocated to subsidize institutions of higher education, primary, junior and secondary schools, and the GoL Scholarship Program. The actual MoE budget was only U.S.\$8,555,535, most of which went to salaries. To put it differently, the GoL was spending only U.S.\$11.00 annually to educate each student enrolled in its school system (kindergarten to high schools).

**TABLE 4.2**

**Ministry of Education budget summary, 2006/2007 (in U.S.\$)**

Program	Recurrent			Capital		Total
	Salaries	Goods and services	Subsidy, transfers and scholarships	Cars	Others	
Instruction	2,492,071	1,687,920	593,495	175,000	266,930	5,215,416
Planning	213,623	207,150		45,000		465,773
Subsidies & Scholarships			1,129,003			1,129,003
University of Liberia			1,173,329			1,173,329
Tubman Technical College			50,000			50,000
Commission for Higher Education			174,817			174,817
Administration	535,188	1,327,925		30,084	225,000	2,118,197
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,240,882</b>	<b>3,222,995</b>	<b>3,120,644</b>	<b>250,084</b>	<b>491,930</b>	<b>10,326,535</b>
% share	31.4	31.4	30.2	2.4	4.7	

Source: RoL/MoE, 2007a: 7.

Immediate post-conflict Liberia witnessed increasing demand for education. With parents demanding schooling for their children, the government was under pressure to keep its promise to provide quality education for all. School enrolment for academic year 2007/2008 skyrocketed when the government declared free basic education for all. Rural youth, who had fled the war and settled in urban communities, competed with urban youth for very limited classroom space and severely limited employment opportunities. The expected economic revival of post-civil war Liberia would create an escalating demand for a trained workforce for projected employment opportunities in the manufacturing, agricultural, and mining industries.

The international development community immediately responded with support to the newly elected government of President Sirleaf. However, this support would still be channeled through the INGOs and UN agencies. INGOs, experts in following funding trails, mushroomed all over Liberia.

**MAP 3**

**International NGOs in Liberia, 2008**



Source: Management Steering Group, 2008.

At one point, there were over 100 newly registered INGOs, many with no record of previous experience in education work. Savvy individuals who enriched themselves by feeding off the misery of others also visited the country with NGOs that existed on paper and in their briefcases only. Many had little formal training, and fewer still had significant work experience planning and delivering education service in post-conflict countries. However, they were experienced and successful grant writers.

I remember two cases that demonstrate the urgency for coordinating the MoE and the education aid community. A Norwegian INGO informed me it had secured U.S.\$210,000 in donor funding to construct three high schools in three counties: one in Bomi County, another in Gbarpolu County, and the third in Grand Cape Mount County. They were surprised when told that the MoE would not approve the construction of additional schools until the 2006/2007 School Census was completed. I explained that the prolonged war had shifted the population and pointed out that their budget was inadequate to construct to the high quality mandated by our plan. Instead of constructing new schools, I suggested they support existing high schools in the targeted counties. They appealed to Minister Korto, who advised they negotiate a compromise. My compromise was that they fund the schools (construction, academic facilities, and administrative and teaching staffs) for three years, giving the government time to budget for it. They went to consider the offer and never returned.

In the second example, Visions in Action requested approval for an “emergency teacher training program” long after the MoE had ended its “emergency” program. Visions in Action appealed to Minister Korto, claiming it had a grant of over U.S.\$1 million that had to be spent immediately or returned. Rather than return it, I suggested joining the Liberia Teacher Training Program (LTP) consortium, which was responsible for establishing a national teacher-training program. Minister Korto overruled my decision, and approved the training. Visions in Action implemented a poorly planned three-week training workshop that took over five weeks. Stipends were not paid on time and the venue was inappropriate. More disturbingly, the MoE was not only excluded, it also did not receive any reports.

My concern, in both instances, was that these ad hoc interventions were outside the LPERP framework (which is further described below), specifically violated decisions regarding ending random planting of schools, and countered the developing teacher policy. In the new dispensation, school construction would be based on the school census and school mapping; and the teacher-training program based on long-term interests and the successful pre-service and in-service training strategy to be implemented by the Regional Teacher Training Institutes (RTTIs). Visions in Action’s “emergency” centralized training project called for gathering hundreds of teachers at a central training venue, removing teachers from their classrooms, and depriving students of valuable learning hours. The Norwegian-funded high school construction would have increased the number of mediocre schools that lacked trai-

ned teachers and administrators, science laboratories, and libraries. These schools would be off-loaded on an unprepared and poorly funded MoE. Such projects would disrupt and retard our planned education reforms. They highlighted, once again, the need for an effective aid coordination mechanism and policy compliance.

Inheriting a grossly under-funded system—the meager U.S.\$5,000,000 budgeted for the 2005/2006 academic year had been depleted or diverted to support services the GoL considered more important—we were faced with three options: (1) Allow the UN agencies and INGOs to continue their domination of decision making and control of education development funds; (2) Fight for complete GoL control of donor grants; or (3) Establish a partnership with joint GoL/UN-INGO responsibilities for policies and programs. Our lack of organizational capacity, reputation for corruption and UN-INGO self-interests in maintaining their role as trusted conduits for international aid were critical to our decision to choose the third option.

## The international aid tapestry in 2006

No one was prepared for the army of international development organizations and experts that descended on Liberia. Unlike the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, which was better organized and had sustained robust international support throughout the war, the MoE was an ugly stepchild.

The pronouncements of commitment to good governance, transparency, accountability, and equal opportunity persuaded the international community to pour substantial funding into the education of children, war-affected youth, women, and virtually anybody who wanted to acquire an education, it seemed. Since the MoE did not have the capacity to manage the recovery program, the NGOs, widely believed to have full capacities, would continue to play their wartime role of delivering education services until sufficient government capacity was built. That was the theory, reasoning, and expectation. It would turn out to be wrong, with disastrous consequences for capacity development itself, and the nature, quality, and sustainability of education recovery. It would magnify the paradox of the partnership: parachuting in capacities from a different environment rather than developing capacities specifically for Liberia.

Although NGOs were the direct service providers, they were at the secondary level of the international development community. They received grants to deliver services to targeted communities. Ideally, the communities should have been their clients. But it did not always seem that way. When necessary, these service providers promoted the idea that they were answerable only to their donors, not to the communities they were contracted to serve.

One such case was USAID-funded Creative Associates, which, in my view, behaved as if it were the final decision maker in the disagreement over the establishment of learning resource centers. Creative Associates negotiated and signed short-term three-year agreements with various entities and individuals for buildings to house learning resource centers, without MoE participation. One of the leases was with the Monrovia City Corporation, for a government building. The MoE could have negotiated permanent free occupancy agreements for GoL-owned structures. I frequently wondered if this happened because of ignorance of government's obligations to support activities of this nature, or selfish manipulations for ulterior motives.

## Donors

In the Liberian environment in 2006–07, donors were organizations or governments that funded national development through grants to NGOs. Each donor nation had its own conditions for making these grants. Donors to Liberia supported specific issues such as gender equality, equality for marginalized populations, democracy or primary education. Because of the breakdown of governance in Liberia, donors did not make direct grants to the Liberian government, fearing improper use of funds, and lack of transparency and accountability. Consequently, there was always an intermediary with fiduciary responsibilities. These fiduciary agents were sometimes international agencies such as UNICEF, UNMIL, the World Bank, and the World Health Organization, and sometimes INGOs such as the Carter Center, the International Rescue Committee, and Save the Children (RoL/MoF, 2008). Table 4.3 indicates the pledges made by donors for the years indicated. Up to mid-2014, some donors still had not fulfilled their pledges.

TABLE 4.3

## Donor pledges to the Government of Liberia, 2004–07

No	Donor	Year & Amount in U.S.\$				
		2004	2005	2006	2007	Total
1	ADB	500,000	0	145,000	3,600,000	4,245,000
2	Canada	0	739,552	0	0	739,552
3	Denmark	2,100,000	1,800,000	1,600,000	1,500,000	7,000,000
4	Echo	15,941,497	23,595,908	21,180,000	0	60,717,405
5	Germany	4,480,000	12,960,000	7,790,000	4,900,000	30,130,000
6	GFATM	5,061,000	9,160,511	8,970,588	0	23,192,099
7	Irish Aid	2,251,587	3,674,977	5,623,958	3,600,000	15,150,522
8	Japan	11,940,000	8,850,000	0	0	20,790,000
9	OSI			1,000,000		1,000,000
10	OTI	10,500,000	1,500,000	4,500,000	7,000,000	23,500,000
11	Spain	0	145,985	0	0	145,985
12	Sweden	12,703,804	14,500,000	14,000,000		41,203,804
13	Switzerland	2,950,000	2,850,000	5,500,000	5,500,000	16,800,000
14	U.S.A.	236,118,000	130,761,000	199,212,500	89,945,000	656,036,500
15	UNDP	6,602,463	3,224,124	4,700,000	0	14,526,587
16	UNEP	200,000	200,000	300,000	300,000	1,000,000
17	UNESCO	0	1,050,000	0	0	1,050,000
18	UNFAO	307,900	0	801,000	0	1,108,900
19	UNHCR	11,474,204	16,610,800	11,854,952	0	39,939,956
20	WFP	35,000,000	45,400,000	50,000,000	33,000,000	163,400,000
21	WHO	4,500,000	3,271,488	2,715,000	2,715,000	13,201,488
22	World Bank	1,900,000	15,500,000	67,800,000	0	85,200,000
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>364,530,455</b>	<b>295,794,345</b>	<b>407,692,998</b>	<b>152,060,000</b>	<b>1,220,077,798</b>

Source: UNDP and RoL/MPEA, 2006.



# The Government of Liberia

Having impressed the powerful countries of the world by winning a hotly contested election with 17 presidential candidates, President Sirleaf enhanced her reputation with her promise to improve the sociopolitical climate of the country through good governance, transparency, accountability, and national reconciliation. The improvements would be manifested in better employment, better schools, a better health system, and improvement in other basic conditions of life. The donors repaid her with immediate financial support for her programs, and eventually forgave Liberia's debts. Heightened popular expectations for instant results escalated an unreasonable and unrealistic demand on government. Thus, the government was eager to secure the aid money (and lots of it immediately), indiscriminate about what money it received, and less concerned about capacity to properly spend it. Liberia was deluged with projects, many dubious and often contradictory. The few MoE personnel who questioned the value, relevance, and priority of questionable projects were considered unsupportive of government, or harboring hidden agendas.

To bring some order to this cluttered landscape, I invited all NGOs working in education to an MoE/NGO information sharing forum held on December 13–14, 2006. The two-day meeting, funded by IRC, was structured on thematic working groups: curriculum, parent teacher associations, teacher training, and accelerated learning programs, with NGO representatives participating in working groups relevant to their program areas. Implementing partners (IPs) retained the working group format as a permanent feature of their bi-weekly coordination meetings. The report of the information sharing forum (GoL/MoE, 2006) was widely circulated among NGOs and donors, and the first meeting held during the holidays in mid-January 2007.

The donors were already loosely organized. A meeting held in Washington in February 2007 began the formalization of the mechanism and procedures that eventually placed the MoE at the center of the decision-making process. Very early in the formation of this structure, donors expressed their preference for meeting as a separate group, rather than joint meetings with IPs. They believed IPs' participation in the Education Sector Development Committee (ESDC) Executive Board could present conflicts of interest when decisions about evaluating IP performance or awarding grants were taken. On the other hand, IPs felt that their insights and grassroots operational experience were invaluable to policymaking, and that therefore there should be only one large group. By the time we completed the LPERP, a clear framework for the partnership had emerged. The NGOs would be grouped into the IPs, and donors into the education development partners (EDPs). The donors would meet monthly and would discuss and give input to policy in collaboration with the EMT (MoE's senior policy and management team), and the NGOs would meet bi-weekly. Once the par-

tnership began to function relatively well, the NGO schedule was adjusted to monthly meetings. When the Education Pooled Fund was established, the EDPs merged with the EMT, becoming the ESDC. At the apex of the complicated Education Pooled Fund mechanism, the ESDC with representatives from the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs (MPEA), and the Liberia Development and Reconstruction Committee became the ESDC Executive Board. In the end, we devised a two-tiered coordination structure (RoL/MoE, 2009c; RoL/MPEA, 2009).

This structure allowed us to achieve a number of objectives: (1) Learn about the field-level education delivery system; (2) Inform IPs about the government's developing education recovery plan and strategies; (3) Share "bottom up/top down" information and experiences; (4) Facilitate coordination and synchronization of international aid with the government's development plan; and (5) Help ease the process of formulating the 10-Year National Education Plan.

At first, NGOs seemed excited about the opportunities for regular dialogues with the MoE and their colleagues. But as the mechanism matured and the MoE increased its demands for more substantive reports and discussions, it seemed IPs' enthusiasm began to subside. I was now asking for active and substantial roles for MoE specialists in the working groups. I wanted accountability for unachieved objectives. I demanded MoE representation on field monitoring and evaluation teams, and asked the IPs to defray their expenses from the project budget, since the MoE had no budget for monitoring and evaluation. We requested to see the project documents, implementation plans, and budget for each IP. We were moving too fast for organizations, which for almost 20 years had answered to no one but themselves. Soon, the top decision makers began to skip the monthly meetings, sending junior staff members whose input was limited to reading reports.

It would be unfair to say all IPs opposed this change. In fact, a few, like Save the Children-UK, Plan International, and the Norwegian Refugee Council, began negotiating a memorandum of understanding when the initial request was made. But it was revealing how organizations that normally proclaimed the virtues of transparency, accountability, and proper fiscal management resisted sharing the same type of information they demanded from the MoE. Full and timely disclosure was generally a one-sided demand, and came from the international side. Mutual accountability was hardly ever mentioned in those early days. Yet, it is one of five fundamental principles of the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (OECD, 2005). We never missed an opportunity to invoke the declaration in support of our demand.

When these repeated requests went unheeded, we informed the IPs that they would be required to sign a memorandum of understanding with the MoE as a condition for continuing to provide education services in Liberia. The compliance deadline was set for March

31, 2007. The IPs challenged this decision, arguing that MPEA authorization rendered the MoE's request superfluous. They also complained that the process was cumbersome and would obstruct their operations. This was hardly the case. We requested a small adjustment, which required relevant sector ministries' or agencies' endorsement before Planning Ministry authorization. Sector endorsement would be based on the following criteria: (1) capacity and experience of the applicant, (2) quality of operational staff, (3) previous achievements in comparable situations, and (4) present and future funding.

We argued successfully that even if the MPEA did have the expertise to determine an NGO's qualification to provide service in a particular sector, it made absolutely no sense to exclude sector ministries or agencies. The Ministry of Health and Social Welfare joined the MoE in the request for changes in authorization procedures; and we found a supportive ally in the assistant minister for International Cooperation at the MPEA. After several months of this debate, the MPEA contracted a consultant to write a policy. We had won; but we also lost. Consistent with prevailing lack of both national confidence and self-confidence, the consultant hired was an expatriate "expert." It took two expensive consultants to complete a discussion draft. In the end, Liberians and NGO representatives produced the draft submitted for national consultation. This was yet another sad example of how dependency on expatriate experts, even for very simple tasks, and the willingness of the donors to search for expatriate experts rather than local specialists, continued to undermine the grand capacity building pronouncements of the GoL and its international partners.

## Formulation of the LPERP

President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's 150-day deliverables were equivalent to the Quick Impact Projects advanced by UNMIL's Special Representative of the [UN] Secretary General, Jack Klein: short-term projects designed to buy time from the demanding public while government planned medium- and long-term projects. As long as government was restricted from negotiating for investment in its own resources, mobilizing the development finance agenda would continue to be insurmountable. Powerful international and traditional donors like the World Bank discouraged our overtures because the Liberian government had not requested that they fund education. On the advice of World Bank Education Specialist Peter Darvas, I asked then Minister of Finance Antoinette Sayeh if she would support an application for the Education for All–Fast Track Initiative (EFA-FTI) Catalytic Fund. She was receptive and suggested that Minister Korto secure President Sirleaf's support.

The first challenge for the partnership was to secure funds for education reconstruction. A meeting held in Washington, D.C., in February 2007 seemed an opportunity to

make a case for education support. But that meeting did not focus on education reconstruction. There were no passionate education advocates on the podium, confirming what I had suspected and feared all along. Education, Health, Agriculture, and Infrastructure shared the Social Services Breakout Session. The “star” sector was health and social welfare, with infrastructure a close second. The education segment of the breakout session was poorly attended, prompting the MoE and its partners to move forward with a backup post-D.C. meeting briefly discussed before departing Monrovia. By the end of the Washington meeting, we received word from the EFA-FTI that they would accept an application from Liberia for either the March 31, 2007, or October 15, 2007, deadline. The news stimulated much enthusiasm and UNICEF agreed to support and host the follow-up meeting at its New York headquarters. That meeting took place on February 16, 2007, with relevant UN agencies, major INGOs, philanthropic institutions, academics, and researchers participating. The meeting viewed the LPERP plan (RoL/MoE, 2007a) favorably, but many participants questioned whether its U.S.\$70 million budget would be adequate.

Our application would be based on the MoE’s 15-page short-term program, *Priorities for the Post-Conflict Recovery of the Liberia Education Sector* (RoL/MoE, 2007c). The development of that document showed a commitment of the MoE and its partners to spare no efforts in mobilizing resources. K. Dormu Farwenee, Anthony Nimely, UNICEF Education Officer John Sumo, and Onu Richards joined me on the core MoE team. The team was supported by UNICEF consultant Jonathan Causley, backstopped by World Bank Education Specialist Peter Darvas, and Ahmed Ferej, officer-in-charge at the UNESCO Monrovia Office, and Keith Wright, deputy UNICEF country representative. When the MoE did not have electricity, the planning sessions moved to UNICEF or UNESCO offices. Other EDPs and IPs read and critiqued the drafts. Academics, teachers’ associations, and parent teacher representatives provided very useful input, though within a very short time frame. Time limitations restricted the process to a highly select group, limited in number and by geography.

A number of education partners had misgivings about the decision. Even the consultants felt we were overly ambitious. We knew our application would not fully meet the requirements of the EFA-FTI Catalytic Fund. We lacked many pre-requisites for the application: a 10-year national education plan, sufficiently reliable school data, and many critical studies that would have informed the plan. But we decided to focus on our positives: a small but dedicated planning staff and a small but supportive donor group. We had Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as president and the first woman elected to head an African government. She was a flag-bearer and willing advocate for Liberia’s cause with leaders of the world’s powerful nations. It was difficult to see how these nations would deny an impoverished country U.S.\$70 million to educate its children when it was spending around U.S.\$700 million annually to keep UNMIL troops in Liberia. Could the international community ignore the 500,000 youths who had never completed primary school, or even entered school? What would the adoring

world press say about the denial of Liberia’s application? We did not think they could deny assistance without appearing to be hypocrites and meaningless speechmakers.

Out of this rushed process emerged Liberia’s application to the EFA-FTI Catalytic Fund. An abridged national consultative conference was planned during the second week of March. Over 200 participants were invited from various segments of the population including students, teachers, women, war-affected youths, representatives from the public and private sectors, community leaders, civic society activists, and members of the press. Unfortunately, only about 70 persons participated; most of them were teachers, school administrators, and academics. The plan was finalized and the application delivered to the EFA-FTI Catalytic Fund through UNICEF, on the March 31, 2007 deadline.

## The Education Pooled Fund

The second major challenge was the establishment of the EPF, which took almost a year of intense and exhausting negotiations. The decision to set up a pooled fund was made before the formal announcement of grants from UNICEF/The Netherlands, and the Open Society Foundations. Burdened by multiple, complicated and time-consuming reporting formats, we were attracted by the flexibility of pooled funding for a program rather than restrictive funding for specific projects—a nightmare for financing programs. USAID declined to participate because of U.S. government restrictions against comingling its funds, and the European Commission deferred a decision until it could conduct an audit to verify compliance with its standards. The World Bank, widely accepted as the most credible agent for managing such funds, considered a pooled fund mechanism superfluous. I believe this was self-serving because a successful pooled fund would have undermined the World Bank’s traditional role.

UNICEF and Open Society were unwilling to place their funds into World Bank custody because its complicated procedures have proved stifling in post-conflict countries where conflict continues to impact the environment long after it has ended. Hugh McLean of Open Society’s London Office joined his colleague Aleesha Taylor at critical moments in the pooled fund negotiations. Together they advocated for even greater control for the MoE. Although UNICEF Liberia was supportive of a central role for the MoE, there were objections, resistance, and delays emanating from financial managers at UNICEF’s New York headquarters. If the Open Society team had not insisted on the MoE leading the process, the EPF would not have had the innovative governing instruments and structures that made national ownership and empowerment its hallmark.

As for the MoE, we wanted a mechanism that allowed us to participate actively in all decisions regarding our national education recovery. We were apprehensive about a World

Bank arrangement designed for a fully functioning environment transplanted and reassembled in Liberia, a society barely out of crisis, although the actual war had ended. It took nearly a year of negotiations before the pooled fund mechanism was finally agreed on. The Liberia Education Pooled Fund's governing arrangements and instruments placed Dr. Korto, the minister of education, at the center of all major decision points. If Dr. Korto had been the decisive confident leader envisioned in the EPF instruments, it might have developed into a truly unique model. President Sirleaf presided over a grand EPF launching ceremony at the C. Cecil Dennis Auditorium of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on May 22, 2008. Partnership members and representatives from the judiciary, the legislature, the full Cabinet, and the private sector, as well as parents, students, and teachers attended the ceremony, which received national and international media coverage.

## Teacher training

The third major challenge for the education partnership was formal teacher training. Teacher issues are the most contentious issues in Liberian education today. Everything about teachers is challenging: training, deployment, salaries, qualifications, certification, and incentives. The problems existed before the civil war but the conflict exacerbated them. During the war, NGOs were conducting many “teacher-training workshops,” even groups not otherwise active in the education sector. That was where the money was, and there was virtually no accountability requirement for content relevance, standards or the qualifications and experience of presenters and trainers, and few questions were asked about outputs and outcomes. When such questions arose, it was easy to state broad figures like number of teachers attending courses. Very few could describe course content, or the qualifications and experience gained. The important thing was that the nation needed teachers.

Later, this mass short-term teacher-training scheme would result in problems for the MoE. However, during and immediately after the first civil war, in 1990–95, teacher training was a manner of survival because teaching was one of the few available employment opportunities. Thus, by 2006, it was important to tackle the syndicate that ran the training schemes: the district and county education officers, and their immediate supervisors at the MoE Central Office.

High demand virtually guaranteed employment to any barely literate person. Trained to no specific competencies, in 2006 a teaching staff estimated at around 25,000 was demanding salaries on par with RTTI-trained teachers. The vast majority were products of unregulated mass short-term teacher-trainings; they had hardly any teaching skills and barely any familiarity with subject content. Due to poor teacher assignment, many schools

had 10:1 pupil to teacher ratios, while some, especially urban schools, had 100:1. So when USAID offered to fund a national training program based on the RTTI pre-service/in-service model, the MoE readily accepted the offer, convinced that the proposed teacher training system would provide the solution to this appallingly vexing educational problem.

The LTTP Project had the advantage of guaranteed USAID funding over an initial three-year period. A highly respected education consulting NGO, the Academy for Educational Development (AED) would be implementing it. Other major partners, especially UNICEF, expressed serious misgivings about abruptly ending the ongoing teacher trainings. UNICEF, which funded most of the wartime teacher training programs, wanted to upgrade and continue the existing training schemes in view of the dire need for teachers, the sheer numbers to be trained, and the time it would take to train them in the new program. With all three RTTIs operating at full capacity, a maximum of only 1,000 teachers could be trained annually. Satellite in-service training schemes by contracted agents, principally the University of Liberia and Cuttington University, could potentially train an additional 1,000 teachers annually. Old fault lines began to reappear in the partnership. The divisive competition to take credit for successful projects, manifested by planting flags and insignia, which was not so noticeable during the formulation of the LPERP and establishment of the pooled fund, began to rise again.

My own view was that, as the LTTP was a major LPERP component, it should be a project of the GoL, so that it could be eligible for financing from the pooled fund. However, if branded a USAID project, replete with the famous handshake logo and flag, it would be very difficult to persuade other donors to fund it. Apparently, my argument was unconvincing. I was committed to this idea because I likened our education recovery journey to a long train journey in which passengers would board and alight at various stations. Donors, for many reasons, might temporarily or permanently end funding. We could use the EPF to fund many of these strategic interventions, if they were not stamped with the insignia of specific nations. Competing to plant flags and logos, rather than striving for impact and outcomes, was detrimental to the partnership. At one time, in 2009, three of our important partners publicly competed for community approval to build learning resource centers in Buchanan and Zwedru.

The LTTP would run into several problems. AED announced it would prepare only sample sets of teacher training materials, and had no funds to finance furniture, computers or libraries. Matters became even worse when AED informed the MoE that rehabilitation and re-establishment of the teacher training system meant construction of the physical structures and installation of electrical outlets only. It did not mean provision of electricity, fuel, feeding, teachers or salaries. In fact, AED suggested the Planning Department source funds from other ESDC agencies. ESDC executive board members Stella Kaabwe (UNICEF)

and Aleesha Taylor (Open Society) endorsed recommendations that EPF funds be used to procure these necessary services, averting a major setback for a strategic component of the LPERP. When donors and NGOs hang banners stamping projects as their own and not Liberian government-owned, they undermine the very government they support. Yet, we do recognize the need to give credit to donors and their contracted agents. The question is how do we balance the two? One solution that worked was to label all the projects “Government of Liberia Project, funded / supported by [name(s) of donor(s)] and implemented by [name of partner].”

## Conclusions

As I look back on my tenure at the MoE, I learned some valuable lessons. These reflect my own analysis and understanding of my experience as deputy minister for planning, research, and development in the Ministry of Education, Republic of Liberia; they are not the views of the minister at the time or since, the Ministry of Education, or the Government of Liberia.

1. Culture plays an astounding role in national recovery. It is not on the government agenda, neither is it on that of the partners. It is whispered about, even though reconnecting people to positives of their communities is fundamental to rebuilding individual lives and communities that the war destroyed. Culture is the essential building block for values, understanding relationships, self-identity, self-confidence, shared experiences, and shared destiny. Donors and their agents cannot argue that their failure is the result of not wanting to interfere with or change the culture. We see their collective and robust opposition to traditional practices that they consider bad. Too often “cultural sensitivity” is substituted for “cultural understanding.” There is a significant difference between those two concepts that must be understood and factored into reforms. People working in development must understand the culture enough to discuss sensitive issues without being insulting and disrespectful. This is a difficult balance that requires a multiplicity of skills. It takes trust building; and building trust takes time. So a consultant who drops in with a mandate for instant delivery is at a disadvantage the moment he or she signs that contract.
2. There needs to be greater funding for education throughout a crisis, not only when the war ends. If education were treated the same as health and innocuous “peace building” programs, better results would be attained. From 2004 to 2006, only U.S.\$31,883,902 was allocated to the education sector in Liberia compared to U.S.\$553,577,004 for



“peace building” (see Table 4.4). UNMIL’s budget was funded separately, so it is fair to ask what activities were covered by that “peace building” budget. If all funding for “education” interventions had been harmonized and integrated into the school system budget, it would have supported an aggressive and robust integrated skills and employment program that would have changed individual lives and communities, and significantly impacted real national development.

**TABLE 4.4**

**Total funding breakdown by sector, 2004–06 (in U.S.\$)**

No.	Sector	Amount	Donor
1	Agriculture & Food Sec	18,393,233	Irish Aid, UNFAO, UNHCR, USA, WFP
2	Economic Recovery	9,129,860	Irish Aid, Japan, UNDP, World Bank
3	Education	31,883,902	UNESCO, Irish Aid, WB, USA, UNHCR, WFP
4	Gov. & Rule of Law	66,019,819	ADB, Denmark, IFES, Irish Aid, OSI, UNDP, USA, WFP
5	Health	83,736,158	ADB, Canada, ECHO, GFATM, Irish Aid, UNDP, UNHCR, USA, WB, WFP, WHO
6	Infrastructure	58,053,389	Irish Aid, UNDP, UNHCR, USA, WB, WFP
7	Nutrition	17,655,615	ECHO, IFES, UNHCR, USA, WFP, WHO, Irish Aid
8	Water and Sanitation	15,063,303	ECHO, UNHCR, USA,
9	Emerg Shelter & NFIs	1,454,687	Irish Aid, USA
10	Protection	83,266,064	ECHO, UNDP, UNHCR, USA, WFP, Irish Aid, Japan, Spain
11	Multi-sectoral Activities	83,988,499	Irish Aid, UNDP, UNEP, UNHCR, USA, WB, WFP
12	Peace building	553,577,004	Irish Aid, Japan, UNDP, USA, WFP
13	Coordination	3,726,819	Canada, ECHO, UNDP, USA, WB
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>1,025,948,352</b>	

Source: UNDP and RoL/MPEA, 2006.

3. “Capacity development” has become empty rhetoric in contemporary Liberia. If it were a priority, we would put more thought and resources into it. We need to postpone, or at least balance, the desire for instant “success” of short-term results with the benefits of targeted medium- to long-term capacity building. As one Japanese prime minister noted when addressing a conference on African development over 20 years ago, Africa’s capacity problem could be solved if African governments did not allow their educated workforce to be driven overseas by starvation wages at home. Incredibly, the same governments that pay lucrative salaries to expatriates have no problems paying their own nationals rock-bottom salaries that drive them abroad or corrupt them at home.
4. Donors need to rethink their opposition to funding salaries for government employees. It is simply less expensive to recruit and train competent Liberians and pay them attractive salaries than to pay short-term expatriates who have no long-term commitment to the country. They are parachuted in, with their laptops full of generic assessment and evaluation templates, and disappear with little impact from their work. Most reports do not even reflect Liberia-specific realities. The lesson is clear: quick-impact consultants made no substantial impact. In fact, they jeopardized real capacity development. A more sensible approach would be to bring in medium- to long-term consultants with mandates to build specific capacities of their national counterparts. The consultants should be selected through a careful and meticulous process, factoring in previous experience in building the capacities of their counterparts. Their contracts should specify “capacity-building” as a major responsibility for which the consultant will be evaluated. One high-priced consultant with whom I dealt made it clear that he was disdainful of MoE personnel, and actually hated to be in the building. He gained his insights about Liberia from his fellow expatriate hotel residents and foreign businessmen. The businessmen knew two categories of Liberians: servants and workers in their businesses, and the government officials they helped to corrupt and keep corrupt. On the MoE side, we need to identify assertive, self-directed, and confident employees or recruit young college graduates with similar characteristics as counterparts to the consultants.
5. Donors must structure their support so that it compels recipient nations to provide competent, assertive candidates for counterpart positions to consultants, rather than encourage unqualified partisans who see the positions as temporary employment before they are given political appointments or contest legislative seats. The process of preparing to submit the MoE’s application to the EFA-FTI Catalytic Fund is an example of a sponsor-centered process that needs to be changed. UNICEF was an excellent sponsor; without its support, it is not an exaggeration that we would not have

completed any of our applications. Having said that, I must say I felt that the process relegated the government to a passive role when it should have been at the center. The sponsor should facilitate the recipient's entry into the process and support, not replace the recipient. Whenever I raised this contradiction in meetings, the response was always that we (government) are the drivers of the vehicle of change. To which I always replied that we did not want to be drivers of the vehicle; we wanted to be the owners, because drivers take instructions from owners.

6. In emergency situations, the structures and systems must be built to the specificity of the strengths and weakness of the local institutions, and even then they should be adjustable. That would require knowledge, understanding, and willingness to adapt, adjust and be flexible. Structures and systems should reflect local realities as well as the expectations of meeting standards of best practices from similar situations. "Best practice" is relative and inextricably linked to culture, at the institutional and societal levels. Parachuted and re-assembled systems can hardly be expected to work in new countries the way they did in countries for which they were designed.
7. The MoE Planning Department was fortunate to have specialists in partner organizations who were thoroughly professional and extraordinarily committed, with unabashed passion for their work. Peter Darvas (World Bank), Stella Kaabwe (UNICEF), and Aleesha Taylor (Open Society) were appreciated within the department as attentive listeners to the MoE side and they demonstrated a willingness to explore solutions with the MoE. With all of their other pressing responsibilities, they always found time to share their experiences. Sadly, Peter Darvas was transferred from his Liberian assignment just as we began to prepare our EFA-FTI Catalytic Fund application. His absence left a very large gap that his replacement was never able to fill. I was replaced at the MoE in June 2010. Stella Kaabwe, a passionate advocate for children's education, ended her UNICEF employment sometime later, leaving Aleesha Taylor of Open Society the lone veteran of those battles to give Liberian children the same opportunities that their peers in other countries enjoy. I often wonder how education reform would have progressed if this team had been left in place for six years.



# The experience of the Ministry of Education's planning department

*Anthony A. Nimely and Eugene Jappah*

In the immediate post-war years, the Ministry of Education (MoE) had to be almost totally reconstructed. In this chapter we share the experience of the planning department in contributing to and in some respects leading the reconstruction of Liberia's education system.

## Overview of the Department of Planning, Research and Development

### ***Structure***

To understand the way the department of planning functioned, a brief introduction to its structure will be helpful. By 2011, the New Education Reform Act articulated the structure that emerged as follows:

The Ministry shall have three departments [the Department of Administration, the Department of Instruction and the Department of Planning, Research and Development] each to be headed by a Deputy Minister, and shall be further organized into bureaus and every bureau shall be headed by an Assistant Minister, all appointed by the President with the advice and consent of the Liberian Senate (RoL, 2011).

Assistant ministers head bureaus within the departments; they are supposed to be the technical heads for each of the departments, reporting to deputy ministers. Deputy ministers coordinate department activities and provide advice to the minister of education. All ministers serve at the will and pleasure of the president and can be rotated or changed anytime the president thinks it advisable from a policy perspective, or personally or politically expedient.

The department of planning has one bureau headed by an assistant minister. The bureau comprises five divisions, each headed by a director: planning and management, research and publication, education facilities, education management, and information systems. The planning department is the service provider to the other two departments, administration and instruction.

### ***Core functions***

Section 3.4.2, “Core functions of the Department of Planning,” of the Education Reform Law of 2011 provides that the Department of Planning, Research, and Development shall have the following mandate and core functions: design, develop, manage, and coordinate all policies, procedures and activities for reviewing and updating national education plans; ensure that developed plans are in consonance with the national development priorities and objectives (RoL, 2011).

By legislative mandate, the planning department sources funding for other sub-sector programs, sets standards for all education infrastructure including design and construction, works with development partners to foster the government’s development agenda, creates the conditions for sector capacity development and improvement, and monitors and evaluates all education programs in consonance with MoE standards. The department also collects, processes and publishes periodic education data for information dissemination and progress tracking purposes. Finally, the department is responsible for harnessing global best practices in shaping education developments (RoL, 2011). These tasks have been daunting for the department and remain so for several reasons, some of which will be outlined as the chapter progresses.

## **The planning department’s fifteen-year track record**

The planning department has been the coordination conduit through which donor funding has come to the education sector. Between the 1980s and mid-2000s, millions of U.S. dollars in education spending were negotiated and supervised by the department. The arrangement was so strong that the African Development Bank, European Union, USAID, the World Bank, and other agencies either seconded staff to the MoE or set up an implementation unit

within it. Between the 1970s and late 1980s the department hosted a World Bank Project Implementation Unit imbedded in its organization structure. The Improved Efficiency of Learning Program, which became the Primary Education Program, was a USAID-funded effort that provided the basis for the present Accelerated Learning Program. Together with the recently established Italian Funds-In-Trust, these programs and projects were efficiently managed by the department of planning.

The issue of human resource capacity was addressed either through technical assistance consultants to the department or short- and long-term training opportunities provided to local staff by donors. The department benefitted to such an extent from logistical support provided by these projects that it was not dependent on budgetary allocation.

## The department of planning and the establishment of the Education Pooled Fund

Post-conflict education reconstruction activity provided the opportunity for the Government of Liberia (GoL), through the MoE, to implement the three-year Liberia Primary Education Recovery Program (LPERP) from 2008–10. The LPERP, for which the Education Pooled Fund (EPF) was established as a funding mechanism, was the first post-war attempt by the MoE to move away from ad hoc emergency programs to a developmental approach.

The Education for All–Fast Track Initiative (EFA-FTI) did not approve a hurriedly developed plan for funding because, according to a UNICEF staff member, “it lacked the basic tenets of a development plan.” Hence, the MoE was encouraged to develop a comprehensive sector plan inclusive of all sub-sectors, supported by vetted education data with clear and progressive funding arrangements through budgetary allocation in accordance with global benchmarks. The LPERP action program was described in seven components “intended to take the primary education sector from an emergency status to a recovery status” (RoL/MoE, 2007c). The seven components of the LPERP were: (1) infrastructure expansion and improvement; (2) instructional materials and curriculum development; (3) teacher development; (4) the Accelerated Learning Program; (5) advisory, supervision, and assessment services; (6) education sector governance; and (7) organizational capacity.

Being the responsible department for the development of policies, procedures and activities, the department of planning was the key representative of the MOE in the process that established the pooled fund. The deputy minister led a team from the planning department, including an international technical assistance consultant and local staff, during the establishment period of the LPERP and the pooled fund. The department organized and coordinated meetings for the governing bodies of the pooled fund, and also developed documents that included:

1. Lists of agreements; which comprised
  - a. Letter of Agreement between the Open Society Foundations and UNICEF
  - b. Development Grant Agreement between UNICEF and the Ministry of Finance
  - c. Memorandum of Understanding between the MoE and the Ministry of Finance
2. Terms of Reference and Flow of the Fund
3. Work plan format for use of the fund, as well as other documents related to the overall operation of the EPF

Owing to the level of engagement and the role played in the pooled fund establishment process, full knowledge for compliance to and implementation of the pooled fund was embodied in the department of planning. The international technical assistance consultant worked with local counterparts within the department to provide knowledge and skills transfer necessary for fully implementing the LPERP consistent with the procedures governing the pooled fund. Hence, the planning department led and coordinated the process for implementation of initial activities of the LPERP and the pooled fund in 2008–09.

It was appropriate that the EPF was managed and supervised by the department of planning because of its experience with such programs and projects. Despite this, managing a pooled fund project presented new types of challenges and the need for an accelerated pace of innovation.

The focus of the LPERP and the EPF on primary education was an effort to meet Education for All Goal 2, “Provide free and compulsory primary education for all.” This action was not intended to ignore the fact that the entire education sector was still in dire need of recovery that required immediate attention at the time. Implementation of the LPERP, however, afforded the MoE the opportunity to achieve the EFA-FTI requirement of crafting a comprehensive plan.

In the face of multiple competing priorities across the sector, the planning department had the responsibility to ensure that activities funded under the EPF met all requirements and were contributing to the goal of recovering primary education. Access and quality were high priorities for putting primary education back on track. To achieve this, teacher training, textbooks, and construction and renovation of schools were paramount to achieve the objective of addressing the negative legacies left by 14 years of carnage and inactivity in the education system.

To this end, Open Society and the Government of the Netherlands made available an initial amount of U.S.\$17 million to jumpstart the process of the education sector recovery with an emphasis on primary education. This was the birth of the EPF for the MoE. Although from two distinct donor sources, the fund took on a new and unique identity because funds could not easily be traced to a particular individual donor.



## Collaboration with other departments for use of the Education Pooled Fund

The three departments of the MoE all had a role to play in utilizing the pooled fund, beginning with the planning process, developing the annual work plan using the designed format. In keeping with the seven components of the LPERP, the department of planning worked closely with the responsible units and divisions within the executing departments and provided guidance in the development of the work plan. The department of planning prepared the final draft work plan and circulated it to members of the Education Sector Development Committee (ESDC) for review and comments. The department then presented the plan at an ESDC meeting, providing clarity where necessary.

The planning department identified focal persons in each MoE department to work on the LPERP. Engaging these focal persons in one-on-one meetings during formulation of the work plan was one strategy used by the planning department to build capacity in other departments to achieve pooled fund objectives.

## Internal control for the EPF

The practice of the sector-wide approach (SWAp) to achieve common objectives had been missing from the MoE's culture of program implementation during the years of conflict. The MoE had been polarized along project lines, as some MoE sub-sectors were active during the emergency periods because they had programs that were donor-attractive and donor-driven, including curriculum development, school feeding, school health activities, teacher training, and school construction. Sub-sectors of the MoE whose programs did not have any emergency components were in no way involved in funded programs. It is within this environment that the LPERP was implemented. Moreover, the conflict had allowed project managers to control project funds with few criteria for reporting and accountability. To establish basic compliance principles, the EPF thus set up a custodial body called the Project Financial Management Unit that took instruction directly from the minister of finance.

The internal strategy employed by the planning department to encourage the participation of the other two departments, as required by international best practices, included:

- ▶ Frequent presentations of the LPERP medium-term plan to create awareness of the program within the MoE and to foster ownership;
- ▶ Participatory development of sub-sectors' annual work plans;
- ▶ Presentation of certified and approved plans to a wider body of MoE personnel.

The department ensured that a culture of interdependence existed in managing the project. Contracts were contingent upon the drafting of planned activities and budget lines. Beyond plan preparation and the definition of thresholds for funding, the planning department was only part of the initial procurement process, which involved tendering. The Department of Administration led the procurement, distribution, and accounting processes. The department of planning supervised and monitored the progress of the project's implementation process. The deputy minister of planning, research, and development reported the status of the project to all stakeholders.

Because of its implementing role, the Department of Instruction benefitted from numerous aspects of the overall program, such as a cadre of trained teachers, completed primary schools, a new supply of classroom furniture, textbooks, and other teaching and learning materials. The Department of Instruction, like the other two departments, received technical assistance that provided consultants in the areas of curriculum, textbook, and learning resource material procurement, school fee abolition, policy development, and school health.

## Challenges for the planning department in managing the pooled fund

### ***Noncompliance with plan***

Management and implementation of the EPF presented a whole range of challenges, especially related to noncompliance on the part of the MoE. The pooled fund was intended to finance activities that were agreed upon in the work plan and consistent with the seven components of the LPERP. However, after plans were developed and approved through the required process, decision/policy makers at the ministry would request funding for activities completely outside of the plan. Interestingly, such funding was requested with no reference to procedures, which usually put the MoE in an embarrassing position. As a result, payment requests were always returned from the Public Financial Management Unit at the Ministry of Finance. These requests were returned for different reasons; however, it was mainly because they were not a part of the plan and therefore could not be easily justified.

Another noncompliance issue related to procurement. The procurement process, in most instances, took longer than expected. When the process was finally completed, it sometimes fell short of the national procurement regulations of the Public Procurement and Concessions Commission.

## **Capacity**

Lack of capacity, both internal and external, was recognized as a huge challenge in implementing the LPERP. Some capacity gaps are always present despite proper planning and preparation. One such capacity challenge occurs in the local construction industry. Contractors usually lack sufficient capacity to deliver on a construction contract for schools and other infrastructure such as education offices and teachers' housing. This arises because most contractors underbid and then find it difficult to complete the project.

Another capacity issue related to improper planning: planning for construction does not usually take into consideration locations and terrain in which construction is expected to take place, especially in the locations that are completely inaccessible to vehicles during the rainy season. During the annual rainy period, which typically lasts from April to October, many roads are impassable and construction projects that require movement of materials, especially in the interior of Liberia, become very difficult. Failure to complete construction of a huge number of the schools happened largely because bad weather conditions made contractors unable to function in the relevant locations. Ultimate responsibility for this could be attributable to the MoE, but even the United Nations Office for Project Services, a body that came highly recommended, could not deliver on the 20 schools it was contracted to manage. Finda Architecture and Construction Company, the firm contracted to complete the construction of the 20 schools not completed by the United Nations Office for Project Services, acknowledged the importance of the challenge of reconstructing these schools.

Though implementation of the LPERP was seen as an opportunity to build human resource capacity within the MoE, the low-capacity of human resources actually hindered coordination among and between the departments. The LPERP was designed with the intention of leaving behind a well-trained and skilled staff corps; this was supposed to happen through knowledge transfer arising from interactions with various technical assistance consultants. At times, however, these consultants worked alone, excluded a department's staff, completed their assigned tasks and left immediately upon completion. On other occasions there was inappropriate pairing; a technical assistance consultant was assigned to a staff member or team unit that was not trainable, so no knowledge was transferred to the intended individual or section. Consequentially, the MoE lost out because the expected output from the project was not achieved. The planning department had to take on the challenge of figuring out the priority projects for each department, to ensure that the program met deadlines and delivered the quality of output required.

## ***Frequent leadership turnover***

Another challenge was the frequent turnover of leadership and staff who worked to implement the LPERP using the EPF. The EPF at some point began to lose its status; it was no longer seen

as a means to address gaps. This came about as more and more political changes were made in government. New political leaders needed time to understand the functioning of the pooled fund before they could effectively work with it. However, they most often came in with their own agendas. For various reasons, staff turnover usually negatively affected the pooled fund.

It became glaringly clear that every time there was a change of political appointees in MoE leadership, greater demand was placed on the fund to address things that were not covered under the EPF's mandated range of projects. The newly appointed policymakers were not so keen on knowing the conditions that constituted the EPF and fund usage. All they had in mind was that there was some money in the EPF and it was there to be spent on things they envisaged as priorities for their respective sections or departments.

Some of the newly commissioned deputy ministers saw the EPF as petty cash for the MoE and thought that it could be accessed and expended at will. Some wanted to use the funds to cover their personal travel expenses abroad. Others saw it as the means to addressing unplanned requests for politically-oriented projects. Education projects and health-related services are frequent political platform promises and legislators use their influence to sway projects to their voters and constituencies. Direct government funding and donor funded projects are commonly used this way; the pooled fund projects came to be no exception.

When this new culture of practice emerged between October 2009 and July 2010, expenditure was no longer necessarily informed by a work plan and approval from the fiduciary board was no longer sought before funds were accessed. The Education Sector Development Committee was now only a symbolic body that was told what to do. It was not solicited for approval and advice. The role of the ESDC became confusing to the new leadership; moreover, the regular ESDC meetings that kept all of the sub-sectors updated were thereafter held sparingly.

Negative repercussions related to staff turnover were not unique to the GoL. UNICEF, the lead education partner, and other education development partners experienced staff changes as time went by. UNICEF changed two of its key staff, the resident representative and the head of the education section. These two formed part of the negotiating team that went to New York to attend the Partners' Conference on Liberia. Their departure undermined the strength of the ESDC because those who replaced them did not exhibit the same level of commitment to the EPF. This was probably due either to their unfamiliarity with the culture of impunity that characterized the use of public funds in Liberia, their own lack of institutional memory to help them manage the EPF effectively, or the fact that the EPF had no future replenishment potential.

## The irony of donors' attitudes toward the Education Pooled Fund

One purpose of a pooled fund was to give the MoE the leverage to deliver education services without the many strings that go with other donor funding. The EPF effaced the identity of funding sources and took on a new, shared identity. Besides the Netherlands and the Open Society Foundations, no donor partners attempted or had the least desire to channel funds through the pooled fund mechanism. While this was not communicated formally, one could only infer that the pooled fund mechanism took away their autonomy and authority. Donor partners now had to negotiate with the government on project location. The MoE could negotiate the number of technical assistance consultants that could be accepted and decide on their conditions of service through terms of reference and tendering. Demands for strict adherence to national standards became the hallmark of project discussions. These were some of the consequences of pooled funding that reinforced local ownership in several ways but seemed new to the partners.

The EPF should have had the potential for replenishment (i.e., all future funding coming to the GoL for education development or to the MoE could have been channeled through the EPF) (RoL/MoE, 2009b: 28). However, the memorandum of understanding that laid out the working methods of the EPF designated UNICEF as custodian. There was no other choice because UNICEF is the leading education partner of the MoE. Given that level of responsibility, it was expected that UNICEF would nurture the level of confidence and transparency that would attract other donors to contribute to the EPF. Instead, UNICEF was the first to show its lack of confidence in the EPF by not committing its own money to the pooled fund.

It is common knowledge that institutions function by example. UNICEF initiated the practice of not using the EPF as a conduit to fund education programs and donors such as the European Union, the UNDP, and the USAID later emulated UNICEF. An EU representative noted, "UNICEF is not committing its fund to the Pool and so the EU will not because the Pooled Fund will not work." Ironically, the same donors whose idea gave rise to the EPF were the very donors who did not believe in its ability to safeguard their money. Their actions grossly undermined the EPF mechanism and killed its future effectiveness long before the implementation stage.

UNICEF may claim that the U.S.\$12 million in Netherlands funding that it administered for the EPF was technically UNICEF funding. That may be the case legally, but it is not how the funds were perceived in Liberia. Liberian officials understood that all the money given through UNICEF was Dutch in origin. Some Liberians regret UNICEF's failure to supplement the Dutch funds from other sources.

## Recommendations for the future

This chapter has chronicled the role of the department of planning in the management of the EPF. We have shown that, although usage of the fund was said to be solely within the MoE's purview, in practice that was not the case. There were strings attached that seemed unbreakable; in some instances those strings contributed to delays and failures. In the years of the LPERP, 2007–10, the project was designed to build local capacities that would enable the MoE to continue to manage the pooled fund and similar future funds. This did not occur, as the ministry continually demonstrated that it was unable to fully take over the management of the EPF even after six years of the project from 2007 to 2013. This scenario created the condition for the continuous presence of technical assistance consultants and the Project Financial Management Unit. Besides, the level of reluctance exhibited toward contributing to the fund suggests that the EPF has a grim future and cannot be seen as a means to achieve any educational objectives, let alone larger goals. The department of planning's refusal to fully address the staffing needs of the project had no managerial merit and brought about growing dissent from several quarters within the MoE. Finally, political will toward education development was not exhibited during the period of the EPF's implementation, even though projections were made and memoranda of understanding demonstrating GoL commitment were established. This shortfall on the part of the GoL contributed to the growing tendency for the fund to be misdirected and, on several occasions, abused.

These are recommendations drawn from reflections on the experience of the EPF and analysis of the project documents:

1. Recognize that the conclusion of the first EPF summarizes donors' perceptions about the experience of the Ministry of Education's planning department and therefore bears on future funding commitments to education. At some point in the utilization of the fund, with no reference to agreed procedures, it seemed the focus was to deplete the fund, bringing it to zero balance. While this may have been necessary because it demonstrated the MoE's capacity to spend the fund's U.S.\$17 million, it did not guarantee any future replenishment of the EPF. There was more to managing the fund—as outlined in memoranda of understanding, policies and plans—than just exhausting it until it reached zero balance. Continuity of the EPF depended on the MoE's compliance with all the minute details of project protocol. Such practices could have created confidence and generated donor trust in the MoE's management through the department of planning.
2. Recognize that the culture of poor coordination between and among sub-sectors of the MoE grossly hindered the quality of service, pace of delivery, and drive for good

governance and division of labor in the spirit of a SwAP. Poor coordination and weak information-sharing have continued effects on the productive capacity of the MoE. The quest for adoption of best practices in coordination required good information dissemination and communication. The tendency of the MoE to be polarized along departmental lines undermines opportunities for collaborative support and maximum effectiveness. This polarization is dangerous and does not augur well for the education sector. All departments needed to be aware of the details of projects that required the involvement of other sub-sectors for their successful implementation.

3. Recognize that the circumvention of monitoring and evaluation as a core process of implementation for the EPF leaves one to wonder about the yardstick employed for measuring progress and the tools for decision making. Monitoring and evaluation has not been part of the culture of program or project management activities. Only donor-funded projects have been tasked to do monitoring and evaluation as a prerequisite to additional funding. The MoE, in whose interest projects are implemented, has never been motivated to find out how specific project interventions impacted the target groups. Everything is left to chance and the EPF was no exception; no provision was made to evaluate the effectiveness, impact, and authenticity of the project.





# The “Liberian boy”: the role of international consultants in Liberia’s educational reconstruction

*Batuhan Aydagül*

## Introduction

I left Liberia at the end of October 2008. Yet, in fact, Liberia has never left me. The thoughts and emotions built through the not-so-long but very intense 15 months I served in the Ministry of Education (MoE) live in my mind and heart to this day. What started as an unusual journey, a Turkish education policy analyst climbing the stairs of the MoE building on Broad Street in Monrovia as an “international consultant,” ended with me leaving the country as the “Liberian Boy,” a nickname given by colleagues and friends in the MoE with whom I had the privilege of working.

In this chapter, you will read reflections, deriving mostly from my own experiences and insights, about the role of technical assistance delivered through international consultants in education change in Liberia, particularly in the implementation of the Liberia Primary Education Recovery Program (LPERP), which was intended to lead and orchestrate the work of all partners toward a holistic framework of mid-term goals and objectives set out by the government.

In the spring of 2007, the Open Society Foundations, UNICEF and the World Bank had proposed to the MoE that they provide long-term technical assistance to support the Department of Planning, Research and Development, the body responsible for coordinating the implementation of the LPERP as well as all international aid to education, which was headed by Deputy Minister James Roberts. Upon initial agreement from the MoE, Open Society offered to find and recruit this person and approached me.

I first met with Deputy Minister Roberts in Washington, D.C., in April 2007 while a team of MoE staff was on World Bank training. For him, it was important that he met the person who would work with his team and himself prior to final confirmation of the assignment. The meeting went well. Both during the meeting and afterwards, through calls and e-mails, a series of discussions occurred on the administrative matters of my engagement.

Finally, I went to Liberia in the beginning of June 2007 for a week-long orientation. At the end of that week, the MoE asked me to start my job within a month and required that I work within the department of planning. This arrangement conveniently situated me in a central position from which I could work with various departments and divisions within the MoE and with external partners. This provided me a “bird’s eye view” of educational change in Liberia that proved to be very valuable.

Since the first day I arrived in Monrovia, I have never ceased to believe that the potential for radical and rapid education change in Liberia was within close reach of Liberians. The government of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was committed to improving education. The international community stood beside the government. In 2010, the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) allocated Liberia U.S.\$40 million in support of its Education Sector Plan. By June 30, 2013, U.S.\$9.2 million, 23 percent of the total allocation, had been disbursed (GPE, 2013a: 9).

So, Liberia has had the commitment of a strong president and her cabinet, the support of the international community, technically robust plans and necessary funds to deliver better quality education to children across the country. Yet, the journey proved to be very challenging, both then and now. Why?

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27. I work for Education Reform Initiative, a non-governmental think-and-do-tank in Turkey. Turkey is not alone among newly industrializing countries in its near-absence from the international technical assistance pool. Historically, development assistance flowed from industrialized countries, most of which are members of the Development Assistance Committee in the OECD, to developing countries. My assignment with the MoE in Liberia was treated as “news” by the Turkish media because seldom, if ever, had a Turkish education professional transitioned from a post in Turkey to one within a different country’s Ministry of Education. One column about this news read, “Consultant from Turkey to the Liberian Ministry of Education.” Another was more satirical of the Turkish government while giving out the news: “Turkey didn’t listen to ERI [Education Reform Initiative], Liberia takes it as consultant.”

I will first suggest a framework of three critical factors that should make development work successful, given that relevant conducive macro-conditions are in place, as they were to a large extent for education in Liberia back in 2007. Then, I share my assessments of the implementation process, using this framework as a lens. After laying out my conclusions, I close with a narrative that highlights a critical but often neglected consideration in development discussions: individuals.

## A framework for assessing the implementation of plans

When a sector in a post-conflict country has political support from the country's leadership, enjoys constructive relationships with its development partners, has developed a modest plan catering to its priorities and realities, and has secured funding, the remaining challenge is to realize the objectives and deliver results to beneficiaries. There are various countries around the world in which finance, infrastructure or social sectors can be identified as being in such a promising situation. Yet, this potential is not often realized, at least not easily and on time. It appears that planning and funding development is doable; implementing development is distressingly slow.

Based on insights gained throughout LPERP's implementation process, I suggest a framework consisting of three critical success factors that could help public institutions translate plans and funds into results. These factors are: external technical assistance to boost implementation in the short term and build institutional capacity in the medium term, a factor I refer to as *advisers*; people within the institutions, including but not limited to the senior leadership, who will champion the whole reform process and rigorous implementation, a factor I refer to as *champions*; and, finally, people across the institution who are ready to execute with guidance from advisers and leadership and encouragement from champions, a factor I refer to as *achievers*.

Governments and their international partners must ensure that they mobilize a critical mass of advisers, champions and achievers within institutions while finalizing plans and funding arrangements. In the following sections, I deliberate further on each factor.

### ***Advisers: Technical assistance***

In 2007, as Liberia was transitioning to peace and democracy, development partners were increasing their commitments of technical assistance to the newly elected government within their aid packages, which also included funding international NGOs that provided direct services to beneficiaries in the field, building infrastructure, etc. This was in line with the overall spirit and practice of development in Liberia, which emphasized strengthening natio-

nal ownership and building local capacity through collaborations among major development partners. This development practice was aligned with the principles of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (OECD, 2005). One implication of this paradigm was that development partners were supporting the Government of Liberia to employ long-term international technical assistance consultants in positions across various ministries and other public agencies.

A few examples to this collaboration: The Ministry of Public Works and development partners had set up an Infrastructure Implementation Unit, comprised of national staff and international experts seconded by the development partners, to implement projects funded by the Liberia Reconstruction Trust Fund (World Bank, 2013d). Development partners in the health sector had brought in technical assistance to support the financial management of the Liberia Health Sector Pool Fund by the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare to implement the National Health Plan (Hughes, Glassman and Gwenigale, 2012). Within the Ministry of Finance, the Project Financial Management Unit, which acted as a centralized unit for financial management of World Bank-funded projects, employed both national and international experts with support from development partners (RoL/MoF, 2013).

In addition to national and intergovernmental development agencies, there were other programs that provided short- or long-term support to the Government of Liberia. One of these programs, the Scott Family Liberia Fellows, recruited young professionals as fellows “to fill a critical capacity gap and work in Liberia as ‘special assistants’ to senior Liberian government officials, primarily cabinet ministers” (Center for Global Development, 2013). Another, more short-term, source of capacity support for the government agencies has been graduate students from the Kennedy School of Government who came to Liberia for their compulsory summer internships. Some of these interns came back to Liberia after graduation for long-term professional engagement.

Why is this aspect of development aid important? The arrival in Liberia of long-term experts, who were often embedded within the public agencies, was evidence of changing development paradigms in the country. Both the government and development partners were transitioning from a post-conflict to early-recovery phase, during which building national ownership and strengthening institutional capacity became priorities. In health and education, ministries were eager to gradually take over delivery of services to the population from the international NGOs in the field, or at least to assume responsibility for planning and coordination of these services. Thus, the development of the National Health Plan and the LPERP, and subsequently the Education Sector Plan, were important steps taken in that direction. External technical assistance was essential for these ministries to undertake rigorous coordination and implementation tasks.

## ***Champions: Institutional ownership and leadership***

An ambitious national development effort, like the LPERP, needs people who will constantly advocate and drive progress. Senior leadership has to be the primary champion and engage other motivated and competent people in various departments and divisions to spread and strengthen the determination for delivering results across the institution.

## ***Achievers: Mid-level ministry staff***

Institutional execution of plans and delivery of results depend on people making things happen; I call them “achievers.” In Liberia, the mid-level staff in the MoE was the most committed group of individuals. The feedback of various consultants shows that the mid-level ministry personnel were aware of their limitations and welcomed external technical support to learn how to do their job better. With little encouragement they were willing to work hard to get things done. When newly recruited national staff came on board they brought additional momentum to the ministry.

## **Assessment of critical success factor I: Technical assistance (Advisers)**

Years of violent conflict had deprived many public agencies in Liberia of their competency in public administration and finance. In education, realizing short and midterm objectives required intensive prior preparations and specific sets of skills to undertake complex reforms, such as expanding the infrastructure or designing the new curriculum. When the MoE and education development partners (EDPs) developed the LPERP, they had already included an intensive injection of technical support to various units within the ministry to strengthen the overall implementation capacity (see Table 6.1). It was critical that the planned technical assistance arrived in the country in a timely manner, was assigned to relevant departments and divisions within the MoE, and was constructed in a way to foster national ownership.

## ***Mobilizing technical assistance***

Despite rigorous planning, during the first year of the LPERP the EDPs provided only part of the planned support for implementation, capacity building, and policy formulation. Furthermore, when technical assistance and short-term consultants were provided their actual start dates were often delayed (see Table 6.1). This constituted a major setback, as the technical assistance that was delivered was not adequate to form a critical mass of

**Table 6.1**  
**Liberia Primary Education Recovery Program (LPERP) Components<sup>1</sup>**

	Component 1: Infrastructure Expansion & Improvement			Component 2: Instruction Materials & Curriculum Development		Component 3: Teacher Development		Component 5: Advisory Services, Supervision & Assessment	Component 6: Education Governance		
	TA in architecture & contract management	STC in school mapping	STC in formulation of infrastructure expansion plan	TA in textbook management	TA in curriculum and IM	STC in situation analysis	TA in teacher policies	STC in student assessment	STC in organizational design	STC in school grants	STC in PETS (PER)
TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PLANNED FOR THE FIRST YEAR OF LPERP IMPLEMENTATION (July 1, 2007– June 30, 2008)											
EDP Support											
EU											
OSF				Provided as scheduled							
UNESCO											
UNICEF										Provided as scheduled	
USAID								Provided with delayed start date			
World Bank / EPDF						Provided with delayed start date					Provided as scheduled

EDP: Education Development Partner  
 STC: Short Term Consultant  
 TA: Technical Assistance/Consultant

1. This table refers to six of the eight components of the LPERP. Component 4 (Accelerated Learning Program of Older Students) and Component 8 (Institutional and Implementation Arrangements for the Program) are not reflected.

	Component 7: Organization Capacity										LPERP Implementation		
	STC in institutional assessment	STC in management training	TA in Human Resources	STC in financial management	TA in financial management	TA in procurement	STC in EMIS	TA in EMIS	LPERP Implementation	LPERP Focal Person for DM Administration	Donor Coordination		
EDP Support													
EU													
OSF									Provided as scheduled	Provided as scheduled			
UNESCO													
UNICEF				Provided with delayed start date									
USAID													
World Bank / EPDF									Provided as scheduled	Provided as scheduled		Provided as scheduled	

EDP: Education Development Partner

STC: Short Term Consultant

TA: Technical Assistance/Consultant

international consultants across various departments within the MoE. Consequently, this lack of capacity slowed down the implementation of the LPERP.

A major component of overall technical support for the MoE was supposed to be provided by the European Commission. Although the European Development Fund approved the €12 million European Commission Support to Education in Liberia (ECSEL) in mid-2006 (European Commission, 2008: 23), €2,707,850 worth of long-term technical assistance was not made available until March 2009 (Delegation of the European Union to Liberia, 2013). This delay meant that throughout the first 20 months of the LPERP, the MoE did not have access to technical assistance for institutional development, education monitoring, and information systems, and human resources and financial management, all key features of rebuilding a robust institutional capacity.

Another key player in providing technical support to the MoE was the World Bank through the Education Program Development Fund (EPDF).<sup>28</sup> Major donors established the EPDF through the World Bank in 2004 to “enable more low-income countries to access the FTI,” and thus, to “provide technical support and build capacity required to prepare a sound education plan” (World Bank, 2013c). Though the primary emphasis was on preparing education sector plans, the EPDF also provided technical support for the implementation of funded plans. In Liberia, the EPDF grant was supposed to serve both purposes: To help the government prepare an education sector plan for reapplication to the Catalytic Fund in two to three years and to implement the LPERP.

The EPDF proposal for Liberia was funded for a year, starting in July 2007, and initially included short-term consultant opportunities for issues such as school mapping, school architecture, textbook procurement, teacher policies, student assessment, and management training (Personal communication from EPDF Manager, World Bank and the Deputy Minister for Planning, MoE, 8/14/07). Utilization of the EPDF did not start until January 2008 and when it did the management of the fund prioritized efforts to prepare a new sector plan. In the first round of technical assistance, a long-term consultant was hired to lead the plan development process and two short-term consultants and/or World Bank staff members were brought in to undertake analytical work on public expenditure review and teachers, with the intention of providing evidence for the sector plan.<sup>29</sup>

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28. Under the auspices of the Global Partnership for Education, the Education Plan Development Grant is now fulfilling the purpose of the EPDF (GPE, 2013c).

29. The MoE benefited from the EPDF in recruiting much-needed local staff for institutional support in various positions (e.g., donor coordination, planning, and recruitment). This chapter focuses on the role of international consultants, so I left out further analysis of this aspect.



By April 2008, the utilization of the EPDF had become an issue of tension between EDPs and the MoE in Liberia (Personal communication from me to Open Society education sector plan management, 4/7/08), as the implementation of the LPERP was making barely any progress. Some partners criticized the World Bank for pursuing its own agenda (developing the ESP and reapplication to the Catalytic Fund) and acting without consultations with other partners. The good news was that following a series of sincere conversations, the utilization of the EPDF made more progress. For example, an international consultant for developing an infrastructure expansion plan (including finalizing designs for new school projects) arrived in mid-summer of 2008, almost a year after the start of the EPDF grant.

During the first year of the LPERP, two other international consultants worked in the MoE to support the implementation process and analytical work. Open Society employed a textbook procurement consultant and UNICEF brought in a consultant to support the financial management and SWAp (sector wide approach) planning efforts.

### ***Structuring technical assistance within the MoE***

Even when all other preconditions of development are in place, how technical assistance is structured within a beneficiary institution is critical to its utilization and success. Well-planned, and carefully structured technical assistance delivered in a timely manner could work, and there were examples of that in the MoE during 2007 and 2008. Chapter 10 will explore the contribution of technical assistance to the procurement of textbooks.

My experience during discussions on the administrative matters, or rules of engagement, related to my placement within the MoE reflected the MoE's eagerness to take ownership and build institutional capacity. How the four following dimensions are structured is important for transforming technical assistance into sustainable development for beneficiary public agencies.

- ▶ **Status and title of technical assistance:** The status and title of external technical assistance must reinforce the collegial and equal relationship with national peers. Furthermore, there was often a real need to get things done together beyond giving “advice” on how things should be done. When possible, the engagement of international consultants should avoid the not-so-productive hierarchical relation between the consultant and the beneficiary. In my own case, Deputy Minister Roberts approved that I assume the responsibility of LPERP coordinator within the department of planning following discussions with Open Society, UNICEF, and the World Bank about the tasks I would be undertaking. This was also in line with the practices of other ministries that employed long-term technical assistance.
- ▶ **Matching technical assistance with national counterparts:** A critical success factor for ensuring that the beneficiaries make more use of technical assistance in the long run

is to build and/or strengthen institutional capacity. Assigning a national counterpart to work closely with and shadow the international consultant is a good practice, one that can be seen in many government agencies around the world. The MoE wanted Anthony Nimely to be my counterpart throughout my term there and to take over my position by the time I left. It was intended that Nimely would enhance his capacity as a policy planner through our work together. This arrangement was important for improving communication between my function and the MoE, as well as making national ownership more visible before all the stakeholders in the country since Nimely and I acted together in many instances.

- ▶ **Reporting mechanism for technical assistance:** The way to strengthening national ownership of development goes through government agencies assuming responsibility for a specific mandate and being accountable for realizing that mandate. Within this perspective, the arrangement between the MoE and Open Society required me to report directly to Deputy Minister Roberts on all issues related to work, including but not limited to identifying work priorities, attending meetings within and out of the MoE, and deciding on when to use contractual leave time. During the time I served in Liberia, I often found it very valuable to report directly to a deputy minister because it allowed me to reinforce national ownership of my work outputs.
- ▶ **Physical location of technical assistance:** Where international consultants are based to perform their work may seem like a minor issue but I found it critical, especially in empathizing and bonding with individuals working in the beneficiary institution. Being physically located at the beneficiary institution also complements the above-mentioned features of engagement.

### ***Evaluating technical assistance: Pending questions***

During 2007, the EDPs failed to mobilize comprehensive technical assistance support to the MoE as initially planned. As a result, a disparity of institutional capacity among various departments and divisions formed. Whereas the department of planning benefited from the incoming technical support, the departments of administration and instruction barely had any support during the first year. This situation made it more challenging to utilize the technical assistance available, as there was little that planning could have achieved without synchronized execution by administration and instruction. So, concerning the first critical success factor, the ***technical assistance provided was insufficient***, given the complexity of challenges facing Liberia in education reconstruction.

If technical assistance had been delivered, could we realistically assume smooth and effective utilization? It depends on how the technical assistance is structured and managed.

The case of European Commission technical aid to the MoE in Liberia offers a good case for analysis.

As I was leaving Liberia, I thought the delay in the arrival of the ECSEL technical team was particularly detrimental to education recovery because it was impeding institutional capacity building. Having observed the need for technical assistance and its benefit when rightly done, I was quite optimistic of this team's potential contribution. At the same time, I was worried that progress on major components of LPERP depended too much on the performance of the ECSEL technical team, especially on their effective and harmonious working relationships with their MoE colleagues. Any communication problems could jeopardize the overall progress of the LPERP.

The ECSEL team arrived in Liberia in spring 2009, long after I had left. As far as I was able to follow from a distance, a negative working relationship formed between these long-term consultants and the MoE leadership—to the extent that at one point the team leader was declared *persona non grata* by the MoE and had to leave his post.

In an attempt to understand this specific tension, one of the four structural features that I propose to effectively structure technical assistance seems most important: Reporting and accountability mechanisms for technical assistance. There is a significant duality in how consultants are held accountable in projects funded by big aid agencies such as the European Commission or USAID. Technical teams or institutions that are awarded the contract to implement a certain project are fully accountable to donors for realizing on-time deliverables that are within the budget.

At the same time, these consultants have to work together with the beneficiary institution, especially because they serve a development plan that is bigger than a specific project, which makes harmonization and coordination of various projects and efforts very critical. Thus, technical assistance teams should be open to guidance from the senior leadership of beneficiary institutions and be willing to cooperate and collaborate to find ways and means to make progress together.

On this duality of accountability the Paris Declaration makes it clear to donors that they should align their practices and programs with the government. What about the accountability of technical teams, how do we ensure that international consultants are primarily accountable to the leadership of beneficiary institutions while mobilizing necessary mechanisms to ensure that beneficiaries stay committed to and accountable for implementing plans?

To sum up this section, while the MoE needed technical assistance to strengthen its institutional capacity and to implement the LPERP, mobilizing and utilizing technical assistance proved to be very challenging. Despite this complexity, I still argue that the MoE and similar institutions may need and can benefit from technical assistance; it is just that the latter needs to be done correctly.

## Assessment of critical success factor II: Institutional ownership and leadership (Champions)

Liberia's transition of development paradigm from a post-conflict to early recovery phase was visible in many ways through more robust ownership at the cabinet level and changing development practices by development partners. Nevertheless, its adoption by various ministries depended on the extent to which the senior leadership, particularly ministers, incorporated this new paradigm into their own policy and decision-making processes. For example, the minister of health and social welfare was often praised in Monrovia development circles for his leadership in developing and executing a sector plan and making the development partners deliver their support according to that plan.

The same was not true for the MoE leadership. By July 2007, the MoE had a plan prepared in collaboration with and partially funded by EDPs and access to funds provided by UNICEF and Open Society to make up for the remaining funding gap, especially for the first two years. So, the Ministry of Education was in a similar place vis-à-vis the Ministry of Health. The MoE's top leadership could have built ownership of the plan within the ministry and led all stakeholders to execute the plan. This did not happen.

This lack of commitment and leadership at the top had implications on other senior positions within the ministry: Implementing the LPERP did not constitute a priority for many. The Executive Management Team, the governance body of the MoE consisting of the minister, three deputies and comptroller, often dealt with pressing day-to-day administrative issues rather than making the implementation and monitoring of the LPERP a priority for the organization. While Liberia was gradually moving toward development, the MoE leadership was still managing education in a post-conflict emergency mood, trying to fix problems as they became urgent and neglecting to ambitiously undertake systematic and sustainable change.

### ***Limited ownership within the MoE***

There were two reasons for this. Firstly, though the MoE and EDPs developed the LPERP, the awareness and ownership of this plan was rather limited to the department of planning. Obviously, policy makers in the departments of administration and instruction knew about the LPERP. The challenge was not one of lack of information. It was rather that they had not internalized its significance or understood how it would affect their day-to-day jobs.

In 2007, the MoE and EDPs prepared the LPERP proposal in Liberia, forwarded it to and obtained endorsement from the EFA-FTI secretariat, and received an official reply from the Catalytic Fund about the details of funding arrangements. During that period, there was no major event or effort to celebrate this significant achievement or build awareness

and ownership among the stakeholders, notably the MoE itself. A significant milestone in education development in Liberia was off to a quite ordinary beginning.

The first major event the MoE organized to bring ministry staff together to discuss vision and plans in education was a retreat on November 9, 2007. In that meeting, following the minister's speech outlining the vision of the MoE ahead, LPERP's three-year objectives and progress in its first quarterly action plan were shared and discussed. Also on the agenda were information and a progress report on the development of the education sector plan and poverty reduction strategy. I felt then and now that this was the kind of event the MoE should have organized more often to build and maintain more momentum. However, no subsequent retreat or similar event was organized before I left Liberia in October 2008.

### ***A hierarchical flaw of accountability***

There were no monitoring or accountability mechanisms in place that would create incentives for the ministry at various levels to drive the execution of LPERP. The internal culture of the MoE at the time had not created an environment of accountability; no one was held responsible for failing to realize objectives. The more work plans were developed and not implemented, the more the MoE staff lost interest in the whole process and the greater the risk of the LPERP becoming an exercise in futility: More paperwork that never resulted in outcomes or implications for the education system.

It was particularly difficult to get assistant ministers to focus on the plan, given they could barely see any evidence that this was something the senior leadership cared about. In such a context, the planning team as well as international consultants had barely any leverage to mobilize other people within the MoE for executing the LPERP.

Lack of internal accountability was associated with lack of external accountability. There were no mechanisms to make the MoE leadership accountable to all the stakeholders, particularly the cabinet and the legislative bodies, for effectively and efficiently realizing the LPERP. This absence of accountability generated few incentives that would draw decision makers to focus on the LPERP's growth. Among other things, political and personal short-term interests might have prevented politically appointed senior civil servants from focusing on long-term development goals.

### ***Efforts to promote institutional ownership and leadership***

I often found myself alone in championing the LPERP in Liberia while I worked in the MoE and struggled a lot to build ownership. Even my counterpart was busy with other things, including working on the poverty reduction strategy, and he was not always able contribute. What contributed to my efforts later was the establishment of the Liberia Education Pooled Fund (EPF) as it promised direct access to aid. However, there were other and quite

significant components of the LPERP directly funded by EDPs that the MoE could have implemented until the signing of the EPF. The MoE could also have completed preparations for major spending items such as infrastructure expansion. Eventually, the momentum increased in the MoE, but whether that was sustained remains doubtful.

By October 2007, three months into the first year of the LPERP, I had become well aware of the limited ownership of the LPERP across the ministry and of the need for stronger and more visible leadership. In a memo dated October 9, 2007, I suggested the following, among other things, to build momentum for LPERP:

The following steps can help strengthen the ownership of the Executive Management Team:

- a. The Executive Management Team should meet weekly with a special agenda on LPERP to review the progress and take necessary decisions. If held regularly and planned well, these meetings can easily be held in an hour;
- b. Given their heavy work load, deputy ministers and the comptroller should identify focal persons for LPERP in their respective departments to facilitate communication, collaboration and coordination within the Ministry of Education as regards all LPERP-related issues;
- c. All assistant ministers and directors should be kept accountable to the Executive Management Team for benchmarks identified for their bureaus and/or directorates in quarterly action plans.

Concerning these suggestions, the Executive Management Team neither met regularly to oversee the implementation of the LPERP nor held assistant ministers and directors accountable for progress. The idea of assigning focal persons was accepted but it took a very long time to appoint these people in all departments.

I also had suggested that the MoE institutionalize a planning team that would consist of staff from all three departments to drive the implementation of the LPERP and consequently empower its members to be internal champions for implementation. While an LPERP planning team was set up by spring 2008, focal persons for the departments of instruction and administration, both very important positions to drive implementation efforts in the respective departments and ensure coordination with the planning team, were still being hired in late summer.

While I worked at the MoE, Open Society became an external advocate on various issues, most notably during the process leading to the establishment of the EPF. Open Society's effective advocacy sped up the procurement of textbooks by the MoE and its partners. Open Society complemented well the conventional donor support Liberia received.

Finally, as I left Liberia, I suggested that the external accountability of the MoE could be further strengthened if a critical voice was established outside of the ministry to monitor both the government and the EDPs. I argued that a non-governmental actor could provide more pressure on the ministry to focus on implementing its programs and realizing the potential of the EPF. If provided technical support, this nongovernmental body could also monitor the policies of the ministry and the programs implemented by international agencies. This role could include advocacy for sustainability, equity and gender parity within education initiatives. Today, I have little evidence that this was realized, yet, I still argue that it should be on the agenda of interested agencies.

## Assessment of critical success factor III: Mid-level Ministry staff (Achievers)

The other factor that impeded the implementation of the LPERP as well as translation of international technical assistance into results was excessive planning that overtook scarce MoE human resources. Donor-driven macro planning and policy initiatives such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy, Education Sector Policy, and Country Status Report emerged as independent initiatives and drew resources away from the already limited pool of *competent* planners available within the ministry. The same group of individuals often found themselves attending conferences and meetings in and out of the country on behalf of the ministry. There were times I found myself all alone trying to coordinate implementation efforts within the MoE as other planners, including my counterpart Anthony Nimely, were required to engage in planning efforts elsewhere in or out of the ministry. As a result, a serious gap opened between planning and implementation efforts, the former seriously hindering the latter.

A particularly puzzling question for me was why developing a country status report and education sector plan became such a priority when there was already a funded plan that the MoE should have implemented to improve education for children in Liberia. It was important to consider the long-term funding needs and prepare for reapplication to the Catalytic Fund, but even in that case the MoE and the EDPs should have ensured that the MoE had enough competent human resources to deal with both at the same time. It was primarily the World Bank that rigorously pushed the new education sector plan, as the early utilization of the EPDF showed. Other partners did not necessarily agree with the World Bank's prioritization.

Another downside of focusing on developing an education sector plan was that it downgraded the status of the LPERP and the EPF. Indeed, the LPERP did not meet the

criteria for funding from the Catalytic Fund. Among other flaws, its plan was not an analytically rigorous document. Yet, it met the needs of Liberia at that time. It consolidated aid from various EDPs, emphasized strengthening of institutional capacity (governance, human resources, financial management, procurement, etc.), and tackled urgent and fundamental needs in education.

The lack of competent human resources within the MoE had become apparent to many by 2008, especially in technically demanding functions such as procurement and financial management, both critical to the MoE in utilizing the EPF. Faced with this pressing issue, both Open Society and the World Bank (through the EPDF) mobilized their own resources to hire national experts for these positions. In general, EDPs were reluctant to fund the MoE to hire new staff due to concerns about sustainability in the long run. Thus, it was quite constructive for Open Society and the World Bank to be flexible and rather rapid in responding to the MoE's call for support.

Often, the achievers within the MoE were as frustrated as internationals by the limited engagement of the leadership in policy issues. In a way, the lower ranks of the ministry were more eager to adapt a long-term developmental approach to education problems than their senior management. Obviously, with more encouragement and support from the leadership these achievers could have played critical roles in implementation.

## Conclusions

By October 2008, the MoE and the EDPs had set up the EPF and made progress toward realizing the first-year objectives of the LPERP. There were success stories as well as failures and challenges. All actors involved in education change in Liberia shared credit for good news and responsibilities for not-so-good news.

The EPF was set up following intensive investment of know-how and time by the MoE and the EDPs. As it came into effect, it introduced delicately thought-through governance and coordination mechanisms to manage both education recovery in Liberia and incoming international aid. UNICEF and the World Bank made valuable contributions to building this new structure. The EPF has since been analyzed as an emerging good example of aid partnership in global development circles (Davies and Bentrovato, 2011; Williams and Bentrovato, 2011; Schmidt and Taylor, 2010).

Unfortunately, the potential of the EPF was not fully utilized. Firstly, the MoE and the EDPs failed to make the new aid architecture work. Liberia successfully acquired funding for its education sector plan from the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) in 2010. As much as this was definitely news to celebrate, it also meant that the aid structure set up for the



EPF was on the way to becoming obsolete. Six years after Liberia acquired its first round of direct aid to education, a look at the aid disbursements from both the EPF and later the new funding that was secured from the GPE shows that absorption capacity, not lack of funding, constituted a bottleneck (GPE, 2013a).

Should the MoE and the EDPs have focused on making the newly set-up aid architecture work effectively and later tried to channel new aid to EPF? Would making the implementation of the LPERP a priority for all stakeholders have contributed to utilizing technical assistance more effectively and wisely and delivering results in education? These are critical questions that may not have easy answers, yet, it is important that we think about these to make a fair assessment of the past and hopefully generate a few lessons for the future. My assessment is that the answer to both questions is, “Yes.”

This chapter has mostly focused on plans, implementation challenges, national actors, and international aid agencies through a policy discourse. Given where education in Liberia is today, we could all question our previous efforts, their justification or effectiveness, and end up being quite pessimistic about the future. Should we be pessimistic? I argue we should be realistic but determined to change the way we think about development. I will just share two insights from Liberia to end this chapter.

Firstly, in the field of development, including in education, some people think and work at a macro or policy level. But others are in the trenches, getting their hands dirty to impact the lives of principals, teachers, students, and parents, individuals with names and faces. For policy-makers sitting in the central ministry, advisers like myself who work at that level, consultancy firms or subcontractors of aid, the connection to the individual is much more distant.

This proximity to the individual is a source of tension in development. The individuals and institutions working in the field have first-hand experience interacting with individuals in schools, primarily students, whereas those who work at the macro level have no such exposure. This gap between the “implementer in the field” and “planner in the capital” results in different perceptions of problems and required solutions.

This gap exists equally between planning circles in the global development scene and practitioners in beneficiary institutions and between planning circles in ministries and practitioners in schools. Perhaps it is time to assess all global or national planning endeavors from this perspective and attempt to bridge this gap so that planning could deliver more results to beneficiaries, especially and eventually to children.

Several actions could contribute to bridging this gap:

- ▶ Aid agencies should move beyond their conventional approach in setting performance indicators that prioritize quantifiable outputs (e.g., number of certificates delivered, number of courses offered, etc.) toward more qualitative assessment of development

processes and impacts on beneficiaries. This could create more incentives for staff members in the field to be closer to beneficiaries and be more concerned about their experiences.

- ▶ More and more, international appointees should spend time with communities and interact with national or local organizations that work in the field. Observation and building empathy with beneficiaries could be a key feature of identifying development problems more accurately and generating more applicable and sustainable solutions to these problems.
- ▶ Development partners and governments should ensure shadowing of international appointees by more junior national staff, and mentoring should be embedded within this working relationship. Failure to achieve this risks further driving national governments' dependency on external human capital to deliver results.

Secondly, individuals working in development at the policy level, especially in a post-conflict country, should be emotionally prepared to work for a long time without seeing tangible results. Processes do matter as much as results and outcomes. The day in late May 2008 when all parties concerned signed the EPF was a good one. Despite lots of difficulties and a very long-lasting process, we had achieved the establishment of an innovative aid financing mechanism.

On August 10, 2008, I attended a very significant ceremony at the Kakata Teacher Training Institute. The first cohort of teachers who had completed their year-long in-service training graduated and received their "C" Level Teaching Certificate. Seeing 139 teachers receive their certificates left me with a great sense of fulfillment and satisfaction: One that was personal, real and close to the individuals whose lives we in the ministry had been trying to impact all that time.

Success in development can only be achieved through a collaborative effort that includes government officials, national staff, representatives from aid agencies, contractors, NGOs, and the communities themselves. Following the graduation ceremony at Kakata, I talked with Sam, the Liberian education manager who worked in Nimba; I congratulated him and his team for their contribution. I could see the pride and happiness in his eyes. Yet, he was humble as always, looked into my eyes, shook my hand and said, "We did it together."

# The role of local civil society in the post-conflict reconstruction of the Liberian education system

*T. Michael Weah*

*“Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world.”*

(Nelson Mandela, 2003)

## Introduction

One of the important aspects of development of governance and administration in many African countries is the growing engagement of people in determining the way they are governed. The trend today is toward communality and collectivity of interest in which people find solutions using social groupings such as civil society.

Canadian philosopher Charles Margrave Taylor defines civil society as “a web of autonomous associations independent of the state; which binds citizens together in matters of common concern, and by their existence or actions could have an effect on public policy” (Masterson, 2006: 4). In describing the voluntary nature of civil society, Masterson (2006: 5) quotes approvingly a definition from the London School of Economics and Political Science:

Civil society refers to the arena of uncoerced collective actions around shared interests, purposes and values ... a diversity of spaces, actors and institutional forms ... such as registered charities, development non-governmental organisations, community groups, women's organisations, faith-based organisations, professional associations, trades unions, self-help groups, social movements, business associations, coalitions and advocacy groups.

Looking at the activities and impact of civil society today, one of the definitions that seems to be applicable is the one used by the Civil Society Index: "Civil society is the arena, outside of the family, the government and the market where people voluntarily associate to advance common interests" (Darkwa, Amponsah and Gyampoh, 2006: 16). This definition shows civil society as an assembled intermediary association operating between the basic components of society (family, individuals, and household) and the economy, the state, and its agencies to improve their effectiveness and responsiveness.

With their grassroots approach and ability to rally the people in situations that impact their lives, civil societies are becoming an integral part of the interaction between the state and communities in many African countries. International donors are recognizing this. Given donors' concern with corruption in high places and the lack of accountability and transparency that seem to be endemic in many developing countries, the focus is on civil society organizations (CSOs) as implementers that also assume fiduciary responsibility. CSOs are usually seen as being well acquainted with their communities and passionate and knowledgeable about their interests, thus creating a platform on which trust and cooperation can be built, a situation that donors appreciate. The donors dealing with CSOs in such a capacity have brought them into direct competition with the state for scarce funding.

With donors putting such comparatively high confidence in African CSOs, inherent challenges are also brought into focus. The internal weaknesses of African CSOs must also be factored into their role of buffering the state's efforts in the interest of the people. *The Civicus Civil Society Report for Ghana* (Darkwa, Amponsah and Gyampoh, 2006: 87–88) captures some of the weaknesses that characterize Liberian CSOs:

- ▶ Limited organizational, infrastructural, and resource capacity
- ▶ Under-funding
- ▶ Limited policy influence
- ▶ Limited visibility
- ▶ Ad hoc proliferation (of CSOs and their programs)

# Liberian CSOs and the education sector

## *Types of CSOs*

CSOs, with all their challenges, have been a source of mediation in Africa, especially in post-war countries such as Liberia during and after the 14 years of civil conflict that devastated the social and economic fabric of the country. The ending of the war can be attributed to the strong commitment to peace and initiative of CSOs. The efforts of some organizations, such as Women in Peace Building Network and Women in Mass Action for Peace, have been recognized both in Liberia and internationally. The Nobel Peace Prize won in 2011 by Leymah Gbowee, a major leader of both organizations, is a clear indication of how far CSOs have penetrated the socio-political matrix of Liberia and the world.

Using the Civicus Civil Society Index, CSOs in Liberia have been divided into three categories (Actions for Genuine Democratic Alternatives, 2010):

1. Interest value groups comprising unions, associations, and federations; these groups are characterized by large membership and are interest-driven;
2. Service and humanitarian groups working to improve service delivery, combat poverty, and assist the most vulnerable (e.g., orphanages, local Red Cross chapters, charities);
3. Policy and advocacy groups involved in pro-democracy movements and human rights (e.g., research and academic think tanks and institutions).

CSOs in Liberia working in these categories mostly fall under the legal framework of nongovernmental organization and maintain their role outside of government. However, CSOs' involvement with their communities in activities promoting peace, democracy, and infrastructure development put them within the framework of the national agenda.

As Liberia transitions from the emergency to the development stage, government is emphasizing the education sector to develop national human resource capacity. During the period 2007–11, there was a flurry of policy formulation and education support activities using the Education for All (EFA) goals and the Millennium Development Goals, especially Goal 2, which aims to ensure that children everywhere will complete a full course of primary education by 2015. Like many other developing countries that depend on donor funding, Liberia is using the EFA goals to drive its education sector reform processes. The EFA goals have been incorporated very extensively into the two main Liberian government education documents, the Education Sector Plan (RoL, 2009) and the New Education Reform Act (RoL, 2011), that presently frame the activities of the Ministry of Education (MoE) and are to provide the road map for the education sector.

## ***Roles of CSOs in Liberian education sector governance***

In the achievement of its education goals, the Government of Liberia (GoL) faces many challenges. In the Education Sector Plan (RoL, 2009), the ministry lists the following obstacles:

- ▶ Inadequate and undefined sources of finance that will enable the sector to keep pace with the ever-increasing demand for quality and relevant education;
- ▶ Weak capacity for management and governance from central to the local level;
- ▶ An outdated curriculum and inadequate textbooks, chairs, desks, and school supplies;
- ▶ Insufficient school access that limits the ability of every child, including girls and persons with disabilities, to exercise his/her right to quality education;
- ▶ Insufficient numbers of well trained, qualified, and motivated teachers;
- ▶ An understaffed and over-crowded public university;
- ▶ Poor quality programs being offered at some institutions of higher learning.

To address these challenges and strengthen education, the GoL has redefined its approach to the education sector by repealing old governance arrangements that were ineffective or archaic. It has adopted new policies and overseen the passage of new laws. To make these laws and policies inclusive and a national endeavor, the people were involved in the development of these documents. In the case of the Education Sector Plan, discussion and consultations were held with CSOs and CSOs also vetted the documents. Some of the CSOs included in the process were: the Association for the Disabled, the Federation of Liberian Youth, the Forum for African Women Educationalists, the Liberian Council of Churches, the National Teachers' Association of Liberia, and representatives of Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) in Montserrado County (RoL, 2009: 22). Although these discussions were held mainly in the Monrovia area, for once the voices of the people and stakeholders, through the CSOs, were heard.

One important component of the New Education Reform Act is the decentralization of the function of the MoE, which will allow local communities to participate in the administration of the school system in the counties. Three entities were created by the act for the people's participation: the National Education Advisory Board, County School Boards, and District School Boards. More local involvement is ensured through the PTAs, whose activities are guided by the PTA manual developed by the Ministry of Education.

The National Education Advisory Board (RoL, 2011: 28) was created to promote national participation in national education policies and programs. Three of its objectives directly incorporate activities that CSOs are customarily involved with:

- ▶ To assemble public, private, and faith-based concerns, interests, and aspirations regarding policies, plans, and regulations;
- ▶ To undertake debates and facilitate dialogues to create consensus on vital issues regarding education with emphasis on success, quality, relevance, and standards at all levels as well as cost and financing;
- ▶ To enhance transparency, accountability, and democratic tenets.

The National Education Advisory Board membership is composed of a sizable number of CSOs, which should ensure that the people's interests are considered on national education issues. Those CSOs represent a cross section of society and also include the business community through the Liberia Chamber of Commerce, an important component in building the connection between the education provided and the job market.

In the New Education Reform Act of 2011, the National Education Advisory Board is the central core of the education system of Liberia. It gives the stakeholders ownership of the education sector and their decisions can impact quality, administration, and governance. The act has a very strong CSO component but the portion of the act that gives the minister of education the power to appoint the members (*Autonomous / Auxiliary Bodies, Appointment of Members—RoL, 2011: 28–30*) may compromise the board's independence and capacity to express critical views, two basic tenets for the effectiveness and success of such a body.

Under the National Education Advisory Board are the County School Boards followed by the District School Boards, which work with schools on the district level. The County School Boards, headed by county education officers and headquartered in the county capitals, have control over county education activities including facilitating, monitoring, and overseeing all schools in the county school system in accordance with guidelines, policies, and regulations. Again, the minister approves the County School Boards and they work within the general framework of the ministry (*RoL, 2011: 30–32*). At the school level are the PTAs, which may be the only truly independent bodies within the matrix of decentralization and school administration.

Decentralization of the education system and the involvement of CSOs at the county, district, and school levels have provided the opportunity for citizens to have a say in how their children are educated. The New Education Reform Act has provided the legal framework for people's participation but, unfortunately, to date none of the boards are operating, with the exception of the PTAs, which function mainly in urban areas.

The government depends very heavily on the international donor community to be able to carry out its education plan. This puts the GoL in the position of doing what outsiders think is good for it. Donors allot money, but the GoL often has neither the intention nor the ability to continue initiated programs. For example, some international NGOs have

suggested the appointment of monitors in the counties to assure that school programs are implemented as the MoE gears up for decentralization. The MoE, with its chronic “no money syndrome,” says that it is unable to do so at this time. So, a nongovernmental organization has volunteered to make money available to support such a program for a period of time; the idea is that the MoE will take over later. But the usual scenario is that after the nongovernmental organization’s involvement, the MoE usually makes no provision in its budget and is in no position to take over the program. This may happen to the county education monitoring program; it did happen with the Accelerated Learning Program, a USAID-supported initiative implemented by the nongovernmental organization, Core Education Skills for Liberian Youth. The MoE is presently looking for a partner to continue that program.

In dealing with the fragile state of Liberia, donors have added conditions for aid such as transparency, accountability, good governance in delivery of services, and interacting with the intended beneficiaries, the people. This has warranted the inclusion and recognition of a new set of partners that are familiar with and part of the beneficiary groups, CSOs.

CSOs, with their knowledge of localities and presumed expertise in their areas of interest, have become the partner and conduit through which many donors are providing funds for beneficiary communities. The GoL has recognized this CSO role through the education boards that were integrated into the crafting of the New Education Reform Act and the National Sector Plan.

The varied groups’ participation brings to the sector a pool of new ideas, integrity, and quality services and standards. This was expressed in the creation, for the first time, in 2009, of a national education policy with citizen involvement. Sometimes citizens’ impact is merely making the public aware of the situation in terms of the usage of funds, materials, and human resources, and sometimes the impact is reflected in the creation of a sense of ownership that brings about positive change.

## Examples of Liberian CSO engagement in education

Local educational CSOs in Liberia have various areas of focus that drive different aspects of change in the education sector, including:

- ▶ Student performance (SADAD and LIPACE)
- ▶ Effective service, transparency, and accountability in school material procurement and supply (COTAE)
- ▶ School standards and capacity building (WE-CARE)



- ▶ Increased literacy (Alfalit International–adult education)
- ▶ Advocacy (Network of Liberian Libraries–advocating for a national library policy and a national library act to ensure support and funding of libraries)

I will now examine the activities of SADAD, LIPACE, COTAE and WE-CARE, Liberian CSOs that have developed unique approaches to advance educational goals.

### ***Students Against Destructive Activities and Decisions (SADAD) and Liberia Institute for the Promotion of Academic Excellence (LIPACE)***

“The teacher says we *mun* [must] bring her something for our test, Mama,” Tynan, a second grader, says to her mother. Without hesitation her mother reaches into a bag tied around her waist under her *lappa* and takes out 50 Liberian dollars. “Give your teacher this small thing ya. Times hard,” she says, giving the child the money. The child takes it and hurries to school and the mother, a market woman, puts the pan of potato greens on her head and heads for the market where she will sit all day selling in the hot sun (Incident recounted during an interview with Mohammed Foboi, Head, SADAD, May 2013).

This vignette draws our attention to the practice of paying for grades and buying exam papers from teachers, which is rampant in the school system in and around Monrovia. The practice is embedded in the schools and has been given the name “flexibility fee.” This practice was even showing up in the West African Examinations Council exams.

In 2008, a group of high school students from Clara Town, an economically challenged community in Monrovia, and others in Paynesville formed two CSOs to address the problem by bringing together a group of volunteer high school students: SADAD (Students Against Destructive Activities and Decisions) and LIPACE (Liberia Institute for the Promotion of Academic Excellence). SADAD is a program against violence in the classroom and LIPACE is a tutoring program for students.

In 2012, the impact of SADAD and LIPACE, with its implementing partner, Youth Exploring Solutions, was reflected in the performance and result of the West African Examinations Council exams. The year saw the best scores and student performance on the exam. Out of the 25,000 students who sat for the exams in 2012, 18,133 (over 73 percent) passed and a significant number made division one, the highest score. The last time such a result was achieved was in 1986, before the war. A total of 220 students from 10 schools regularly participated in the LIPACE/Youth Exploring Solutions tutoring program. This represented 20.81 percent of the total number of senior students in the institutions that sat the exam. A total of 186 students successfully passed the West African Examinations Council exam, 84.54 percent of those who participated in the project, while only 34 students (15.46 percent) failed the exam (*The Informer*, 2012). The LIPACE / Youth Exploring Solutions project results

were over 11 percent better than those achieved nationwide, indicating the value of the tutoring interventions.

Like many small CSOs, these student grassroots organizations face many challenges, including securing funding and recognition from the ministry as they try to find solutions to the intractable problems of cheating on exams, poor school attendance, demands of money and sex for grades, teenage pregnancy, and sexual harassment of female students (Interview, LIPACE and SADAD officials, 6/15/13).

### ***Coalition for Transparency and Accountability in Education (COTAE)***

The Liberian education sector is riddled with corruption. This is the message heard on the airwaves, in the newspapers, and at the *hartai* shops (meeting places for tea). Padded payrolls, illegal encashment of multiple checks, padded bills, failure to deliver goods or services paid for, poor procurement practices, and the list goes on. To address these problems, the Liberian legislature enacted the Public Procurement and Concessions Act and the GoL established the Public Procurement and Concessions Commission (<http://www.ppcc.gov.lr>). But the verdict of the operation of the education sector today is best summarized by the CSO consortium COTAE, "... damaging procurement practices perpetrated by entrenched networks of corrupt public officials and a collusive business environment" (Nah and Ebba, 2011: v).

COTAE consists of five CSOs: the Center for Transparency and Accountability in Liberia, the Liberia Technical Committee for Education for All, the Federation of Liberian Youth, the Liberian Institute of Certified Public Accountants, and the Liberia Economic Journalists Association. The Center for Transparency and Accountability in Liberia functions as COTAE's secretariat (Center for Transparency and Accountability in Liberia, 2011: 2).

COTAE's goals are to promote good governance and fight corruption, advance quality education for all, coordinate and organize youth activities, ensure accountability and fiscal responsibility, and provide information and awareness to the Liberian public. It was in this light that COTAE embarked on a project, funded by OSIWA (Open Society Initiative for West Africa), under the theme Procuring the Best for Quality Education, which aims to involve local people to "impact education policy through advocacy and proactive monitoring" (Nah and Ebba, 2011: 1). This exercise generated the report *Lifting Education: A National Call for Integrity, Accountability and Transparency in Procurement* (Nah and Ebba, 2011).

This COTAE project sought to raise awareness of the strengths and weaknesses in the education sector, "to enlighten the public about ... the importance of transparency and accountability ... in education procurement" (Nah and Ebba, 2011: 3), and to recommend solutions to curb corruption in education procurement, the Achilles' heel of providing quality education, according to COTAE. This was one of the first well-documented studies by a

local CSO group showing a clear link between present procurement practices and corruption and informing the people by creating awareness.

COTAE has brought into focus some of the challenges of decentralization of the education sector under the New Education Act. It has also documented and made the people aware of their roles in the education of their children in the areas of school materials provision and adequate school facilities. The coalition also shows what a group of CSOs can do when they combine their efforts to address major challenges confronting education in Liberia and what their different experiences and foci can contribute. For example, the Federation of Liberian Youth, the Liberia Technical Committee for Education for All, and the Liberian Institute of Certified Public Accountants each managed project implementation in several counties, while the Center for Transparency and Accountability in Liberia handled administrative and financial coordination, and the Liberia Economic Journalists Association coordinated media activities.

All the CSOs that make up the coalition face challenges, including funding shortages and lack of opportunities to build their capacity and broaden the base of their grassroots platform. Some of the questions that arise from these reflections include: Would COTAE have been able to carry out their well-researched project if they had not had external donor funding? Is the Liberian public (the communities with projects COTAE investigated) willing to give moral and financial support to such investigative “watchdog” efforts? How is the COTAE report being used by the MoE, the people, and the donors?

## **WE-CARE**

The war is raging and all that is heard is the sound of gunfire and artillery shells. People are looking stealthily around before venturing out of their houses. No one knows where it is safe or where to find the next meal or water. In all this uncertainty and chaos, the WE-CARE Foundation was founded.

WE-CARE began in 1992 with a book chain program in the heat of the Liberian civil crisis. Books were freely lent and after the borrowers read the books, they did not have to return them but were asked to give them to others to read. A dusk to dawn curfew had been imposed and WE-CARE was using books as a consoling element and a way to help people occupy the long hours instead of going out to fight.

Since that time, WE-CARE has come a long way and today operates the WE-CARE Library, which is one of the few public libraries in Liberia where all services are free, including access to the Internet. WE-CARE also establishes reading rooms/libraries in schools (28 to date), distributes free books and other educational materials, runs Story Hour for Kids (a reading program in economically challenged communities that teaches children to read and develop love for books), publishes children’s books, trains teachers under the

Reading Liberia program, and runs Critical Thinking Liberia, which trains teachers and other professionals in critical thinking methodologies and strategies and participatory learning in the classroom.

In the 1990s, WE-CARE strongly advocated for libraries/reading rooms in schools and today works with other CSOs, such as the Liberia Library Association, to develop and secure implementation of a National Library Policy that would ensure that libraries are established throughout Liberia. Libraries should be an integral part of national development given their role as hubs for information technology and sources of reading material.

In its advocacy role, WE-CARE has embarked on an awareness campaign to inform teachers, school administrators, and PTAs of best practices in libraries and reading promotion, and the essential characteristics of a positive learning environment. WE-CARE hopes to give beneficiaries the foundation and information they need to engage their education authorities on decisions about priorities in the face of scarce funding and the economic status of their communities. Critical thinking, participatory learning and a student-centered environment are relatively new concepts in the Liberian school system. Through workshops, critical thinking meetings, and text messages, WE-CARE is making teachers and school authorities aware of these practices.

WE-CARE initiated most of its own programs. Today, it has partners such as the Canadian Organization for Development through Education and the Open Society Foundations. WE-CARE has the usual problem of not being given the recognition that education officials usually accord to foreign entities. During my interview with the coordinator of WE-CARE, she spoke about the lack of endorsement of the WE-CARE Reading Liberia Teacher Training Program and Critical Thinking Liberia by the MoE. She said the ministry had a very strange reason for withholding her “official” endorsement, even though the MoE sees the professional standards of WE-CARE’s operations and the quality of her output. Ministry officials have stated that if they recognized WE-CARE’s teacher program, other organizations would apply for the same kind of endorsement. The coordinator feels that this should not be a problem and points out that the ministry just needs to set standards or enforce relevant rules if it already has them. If an entity’s operations meet those standards or rules, the MoE should grant the official recognition that entity deserves instead of denying recognition based on a Pandora’s Box argument.

Officials from the ministries of education and finance are usually surprised to hear about the library and critical thinking workshops that WE-CARE conducts in other African countries, including those related to production of children’s books and teacher trainings. A library right in the center of Monrovia elicits surprise: not that the facility exists, but that Liberians established it and Liberians are running it (Interviews, WE-CARE Coordinator, 7/18/12 and 5/13/13).

## *The impact of these CSOs*

These CSOs, working alone or in coalition in the education sector, operate in the community outside the sphere of government on their specific issues and interventions. They advocate and give voice to sectors of the education platform that are not usually heard in the public discourse. SADAD and LIPACE are small CSOs and although their activities in the schools are not making headlines, their intervention against malpractices in the school system is a step toward improving the learning environment by working to eradicate practices that may underlie the rampant corruption and inefficiency that dog Liberian society today. In its support of reading, children's book production, teacher training, and libraries, WE-CARE has chosen a niche where the future lies, based on a simple principle: A reading people is an informed people and informed people make decisions that affect their social and economic wellbeing. In its "watchdog" role, COTAE is setting the pace for accountability and transparency in school supply procurement and service delivery, which are two ongoing challenges and the central themes of the decentralization policy of the MoE.

## Decentralization and CSOs

In the cause of decentralization and devolution of the education sector, the GoL has recognized the need for citizens to contribute to a sphere of social service that is the forerunner for the development of the individual and the country. The GoL also sees the devolution of its services in the education sector as the panacea for problems of inefficiency, corruption, and lack of transparency in its operations. Many donors seem to agree with this policy, as evidenced by their relationships with some CSOs that they fund to deliver services.

It is worthwhile to examine the opportunities and limitations of decentralization in developing countries, as that approach is fundamental to the service delivery strategy of the GoL. In discussing decentralization of administration and governance, Larry Diamond (2004) expresses some of the advantages that the GoL hopes to achieve through decentralization and the involvement of CSOs, including:

1. An opportunity for sectors that may be marginalized to have some control over their own affairs. "When government is closer to the people, it is more likely to be held accountable by them for its successes and failures in the provision of basic services, the maintenance of order, and the fair resolution of local issues and disputes. Government tends to be more responsive when it is closer to the people."
2. Some elements of government responsibility being transferred to local government "provide a more accessible means for citizens to become active in public affairs:

to question their local officials, monitor what they do, present their interests and concerns, and learn the skills and values of democratic citizenship.”

3. “Decentralization of power provides an additional check against the abuse of power,” and pressure from the grassroots is likely to enhance the depth and legitimacy of democracy.

After reviewing many studies for the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization, Jean-Paul Faguet tentatively concludes that decentralization has incrementally “increased the access of people in previously neglected rural regions to central government resources,” has “improved participation and the capacity of local administration to put pressure on central government agencies for a share of the local resources and in planning and management development,” and has slowly improved the “administrative and technical capacity of local organizations ... and new organizations have been established at the local level to plan and manage development” (Faguet, 1997: 2).

Faguet also mentions the negative side of decentralization: a “tendency to create greater inequities among communities and regions with different levels of organizational capacity,” opportunities for “local elites to play a disproportionate role in the planning and management of projects,” lack of “institutions (public or private) to complement the managerial capacity of local governments,” and deviation from good practice for political purposes (Faguet, 1997: 2).

Faguet concludes that “decentralization has obtained moderate success in some countries, moderate failure in others, and both in many. But the reasons for this are poorly understood” (Faguet, 1997: 2).

Decentralization and CSO participation have their challenges. The GoL must move cautiously and make informed decisions in collaboration with all stakeholders. As Susan Wong writes in relation to community-driven development programs, “institutional change will take time and there is no straight, quick pathway toward genuine reform” (Wong, 2012: vii).

But the GoL can expedite the process and increase the possibility of success through the development of its grassroots platform, the CSOs, by having them work alongside the MoE and by including CSOs in the identification of people’s concerns and formulation of education policies. This is imperative in the face of scarce resources and untrained manpower; the context of “no money” is the GoL’s usual excuse for program failure. Sharing of information with the CSOs about the national budget, school policies, funding, regular allotments and supplies, and procurement procedures is not common practice in the MoE’s operations. A change may bring some degree of accountability and efficiency to the decentralization process.

As CSOs in the education sector play their role in empowering the people, their approach and strategies should be construed not as confrontational or threatening, but as

an enabling factor in support of government's effort to provide services efficiently to people it may not normally reach. The *National Policy on Non-Governmental Organizations in Liberia* speaks about GoL support and the historic tradition of CSOs in Liberian society. Specifically, the 1970s and 1980s saw the "emergence of modern CSOs with a focus on capacity building, human rights, advocacy and development issues" (RoL, 2008).

With that historical background and in light of present realities, the GOL should continue to support CSOs' efforts by utilizing those legal documents that have created an enabling policy environment for smooth working relationships. For the reform to be meaningful in Liberia's educational system, legal mechanisms (such as the national constitution) and the national judicial system must be engaged in support of the New Educational Reform Act and the National Sector Plan. This will assure all parties that the CSOs, local, regional, and national authorities are held accountable for abuses of power, violations of rights, and charges of corruption. This is essential if decentralization and the increased role of civil society in the education sector are to be successful (Miller, 2002).

The Civicus report claims that 55.9 percent of the Liberian people are engaged in some kind of civil society activity, which is a strength that can be utilized as Liberia rebuilds its society. However, the same report also gives a grim assessment of the state of CSOs in Liberia today. Their level of organization is about 50 percent efficient and they are dogged with poor human, technological, and financial resources (Actions for Genuine Democratic Alternatives, 2010: 7). Cooperation among CSOs needs to be improved and the connection between CSOs in rural and urban areas is relatively low.

One of the assertions sometimes made by the government is that CSOs are not trained or qualified and usually not well informed to speak on certain subjects or to make the claims that they do. It is also alleged that sometimes the constituent base, funding, and motives of CSOs are suspect. For CSOs to be major contributors to the success of the education sector, they must address these concerns by:

- ▶ Improving their level of organization and advocacy skills and building their manpower capacity by providing education opportunities for their staff;
- ▶ Strengthening their ability to deliver services to target beneficiaries and, especially in Liberia, to areas that are marginalized politically and socially or are not easily reached and are neglected (e.g., due to bad roads that are inaccessible part of the year);
- ▶ Increasing their visibility by creating the means to inform their target communities, the MoE, donors, and the public of their activities;
- ▶ Making accountability, transparency, and thorough reporting part of their operations to buttress their watchdog role and build credibility;
- ▶ Identifying adequate funding and support with some local participation;

- ▶ Consolidating their efforts and networks to enhance effectiveness and counter the duplication of efforts and programs.

Addressing these priorities will enhance the CSOs' long-term relevance and impact on the sector as they advocate and influence policies. It will also strengthen their ability "to reach large numbers of the poor directly, particularly in the context of weak or fragile states, in post-conflict and post-disaster environments, or in areas with poor track records of service delivery within the bureaucracy" (Wong, 2012: iv).

In post-war Liberia, as concerted efforts are being made to decentralize the functions of the education system and make it more efficient in decision making and service delivery, people's participation must be a factor in the process. CSOs provide that guarantee of popular involvement. Legal and political instruments, including the New Education Act, the National Education Policy, and Decentralization Policy, are all new in the education agenda and need time and the cooperation of all stakeholders. These new instruments indicate the commitment of the GoL to the education process, and the inclusion of CSOs, a voice of the people, is a progressive sign of collaboration. This collaboration further suggests that, after 15 years of civil war, the Liberian people and its leaders have decided to use education, "the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world," according to Nelson Mandela (2003), to change their lives.



# The Liberian Education Trust: a history

*Deborah Harding*

The Liberian Education Trust (LET) was set up in the United States as a transition grant-making initiative in December 2005 at the request of President-Elect Ellen Johnson Sirleaf following her November 2005 visit to the United States. During that visit, when Americans asked her what they could do to help her, she said, “I need help with education.”

In the presidential campaign, she had significant support and turnout from women voters, especially rural women who told her they wanted education for their children and for themselves. With a national annual budget of only U.S.\$80 million when she took office in 2006 and an entire country to rebuild, she was going to be hard-pressed to deliver schooling for all without new resources.

As a transition initiative, LET’s program was set up to help restore normalcy in the post-conflict chaos by getting boys and girls off the streets and into schools. Girls orphaned and alone, or living without adult protection, were especially vulnerable in a war-torn society where rape had been endemic. Rape had been a frequent behavior of the child soldiers and paramilitaries who dominated Liberia during the 14 years of the civil wars. Amid the chaos of rebuilding, refugee flows and tens of thousands of hungry, penniless displaced youth and adults, restoring the regular structured school life of Liberia’s children and youth would play a significant role in creating normalcy. This strategy seems to be essential for post-conflict countries.

I established LET as a project of an existing U.S. nonprofit 501(c)(3)<sup>30</sup> tax-exempt organization. Since I was not sure if we would be able to raise a significant amount of money, it seemed wisest not to take on any financial burden of overhead. LET would join an existing organization and pay that organization a fee to manage our finances (incoming and outgoing) and the grants made, thus freeing us from the burden of hiring and managing staff for those time-consuming and specialized tasks. I committed to run LET as a volunteer supported by a small advisory board of distinguished professionals who undertook to raise funds and approve grants, chaired ably by Robert Sirleaf.

Next, I interviewed and hired a Liberian consultant, Dr. Evelyn Kandakai, a highly-regarded former minister of education, to produce a needs assessment and make recommendations for a LET grants program. Her internal memorandum indicated that the immediate needs were access, qualified teachers, and support for school fees for girls. When Liberian families had limited resources, the practice was to send boys to school. Thus, we sought to address the imbalance by increasing girls' enrolment.

LET established three clear and simple goals, based on Dr. Kandakai's recommendations: To build 50 schools, train 500 teachers, and give 5,000 scholarships to girls in formal education and market girls and women (petty traders) for literacy courses.

With these goals, we began to raise funds and received the first million of some U.S.\$5.5 million to date from George Soros. Our second major donor of U.S.\$500,000 was Abigail Disney. Judy Slotkin and Rob Sirleaf, advisory board members, held successful fundraisers in New York City and Charlotte, North Carolina, respectively and we were well on our way. Later, Allida Black, another advisory board member, put together a successful event in Washington, D.C. Each raised and generously donated additional funds as well. President Sirleaf attended these three events and was joined by then Senator Hillary Clinton for the last one. As we got underway, many individuals helped us raise funds and/or made donations—large and small.

In mid-2006, Dr. Kandakai was asked to set up and direct a Liberian-registered NGO, LET-Monrovia (LET-M), which LET funded and which informed all of our work on the ground and administered the grants. She worked with a board chaired by Mrs. Cecelia Bull.

LET had decided not to operate programs but to make grants to Liberian NGOs to carry out our work. We made all the grants to build schools directly to the Liberia Agency

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30. Section 501(c) of the United States Internal Revenue Code provides that 28 types of nonprofit organizations are exempt from some federal income taxes. 501(c)(3)s are organizations devoted to one or more of the following purposes: religious, educational, charitable, scientific, literary, testing for public safety, to foster national or international amateur sports competition, or prevention of cruelty to children or animals.

for Community Empowerment (LACE), an excellent Liberian NGO building projects across the country with full community participation. The MoE gave the approved school design to LACE. LACE, LET-M and the Ministry of Education agreed on the locations of the schools. LET provided the funds to LACE to build or rehabilitate schools with the participation of those living in the local communities.

We also made grants directly to Liberian NGOs to address the other goals in the early years. These grants were vetted and recommended by the LET-M board to LET. By the third year we made all the grants (except building schools) through LET-Monrovia for re-granting. They were more than capable of running these grants programs; it was more efficient given the lack of banks and reliable communication systems in the rural areas.

Between 2006 and 2010, LET and LET-M were able to meet and exceed their goals in two areas. We provided grants to the Webbo Regional Teacher Training Institute and NGOs to support 1,000 teachers with short-term training/upgrading, and to local NGOs to support scholarships for some 10,000 girls from kindergarten through university and for market women in 6-month literacy courses. By 2010, LET-M was working with 40 partner grantees.

LET did not meet its goal of building 50 schools. However, we did make grants to LACE to build 25 government schools around the country and one health clinic. When major institutional donors, including the Government of Liberia, started to build schools, we decided to use our modest resources to address the dire needs of Liberian school children to improve their reading comprehension.

LET made a commitment that within three years our Liberian partner, LET-M, would begin to take over the program and related fundraising. This was an ambitious goal. In fact, it is taking a good bit longer for this to happen, although LET-M has raised some impressive funds locally, principally through a USAID-funded contract, a USAID grant, international NGOs such as PLAN, and several U.S. foundations. There are still shortfalls in funding our ambitious program, so LET has continued to shore up those efforts with both program and operational grants.

To help LET-M begin to develop a fundraising strategy, LET sent several consultants to Liberia and also arranged a two-week fundraising workshop in the United States, but the intended participant from Monrovia was denied a U.S. visa. Two teams of Wharton MBA students spent two weeks each with LET-M, working with them on a fundraising strategy, budget planning, and facilitating a capacity building workshop for LET-M's 40 partner organizations.

In 2011, Mrs. Hester Williams Catakaw was named the director of LET-M and a new board appointed, chaired by the talented businesswoman Mrs. Maureen Shaw. LET sent two consultants to work with the new team for three months on a strategy that included addressing the reading crisis in Liberian schools, operationalizing an active fundraising effort and

financial management. The CPA consultant recruited and trained a financial officer, worked to clear up a handful of late financial reports from grantees, and developed a manual of procedures and checks and balances for the new officer.

Under the new leadership, the LET-M program continued to focus on giving scholarships for formal education to disadvantaged girls through some 14 NGOs around the country. Funding came from Liberian sources, LET, and several U.S. foundations. In support of these partners, LET-M continues to run capacity building workshops. Under Mrs. Catakaw's leadership, the staff has grown. LET-M has a new office and a vehicle and, most importantly, is building on its already well-respected reputation throughout the country.

In addition, there was a shift to address the reading crisis. The Liberian school child is in school without access to books. This fundamental skill is basic for learning. It is a critical issue that must be addressed. LET-M joined together with LET in the establishment of eight libraries placed in Liberian government rural schools. LET purchased and shipped the books and funded LET-M to manage the program on the ground: renovation and furnishings of the libraries, and the identification, training, monitoring, and payment of the librarians. LET-M was tasked with setting up oversight committees at each library made up of student leaders, teachers, parents, and notables to set the procedures and rules for use of the books. It has current plans to establish three additional libraries.

LET-M also runs a well-regarded Saturday reading program for youngsters. With a new grant from the Open Society Foundations, LET-M plans to expand this program to a rural site. LET-M also manages the Lolognta Early Childhood Center in Fiamah for disadvantaged children, which President Sirleaf established.

LET was set up as a three-year transition initiative to support the restoration of basic education in the years following the civil wars. Eight years later, it is now appropriate for LET-M to take over and for LET to wind down. LET continues to fund a project, managed by LET-M, to set up fully stocked libraries plus trained librarians in rural schools. Two primary schools and six rural secondary schools in different counties have been up and running over the past year and a half. There are Peace Corps volunteer teachers working in the six secondary schools. LET-M is encouraging them to offer after-school and summer school reading programs. In the summer of 2012, the first such program in Salala was highly received. Another took place in the summer of 2013.

In many developing countries NGOs face similar challenges. At the organizational level, these tend to be lack of planning skills, lack of financial management skills, insufficient attention to strategy and to capacity building, and a lack of collaboration with others working in the same field. Perhaps small, fragile NGOs in a post-conflict environment do not have the luxury of networking. However, if others do not know what you are doing and what results you are achieving, it is difficult to attract donors and other potential partners.

Several of these issues affected LET-M at different times. To that end, we sent different consultants to Monrovia to help them, including two teams of Wharton MBA students. Two consultants stayed for three months working side by side with the LET-M staff. The benefits are not yet clear.

NGO boards in post-conflict Liberia also have challenges as there are no set procedures or manuals to follow as to what their responsibilities are and how much oversight they have without micromanaging the staff. In the early years of LET-M, it taxed the capacity of a small three-person NGO to administer two grants programs with some 40 grantees. The post-conflict environment made even getting the funds out to the rural areas all but impossible, in the absence of rural banks. Obtaining from the NGO grantees regular narrative and financial reports, and the grades of thousands of scholarship recipients across a country that had little modern communications and remote rugged road travel is a testament to the commitment of the LET-M staff.

LET-M did and does still provide capacity building workshops for its grantees on many of these matters but unfortunately did not take the time to look closely at its own operations and effectiveness with the same regard.

Because LET, as the donor, was a lean operation itself, we were committed to put as much of our money as possible into education in Liberia. LET-M managed all of this work in a very tiny office with insufficient space and with no vehicle. Generally, the first thing noticeable about post-conflict Africa is the presence of new white Range Rovers or Land Cruisers, with the logos of international organizations and international NGOs painted on the side, parked all over town. Most local NGOs, including LET-M, were not among them.

Finally, LET-M was donor-dependent. First, the funds came from LET in the United States. Gradually, LET's funders offered some support. Research Triangle Institute International engaged LET-M as a sub-contractor on a national Early Grade Reading Assessment study. In retrospect this was too much new work for such a small NGO. It almost sank the management of LET-M's own grants programs.

Due to the lack of networking, major international and institutional donors in Monrovia were not approached for funding with any know-how. Perhaps a letter was sent to an embassy but no real research or outreach took place. Face-to-face meetings with international donors in Monrovia could have opened more doors in a post-conflict situation than writing letters. There seemed little interest in undertaking such meetings with international donors. And, there was no real effort to position LET-M for a larger role in the Liberian civil society sector where it might have become the education funder. LET-M did hold a fundraising benefit dinner with President Sirleaf, which was quite successful.

In post-conflict situations, individuals are working more than one job to secure their family's needs and cover the expenses of food, school fees, and maintaining a household.

Families are dispersed or destroyed and the traditional linkage of family and extended family support are severed. Small NGOs do not pay staff enough to keep the wolf at bay.

On November 5, 2007, I wrote in a letter published in LET's 2006 Annual Report:

In countries emerging from conflict and turning toward democracy, the blossoming of civil society is an affirmation of recovery. A robust civil society sector provides space for citizens to express their views, to participate broadly in their society, and to take responsibility not just for voting but for rebuilding their country. A civil society that works is imperative, especially when public institutions are nonexistent or weak. Without a healthy civil society, fragile new democracies are unlikely to evolve into thriving ones.

LET chose to focus its grant making on civil society organizations, as do most U.S. grant makers around the world. It has been a great pleasure to support the civil society sector, which is now once again, post-conflict, quite robust. Liberians are a caring and compassionate people. They engage to solve local problems and they care for the disadvantaged. In post-conflict countries, it is important for international and institutional donors to seek out and support local NGOs. Where this is all too frequently not done, it seems to be fear of corruption and simply not knowing much about activities beyond the capital city. LET experienced no misuse of its grant funds made to local NGOs. This is in thanks to the able LET-M Liberian leaders, who vetted all grant proposals and who knew the capacities and reputations of the grant seekers.

One confusing aspect of this eight-year program has been our name. LET has become the brand name for the combined work of two legally separate organizations. LET is legally a U.S. entity and LET-M is a Liberian one. LET is a grant-making organization. LET-M is both an operational and a granting organization. Once LET-M is able to fully fund itself, LET will close down. We are shortly approaching that situation. At that time, it would be worthwhile for LET-M to become simply LET.

The AllAfrica Foundation deserves a special thank you for taking LET on as a project. We have built a true partnership from this generous act, not only in providing us a home and a financial management system to rely on but also for sharing years of insights and commitment to Africa and Liberia and for covering our work in [allafrica.com](http://allafrica.com).

On behalf of LET, LET-M, and our donor partners, we collectively join in thanking President Sirleaf for the opportunity to support her herculean efforts to provide an education to all Liberian children.

# Diverse partnerships: designing and implementing the Liberia Teacher Training Program

*Mark Ginsburg and Brenda Arrington*

## Introduction

This chapter analyzes the processes of designing and implementing the Liberia Teacher Training Program (LTTP) during the period 2006–10. While giving attention to the context, goals, and activities of the LTTP, we focus on the variety of relationships that emerged between different sets of partners and between the same partners over time.

The LTTP was and is a project funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in support of the Government of Liberia. This chapter mainly examines LTTP I, which was implemented between November 2006 and March 2010 by a consortium of organizations associated with the Educational Quality Improvement Program (EQUIP2): the Academy for Educational Development (AED), the International Rescue Committee (IRC), and the Mississippi Consortium for International Development (MCID). This chapter also discusses the transition to LTTP II, which has been implemented since April 2010—and is currently scheduled to continue through September 2015—by another EQUIP2 team: FHI 360<sup>31</sup> and RTI International.

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31. Family Health International acquired the assets of AED on July 1, 2011. The expanded organization, named FHI 360, became the lead organization for implementing LTTP II at that point.

This chapter draws on research conducted by Mark Ginsburg as part of a comparative case study for the EQUIP2 Leader Award, involving an extensive review of project documents as well as interviews with some of the key LTTP staff in 2010 (Ginsburg, Rose and Adelman, 2011). That research has been supplemented by a more recent literature review and reflections by Brenda Arrington, who served as AED's and then as FHI 360's home office project manager for both LTTP I and LTTP II.

Before analyzing the processes of designing and implementing the LTTP, we sketch the educational context of teacher training in Liberia. The context not only shaped the design and implementation of the LTTP, but also influenced the various partnerships that developed in relation to the project.<sup>32</sup>

## Educational context of the LTTP

In 1988, shortly before the civil war broke out, approximately 73 percent of Liberia's primary school teachers were underqualified, having themselves undertaken only secondary schooling, which many did not complete. Numbers of students entering and graduating from teacher training courses were in steep decline. Teacher education graduates often did not enter or stay in the profession. Frequent delays in salary payments to teachers weakened the teaching force (RoL/MoE *et al.*, 1988: 19; ch. 1).

During the civil war, "many teachers were killed or fled to other countries" (Davidson and Hobbs, 2013: 284). Moreover, the Rural Teacher Training Institutes (RTTIs) were "in various states of disrepair, with Kakata being the least destroyed but in need of repair, Zorzor almost completely in shambles, and Webbo also in need of significant renovation and repair" (USAID Liberia, 2006: 8).<sup>33</sup>

The dire circumstances of the systems of education and teacher education in Liberia persisted in 2006 despite earlier efforts of the Government of Liberia, with the support of UN agencies. In March 2000, the Ministry of Education (MoE) "in conjunction with UNDP and UNICEF, prepared a comprehensive plan to rehabilitate and reform the entire education

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32. For more detailed information on the historical background of Liberia's civil war, see Appendix.

33. In the request for applications for LTTP I, USAID Liberia (2006: 8–9) specifies that "under separate contracts, USAID ... in conjunction with the US Department of Defense and the Defense Security Cooperation Agency's Humanitarian Assistance program, will be assisting the Government of Liberia ... in refurbishing the three RTTIs with physical infrastructure repairs and classroom commodities."



system ... [which focused on] strengthening teacher training colleges and universities, as well as the essential efforts to provide attractive salaries, incentives and benefits to both teachers and teacher trainers” (AED *et al.*, 2006: 9). With the help of international organizations, the MoE produced its Education for All National Action Plan in 2004; “embarked upon a series of consultative meetings with teachers and principals across Liberia” in 2005; and “collaborated with the Ministry of Finance and the Central Bank to conduct a major payroll scrutiny exercise” in 2006 (AED *et al.*, 2006: 10–11).

Furthermore, the “European Commission ... supported the reorganization, upgrading and training of the Ministry of Education down to the district level, including the establishment of financial and management information systems” and “UNESCO ... provided advisors to the Ministry” (USAID Liberia, 2006: 4). In addition, UNICEF had taken the lead to organize a C-Certificate<sup>34</sup> upgrading program for primary school teachers, which between 2000 and 2004 was “offered by NGOs for [approximately 600] teachers who are in the classroom but have never received teacher training” (USAID Liberia, 2006: 3).

## Designing and implementing the LTTP

We discuss the LTTP experience in four sections: (1) the assessment phase of LTTP I (2006–07), (2) the initial implementation phase of LTTP I (2007–09), (3) the extension phase of LTTP I (2009–10), and (4) the transition to LTTP II (2010). Then, prior to the conclusion, we assess the limitations and possibilities of the various partnerships that occurred during different phases of designing and implementing the LTTP.

### *The assessment phase of LTTP 1 (2006–07)*

Based on its assessment of the education sector in Liberia, the USAID Liberia Mission developed a request for applications for the LTTP, which it presented to one of the consortia of organizations funded by a USAID global mechanism, the Educational Quality Improvement Program (EQUIP2). The request for applications described the project as:

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34. Liberian policy specifies the qualifications needed by teachers as follows: a) an A-Certificate, which in combination with a bachelor’s degree constitutes the minimum required qualifications for senior secondary school teachers, b) a B-Certificate, which in combination with an associate’s degree constitutes the minimum required qualifications for upper basic or junior secondary school teachers, and c) a C-Certificate, which in combination with a high school diploma constitutes the minimum required qualifications for lower basic or primary school teachers (RoL, 2011).

Working with the Ministry of Education to comprehensively address the needs of teacher training and support system for basic education ... [including] the preparation of faculty for the three rural teacher training institutes; curriculum development; training for classroom teachers at the primary and junior secondary levels; ... and community and in-service support for teachers in the classroom. (USAID Liberia, 2006: 2)<sup>35</sup>

EQUIP2's application to implement LTTP I describes two phases of work: "Phase I will consist of sending a start-up and work plan development team, which will complete the initial critical assessments, work through operational and partnering issues,<sup>36</sup> and establish a common understanding of the project with the MOE and USAID" (AED and IRC, 2006: 5).

As described in the LTTP I assessment report:

The assessment itself was carried out in November and early December 2006 by a six-person team made up of [staff and consultants] from the Academy for Educational Development, the International Rescue Committee, and the Mississippi Consortium for International Development. ... [In addition,] Liberian professionals from throughout the system were critical to each phase of the assessment process, including conceptualization, data collection, analysis, conclusions and recommendations. This effort was also informed by a series of activities sponsored by LTTP that brought together and engaged key donors, stakeholders and partners ... [including:] a USAID / MoE stakeholders lunch, a University Symposium on Teacher Training Curricula, a UNESCO / LTTP Stakeholder Policy Meeting on Education Policy, and a community workshop that brought together CEOs [County Education Officers], DEOs [District Education Officers], PTA representatives, teachers and students. ... Surveyed documents included national policy and strategy documents, education plans and strategies, donor studies and intervention reports. (AED et al., 2006: 11-13)

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35. Acknowledging the work of other international organizations working in Liberia, USAID Liberia (2006: 13) specifies that the team implementing the LTTP should "work with MOE and EU-supported activities [on] ... interventions that will assist primary school principals to carry out their duties, especially related to improving and supporting instruction in their schools."

36. AED and IRC (2006: 4) emphasize that "the project will work with key MoE officials and local systems, procedures, and structures to avoid duplication and to establish sustainable capacity."

Based on the assessment and additional discussions with USAID and the MoE, the EQUIP2 consortium developed a work plan for the LTTP (2007–09) that focused on outcomes, such as the following:

1. A competency-based framework [i.e., standards] for teachers, inclusive of the knowledge, skills and dispositions ... is used to create a harmonized system of teacher training ...;
2. Professional development programs are available for current and future teachers, including an increasing number of female teachers, to upgrade their qualifications and ... [to prepare them] to meet the challenges of the new curriculum and the needs, including psychosocial needs, of their students;
3. RTTIs ... have increased institutional and staff capacity to provide quality pre- and in-service teacher development programs. (AED *et al.*, 2007b: 7–14)<sup>37</sup>

### ***The initial implementation phase of LTTP I (2007–09)***

One major activity of LTTP I involved facilitating the development of “Professional Standards for Teachers in Liberia” (Rodriguez, McLaughlin and Cummins, 2009; Interview, Mark Sweikhart, 10/10/2010), which were framed around five domains: knowledge, teaching skills, classroom management, student assessment and evaluation, and professional ethics and behavior (RoL/MoE, 2007d). The following excerpt from the Standards document specifies that this activity involved a variety of individuals and organizations:

The standards effort was spearheaded by the Minister of Education ... and carried out with funding from [USAID]. The standards were developed by a team of 29 Liberian educators, including teachers, school principals, CEOs [County Education Officers], DEOs [District Education Officers], superintendents, RTTI staff, Ministry of Education officials, university staff and other educators, during a series of workshops that took place in Monrovia, Liberia between March and September 2007. The workshops were facilitated by ... [the] Assistant Minister, Teacher Education ... [and the] Assistant Dean, William V. S. Tubman College of Education, University of Liberia. ... Several Government of Liberia agencies, institutions, and international donor and

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37. Three people involved in LTTP I mentioned during their interviews that they believed that the two-year period available for implementing the project was not sufficient to effectively accomplish the objectives, and the five-month extension, though helpful, could not be factored into plans during the initial implementation period (Interviews, Brenda Arrington, 10/5/2010, Johnson Odharo, 10/16/2010 and Mark Sweikhart, 10/10/2010).

implementing organizations contributed to this effort. These groups include: ... the Academy for Educational Development, International Rescue Committee, Mississippi Consortium for International Development, University of Liberia, Cuttington University, Stella Maris University, National Teachers' Association of Liberia, UNESCO, UNICEF, Norwegian Refugee Council, Open Society, and Save the Children–UK. (RoL/MoE, 2007d: 1–3)

Another major activity of LTTP I was coordinating efforts to develop a standards-based curriculum for pre-service and in-service teacher education programs (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2009; Interview, Mark Sweikhart, 10/10/2010). Among other things, this effort involved organizing two workshops in December 2007: the National Workshop on Aligning Curricula with Standards (December 4–6) and the C-Certificate Curriculum Development Workshop (December 10–14).

The [first] workshop was facilitated by [LTTP staff and consultants] and was attended by fifty-five Liberian education stakeholders, including: officials from Ministry of Education; ... professors and administrators from the University of Liberia, Stella Maris University, Cuttington University, and AME [American Methodist Episcopal] Zion University; Directors of the Rural Teacher Training Institutes; and Liberian Master Trainers, superintendents, principals, administrators, and teachers. ... By the end of the workshop, consensus on the components of the Liberian teacher education curriculum for the University and C-Certificate was reached. (AED, 2007: 1)

A working team comprised of twenty-six Liberian education stakeholders met for an intensive week-long [second] workshop to align the new C-Certificate with the Professional Standards for Teachers in Liberia. ... The key features of the new C-Certificate teaching curriculum are: standards-based, integrated methodology with teaching content ... based on strengths of previous Liberian C-Certificate courses.<sup>38</sup> (AED, 2007: 1)

Using the draft and, later, the final versions of this C-Certificate curriculum, LTTP staff organized an in-service teacher education program, beginning in 2007 (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2009; Interview, Mark Sweikhart, 10/10/2010). The program comprised an initial five-week residential program and a concluding three-week residential program, which sand-

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38. Mainly, this reference is to the “10-12 week UNICEF-funded crash C-Certificate program operated by the MoE” (AED and RTI International, 2010: 21).

wiched a 15-week period in which teachers met once a month for seminars and received periodic supervisory guidance and support when project field staff visited their schools. The program was implemented for three cohorts (2007–08, 2008–09, and 2009–10), which yielded a total of 120 female and 755 male graduates.

Linked to the in-service C-Certificate program, in 2008 LTTP staff and consultants in collaboration with Open Society and Critical Thinking Liberia organized “a three-phased introductory training ... for all new MoE trainers that lasted six weeks .... In 2009, the program was shortened to a comparable program of three weeks. One-hundred-six trainers (100 male, 6 females) participated in these” [training of trainers workshops] over the two years (AED, 2010: 26–27).

With respect to RTTIs’ institutional and staff capacity, one should remember that when LTTP began, none of the three existing RTTIs (Kakata, Webbo and Zorzor) were in operation or renovated (Interview, Mark Sweikhart, 10/10/2010). While USAID contracted with Development Associates International as well as UNHCR to renovate the physical facilities,<sup>39</sup> LTTP staff worked with the MoE to: a) support the MoE budget planning and preparation processes in the initial year; b) facilitate the crafting of appropriate staffing structures, staff recruitment, and evaluation processes; c) support annual student recruitment efforts, with effective processes and tools to screen applicants; d) assist in annual academic year scheduling and planning; and e) ensure appropriate documentation of RTTI processes and policies for staff as well as students (AED and RTI International, 2010; Rodriguez *et al.*, 2009).

LTTP staff also conducted staff development for the faculty to implement a nine-month pre-service program, which included six months of residential coursework at two of the RTTIs (Kakata and Zorzor) and a three-month student-teaching practicum (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2009; Interview, Brenda Arrington, 10/5/2010; Interview, Mark Sweikhart, 10/10/2010). The program was initially implemented in 2008–09 and again in 2009–10, producing a total of 93 female and 836 male graduates.<sup>40</sup>

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39. According to LTTP’s quarterly report for July-September 2007, during “regular MoE-led coordination meetings ... major topics of discussion were renovation of the RTTIs ... the status of DAI [Development Associates International] .... Renovations at the [Kakata] facilities did not allow the piloting of the residential phase of the in-service C-Certificate training there in August and September .... The [Zorzor] renovations [by Development Associates International] also began this quarter .... The renovation at [Webbo] by UNHCR has been delayed due to the late signing of the MoU [memorandum of understanding]” (AED *et al.*, 2007a: 7–8).

40. While the RTTIs continued to implement pre-service C-Certificate programs in subsequent years, Stromquist *et al.* (2013: 523) observe that “all the rural teacher training institutions have the capacity to double their output of trained teachers. They are under-utilized because of their inability to attract sufficiently qualified high school graduates, particularly females.”

## ***The extension phase of LTTP I (2009–10)***

In October 2009, LTTP I was extended by USAID through the end of March 2010 (USAID Liberia, 2010: 8). During this period, project staff and consultants continued to support the pre-service C-Certificate programs at Kakata and Zorzor RTTIs. This involved organizing capacity building workshops on teaching methods, student assessment, and supervision of student field experiences for RTTI staff, as well as providing female students in cohort 2 (2009–10) with “girls’ assistance packages.”

During the extension period, LTTP I staff and consultants also continued to implement the in-service C-Certificate program. This entailed distributing to cohort three participants, who had completed their initial residential phase in September 2009, “the basic package of supplemental teaching supplies” as well as “a seven-part set of Self-Access materials to support the development of their English and math skills through the school year” (AED, 2009: 4). In addition, LTTP organized the series of six cluster trainings as well as conducted periodic supervisory guidance and support visits to participants’ schools. LTTP I staff and consultants also organized “a week-long workshop with the MoE and NGO partners to provide a full orientation on the C-Certificate curriculum, training model, materials, methods, assessment tools, and [training of trainers] program” (AED, 2009: 4).

Another thrust of activities by LTTP I during the extension period involved technical assistance to the MoE to:

Conduct a payroll audit to verify the number of filled teaching posts and the qualifications of the teachers in those posts, map teacher distribution by school, and link this information to the Ministry of Finance payroll system. ... [T]he audit [was to] provide a mechanism for the Ministry to create new positions and to place newly certified, high quality graduates from the RTTIs ... into schools, thus bolstering its plan to upgrade the qualifications and quality of the teaching force. (AED, 2009: 6)<sup>41</sup>

## ***Transitioning to LTTP II (2010)***

During the period of the LTTP I extension, USAID Liberia released its request for applications for a cooperative agreement with EQUIP2 to undertake LTTP II. The results to be achieved through LTTP II were “intended to expand and improve teacher training activi-

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41. As noted in the extension proposal, since the end of the civil war in 2003, there had been “two prior attempts ... to conduct a teacher audit. The most recent, conducted in early 2008, failed due to the combined lack of expertise in designing a methodology for data validation and insufficient funding to support survey visits to all public schools. Auditors were forced to rely on county and/or district records which were often out of date and inaccurate” (AED, 2009: 7).

ties, but also to address underlying institutional, policy and system weaknesses that impact Liberia's capacity to deliver a professional development program for Liberia's educators" (USAID Liberia, 2010: 11). In addition to "increasing teacher effectiveness" and "extending access to women and girls," the request for applications included a new objective for LTTP: "fostering [children's] effective reading and math skills"<sup>42</sup> (USAID Liberia, 2010: 11) in nine of Liberia's fifteen counties.<sup>43</sup>

One institutional weakness of the MoE was in the area of educational statistics, notably the lack of a robust Education Management Information System (EMIS). Thus, the request for applications specifies that LTTP II would "assist the MOE in establishing a robust, but very user-friendly EMIS and Integrated Information System, and build capacity to gather, analyze and use data to inform decision making, forecasting, and planning and policy development" (USAID Liberia, 2010: 13).<sup>44</sup>

Recognizing the continuing challenges Liberia faced even seven years after the end of the civil war, USAID Liberia included an additional provision in the planned cooperative agreement for LTTP II. This required "the Recipient to manage and implement a Rapid Response Fund (RRF) of U.S.\$500,000. This RRF [was designed to] allow [LTTP] to quickly and efficiently respond to requests from the USG [United States Government] and the Liberian government and its institutions, local partners and civil society in direct support of the interventions and the achievement of the Cooperative Agreement objectives" (USAID Liberia, 2010: 26). This funding was in addition to funding through LTTP II "for no less than 28 months of RTTI operational support (... approximately U.S.\$130,000/month) ... [for] food and fuel supplies" (USAID Liberia, 2010: 39).

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42. Component 4 of LTTP II focused on "effective language and literacy acquisition and student learning." In a sense, USAID Liberia had fused this component onto what had previously been LTTP I by incorporating the activity undertaken as a pilot project, Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) Plus-Liberia, implemented by RTI International (see Davidson and Hobbs, 2013). This fusion of the two projects also shaped the restructuring of the partnering organizations identified to implement LTTP II: AED and RTI International.

43. However, "towards the end of year one, USAID decided to reduce and focus project activities in five counties comprising the Development Corridor counties of: Bong, Nimba, Lofa, Margi and Montserrado" (AED and RTI International, 2011: 2).

44. During an interview Johnson Odharo stated that "although EMIS work was originally to involve a minor modification, subsequently the MoE asked for a fully blown EMIS, but initially USAID [was] not willing to fund this" (Interview, Johnson Odharo, 11/16/2010). Subsequently, building on prior efforts and equipment provided by the European Commission, LTTP II worked with the MoE to conduct annual school censuses and publish educational statistics bulletins in 2012 and 2013 that incorporated key information on increasing proportions of government and then also nongovernment primary and secondary schools (RoL/MoE, 2012; RoL/MoE, 2013).

In its application to implement LTTP II, the EQUIP<sub>2</sub> consortium—now represented by AED and a new collaborator (RTI International)—highlighted partnerships with the MoE as being vital to sustainability: “Partnerships with the MOE are critically important to the sustainability of an evolving professional development system. To ensure sustainability, LTTP II will work with the MOE to establish and support joint working groups specifically dedicated to the design and development of the activities implemented” (AED and RTI International, 2010: 15). More specifically, in addition to continuing to support the pre-service and in-service C-Certificate teacher education program, the LTTP II application stated:

LTTP II will focus on concrete actions and materials that make a difference in the classroom. ... LTTP II will also expand and adapt the teacher management system to improve conditions of employment; reduce corruption and loss; highlight/reward effective teachers, directors, and schools; ... ensure that salaries are paid regularly and promptly, and only to existing teachers; clarify the promotion system and career ladder, tied directly to improved qualifications, training, and performance; address the conditions of employment at the school level by identifying and addressing major concerns; and establish an effective base of accurate data to inform decisions on teachers and schools. (AED and RTI International, 2010: 5–6)

According to Johnson Odharo, who became chief of party under LTTP I and continued in this role during the initial period of LTTP II, the new program “started with a design workshop for all stakeholders in July 2010 ... [in order] to promote ownership by and credibility of the ministry. Next, efforts were devoted to getting the MoE to agree to nationwide participation to discuss a revision of the Education Law” (Interview, Johnson Odharo, 11/16/2010).<sup>45</sup> Thus, in collaboration with the European Commission Support to Education in Liberia (ECSEL) project and UNICEF, the LTTP supported the MoE to organize “the first post-war National Consultative Conference attended by 395 registered delegates and participants” (AED and RTI International, 2011: 4).

The LTTP quarterly report for the October–December 2010 period (AED, 2011: 2–3) identified the following accomplishments since the beginning of LTTP II:

- ▶ Assisted the MoE Bureau of Teacher Education to create a structure for cross-donor coordination in planning and implementing aspects of the teacher training program.
- ▶ Facilitated the planning of a National Consultative Conference.

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45. Indeed, on August 8, 2011, the President of Liberia signed the Education Reform Act of 2011 (RoL, 2011), which had been developed by the Ministry of Education with technical assistance from the LTTP and passed by the House of Representatives and the Senate.



- ▶ Assisted the MoE Bureau of Teacher Education to re-open and enroll the first cohort of seventy-five students at the Webbo Rural Teacher Training Institute.<sup>46</sup>

## Possibilities and limitations of LTTP partnerships

Efforts to design and implement the LTTP involved a range of organizations that engaged in diverse partnership relations over time. Here we discuss four sets of partnership relations: a) USAID Mission and EQUIP2 consortium, b) Government of Liberia (notably, the Ministry of Education) and the LTTP implementation team, c) multiple international organizations implementing the LTTP, and d) the LTTP implementation team and other international governmental and nongovernmental organizations.

### ***USAID Mission-EQUIP2 consortium relations***

The USAID Mission in Liberia followed a strategy that had become commonplace for U.S. Government development assistance in education and other sectors. That is, rather than directly implementing activities or contracting with individual consultants to do so, USAID engaged one or more U.S.-based international NGOs to implement a program of activities. In the case of LTTP, the mission secured a cooperative agreement with the consortium of organizations implementing Educational Quality Improvement Program 2, one of three USAID globally-funded “leader with associate award” mechanisms.<sup>47</sup> EQUIP2 along with the other two EQUIP consortia had in 2003 succeeded, through a competitive process, in positioning themselves to negotiate project work with USAID missions.

Thus, when USAID Liberia decided to fund LTTP, the mission directly contacted AED, which was the lead of the 14 organizations that comprised the EQUIP2 consortium. This enabled the mission to begin negotiations with an AED-led group of organizations and facilitated the two-phase design of LTTP I: assessment and work planning (2006–07) and implementation (2007–09). This also made it relatively easy to work out arrangements for the six-month extension phase of LTTP I (2009–10).

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46. In order to implement the pre-service program at Webbo, it was necessary to undertake further renovations and infrastructure improvements, an issue mentioned in the external mid-term evaluation for LTTP I (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2009: vi).

47. EQUIP2 focused on “policy, systems, and management,” EQUIP1 on “classrooms, schools, and community” and EQUIP3 on “out-of-school youth, learning, and earning” (for further details, see [www.equip123.net](http://www.equip123.net)).

From the perspectives of AED employees who were involved in various roles in LTTP I, the USAID Mission was a very good partner. First, the mission was involved in key national events (teacher standards, C-Certificate curriculum, etc.), reinforcing the LTTP team’s efforts as well as offering its own insights and suggestions. Second, the mission was open to renegotiate the results expected and activities planned, as the context created unanticipated challenges. Third, USAID Liberia at various points during LTTP I agreed (with the MoE and LTTP staff) to contribute funds beyond what had originally been specified in the cooperative agreement.

For example, “when the Liberian government faced financial crisis and could not contribute to agreed-upon activities, the USAID Mission found new money to support the project” (Interview, Mark Sweikhart, 10/8/2010; confirmed in interviews with Brenda Arrington, 10/5/2010 and Johnson Odharo, 11/5/2010). For example, in July 2009, USAID Liberia agreed to pay for food and fuel to keep the RTTIs operating, although the MoE and Liberian Government had agreed to take on this financial obligation. The mission also projected that it would continue to provide extraordinary support to the RTTIs’ operational budget during LTTP II, as noted in its request for applications: “Due to the global economic crisis and MOE budget shortfalls, USAID, through this Cooperative Agreement, shall provide a contemplated 28 months of operational support for the RTTIs” (USAID Liberia, 2010: 18).<sup>48</sup>

### ***Government of Liberia (MoE) and the LTTP implementation team***

USAID Liberia engaged in various negotiations before, during and after LTTP I, some aspects of which were referred to in the previous section. However, here we focus on the partnership relations between the Liberian Government (MoE) and the LTTP implementing team. This set of relations was also relatively positive and smoothly functioning (Interview, Brenda Arrington, 10/5/2010), though—as is the case in other kinds of partnership (Ginsburg, 2012b)—the partners were not exactly equal in terms of technical and financial contributions. As discussed in the LTTP I final report (AED, 2010: 60–62):

- ▶ The MOE [was] still at its early development stages and change has been slower than expected.
- ▶ The continued high MOE senior level staff turnover and lack of systems for policy and systems documentation resulted in a limited MOE institutional memory.

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48. However, we should clarify that USAID at times made funding conditional upon MoE actions. For example, in early 2010, USAID “threatened to freeze project funds if the MoE did not take action on ‘ghost’ teachers (i.e., deleting them from payroll)” (Interview, Johnson Odharo, 11/16/2010).

- ▶ [Education officers'] school support systems were lacking to fully ensure local accountability, conformity with MOE policy, and proper monitoring and support of schools and communities.
- ▶ Lack of both clarity in the job descriptions and [education officers'] capacity to effectively assume their roles restricted their abilities to serve the larger goal of improving educational quality.
- ▶ The logjam on payroll issues slowed rapid movement of trained teachers, trainers and staff onto payroll and this served as a deterrent to in-service teacher trainees and prospective trainees.
- ▶ Budget shortfall crisis within the government meant the ministry had to retract on commitments originally made that would have led to more MOE-operated, sustainable teacher education systems.
- ▶ Financial problems at the RTTIs, related to operations, food, salary payment, as well as occasional trainee/trainer strikes [created problems].

Additionally, the authors of the LTTP I Midterm Evaluation commented that there was lack of clarity about the MoE's "responsibilities with regard to teacher training. The lack of clear assignment of responsibilities, chain of command and empowerment of MoE personnel to make decisions based on an agreed upon work plan impeded progress in the implementation of training activities" (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2009: viii).

Nevertheless, there was evidence of the MoE contributing as a real partner in LTTP activities. For example, while LTTP staff and consultants provided technical assistance and sometimes took the lead in facilitating workshops, Liberian educators (MoE officials, university faculty, RTTI instructors, and school-level personnel) assumed major responsibility for developing teacher standards and the (pre-service and in-service) C-Certificate teacher education curriculum (Interview, Mark Sweikhart, 10/18/2010). According to the LTTP I final report: "The national teacher standards development efforts proved that [educators and] students could be active contributors to the process ..., and that such development efforts ... benefit significantly from a concerted effort that provides both a significant infusion of technical knowledge as well as proper facilitation, guidance and support" (AED, 2010: 63).

### ***Multiple international organizations implementing the LTTP***

As noted previously, LTTP I was implemented by three organizations—Academy for Educational Development (AED), International Rescue Committee (IRC), and the Mississippi Consortium for International Development (MCID), while LTTP II was implemented by two organizations—AED and RTI International. As happens in other international development

projects (Ginsburg and Megahed, 2011), challenges arose in collaboration and coordination, leading to “stove-piping” of project components and activities.

For instance, in LTTP I, because IRC had a longer-term presence in Liberia than the other partnering organizations and because its approach to development work was different from the other implementing organizations, it was difficult to integrate the various components of the project. For example, IRC staff was not physically located with the rest of the project staff, which hampered on-going communication and created challenges for the project’s implementation and reporting functions. Furthermore, IRC staff tended to view their role as delivering services rather than providing technical assistance or building capacity of Liberian education personnel. Thus, the IRC-led in-service program was mainly delivered by IRC staff (with limited design and implementation roles for MoE personnel), while AED and MCID staff provided technical assistance to and training for RTTI personnel, who increasingly assumed responsibility for implementing the pre-service program.

Interestingly, in the initial period of implementation of LTTP II the in-service program and pre-service programs continued to operate in a relatively isolated fashion, and the added area involving teacher capacity building (the Reading First + Math component) also functioned in a relatively “stove-piped” fashion, with its activities not being really integrated with those of other parts of the program (Averill *et al.*, 2012).

### ***The LTTP implementing team and other international organizations***

LTTP was structured as a project funded by one bilateral organization (USAID) and implemented by a consortium of U.S.-based international NGOs. This “projectized” approach reflected what up until recently had been the U.S. government’s approach to international development in education and other sectors. According to Schmidt (2009: 65), “USAID in general [did] not channel funds through common or pooled funds but work[ed] in support of an education SWAp [Sector Wide Approach]. USAID maintain[ed] its bilateral dialogue with the MoE outside of the sector coordination structures ... while also [being] ... an actively engaged partner in sector coordination efforts ....”

Indeed, it was not until 2011 that USAID’s strategy incorporated multi-donor pooled fund arrangements as a possibility (USAID, 2011b). This strategy reflected a change in USAID’s operational strategy, termed “USAID Forward,” which enabled awards to be made to “public international organizations [PIOs] ... where a significant development purpose is met by granting the PIO greater autonomy with funds, such as in multi-donor pooled funding arrangements” (USAID, 2011a: 8). The new USAID Strategy thus emphasizes partnerships, but clarifies that “partnerships must be focused on Agency and country priorities, have clear goals, and ... be outcome driven” (USAID, 2011b: 13). And, as RESULTS Education Fund (2013: 13) concludes, based on an assessment conducted two years into the implementation of the new strategy, “even where it is involved in pooled funds arrangements, USAID

is often reluctant to channel funds through them, treating them more as education donor groups than capacity building mechanisms.”

Nevertheless, USAID Liberia designed LTTP based on its discussions with and analysis of the efforts of various international organizations, including the European Commission, UNDP, UNESCO and UNICEF. Moreover, LTTP was designed to operate in relation to other international organization interventions in support of the MoE. This was evident from the initial assessment phase of the LTTP, which witnessed a joint UNESCO / LTTP-organized stakeholder meeting to discuss issues related to Liberian educational policy. Another indication was that the LTTP assessment activities included the review of reports on donor studies and other activities.

Furthermore, major initiatives undertaken during LTTP I’s initial implementation phase—developing teacher standards and refining and extending the C-Certificate teacher education curriculum—involved participation by international intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, including the Norwegian Refugee Council, Open Society, Save the Children–UK, UNDP, and UNESCO. And the C-Certificate curriculum was built on the earlier work undertaken by UNICEF and various NGOs during 2000–04.

As discussed, LTTP I devoted considerable human and financial resources to re-establishing the RTTIs, which became the sites for the residential phases of both the pre-service and in-service C-Certificate teacher education programs. However, this work depended on the rehabilitation of the physical facilities of the three RTTIs—work that was undertaken by Development Associates International and UNHCR. This meant that some LTTP activities had to be delayed or moved to a different site when completion of the reconstruction work was delayed.

During LTTP II, project staff continued to partner with other organizations. For example, the MoE, with support and participation from the LTTP and USAID as well as the European Commission and UNICEF, organized the consultative conference convened in 2010 to begin discussions about reforming the overarching education law.

Finally, LTTP II’s work with the MoE in refining and institutionalizing the EMIS was not done in isolation from other organizations. This effort built on the 2008/09 *National School Census* report, which had been undertaken by the MoE with European Commission and UNESCO technical assistance (RoL/MoE, 2010). The LTTP and the MoE also made use of computers and other equipment that had been purchased under the ECSEL project.

## Conclusion

The story of the different phases of the LTTP between 2006 and 2010 illustrates how the bilateral organization funding the program (USAID Liberia) and the international NGOs implementing the program (AED/FHI 360, IRC, MCID and RTI International) engaged in

diverse forms and degrees of partnership with each other, with the MoE and other Liberian education personnel, and with a range of international organizations. Despite USAID's strategy to pursue separate projects, rather than participating, for example, in the Liberia Education Pooled Fund, the USAID-funded Liberian Teacher Training Program provided opportunities for partnering in efforts to re-establish and further develop teacher education and other aspects of the education sector in the aftermath of Liberia's civil wars.

The partnership between USAID and the Government of Liberia (Ministry of Education) was based on a formal bilateral intergovernmental agreement. Other partnerships were contractual (e.g., AED with IRC, MCID, and RTI International as well as these organizations in relation to USAID Liberia). Still other partnerships were less formal, but were pursued for purposes of general coordination of activities or collaboration in undertaking specific initiatives or organizing particular events. While there were challenges involved in creating and sustaining the various partnerships, they provided opportunities to enhance the impact of efforts to promote educational reconstruction and development in Liberia.

# Selection, procurement, and distribution of textbooks and teachers' guides

*Keith Burchell*

## Context

As one of a number of education development partners working with the Ministry of Education (MoE), Republic of Liberia (RoL), the European Commission had agreed to a program of support to the education system in Liberia. One of the interventions in that program was an agreement to finance the procurement of textbooks in the ratio of four pupils per textbook for public (government and community) primary schools in Liberia.<sup>49</sup> The country's mission schools and private schools were not to be included in this intervention.<sup>50</sup>

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49. The pupil to textbook ratio was 27:1, 20:1, and 15:1 in Liberia's public schools, private, and mission schools, respectively (RoL/MoE, 2007b).

50. The total number of primary schools in Liberia was 3,852, of which 33 percent were private or mission schools. The total enrolment in public (including community) primary schools was 597,316. The total enrolment for private and mission schools was 297,000 (RoL/MoE, 2007a).

From the outset, the procurement was seen as a Quick Impact Activity within the wider European Commission Support to Education in Liberia (ECSEL) program, as opposed to being a separate program. It envisaged the reprinting of the textbooks and their subsequent distribution within Liberia. ECSEL funding would fall outside the projected formation of the Education Pooled Fund (EPF). At my first meeting with the European Commission Liberia Program Manager, I was advised that it was his intention to request that UNICEF undertake the distribution of the textbooks, once printed, to the county/district education offices. This decision had been taken before it was appreciated that publishers held the publishing rights to the textbooks.

Over the years the MoE had been authorizing the reprinting of textbooks; consequently, it had been assumed that the MoE owned the copyright to the textbooks listed in the MoE's *List of Approved Textbooks 2006–2010* for use in Liberian Primary Schools.<sup>51</sup>

The European Commission engaged me as the consultant to support the MoE on the textbook distribution project. I arrived in Monrovia in August 2007 and quickly established that several UK publishers owned the publishing rights to the MoE's officially approved textbooks.<sup>52</sup> It was considered unlikely that the publishers would sanction the printing of textbooks for which they held the publishing rights; they were known to be concerned about the poor quality of the unauthorized reprints in use in Liberian schools, which still bore the names of their respective publishers.

With the publishing rights being owned by commercial publishers, a competitive tender for the printing of the textbooks was not feasible. It was some months later that it became clear that UNICEF could not handle the distribution of materials for which a competitive print tender was not possible.

During a visit by a World Bank Education Mission in September 2007, the relevance of the content of the MoE's approved books was questioned, given that the textbooks had originally been published in 1980 and revised in 1997. As the MoE was unable to give any assurances on the relevance of the content of the textbooks, the textbook project partners decided to review and critically evaluate the approved textbooks along with others being used in West African Examinations Council countries in the region.<sup>53</sup> The Bureau for Curriculum Development and Textbook Research of the MoE was mandated to undertake the textbook review. At this point, all parties recognized that the textbook procurement had ceased to be a Quick Impact Activity.

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51. Subjects covered by the textbooks were mathematics, science, language arts, and social studies.

52. The publishers were Evans Brothers, Macmillan, and Longman/Pearson Education.

53. The Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone.



## Textbook evaluation

The project partners convened a textbook review and evaluation workshop. The evaluators would be subject specialists from within the Liberian education sector, nominated by the MoE. The critical evaluation and selection of textbooks was a new task for the bureau, so staff were provided with a copy of the *Instruction and Information Booklet for the Submission of Textbooks for Evaluation and Recommendation to the Ministry of Education* (Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago/MoE, Textbook Evaluation Committee, 2005) to inform them on how they might approach the process.

In addition, the bureau was given a document entitled *Objective Evaluation and Selection of Textbooks* (Burchell, 2007b). This document set out the rationale, processes, and mechanisms for selecting and approving textbooks to ensure the process would be transparent, fair, cost-effective, and conducted in a realistic time-frame. A *Model for a Textbook Evaluation System* (Burchell, 2007a) was also provided. The total number of series, per subject, evaluated was: mathematics (14), science (9), language arts (12), and social studies (7).

The recommendations of the Evaluation Workshop evaluators, submitted to the MoE Executive Management Team, were approved and constituted the MoE's List of Approved Textbooks for use in the primary schools of Liberia. Among the conclusions of the Evaluation Subject Groups were recommendations that three of the textbook series selected (i.e., three of the then current Liberian series) required a teacher's guide to be written for each grade. The existing Liberian science series was rejected and a series from Zambia for Grades 1–3, pupil and teacher guides, and a series from Ghana for Grades 4–6, pupil and teacher guides, were selected. In addition, the Liberian social studies series was considered too narrow (too Liberian-centric). The social studies subject group recommended that the Sierra Leone social studies series also be adopted, as it covered issues lacking in the existing Liberian social studies series. Book 6 in the Liberian English series failed the evaluation and was replaced by Sierra Leone Primary English: Grade 6, pupil and teacher guides. The Evaluation Subject Groups also concluded that all the textbook series selected covered the Liberian curriculum and that further editorial changes were unnecessary.

Around the time of the Evaluation Workshop it emerged that the curriculum used for evaluating the textbooks had been revised / written to fit the textbooks on the MoE's previous list of approved textbooks. The concept that the curriculum should be the driver of the content of textbooks was alien to the Curriculum Department's management team at that time. It soon became evident that the MoE's Curriculum Department did not possess the capacity, knowledge or skills to revise the curriculum and that little progress on produ-

cing an acceptable new curriculum would be made until such time as external/international curriculum experts were brought in to work with the Curriculum Department.<sup>54</sup>

No further progress on the procurement of the textbooks was made until Open Society requested my return to Liberia in July 2008.

## Budget for textbooks procurement

Under the European Commission proposals, a pupil to textbook ratio of 4:1 had been envisaged. In August 2008, with the knowledge that the EPF was being put in place, its management committee agreed that the EPF should procure textbooks in sufficient quantities to achieve a pupil to textbook ratio of 2:1 at a cost of U.S.\$5.4 million.<sup>55</sup> The budget included U.S.\$298,000 for distribution and U.S.\$243,000 for contingencies. No financial provision was made for a communications strategy (i.e., public relations, communications or publicity) or the holding of training workshops. As the printing of the textbooks was beginning, Open Society provided a budget of U.S.\$9,000 to fund the making of a short radio series highlighting aspects of the distribution for airing on local community radio stations.

## Procurement of the textbooks

The Procurement Department within the MoE had no expertise in international textbook procurement. Traditionally, the MoE procured books as if they were just another commodity, without any appreciation that each title is a separate product; that each title may have a different publisher (manufacturer); and that where the printing of bulk quantities of textbooks is required, precise production specifications must be provided. For the printing of textbooks, these specifications might include: weight of paper; size of type face; typeface to be used; number of colours to be used; weight of the board cover; type of finish to the outer cover; type of binding. That the foregoing components or other appropriate components should be specified and included in any tender specification was a revelation to the Procu-

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54. Curriculum departments that I have observed in two recent post-conflict countries lacked the capacity to manage the development of a new or revised curriculum appropriate for the needs of their respective ministries and designed to take the delivery of education forward.

55. The total number of textbooks and teacher guides ordered were 642,000 and 87,000 respectively for distribution to 2,841 schools.

rement Department and the Curriculum Department, to whom the former turned to for advice on all matters relating to books.

In view of the fact that all the textbooks and teacher guides<sup>56</sup> were published by commercial publishers, invitations to quote were sent to the respective publishers. Specifics covered in the invitations to quote included:

- ▶ The offer prices had to be based on fixed non-negotiable discounts off the submitted tendered price according to the quantity ordered.
- ▶ Each publisher was required to confirm they held the publishing rights to the title(s) being procured. This necessitated provision of a statement of copyright ownership or ownership of the publication rights for the materials to be procured, plus a statement indemnifying the MoE against any claim for breach of copyright.
- ▶ When submitting their tender/bid prices, publishers had to indicate the time frames for the various components (e.g., editorial, printing, pre-shipment inspection, shipping, etc.) with their best estimate for when the textbooks would arrive in Monrovia docks following receipt of a confirmed order. This request was merely for information and to facilitate planning and was not material to the acceptance of a tender offer.
- ▶ Clear instructions on how the books were to be palletized for delivery to Monrovia.

The Procurement Department of the MoE sent invitations to quote to the respective publishers in September 2008. The resulting contract awards (orders) were emailed to the publishers for signature.<sup>57</sup> The contracted publishers were required to provide the MoE with a performance guarantee; in return they received a 25 percent advance payment;<sup>58</sup> the balance to be paid on delivery of the books to Monrovia port.

As all the textbooks and teachers guides ordered were non-stock items, they had to be reprinted and shipped to Liberia. Some publishers printed in Malaysia, others in China (Hong Kong). The publishers were responsible for shipping their books to Monrovia port. Thereafter, the MoE was responsible for clearing the books through the port and onward transportation to the distribution warehouse(s). The shipments from the publishers arrived at different times over a period of approximately three months.

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56. Some teacher guides had to be specifically written by the publisher of the textbook.

57. Unit prices per subject ranged as follows: Mathematics—Pupils: U.S.\$4.19–U.S.\$5.35 Teachers: U.S.\$2.62; Language Arts—Pupils: U.S.\$1.81–U.S.\$3.42 Teachers: U.S.\$4.36–U.S.\$6.31; Science—Pupils: U.S.\$1.46–U.S.\$5.77 Teachers: U.S.\$0.67–U.S.\$2.63; Social Studies—Pupils: U.S.\$4.00–U.S.\$5.61 Teachers: U.S.\$2.60

58. The Education Pooled Fund made the payments.

In common with a number of East and West African ports, there were ominous reports of potentially costly delays in clearing containers through Monrovia port. With the support of the minister of education, the Ministry of Finance granted advance tax exemption for the textbook procurement exercise. To further minimize potential delays, the publishers were requested to send electronic copies of their shipping documents and invoices. The Procurement Department coordinated the preparation of the paperwork in readiness for the arrival of each shipment. The pre-clearance procedures necessitated having the shipping documents approved by the Ministry of Finance; without the relevant stamps on the paperwork, clearance of the containers would have been delayed. To ensure the requisite signatures and stamps were in place entailed the Procurement Department having a member of staff hand-carry the paperwork around the Ministry of Finance. To maintain the momentum, as project consultant, I was obliged to adopt a hands-on approach toward liaison with the Procurement Department and its officers.

## Education Management Information System (EMIS)

The MoE's EMIS database obtained its raw data from the MoE's annual school census. Each year the department distributed census forms, which were mostly hand-carried by staff trained in data collection. For the book procurement, consolidation and distribution, the relevant data taken from EMIS were the names of the schools, the school number by district and county, and the total enrolment for each grade—the split between boys and girls was not relevant to the procurement. The total enrolment for each grade in each school was halved to determine a pupil to textbook ratio of 2:1. The aggregate of these figures determined the total number of copies of each title that would be required to ensure each school received sufficient quantities of the textbooks. Inevitably, with any EMIS-based data there is a time lag as the data can be as much as twelve months out of date. Consequently, the data can only ever be a best estimate, even if the figures are inflated to allow for projected increases in enrolment. School enrolments can be influenced by many factors, including the rate of refugee repatriation, the impact upon parents of textbooks arriving in schools, population shift from rural communities to urban or peri-urban communities. As in any country, the data collated in the EMIS database was only as good as the information collected and the accuracy of returns submitted and was, unfortunately, open to abuse and manipulation. Examples of the latter situations included inflated or under-reporting of enrolments, ghost schools, and private schools being classified as public schools.

## Consolidation—Pick ‘n’ Pack

Consideration was given to outsourcing both the consolidation and distribution processes. Unfortunately, at that time there were no commercial companies operating in Monrovia with the relevant resources or expertise to handle a distribution of the magnitude demanded for the textbooks. During the investigatory period, the challenges became clearer when it emerged there were parts of the country to which even the Coca Cola Company did not distribute—often a good indicator of the effectiveness of the distribution network in a post-conflict environment.

Ultimately, it was concluded that the MoE would have to undertake the consolidation and distribution. The first challenge to be overcome was to find a secure warehouse in which to store the textbooks once they had been cleared through Monrovia port. In addition, this warehouse had to be large enough to have space in which to carry out the pick ‘n’ pack or consolidation of the textbooks into individual school lots. The project team estimated that a warehouse with 20,000 square feet of floor space on one level would be required. A warehouse meeting the required specifications was not available in Monrovia at that time.

The best that could be found was a warehouse with vacant possession and 9,600 square feet of floor space on two levels, one of which was a mezzanine. In its favor was the fact that it had a loading deck enabling containers to be off-loaded straight into the warehouse. There was also a ramp providing access for forklifts to the warehouse deck. The building was secure, had large access doors, was located in a big compound off the main highway between downtown Monrovia and Paynesville in Congo Town and had plenty of space in which to store any spare sea containers. The mezzanine was set sufficiently far back to allow a forklift to be able to reach the first floor.

As a result of years of neglect, there was no electricity in the building, the toilets were non-functioning, and the outbuildings had been destroyed or lost their roofs. As the warehouse would only be used during daylight hours, the absence of electricity was considered to be a minor inconvenience. In common with most of Monrovia at that time, there was no running water so it had to be collected from a water point some 200 yards distant from the warehouse every day. The MoE made available some of its security personnel to provide 24-hour surveillance of the warehouse. A wooden shed was built for the security personnel to offer protection from the rain and the cold of the nights, and to provide a place for female staff to leave bags. No personal belongings were to be allowed into the warehouse.

Calculations of the number of pallets to be received indicated that a second warehouse was required. The MoE offered the use of one of its warehouses in Newport Street in downtown Monrovia, which was in walking distance of the ministry headquarters building. This building was far from ideal—it turned out to have a badly leaking roof, which was replaced

twice yet still leaked! The warehouse had been constructed on a swamp and it was very evident that during the rainy season the yard in which it was situated, which was unpaved, would become waterlogged. The minister of education agreed to make it a priority to have the yard completely surfaced with hard core and cemented over and to start work on a second warehouse in the yard without further delay.

The MoE's various warehouse staff, who came under the management of the Procurement Department, were considered unsuitable for the task ahead and the need to distribute within the dry season. Poor timekeeping, poor attendance, inflexible attitudes, and a refusal to work on Saturdays were some of the factors. With the agreement of the ministry, it was agreed that a team of two supervisors, two logisticians, and 18 high school graduates, students or recently qualified college graduates would be recruited to do the pick 'n' pack. Two teams of six, along with a logistician and a supervisor were allocated to the Congo Town warehouse and one team of six, a logistician and a supervisor were allocated to the Newport Street warehouse in Monrovia. The MoE selected and recruited the team members. All three teams performed well and by the end of the pick 'n' pack had bonded as a unit to such an extent that when the program ended they were able to offer their services to other book projects. The MoE provided each location with a janitor.<sup>59</sup>

Prior to the arrival of the first containers of books, all three teams were gathered at the Congo Town warehouse, where I trained them in the skills they would have to employ during the de-stuffing of the containers into the warehouse. At this stage, the emphasis was on the layout of the warehouse and the space allocated for each county; the use of the pallet trucks; the need to take stock of the pallets as they were received (i.e., count the number of cartons received); how the containers would be de-stuffed and by whom. The purpose of this training was to minimize the need for double handling. As will be shown below, the best laid plans can come unstuck! At a later date the teams were trained in how to pick 'n' pack the books, including checking each other's work; how to pack and label the cartons; and, how to stack cartons on pallets (so they would not fall over whenever a pallet was moved or lifted by a forklift).

The publishers had been instructed to palletize and label their books by subject, by grade and by county, based on figures for each county provided by the MoE. It was agreed that the pallets for a number of the counties would be relocated to the MoE's Newport Street warehouse.

The first publisher's containers arrived in Monrovia port during March 2009 and were cleared by the MoE's Procurement Department in about one week, which reflected well

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59. The prime role of the janitor was to fetch fresh water each day and maintain the cleanliness of the warehouse and facilities. It was later to emerge that one of the janitors had a reasonable working knowledge of Excel spreadsheets, which came in useful at a later date.

on the MoE's pre-clearance preparations. Thereafter, the MoE contracted a transport company to move the containers from the port to the Congo Town warehouse. On some occasions the containers were de-stuffed using the pallet trucks and moved into the warehouse. With the co-operation of the World Food Program, it was sometimes possible to have the use for two days at a time of one of their forklifts based in the port, to help with de-stuffing containers and moving pallets to the mezzanine in the Congo Town warehouse. All pallets with books destined for transfer to the Newport Street warehouse were stacked at the front of the warehouse. After three of the containers had been de-stuffed, the teams knew their roles. At that point I went on leave.

When I returned a month later, another seven containers had been unloaded into the warehouse, but the MoE had not used any of the staff trained in de-stuffing the containers. The MoE director, with all the contact names and phone numbers, had been permitted to go up-country on other business, and nobody else knew the names of the trained team or had their contact details! The result was utter chaos, with the contents of containers randomly placed anywhere within the Congo Town and Newport Street warehouses. It took a month to sort out both warehouses and return them to a state in which the pick 'n' pack could take place.

Given the harshness of the Liberian climate, the fact that some deliveries would be made during the rainy season and the books for some schools would have to be hand carried through tropical forest for several days or transported by canoe, and the ever present threat of termite infestation, all cartons were covered in industrial cling film prior to delivery.

The pick 'n' pack started during July 2009 and was completed, on schedule, in mid-December 2009. The pick 'n' pack was done on a county basis, starting with one district and completing all the schools in that district before moving on to the next one. The completed schools' books were loaded onto pallets by district, by county. Once all the schools in a county had been packed, the county's allocation of textbooks was ready for distribution.

## Distribution and delivery

The distribution process was the responsibility of the Curriculum Department of the MoE; it ran concurrently with the pick 'n' pack operation. The first deliveries commenced in October 2009. The MoE recruited a team of casual workers to load the truck(s) and drive consignments to a county. The MoE was responsible for the hire of the vehicles used to deliver and transport the consignment to each of the County Headquarters. On reaching the County Education Office the consignment was offloaded into a suitable store identified by the County Education Office.

Largely due to the MoE's poor record for making payments, the more reliable transport companies did not care for the business. So the transporters contracted to undertake the deliveries to the counties were often not the most reliable, which led to complications and delays, such as mechanical failures and breakdowns. Nevertheless, by the first quarter of 2010, all counties had received delivery of their books.

Once the books had arrived at each county education office, the project gave funds for district education officers to recruit a local team and hire a pickup to move the parcels of books to the various schools in each district of the county. This was the least satisfactory aspect of the distribution as it entailed handing out cash to the district education officers and consequently was open to abuse. As no rural branch bank network existed, no suitable alternative could be found at the time.

## Constraints

The scale and number of the challenges facing post-conflict countries in Sub-Saharan Africa are enormous. The Liberian textbook distribution initiative experienced some of those challenges.

### *Management*

Liberia is unique in West Africa, in that its government structures are based upon the U.S. model. The president appoints the minister, deputy ministers, and assistant ministers. The rationale behind some of the appointments is difficult for outsiders to fathom, as the choice may reflect the need for tribal balances, a rewarding of electoral support, pressure to find employment for people returning from the diaspora, or a perceived opportunity to capitalize on some background experience in education. All too rarely were people appointed who had a proven grounding in the education sector and, more telling, few had management experience at a high level. The turnover of ministers was high, which led to a loss of continuity. As each minister moved on they cleared their office and took all their files with them. The result was that the incoming appointee had to spend much time networking with colleagues in the ministry for copies of policy documents, background papers and reports, establishing the background to decisions taken, which they usually learned about in an unstructured manner.

The presidential policy of appointing executives to the ministry meant that the MoE rarely built up an experienced cadre of civil servants, capable of bringing continuity to the ministry. The civil service appointees started at level four within the ministry—various directors reporting to assistant ministers. The directors were rarely effectively supervised. Pro-



gress on projects and programs was painfully slow, partly owing to poor decision making but largely due to a lack of direction and management intervention from ministers.

The executive of the MoE comprised the minister, deputy ministers, and the finance directorate. While they made executive decisions, the executive never appeared to appreciate that if the ministry was ever to implement the policies being agreed with the education development partners, they had to manage the assistant ministers and the directors on a daily basis. Failure to monitor the performance of their staff was manifest in the number of occasions work would come to a total halt as somebody had hit a problem and needed guidance on what to do next. People did not seek help, so work was continually stalled until questions were asked. At that time, skills such as lateral thinking, problem solving, and looking for alternative solutions were not evident. Many of the staff within the MoE were capable of performing to a higher standard, but lacked the motivation and mentoring to realize their potential and capabilities.

The assistant minister for curriculum and his staff worked in a vacuum. Other than at ministerial level, with one or two notable exceptions, few MoE staff interacted with their peers in the other education systems of West Africa. As a result, they had little exposure to or day-to-day experience with developments occurring in their field within the region, let alone in the education sector in other parts of the world. It was evident that the donors should not have expected the MoE to undertake the revision of the curriculum without the assistance of external technical expertise. UNESCO had provided assistance to the Curriculum Department for the first attempted revision of the curriculum; however, international experts who reviewed it generally considered the final outcome unsatisfactory. The general consensus at the time was that a completely new curriculum was required, which would ultimately be used to introduce, using international procurement guidelines, new textbooks capable of delivering the latest version of the revised/new curriculum.

The MoE was supposed to provide me with a counterpart; however, after spending the best part of two and half years in country, I left without a counterpart ever being named or assigned. As a result, the ministry lost an excellent opportunity to have somebody trained and gain hands-on experience in many aspects of textbook policies, procurement, and distribution.

## ***Climate***

While the climate in Liberia is not as harsh as some parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, the long rains (wet season) from April/May through October/November mean that travel outside of many of the urban centers is a challenge. The dry season fits uncomfortably with the academic year. The latter follows the calendar year with the long school holiday falling over the Christmas/New Year period. It will take careful planning and a lot of management if, in the

future, replacement textbooks are to be in schools for the beginning of each academic year. It is more likely that textbooks will be delivered during the first session of the academic year when the roads are passable and schools accessible. That has implications for the effective learning of the pupils.

## ***Infrastructure***

Over the period of the textbook distribution, the country's infrastructure was essentially broken. Within the MoE headquarters, staff was located on floors five to eight of an office building that had seen no investment since before the war. The lifts did not work, there was no running water, and electricity was provided by a generator. For a period of at least three months the building had no electricity—either the generator was broken or the ministry did not have the funds to purchase fuel. As a result, during such periods the staff was unable to access information and work on their computers.

The road network within the country had suffered from years of neglect. The war years only served to exacerbate the state and conditions of the roads.

While an electricity grid system was being put in place across the country, most of Monrovia (at that time) and the rest of the country had no mains electricity.

## ***Finance***

During the period under consideration, the MoE's finances were under constant pressure. These pressures would manifest themselves in a lack of fuel to run the generator, resulting in no electricity; staff being paid late, resulting in de-motivated staff; and a reluctance of companies and contractors to engage with the Ministry owing to its poor payment record. It was largely thanks to the existence of the EPF that the textbook distribution program was able to negotiate with contractors on the basis that payment for their services was secure—payment would (effectively) be made directly to them by the EPF and not by the MoE.

## ***Corruption***

Corruption was endemic in Liberia and affected all strata of Liberian society. The MoE was no exception. One early piece of advice I received from a middle ranking officer in the MoE was “never trust anybody and plan for every eventuality.” Regrettably, it proved to be extremely sound advice. One of the advantages of the EPF was that all payments were approved by the MoE, authorized by the Ministry of Finance, with payments going straight to the payee.

One of the consequences of designing all the policies and procedures surrounding the textbook procurement and distribution with strict controls and procedures was that it was very hard to find officers within the MoE prepared to work on the textbook program. This general reluctance of officers to commit themselves was, in large part, due to people

quickly realizing there would be little or no opportunity to “make anything on the side.” This was good for the development partners and implementation, but reduced opportunities for capacity building.

## **Language**

For many of the policymakers, decision takers, and policy implementers, English was not their first language.<sup>60</sup> While oral communication with MoE officials presented no challenges, low levels of literacy and limited access to internet made written communication quite difficult and added to the frustration of all parties. If an opinion or decision was required, it was best to leave a hard copy of the document at the MoE and call back later.

The best results in training were obtained when training was as visual and practical as possible. Many of the Liberians I worked with struggled to grasp concepts expressed orally in English; however, if they were shown visually what to do or what was expected of them, they were more than capable of grasping the concepts and doing the work required. This was particularly evident in the training given to the Pick n’ Pack teams. They had to be shown how to do each component, usually three times. Thereafter, their work just had to be supervised; further instruction was not required and the work was undertaken to a more than acceptable standard.

## **Training and sensitization of MoE officers in the counties**

For the textbook distribution to stand any chance of success, it was necessary to communicate with the county education officers to ensure a flow of information down to the counties and districts. A series of workshops was held in Monrovia for the county education officers. The purpose of the workshops was to inform the officers of the changes made to some of the textbook titles and to tell them about the target pupil to textbook ratios in the schools, when the distribution would take place, and the mechanics of the distribution.

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60. Across Liberia more than 30 indigenous languages are spoken, which can be broadly classified into Mel, Manding, Kru, and Gola. Standard Liberian English is the language of those people whose African American ancestors immigrated to Liberia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They and their descendants are frequently referred to as Americo-Liberians. Vernacular Liberian English (also known as Liberian Kreyol), the most common variety, has developed from Liberian Pidgin English (a version of West African Pidgin English) and has been influenced by Standard Liberian English (Singler, 1981; Singler and Kouwenberg, 2008).

The county education officers then had to return to their counties to meet with their district education officers and inform them of the details of the distribution. The district education officers were advised to inform the head teachers in the schools within their district about the forthcoming textbook distribution.

As previously mentioned, Open Society provided a budget of U.S.\$9,000 to pay for the making of a series of short radio programs to be aired by various community radio stations across Liberia.<sup>61</sup> For the most part the target audience was parents. The programs aimed at sensitizing parents about details of the textbook distribution and the care and handling of the textbooks.

### ***Instructional Materials Management Handbook and Textbook Policy***

To support the textbook distribution and to assist head teachers, school management committees and parent teacher associations (PTAs), the *Instructional Materials Management Handbook* (RoL/MoE and Burchell, 2008a) was written and supplied to every primary school.

Assistance was also provided to the Curriculum Department with the drafting of a *Textbook Policy* (RoL/MoE and Burchell, 2008b). The draft policy was reviewed by a team of experts from within the ministry and from the University of Liberia, Faculty of Education. The textbook policy was subsequently submitted to the MoE Executive Management Team, accepted and adopted as the MoE's official Textbook Policy.

## **Conclusions**

1. In Liberia and in South Sudan, pressure to make a quick impact led to insufficient attention being paid to the design of the textbook component of post-conflict education system reconstruction. The focus is on procurement; however, in a post-conflict situation distribution and storage facilities are a far greater challenge. Both components need to be adequately and realistically funded. In Liberia, I was not involved in the distribution element of the textbooks procurement and therefore did not have access to the actual distribution costs, but they were probably of the order of 9 to 10 percent of the overall procurement budget. In South Sudan, the cost of distribution

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61. In an equivalent textbook distribution implemented in South Sudan in 2013, the communications strategy had a budget of U.S.\$195,000, which included the cost of a communications consultant. The consultant's terms of reference included: liaising with the various radio networks, the print media, South Sudan Television and faith (Church) organizations, and keeping the State Ministries of Education informed.

down to school level in-country is likely to be three times the cost of printing and procuring the textbooks and transporting them to the consolidation center.<sup>62</sup> To avoid the repetition of similar weaknesses in project design, donor partners should involve a technical expert who has appropriate textbook project experience when designing textbook procurement and distribution projects with a view to ensuring the wider implications arising from textbook use are built into the project (or are at least considered).

2. The textbook project made no provision for the storage of the textbooks at school level. Away from the coastal strip, most schools are of flimsy construction—recycled tin sheeting or bamboo with tin or thatched roofs. Head teachers of such schools were most likely to opt for storing the textbooks in their houses.<sup>63</sup>
3. In the original plans for Liberia (and South Sudan) no provision was made in the procurement budgets for a fully-funded communications strategy. In a post-conflict situation, a communications strategy is essential in order to inform the decision makers, reach out to parents and communities, sensitize the education officers in the field as well as those at state and county levels, and ensure all stakeholders are kept informed on the project's progress. There will inevitably be a requirement to include a series of provincial workshops to sensitize education officers working in the field. One of the shortcomings of the textbook distribution program in Liberia was that all workshops were held in Monrovia, which weakened the impact of the textbook distribution at the county and district levels.
4. The arrival of and distribution of the textbooks may highlight more challenges than they resolve. One such challenge will almost certainly center on language. In Liberia, most people either spoke Liberian English (a form of pidgin English) or one of the many vernacular languages of the country. Yet the textbooks and teacher guides supplied were all written in English. The standard of teaching was low—few of the teachers had received more than one or two months of training since returning to their

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62. In South Sudan, the quantity of books procured was 9.26 million. Unit cost of printing—U.S.\$0.35; printing, delivery to Kampala and consolidation—U.S.\$0.51; complete cost for printing, transportation, consolidation and delivery at county and school levels—U.S.\$1.10; total cost of printing of books, delivery of storage containers to county education headquarters and delivery to schools in plastic boxes—U.S.\$1.28.

63. In South Sudan, an estimated 80 percent of the country's primary schools are classified as "under-tree schools." To counter this challenge and the harsh climate, books were delivered in plastic boxes with a sealable lid.

schools. Without any advance preparation, they were presented with pupils having their own textbooks; the textbooks are written to encourage child-centered learning and written in English. In Liberia, the MoE's efforts at in-service training were unlikely to make much of an impact on the thousands of teachers in need of training or coaching, leaving one to question whether more could and should have been done to help teachers make better use of the textbooks to provide a better education for the students.<sup>64</sup>

5. A further challenge is the understandable tendency for the Curriculum Departments of MoEs to stray into the field of textbook publishing, using the argument that there is a need for culturally sensitive textbooks or readers as justification. Against advice, the MoE in Liberia went ahead and spent scarce financial resources producing locally-authored readers for use in the schools. The results were books that were unsuitable in almost every respect. They were poorly edited, too long, used language inappropriate for the target age group, contained poor illustrations with no colour and were manufactured to low quality standards. In truth, there was no shortage of culturally sensitive readers available from commercial publishers who could have satisfied the MoE's immediate requirement. The extent to which a MoE should engage in publishing activities is debatable at the best of times, but a post-conflict situation is no place for even contemplating publishing activities because management resources and finances are limited and already over-stretched.
6. It is a sad fact but possibly inevitable in many post-conflict countries that the people who lead the country out of conflict are often not equipped to steer it along the route to reconstructing its broken economy, education system or infrastructures. They may lack the level of education needed, have limited management experience, and are often motivated by self-aggrandizement. Liberia was no exception. The pool of management within the ministry was shallow; many officers had limited manage-

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64. In South Sudan, DfID planned to distribute 9.2 million textbooks and a further 404,000 supplementary instructional materials into primary schools, most of which have never had textbooks to deliver the primary curriculum, and where the language of instruction has historically been Arabic, Juba Arabic or one of several indigenous languages. The Government of the Republic of South Sudan previously declared that English would be the language of instruction but at that time there was no means of reaching out to help retrain teachers. As occurred in Liberia, the emphasis has been on rebuilding teacher training facilities, without dealing with the here and now. The current level of in-service training is not adequate to retrain teachers or meet the need for teaching them English as a second language to help them move from teaching in their mother tongue.

ment experience before being elevated to senior roles within the ministry. Those in management positions within the ministry found it virtually impossible to implement most of the policies agreed with the development partners, principally because few understood the concept of supervisory management. The fact that the textbook component was delivered was largely due to the fact that the project was managed by a non-ministry person, who was able to call upon specific support from the relevant ministers as and when the occasion required.

7. One of the objectives of the textbook procurement in Liberia was to help build capacity within the MoE. In this the project failed, principally because the MoE was unable to find anybody willing to take on the task of shadowing me. This was probably due to the fact that the MoE had anticipated that one of the ministry's existing staff would have taken on the role. In any event, because the position was not remunerated no one was interested in making the commitment. It is possible that, had a development partner been prepared to fund the position for the duration of the project, a suitable candidate might have come forward or been identified. However, such funding would not have guaranteed that there would have been a permanent job for that person at the end of the project. Without a permanent job, the capacity development aspect would have been lost.
8. The post-distribution monitoring undertaken by Open Society of the MoE's effectiveness in the distribution process indicated that most schools received their textbooks. The pre-distribution training had produced mixed results, with some schools following recommended procedures and having some success in obtaining community/parental support for looking after the textbooks. In some schools it was apparent that parents and community members had not received the same level of training. Monitoring confirmed that insufficient resources had been devoted to training head teachers and reaching out to community elders and leaders.
9. Had there been time, it would have been preferable if the publishers had revised the content of each series to reflect societal changes that had occurred since the books were first published. It would also have been preferable if they had modernized the design, page layout, and illustrations of the textbooks. Despite their shortcomings, the books supplied will deliver the current Liberian primary curriculum and give teachers the tools to do so, particularly through the addition and supply of teacher guides for each grade.
10. A textbook to pupil ratio of 2:1 represented a significant improvement upon what had existed before the distribution, when the teacher may have possessed the only copy of the textbook in the school. Every effort was made by the MoE to ensure copies of the

textbooks reached schools in all parts of the country. In so doing, the MoE achieved the objective of the textbook distribution: to provide every primary pupil with access to textbooks that covered the four core subjects taught in Liberian primary schools.

11. Most of the publishers also made a commercial edition of the textbooks available for sale through approved booksellers so that parents wishing to purchase personal copies could do so. The commercial editions were also intended to meet the demand from private and church/mission schools.
12. Textbook distributions in post-conflict counties are high-profile activities that produce positive and demonstrable outcomes. For the most part, the challenges of post-conflict reconstruction can be ameliorated through detailed planning, tightly controlled management of the project/program from beginning to completion, and paying attention to lessons learned from previous textbook distributions, which may have taken place in better times.



# Building the foundations: early childhood development in Liberia

*Yukhiko Amnon and Tina Hyder*

## Introduction

Early Childhood Development (ECD) has, in recent years, gained recognition in many African countries as an important component of the human development agenda. This is illustrated by the fact that in 2010, across sub-Saharan Africa, only two countries had established policies for ECD, but by 2012, 23 out of 47 countries across the continent had adopted national policies (Neuman and Devercelli, 2012). International research findings continue to furnish evidence to support the importance of the early years in human growth and development. In addition, governments worldwide are paying attention, with increased vigor and enthusiasm, to the needs and rights of young children from conception to primary school. Interest in this sector is also shifting toward ensuring that children are not perceived as a homogenous group, but, instead, as diverse individuals with varied interests and needs that change according to the environments and contexts in which they are born and live.

This chapter will outline how the government of Liberia seized the opportunity to invest in integrated services for young children following the devastating impact of the civil war. In fact, it can be argued that there is an increasing national commitment to the rights of the youngest children in society, underpinning and arising from the development of a national integrated ECD policy. However, the chapter also outlines the need for renewed

pressure to prioritize ECD within wider international education and financing debates to ensure that this critical period of human development is recognized as an essential foundation for individual and national growth and development.

## The Liberian context

For years prior to the war, Liberia had provided education and health care services for young children, but without formal policies and implementation frameworks uniting the planning, financing, and delivery of provision. As in many countries, the concept of integrated and holistic services for children was not common during Liberia's pre-war period. The services that did exist in Liberia were in the form of pre-primary education and health care in hospitals and clinics. Although services for young children were by no means comprehensive, the 14-year war shattered the country's social and economic infrastructure, and destroyed even the limited health and education services that young children had previously enjoyed.

The situation today is that of an estimated population of almost 4 million people, more than 43 percent of Liberians are under the age of 14 and probably around 650,000 children are under the age of four (Central Intelligence Agency, 2013). This means that Liberia has a very young population with a growing need for services. Women tend to have children at an early age; 38 percent of all women under the age of 18 have had a child (RoL/Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, 2008). There are on average 4.92 children per family (RoL, 2010). Liberia's infant and under-5 mortality rates remain among the highest in the world, with more than 11 percent of children dying before reaching their fifth birthday (World Health Organization, 2011; UNICEF, 2013a). The main causes of death among infants and children are: diarrhea (18 percent), malaria (16 percent), pneumonia (14 percent), AIDS-related (3 percent), measles (2 percent) and injuries (1 percent), with other varied causes making up the remaining 16 percent of all deaths (RoL/Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, 2008). Maternal mortality also remains high, with about 770 deaths per 100,000 births, which makes Liberia the eighth most dangerous place in the world to give birth to a child (Central Intelligence Agency, 2013). Only 46 percent of all pregnant women receive skilled care during the delivery of their children (United Nations Population Fund, 2011). Also of serious concern is the fact that approximately 15 percent of all children in Liberia are underweight; up to 4 percent are wasted (low weight for height) and 42 percent are stunted (limited height for age) (RoL, 2010). Lack of nutritious food and essential micronutrients affects not only children's physical development but intellectual development as well, and has a long-term impact on children's ability to make the most of their education. When girls experience malnutrition, their growth failure is reproduced in their children. Therefore,

deficiencies in iodine, iron, and vitamin A have serious consequences for maternity, child-birth, and infant physical and mental health, and contribute to poor pregnancy outcomes. Maternal and child nutrition are inextricably linked, with maternal nutrition essential not only for the mother's own health but also for the well-being of her children (RoL/Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, 2008).

Coupled with these bleak statistics, the conflict left a profound legacy in the lives of young children and their families. Although not substantiated, it is anecdotally apparent that during and immediately after the conflict, teenagers, warlords, lone women, and rape victims formed significant numbers of Liberia's new parents. This has left many children with little or no care at all, in highly vulnerable situations. Acute cases of malnutrition, dysfunctional family care, poor health, and limited development outcomes were and remain common. What is striking is that many of today's parents were in fact children during the war and, consequently, probably did not receive the consistent care and nurturing, supported by effective public services, that enable children to thrive, grow, and acquire the necessary skills to parent their own children. It is this new generation of parents that the Government of Liberia particularly wanted to target with a renewed focus on ECD, according to a statement made in 2010 by Hester Catakaw, then deputy minister for instruction, Ministry of Education, during discussions about training for early childhood development.

## Global investment in ECD

There are inter-connected and compelling reasons for supporting greater investment in ECD. A rich scholarly research literature supports arguments for ECD, which include the role of ECD as a cost-effective public policy priority (Walker *et al.*, 2011; Heckman, 2013); as a means to reduce discrimination and inequality (Save the Children, 2012); as a means to mitigate the impact of conflict (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2010); and as a child's right (UN, 1989; UNICEF, 2013*b*). All the above arguments are supported by a growing body of scientific evidence from the field of neuroscience about the importance of the early years as a foundation for human development (Grantham-McGregor *et al.*, 2007; UNICEF, 2013*b*; National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2010).

Of particular relevance is the evidence about ECD as an essential foundation for later educational attainment. Absence of good early childhood experience can mean that children fail to reach their optimal developmental goals, resulting in an inability to thrive and learn once they reach primary school. Children who attend ECD programs are more likely to be ready for school and are also likely to be successful in the transition from primary to secondary education. ECD programs therefore not only promote child survival but can also

reduce drop-out and repetition rates in school. Investment at an early age is cost-effective for governments and beneficial for children and communities, as the costs of remedial interventions to ensure children complete their education later in life can be prohibitive. Beyond the United States, studies in other parts of the world reveal approximately a 9 percent increase in income for every year of school completed. The very same studies indicate that later educational attainment can be predicted on the basis of early childhood learning and development outcomes (World Bank, 2013a).

Participation in ECD services is growing globally, particularly in pre-primary education, but such participation is still limited and unequal in developing countries, especially for the most disadvantaged children. Sub-Saharan Africa and Arab states showed the lowest gross enrolment ratios, 18 percent and 21 percent respectively in some countries, with children from privileged backgrounds more likely to receive pre-primary provision than poor children (UNESCO, 2012).

However, greater investment in ECD is hampered by a series of challenges. The main challenge for implementing ECD programs is arguably lack of political will, with ECD being seen as an inessential luxury, when in fact the evidence suggests that the greatest gains can be made for the poorest populations through effective and targeted interventions. Other significant obstacles to the expansion of ECD services include limited country capacity (including central and local administration); and, in some cases, low demand for services. In addition, the quality of ECD services is often less than adequate. In many sub-Saharan countries, infrastructure, teaching-learning materials, and ECD curricula are of poor quality, are not well adapted to the needs of children, and lack a focus on active, play-based learning. Additionally, qualified teachers and educators are scarce.

The response of donors through mechanisms such as the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) has been to increase funding to “expand quality and sustainable [Early Childhood Care and Education] programs, which target the poorest. These funds help train educators, develop pedagogical materials and alternative and cost-effective models of [Early Childhood Care and Education] services” (GPE, 2013b).

GPE has also mobilized the political will of partners to expand ECD; 24 partners agreed to support ECD at the GPE replenishment conference in 2011 (GPE, 2013b). These commitments will create an enabling environment for children to begin learning at an early age.

Liberia exhibits many of the factors outlined above, so investment in expansion of services is not the central issue; the primary priority is the need to strengthen the systems (training and administration) that will deliver quality ECD services and increase political backing for greater investment in the system.

## Financing ECD in Liberia

The Education for All–Fast Track Initiative (EFA-FTI) was launched in 2002 as a global partnership to accelerate progress toward the Education for All (EFA) goal of universal completion of primary education for girls and boys by 2015. To support that goal, the Catalytic Fund was established in 2003 to provide transitional funding to low-income countries for up to three years. The principles of the Catalytic Fund were revised in 2007 to ensure more predictable and longer-term financial support to countries with endorsed education sector plans. It was under the auspices of the Fast Track Initiative that the Government of Liberia applied for funding to reconstruct the education system, within which early childhood development was eventually considered a key component.

In 2007, Liberia submitted a request to the EFA-FTI Partnership for acceptance and Catalytic Fund financing. Admission to the Partnership was granted but financing was denied. However, noting the significant needs of Liberia and the importance of the Liberia Primary Education Recovery Program (LPERP), the Partnership agreed to provide some transitional funding for Liberia to implement the program and address the issues identified by the Catalytic Fund Strategic Committee meeting. It was agreed that UNICEF, using a grant from the Government of the Netherlands, would provide the funding (U.S.\$12 million) which was pooled with financing from the Open Society Foundations (U.S.\$4.25 million) for a total of U.S.\$16.25 million. The Partnership also approved the use of the Education Program Development Fund (EPDF) to support capacity development and technical assistance to facilitate the preparation of a more comprehensive and longer-term sector plan.

A request to enhance capacity in ECD was also made to the EPDF. James Roberts, then deputy minister of planning, wrote to the EFA-FTI Secretariat in 2010 that:

... the Ministry of Education in Liberia has consistently prioritized development of its youngest citizens and momentum around ECD is building up in the country. Given the dire circumstances of children in Liberia, we believe it is important to leverage complementary World Bank and OSI sources of expertise and funding in order to build our capacity and significantly improve the situation of young children. We sincerely hope that Liberia can be included in the new World Bank capacity-building program.

The application was successful. The background to the application was that James Roberts attended a World Bank Strategic Choices in Education Reforms meeting and became convinced of the need for investment in the sector. Not all donors were advocating for ECD within the frame of education at the time. UNICEF, while committed globally to ECD, was

open about the fact that as an agency it considered ECD less of a priority than investment in basic education in Liberia. It was therefore due to the efforts of Liberian government actors such as James Roberts and others that a focus on ECD was established and maintained in discussions with funders.

This illustrates that ECD is still an “optional” extra in discussions about funding. For historical reasons, though it is an inter-sectoral discipline, ECD tends to be most closely associated with the education sector. Therefore, it is through education sector funding streams that ECD services and systems, particularly those that focus on pre-school education, are often supported. If ECD remains an optional item it will continue to be overlooked. It is unfortunate that the research evidence, which demonstrates that investment in high quality ECD reaps positive returns for later educational attainment, is still not reaching or convincing policymakers, posing a challenge to the sector as a whole. And while this trend may be shifting, as it appears that funding for ECD is increasingly included in applications to global education funds, it is perhaps too early to note a new era of full support for ECD as an essential foundation for the education sector.

ECD became a major component in the Liberian Ten-Year National Education Plan, supported by the EFA-FTI Catalytic Fund grant of 2010. Initially, after some lobbying by interested agencies, U.S.\$1 million was allocated to ECD from the Catalytic Fund over the three-year period from 2010 to 2013, with an additional U.S.\$800,000 also being mooted following further lobbying. Funds were earmarked for a range of analytical and technical tasks including development of a strategy and implementation plan for the national ECD policy. Funding was also included to develop program and pedagogical standards, regulations for ECD provision, a national curriculum, and development of low-cost play and learning materials. Elaboration of a national training and certification program and the development of eight pilot sites in rural areas were also initially included.

However, what happened next is a lesson in donor coordination and indeed highlights one of the paradoxes of partnership. The Ministry of Education (MoE) had selected priorities for ECD in discussion with other partners and efforts were made to reinforce, strengthen, and complement ongoing activities. In the end, the funding initially secured for ECD under the Catalytic Fund was reduced to include only eight pilot sites and the development of plans to implement the ECD policy and standards. Donors then picked up other tasks and, unfortunately, ECD did not receive much funding from the Catalytic Fund. Why did this happen? At one level, reduction in the overall budgets available through the Catalytic Fund provides the most straightforward explanation. However, it appeared that funds could be shifted away from ECD, as it was believed that other donors, such as UNICEF, would continue to fill the gaps that removal of the Catalytic Fund would create. ECD did not appear to get the backing in the MoE, or within the supervising entity of the GPE funds, that other parts of the education sector were able to muster.

The context for the initial application was that the MoE had, in fact, been working with development partners, including the Open Society Foundations, to provide a sound basis for development of a comprehensive, multi-sectoral approach to ECD over a period of some years. As part of this partnership, a series of events was held on the policy contexts for ECD in January 2008, and three analytical studies (Child and Family Needs Assessment, Policy Analysis, and Resource Analysis) were commissioned as a partnership between the MoE and the Open Society Foundations and one of its regional offices, the Open Society Initiative for West Africa, conducted by Liberian researchers with international consultants. The studies then informed both the ECD chapter in the Education Sector Plan and the inception of an inter-sectoral national Early Childhood Development Policy.

At the same time, the Ministry of Education established the National ECD Policy Planning Committee with several sub-committees, led by the MoE, including government representation from the ministries of health and social welfare, gender and development, finance, information, planning, justice, internal affairs and labor, as well as from the National Commission on Disabilities. The National ECD Policy Planning Committee participants also included representatives of UN agencies and a teacher-training institute, as well as international organizations such as PLAN, Right to Play, and Save the Children, and national civil society organizations such as the Children's Assistance Program, Forum for African Women Educationalists, and the YMCA.

However, despite a context of interest and excitement in ECD, few donors actually committed funds, although there was good cooperation around the development of the ECD policy and a range of donors committed to supporting aspects of its delivery. As one of the main development partners and donors in ECD, Open Society had been at the forefront of partnering with the MoE to build the ECD sector. Through a series of memoranda of understanding with the MoE, Open Society aimed to address systems and capacity building through multi-leveled engagement comprising partnership arrangements for development of a national training system for ECD; co-construction of a national early childhood curriculum with supporting materials; support for demonstration classrooms and pilot sites and ongoing training and technical assistance to the MoE. Open Society was committed to providing complementary and additional funds for the very same items that Catalytic funding had been highlighted to support. Through a series of initiatives including grant giving, funding of training and scholarships, study tours, and technical assistance, Open Society provided tailor-made support to strengthen the ECD sector, and was and remains a trusted partner. Funders such as Open Society are able to provide sustained, predictable and flexible funding, and can fill in the gaps and supplement less flexible funding streams such as the Catalytic Fund. However, the availability of funders like Open Society should not remove the imperative for major international financing initiatives, such as the Catalytic Fund, to commit extensive and meaningful support to ECD.

# The current situation

## *The policy context*

The Education Reform Act of 2011 established the Bureau of Early Childhood Education within the Ministry of Education. The bureau falls under the Department of Instruction and is headed by an assistant minister. It has oversight responsibility for all pre-primary schools and early childhood centers in the Republic of Liberia, and shares the responsibilities of ECD activities with other sectoral ministries.

According to section 3.3.6 of Liberia's New Education Reform Act of 2011 (RoL, 2011), the Bureau of Early Childhood Education is charged to:

- a) Design, develop, implement, coordinate, monitor, and review all early childhood education programs, in line with national policy developed by the ministry and endorsed by the government, and in conformity with the ministry's stated objectives and priorities for such level;
- b) Ensure that the early childhood education programs are in line with national policy objectives and the priorities of the Ministry of Education for such educational level;
- c) Develop and maintain a professional relationship with teachers, administrators, and other officials of public, private, and faith based early childhood development institutions;
- d) Issue permits, subject to approval of the deputy minister for instruction and endorsement by the minister, for the operation of early childhood programs in the country;
- e) Ensure effective monitoring and review of content, pedagogy, access, gender equity, management, and control of the early childhood program; and
- f) Help facilitate well designed and managed early childhood development institutions.

The Early Childhood Bureau has become a pivotal institution for the growth of early childhood development services in the Ministry of Education and pioneered the cross-sectoral approach needed to inform development of the National Integrated Policy for Early Childhood Development. For instance, the Ministry of Health is responsible for the primary health care system, which has reduction of child and maternal mortality as one of its cornerstones. Ongoing conversations aim to link initiatives related to child and maternal health with other ECD activities, to create comprehensive services for children from birth onwards.

Within the National Integrated Policy for Early Childhood Development, Liberia defines ECD from conception/birth to eight years, however, its major focus, particularly for



programming and implementation aspects, is on ages three to five years. This is because the school enrolment age for Grade 1 in Liberia is six years old. Developmental needs and rights of children from six to eight years are mainly catered for in the plan, policies, and programs of primary school, which is now referred to as “Lower Basic.”

Early Childhood Development in Liberia refers to all programs and services that are provided to children from conception to eight years old enabling them to grow up and develop cognitively, socially, emotionally, morally, and physically, becoming more productive Liberian citizens able to reach their full potential. The Ministry of Education is the lead ministry for the entire National Integrated Policy for Early Childhood Development. Although Section 4.3.4 of the Act states that “The age range for attendance in early childhood programs shall be from three (3) to five (5) years, provided no child shall be denied attendance in early childhood education programs,” Section 4.3.3 of the Act, mandates that “the Ministry [of Education], through inter-sectoral collaboration with other Ministries and non-government partners shall ensure integrated services and delivery of educational components required to sustain the early childhood programs of the nation” (RoL, 2011; see also Box 1).

#### **Box 1**

### **Extracts from the New Education Reform Act of 2011**

#### **4.3 Early Childhood Education**

##### **4.3.1 Basis for Early Childhood Education**

The basis for Early Childhood Education (ECE) shall be to provide the necessary opportunities for each child to develop the appropriate physical, mental, emotional and social skills, attitudes and habits to enable him or her to proceed to the primary level. Accordingly, the ministry is mandated to encourage, support and require all counties and districts to establish facilities for ECE based on available resources. Support to the programs shall include, as may be affordable by the government, assistance to teacher colleges and other accredited institutions producing teachers for the childhood education sector.

##### **4.3.2 Ministry to Issue Guidelines and Requirements for Opening and Operating Early Childhood Education Institutions**

The ministry is vested with the authority to develop, issue, and publish, from time to time, binding rules, guidelines and regulations for the opening, operation and maintenance of ECE schools or institutions. The ministry shall have the further

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authority to prohibit any person or institution from opening or operating an ECE program for which a license has not been granted by the ministry, and to suspend or revoke the license of any school or institution failing to conform to or not meeting the requirements and guidelines of the ministry for the operation of such programs.

#### **4.3.3 Standardization of Early Childhood Education programs and curricula**

The ministry, through the appropriate department of the ministry, is mandated to develop standardized curricula and sustainable programs in ECE, ensure that capacities are built for this level of the educational system, and that schools and institutions operating such programs conform to the curricula and standards. In this regard, the ministry, through inter-sectoral collaboration with other ministries and nongovernment partners shall ensure integrated services and delivery of educational components required to sustain the early childhood programs of the nation. Schools and institutions failing to adhere to or meet the curricula requirements or the standard developed by the ministry are subject to suspension or revocation of their license.

#### **4.3.4 Age Range for Early Childhood Education**

The age range for attendance in early childhood programs shall be from three (3) to five (5) years.

*Source: RoL, 2011: 24–25.*

So, Liberia has committed itself to the provision of early childhood education and development for all children as early as possible through encouragement of all national stakeholders, communities, districts, and counties to establish and upgrade early childhood programs with integrated services for children and their families.

In December 2010, the bureau held its first Donor and Implementing Partner Forum where services provided were listed and mapped by county. The bureau is actively engaged in expanding its donor and partner participation at county, national, and international levels.

### ***Work in progress***

According to the 2007/2008 school census, 491,564 children were enrolled in pre-primary education. This figure includes many overage children, as there is still a common misconception that the function of pre-primary education is to teach children to read and write, rather than provide opportunities to develop children's critical thinking skills. The same

census noted that approximately 4,000 pre-school institutions, private and public, were providing pre-school services, with approximately 11,000 pre-school teachers (RoL/MoE, 2009a). There are, as yet, no full-time training courses at certificate level or above in early childhood development, though this is under discussion.

The first international ECD conference was held in Liberia in April 2013, hosted by the Ministry of Education with OMEP (World Organization for Early Childhood Education) and supported by the Open Society Foundations, the Open Society Initiative for West Africa, and UNICEF. More than 600 people attended. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf gave the opening address, signalling her support for the sector. The minister of education also attended. The conference provided an opportunity to showcase the national four-stage training framework in early childhood development and provided tasters of the workshops intended for parents, caregivers, and community leaders in basic child care, health, nutrition, maternal care, child rearing practices, and basic child rights and protection issues. Plans for the national dissemination of the community awareness program were also shared, as were training plans for teachers in child-centered approaches, using the newly drafted early childhood curriculum. Staff from on-going pilot sites and demonstration classrooms also shared their experiences of working with communities to raise awareness of ECD, and gave workshops on making materials.

Representatives from the higher education sector came together to begin a series of discussions about how to include ECD at certificate, undergraduate, and post-graduate levels in institutions across Liberia, in order to ensure that the workforce needed for the sector is appropriately trained.

The conference marked a turning point for ECD in Liberia. There is now a national early childhood policy in place setting out what the government intends to do to promote the overall development of young children alongside the different responsibilities of various government departments. The roles of parents and communities are also outlined. A new, draft early childhood national curriculum is in development; it describes what children should know at different points and, more importantly, provides ideas and tips for teachers about how best to work with children to promote active learning. The national curriculum also describes how to set up a classroom with learning areas so that children can move around and play in areas dedicated to music, literacy or science. Outside of Monrovia, Tubman University in Maryland is developing some of the first courses in early childhood for Liberians who wish to train as teachers of young children. Construction of a small number of Early Childhood Development classrooms across the counties of Liberia is about to commence, drawing upon Catalytic Fund funding, so that everyone has a chance to see what a well-equipped center looks like and how to organize activities for children and involve parents. The experiences of a range of institutions that have been organizing ECD services

for children and communities will inform the creation of the eight classrooms and will ensure that district officials, communities, and educators are coordinating efforts to create a high quality service for children. A project is also under discussion to create storybooks for young children, written and produced by Liberian authors and artists.

To continue this path to change, parents, teachers, and the wider community need to come together to ask the government to fully implement Liberia's National Integrated Early Childhood Policy. The newly adopted policy requires Liberia's health, protection, and education sectors to collaborate to create services that meet the needs of children and their families across the country. The government and its development partners now need to deliver the promise of Liberia's early childhood policy by ensuring that officials, parents, caregivers, and educators across Liberia are aware of the policy and that sufficient funds are provided to create high quality services.

# Conclusions about the partnership paradox in Liberia's post-conflict educational recovery in the light of international experience

*Christopher Talbot*

Throughout this concluding chapter, it is helpful to bear in mind the conditions faced by educational planners and implementers in post-conflict Liberia. The country was gutted and impoverished by 14 years of vicious civil war, its infrastructure, including hundreds of schools, in ruins, its neglected and damaged rural roads impassable during long rainy seasons every year. Children, families, and whole communities had witnessed appalling brutality and endured displacement within Liberia and in surrounding nations. Huge numbers of young people had completely missed out on schooling; hundreds of thousands of citizens were illiterate. The whole teaching service was in disarray, teachers lacked subject knowledge and pedagogical skills, the national curriculum required revision, and there were acute shortages of textbooks and other learning materials. Yet the Liberian people, led by the government elected at the end of 2005 and supported for better or worse by the international community, worked to rebuild a future for their society through restoring education.

The purpose of this book has been to present a realistic story of Liberia's post-conflict educational recovery and the inherent paradox of the partnerships that are necessary to support national educational reconstruction and, in time, to sustain national educational development. That story has been told through the experiences of 14 practitioners who were deeply involved in Liberia's post-conflict reconstruction during the crucial period 2006–10. Their different perspectives on the same events and processes have produced a richly detailed account.

On some subjects those perspectives clash. On most issues of substance, perhaps surprisingly given the variety of the authors' organizational affiliations and cultural backgrounds, there is considerable agreement. This chapter brings together the most compelling conclusions drawn by those 14 practitioner-authors, highlighting the points of consensus and divergence. After a review of changing conceptions affecting educational reconstruction over the past decades, the authors' conclusions are analyzed under several headings: concepts of partnership, general characteristics of the partnership paradox in Liberia, roles of donors, misunderstandings about funding procedures, perceptions of corruption, roles of civil society, and government capacity and its development. Throughout, the views of the authors are compared with findings of other researchers on the post-conflict reconstruction of education in Liberia and elsewhere. While Liberia's situation was unique, there may be lessons and warnings for those implementing post-war reconstruction of education systems in other countries.

## Changing conceptions affecting post-conflict reconstruction of education systems

Over the past decades, researchers and policymakers have analysed conflict, education, and educational reconstruction with different emphases, which are not merely intellectual or policy fads but the fruit of deeper thought stemming from a rapidly growing body of research. Several approaches have built on one another cumulatively, without replacing earlier themes as dominant conceptions of the field. In the short sub-sections that follow, I focus mostly on the past two decades. Approximate dates of international attention to each theme are shown, though prior themes continue to influence subsequent themes.

### ***Early descriptions (1947–1998)***

During the half-century following World War II descriptive studies of the impact of conflict on education appeared. The first and in some ways most remarkable was UNESCO's two-part *Book of Needs* (1947 and 1949), an extraordinary cataloguing of the impact of World War

II on national education systems, their state at the time, and their reconstruction needs. Those needs were described almost exclusively in material and logistical terms with finely detailed lists of annual requirements.<sup>65</sup>

During the late 1990s, partly still under the influence of World War II, but also of massive and appallingly violent conflicts in Liberia, the occupied Palestinian Territories, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia,, Southern Sudan, and the former Yugoslavia, more detailed descriptive studies were conducted, typically with brief case studies. These began to synthesize a wider range of system impacts and reconstruction needs, though the emphasis was still very descriptive, e.g., Arnhold et al. (1998); Tawil, ed. (1997).

### ***Articulation of broad principles (1999–2005)***

Around the turn of the century, intertwined with increasingly sophisticated analyses of education response to conflict emergencies, policymakers and researchers began to articulate broad principles of effective post-conflict educational reconstruction. This shift from description toward identification of sound practice arose partly from Graça Machel's authoritative report, *Impact of Armed Conflict on Children* (1996), which set the framework for many governments' and agencies' efforts to fulfil children's rights in wartime. Although all commissioned by UN bodies, the seminal works of Pigozzi (1999), Bush and Saltarelli (2000), and Sinclair (2002) were notable for their emphasis on government perspectives and needs, not only those of UN agencies and NGOs. Bush and Saltarelli also pioneered the study of the complex relationship between education and conflict, stressing the role of education as a contributor both to conflict and to its mitigation.

The World Education Forum held in Dakar in April 2000 re-launched the Education for All (EFA) movement. Its *Dakar Framework for Action* acknowledged the impact of conflict on education and committed all signatory governments and agencies to "meet the needs of education systems affected by conflict, natural calamities and instability and conduct educational programmes in ways that promote mutual understanding, peace and tolerance, and that help to prevent violence and conflict" (World Education Forum, 2000: 9). This public commitment was the institutional and political foundation for intense activity in the following years.

Emerging from Dakar, the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) was founded in November 2000. INEE is "an open global network of practitioners and policymakers working together to ensure all persons the right to quality education and

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65. For example, in 1947 Poland's shattered schools were estimated to need 4,000,000 pencils, 2,800,000 erasers, 6,000 atlases, and 500,000 children's books (UNESCO, 1947: 90).

a safe learning environment in emergencies through to recovery” (INEE, 2010*b*: verso). Since its origin, INEE has become increasingly influential in the growing field of education in emergencies and reconstruction: building a community of practice, sharing information, generating knowledge and facilitating learning, articulating and promoting foundational minimum standards, creating and disseminating a wide range of planning and management tools, supporting members, convening collaborative processes, and advocating and influencing policy formulation.

Partly in response to these developments, in the early 2000s UNESCO’s International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) commissioned and published several studies of post-conflict education reconstruction, notably of Rwanda (Obura, 2003), Kosovo (Sommers and Buckland, 2004) and Timor-Leste (Nicolai, 2004), of education in chronic crisis in the occupied Palestinian Territories (Nicolai, 2007) and Burundi (Obura, 2008), and of post-disaster education reconstruction in Pakistan (Kirk, 2008). These studies began to identify sound principles for the field, as well as lessons on what to avoid, which IIEP gathered into a comprehensive practitioners’ and policymakers’ guidebook (IIEP, 2010).

Meanwhile, researchers based in and around the World Bank’s Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction Unit were developing broader frameworks of analysis for post-conflict reconstruction as a whole (e.g., McKechnie, 2003; Collier and Hoeffler, 2004). Building on some of that work and on IIEP’s research, and drawing on a wide range of World Bank case studies, Peter Buckland wrote a clear and practical overview of fundamental principles of post-conflict reconstruction in the education sector, highlighting promising directions and neglected issues (World Bank, 2005).

By the time policymakers were beginning to take decisions about the reconstruction of Liberia’s education system, the following broad lessons had been distilled from the previous half-decade of work, summarized by Buckland (World Bank, 2005: xvii):

Four important starting points:

- ▶ First, focus on the basics to get the system functioning so that the return of children and youth to school can be seen as an early “peace dividend” that will help to shore up support for peace.
- ▶ Second, acknowledge the importance of symbolism in education and ensure some bold symbolic actions (such as purging textbooks) signalling that, while much about the system remains unchanged, the reform has started.
- ▶ Third, build recognition that reform of education is an incremental and ongoing process that takes decades and must be led from within the country as consensus develops on the wider development vision of that society.



- ▶ Fourth, focus from the beginning on building capacity for reform, which includes supporting the participation of communities, local authorities, and other stakeholders.

Some other important overarching lessons that emerged ....

- ▶ Make use of interim arrangements and transitional mechanisms.
- ▶ Prioritize basic education within a system-wide approach.
- ▶ Demonstrate early and visible impact.
- ▶ Decentralize the system to encourage parental involvement in school governance.
- ▶ Build the capacity of the central authorities to ensure an enabling environment for decentralization.
- ▶ Build effective partnerships and work closely with interagency coordination mechanisms.
- ▶ Recognize the contribution that returning refugees, and especially youth, can make to the process of education reconstruction.

These and similar lessons were widely disseminated by INEE and other networks and entered the policy frameworks, internal guidance, and training programs of many agencies influential globally and in Liberia.

### ***Social capital and social cohesion (2001–present)***

In the 2000s, concepts of bonding and bridging social capital and of social cohesion (Putnam, 2004; Helliwell and Putnam, 2007), first developed for richer industrialized states, began to be applied to developing countries affected by conflict. These found expression and influence in the work of academics such as Stephen Heyneman (2003) and of policymakers at the World Bank and elsewhere, e.g., Roberts-Schweitzer, Greaney and Duer (2006). Sound educational planning, particularly expressed through politically inclusive access policies, curriculum content and learning resources, was depicted as a vehicle for increasing the cohesion and respect for diversity of post-conflict societies. This thinking was part of the policy environment in which Liberia's educational reconstruction was conceived. It remains influential at the global level today.

### ***Education and state fragility (2003–present)***

Bilateral and multilateral donors were exploring the limits of their possibilities to support educational reform and reconstruction in states and societies that were labelled fragile. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development

Assistance Committee defined fragile states operationally as “countries with poor governance, characterised by a lack of political commitment and/or weak capacity to develop and implement pro-poor policies” (Rose and Greeley, 2006: 1). With refinements and further sub-categorization, the notion of fragility as lack of political will and capacity came to dominate the policy discourse around educational reconstruction.

Within their ministries and organizations and in policy fora, donor representatives debated the complex phenomena of educational reconstruction in fragile contexts, struggling to balance appropriately their desire to support and to be seen to support post-conflict reconstruction while respecting fiduciary requirements of their parliaments and ministries. Those requirements were usually very strict on the texts of agreements; the need for high quality, approved education sector plans; and transparent, independently monitored processes for disbursement, procurement, accounting, and reporting. INEE responded to the evident need for a “safe space” for discussion by facilitating the creation of an INEE Working Group on Education and Fragility, where policy options are researched and explored, and information and tools shared among donors and implementing agencies. Through the Education for All–Fast Track Initiative, discussed in chapter 2, donor representatives hammered out tentative approaches to funding education reconstruction in conflict-affected states. During this same period, the mid-2000s, the aid community was elaborating principles and conditions for aid effectiveness (OECD, 2005/2008) and for effective service delivery, including provision of education in fragile contexts (e.g., Berry, 2007).

Critiques emerged from practitioners and academics over the terminology of “fragile states,” which had replaced the earlier “failed states,” which was even more offensive to concerned governments thus stigmatized. These critiques focused on the conceptual vagueness, lack of agreement on distinguishing characteristics, and political difficulty of the term (Kirk, 2007; Bengtsson, 2011). Researchers also sought to identify ways in which education may be a driver of conflict and fragility (e.g., Davies, 2011).

Within the context of these discussions, UNICEF sought and received a huge grant of U.S.\$201 million for its Education in Emergencies and Post-Crisis Transition Program (UNICEF, 2010). Funding from that program was eventually directed to Liberia’s Education Pooled Fund (EPF) through processes described in earlier chapters of this book. All these considerations underlay the debates among potential partners in the reconstruction of Liberian education.

### ***State-building, peace-building, and resilience (2009–present)***

Reflections on the limitations of fragility as a robust concept for determining policy led researchers, practitioners, and donors to focus on more positive analytical frameworks. The role of education in state-building and even in peace-building has exercised policymakers

in recent years, with attention focused on how effective service delivery in conflict-affected states can build state legitimacy (Ndaruhutse *et al.*, 2011). Supported again by the Government of the Netherlands, UNICEF has developed a 14-country Peace-building, Education and Advocacy Program, which aims to explore ways in which education programming can contribute to peace-building processes in conflict-affected states (UNICEF, 2014; Novelli and Smith, 2011).

Another positive concept under investigation is resilience, which the World Bank (2013b) defines in education systems as “the assets and strengths of education communities [and] relevant policies and programs that can support at-risk individuals to overcome adversity and have positive learning outcomes.” Largely from within the World Bank, attention has been drawn to ways and conditions in which education can strengthen the resilience of states, communities, and individuals (Reyes, 2013).

### ***Conflict-sensitive education (2011–present)***

Conflict-sensitive education is a new emphasis emerging in recent years from the work of many partners around education and fragility, state-building, and peace-building (IIEP, 2011; Sigsgaard, 2012). INEE has issued a guidance note (Koons, 2013: 12), which defines conflict-sensitive education as the process of:

1. Understanding the context [of conflict] in which education takes place;
2. Analysing the two-way interaction between the [conflict] context and education programmes and policies (development, planning, and delivery); and
3. Acting to minimize negative impacts and maximize positive impacts of education policies and programming on conflict, within an organization’s given priorities.

Conflict sensitivity and peace-building have fundamentally different aims: Conflict-sensitive approaches to education aim to work “*in* the context of conflict to prevent negative and, if possible, maximize positive impacts of programmes on conflict and violence factors.” Peace-building aims to work “*on* conflict, seeking to reduce drivers of violent conflict and to contribute to the broader societal level peace” (Koons, 2013: 13).

All these conceptions of the relationship between education and conflict have influenced the ways in which Liberia’s educational reconstruction was conceived, carried out and, in recent times, interpreted.

## Concepts of partnership

In this book the term “partner” has been used in at least two distinct and not necessarily related ways, as also occurs in wider literature on “education partnerships” (e.g. GPE, 2013d: 2–4).

In its broader sense “partner” is used to refer to an organization that joins with others to plan and implement educational activities, in this case educational reconstruction in Liberia. It is almost synonymous with “stakeholder.” Education partnerships are “relationships between organizations which address issues of advocacy, policy building, direct implementation, basic and applied research, plus the fostering of social agendas and monitoring accountability” (Roberts-Schweitzer, 2009: 92). Typical partners include national governments and their constituent ministries and agencies at all levels; donor governments, sometimes designated “bilaterals”; multilateral organizations, including the United Nations and its specialized agencies, regional banks, and the World Bank; nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs); and the private sector, foundations, and think tanks.

Most of the authors of the previous chapters and many other writers also refer to “partners” in a narrower sense, signifying donors. This use of the word has a euphemistic tone, almost as though it were impolite or in bad taste to mention directly the giving of money for educational reconstruction.

Educational partnerships are “collaborative groupings of people and/or agencies ... that are working together to solve ... problems related to [education]” (Franklin, 2008: 426). In Liberia between 2006 and 2010, several partnerships that focused on education could be considered paradoxical. The main partnership discussed in this book is the financial one that developed around Liberia’s EPF, specifically consisting of the Ministry of Education (MoE), the Open Society Foundations, UNICEF, and indirectly, the Government of the Netherlands. But the authors also refer to wider partnerships around funding and implementation of educational reconstruction, which included the various donor governments and agencies active in financing Liberian education, whether or not they were part of the EPF; and the many NGOs and CSOs working with one another, the UN, donors and the MoE to implement educational programs and projects. The global aid architecture for education in developing countries is also designated a partnership. All of these partnerships exhibited paradoxical features that the authors have described and analyzed.

# General characteristics of the partnership paradox in Liberia

On June 11, 2013, at a meeting in New York hosted by the Open Society Foundations, author James Emmanuel Roberts summed up his view of the paradox of the educational reconstruction partnership in Liberia: “The dynamics of the partners with money came up against poor and low capacity in the Ministry of Education. A partnership of such unequals: the paradox is there.” In her introductory chapter, Aleesha Taylor acknowledges the obscurity and rhetoric of partnerships that mask “asymmetries of power between the individual and institutional stakeholders involved.” Eluned Roberts-Schweitzer (2009: 93), writing of experiences worldwide, questions arrangements that are “described as partnerships with an assumption of equality,” but “are in fact anything but” equal.

## ***Turbulence: Opportunity or threat?***

“Turbulence” is Cream Wright’s principal characterization of the partnerships associated with Liberian educational reconstruction, at both the global and Liberia level. In this book, other authors attest to the troubling uncertainty felt in Liberia about how funding might be negotiated and secured, particularly in 2006–08. The deep root cause of the turbulence is well analyzed by Roberts: “Because of the breakdown of governance in Liberia, donors did not make direct grants to the Liberian government, fearing improper use of funds, and lack of transparency and accountability.” Donors were simply not prepared to trust the new Government of Liberia with their funds. The Liberian MoE lacked credibility in their eyes. There was tension between Liberia’s national sovereignty and donors’ needs to show responsible spending of their taxpayers’ money.

Wright suggests that the uncertainty and turbulence could have been, and by some was embraced as, an opportunity to find strategic, innovative, even transformative solutions well adapted to Liberia’s immense needs, by taking risks and experimenting with traditional roles, responsibilities, and processes. For the most part, however, Wright argues, influential individuals working for governments and agencies feared that their organizational positions would come under threat. This Liberian experience is echoed in the findings of Glennie *et al.* (2012), who criticize the tendency of aid agencies to avoid risks rather than managing them. McKechnie and Davies (2013: 11) present evidence that donors keeping tight control over aid in post-conflict environments “may present higher risks of programme and strategic failure” than localizing aid modalities.

Part of the partnership paradox in Liberia was that conflicts emerged *within* agencies and not only *between* them. Key people and their agencies became preoccupied with internal tensions, perceptions of winning and losing policy debates, and defending narrow

institutional, even sometimes personal interests. Wright concludes with regret that routine interventions by donors, UN agencies and NGOs—business as usual—resulted. Instead of close collaboration between agencies, disparate visions, rivalry, and competition soured relationships. Mark Ginsburg and Brenda Arrington illustrate this point in their account of “stove-piped” implementation of components of the Liberia Teacher Training Program. The general sense emerging from all the practitioner-authors is of some limited achievements, but mainly of *lost opportunities* for creative partnerships in both funding and implementation of educational reconstruction programs.

### ***Synergy or self-interest?***

In an effective partnership, the value added by all partners working together should be greater than what would have been possible if they had worked alone. This added value, or synergy, requires partners to set aside their own institutional and personal interests for shared goals. While there is no doubt that the MoE, UNICEF, and Open Society added more value through the EPF than they could have done without its existence, most of the authors deplore the absence of other bilateral and multilateral donors from the fund. The reasons for this prevailing institutional self-interest will be explored more fully below.

### ***Effective and efficient partnerships?***

The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (OECD, 2005/2008) set out five principles of aid effectiveness:

1. **Ownership:** Developing countries set their own strategies for poverty reduction, improve their institutions, and tackle corruption.
2. **Alignment:** Donor countries align behind these objectives and use local systems.
3. **Harmonization:** Donor countries coordinate, simplify procedures, and share information to avoid duplication.
4. **Results:** Developing countries and donors shift focus to development results and results get measured.
5. **Mutual accountability:** Donors and partners are accountable for development results.

The OECD (2011) distinguishes six commonly used categories of aid instruments: general budget support, sector budget support, government-managed pooled funds, jointly managed trust funds, project support, and support to and through nonstate actors. Writing for the Overseas Development Institute, Manuel *et al.* (2012) analyze the performance of these six aid mechanisms in several conflict-affected fragile states according to three of the

Paris principles—alignment, harmonization and ownership—as well as their ability to deliver direct results with their expenditure.

Government-managed pooled funds, such as the Liberian EPF, are usually policy-aligned with an agreed sector plan. Alignment to government processes is possible, especially if there is a program/project implementation unit embedded within the government. Harmonization should be automatic but in practice is often not achieved. Country ownership of pooled funds depends on the extent to which the sector plan is widely owned, and on the extent of donor earmarking. The effectiveness of pooled funds in direct delivery of project-related results partly depends on the effectiveness of expenditure systems used, whether those of the government, of donors, or a mix of both. Contributions of pooled funds to indirect results, such as state-building and peace-building, are difficult to ascertain (Manuel *et al.*, 2012), yet it is vital that conflict-affected states be supported by balanced short-term service provision funding and longer-term funding for state-building (Roberts-Schweitzer, 2009).

Coppin (2012) has characterized an effective pooled fund as shown in Box 2.

## Box 2

### Summary of attributes of a good pooled fund in Paris Declaration terms

Past research stresses that a good pooled fund:

...promotes ownership

- by engaging key players in national government (ministers are on the management committee, for instance)
- by developing the capacity of the national government
- by having a project implementation unit that is embedded in the relevant ministry
- by being transparent to national government

...promotes alignment

- by aligning with relevant national strategy documents
- by limiting earmarking or preferencing
- by aligning (or shadow aligning) with government systems

...promotes harmonization

- by having systems that give donors confidence to contribute, including:
  - adequate fiduciary oversight
  - experienced senior staff
  - transparency to donors

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...delivers results

- by disbursing funds quickly and flexibly, using procedures that are appropriate to a fragile state

...promotes mutual accountability

- by ensuring good monitoring systems and independent reviews
- by ensuring donors and recipients are accountable for development results

*Sources:* Coppin, 2012: 6; GPE, 2013d: 50

Overseas Development Institute researchers showed that some pooled funds have been able to provide “close alignment with national priorities, consolidate small projects into scalable national programmes, use national systems and harmonise and simplify the transaction costs of foreign assistance ... Pooling funds also pools risks among donors and shifts the accountability for risk management to the multilateral organizations that usually administer them.” The Overseas Development Institute found four variables determined the success of pooled funds: “degree of government ownership; physical location of secretariats; extent of pools’ in-year flexibility; and their ability to finance recurrent expenditures” (Manuel *et al.*, 2012: ix).

Although Williams and Bentravato (2011: 49) conclude that the Liberian EPF “has been found to be a flexible and timely funding mechanism,” the practitioner-authors of this book on the whole do not agree. According to the criteria outlined above, the achievements of the Liberian EPF were rather limited. Alignment was hampered by the fact that there was no thorough education sector plan in place for the first years of the EPF’s operation. Country ownership was also frustrated by the lack of a sector plan and by severe government capacity shortages, discussed more fully below. The EPF failed to achieve harmonization among donors, most of whom were unwilling or unable to coordinate, simplify procedures, and share information to avoid duplication around the EPF’s objectives. Some good results were achieved, but with great delays. There was reasonable accountability to the donors, but not so much to other stakeholders.

Taylor expresses her concern that the EPF arrangements, though designed to empower the MoE, may have thwarted the progress of the education sector in Liberia. As Wright argues, in Liberia, more effective partnerships would have resulted in better service delivery as well as a greater balance between “respect for government autonomy and discre-



tion” and “appropriate accountability for... funds,” with corresponding reduction in Liberia’s dependency on external leadership and in corrupt behavior.

The practitioner-authors broadly agree that the EPF partnership was frustrated in its efforts to achieve such a balance for two principal reasons: (i) Because the EPF partnership was undermined by the unwillingness or inability of other donors, besides Open Society, UNICEF, and indirectly the Government of the Netherlands, to support the pooled fund, the EPF partnership failed to act efficiently in facilitating government service delivery in education. (ii) Because of attitudes and behaviors of the Government of Liberia, in particular the leadership of the MoE, opportunities for funding, implementation, and capacity building were not fully seized. The reasons for the ineffectiveness and inefficiency of the partnerships will be analyzed in detail below.

### ***Cultural understanding?***

Roberts highlights the central importance of cultural understanding to the success of partnerships in national recovery. On all sides, those working for Liberian educational reconstruction needed to “understand the culture enough to discuss sensitive issues without being insulting and disrespectful.” Clearly there were areas of mutual cultural incomprehension between ostensible partners in Liberia, which would have required great efforts at building trust to overcome. International observers have identified the mutual trust gap as a major obstacle to effective partnerships for reconstruction of education systems after conflict (Sperling, 2007; Roberts-Schweitzer, 2009). Several of the practitioner-authors echo this concern, pointing to examples of international agencies’ or individuals’ ignorance of or impatience with Liberian realities. They also refer to situations in which Liberian officials were unable or unwilling to understand the constraints imposed on international staff by the inflexibility of rules that were the expression of donors’ and agencies’ institutional cultures. Yet almost all authors, both Liberian and international, warmly acknowledge the immense efforts made by some key individuals to understand others, build trust, strengthen partnerships, and deliver the best quality education to Liberian children and young people. Their shared sorrow is that such particular examples of good teamwork were not enough to overcome the ambient poor communication between supposed partner agencies.

Batuhan Aydagül draws attention to a reason for some of this lack of cultural understanding: the isolation of many international staff from Liberian communities, teachers and children; a failure to spend adequate quality time observing and listening to those most affected by their decisions. Aydagül points out that many international staff rarely visited communities outside or even inside Monrovia, and were barely engaged with the daily work and professional priorities of Liberian ministry officials, who bore the prime responsibility for policy development, planning, and education service delivery. Keith Burchell emphasises the language difficulties that thwarted cultural understanding and effective work: English

was the language of all education partnership work and documents, though the formal English language skills of many MoE staff and most teachers were not strong.

## The roles of donors

Cream Wright, Stella Kaabwe, and Aleesha Taylor detail the process by which the Government of the Netherlands, the Open Society Foundations, and UNICEF bravely and innovatively sought and found a mechanism to fund the reconstruction of Liberian education. Their initiative was intended to open the way for many donors to contribute jointly to that cause. Those three institutions were the exception in an international donor community that gave many Liberians an impression, with some justification, of cowardice and heartlessness.

Anthony Nimely and Eugene Jappah sum up the disappointment of all the practitioner-authors of this book with their observation that “no donor partners attempted or had the least desire to channel funds through the pooled fund mechanism.” They attribute lack of willingness to donors’ reluctance to surrender their autonomy and authority. Roberts particularly criticizes the World Bank for that attitude. Wright alludes to technical and fiduciary impediments to World Bank participation in the EPF, but regrets that they were not overcome, and that the World Bank discouraged other donors from joining the EPF. Ginsburg and Arrington discuss the example of USAID’s inability to join the EPF because its global policy and strategy would not allow it to do so. Overseas Development Institute researchers found that a major limitation to the success of pooled funds in difficult environments is “the unwillingness or inability of some donors to co-finance/mingle their funds with those of other donors” (Manuel *et al.*, 2012: ix).

At the Open Society Foundations’ New York meeting in June 2013, Peter Darvas, who worked for the World Bank in Liberia for a time, regretted the bank’s failure to align with the EPF. At the same meeting, Aydagül lamented the fact that MoE staff members had to waste so much time preparing procedural matters so that other donors could contribute to the EPF, but none did. Wright and Roberts explain the general failure of donors to use the EPF in terms of interdonor competition and petty rivalries, while acknowledging that donors also had genuine concerns about government capacity to plan, implement, and monitor activities.

The Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) (2012: 34) echoes these views:

The general feeling among Liberian stakeholders is that donor commitments are seemingly not meeting education needs; interventions are based on where donors can come in rather than on need. Funds are usually earmarked and there is hardly any budget support or pooled funding due to associated high fiduciary risk. Donor

procedures and processes are lengthy and highly bureaucratic as a result. .... There is also the issue of programme sustainability whereby some EDPs [education development partners] implement a programme or project, which the Government of Liberia ends up inheriting with no resources for it.

Roberts-Schweitzer (2009: 94) confirms these concerns with observations from global experience:

The relationship is all too often still one of governments spending time and money to get a small proportion of their non-salary budget needs, within parameters which they may not be able to achieve and which they may have prioritized differently if left to themselves.

Despite these disappointments, individual donors were sometimes able to fund important work for which the MoE simply had no money, as Ginsburg and Arrington show through the example of USAID's support to teacher training.

INEE's guidance on external education financing emphasizes the importance of simplicity, speed, and flexibility in disbursements for education in fragile states, a view endorsed by Overseas Development Institute researchers and others (INEE, 2008; INEE, 2010a; Manuel *et al.*, 2012; Roberts-Schweitzer, 2009). President Sirleaf, Deborah Harding, and Aleesha Taylor note that foundations, such as Open Society and the Liberian Education Trust (LET), were in general much more flexible and willing than bilateral and multilateral donors to take calculated risks in their funding practices in Liberia. All the authors acknowledge that Open Society was exceptionally open and flexible, seeking to facilitate sustainable funding and to make the EPF a success. Open Society's role in Liberia illustrates a general principle that comparatively small but influential donors can send signals to others by early funding of reconstruction activities.

Although all the practitioner-authors commend UNICEF for its courageous initiative in agreeing to set up and administer the pooled fund, Nimely and Jappah, and Roberts, express particularly keen disappointment that UNICEF also took the lead to fund education programs outside the EPF mechanism, and that their example was followed by major donors such as the European Union and USAID. Kaabwe and Wright defend UNICEF from the charge that they contributed to the EPF only what they had been given by the Netherlands, and none of their "own funds," pointing out that the Dutch funds were in fact legally UNICEF's, once they had been handed over. Nimely and Jappah acknowledge that legal fact but make the telling observation that "it is not how the funds were perceived in Liberia."

Although many donors refused to finance the EPF, Wright points out that they chose to focus their own contributions on the same priorities the EPF was supporting. The result

of this “honeypot” tendency was an excessive clustering around primary schooling service delivery, which crowded out the efforts of the pooled fund itself in that sub-sector, as well as more strategic, transformative, long-term system-wide investments that were essential in a post-conflict state. Writing in a global context, Buckland (World Bank, 2005) warned of the dangers of sectoral imbalance in post-conflict reconstruction efforts, notably excessive relative investment in primary schooling at the expense of secondary and tertiary education, and of youth and adult education. Certainly in post-conflict Liberia there could have been greater investment in the educational needs of conflict-affected youth, demobilized soldiers, people living in neglected border regions, and educational initiatives favoring reconciliation. Among the practitioner-authors of this book, Amnon and Hyder illustrate the truth of Buckland’s point about balance by highlighting donors’ neglect of Liberia’s early childhood sub-sector. Kaabwe argues that an effective EPF would have funded the whole education sector. Roberts goes further, suggesting that donor funding should have been integrated into and used to finance the MoE’s budget, including direct funding for government employees’ salaries, to which most donors were allergic.

One of the sources of tension in Liberia’s educational reconstruction process was the failure to balance two conflicting priorities. In early post-conflict reconstruction there is a need for investment in activities that yield two types of outcome—quick and visible impact to build communities’ confidence in themselves and the newly elected government authorities, and slower, long-term education system building and development (World Bank, 2005; Roberts-Schweitzer, 2009). Examples of the former include school repairs and rehabilitation, distribution of learning materials, school supplies, and furniture. Examples of the latter include re-establishment of a functioning Education Management Information System, curriculum reform, decentralization of effective decision making, and rationalization of teachers’ contractual and compensation arrangements. International experience suggests that most funding for conflict-affected fragile states comes through short-term grants, and that the result is relative neglect of measures needed to build strength and sustainability within education systems (Dolan and Ndaruhutse, 2011). In fact, some donors in Liberia pushed for quick impact projects; others for the longer term reforms. The MoE just did not have the clarity and unity of vision, nor the depth of competent, experienced staff, to tell the donors where its priorities lay and to convince donors of the value of that vision.

## Misunderstandings about funding procedures

Donors’ lack of confidence in Liberian government structures and controls led to their imposition of their own rules upon the funding that was made available, both through the EPF and by their separate contributions. Roberts conveys the anger and humiliation that these

“parachuted” systems generated among Liberian officials. Kaabwe demonstrates how the MoE’s misunderstandings about donor requirements and the EPF’s procedures for approval of spending caused long delays in disbursements, which reinforced donors’ impressions that no further funding was needed. In fact, funding was desperately needed but could not be easily used. This indicates a possible failure of the EPF partnership, and by UNICEF as fund custodian, to communicate the core values and procedures of each organization thoroughly, an illustration of the need for mutual cultural understanding.

Wright concludes that post-conflict countries such as Liberia need “better financing and operational models that would promote greater transparency, accountability and value for money on the part of their governments as well as for the partners ....”

## Perceptions of corruption

Donors’ reluctance to allow full recipient government ownership of the funding they provide to fragile states is not entirely irrational. They have genuine and well-founded concerns about government inefficiency and corruption (Davies and Bentrovato, 2011).

In her Foreword, President Sirleaf acknowledges that corruption and abuse are “pervasive” in the Liberian education sector (see also Williams and Bentrovato, 2011). In many countries, this is due to a combination of factors: Comparatively large amounts of money flow through complex multi-layered bureaucracies, for teacher salaries, procurement, construction and maintenance, with weak government mechanisms for monitoring and reporting actual expenditure. Low salaries of civil servants, the payment of which is often long delayed or skimmed by higher levels of the bureaucracy, may provoke corrupt behavior. Parents of children who do enrol in and attend school may be highly motivated to ensure their success and so be susceptible to offer bribes, or may not know what constitutes an illegal charge or fee (Transparency International, 2013). Burchell notes that the tight controls imposed upon the management of the textbook procurement and distribution program actually deterred MoE staffers from working on that program, as they knew there would be little opportunity to “make anything on the side.”

However, Kaabwe nuances the discussion of corruption by pointing to the lack of provision in the EPF’s procedures for continuous monitoring of spending by UNICEF, the fund custodian, which opened up opportunities for inappropriate activities, some of which may not have been corrupt but rather financial mismanagement based on misunderstanding of the EPF’s procedures. International empirical evidence suggests that the argument that some governments are so corrupt that donors should avoid localizing aid may be overblown and that, even in fragile states, appropriately managed localized aid can strengthen institutions (Glennie *et al.*, 2013).

## Roles of civil society

Michael Weah argues forcefully that some of the weaknesses in the management of post-conflict reconstruction of education in Liberia could have been overcome if there had been stronger engagement of civil society organizations (CSOs) in policy development and service delivery, with CSOs entrusted with implementation of projects to a greater extent and with adequate funding. President Sirleaf makes a similar point in her Foreword. Within the Early Childhood Development sub-sector, Amnon and Hyder demonstrate the valuable contributions made by Liberian CSOs and international NGOs to planning and policy development and in mounting early childhood education and development programs throughout the country, with very little funding.

Weah's justification for his view, based on his knowledge of many Liberian CSOs and international experience, is that CSOs improve education sector governance, facilitate decentralization of decision making, increase transparency, decrease corruption, and strengthen accountability to local communities for education service delivery, partly by advocacy and adopting a watchdog role. Harding is sympathetic to this line of reasoning, but warns that small Liberian NGOs often work without policy guidance and oversight. Weah acknowledges that some CSOs and national NGOs have problems of focus and identity, as some were founded out of tribal or political party allegiances. CSOs and national NGOs need resources to develop their own capacities to plan, manage, and monitor education projects.

International experience suggests a number of paradoxes about CSOs' engagement in education after conflicts. CSOs can bring community-driven priorities to educational reconstruction, but community demand may outstrip CSOs' capacity to supply teachers and learning materials. Moreover "governments may be suspicious of their motives, and donors too quick to support them outside of agreed coordination structures." So governments need to be able simultaneously to include NGOs systematically in policy dialogue and planning while regulating their activities (Berry, 2010: 592; see also Roberts-Schweitzer, 2009).

At the June 2013 New York meeting, Wright described a conundrum for the role of CSOs. In many post-conflict societies donors used to direct much of their assistance to education through CSOs, creating antagonism between CSOs and governments that struggled to establish credibility and leadership. Wright particularly described the aspiration to a watchdog role as dangerous, as governments respond either with repression or by co-opting CSOs, turning watchdogs into "lapdogs." His recommendation is that CSOs should focus their attention on local delivery of education services, under overall authority of the MoE, but with at least some funding secured independently of government.

Successful implementation of educational provision by NGOs in Liberia would have required the MoE to see itself less as a provider of education and more as a standard-setter

and monitor of the quality of others' provision, and as a source of empowerment to communities and CSOs. This would have required the MoE to accept a fragmented system of educational provision. Such roles were simply not within the MoE's capacity and resources in the late 2000s.

## Government capacity and its development

### *Leadership*

President Sirleaf identifies lack of capacity as “the single biggest challenge we face,” a view shared by other commentators on Liberia's educational reconstruction (e.g., Williams and Bentreovato, 2011). She acknowledges that she was “disappointed ... with some of [her] early choices” for senior leadership positions. Burchell agrees, emphasizing that the president named to the senior management of the MoE political appointees with little background in education and, even more seriously, lack of high-level management experience and little understanding of the concept and techniques of supervisory management. Frequent politically motivated changes in senior leadership compounded these weaknesses, according to Nimely and Jappah.

Aydağül particularly faults the senior management of the Ministry of Education at the time for poor leadership, for failing to build awareness of and ownership around the national plan for primary education (LPERP) across the ministry, and for allowing the LPERP to remain almost exclusively the concern of the department of planning. Nimely and Jappah detail the poor coordination and rivalry between departments and sub-sectors of the MoE. They especially condemn the failure of the MoE's leadership to comply with agreed plans and their demands for implementation of unplanned activities in defiance of established procedures. Ginsburg and Arrington highlight the lack of clear assignment of responsibilities and decision-making authority to MoE personnel and of a functional chain of command.

According to Aydağül, the MoE leadership developed no system of internal accountability within the ministry and external accountability to other stakeholders, to hold officers responsible for fulfilling objectives. Middle-ranking staff members were not given the impression that the LPERP and activities implemented under the EPF were of much importance to the MoE leadership. Burchell and Aydağül both highlight the MoE's failure to monitor performance; Nimely and Jappah assert that monitoring and evaluation were “circumvented” by the MoE's senior management. These experiences confirm the findings of a four-country ADEA study of post-crisis reconstruction of education systems, which concluded:

Although there is recognition of the importance of ministries having monitoring and evaluation capabilities, the overall finding is that it is not a priority. The lack of comprehensive education statistics renders it hard to appreciate how ministries plan and budget effectively. Statistics and the ability to use them are essential tools in effective management. It is not possible to address issues of equity, accountable governance and inclusivity without these competencies. All the countries studied under-valued these skills to varying degrees. (Arnott and the ADEA Working Group on Education, Management and Policy Support Team, 2012: 7–8)

Ginsburg and Arrington refer to the MoE's institutional weakness in educational statistics, in particular "the lack of a robust Education Management Information System (EMIS)." The MoE only began to publish annual education statistics on its website in 2012 (RoL/MoE, 2012).

Nimely and Jappah describe the attitude of some deputy ministers toward the EPF as "petty cash for the MoE" or as a source of funds for "politically oriented projects [requested by] the Executive or legislature." Kaabwe notes that the MoE's senior management made inappropriate political commitments of EPF funds, especially for school construction where it had not been planned.

### ***Technical assistance***

Unfortunately these serious failures of top management were not outweighed by an abundance of high quality international technical assistance. Aydagül chronicles the disappointingly long delays in donors' promised deployment of some essential technical consultants. Aydagül, Burchell, and Nimely and Jappah lament basic mistakes made in the structuring of technical assistance within the MoE: inappropriate status and function titles, poor selection of work location, non-existent or inappropriate assignments of national counterparts to consultants, and weak accountability of consultants to senior MoE management. Nimely and Jappah also refer to the poor attitudes of many international consultants, though there were several honorable exceptions. They sadly admit that some of the MoE teams that consultants were assigned to work with were so incompetent as to be "not trainable."

Churn in international partner staff did not help with technical support to the ministry, though Roberts pays tribute to the deep commitment and high quality of work performed by an inter-agency team of a very small number of MoE planners, supported by a few fine international consultants, plus key staff of UNICEF, the World Bank, and Open Society.

### ***Mid-level MoE staff***

Several authors regret that the MoE failed to staff the implementation of the EPF's program with enough core personnel; the very few assigned to it were overwhelmed. Aydagül pro-



vides evidence for a startling yet sobering conclusion: the international community imposed too much planning and too many policy initiatives on too few competent MoE educational planners. Planning “seriously hinder[ed] implementation.”

### ***Spending capacity***

Research conducted by the OECD suggests that highly fragile states are able to manage only about a third of all aid that they receive (OECD, 2010; Manuel *et al.*, 2012). Several practitioner-authors of this book refer to the fact that the U.S.\$20 million of pooled funding that was donated was intended for one year’s implementation; but seven years later, in 2014, there was still unspent money in the EPF. Aydagül notes that “absorption capacity, not lack of funding, constituted a bottleneck.” This was due to the donors’ excessive requirements for approval of spending, the MoE’s lack of awareness and understanding of those requirements, slow procurement and distribution procedures, and lack of MoE staff dedicated to EPF program implementation.

### ***Capacity development***

De Grauwe (2009: 53) defines capacity development as:

...any activity which aims explicitly at strengthening a country so that it can better achieve its development objectives by having a positive and sustainable impact on any of the following:

- individual officers with the necessary capacities and incentives;
- organizations that have a clear mandate and are run effectively;
- a supportive public service;
- a motivating, stable and structured context

without having negative effects on any of these levels.

The findings of international research on states emerging from conflict strongly suggest that “ministries fast-track their own internal capacity in sector assessment, planning and financial management” (Arnott and the ADEA Working Group on Education, Management and Policy Support Team, 2012: 7). Analyzing strategies for effective capacity development in fragile states, Bethke (2009) and Sigsgaard (2011) concluded with the following advice for implementers:

- ▶ Prioritize capacity development even though the way forward is not clear
- ▶ Build trust and good inter-personal relationships

- ▶ Commit to a long-term investment in capacity development
- ▶ Produce a capacity development plan (even if it is a small one)
- ▶ Develop and work on concrete outputs or outcomes in order to build on success and build confidence
- ▶ Strive to improve coordination
- ▶ Give people the tools that they need to do their jobs
- ▶ Be flexible

In light of these observations, we can draw some conclusions about capacity development in Liberia’s educational reconstruction during the period 2006–10. One of the important objectives of the EPF and of its component projects was to build the capacity of MoE and other Liberian staff members, in order to provide sustainability to the educational reconstruction process (Schmidt and Taylor, 2010). Williams and Bentrovato (2011: 48) assert that the EPF “has been found to be effective in supporting government capacity development through creative approaches to funding while addressing donor concerns about accountability and management.”

In contrast, the practitioner-authors of this book consider capacity development to have largely failed. Ginsburg and Arrington demonstrate that capacity building of the MoE through the LTTP was neither a high priority for USAID nor for some of the program’s international implementing agencies. Kaabwe and Roberts argue that there was too much pressure from donors and political leaders for “instant results” through quick and visible successes, and too much staff turnover within the MoE and other agencies. Genuine capacity building of institutions, teams, and individuals is a long-term endeavour, requiring policy commitment, time and money, and a focus on building systems (processes, policy and procedures), rather than just quick products (Sigsgaard, 2011). As an illustration, Burchell writes sadly of the ministry’s failure to assign him a counterpart after two and a half years of work: “[T]he ministry lost an excellent opportunity to have somebody trained and gain hands-on experience in many aspects of textbook policies, procurement, and distribution.” Kaabwe wonders whether a full-time, presumably international partnership manager, heading a secretariat, should have been appointed to the EPF, but considers that such a post would have “compromised the MoE’s need for capacity development leading to sustainability.” Roberts concludes that capacity development is “empty rhetoric in contemporary Liberia,” because of the fecklessness within government and the shallow engagement of many international consultants.

## Liberia's paradoxical educational partnerships

A paradox is a phenomenon or circumstance that exhibits contradictions with itself. In that sense, Liberia's educational partnerships were paradoxical. Intending to work together to support the rebuilding of the country's educational foundations, Liberian and international actors achieved some but only limited successes in the period 2006–10. Those successes were achieved as much in spite of the existence of formal partnerships as because of them or through them.

While much has improved in recent years in donor coordination with the Government of Liberia, and between donors, the paradox, the internal contradictions revealed by the negotiation and implementation of the EPF, persist to this time of writing. That paradox could gradually be overcome by the concerted action of courageous and unselfish individuals, working within principled and committed institutions with effective and tested policy and programmatic tools, for the greatest good of Liberia's children and youth.



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# Historical background to Liberia's civil war

*Mark Ginsburg*

Indigenous Africans have lived in the territory today known as Liberia at least since the 15th century, when Portuguese explorers came into contact with some of the groups. It was one of these indigenous groups that sold some land in 1821 to the first contingent of black former American slaves who, with the help of the American Colonization Society, sought to establish a settlement in West Africa. After a series of armed struggles with various indigenous African groups, the ex-slave settlers (subsequently known as Americo-Liberians) expanded the boundaries of this American colony, and in 1847 proclaimed the independence of the Republic of Liberia (Ciment, 2013).

From 1847 to 1980, the Americo-Liberian minority governed the nation, through “intimidation and suppression” of the various indigenous African groups, who collectively constituted 95 percent of the residents of the country (League of Nations, 1931). Indeed, indigenous Liberians were only granted voting rights in 1963. While some assimilation by and intermarriage with indigenous groups occurred during this 153-year period, some members of the indigenous groups engaged in a series of uprisings and rebellions against the Americo-Liberian group, which governed and dominated the economy. The U.S. government provided military and other forms of support to the Liberian government in its efforts to deter the insurrections by indigenous groups. The intergroup conflict reached a crescendo in 1979–1980, when indigenous people took to the streets to protest plans to raise the price of rice; government soldiers killed 70 protesters.

In April 1980, Samuel Doe, a member of the Krahn ethnic group, led a *coup d'état* against President William Tolbert. Initially, many Liberians welcomed leadership by a member of an indigenous group, and the Doe government strengthened relations with the U.S. government, in part by breaking off relations with Libya and the Soviet Union. Over time, however, Doe's government became increasingly corrupt and repressive, and leadership positions became almost exclusively restricted to members of his Krahn ethnic group. These developments and the winding down of the Cold War in the late 1980s led the U.S. government to reduce its support for the Doe regime (Adebajo, 2002).

After a failed coup following Doe's disputed election victory in 1985, Doe sent government troops to attack strongholds of other ethnic groups such as the Gio and the Mano (Adebajo, 2002; Daniels, 1994). Many members of these groups went into exile in Côte d'Ivoire, where they joined rebel forces under the leadership of an Americo-Liberian, Charles Taylor.

From the mid-1980s Liberia "was in the midst of a worsening economic crisis"; the government fell behind in its debt payments, which "resulted in the discontinuance of new direct support from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund" (RoL/MoE, MPEA and USAID, 1988: 4; ch. 1).

In 1989 the rebels, now called the National Patriotic Front of Liberia, launched an invasion from Côte d'Ivoire. This triggered a civil war, which lasted until 1996, although Doe was killed in 1990 and the Economic Community of West African States and the United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia brokered a series of 13 ineffective peace agreements (Adebajo, 2002; Daniels, 1994).

These organizations also brokered the Abuja II Peace Accord, which was successfully implemented beginning in 1996, and this led to presidential elections the next year. Charles Taylor was elected, receiving approximately 75 percent of the vote, while Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was the runner-up with less than 10 percent.

Intermittent violence occurred between 1997 and 1999, when a second multi-group civil war erupted. In 2003, President Taylor resigned after the UN charged him with war crimes and crimes against humanity, declared an embargo on Liberian timber products, and decided to send a multinational military force to Liberia. A new peace agreement was reached in Accra, Ghana on August 18, 2003. The Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace is credited with applying critical pressure on the warring parties to forge a peace agreement (Gerdes, 2013).

After a two-stage election was held in late 2005, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, of mixed Americo-Liberian and indigenous group descent, was elected president of Liberia. In the runoff election she gained 59 percent of the vote, defeating George Weah, a member of the Kru ethnic group. President Sirleaf took office on January 16, 2006. However, after 14 years of almost continuous civil war, Liberia's economy had basically been destroyed (Ciment, 2013; Stromquist *et al.*, 2013).

# The book

In 2006, after nearly two decades of civil conflict and instability, Liberia's physical and governance infrastructure was destroyed and its brutalized population was stricken with high levels of illiteracy and unemployment. The newly formed government of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was not able to meet the stringent requirements imposed by the global aid architecture at the time. In response to this, the Open Society Foundations and UNICEF, working in collaboration with the Government of the Netherlands, made a commitment to deliver up to U.S.\$20 million to Liberia's Ministry of Education to catalyze the recovery of the sector and to support the development of a comprehensive sector plan. The Liberia Education Pooled Fund was launched in May 2008. The purpose of this publication is to present the realities of Liberia's post-conflict educational recovery and the inherent paradox of the partnerships that are necessary to support it. The contributors to this volume have presented first-hand accounts of their engagement in the immediate post-conflict phase of Liberia's educational recovery, and with this have provided lessons and insight for a growing field of education and international development specialists.





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