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LIBERIA

Working with Liberians to
Lift Liberia

MATTERS

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Civil Society and Media Leadership program launched

On the Friday the 4th of June, USAID's new Civil Society and Media Leadership (CSML) program was launched in an official event at the YMCA conference room on Broad Street in Monrovia.

The new CSML program is a five-year, \$11 million program being implemented by

International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX), and will target seven counties in Liberia: Montserrado, Grand Bassa, Lofa, Bong, Nimba, Grand Gedeh, and River Gee. The program goals are to increase citizen participation in, and ownership of, government policy in these counties by enhancing the



Democracy and Governance team leader Sean Hall makes introductory remarks

abilities of civil society organizations. Through training, mentoring, small grant projects and provision of resources the CSML will improve the skills and performance of civil society organizations, enabling them to play a **cont. on page 2...**

MCC Threshold Grant awarded to Liberia

The Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) board of directors approved a \$15 million threshold grant for Liberia which will focus on land rights issues, girls education, and trade policy.

Threshold grants are awarded by the MCC to countries whose application for larger, longer term Compact grants fall just short of the eligibility requirements, leaving them on the 'threshold' of acceptance.

The approval of a threshold grant is a proud moment for Liberia as the MCC abides by a strict policy of only forming partnerships with countries committed to good governance, economic freedom, and investments in their citizens.

USAID Liberia staff were very actively involved in supporting the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs in the development of the Government of Liberia's application to the MCC and will continue to be actively involved as the MCC has nominated USAID Liberia as the party responsible for administering the threshold program.

The MCC program will help to promote equitable access to land and increase land security through increased understanding of property rights issues, and improved land administration and registration capacity. The program will also improve girls' primary education enrollment and retention rates through a

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**CSML Launched
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more active and effective role in giving a voice to Liberians in policy development and advocacy, service delivery, and public monitoring of government performance.

The second component of the CSML program is the media component which will work with the Liberian media to help improve the professional capacity of individual journalists and media outlets. Selected Liberian media will be trained to better conduct sound, analytic, corroborated investigative stories on corruption, government policy making and performance, and to be responsible and judicious in their reporting. Since 2004 USAID has enabled upcountry communities to have their own community radio stations, thereby ensuring that most Liberians have access to some form of news media. This new program continues that commitment by working to extend the reach and enrich the content of community radio stations in the seven targeted counties.

The launch was well attended by a cross section of Liberian civil society organizations, media outlets, and donor partners and Government of Liberia ministries. In addition, IREX implementing partners The Carter Center, YMCA, and the Liberia Media Center were all represented.

During their prepared remarks Charge d'Affaires Robinson and Mission Director White both emphasized the importance of an active and engaged citizenry to the proper functioning of a successful democracy, and highlighted the invaluable role a professional and effective media play in creating informed citizens, particularly with general elections scheduled for the end of 2011.

Mission Director White also highlighted the CSML program's goal of ensuring that 30% of grants go to activities focused on women or gender, and its goal of ensuring that 25% of grants go to organizations proposing youth focused projects.

In particular, the program will work in partnership with the Liberia Women Media Action Committee (LIWOMAC) to shape a strategy to advance women as journalists, media managers, quoted sources in the media, and media audiences. The program will also help ensure inclusion of gender sensitivity in reporting, training in leadership and investigative journalism for women, and radio programming for and about women.

**MCC Threshold Grant
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scholarship program for girls as well as grants to communities to improve schools and grants to support mentoring and awareness campaigns. Lastly, the program will support efforts to improve trade policy and practices especially harmonizing tariffs, engaging regional and global bodies, and strengthening the regulatory environment.

Countries that successfully implement the MCC threshold program are eligible to then apply for compact programs, although a large number of countries never go on to achieve compact program status, so the successful implementation of this Threshold program must be a Government of Liberia priority.



USAID Mission Director Pamela White and Minister of Planning and Economic Affairs Amara Konneh sign the MCC Threshold agreement.

Undersea cable to bring broadband internet to Liberia

The Government of Liberia has signed an agreement with France Telecom that will bring broadband internet to West Africa by the second quarter of 2012. The construction and maintenance agreement will install the undersea, fibre-optic Africa Coast to Europe (ACE) cable along the coast of West Africa and allow Liberia, and 18 other countries, to connect to the internet via broadband for the first time.

The \$25 million agreement, signed in France by President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, is between France Telecom and the Cable Consortium of Liberia (CCL), a public-private partnership between the Government of Liberia (37% ownership), Lonestar Cell (33%), Cellcom (10%), and the Liberia Telecommunications Corporation (20%).

It is believed that the installation of the undersea cable and the subsequent availability of broadband connectivity will provide a significant boost to the business environment in Liberia, as well as an important upgrade in the quality of services provided by the Government, as noted by Minister of Post and Telecommunications Jeremiah Sulunteh.

"This broadband will improve communication to the extent that a medical doctor in Liberia can perform an X-Ray and immediately transmit the result to anyone or another medical doctor in the remotest parts of the country or even out of the country", said Minister Sulunteh.

At an event celebrating the signing of the agreement, Liberian Minister of Planning and Economic Affairs Amara Konneh praised USAID for their role in providing legal and technical assistance that was essential to the negotiation of the agreement.

Representing USAID at the event was Democracy and Governance team leader Sean Hall, who also highlighted the benefits that broadband connectivity will bring to Liberia, saying "[broadband connectivity] is going to open Liberia up to business and is going to create new opportunity and employment, sharing of information, building social networks and put Liberia on the information super-highway."

While the signing of the contract is undoubtedly good news for Liberia, there remains a lot of work to be done within the country to ensure that the broadband speeds are able to be utilised by Liberians throughout the country, both on an infrastructure level and on a capacity level. In a country where internet penetration is reportedly used by less than 10% of the population, it is important that a comprehensive plan be established to ensure these infrastructure and capacity challenges will be addressed.



New Multi Year Assistance Programs awarded by Food For Peace

The Food For Peace office at USAID Liberia has awarded two new Multi Year Assistance Programs (MYAPs) for implementation in Liberia over the next five years. The programs will seek to address the root causes of food insecurity that are affecting the most vulnerable populations by using integrated approaches that will combine agriculture, health, nutrition, water and sanitation, microfinance, and education activities.

In the first of the MYAPs, non-profit organization ACDI/VOCA will receive an estimated \$40 million in resources over five years to implement their Liberian Agricultural Upgrading, Nutrition, and Child Health (LAUNCH) program. ACDI/VOCA will

operate in Bong and Nimba Counties and will be supported by subgrantees Project Concern International, John Snow International, and Making Cents International.

Opportunities Industrialization Centers International (OICI) was also approved to implement a program, and will receive \$35 million in resources over the next five years for their Liberia Initiative for Food Enrichment (LIFE) program. They will operate in Grand Gedeh and River Gee counties and will be supported by subgrantees World Initiative for Soy in Human Health, Shelter for Life, and Malnutrition Matters.

USAID contract set to double power generation in Monrovia

USAID has awarded a contract to US company Berger-Cummings for the supply, transportation, installation and commissioning of a diesel power generation plant. The contract, valued at \$11 million, is scheduled to be completed by December this year and with a total capacity of 10 megawatts the facility will double the electricity generation capacity in Monrovia. The power will be generated on a turn-key basis and once the facility is successfully commissioned, it will be handed over to the Liberia Electricity Corporation (LEC) for commercial operation.

This is just the latest in a string of positive USAID

contributions to the Energy sector in Liberia. Previously USAID has contributed to the Emergency Power Program (EPP) which was a multi-donor program aimed at restoring power to parts of Monrovia. USAID also worked to provide rural communities with access to affordable energy and to help the Government of Liberia develop a sound energy policy through the Liberia Energy Assistance Program (LEAP).

Recently, USAID has leveraged its Development Credit Authority to encourage banks to provide loans to small and medium enterprises working in renewable energy.

Thanks for Voting

Many thanks to all of you who cast your vote for the newsletter name. In the end it was a tight contest, with "USAID Matters" winning overall with 20.8% of the vote.

USAID Liberia Magazine is produced in-house at USAID Liberia. For comments, questions or suggestions please contact jprudhomme@usaid.gov