



USAID
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LIBERIA

Working with Liberians to Lift Liberia

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USAID pays teacher salaries

On April 27th the U.S. Government through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) announced support in the amount of up to four (4) million U.S. Dollars to the Ministry of Education (MOE) to pay teachers' salaries through the Ministry of Finance's (MOF) Project Financial Management Unit (PFMU).

At a press conference held at the US Embassy, USAID Mission Director Pamela White explained that the funds were made available by the US Congress under a supplementary provision to respond to the worldwide financial crisis and its effects in developing countries. Ms. White added that this funding represents a groundbreaking new direction, allowing USAID to channel support directly to Government Ministries. Previously direct budgetary assistance to government ministries and agencies has been shunned because of a lack of specifics as to how the funds have been used, said Ms. White.

The current effort to support the education sector will strengthen the leadership role of the Ministry of Education in retaining approximately 7,300 newly recruited and recently certified teachers who are graduates of the Rural Teacher Training Institutes (RTTIs), through the payment of salaries for these specific MOE employees, who have been hired and are teaching in MOE primary schools. Salary payments will be made to newly recruited and recently certified teachers identified on an MOE-approved list of teachers formulated during this recent exercise. This activity further

supports USAID and the Government of Liberia's continuing efforts to develop a cohesive and comprehensive database that will ultimately result in a unified payroll system for all MOE employees, an exercise started in November 2009 with the participation of the General Auditing Commission, the Civil Service Agency, the Ministry of Finance, and the Ministry of Education, and coordinated by USAID's Liberia Teacher

Teachers line up to receive salary payments at an Ecobank branch

Training Program (LTTP). Speaking at the announcement, Deputy Minister for Research and Planning, J. cont. on page 2...



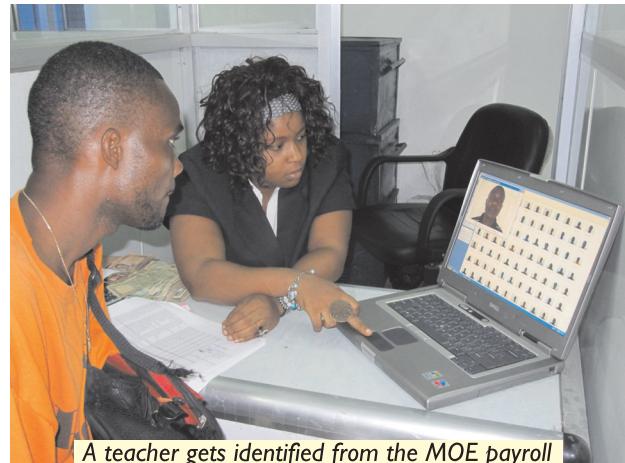
cont. from cover page... Roberts said, "The provision of this fund to support salary payment for the newly recruited and certified teachers is a significant manifestation of USAID's commitment to improving the quality of teaching in our schools. We applaud the USAID for this grant; and Pam White [USAID Liberia Mission Director] in particular for her strong advocacy and timely intervention."

In addition to the payment of these 7,300 employee salaries and modest administrative costs, USAID is procuring modern payroll software for the Government of Liberia to assist the PFMU in maintaining accurate records and payments, which will be disbursed to employees through Ecobank, an internationally recognized institution, starting in early May 2010.

During the press conference Ms. White took a moment to express the importance of using US assistance funds properly. "There will be severe consequences if funds donated here are not used for their intended purposes" she said, before adding "if someone is pocketing another person's check we will close down and move elsewhere" in reference to the current MOE budgetary assistance. Her comments were made in light of recent reports of misappropriation of international donor's funds by the Liberian Government.

This initiative providing the MOE funding to pay the newly recruited and recent RTTI-graduated teachers is part of USAID Liberia's goal to "lift Liberia" to build and maintain a qualified workforce of educators and teachers capable of meeting the Poverty Reduction Strategy goal of primary education for all children.

USAID Mission Director Pamela White said, "Teachers do more to shape Liberia's future than any other investment made in Liberia. We know that education is central to every child's life and every community's future. The United States, in collaboration with the Government of Liberia, is pleased to support these teachers who work so hard to serve their country's needs and to contribute to Liberia's long-term development."



A teacher gets identified from the MOE payroll

Facts about Feed The Future:

\$3.5 billion, 3 year pledge by President Obama at G8 summit in L'Aquila, Italy.

An additional \$18.5 billion in pledges from other donors.

Feed The Future could increase the incomes of 40 million people living on less than \$2 per day.

Feed The Future could also reach 25 million children with nutrition interventions

Feed The Future discussed with journalists

On May 19th Embassy Public Affairs Officer Dehab Ghebreab hosted a luncheon for five senior economic and business reporters to discuss food security and the May 20th launch of the Feed The Future initiative in Washington, DC.

USAID's Economic Growth Specialist McDonald Homer and Department of State Economic Officers Rebecca Alper and Sarah Gonzalez discussed the Feed The Future initiative with the reporters and brainstormed ways to introduce new reporting on food security issues.

The reporters all agreed that agriculture in Liberia was typically not considered a business and as such was not covered very thoroughly by the media. They discussed ways to encourage reporting that reemphasized the theme of food security, including profiles of successful Liberian farmers, and articles on nutrition.

USAID and UNFPA sign historic Memorandum of Understanding

On May 17th USAID and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) signed an historic Memorandum of Understanding to better coordinate their efforts in supporting the Government of Liberia in the field of reproductive health.

The signing ceremony, held in the conference room of the US Embassy's Public Diplomacy Section,

"by age 18 half of Liberia's girls have already given birth"

marked the first Memorandum of Understanding to be signed since President Obama's administration arrived at the White House in January 2009.

Reproductive health issues in Liberia are central to sustainably addressing the country's problems. "There's a direct connection between a woman's ability to plan her family, space her pregnancies, and give birth safely and her ability to get an education, support her family, and participate fully in the life of her community" explained USAID Mission Director Pamela White at the signing ceremony.

Ms. White went on to say that in light of the great importance of the reproductive health field, it made sense for the two biggest donors working in this field to cooperate.

UN Resident Representative Esperanza Fundira echoed Mission Director White, saying "As the two leading agencies for the importation of Reproductive Health commodities, we are committed to providing support to the Government of Liberia to ensure RH commodities security at all times."

Together, USAID and UNFPA provide 99% of the contraceptives available in the country, but continue to face major challenges in Liberia: one in three Liberian women say they would like to use a method to better space their pregnancies and plan their families, but lack the knowledge or access to contraceptives. Teenage births are another challenge: by the age of 18 half of Liberia's girls have already given birth. Mortality rates for pregnant women are about 1 in 1,000 meaning that every year 1,000 Liberian women die as a result of pregnancy related complications.

With statistics like these in mind USAID and UNFPA have signed the MOU targeting seven areas of common interest within the field of reproductive health: Commodity security, supply chain management, supervision and human capacity building, population awareness and advocacy, maternal newborn and family planning, policy development and implementation and monitoring and evaluation.

USAID and UNFPA believe that bringing safe, modern methods of spacing childbirths two years or more is important to health of women and children, and would lower maternal mortality. Women who have babies too close together are at high risk, and so are their babies. Child spacing and family planning benefit everyone.



USAID Mission Director Pamela White speaks at the MOU signing, flanked by UNFPA Representative Fundira Esperanza and USAID Health Development Officer Chris McDermott.

USAID Information Gathering Visits to Nimba County

On May 12th, USAID hosted a Land Dispute Round Table at the Ganta YMCA in Nimba County. The discussion rounded out a three day information gathering mission during which twelve USAID program sites were visited by the Mission Director. The discussion was attended by the District Commissioner, representatives from the Ganta Mayor's office, the Concerned Mandingos Society of Liberia, the Chief Elder of the local Mano tribe, and representatives from USAID including Democracy and Governance Specialist Sean Hall.

The dispute in Ganta city is one of Liberia's most volatile land disputes, especially considering the recent violence that erupted in the area, partly along ethnic lines. While the violence was not directly attributed to issues of land ownership, it illustrated the fragile stability that currently exists in the area.

The discussion, often vigorous and occasionally heated, allowed the hosts to get a better understanding of the basis for each party's argument.

Just prior to the discussion Mission Director White and Sean Hall were interviewed on a popular local community radio show about the nature of the three day visit to Nimba County, USAID's work in the area, and the challenges Nimba County and Ganta City face.



USAID Liberia's Pamela White and Sean Hall take to the airwaves on Ganta's community radio morning show.



Liberian children laugh as they see themselves reflected in the side of a USAID vehicle during the Mission Director's trip around Nimba County.

- Photo by Elena Andreotti