INDEPENDENT REPORTING MECHANISM:

LIBERIA PROGRESS REPORT 2013–2014

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First Progress Report

Open Government Partnership

INDEPENDENT REPORTING MECHANISM

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LIBERIA
PROGRESS REPORT 2013-14

INDEPENDENT REPORTING MECHANISM (IRM):
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The Government of Liberia made good progress on its most ambitious milestones but many milestones saw little to no progress. To improve performance, the Government should consider creating an OGP secretariat that would be in charge of coordinating the OGP process, assisting agencies with implementation and organizing regular consultation.

The Open Government Partnership (OGP) is a voluntary international initiative that aims to secure commitments from governments to their citizenry to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption, and harness new technologies to strengthen governance. The Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) carries out a biannual review of the activities of each OGP participating country.

Liberia officially began participating in OGP in September 2011, when President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf declared the Government's intent to join.

The Ministry of Information Cultural Affairs and Tourism (MICAT) leads OGP in Liberia with the blessing of the President. MICAT played a coordinating and quality control role rather than assuming a command and control structure. During the latter half of 2013, the Government created a Steering Committee comprised of MICAT, the Ministry of Finance, the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission and civil society organizations to serve as a working group and advisory board. The agencies did not have a dedicated line in the national budget for OGP operations. Ministries and agencies were expected to use their budgetary allotment to implement milestones contained in the action plan.

OGP PROCESS

Countries participating in the OGP follow a process for consultation during development and implementation of their OGP action plan and during implementation.

Consultation during development of the action plan was limited to a few CSOs and MICAT staff. Advanced notice for public comment on the draft action plan did not take place and public awareness-raising was done on an ad-hoc basis. The Government held a validation meeting to present the action plan to stakeholders. However it is unclear whether recommendations from civil society were reflected in the final action plan because documentation of the meeting was not available.

The Steering Committee monitored action plan implementation. However, it met infrequently and lacked authority over implementation decisions.

At the time of writing this report, the Government had not published its self-assessment report. A forum on the status of the action plan was held in July 2014 where MICAT distributed a document listing completion of the commitments expressed as a percentage.

AT A GLANCE

MEMBER SINCE: **2011**
NUMBER OF COMMITMENTS: **6**
NUMBER OF MILESTONES: **18**

LEVEL OF COMPLETION

COMPLETED:	3 of 18
SUBSTANTIAL:	3 of 18
LIMITED:	6 of 18
NOT STARTED:	5 of 18
UNCLEAR:	1 of 18

TIMING

ON/AHEAD OF SCHEDULE:	5 of 18

MILESTONE EMPHASIS

ACCESS TO INFORMATION:	14 of 18
CIVIC PARTICIPATION:	4 of 18
ACCOUNTABILITY:	2 of 18
TECH & INNOVATION FOR TRANSPARENCY & ACCOUNTABILITY:	4 of 18

NUMBER OF MILESTONES THAT WERE:

CLEARLY RELEVANT TO AN OGP VALUE:	16 of 18
OF MODERATE OR TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL IMPACT:	3 of 18
SUBSTANTIALLY OR COMPLETELY IMPLEMENTED:	7 of 18
ALL THREE (✪):	**2 of 18**

COMMITMENT IMPLEMENTATION

As part of OGP, countries are required to make commitments in a two-year action plan. The following tables summarize each commitment, including its level of completion, ambition, whether it falls within Liberia's planned schedule, and the key next steps for future OGP action plans. Liberia's action plan included measures aimed at increasing budget transparency and public participation. Most of the measures of the one-year action plan saw only limited implementation. Continued action and full, two-year action plan commitments should follow in the next action plan.

Note: Table 2 refers to the Governments' own qualitative self-assessment report in which each action received a rating of "percent complete".

Table 1 | Assessment of Progress by Commitment

COMMITMENT SHORT NAME	POTENTIAL IMPACT				LEVEL OF COMPLETION				TIMING	NEXT STEPS
✪ MILESTONE IS SPECIFIC AND MEASURABLE, CLEARLY RELEVANT TO OGP VALUES AS WRITTEN, HAS SIGNIFICANT POTENTIAL IMPACT, AND IS SUBSTANTIALLY OR COMPLETELY IMPLEMENTED.	NONE	MINOR	MODERATE	TRANSFORMATIVE	NOT STARTED	LIMITED	SUBSTANTIAL	COMPLETE		INCLUDE THIS COMMITMENT, IN PART OR IN TOTAL, IN NEXT ACTION PLAN?
1. Operationalizing the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)	◼	◼	◼		◼	◼			Behind schedule	Yes
1.1. Create a unified public information database and publish all high-profile public interest information.	◼	◼			◼	◼			Behind schedule	Yes
1.2. Provide support to the Information Commission to ensure effective oversight of the FOIA.	◼				◼	◼			Behind schedule	Yes
1.3. Standardize all government websites to have them regularly updated with relevant information.	◼				◼	◼			Behind schedule	No
1.4. Increase internal and external awareness on the FOI Act of 2010.	◼					◼	◼		Behind schedule	No
1.5. Adopt a standardized FOIA implementation procedure and policy.	◼				◼	◼			Behind schedule	Yes
2. Open Budget Initiative–Increasing public access to budget information	◼	◼			◼	◼	◼		Behind schedule	Yes
2.1. Regularly publish and disseminate the simple English version of the citizen budget guide.	◼	◼			◼	◼	◼		On schedule	No

COMMITMENT SHORT NAME	POTENTIAL IMPACT				LEVEL OF COMPLETION				TIMING	NEXT STEPS
✪ MILESTONE IS SPECIFIC AND MEASURABLE, CLEARLY RELEVANT TO OGP VALUES AS WRITTEN, HAS SIGNIFICANT POTENTIAL IMPACT, AND IS SUBSTANTIALLY OR COMPLETELY IMPLEMENTED.	NONE	MINOR	MODERATE	TRANSFORMATIVE	NOT STARTED	LIMITED	SUBSTANTIAL	COMPLETE		INCLUDE THIS COMMITMENT, IN PART OR IN TOTAL, IN NEXT ACTION PLAN?
2.2. Establish a dedicated website for the Open Budget Initiative to host updated information about the budget process and execution.	■				■	■	■		On schedule	No
2.3. Develop a platform that provides regular budget update to all citizens via SMS and other associated technologies through various local languages in Liberia.	■	■			■				Behind schedule	No
2.4. Provide periodic support to the rural radio stations to broadcast the messages of the Open Budget Initiative.	■	■			■	■			Behind schedule	Yes
2.5. Provide quarterly update on the implementation status of all projects in the national budget and communicate the budget performance report to the public via existing communication channels.	■	■			■	■			Behind schedule	Yes
3. Extractive Industries Transparency– Accountability of revenues generated from natural resources	■	■	■		■	■	■		Behind schedule	Yes
3.1. To publish and popularize through community town hall meetings, radio appearances, website and newspaper publications, the 4th Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) Reconciliation Report of Liberia and the Revenue Tracking Report covering the period 1 July 2010 to 30 June 2011.	■	■			■	■	■		Behind schedule	Yes
✪ 3.2. Conduct post contract award audit/ investigations of material contracts, concessions and licenses entered into by the Government of Liberia with companies operating in the mining, oil, forestry, and agriculture sectors covering the period 13 July 2009 to 31 December 2011.	■	■			■	■	■		Ahead of schedule	Yes

COMMITMENT SHORT NAME	POTENTIAL IMPACT				LEVEL OF COMPLETION				TIMING	NEXT STEPS
✪ MILESTONE IS SPECIFIC AND MEASURABLE, CLEARLY RELEVANT TO OGP VALUES AS WRITTEN, HAS SIGNIFICANT POTENTIAL IMPACT, AND IS SUBSTANTIALLY OR COMPLETELY IMPLEMENTED.	NONE	MINOR	MODERATE	TRANSFORMATIVE	NOT STARTED	LIMITED	SUBSTANTIAL	COMPLETE		INCLUDE THIS COMMITMENT, IN PART OR IN TOTAL, IN NEXT ACTION PLAN?
4. Citizens' Participation and Dialogue–Increasing communications between state and citizens	■	■			■				Behind schedule	Yes
4.1. Develop a communications strategy to strengthen public understanding, participation, and ownership of the Agenda for Transparency and its implementation.	░	░			Unclear				Unclear	Yes
4.2. Develop interactive, multi-faceted, multistakeholder platform to gather citizens' feedback on national development outcomes	░	░			░				Behind schedule	Yes
✪ **5. Promoting a Culture of Transparency and Accountability**–Ensure passage of the Code of Conduct for Public Officials and Whistleblower Protection Acts	■	■	■	■	■	■	■		Behind schedule	Yes
6. Technology and Innovation–Open data website.	■	■			■	■			Behind schedule	No
6.1. Ensure the implementation of the Integrated Financial Management System (IFMIS) project beyond the pilot phase.	░				░	░	░		On schedule	No
6.2. Launch Liberia's Open Data Website to make public all relevant information on Liberia.	░	░			░	░			Behind schedule	No
6.3. Complete the development of the platform for the connection of the Government's ministries to the fiber optic cable.	░				░	░			Behind schedule	No

Table 2 | Summary of Progress by Commitment

NAME OF COMMITMENT	SUMMARY OF RESULTS
✪ MILESTONE IS SPECIFIC AND MEASURABLE, CLEARLY RELEVANT TO OGP VALUES AS WRITTEN, HAS SIGNIFICANT POTENTIAL IMPACT, AND IS SUBSTANTIALLY OR COMPLETELY IMPLEMENTED.	
1. Operationalizing the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) • OGP Value Relevance: Clear • Potential impact: Moderate • Completion: Limited	The Liberian government sought to increase public awareness of and government compliance with existing legal and institutional frameworks for the disclosure of public information. While progress has been made in normalizing the expectation of access to information, the government did not complete its milestones for implementation and a perceived lack of drive from the top-level undermines compliance by senior and junior members of government. • **1.1 Public Information Officer Appointment:** This new effort to dedicate an entity responsible for responding to access to information requests within government agencies and ministries is an incremental but positive step towards greater accountability and access to information. The government self-assessment reports a 70% completion rate, but other government and civil society leaders assert that only 22 of 60 agencies are compliant. • **1.2 FOIA Oversight:** Government fulfilled the pledge to support the Independent Information Commission (IIC) in terms of finance, but the phrasing of the commitment leaves open the question as what other types of support might be expected. The government significantly increased financial support for the IIC to continue as the main government agency for FOIA implementation. • **1.3 Website Standardization:** There has been limited progress in standardizing websites. The self-assessment found a 90% completion rate but civil society members dispute the existence of a standardized format and criticize the lack of regular updates to various government websites. • **1.4 FOIA Awareness:** This new ambition for creating internal and external awareness of the FOIA led to workshops for the government officials, members of the public, and training community based networks. Civil society continues to advocate deeper and continued education and awareness interventions, though the self-assessment found a 90% completion rate. • **1.5 Adopt FOI Policy:** Civil society members have requested completed standardized operational procedures. However, the IRM researcher was unable, in the course of research to verify the completion of this procedure and policy manual. In order to ensure that access to public information leads to more transparency and accountability, the IIC needs to build citizens' trust by documenting delinquent ministries and agencies, dedicating resources to hire lawyers for Civil Law or Circuit Court appeals, and continuing to educate policy makers on their role in the implementation of the FOIA.

NAME OF COMMITMENT	SUMMARY OF RESULTS
2. Open Budget Initiative (OBI) • OGP Value Relevance: Clear • Potential impact: Minor • Completion: Substantial	This commitment addresses Liberia's history of financial mismanagement and seeks to engender greater trust in the government through transparency. The government completed some of the milestones. The six-month timeline for completion, lack of legislation to ensure compliance, and continued inability of the majority of the population to easily access and understand the budget information demonstrates the continued challenges to achieving policy goals of open budgeting. • **2.1 Popularize Simple Budget:** The government actively worked with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to achieve their milestone to popularize the simple English version of the budget guide for 2013-2014. The government contracted CSOs to distribute, raise awareness, and facilitate regional town hall meetings. As of writing, the government has not publicized future budget awareness campaign plans. • **2.2 Establish Open Budget Website:** The government fulfilled its milestone to create a dedicated website with national budget and quarterly and yearly fiscal reports. The Ministry of Finance, on its grounds, erected an electronic billboard displaying budgets and projects. Civil society interviewed continues to advocate for accountability measures that target a larger portion of the population. • **2.3 Budget Update Through Technology:** The government implemented a pilot program for citizens to request budget information updates via SMS. While CSOs indicated early success funding lapsed indefinitely. • **2.4 Increase Citizens' Knowledge of the Open Budget:** Government officials and community radio station managers confirmed that this commitment has not yet started. • **2.5 Budget Performance Review:** Regular fiscal outtrun reports have been compiled and are accessible on government websites. Government is expanding this initiative to other sectors. While the reports cover expenditures in detail, they will need to compare expenditure with allocation to fully assess budget performance in order to move towards completion. Moving forward, the government should enact legislation to decentralize budget formulation and enhance in-person discussion. To enhance outreach, the government can continue providing the simple English budget guide and finance local language radio broadcasts on budget allocations for county development projects.

NAME OF COMMITMENT	SUMMARY OF RESULTS
3. Extractive Industries Transparency • OGP Value Relevance: Clear • Potential impact: Moderate • Completion: Substantial	This commitment has two actions to improve transparency and public participation around natural resource revenue and contracting. Despite an increase in the availability of information, engagement remains limited to the small portion of the population that is literate, has Internet access, and can understand the jargon of concession contracts. • **3.1 Increasing citizens' access to information on revenue from natural resources:** The Government of Liberia promoted the fourth Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) Reconciliation Report of Liberia through 25 town-hall meetings in ten counties, radio talk shows, and local newspapers. Although activities did not take place in all fifteen counties as stated in the original text, a summary of the report is available on Liberia EITI (LEITI) website. • ✪ **3.2 Compliance by government in awarding contracts to companies:** This commitment contracted a third-party auditor to evaluate government and company compliance with post-award. Hard copies of the post-contract award audit reports for the given period are available at the LEITI office. In the next OGP action plan, the government could commit to ensuring citizen participation in each stage of the contract negotiation process. To improve compliance by agencies and companies, the government can implement the post-contract audit recommendations and shift from bi-annual to annual post-contract audits.
4. Citizens' Participation and Dialogue • OGP Value Relevance: Clear • Potential impact: Minor • Completion: Not Started	This commitment sought to establish a platform for facilitating the two-way flow of information critical to open government. This commitment has the potential to change citizen-state relationships but more action is required in order to achieve completion. • **4.1 Improved Communication by the Government:** The Government's self-assessment report rated the milestone at 80% completion with a draft communication strategy awaiting Cabinet endorsement. Civil society members interviewed by the IRM researcher were not consulted in the drafting process and the IRM researcher could not verify whether a draft exists. • **4.2 Establish Platform for Citizens' Feedback to Government:** The Government sought to develop a platform to gather citizens' feedback on national development outcomes. The Government's self-assessment indicated that this milestone has not started. In the next action plan, the government can enhance its communication strategy by drawing on the expertise of civil society members to set a framework for how it engages with citizens.
✪ **5. Promoting a culture of transparency and accountability** • OGP Value Relevance: Clear • Potential impact: Transformative • Completion: Substantial	The Code of Conduct for public officials and the Whistleblower Protection Bill aimed to reduce corruption, improve work ethic within the public sector, and increase transparency and accountability. The Legislature passed the Code of Conduct, but the Whistleblower Protection Bill awaits passage. In the absence of legislation, the President signed Executive Order 22 in 2009, which in some ways, goes farther than the Bill, but does not have full force of law. In order to realize results from the code of conduct, citizens will need to understand better how the bill can be used for advocacy. The Executive will need to continue lobbying for passage of Whistleblower Protection.

NAME OF COMMITMENT	SUMMARY OF RESULTS
6. Technology and Innovation • OGP Value Relevance: Clear • Potential impact: Minor • Completion: Limited	The objective of this commitment is to support citizens' access to information and government's transparency policies by enhancing inter-connectivity among government agencies. Enhanced connectivity can create an opportunity for increased access but the commitment does not explain how these milestones will contribute to the values of open government. This also lacks legislation to ensure compliance. • **6.1 Integrated Financial Management:** The Government extended the Integrated Financial Management System into a full project. The Government self-assessment rated the project at 80% completion, although members of civil society interviewed by the IRM researcher could not confirm the utilization of the data because it is an internal system. The lack of accessibility raises concerns of its relevance to OGP values. • **6.2 Open Data Website:** The self-assessment report rated the launch of an Open Data Website at 15% completed. The Governments' civil society partners indicated a lack of funding, weak interagency communication and coordination, and technical problems as continuing challenges to the completion of this milestone. • **6.3 Increase Connectivity:** As written, it is unclear how improved Internet connectivity directly contributes to the values of open government. As of the writing of this report, fourteen government agencies are connected to the fiber optic cable. The government agency responsible for implementation cites a lack of infrastructure and limited funding as factors impeding progress. When it comes to digital services and open data, the next action plan will need to clearly map connections between these innovations and open government.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Since the end of the civil war, the Liberian government has made efforts to curb corruption and increase transparency but more work remains to be done. Similarly, although the Constitution guarantees participation, citizens remain suspicious of government efforts at two-way communication.

The IRM researcher made the following recommendations aimed at improving the OGP process and supporting implementation of government commitment in Liberia.

TOP FIVE 'SMART' RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Popular Participation and Ownership:** Increase citizens' participation beyond select Monrovia-based CSOs as well as participation from the legislative and judicial branches of government in the formulation of the next action plan.

2. **Demonstrate Top-level Political Commitment:** Top-level government officials should demonstrate their involvement in the implementation of the next action plan by participating in OGP consultative meetings and processes as well as in the official launch of the OGP action plan.

3. **Include Commitments involving Three Branches of Government and that Reflect OGP Values and Principles:** All commitments and deliverables should demonstrate relevance to the values and principles of OGP. Commitments should be specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, time-bound and have set benchmarks for completion.

4. **Establish an OGP Secretariat:** The formulation and implementation of the next action plan should be led by a secretariat housed at MICAT whose time would be fully dedicated to the work of the OGP. The Secretariat would be tasked with leading broad-based consultative processes in formulating the action plan, coordinating and documenting meetings and following-up with individual agencies on the implementation of commitments.

5. **Develop a Coordination Strategy:** When established, the OGP secretariat should be charged with the responsibility of developing a comprehensive coordination strategy prior to the implementation of the action plan. The strategic document could highlight mode of coordination between the secretariat and the government's focal agency on the OGP, lay-out roles and responsibilities, frequency of meetings, outreach model, channels of communication, and monitoring plan.

Oscar Bloh is a lawyer and has worked for the past twelve years in the civil society sector as a development practitioner and a researcher on issues related to governance and policy reforms.

Open Government Partnership
INDEPENDENT REPORTING MECHANISM

The Open Government Partnership (OGP) aims to secure concrete commitments from governments to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption, and harness new technologies to strengthen governance. OGP's Independent Reporting Mechanism assesses development and implementation of national action plans to foster dialogue among stakeholders and improve accountability.

I | NATIONAL PARTICIPATION IN OGP

The Open Government Partnership (OGP) is a voluntary, multi-stakeholder international initiative that aims to secure concrete commitments from governments to their citizenry to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption, and harness new technologies to strengthen governance. In pursuit of these goals, OGP provides an international forum for dialogue and information sharing among governments, CSOs, and the private sector, all of which contribute to a common pursuit of open government. These OGP stakeholders participate to further the principles and mission of OGP.

HISTORY OF OGP PARTICIPATION

Liberia began its formal participation in September 2011, when President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf declared her country's intention to participate in the initiative.[1] In order to participate in OGP, governments must exhibit a demonstrated commitment to open government by meeting a set of (minimum) performance criteria that are particularly consequential for increasing government responsiveness, strengthening citizen engagement, and fighting corruption. Objective third-party indicators are used to determine the extent of country progress on each of the dimensions, with points awarded as described below.

Liberia entered into the partnership exceeding the minimal requirements for eligibility, with a high score in each of the criteria. At the time of joining, the country had an access to information law,[2] received the highest possible ranking for open budgets (4 out of a possible 4)[3] and for asset disclosure for senior officials (4 out of 4),[4] as well as a score of 6.18 out of a possible ten on the Civil Liberties category of the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index.[5]

All OGP participating governments are required to develop OGP country action plan that elaborates concrete commitments over an initial two-year period. Governments should initiate their OGP country action plans by sharing existing efforts related to their chosen grand challenge(s) (see Section IV), including specific Open Government strategies and ongoing programs. Action plans should then set out governments' OGP commitments, which move government practice beyond its current baseline with respect to the relevant grand challenge. Commitments may build on existing efforts, identify new steps to complete ongoing reforms, or initiate action in an entirely new area.

Liberia developed its National Action Plan from February 2013 to April 2013. The effective period of implementation for the action plan submitted in April was officially 1 July 2013 through 31 July 2014. On 8 July 2014, the government organised a stakeholders' forum as a self-assessment on the achievement of milestones. At the time of writing this report, the document on the outcome of the forum was not available to the public.

In order to meet OGP requirements, the Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) of OGP partnered with Oscar Bloh, an independent researcher, who carried out this evaluation of the development and implementation of Liberia's first action plan. The IRM aims to inform ongoing dialogue around development and implementation of future commitments in each OGP participating country. Methods and sources are discussed in a methodological annex in this report.

BASIC INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

The Executive Branch that implements policies and legislation through ministries and agencies is in charge of the OGP. The President and other senior government officials were not directly involved in conceptualising the development of the action plan. Instead, they delegated the task to the Ministry of Information Cultural Affairs and Tourism (MICAT), which was not created specifically for OGP but has been in existence for many years, to drive the process. MICAT had the blessing of the President to lead this process, but has no other legal mandate specifically related to OGP. As a consequence, MICAT has little or no legal or political power to force policy changes on other agencies or ministries of government.

Currently, MICAT's mandate relates largely to ensure quality control by organising and co-ordinating OGP meetings from the development of the action plan to its implementation, and soliciting commitments from other agencies or institutions they found relevant to their function. Most of the commitments fall under the Executive Branch of Government. Nonetheless, most agencies relevant to the commitments did not participate in OGP meetings during the implementation phase.[6]

During the latter half of 2013, the government in consultation with representative from civil society organizations put in place a Steering Committee (SC) comprising MICAT, the Ministry of Finance (MoF) and the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission (LACC) and members of civil society organizations. The MoF participated actively during the development and implementation of the action plan. The SC serves as a working group and an advisory board. MICAT, as the lead ministry, could not provide any criteria used for the selection of the other government institutions. At the same time, this SC did not have any significant authority to influence the commitments that different government agencies made in the action plan. Two factors were responsible for this. Firstly, the Executive Branch did not release any circular to ministries and agencies committing to open government principles and values. Secondly, government agencies relevant to the plan were not involved in the initial stakeholders' consultation, which led to the development of the milestones.

Liberia is a unitary sovereign state divided into counties for administrative purposes. The government is a republic with three separate co-ordinate branches: the Executive, Legislature, and Judiciary. These branches operate based on the doctrine of separation of power. As a highly centralised political system, the national level government can enforce actions at subnational levels, but the OGP commitments and milestones had no implications for the subnational government. This is related to the fact that the consultation leading to the development of the action plan did not take place beyond the national level (see Section II on "Action Plan Development").

Liberia's entrance into the OGP framework came after the country had two successive elections following an extended period of civil war. The first election was in 2005 and the other in 2011. The sitting president won both elections, and this served as a significant political asset and encouraged international goodwill to the administration.

Although there was an initial endorsement of OGP by the Cabinet, high-level commitment lessened over time. OGP did not have a dedicated line in the national budget for its operations. However, according to government officials, the Government through the Ministry of Finance provided funding in the amount of $10,000 for specific OGP activities, including the first year review and for facilitating the implementation of the commitments. In addition, the Government sponsored the back-to-back trips for the focal person to attend the OGP meetings in London in 2012 and 2013.[7]

MICAT engaged the House's Committee on Ways, Means and Finance to include OGP in the 2013-2014 National Budget. MICAT proposed a budget of US$350,000 to the Committee. The amount was negotiated down to US$40,000.[8] This drastically cut amount was not reflected in the approved budget. Thus, individual ministries or agencies with budget allocations were expected to use their budgetary allotment to implement milestones that were contained in the action plan. This created the framework for mainstreaming and engendering ownership of OGP values and principles in the work of other ministries. In a similar vein, the OGP had no full-time dedicated staff members. The Deputy Minister of Administration of MICAT managed the co-ordination of OGP activities with

support from the Legal Officer of MICAT assigned in the office of the Deputy Minister. The two persons had OGP responsibilities in addition to the duties for which they were hired. The two-person team became known as the OGP Secretariat operating within the Deputy Minister's Office.

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

The IRM partnered with experienced and independent national researchers to author and disseminate reports for each OGP participating government. In Liberia, the IRM partnered with Oscar Bloh, an independent researcher. The researcher reviewed the Government's national action plan[9] and the government's self-assessment scorecard, which was presented at the stakeholders' conference held in July 2014. Unfortunately, there is no Internet link to access the scorecard. However, numerous references are made to these documents throughout this report. OGP staff and a panel of experts reviewed the report.

To gather the voices of multiple stakeholders, interviews were conducted with CSOs, government officials, and other stakeholders involved with the OGP. Summaries of interviews are in the Annex.

In order to diversify the views of interviewees, the researcher had planned to conduct interviews with CSOs and government officials at the county level. However, this aspect of the research did not take place due to travel risks as a result of the Ebola epidemic.

[1] "Liberia," Open Government Partnership, http://bit.ly/1u312hh
[2] Republic of Liberia, "Freedom of Information Act of 2010," Embassy of the Republic of Liberia to the United States, September 2010, http://bit.ly/1DEIxm5
[3] International Budget Partnership, *Open Budgets. Transform Lives*, (Washington, DC: Open Budget Initiative, 2010), http://bit.ly/1hTd9TQ
[4] Simeon Djankov, Rafael La Porta, Florencio Lopez-de-Silanes, and Andrei Shleifer, "Disclosure by Politicians," (Tuck School of Business Working Paper 2009-60, 2009), http://bit.ly/19nDEfK; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), "Types of Information Decision Makers Are Required to Formally Disclose, and Level of Transparency," in *Government at a Glance 2009*, (France: OECD Publishing, 2009), 132, http://bit.ly/13vGtqS; Richard Messick, "Income and Asset Declarations: Global Experience of Their Impact on Corruption" (paper prepared for the Conference on Evidence-Based Anti-Corruption Policy organised by Thailand's National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC) in collaboration with the World Bank, Bangkok, Thailand, 5-6 June 2009), 16, http://bit.ly/1clokyf
[5] The Economist, *Democracy Index 2010: Democracy in Retreat*, by the Economist Intelligence Unit (Report, London, 2010), http://bit.ly/eLC1rE
[6] Members of civil society organizations, interview with the IRM researcher, between July and August, 2014.
[7] Interview conducted with MICAT officials on July 9, 2014.
[8] Officials from the Ministry of Information, Cultural Affairs and Tourism of the Republic of Liberia (MICAT), interview with the IRM researcher, July 9, 2014. CSOs also confirmed the facts.
[9] The Republic of Liberia, *The Open Government Partnership (OGP): National Action Plan of the Republic of Liberia*. (Liberia, April 2013), http://bit.ly/1BYRsN5

II | ACTION PLAN DEVELOPMENT

OGP awareness-raising in Liberia started with an orientation meeting with CSOs and public radio broadcasts. Despite these efforts, consultation on the development of the action plan was limited to a few individuals. It is unclear to what extent the consultation influenced the content of the action plan.

Countries participating in OGP follow a set process for consultation during development of their OGP action plan. According to the OGP Articles of Governance, countries must:

- Make the details of their public consultation process and timeline available (online at minimum) prior to the consultation;
- Consult widely with the national community, including civil society and the private sector, seek out a diverse range of views, and make a summary of the public consultation and all individual written comment submissions available online;
- Undertake OGP awareness-raising activities to enhance public participation in the consultation;
- Consult the population with sufficient forewarning and through a variety of mechanisms—including online and through in-person meetings—to ensure the accessibility of opportunities for citizens to engage.

A fifth requirement, during consultation, is set out in the OGP Articles of Governance. This requirement is discussed in Section III on "Action Plan Implementation":

- Countries are to identify a forum to enable regular multi-stakeholder consultation on OGP implementation. The forum can be an existing entity or a new one.

This is discussed in the next section, but evidence for consultation both before and during implementation is included here and in Table 1 for ease of reference.

Table | Action Plan Consultation Process

PHASE OF ACTION PLAN	OGP PROCESS REQUIREMENT (ARTICLES OF GOVERNANCE SECTION)	DID THE GOVERNMENT MEET THIS REQUIREMENT?
During Development	Were timeline and process available prior to consultation?	No
	Was the timeline available online?	No
	Was the timeline available through other channels?	No
	Was there advance notice of the consultation?	No
	How many days of advance notice were provided?	N/A
	Was this notice adequate?	No
	Did the government carry out awareness-raising activities?	Yes
	Provide any links to awareness-raising activities.	See narrative
	Were consultations held online?	No
	Were in-person consultations held?	Yes
	Was a summary of comments provided?	No
	Were consultations open or invitation-only?	Invitation-only
	Place the consultations on the IAP2 spectrum.[1]	Consult
During Implementation	Was there a regular forum for consultation during implementation?	Yes
	Were consultations open or invitation-only?	Invitation-only
	Place the consultations on the IAP2 spectrum.	Consult

ADVANCE NOTICE AND AWARENESS-RAISING

In 2012, prior to developing the action plan, the government through the Ministry of Information, Cultural Affairs and Tourism (MICAT) held an orientation meeting with five selected CSOs working on media and transparency issues. The CSOs were briefed on the government's membership to the OGP. The IRM researcher could not find evidence of advance notice on the consultation by the Government. The IRM researcher did not find any evidence of a written public outreach strategy for mass public awareness to engage citizens' participation in the OGP process. However, officials of MICAT and select members of CSOs appeared on several Monrovia-based radio stations, particularly the Liberia Broadcasting System (LBS), a state-run entity and UNMIL Radio Apart from these occasional appearances, there was no evidence of raising awareness outside of Monrovia.

DEPTH AND BREADTH OF CONSULTATION

The depth and breadth of the consultation in developing the action plan determine the quality of the process and, to a large extent, the success of implementation. One of the standards for the OGP process is that countries must consult widely with community members, other government institutions, CSOs, and the private sector to solicit a diverse range of views. The government, led by MICAT, planned to consult more broadly in developing the action plan, but this did not take place due to time limitations from finalising the document for cabinet review and approval.[2]

As a consequence, the depth and breadth of consultation was low, and diversified views were limited or absent. The government organised a one-day consultative meeting in developing the action plan but the IRM researcher could not verify whether or not MICAT adhered to the seven days advance notice. This meeting was attended by four selected CSOs with expertise and knowledge relevant to OGP and three staff members from MICAT.

The private sector and members of other branches of government did not participate in the meeting. At this consultative meeting, the government, through MICAT, presented a draft action plan for discussion. It appeared that ministries and institutions under the Executive Branch presented individual commitments and milestones to MICAT, which MICAT used to develop the draft plan that served as the basis for the consultation. This is evident by the fact that the milestones were activities that the government was already pursuing.

Those interviewed considered the consultation to be meaningful, but believed that it would have been enriched with the participation of other ministries that would have brought different perspectives to the planning process. In furtherance of its consultative process, the government held a one-day validation meeting of the action plan on April 10, 2013. The purpose of the validation was to present the action plan to stakeholders to ascertain whether the commitments were realistic, reflected OGP principles, or needed further changes.

At the validation meeting, the number of participants greatly increased, and CSO representatives other than those that participated in the consultation came, as well as private sector representatives, and government ministries and agencies. It is difficult to ascertain whether the recommendations from civil society or the private sector were reflected in the final version of the action plan because minutes or documentation from the consultative forum and validation were not made available to the IRM researcher, despite a formal request to MICAT. Without this documentation, it was difficult to say whether those who attended the validation requested substantial changes in the action plan.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The government operates more strongly if it operates as a unit, and the leadership of the three branches of government should collectively endorse commitment to the OGP process. However, the Legislative and Judicial Branches did not participate in the consultative processes. As a consequence, milestones contained in the action plan do not have direct effect on the internal operations of these branches of government in terms of OGP principles. At the same time, the Chairperson of the Senate Standing on Autonomous Agencies and a lead supporter of the passage of the Code of Conduct Act served as the keynote speaker during the review meeting of the action plan.

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[1] "IAP2 Spectrum of Political Participation," International Association for Public Participation, http://bit.ly/1kMmlYC
[2] International civil society organization, interview with the IRM researcher, August 12, 2014.

III | ACTION PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

A Steering Committee (SC) comprised of select civil society members and government stakeholders monitored action plan implementation. However, it met infrequently and lacked authority over implementation decisions.

REGULAR MULTI-STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

A secretariat from the office of the Deputy Minister for Administration, a division of Ministry of Information, Cultural Affairs, and Tourism (MICAT), co-ordinated stakeholders' meetings about the implementation of the action plan. Stakeholders participated in these meetings in-person based on written and formal invitations extended to select CSOs. CSOs and MICAT formed a core group called the Steering Committee (SC). From the initial stage, this group met regularly once a month. Over time, meetings became irregular.

The Deputy Minister for Administration of MICAT chaired the SC. This was a new forum established specifically to discuss the OGP action plan. It did not have influence or the authority over decisions related to implementation. Meetings were not held regularly, and the Secretariat lacked a clear strategy or comprehensive co-ordination mechanism.[1] For example, government ministries and agencies that were responsible for specific milestones did not attend meetings, but rather sent reports to MICAT on achievements. Members of civil society monitored the achievement of the deliverables in the action plan.

It is important to note that the SC always met in Monrovia at MICAT's office. Participants had expertise in media development, information technology, and accountability and transparency. The minutes from the SC meetings were not easily accessible by the public. Interviews with some members of civil society who were also members of the SC acknowledged that minutes from the SC meetings were sent via email; however, they did not provide the IRM researcher with copies.

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[1] This is feedback from a member of a CSO who regularly attended the implementation meetings.

IV | ANALYSIS OF ACTION PLAN CONTENTS

All OGP participating governments develop OGP country action plans that elaborate concrete commitments over an initial two-year period. Governments begin their OGP country action plans by sharing existing efforts related to their chosen grand challenge(s), including specific open government strategies and ongoing programs. Action plans then set out governments' OGP commitments, which stretch government practice beyond its current baseline with respect to the relevant policy area. These commitments may build on existing efforts, identify new steps to complete ongoing reforms, or initiate action in an entirely new area.

OGP commitments are to be structured around a set of five "grand challenges" that governments face. OGP recognises that all countries are starting from different baselines. Countries are charged with selecting the grand challenges and related concrete commitments that best fit their unique country contexts. No action plan, standard, or specific commitments are to be forced on any country. The five OGP grand challenges are:

1. **Improving Public Services**—measures that address the full spectrum of citizen services including health, education, criminal justice, water, electricity, telecommunications, and any other relevant service areas by fostering public service improvement or private sector innovation.

2. **Increasing Public Integrity**—measures that address corruption and public ethics, access to information, campaign finance reform, and media and civil society freedom.

3. **More Effectively Managing Public Resources**—measures that address budgets, procurement, natural resources, and foreign assistance.

4. **Creating Safer Communities**—measures that address public safety, the security sector, disaster and crisis response, and environmental threats.

5. **Increasing Corporate Accountability**—measures that address corporate responsibility on issues such as the environment, anti-corruption, consumer protection, and community engagement.

While the nature of concrete commitments under any grand challenge area should be flexible and allow for each country's unique circumstances, OGP commitments should be relevant to OGP values laid out in the OGP Articles of Governance and Open Government Declaration, signed by all OGP participating countries. The IRM uses the following guidance to evaluate relevance to core open government values:

- **Access to information**—commitments:
  - o   pertain to government-held information;
  - o   are not restricted to data but pertain to all information;
  - o   may cover proactive or reactive releases of information;
  - o   may pertain to strengthening the right to information; and,
  - o   must provide open access to information (information should not be privileged or internal only to government).

- **Citizen participation**—governments seek to mobilise citizens to engage in public debate, provide input, and make contributions that lead to more responsive, innovative, and effective governance. Commitments around access to information:
  - open decision making to all interested members of the public; such forums are usually "top-down" in that they are created by government (or actors empowered by government) to inform decision making;
  - often include elements of access to information to ensure meaningful input of interested members of the public into decisions;
  - often include enhancing citizens' right to be heard, but do not necessarily include the right to be heeded.
- **Public accountability**—rules, regulations, and mechanisms in place call upon government actors to justify their actions, act upon criticisms or requirements made of them, and accept responsibility for failure to perform with respect to laws or commitments. As part of open government, such commitments have an "open" element, meaning that they are not purely internal systems of accountability without a public face.
- **Technology and innovation for transparency and accountability**—commitments for technology and innovation promote new technologies, offer opportunities for information sharing, public participation, and collaboration. Technology and innovation commitments:
  - Should make more information public in ways that enable people both to understand what their governments do and to influence decisions;
  - May commit to supporting the ability of governments and citizens to use technology for openness and accountability;
  - May support the use of technology by government employees and citizens alike;
  - May focus on the national, local and/or subnational level, wherever the government believes their open government efforts will have the greatest impact.

Recognising that achieving open government commitments often involves a multi-year process, governments should attach time frames and benchmarks to their commitments that indicate what is to be accomplished each year, whenever possible.

This section details each of the commitments in Liberia's initial action plan. While most indicators used to evaluate each commitment are self-explanatory, a number deserve further explanation.

1. **Relevance:** The IRM researcher evaluated each commitment for its relevance to OGP values and OGP grand challenges.
   - OGP values: To identify OGP commitments with unclear relationships to OGP values, the IRM researcher made judgments from a close reading of the commitment's text. This judgment reveals commitments that can better articulate a clear link to fundamental issues of openness.
   - Grand challenges: While some commitments may be relevant to more than one grand challenge, the IRM researcher only marked challenges that had been identified by government.

2. **Ambition:** The IRM researcher evaluated each commitment for how ambitious commitments were with respect to new or pre-existing activities that stretch government practice beyond an existing baseline.
   - Potential impact: To contribute to a broad definition of ambition, the IRM researcher judged how potentially transformative each commitment might be in the policy area. This is based on the IRM researcher's findings and experience as a public policy expert. In order to assess potential impact, the IRM researcher identifies the policy problem, establishes a baseline performance level at the outset of the action plan and assesses the degree to which the commitment, if implemented, would impact performance and tackle the policy problem.

o New or pre-existing: The IRM researcher also records whether each commitment was first published in the OGP action plan (or the specificity of the action has been improved) or if the commitment has been carried over from other public documents.

3. **Timing:** The IRM researcher evaluated each commitment's timing, even when clear deliverables and suggested annual milestones were not provided.

   o Projected completion: In cases where this information was not available, the IRM researcher made a best judgment based on the evidence of how far the commitment could possibly be at the end of the period assessed.

GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE COMMITMENTS

Liberia's action plan was for one year. The commitments and milestones contained in Liberia's action plan are heavily tied to reform initiatives that the government was already implementing before becoming a full admittance to the OGP. While most of the milestones contained under the commitments predated OGP, OGP was able to add additional levels of accountability including this report and other ongoing initiatives.

Some reforms included the passage of the Freedom of Information Act (FOI), the Liberia's Anti-Corruption Commission (LACC), the Public Procurement and Concession Commission (PPCC), the Public Financial Management Act (PFMA), the Extractive Industries Transparency Act (EIT) and the revised General Auditing Commission Act (GAC). Other initiatives include the Open Budget Initiative (OBI) and the Integrated Financial Management System (IFMIS).

The action plan "stood to stretch the government's capacity" because each of the commitments contains several milestones that were to be achieved over a period of one year. This is further compounded by the fact that the government inherited weak and fragmented institutions and was implementing other reforms in addition to these.

The commitment to full membership to the OGP was initiated by the President and did not seem to have the endorsement of the other branches of government. The process of developing the action plan was driven practically by one government agency (MICAT), as compared to establishing an inter-agency model, which would have increased the likelihood of broad participation and collective ownership. This is indicative of the manner in which the plan was developed. It was rushed, not thought through well, and did not go through a process of multiple reviews that would have assessed whether the commitments and milestones were specific, measurable, attainable, and realistic in light of the one year time frame set for implementation.

1 | Increase Access to Public Information: Operationalising the Freedom of Information Act

Increase access to public information

- *Appointment of Public Information Officers pursuant to the FOI Act to ensure effective implementation*
- *Provide support to the Information Commission to ensure effective oversight of the FOI Act*
- *Standardize all government websites to have them regularly updated with relevant information*
- *Increase internal and external awareness on the FOI Act of 2010*
- *Adopt a standardized FOI implementation procedure and policy*

[…] The government will continue the partnership with civil society organizations in rolling out FOI implementation in the country. These will include the provision of trainings for information officers from the different government ministries and agencies.

The FOI related commitments would be concluded by the close of the first year of the implementation process.[1]

COMMITMENT DESCRIPTION		
ANSWERABILITY	**LEAD INSTITUTION**	Ministry of Information (MOI); Ministry of Finance (MOF), Independent Information Commission (IIC); Liberia Telecommunication Authority (LTA)
	SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS	Same as Above
	POINT OF CONTACT SPECIFIED?	No
SPECIFICITY AND MEASURABILITY	1.1. Appointment of Public Information Officers (PIO)	Low (Commitment language describes activity that can be construed as measurable with some interpretation on the part of the reader)
	1.2. Ensure effective oversight of the FOI Act	None (Commitment language contains no verifiable deliverables or milestones)
	1.3. Standardise all government websites	Low
	1.4. Increase awareness on the FOI Act of 2010	None
	1.5. Adopt a standardized FOI implementation procedure and policy	Low

RELEVANCE	OGP GRAND CHALLENGES	Improving public services, Increasing public integrity				
		OGP VALUES				
	MILESTONE	ACCESS TO INFORMATION	CIVIC PARTICIPATION	PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY	TECH & INNOVATION FOR TRANS. & ACC	UNCLEAR
	1.1. PIO Appointment	✗				
	1.2. FOIA oversight	✗				
	1.3. Websites standarisation	✗			✗	
	1.4. FOIA awareness	✗				
	1.5. Adopt FOI policy	✗				

AMBITION

MILESTONE	NEW VS. PRE-EXISTING	POTENTIAL IMPACT
1.1. PIO appointment	New	Minor: An incremental but positive step in the relevant policy area
1.2. FOIA oversight	Pre-existing	None: Maintains the status quo
1.3. Websites standarisation	Pre-existing	Minor
1.4. FOIA awareness	New	Minor
1.5. Adopt FOI policy	New	Minor

LEVEL OF COMPLETION

1.1. PIO appointment	START DATE: Not Specified	END DATE: June 30, 2014	Actual Completion / Projected Completion	NOT STARTED — LIMITED ▼ — SUBSTANTIAL — COMPLETE ▲
1.2. FOIA oversight	START DATE: Not Specified	END DATE: June 30, 2014	Actual Completion / Projected Completion	NOT STARTED — LIMITED ▼ — SUBSTANTIAL — COMPLETE ▲
1.3. Websites standarisation	START DATE: Not Specified	END DATE: June 30, 2014	Actual Completion / Projected Completion	NOT STARTED — LIMITED ▼ — SUBSTANTIAL — COMPLETE ▲
1.4. FOIA awareness	START DATE: Not Specified	END DATE: June 30, 2014	Actual Completion / Projected Completion	NOT STARTED — LIMITED — SUBSTANTIAL ▼ — COMPLETE ▲
1.5. Adopt FOI policy	START DATE: Not Specified	END DATE: June 30, 2014	Actual Completion / Projected Completion	NOT STARTED ▼ — LIMITED — SUBSTANTIAL — COMPLETE ▲

NEXT STEPS

1.1. PIO appointment	Further steps required in next action plan
1.2. FOIA oversight	Further steps required in next action plan
1.3. Websites standarisation	No further steps required in the next action plan
1.4. FOIA awareness	No further steps required in the next action plan
1.5. Adopt FOI policy	Further steps required in next action plan

WHAT HAPPENED?

Overall, this commitment saw only limited implementation. The commitment to increase access to public information was intended to make the operations and decision-making process of the government and other public institutions that use government resources more transparent. Furthermore, the commitment is premised on the assumption that citizen access to public information will make the workings of government more transparent and accountable to the people. However, the voluntary disclosure of information by government entities and public or private institutions that receive government resources is not a common practice in Liberia.

In order to address this challenge, the government passed the Freedom of Information (FoI) law[2] in September 2010, making Liberia the first West African country to have enacted a comprehensive FoI law. The law makes access to information mandatory except for certain types of information that are under the "exemption categories" as contained in the law.

Pursuant to the FoI law, the government established an Independent Information Commission (IIC) and appointed an Information Commissioner (IC) in 2012. The primary functions and responsibilities of the IC are tied to three distinct yet interrelated components:

- **Enforcement:** The core elements of this component include receiving, hearing, and deciding on all requests and complaints.

- **Compliance:** The IC is to provide oversight to ensure that compliance is effected in keeping with the terms of the law. This is to be done through investigation, monitoring, collecting statistics, and supporting government Information Officers (IOs).

- **Outreach and Public Awareness:** This component focuses on the development of an outreach and public awareness strategy to provide useful tools and relevant information to the general public on how to access to the FOI Law.

Prior to the government's membership to the OGP, the government had already set up the legal and institutional frameworks but with little financial support to make the institution functional. The OGP created an opportunity for the government to show some level of commitment to its international obligation. The IIC was included in the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 national budgets. With support from the government and other international partners, the IIC is functional, visible, and has started receiving, reviewing, and hearing complaints. In partnership with CSOs, awareness has been raised about the mandate and functions of the IIC in Monrovia and other parts of the country. Despite these gains, much needs to be done to achieve the commitment and the corresponding milestones.

According to a meeting held by government about the self-assessment report in July 2014, four of the five milestones highlighted under the commitment were ongoing, with varying ratings of completion. The completion rating provided by government reflects the government's qualitative self-assessment expressed in "percent complete". The milestone to "[a]dopt a standardized FOI implementation procedure and policy" was completed. According to the report, the government attained 70% in the appointment of Public Information Officers (PIOs), 90% in the provision of support to the IIC, 60% in standardising all government websites to regularly update relevant information, and 90% on increasing awareness on the FOI Law. The government adoption of a standardised FOI implementation procedure and policy was rated at 100%.

Milestone 1: This new effort to dedicate an entity responsible for access to information requests within government agencies and ministries is an incremental but positive step towards greater accountability and access to information. Individuals from civil society and other government institutions asserted that the 70% attainment rate in the appointment of PIOs is overstated in the self-assessment report.[3] The estimated number of ministries and agencies is around 60. According to the FOI Law, each of these agencies or ministries should appoint a PIO that will be responsible for access to information requests from the public. Currently, 22 of the 60 PIOs have been appointed, including two from Bong and Grand Gedeh Counties. This results in a 37% completion rate rather than 70% completion rate.

Milestone 2: This milestone was aimed at increasing support to the IC but the language of the commitment does not specify what type of support is meant. In interviews with the IRM researcher, members from civil society and a representative from IIC commended the government for the exponential increase in financial support to the work of the IIC. At the beginning of 2013, the Ministry of Finance (MoF) provided US$30,000 for operational costs to the IIC because the IIC was not placed in the annual budget for 2012-2013. However, the IIC received US$461,000 during the national budget period of 2013-2014. A similar figure was allocated in the 2014-2015 budget. This allocation was made for the IIC not because of OGP implementation but rather as a statutory body. However, to make the work of the IIC easier in responding to requests for information as statutorily mandated, other forms of support would be required. These include developing systems and procedures to function effectively as well as compliance by government agencies to the terms of the FOI Act.

Milestone 3: Civil society had an alternative view to the government's rating of the standardisation of government websites. Civil society members interviewed disputed the existence of a standardised format[4] for creating government websites and criticized the lack of updates to the various websites. They further asserted that the format and layout of government's websites vary from one agency to another. In essence, there does not appear to be a standardized website.

Milestone 4: With this milestone, government aimed to create awareness of the FOIA act. Individuals from civil society recognised the efforts made by government to create awareness of the FOI Law by organising workshops for university students and local authorities, and forming and training community based networks. But those efforts do not justify a 90% rating because their intervention covered seven of the country's 15 political sub-divisions.

Milestone 5: Lastly, during the OGP review process in July civil society members asked the government to make available the completed standardised operational procedure and policy of the IIC. However, at the time of writing, the IRM researcher was unable to verify the completion of this procedure and policy manual.

The lack of authority by MICAT to compel other government ministries and agencies to appoint PIOs creates a huge challenge for the processing of information requests coming from citizens. Citizens' access to real-time information could be facilitated electronically, but, without an updated and standardised website, the time to access information could take longer, and the contents could be out-dated. Similarly, without a procedure and policy in place, the time for reviewing and adjudicating complaints can become unnecessarily long, thereby hampering the level of effectiveness and creating the risk of reducing citizens' trust in the process. Lastly, much effort has been placed on creating awareness of the FoI Law. While this is important, the challenge has been in not investing more time and resources in educating citizens on how to utilise the FoI Law to make request for access to information.

DID IT MATTER?

The overarching goal of this commitment was to increase transparency in government decision-making processes by fulfilling citizens requests for public information. The language of the commitment is vague and, because of this, it is difficult to assess its potential impact at the milestone level. However, taken as a whole, this commitment has moderate potential impact.

Notably, citizens' access to information is guaranteed under the Constitution, yet it has never been enjoyed throughout Liberia's political history. It has never been standard practice for state institutions to release public interest information voluntarily. The government manages information placed within the public domain and determines what type of information citizens can access. Moreover, citizens are not aware that access to public information is a right that can be enforced. These problems have created a culture wherein policy-makers do not act transparently or feel accountable to citizens for the decisions they make in their capacity as public officials.

The government's enactment of the FOI law as well as efforts by civil society to create awareness and help citizens access are major steps in holding public officials accountable for their actions. If fully implemented, the commitment would engender some level of accountability and transparency in the operations of public institutions or other private entities and would reduce the culture of impunity.

The commitment to increase citizens' access to information was linked inextricably to the implementation of the FOI law. After a year of implementation, the commitment did not accomplish what it set out to do. However, given the time frame of implementation, slow but steady progress was made in the number of information requests made by citizens, cases heard, and IIC determinations.

Before the OGP, citizens, government institutions, and CSOs utilised the FOI law to make 48 requests to government institutions both at national and county levels.[5] Individuals from the University of Liberia made nine requests for research-related information to the National Social Security and Welfare Corporation (NSSWC). All of the requests received responses. The Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (MoHSW) received six requests for information on the number of health facilities built and the number of health practitioners trained since 2008. The MoHSW responded to one of the six requests. MICAT received six requests and it responded to five. The Ministry of Public Works (MPW) received six requests, responded to all six, and referred the requesters to the ministry's website. Sixteen requests on decisions and expenditure related to the County Social Development Funds (CSDF) were made to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The Ministry responded to all requests. At the county level, five requests were made to the County Authorities of Bong County, seeking information mainly on the management of the County Social Development Fund (CSDF).

In addition to these requests, individual citizens and CSOs with the IIC filed ten complaints to the IIC between 2013 and 2014, during the implementation period of the action plan. The complaints related to certain government institutions and public corporations that refused to comply with requests for information. In 2013, seven additional complaints were filed with the IIC.[6] Of this number, three are pending hearing, two were not heard because the complainants did not exhaust all the steps of the internal review process (as contained in the FOI law), and the remaining two were ruled in favour of the complainants. However, the government agency appealed to the Civil Law Court. The appeal has yet to be determined.

Similarly, in 2014, during the period of implementation of the plan, a private citizen filed three complaints with the IIC against two public corporations and the Ministry of Finance for failure to respond to a request for information. In one case, the IIC ruled in favour of the complainant. The other two complaints are pending.

The implementation of this commitment faced several challenges that have been highlighted by members of government and civil society stakeholders. The FOI law obliges government ministries and agencies to make yearly reports to the IIC on how they implemented the law. According to civil society interviewed, not a single report was submitted. A member of government confirmed this in an interview with the IRM researcher. In the view of civil society, most government agencies did not appreciate the function of the IIC and the value it brings to open government. This was because MICAT did not do enough to facilitate communication linkage between the IIC and other government institutions. Furthermore, enforcement and compliance with the mandate of the FOI law were weak. Several complaints from as far back as 2013 are still pending hearing, and a single case on appeal at the Civil Law Court has yet to be adjudicated. According to interviews with members of government and civil society, this delay is due largely to the lack of leadership at the IIC. In addition to these challenges, the IIC has yet to compile and present to the National Legislature its annual report in keeping with the FOI law.

Early on in FOI implementation, there were strong commitments from political leaders to support implementation. This seems to have waned, however, following delegation of implementation with a modest track record and with relatively few political resources. Civil society made requests to the Office of the President that were not acknowledged.[7] This has the potential to undermine other senior and junior members of government compliance with the FOI law, the legal tool for implementing this commitment.

MOVING FORWARD

Stakeholders:

- The IIC needs to use the monthly senior staff meetings in government ministries and agencies to educate policy-makers on their role in implementing FOI, which is cardinal to increasing citizens' access to information.

- In order to build citizens' trust in the system, the IIC needs to dedicate resources from its budget to hire lawyers who represent them when parties appeal to the Civil Law or Circuit Courts.

Researcher:

- Awareness on the FOI law needs to continue, but awareness should shift from the mandate of the law to educating citizens on how to apply or utilise the law in requesting information.

- In order to improve compliance, the IIC leadership needs to be more assertive and to document delinquent ministries and agencies that have not appointed PIOs or submitted their yearly report to the ICC.

- The IIC should make available to the public, in a user-friendly manner, its internal procedures for receiving, validating, and hearing complaints.

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[1] This commitment contained five milestones. The commitment language was abridged for formatting reasons. For full text of the commitment, see the National Action Plan.
[2] Republic of Liberia, "Freedom of Information Act of 2010," Embassy of the Republic of Liberia to the United States, September 2010, http://bit.ly/1DEIxm5
[3] Members of the Freedom of Information Coalition (FoIC), interviews with the IRM researcher, September 3, 2014.
[4] During the July 2014 stakeholders' review forum, a MICAT official recognised challenges in standardising the website, but the official said that efforts were being made to complete it in the coming year.
[5] An international civil society that has been working with the Government in implementing the FOI Act has a system that tracks and documents citizens' FOI requests.
[6] These figures were provided by an IIC official.
[7] Member of the Freedom of Information Coalition (FoIC), interview with the IRM researcher, September 3, 2014.

2 | Open Budget initiative: Increasing Public Access to Budget Information

Open Budget Initiative:

- *Regularized publication and dissemination of the simple English version of the citizen budget guide*
- *Establish a dedicated website for the open budget initiative to host updated information about the budget process and execution*
- *Develop a platform that provides regular budget update to all citizens via SMS and other associated technologies through various local languages in Liberia*
- *Provide periodic support to the rural radio stations to broadcast the messages of the Open Budget Initiative*
- *Provide quarterly update on the implementation status of all projects in the national budget and communicate the budget performance report to the public via existing communication channels[1]*

[…] These commitments would help to further make government's spending and allocations widely available to the Liberian population. This will help to foster transparency in government expenditures and provide citizens an effective tool to monitor (track) how government spends on development projects meant to directly improve the lives of people across the country.

The government will work along civil society transparency activists to continue implementation of the open budget process. Traditional leaders will also remain key in this endeavor. The country's media, especially the community radio sector would continue to serve as key conduits for the transmission of open budget related information.

By the end of the first six months of implementation these should have been completed.

COMMITMENT DESCRIPTION

ANSWERABILITY		
LEAD INSTITUTION		Open Budget Initiative: Ministry of Finance (MOF), Ministry of Information (MOI)
SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS		Same as Above
POINT OF CONTACT SPECIFIED?		No

SPECIFICITY AND MEASURABILITY		
2.1. Produce and disseminate simple English version of the budget		Low (Commitment language describes activity that can be construed as measurable with some interpretation on the part of the reader)
2.2. Establish open budget website		High (Commitment language provides clear, measurable, verifiable milestones for achievement of the goal)
2.3. Budget update through technology		Medium (Commitment language describes an activity that is objectively verifiable, but the timeline for completion is not clear)
2.4. Increase citizens' knowledge of the open budget		None (Commitment language contains no verifiable deliverables or milestones)
2.5. Budget Performance Review		Medium

OGP GRAND CHALLENGES	Increasing public integrity

OGP VALUES

MILESTONE	ACCESS TO INFORMATION	CIVIC PARTICIPATION	PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY	TECH & INNOVATION FOR TRANS. & ACC	UNCLEAR
2.1. Simple English version of budget	✗				
2.2. Open budget website	✗			✗	
2.3. Budget update through technology	✗			✗	
2.4. Open budget Awareness	✗				
2.5. Budget Performance Review	✗				

AMBITION		
MILESTONE	**NEW VS. PRE-EXISTING**	**POTENTIAL IMPACT**
2.1. Simple English version of budget	New	Minor: An incremental but positive step in the relevant policy area
2.2. Open budget website	Pre-existing	None: Maintains the status quo
2.3. Budget update through technology	New	Minor
2.4. Open budget awareness	Pre-existing	Minor
2.5. Budget Performance Review	New	Minor

LEVEL OF COMPLETION

				NOT STARTED — LIMITED — SUBSTANTIAL — COMPLETE
2.1. Simple English version of budget	**START DATE:** Not Specified	**END DATE:** Nov. 30, 2013	Actual Completion / Projected Completion	Actual: Complete; Projected: Complete
2.2. Open budget website	**START DATE:** Not Specified	**END DATE:** Nov. 30, 2013	Actual Completion / Projected Completion	Actual: Complete; Projected: Complete
2.3. Budget update through technology	**START DATE:** Not Specified	**END DATE:** Nov. 30, 2013	Actual Completion / Projected Completion	Actual: Limited; Projected: Complete
2.4. Open budget awareness	**START DATE:** Not Specified	**END DATE:** Nov. 30, 2013	Actual Completion / Projected Completion	Actual: Not Started; Projected: Complete
2.5. Budget Performance Review	**START DATE:** Not Specified	**END DATE:** Nov. 30, 2013	Actual Completion / Projected Completion	Actual: Limited; Projected: Complete

NEXT STEPS

2.1. Simple English version of budget	No further steps required in the next action plan
2.2. Open budget website	No further steps required in the next action plan
2.3. Budget update through technology	No further steps required in the next action plan
2.4. Open budget awareness	Further steps required in the next action plan
2.5. Budget Performance Review	Further steps required in the next action plan

WHAT HAPPENED?

This commitment was intended to engender more transparency, accountability, and efficiency in the utilisation and management of state resources through the national budget. The commitment will allow the public free and easy access to government's financial information. By making government's revenue and expenditure more accessible and transparent, it should increase citizens' trust in the government. The commitment contributes to the government's policy on increased fiscal probity, reducing waste, and fighting corruption. However, six months is allocated as the timeline for the completion of all five milestones without sequencing, prioritising, and disaggregated them, which makes it vague in terms of measuring level of success.

Financial mismanagement and the abuse of public trust have characterised Liberia's political history for decades. Too often, public officials have misdirected state resources intended for development purposes with impunity. The consequence has been under-development and poverty experienced by the majority of the population. A contributing factor to the mismanagement of resources has been the lack of citizens' access to information on the national budget in terms of income, allocation of resources, and expenditure reports. This is further compounded by the lack of citizens' participation in the process of formulating the budget such as identifying development needs and priorities.

The Government started its Open Budget Initiative (OBI) in January 2013. The Ministry of Finance (MoF) spearheaded it prior to formalising OGP membership. To facilitate and manage this process, an office was opened at the MOF.

There are varying views on the level of completion of the commitment. According to the Government's self-assessment report, the completion rate was 80%. However, members of civil society interviewed differed with this projection.

Milestone 1: With respect to the implementation of the publication and dissemination of a "Simple English" version of the Citizen Budget Guide of 2013-14 budget, the government mentioned that it has produced and distributed 500 copies to selected counties. The copies were sent with T-shirts and banners. Three or four CSOs were contracted by the MoF to distribute the guide and create awareness about it. According to the CSOs, regional town hall meetings were organised to promote awareness. Each region brought together two or three counties with a total of two hundred participants. The awareness-raising activities lasted for two days each and were facilitated by CSOs with representatives from the MoF present. In the view of CSOs, the intent of organising the forums was good. However, the number of persons per forum was too large for every citizen to have an understanding of the contents of the guide.

Milestone 2: With respect to citizens' access to information about the budget, the government asserted that it has created a dedicated website that can be accessed at (https://sites.google.com/a/mopea.gov.lr/mtef-budget/home) where the national budget can be accessed. The website also contains quarterly and yearly fiscal reports on the government's fiscal outrun. This fulfils of one of the milestones contained in the commitment.

Civil society members interviewed affirmed that the government has made significant progress in making the budget easily accessible. In addition to budget accessibility, the government has erected an electronic billboard at the MoF where budget line allocations for development projects are placed. In the views of civil society, the e-billboard only targets an elite and small portion of the population and is more of public relation than reaching out to the larger population.

Milestone 3: The government admitted that this milestone was not fully achieved. The commitment aimed to develop a platform to provide regular budget updates via SMS and other technologies through various local languages. The MoF contracted the services of a civil society media development institute to pilot a program for citizens to request information through mobile text messages such as requests for locations of county development projects. According to CSOs interviewed, the technology was operational for almost six months. The system was piloted in seven of Liberia's fifteen counties. According to an interview conducted with a CSO, citizens sent over 100 messages during the pilot phase seeking information about the budget, particularly the amount that was allocated per county. Using the approved budget, the media development institute responded to requests for budget information. The messages were in English, although the action plan which stated that messages would be sent in local languages. Sending messages in local

languages is not feasible because most citizens cannot read or write in their local languages. Since 2014, the system has become non-functional because the media development institute does not have the financial resources to cover the cost of running it, and the government did not provide resources to continue the process.

Milestone 4: The deliverable to provide periodic support to the rural radio stations to broadcast messages of the OBI was not actualised. According to officials interviewed from the Open Budget Office at the MoF, this component of the commitment has not started yet. Managers of several community radio stations confirmed this in interviews. Community radio stations remain the major channel through which rural citizens access information about the government. Without this, citizens' access to the budget is limited to a small fraction of the population that utilises the Internet.

Milestone 5: According to interviews with officials of the MoF, regular fiscal outturn reports have been compiled and are accessible on the website. The IRM researcher verified this. However, this milestone has a limited completion rating because the government is in the process of conducting independent surveys. The surveys assess the status of development projects, especially within the health and education sectors at the primary level. They are intended to enhance public expenditure tracking and be a tool for accountability and efficiency. However, CSOs think this measure does not go far in fostering open budget. In the view of CSOs, the government should direct some energy and time to scrutinise actual expenditures and allocations, rather than focusing on citizens' access to an electronic budget.

DID IT MATTER?

The commitment is relevant to OGP, and it creates the opportunity to promote access to information and transparency in government's fiscal management process. Specifically, the commitment tried to increase citizens' confidence in the fiscal process through government transparency in budgeting and expenditures. The government committed to exercise transparency through the "Open Budget Initiative" (OBI). The OBI, however, is not supported or grounded in any law that would ensure compliance.

There is little evidence to show that the commitment was accomplished. The e-budget or e-billboards had no direct impact on accountability and transparency other than putting out figures that many citizens cannot understand or interpret. First, due to the high illiteracy rate, many citizens would not be able to access information about the budget via e-mail. The electronic version of the budget has valuable information, but reaches a small audience. Second, Internet connectivity is limited to Monrovia, which means citizens in rural parts of the country cannot access an online budget. Third, although the language of the simple version of the citizens' guide is not in technical financial language, the content is still relatively difficult for ordinary Liberians to read and understand.

Transparency and accountability in budget development and execution are enhanced when citizens actively participate in the process. However, the process is still top-down driven. The OBI does not state how figures in the budget are reached or how resources are spent against the objectives for which resources were allocated.

The commitment is useful because it has the potential to minimise secrecy that has long marred how the national budget is formulated and implemented. Moreover, the use of IT and mobile SMS systems to increase citizens' access to information on the budget was innovative. But it has not proven to be effective in a context characterised by high levels of illiteracy. Mobile technology, while innovative, has financial implications because text messages are not free. At the same time, members of government interviewed affirmed that e-budgeting produces useful information, but citizens' access is limited in scale and scope. CSOs interviewed shared similar views and highlighted that OBI can add value to transparency if there is a framework whereby citizens also can have access to information on how expenditures compare to budget allocation.

MOVING FORWARD

Stakeholders:

- In addition to the OBI, the government should consider the implementation of an Open Budget Expenditure wherein expenditures are matched against actual budget line allocations.

- To enhance accountability and engender ownership of the budget process, the next action plan should include commit the government to decentralise the budget formulation.

Researcher:

- Increase the number of e-billboards in other parts of Monrovia so that a wider portion of the population in the capital can access the information.

- Enact a law that will compel the government's MoF to decentralise the budget formulation process and to make a quarterly expenditure report public online and in-person through county town hall meetings.

- Commit resources that will enable community radios to produce radio programs in local languages that explain the various allocations in the budget for county development projects.

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[1] This commitment includes six milestones. The milestone to "provide [a] quarterly update on the implementation status of all projects in the National Budget" and "[c]ommunicate the Budget Performance Report to the public via existing communication channels" have been assessed together as milestone five in this report. The commitment language was abridged for formatting reasons. For full text of the commitment, refer to the National Action Plan.

3 | Extractive Industries Transparency: Accountability of Revenues Generated from Natural Resources

This commitment contains two milestones, the second of which received a star (✪)[1]

Extractive Industries Transparency

- *To publish and popularize through community town hall meetings, radio appearances, website and newspaper publications, the 4th EITI Reconciliation Report of Liberia and the Revenue Tracking Report covering the period July 1, 2010 to June 30, 2011. The revenue tracking component is a new addition to the LEITI Reconciliation Report that will track the receipts, expenditures and or transfer by relevant government ministries and agencies of earmarked companies' contributions to beneficiary communities and counties. The target groups for dissemination of the above reports include: government ministries and agencies; the Legislature, the Judiciary, international partners, embassies and diplomatic missions near Monrovia, youth and women groups, student groups, traditional leaders, church organiations, and the general citizenry throughout the fifteen counties of Liberia;*

- *✪To conduct post contract award audit/investigations of material contracts, concessions and licenses entered into by government of Liberia with companies operating in the mining, oil, forestry, and agriculture sectors covering the period July 13, 2009 to December 31, 2011, in furtherance of the LEITI's contract transparency mandate. This report will evaluate the process by which each material concession, contract, license and other rights were awarded by the Government of Liberia.*

COMMITMENT DESCRIPTION

ANSWERABILITY	LEAD INSTITUTION	Liberia Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative (LEITI)
	SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS	Same as Above
	POINT OF CONTACT SPECIFIED?	No

SPECIFICITY AND MEASURABILITY	3.1. Increasing citizens' access to information on revenue from natural resources	High (Commitment language provides clear, measurable, verifiable milestones for achievement of the goal)
	3.2. Compliance by government in awarding contracts to companies	High

RELEVANCE	OGP GRAND CHALLENGES	Improving public services, Increasing public integrity, Increasing corporate accountability			
	OGP VALUES				
	MILESTONE	ACCESS TO INFORMATION	CIVIC PARTICIPATION	PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY	TECH & INNOVATION FOR TRANS. & ACC	UNCLEAR
	3.1. Increasing citizens' access to information on revenue from natural resources	✗	✗			
	3.2. Compliance in awarding contracts			✗		

AMBITION		
MILESTONE	**NEW VS. PRE-EXISTING**	**POTENTIAL IMPACT**
3.1. Increasing citizens' access to information	Pre-existing	Minor: An incremental but positive step in the relevant policy area
3.2. Compliance in awarding contracts	Pre-existing	Moderate: A major step forward in the relevant policy area, but remains limited in scale or scope

LEVEL OF COMPLETION				
3.1. Increasing citizens' access to information	**START DATE:** Not Specified	**END DATE:** Not Specified	Actual Completion Projected Completion	NOT STARTED — LIMITED — SUBSTANTIAL ▼ — COMPLETE ▲
3.2. Compliance in awarding contracts	**START DATE:** Not Specified	**END DATE:** Not Specified	Actual Completion Projected Completion	NOT STARTED — LIMITED — SUBSTANTIAL ▲ — COMPLETE ▼

NEXT STEPS	
3.1. Increasing citizens' access to information	Further steps required in next action plan
3.2. Compliance in awarding contracts	Further steps required in next action plan

WHAT HAPPENED?

The Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) is an international framework committed to transparency and accountability in the management of natural resources. Liberia is a member of EITI. This commitment, consistent with the act that established Liberia's Extractive Industries Transparency initiative (LEITI), was to improve natural resource governance. This includes an in-depth analysis of the manner and form by which government awards contracts and licenses to companies operating within the mining, oil, forestry, and agriculture sectors. This activity is intended to ascertain whether contracts that are awarded to concessions are in compliance with the mandate, standard, and procedures of the Public Procurement Concession Commission (PPCC), one of the government's integrity and transparency institutions.

Liberia is endowed with natural resources that include timber, gold, diamond, and iron ore, all of which fuelled the Liberian civil war and remain a source of conflict. The country still has one of the largest rainforests in Africa. The government has entered into contractual agreements with several companies for the exploration of oil in its territorial waters. Because of these, the country's economy is based on natural resources, and a significant portion of the government's revenue is generated from natural resources.

After the civil war, the incoming Sirleaf Government in 2006 inherited empty coffers and an economy that needed to be revitalised.[2] Attracting external investors was one of the ways by which the government could generate resources and fulfil some of its campaign promises of creating jobs, getting people back to work, and improving the livelihood conditions of citizens. Given the urgency, it was a challenge to mobilise resources. It was also challenging to adhere to the principle of transparency and the PPCC standard in legalising its contractual agreements with multiple companies working in the different sectors mentioned above.

With the multiple companies, compliance was not the only issue. Revenue tracking was another issue linked to transparent management of natural resources.[3] This component also includes tracking of receipts, expenditures, and transfer of funds to government accounts in keeping with the terms and conditions of the contractual agreements. It further includes monitoring of earmarked companies' contribution to beneficiary communities in fulfilment of companies' social responsibilities.

This commitment was an initiative that was already being implemented for over three years prior to the government's membership to the OGP. Law backs the LEITI operations. They remain an integral part of the government's transparency initiative in revenue generation and awarding contracts. The commitment sought to achieve two deliverables.

Milestone 1: The first deliverable was to publish and popularise the fourth EITI Reconciliation Report of Liberia covering the period 1 July 2010 to 30 June 2011 to diverse target groups throughout the fifteen counties of Liberia. No performance rating was provided in the Government's self-assessment report, as it was for other commitments. However, according to an interview conducted with the institution managing the implementation of this commitment, 80% of the deliverable was attained, and this was done during the OGP period. The report was disseminated through town-hall meetings with local leaders, private sector, and forums in integrity clubs in schools, appearances on radio talk shows (mainly in Monrovia) as well as publications in the local dailies.[4] In total, 25 town-hall meetings were conducted in ten of the fifteen counties. CSOs interviewed confirmed that these activities took place. The IRM researcher was able to verify that the summary of the report was placed on the LEITI website (www.leiti.org.lr). However, the report was not popularised in five of the country's fifteen counties.[5] Despite this, this milestone was substantially completed because the LEITI achieved most of what the commitment set out to do.

Milestone 2: The second deliverable was to conduct a post-contract award audit and investigations of material contracts, concessions, and licenses entered into by the government with companies covering the period 13 July 2009 to 31 December 2011 in furtherance of LEITI's contract transparency mandate. This deliverable was completed, and hard copies of the report are available at the office of LEITI.

LEITI hired a firm to simplify 68 contracts by removing legal jargon and reducing the volume for easy reading by non-lawyers or experts. The contract involved a review of 68 contracts. The simplified version also will highlight the social responsibilities of companies and the rights and responsibilities of communities directly affected by the investment of companies. Up to the time of the interview, the simplified version was not available, but 75% of the work had been done.[6]

The post-contract audit report is voluminous and the language is technical so without a user-friendly version, utilisation by stakeholders, particularly those at the community level, has been limited. Similarly, without stakeholders' access to the simplified version of the contracts prior to conducting the post-contract audits, it becomes difficult for them to make the connection between what the contents of the contracts and the findings contained in the post-contract report.

DID IT MATTER?

The goal of the commitment was to increase citizens' access to information to enable them to contribute to public debates on the effective management of resources from the extractive sector within an open government framework. The potential impact of the commitment is minor as the change it is trying to achieve is incremental. Access and availability of government information in contractual agreements are limited to a small portion of the population who can read or write and who have access to Internet. Because of the lack of information, citizens have had little or no opportunity to participate meaningfully in public discussions on how state resources are generated and used. This maintains a class of elite people who make and influence policies that suit their interests.

The language contained in concession contracts is not only legalistic but also technical; therefore, most citizens would not have the knowledge or time to understand their contents and implications. Furthermore, the government is so concerned with generating resources that it engages in several contracts. It then becomes difficult for citizens to follow the awarding process and ascertaining whether the government adhered to the PPCC Act of 2009. If the commitment were to be fully implemented, it would expand citizen participation, government openness, and transaction compliance in extractive industry business.

However, the government is not fully compliant with international and national standards in awarding contracts to concessionaries. In keeping with international best practice and Section 95 of the PPCC Act of 2005, concession bidding proceedings must be on the basis of open competitive bidding unless otherwise stipulated under the act.[7] From the period of 13 July 2009 to 31 December 2011, the government awarded 68 contracts, licenses, permits and other rights of exploitation of diamond, gold, oil, timber, and agricultural resources. LEITI commissioned a final report conducted by independent firm, Moore Stephens LLP, in May 2013.[8] According to the final report of the post-award process audit, during the implementation of the plan, 35 of the 68 contracts were non-compliant to the PPCC standard 25 were partially compliant, six were compliant, and two had limitation of scope. The report highlighted six key recommendations to improve the process by which concessions are awarded in Liberia.

The report was published in several newspapers. Despite public reaction from CSOs, the researcher did not find any evidence that stakeholders have pursued the recommendations to engage and work with the government on corrective measures that would address the gaps shown in the report.

At the same time, civil society stakeholders acknowledge the value of the work of LEITI on natural resource governance. Nonetheless, they think that post-contract audits are mainly intended for international compliance to the EITI framework. In their view, popularising reconciliation reports in communities do not necessarily have any direct impact on the manner and process by which government allocates revenue from the extractive sector.

They also believe that the government has not demonstrated the political will to implement recommendations proposed in the post-contract audit reports to enhance improved natural resource governance. Both government and CSO stakeholders believe that the commitment is driven from the top to the bottom. They also believe that citizens are the targets of products, not engaged by government to improve extractive governance given the sensitive nature of the sector.

MOVING FORWARD

Stakeholders:

- In managing expectations, it would be good if the government invests quality time in engaging communities on how revenues generated from the extractive sector are shared within the national budget.

- In pursuing national ownership, the government should consult with diverse sectors of the community in soliciting their views on how extractives governance can be improved.

Researcher:

- In managing the potential for conflict and promoting transparency, it is important that the government considers the involvement of communities at every level of the negotiation process before contracts are consummated so that the community's interests are duly protected.

- Government should consider implementing recommendations from the post-contract audit as a way of responding to gaps in awarding contracts to companies.

- The government should consider commissioning post-contract audits on a yearly basis rather than reviewing contracts that have been signed over a two to three year period.

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[1] Starred commitments are considered exemplary OGP commitments. In order to receive a star, a commitment must meet several criteria. (1) It must be specific enough that a judgment can be made about its potential impact. Starred commitments will have "medium" or "high" specificity. (2) Commitment language should make clear its relevance to opening government. Specifically, it must relate to at least one of the OGP values of Access to Information, Civic Participation, or Public Accountability. (3) The commitment must have a "moderate" or "transformative" potential impact, should it be implemented. (4) Finally, the commitment must see significant progress during the action plan implementation period, receiving a ranking of "substantial" or "complete" implementation.

[2] Mark Doyle, "Challenges for Liberia's Leader," BBC World Affairs, BBC News, 23 November 2005, http://bbc.in/1ANYxyr.

[3] "Liberia," Natural Resource Governance Institute, http://bit.ly/1AddE1E

[4] www.liberianobserver.com and www.newdomocratnews.com.

[5] Official from Liberia Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (LEITI), interview with the IRM researcher, July 16, 2014.

[6] LEITI Official, interview, July 16, 2014.

[7] Republic of Liberia, "An Act Creatingb[sic] the Public Procurement and Concessions Commission," Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 8 September 2005, http://www.mof.gov.lr/doc/procurement.pdf.

[8] Liberia Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (LEITI), *Post Award Process Audit Final Report* by Moore Stephens LLP (Report, May 2013), http://bit.ly/14YLkHW

4 | Citizen Participation and Dialogue: Increasing Communication between State and Citizens

- *Develop communication strategy to strengthen public understanding, participation and ownership of the Agenda for Transparency and its implementation.*

- *Develop interactive, multi-faceted, multi-stakeholder platform to gather citizens' feedback on national development outcomes*

  o *Citizen Website*

  o *Talk to your officials*

[…] Within the first six months of the implementation of these commitments, the government and its civil society partners would have a functional citizens' website and a two-way information transfer system up and running. The communications policy should also be in place by this time.[1]

COMMITMENT DESCRIPTION		
ANSWERABILITY	**LEAD INSTITUTION**	4.1. Ministry of Information (MOI), Liberia Broadcasting System (LBS), Ministry of State (MOS), Government of Liberia Communications Team 4.2. Ministry of Information (MOI), Ministry of Finance (MOF), and Ministry of Post and Telecommunication (MOPT)
	SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS	Same as Above
	POINT OF CONTACT SPECIFIED?	No

SPECIFICITY AND MEASURABILITY		
	4.1. Improved communication by the government	Low (Commitment language describes activity that can be construed as measurable with some interpretation on the part of the reader)
	4.2. Establish platform for citizens' feedback to government	Medium (Commitment language describes activity that can be construed as measurable with some interpretation on the part of the reader)

RELEVANCE	**OGP GRAND CHALLENGES**	More effectively managing public resources				
	OGP VALUES					
	MILESTONE	**ACCESS TO INFORMATION**	**CIVIC PARTICIPATION**	**PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY**	**TECH & INNOVATION FOR TRANS. & ACC**	**UNCLEAR**
	4.1. Improved communication	✗	✗			
	4.2. Establish platform	✗	✗			

AMBITION		
MILESTONE	**NEW VS. PRE-EXISTING**	**POTENTIAL IMPACT**
4.1. Improved communication	Pre-existing	Minor: An incremental but positive step in the relevant policy area
4.2. Establish platform	New	Minor

LEVEL OF COMPLETION				
4.1. Improved communication	START DATE: Not Specified	END DATE: Dec. 31, 2013	Actual Completion Projected Completion	Unable to Tell from Government and Civil Society Responses NOT STARTED — LIMITED — SUBSTANTIAL — COMPLETE ▲
4.2. Establish platform	START DATE: Not Specified	END DATE: Dec. 31, 2013	Actual Completion Projected Completion	▼ NOT STARTED — LIMITED — SUBSTANTIAL — COMPLETE ▲

NEXT STEPS	
4.1. Improved communication	Further steps required in next action plan
4.2. Establish platform	Further steps required in next action plan

WHAT HAPPENED?

This commitment was intended to establish a platform and multi-channels of communication that would facilitate a two-way flow of information between the governed and the government. Through the process, citizens will have the opportunity to provide feedback to their leaders on how government development programs are affecting them. Leaders would be afforded the chance to respond. This is crucial to open government. This commitment supports the government's medium-term development framework coined as the Agenda for Transformation (AfT). The implementation of this policy requires mainstreaming the voices of ordinary citizens, and this commitment is intended to support this process.

Prior to joining the OGP, the government implemented two development policies: the Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy (IPRS) and the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS). After the 2010 general elections, the government carved its third development policy, AfT. In the implementation of these policies, strategic communication was not prioritised. Information dissemination and public relations were prioritised.

Unlike information dissemination, which is top down, strategic communication seeks to increase citizens' knowledge on a particular subject matter or to affect positive change in their behaviour. In achieving this, strategic communication solicits feedback from the target audience through a two-way flow of information.

After one year of implementation of the action plan, the national and county level governments had not developed capacity or committed resources in communicating about the development programs to citizens. The government indicated good intentions in addressing this problem by including a commitment that deals specifically with promoting citizen participation and dialogue. However, concrete steps have not been taken to translate these intentions into actions.

Milestone 1: At the heart of this commitment, the government planned to develop a communication strategy to increase citizen understanding, participation and ownership of the AfT. According to the Government's self-assessment report, 80% of this commitment was achieved. The communications strategy was a deliverable under this commitment. In the self-assessment report, the Government asserted that a draft strategy was developed and presented to the cabinet for endorsement.

However, interviews conducted with CSOs that are strategic partners to the government on the achievement of this commitment revealed that they did not participate in the development of the strategy. They also have not seen the draft. It could not be validated whether the strategy was in its draft form. A formal request was made to the Ministry of Information, Cultural Affairs and Tourism (MCAT) to share a copy of the draft but this yielded no response.

Milestone 2: The second deliverable under this commitment was to develop an interactive, multi-faceted, multi-stakeholder platform to gather citizens' feedback on national development outcomes. In its self-assessment report, the Government indicated that this deliverable had not started.

The IRM researcher did not find any evidence that concrete outputs were achieved under this commitment. The main challenge has been limited financial resources and investment in human capacity development. Improving means of communications with citizens would help bring added value to the implementation of government development priorities.

DID IT MATTER?

This commitment was not new. Strategic communication has been mentioned in other development policies, although there was little financial commitment. At the same time, if the commitment were to be fully implemented, it would have changed citizen-state relationships and widened the Government's operations by mainstreaming diversified voices in formulating and implementing development interventions.

The IRM researcher could find no evidence that the commitment was achieved. Without concrete outputs, it was difficult for stakeholders to act. CSOs critiqued the Government's lack of political will in implementation of this commitment. However, CSOs believe the Government invested time, energy, and resources in public relations, notably in response to opposition parties that criticise the government.

MOVING FORWARD

Stakeholders:

- The government should consider forming a communication team comprising key government agencies and civil society with communications experience.

Researcher:

- In the next action plan, it is important for the government to consider the completion of the strategic communications that would set the framework for how it engages with citizens.

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¹ The commitment language was abridged for formatting reasons. For full text of the commitment, refer to the National Action Plan.

5 | Accountability and Integrity: Promoting a Culture of Transparency and Accountability

This commitment is a starred (✪) commitment[1]

Ensure the passage of the Code of Conduct for Public officials and the Whistleblower Protection Acts

There are two proposed legislations, which have stymied at the Liberian legislature for quite a few years now. These legislations remain key to ensure that a culture of transparency and accountability are inculcated in the Liberian population. They are the workings of the government.

In 2012, The Executive Branch of Government put in place measures on Code of Conduct and Whistleblower Protection. These measures were instituted by means of executive orders and their inforcement was limited to members of the executive branch of government. The government previously also submitted to the legislature bills for passage on the two issues.

Therefore, working along with civil society and the legislature, the government hopes to get the two legislations passed by the end of the second year of the OGP process.

COMMITMENT DESCRIPTION

ANSWERABILITY		
	LEAD INSTITUTION	National Legislature, Law Reform Commission (LRC), Ministry of Information (MOI)
	SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS	National Legislature and the Law Reform Commission
	POINT OF CONTACT SPECIFIED?	No

SPECIFICITY AND MEASURABILITY	Medium (Commitment language describes an activity that is objectively verifiable, but does not contain specific milestones or deliverables)

RELEVANCE		
	OGP GRAND CHALLENGES	Increasing public integrity

OGP VALUES				
ACCESS TO INFORMATION	**CIVIC PARTICIPATION**	**PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY**	**TECH & INNOVATION FOR TRANS. & ACC**	**UNCLEAR**
	✗	✗		

AMBITION

NEW VS. PRE-EXISTING	Pre-existing
POTENTIAL IMPACT	Transformative: A reform that could potentially transform "business as usual" in the relevant policy area

LEVEL OF COMPLETION

START DATE: Not Specified	**END DATE:** June. 30, 2015	Actual Completion / Projected Completion	NOT STARTED — LIMITED — SUBSTANTIAL ▼ — COMPLETE ▲

NEXT STEPS

Further steps required in next action plan

WHAT HAPPENED?

The Code of Conduct of public officials and the Whistleblower Protection Bill were two documents intended to set the standard to guide the behaviours of public officials. The commitment was intended to fulfil Article 90(c) of the Liberian Constitution that provides, "The Legislature shall, in pursuance of the above provision, prescribe a Code of Conduct for all public officials and employees, stipulating the acts which constitute conflict of interest or are against public policy and penalties for violation thereof."

In 2010, the President submitted the two bills mentioned above to the National Legislature for enactment into laws. Government and CSO interviewees considered these two Bills to be of relevance to OGP. The Code of Conduct Bill was passed into law in 2013. It fulfils one of the commitments mentioned in the Action Plan. The Whistleblower Bill has yet to be enacted into law, although it has gone through the committees' review of the Senate and House of Representatives.

According to the President, when passed into law, the Whistleblower Bill will defend those who disclose information for the public good, either in the public or private sectors.[2] This kind of protection was never in place prior to this government taking power. The President expressed the hope that the proposed law will counter corruption and promote good governance.

The President, being aware of the sensitive nature of the Bill and the time it would take to pass the Bill, issued Executive Order Number 22 in December 2009 while the legislature was in recess. The bill on the protection of whistleblowers was released in advance of the planned submission of the bill. The Executive Order banned public and private employers from retaliating against those who disclose information about improper actions that are contrary to public interest. It defined public interest disclosures as those revealing "illegality, criminality, breach of law, miscarriage of justice, danger to public health and safety, and damage to environment," as well as attempts at cover-ups.

The Executive Order also says that individuals subject to retaliation for such disclosures were permitted to bring claims in court. Violators could be subject to criminal penalties, including imprisonment for up to two years. In addition, anyone fearing retaliation for public interest disclosures could appeal for a change of work assignment. If money were recovered on the basis of a disclosure, the whistleblower would be entitled to five per cent of the amount received.[3]

One of the deliverables of this commitment, the Code of Conduct of Public Officials was passed. Now that the law has been passed, government implementation is important. Civil society is responsible for monitoring how the government implements the law. In the meantime, the Whistleblower Act is still lingering at the Legislature.

DID IT MATTER?

The passage of the Code of Conduct is an important step in the right direction in raising the bar for how public officials conduct themselves. The IRM research could not find record that certain portions of the bill were implemented. Once implemented, the commitment is supposed to reduce corruption, improve work ethic within the public sector, and increase a culture of transparency and accountability in the government.

In the view of CSOs, many people have forgotten about the bill due to the length of time it took for the government to pass it. Getting citizens to understand the contents of the bill is critical for an effective advocacy by CSOs in implementing the bill.

MOVING FORWARD

Stakeholders:

- Maintain the passage of the Whistleblower Bill in the next action plan.
- The Executive Branch needs to engage the Legislature so that the Whistleblower Bill can be enacted into law.

Researcher:

- CSOs need to advocate and lobby the lawmakers for the speedy passage of the Whistleblower Bill.
- To broaden citizen participation in the implementation of the Code of Conduct Bill, the government should consider conducting a mass awareness campaign on the contents of the Bill.

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[1] Starred commitments are considered exemplary OGP commitments. In order to receive a star, a commitment must meet several criteria. (1) It must be specific enough that a judgment can be made about its potential impact. Starred commitments will have "medium" or "high" specificity. (2) Commitment language should make clear its relevance to opening government. Specifically, it must relate to at least one of the OGP values of Access to Information, Civic Participation, or Public Accountability. (3) The commitment must have a "moderate" or "transformative" potential impact, should it be implemented. (4) Finally, the commitment must see significant progress during the action plan implementation period, receiving a ranking of "substantial" or "complete" implementation.

[2] "Liberia: Fight Against Corruption Intensifies – Whistleblowers Get Presidential Greenlight," AllAfrica, 21 December 2009, http://bit.ly/1Bmz0Oy

[3] "Liberia: Fight Against Corruption Intensifies – Whistleblowers Get Presidential Greenlight," AllAfrica, 21 December 2009, http://bit.ly/1Bmz0Oy

6 | Technology and Innovation: Open Data Website

- *Ensure the implementation of the IFMIS project beyond pilot phase*
- *Launch Liberia's Open Data Website to make public all relevant information on Liberia*
- *Complete the development of the platform for the connection of government's ministries to the fiber optic cable*

COMMITMENT DESCRIPTION						
ANSWERABILITY	**LEAD INSTITUTION**		6.1. Ministry of Finance (MOF), Ministry of Information (MOI), Ministry of State (MOS) 6.2. Implementation of the Integrated Financial Management System (IFMIS) pilot project Ministry of Finance (MOF) 6.3. Ministry of Finance (MOF), Liberia Telecommunication Corporation (LIBTELCO)			
	SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS		Same as Above			
	POINT OF CONTACT SPECIFIED?		No			
SPECIFICITY AND MEASURABILITY	6.1. Integrated Financial Management		Medium (Commitment language describes an activity that is objectively verifiable, but does not contain specific milestones or deliverables)			
	6.2. Open Data Website		Medium			
	6.3. Increase Connectivity		Medium			
RELEVANCE	**OGP GRAND CHALLENGES**	Improving public services				
	OGP VALUES					
	MILESTONE	**ACCESS TO INFORMATION**	**CIVIC PARTICIPATION**	**PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY**	**TECH & INNOVATION FOR TRANS. & ACC**	**UNCLEAR**
	6.1. Integrated Financial Management					✗
	6.2. Open Data Website	✗			✗	
	6.3. Increase Connectivity					✗

AMBITION

MILESTONE	NEW VS. PRE-EXISTING	POTENTIAL IMPACT
6.1. Integrated Financial Management	Pre-existing	None: Maintains the status quo
6.2. Open Data Website	New	Minor: An incremental but positive step in the relevant policy area
6.3. Increase Connectivity	New	None

LEVEL OF COMPLETION

6.1. Integrated Financial Management	START DATE: Not Specified	END DATE: Not Specified	Actual Completion Projected Completion	NOT STARTED · LIMITED · SUBSTANTIAL · COMPLETE
6.2. Open Data Website	START DATE: Not Specified	END DATE: Not Specified	Actual Completion Projected Completion	NOT STARTED · LIMITED · SUBSTANTIAL · COMPLETE
6.3. Increase Connectivity	START DATE: Not Specified	END DATE: Not Specified	Actual Completion Projected Completion	NOT STARTED · LIMITED · SUBSTANTIAL · COMPLETE

NEXT STEPS

6.1. Integrated Financial Management	No further steps required in the next action plan
6.2. Open Data Website	No further steps required in the next action plan
6.3. Increase Connectivity	No further steps required in the next action plan

WHAT HAPPENED?

The overriding objective of this commitment was to use technology to enhance and promote inter-connectivity among government agencies as a means of sharing data and using the platform to launch the open data website. These actions support citizen access to information as well as the government's transparency policy in the management of resources.

Milestone 1: In operationalising this commitment, the government extended the Integrated Financial Management System (IFMIS) beyond its pilot phase. IFMIS functions under the MoF and is directly responsible for centralised storing of government financial data and for developing a system for integrating it within all ministries and agencies. Prior to developing the action plan, there was a pilot phase in place that started in 2009. The pilot phase has been transformed into a full project under the supervision of the MoF. However, as the commitment is currently written, it is unclear how an internal integrated financial management system is relevant to OGP values.

According to the Government's self-assessment report, IFMIS has been connected to 19 ministries and agencies and gave itself an 80% completion rating. There were plans to add 18 more ministries and agencies by the end of July 2014. Officials directly responsible for the implementation of IFMIS confirmed the completion rating. A discussion with the technician managing the data confirmed this information. However, civil society members interviewed could not confirm utilisation of the data because it is not easily accessible, which raises concern of its relevance to OGP.

Milestone 2: The second milestone was to launch an Open Data Website. This milestone had a 15% completion rating according to the Government's self-assessment report. From interviews conducted with civil society, the IRM researcher could not find much evidence of what has been achieved on this deliverable. iLAB, a civil society organisation that uses technology to promote accountability, was listed in the action plan as a strategic partner in the attainment of this milestone. iLAB's role was to provide technical advice to the SC on setting up the Open Data Website. There is no indication that iLAB received funds from the government to perform this task. According to iLAB, while it is true that there have been some technical issues setting up the platform, the Government did not commit funding to accelerate the work. iLAB further asserted that sourcing data from different government ministries and agencies was a huge challenge, furthered by MICAT's failure to communicate this initiative to other ministries and agencies.

Milestone 3: As currently written, it is unclear how improved Internet connectivity relates to OGP values of access to information, civic participation and public accountability. This milestone was to ensure that all government ministries and agencies got connected to the fibre optic cable. The attainment of this milestone is ongoing. According to the self-assessment report, fourteen government ministries and agencies have been connected for a 47% completion rating. According to an interview conducted with the Liberia Telecommunications Corporation (LIBTELCO), the agency directly responsible for this commitment, completion of the tasks has been slow as a result of two factors. The first is that the country has no national network and lacks needed infrastructure. The second is that the project has limited financial support from the government. The agency has not been able to receive money from the government to implement its $US8.8 million proposal required to expand its operational capacity. To fill financial gaps, the agency renders services to the private sector, commercial institutions, and foreign missions accredited to the country.

DID IT MATTER?

The effective use of IT has a potential impact on how government functions in terms of improving its Internet connectivity and information management system. If fully implemented, the optic fibre would have provided an opportunity for increased data-sharing among government agencies. However, members of CSOs interviewed shared the view that the action plan does not say how improved Internet connectivity will contribute to the values and principles of open government.

Improved Internet connectivity within and among government institutions does not necessarily facilitate citizen access to information. Citizens can only access information that the government agencies post on the Internet. However, there is no legislation that would mandate government institutions to post relevant public information via Internet. To compound this problem, either because of illiteracy, cost, sheer lack of Internet facility, or the combination of all three, most citizens do not have easy access to Internet connection. This is a problem that is particularly acute in the counties outside of Monrovia.

The Data Website was up and running. Civil society within the IT sector have made some initial gains in fundraising to jump start the Open Data Website, but sustained support will be needed from the government to make it operational. IT systems come with innovations and a potential for efficiency, but they are operated and managed by human beings. As such, the installation of any IT system needs to take into account the societal context in which the system is to operate.

MOVING FORWARD

Stakeholders:

- Include in the next action plan, the completion of the Open Data Website to increase citizen access to public information.

Researcher:

- The Executive Branch of government should consider drafting and submitting a Bill to the National Legislature that would mandate all government institutions to post public information on their websites on a monthly basis.

V | PROCESS: SELF-ASSESSMENT

At the time of writing (November 2014), the Government had not published its self-assessment report. The government organised a forum in July 2014 with interested stakeholders to review action plan progress to date.

In July 2014, the government held a one-day forum to review the status of the action plan. At that meeting, key government institutions responsible for the achievement of particular commitments were invited to give a progress report. Some of those who made presentations were representatives from the Ministry of Finance, Liberia's Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, and Liberia Telecommunication Corporation. Over 15 CSOs were invited to the forum. Of this number, six attended, and they were mainly from sectors working on transparency, access to information, and media development. At the forum, the Ministry of Information, Cultural Affairs and Tourism distributed a document that highlighted levels of achievement of each of the commitments expressed as a percentage. The IRM researcher used this document to inform this report. The document was the Government's effort to assess its own performance, although it did not produce the required self-assessment report. In compiling the contents of the document, each government ministry or agency responsible for a commitment was asked to share their status report with the Steering Committee (SC). The SC used the information to assign scores on the level of completion. During the forum, participants made some suggestions on how to improve the OGP process. However, the report of the forum has yet to be completed and shared with the participants and general public.

VI | COUNTRY CONTEXT

This section places the action plan commitments in the broader national context and discusses the concrete next steps for the next action plan.

COUNTRY CONTEXT

Liberia's governance and development history has been marked by a lack of equity, voice, and participation, which were significant contributing factors to the civil conflict. Limited opportunities for popular participation feed negative perceptions about the quality and integrity of policy-makers, undermines their legitimacy, and fuels concerns about the lack of accountability in the management of resources.

Liberians have not had the experience of participating in governance, although Article 7 of the Constitution guarantees participation. This has contributed to the lack of a two-way flow of communication between the government and its people. The result is that it is difficult for the government to mobilise citizens to participate in governance and development programs.

In 2013, the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) joined the Liberian Government in celebrating ten years of peace. The need for the celebration can be attributed to political and democratic continuity, having had two successive presidential and legislative elections. The first one took place in 2005 and the second in 2011. The second reason for the celebration is the stabilisation of the security situation without any major internal threat or external aggression.

Despite these gains, the peace is still fragile. Its fragility is deeply rooted in the fact that the structural conditions that gave rise to the conflict have not been fully addressed. These conditions are tied around major issues such as transparency and accountability in the management of state resources, the rule of law, access to justice, citizens' participation in decision-making processes, and limited access to affordability and quality social services. These unaddressed conditions have created a strained citizen-state relationship and the lack of trust in state institutions.[1]

Liberia is a natural resource-based economy. The country's budget depends heavily on revenue generated from companies investing in sectors such as iron ore, timber, palm oil plantation, and rubber as well as licenses and contracts to explore oil and gold. The effective management of the accumulative resources from these sectors has been a challenge. The President recognised this as a challenge in the governance system when she said in her 2006 inaugural address, "[The] country is not poor but has been poorly managed," and she named corruption as public enemy number one that was to be fought by her government.[2]

Pursuant to its effort in fighting corruption, in 2008 the Government established the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission (LACC) through an act of the Legislature. The rhetoric on fighting corruption has been strong but this has not been matched by actions of the state institutions, such as the LACC and Ministry of Justice (MoJ), to investigate allegations of corruption and prosecute cases with substantial evidence. In a recent report to the Security Council, UNMIL called on the government to do more in fighting corruption.[3] This will require demonstrating the will to prosecute without favouring government officials who abuse the public trust.

But corruption and bribery are not limited to political appointees; they are also reflected in the behaviour of other state institutions. In 2013, Human Rights Watch released a report that highlighted corruption and extortion within the Liberian National Police (LNP).[4] Three years prior to the release of this report, Search for Common Ground conducted a study on the LNP and found similar results.[5] These reports show that the behaviours of the LNP have not changed radically. Despite the training provided by UNMIL and other international partners to support the reform of the LNP, corruption and extortion seem to be imbedded within the police culture. This undermines public trust in the sector.

Similarly, despite efforts by the government and its partners to reform the justice system, the US Department of State Human Rights Report on Liberia highlighted that corruption, bribery, and other forms of human rights violations such as prolonged pre-trial detention are still embedded within its operations.[6] In December 2013, a National Integrity Barometer report rated the Judiciary as one of the most corrupt state institutions.[7] Shortcomings of the judiciary undermine access to justice and the rule of law, fundamental for a vibrant democracy.

An overly centralised government with a lot of power vested in the Presidency greatly undermines maximum feasible participation of citizens in the governance of the country as provided for in Article 7 of the Liberian Constitution. Since 2006, the Government has made efforts in allocating resources in the national budgets called the County Development Funds (CDFs) for local development projects. The intent was for citizens to participate in prioritising their development needs and to be involved in the implementation process. However, several audit reports from the General Auditing Commission (GAC), the integrity institution fighting waste, fraud, and abuse, found interference in the management of the funds by some ministries and the county legislative caucuses. This was greatly undermining the completion and quality of numerous projects.[8] Additionally, counties lack the necessary infrastructure and systems to manage the resources efficiently.

The above effort was carried out alongside attempts by the Government to formally decentralise political power and fiscal authority. The Governance Commission (GC) is the institution that has been leading the decentralisation process. A decentralisation policy has been developed and adopted by the Cabinet. However, its full implementation requires amending portions of the Liberian Constitution that give the President the power to appoint County Superintendents and other local officials. The President established a Constitutional Review Committee (CRC) two years ago. It has been involved in holding nationwide consultations that would lead to the constitutional amendments through a national referendum. Consultation dates have not been set yet. At the same time, a Local Governance Act (LGA) was enacted into law to implement other segments of the decentralisation policy that do not require Constitutional amendments.

Other reform initiatives intended to address some of the country's long-standing problems include the formulation of the Law Reform Commission, the National Forest Reform Law, the Community Rights Law, the National Land Policy, a draft land law that is being reviewed by stakeholders, the Freedom of Information Act, the Commission on Higher Education, the National Gender Policy, and the National Youth Policy.

Placing young people at the centre of the country's development programs cannot be overemphasised because, according to the 2008 National Population and Housing Census of 2008, 65% of the country's population is less than 35 years of age. In her second inaugural address, the President recognised the risk posed by this segment of the population if their problems and issues are not addressed.[9] While this may be true, a youthful population also creates an opportunity for productivity, entrepreneurship, and innovation. The discourse on youth development needs to start from this perspective. The government has initiated short-term and ad hoc responses to address the employment issue facing young people. It has yet to develop a comprehensive medium- and long-term strategy in responding to young people's employment and livelihood challenges, particularly those within the informal sector who have little education and few productive skills.

In 2013, Liberia was ranked sixth among the 10 countries with the highest GDP growth in the world.[10] The growth rate surely will be affected by the outbreak of the Ebola pandemic. According to the Food and Agriculture Organizations (FOA), agriculture accounts for 37% of Liberia's GDP.[11] The Ebola epidemic disrupted the regular planting season, and this certainly will diminish yield for the staple crops such as rice, cassava, and plantain, thereby increasing prices on the local market.

Similarly, mining, which constitutes 17% of the country's economy, is declining[12] as a result of travel restrictions on non-essential staff and the evacuation of other personnel. There have been reports that China-Union Investment and ArcelorMittal, two of the largest investors in the country, scaled down iron ore and mining operations. These actions will reduce investors' confidence if the risks are perceived to be too great. The World Bank reports that the short-term fiscal impact is going to be $US93 million, 4.7% of the country's GDP.[13]

The Government's priority is to eradicate the virus that has affected normal life in the country, including the closure of schools. In the meantime, the 2014/2015 national budget of $US560 million was passed. With a decline in revenue generation, the Government is faced with the challenge of generating this amount. The amount is necessary to run a functional government that provides quality and affordable social services to people as the President's second and final term ends in 2017.

STAKEHOLDER PRIORITIES

There is sufficient evidence of stakeholders' participation in the formulation of commitments in the action plan. While not all stakeholders reached a consensus on priorities, three commitments appeared to be of importance to those the IRM researcher interviewed. The commitments included (1) transparency around revenue generated from the extractive sector, (2) access to information, and (3) open budget processes. Some progress was made in these areas in terms of institutionalising these initiatives within government operations and policies. However, some of the milestones of the commitments mentioned above were not fully achieved. Going forward, it is important that the commitments that reflect OGP values and principles be brought forward to the next action plan.

Based on interviews conducted by the IRM researcher, several areas are importance to stakeholders and require consideration in the development of the next action plan:

- First, transparency around revenue should not be limited to the extractive sector, but extended to other areas such as the operations of Global System Mobile (GSM) companies.

- Second, line ministries or agencies who provide social services or are custodians of public resources need to make available to the public their detailed budgets and work plans that would be frameworks for monitoring performance.

- Third, open budget needs to be followed by open expenditure as a way of engendering transparency in the management of public resources, but also to ensure the quality of services provided.

- Fourth, corruption and the abuse of public trust remains a critical issue undermining open government. Prosecutions of individuals breaching public trust needs to be a high priority in the next action plan.

SCOPE OF ACTION PLAN IN RELATION TO NATIONAL CONTEXT

With respect to the issues affecting the country, the action plan was limited in scope. There has been little public participation in processes that influence the national budget formulation and what development priorities should be funded. This is important for increasing citizens' confidence and trust in their government. The current action plan is focused heavily on policies and laws and not much on transforming the processes and conventional way government does business.

Accountability is inextricably linked to two things: first, citizens' ability to hold public officials accountable is based on citizen access to information. The lack of accountability has contributed significantly to the poor quality of services state institutions provide in the areas of policing, health, education, and the courts.

Other than developing a communication strategy, the government has not been able to make the leap from consulting citizens to enhancing citizen-state engagement. The government has not created an enabling environment for active citizen participation at different levels of government decision-making. The quality of diverse citizens' participation greatly affects the outcome of a development or governance initiative in terms of ownership and results. Processes for citizen participation were not adequately thought through in the current action plan.

[1] Afrobarometer, *"What are Liberians Saying About Corruption and Trust in Public Institutions in Liberia: Afrobarometer Survey Reveals"* by Dan T. Saryee and Harold Aidoo (Report, 2013), http://bit.ly/1AYSzgO

[2] "Inauguration," Speeches, The Executive Mansion, http://bit.ly/1Iu0MdQ

[3] United Nations Security Council, *Twenty-seventh Progress Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia* by the General (Report, 18 February 2014), http://bit.ly/1ChDOCX

[4] Human Rights Watch, *"No Money, No Justice" Police Corruption and Abuse in Liberia* by Valerie Brender (Report, United States of America, 2013) http://bit.ly/1ydfz9N

[5] The report is entitled Security Sector Reform in Liberia: A case of the Liberian National Police Capacity to respond to internal threat in the wake of UNMIL drawdown, 2012 and can be found at www.@sfcg.org

[6] www.state.gov and then go to Media Center and then click on Major Publications

[7] Henry Karmo, "Most Corrupt: National Integrity Barometer Rates Liberia's Judiciary with Very Low Marks," Front Page Africa, 20 December 2013, http://bit.ly/1xYkXgy

[8] General Auditing Commission, Gacliberia.com

[9] The Executive Mansion, www.emansion.gov.lr

[10] Amadou Sy and Amy Copley, "Understanding the Economic Effects of the 2014 Ebola Outbreak in West Africa," Blogs, Brookings, 1 October 2014, http://brook.gs/1nqgm3Q

[11] Amadou Sy and Amy Copley, "Understanding the Economic Effects of the 2014 Ebola Outbreak in West Africa," Blogs, Brookings, 1 October 2014, http://brook.gs/1nqgm3Q

[12] Amadou Sy and Amy Copley, "Understanding the Economic Effects of the 2014 Ebola Outbreak in West Africa," Blogs, Brookings, 1 October 2014, http://brook.gs/1nqgm3Q

[13] Amadou Sy and Amy Copley, "Understanding the Economic Effects of the 2014 Ebola Outbreak in West Africa," Blogs, Brookings, 1 October 2014, http://brook.gs/1nqgm3Q

VII | GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

This section recommends general next steps for OGP in Liberia, in general, rather than for specific commitments.

CROSS-CUTTING RECOMMENDATIONS

Liberia's political and economic conditions remain stable but at the same time fragile. Its fragility is rooted in weak state institutions marred by the provision of social services such as health and education that are of low quality. This is coupled with high unemployment and limited access to livelihood opportunities particularly for young people in the informal sector.

Inadequate service delivery by the government has contributed to low citizen trust in public officials and the institutions they manage. This is further compounded by widespread corruption, the lack of accountability in the way in which public officials make decisions, as well as the management of public resources. This has had a negative effect on the citizen-state relationship wherein citizens do not feel the dividend of participating in the country's democratic process.

While it is true that change will come about through long-term investment in changing the attitudes and behaviors of public authorities, negative perception of the government can be reduced by opening the decision-making process of government and by giving a voice to diverse sectors of the population. This will require strong political ownership of development initiatives that are characterized by the active participation of communities in the planning and implementation of those initiatives.

In the view of the IRM researcher, the Government should consider the following general recommendations in the formulation of the second action plan.

1. Institute corrective measures without favor or discrimination when public officials abuse the trust bestowed upon them to serve in government. This will require the leadership of the executive and legislative branches of government to amend the current LACC's Act to give it a more robust prosecutorial power.

2. Increase the frequency and quality of communication between the government and the governed as a way of managing citizens' expectations and soliciting their views and feedback on a wide range of development and governance issues. Effective communication can be a tool to mitigate negative perceptions about the government as well as to engender citizens' participation in the governance of the country.

3. The Government should hold public officials accountable for their actions or inactions in the performance of their official duties. Accountability involves citizen access to public information, active civic participation that influences decisions that affect them, and evidence of value for money in the implementation of development program.

4. Partner with civil society organizations beyond their participation in developing the action plan to government-allocated resources that enable them to monitor the implementation of the action plan. This will contribute to the checks and balances of the implementation process.

5. The government should engage citizens outside of Monrovia on what kind of information they would like to have access to.

6. The government should consider developing sustainable tools to engage citizens on open government issues other than electronic platforms.

Box | Top Five 'SMART' Recommendations

TOP FIVE 'SMART' RECOMMENDATIONS
1. Popular Participation and Ownership: Increase citizen participation beyond select Monrovia-based CSOs as well as participation from the legislative and judicial branches of government in the formulation of the next action plan.
2. Demonstrate Top-level Political Commitment: Top-level government officials should demonstrate their involvement in the implementation of the next action plan by participating in OGP consultative meetings and processes as well as in the official launch of the OGP action plan.
3. Include Commitments involving all Three Branches of Government and that Reflect OGP Values and Principles: All commitments and deliverables should demonstrate relevance to the values and principles of OGP. Commitments should be specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, time-bound and have set benchmarks for completion.
4. Establish an OGP Secretariat: The formulation and implementation of the next action plan should be led by a secretariat housed at MICAT whose time would be fully dedicated to the work of the OGP. The Secretariat would be tasked with leading broad-based consultative processes in formulating the plan, coordinating and documenting meetings, and following-up with individual agencies on the implementation of commitments.
5. Develop a Co-ordination Strategy: When established, the OGP secretariat should be charged with the responsibility of developing a comprehensive coordination strategy prior to the implementation of the action plan. The strategic document could highlight mode of coordination between the secretariat and the government's focal agency on the OGP, lay-out roles and responsibilities, frequency of meetings, outreach model, channels of communication, and monitoring plan.

VIII | METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES

As a complement to the government self-assessment, an independent IRM assessment report is written by well-respected governance researchers, preferably from each OGP-participating country.

These experts use a common OGP independent report questionnaire and guidelines, based on a combination of interviews with local OGP stakeholders as well as desk-based analysis. This report is shared with a small International Expert Panel (appointed by the OGP Steering Committee) for peer review to ensure that the highest standards of research and due diligence have been applied.

Analysis of progress on OGP action plans is a combination of interviews, desk research, and feedback from nongovernmental stakeholder meetings. The IRM report builds on the findings of the government's self-assessment report and any other assessments of progress by civil society, the private sector, or international organisations.

Each local researcher carries out stakeholder meetings to ensure an accurate portrayal of events. Given budgetary and calendar constraints, the IRM cannot consult all interested or affected parties. Consequently, the IRM strives for methodological transparency and, when possible, makes public the process of stakeholder engagement in research (detailed later in this section). In national contexts where anonymity of informants—governmental or nongovernmental—is required, the IRM reserves the ability to protect the anonymity of informants. Additionally, because of the necessary limitations of the method, the IRM strongly encourages commentary on public drafts of each national document.

INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUPS

In the work plan developed prior to writing this report, the IRM researcher had planned to use several tools to generate information. They included focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and a consultative forum with diverse stakeholders. Due to the Ebola crisis and the government's restriction on public gathering, the consultative forum and focus group discussion did not take place. However, key informant interviews with stakeholders and desk review were carried out. The stakeholders interviewed included members from government agencies responsible for specific commitments and CSOs that the government considered to be strategic partners in the implementation of the action plan. There were no anonymous interviewees. All interviews took place after the July 2014 stakeholder forum held by the government to review progress and status in the implementation of the action plan (see Annex for names and contact information of interviewees).

ABOUT THE INDEPENDENT REPORTING MECHANISM

The IRM is a key means by which government, civil society, and the private sector can track government development and implementation of OGP action plans on a bi-annual basis. The design of research and quality control of such reports is carried out by the International Experts' Panel, which is comprised of experts in transparency, participation, accountability, and social science research methods.

The current members of the International Experts' Panel are:

- Yamini Aiyar
- Debbie Budlender
- Jonathan Fox
- Rosemary McGee
- Gerardo Munck

A small staff based in Washington, DC shepherds reports through the IRM process in close co-ordination with the IRM researcher. Questions and comments about this report can be directed to the staff at irm@opengovpartnership.org.

Table | List of Stakeholders Interviewed

NAME	INSTITUTION
Mr. Victor Dennis	Technical Manager, LIBTELCO
Mr. James Gilayeneh	Department of Open Budget Initiative, MoF
Ms. Facia Harris	Compliance Officer (IIC)
Mr. Emmanuel Howe	Administrator, Independent Information Commission (IIC)
Mr. Malcolme Joseph	Center for Media Studies and Peace-building
Mrs. Nadia Kamara	Legal Counsel (MICAT)
Mr. Lamii Karghoi	Officer in Charge, Liberia Media Center
Mr. James Konah	Acting Director, LEITI
Mr. Prince Kpeler	Citizens United for Peace and Democracy
Mr. Hector Mulbah	Station Manager, Radio Gbezeon, Grand Bassa County
Mr. Thomas Doe Nah	Director, Center for Transparency and Accountability in Liberia (CENTAL)
Mr. William Quay	President, ALICOR
Mr. Teemu Roppone	Director, iLAB
Mr. Norris Tweh	Deputy Minister for Administration (MICAT)
Mr. Alphonzo Zeon	Program Manager, Carter Center
Mrs. Carolyn Zoduah	Policy Director, Alternative for Genuine Democracy (AGENDA)

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