



Open
Government
Partnership



OPEN GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIP

National Action Plan of the Republic of Liberia

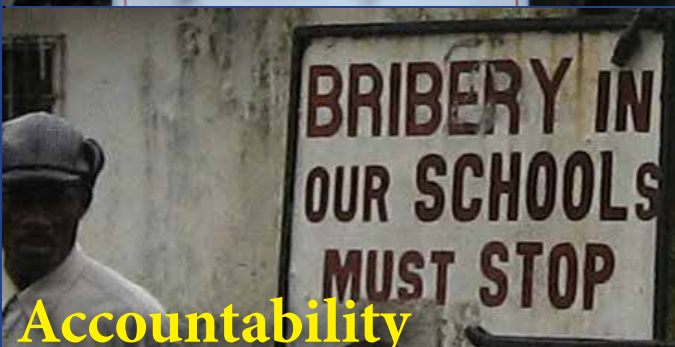
APRIL 2013



Transparency



Participation



Accountability



Technology

1. INTRODUCTION:

In 2005 and 2011, Liberia held two successive back-to-back presidential and representative elections, putting the country's stalled transition to democratic rule and socio-economic recovery on an irreversible trajectory.

As Liberia enters its eighth year of peace and stability under the leadership of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the Government's reform agenda has achieved numerous tangible results—especially in confronting the inevitability of corruption, waste and abuse of public resources.

These reform results include the passage of the Freedom of Information Act, the Liberia's Anti-Corruption Commission Act, the Public Procurement and Concession ACT, the Public Financial Management Act (PFMA), the Extractive Industries Transparency Act, and the Revised General Auditing Commission Act, among others.

Consequently, a greater proportion of Liberia's population than ever before now participate in the governing processes of the country affecting decisional outcomes at the local, county and national levels.

Nonetheless, in order to sustain and improve upon the current reform process would entail enforcing and implementing enacted laws, as well as the enacting draft laws before the Liberian Legislature and strengthening of some Liberia's political institutions.

Thus, in an effort to guarantee the implementation and improvement of these reforms, the Government formally declared through a Letter of Intent dated 7 September 2011 to join the Open Government Partnership or (OGP).

In her Letter of Intent, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf stated: "Despite this progress, there is still much to be done to make Liberia more open, transparent and free from corruption. Our involvement in the transparency activities like the OGP provides us the opportunity to demonstrate and strengthen commitments to open government, accountability and fighting corruption..."

The OGP, launched on September 20, 2011 in New York City, is structured around four key pillars: Transparency, Citizens' Participation, Accountability, and Technological Innovation.

A major requirement for full membership status in the OGP is that each participating country must develop and adopt a Country's Action Plan consistent with the pillars of the OGP.

2. LIBERIA'S OPEN GOVERNMENT EFFORTS TO DATE

The Government has made numerous efforts under the leadership of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to make government's operations more open, efficient and participatory with respect to citizens' participation.

The reform regime of the Government has already impacted the four key areas under the OGP: transparency, public participation, accountability and technology in order to achieve total openness.

2.1 TRANSPARENCY

To increase citizens' access to information and enhance public trust, Liberia has undertaken the following initiatives:

- Access to Public Information: Freedom of Information Act (FOI)-Liberia passed the FOI Act into law on 16 September 2010, making Liberia the first country in West Africa to pass an FOI law. A two-year piloting phase of seven ministries/agencies resulted in the naming of information officers, increased awareness of the FOI Law in pilot ministries, led to a series of record management training and the constitution of the Information Commission;
- Open and Competitive Procurement and Contracting Process: Liberia enacted a PPCC ACT requiring the awarding of GOL contracts or projects are executed on a competitive basis. The PPCC ACT was passed in 2009;
- Open Budget Process: The Ministry of Finance launched an open budget initiative to provide the public with information on government's spending on programs and projects;
- Extractive Industries Transparency: Liberia enacted the LEITI Act to establish openness in granting access to natural resources and in the fiscal returns for the country.

2.2 CITIZENS' PARTICIPATION:

Liberia's nascent democracy is accelerating at a higher pace because citizens now participate in decision-making processes at several levels through established legal framework.

- Public Outreach & Dialogue: There is always elaborate public hearing in the national Legislature preceding the passage of all bills and concession agreements; country-wide consultations often takes place on national development priorities to solicit citizens input.
- Improved Free Press and Free Speech: The government's tolerance towards free press and free speech was demonstrated by the signing unto the "Table Mountain Declaration" which seeks to decriminalize "hate speech" and repeal Libel Laws.
- Multi-stakeholders' Collaboration:

2.3 ACCOUNTABILITY AND INTEGRITY:

The Government of Liberia has emphasized the need for public officials to exhibit a high degree of honesty while demanding more openness within government institutions

- National Anti-Corruption Strategy: The Government instituted and passed the Anti Corruption Act, setting up an Anti Corruption Commission (LACC) to monitor assets of public officials and prosecute those found liable of corruption and the abuse of the public trust and resources;
- Audit Institutions: The Government has set up the General auditing Commission (GAC), an independent Audit Commission that reports to the National Legislation, with the authority to audit all government and public institutions;
- Public Financial Management Act of 2009: This Act lays down the responsibility and authority for budget and public financial management by providing the overall framework for budget preparation and approval, budget execution, borrowing, public debt, government guarantees and aid management;
- Improving Honesty in Government: To facilitate and improve honesty and openness in government and public institutions, public officials, under Executive Order # 38, are required to declare all assets with the Anti-Corruption Commission prior to assuming their position.

2.4 TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

- Improved ICT environment
- Improved e-Governance Platform

3. LIBERIA'S OGP COMMITMENTS

3.1 TRANSPARENCY

□ 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

Liberia passed the freedom of information law in September 2010 as a means of fostering transparency. The government has, while working with civil society actors, gradually implemented the law. These commitments will further the smooth implementation of the law and ensure that citizens have easier access to information and ensure government adheres to proactive disclosure of information as envisioned under the FOI Act. They will also ensure that Liberians have quicker access to administrative redress where their request to access information is denied.

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.

These FOI related commitments would be concluded by the close of the first year of the implementation process.

□ Open Budget Initiative

- Regularized Publication and dissemination of a '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 provide 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 message of the Open Budget Initiative
- Provide quarterly update on the implementation status of all projects in the National Budget
- Communicate the Budget Performance Report to the public via existing communication channels

Liberia has progressively made the government's budget process and budget available to public access and citizens' participation. 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 develop-

ment projects meant to directly improve the lives of people across the country. This will also help to foster trust in the population with respect to government expenditures. These commitments will also narrow the gap between the central government and the majority of the population who reside in the countryside.

The government will work along with civil society transparency activists to continue the 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.

□ 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 & women groups; Student groups; traditional leaders; church organizations; and the general citizenry throughout the fifteen counties of Liberia;
- To conduct Post Contract Award Process 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.

3.2 CITIZENS' PARTICIPATION AND DIALOGUE

- Develop Communications Strategy to strengthen public understanding, participation and ownership of the Agenda for Transformation and its implementation;
- Develop interactive, multi-faceted, multi-stakeholder platform to gather citizens' feedback on national development outcomes
 - Citizen Website
 - Talk to your officials
 -

In every activity in modern democratic societies, participation with the generation population is key to ensuring success. Such communication is even more effective if it is done by means of interaction where citizens are accorded the opportunity of providing their leaders with feedbacks which receive responses from the leaders.

These initiatives feedback into the open budget commitment, for example, as it provides the platform for citizens to communicate their position on development projects and other burning governmental challenges directly to those responsible in the government for the sector concerned.

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.

3.3 ACCOUNTABILITY AND INTEGRITY

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

These 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 limited to only 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.

3.4 TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

- Ensure the implementation of IFMIS Pilot 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

4. CONCLUSION

Liberia's participation in the Open Governance Partnership is informed by its overall desire to create an open society that guarantees high level of citizens' participation and government's responsiveness. This is indispensable to successful development efforts in post conflict Liberia. Public trust is a key component to sustaining economic growth and social cohesion. By re-enforcing transparency, public participation, accountability and technology, Liberia is certain of creating an environment in which its citizens and public officials take full ownership of government programs to derive outcomes..

The agreed initiatives are first steps to achieving compliance with OGP benchmarks. These commitments have a lifespan of a year within which Liberia hopes to achieve the minimum requirements for opening government to the people and guaranteeing their ownership.

Liberia's strategy for implementation of these commitments will be deeply rooted in a strong government-civil society partnership to drive the country to full achievement of agreed outcomes.