

Strengthening Development Cooperation in Liberia Joint High-Level Field Mission

The Government of Liberia, through the Aid Management and Coordination Unit (AMCU) at the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, with support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), organized a high-level field visit and Action Dialogue in March 2022.

The high-level field visit, convened from March 12-13, 2022, was a joint supervision mission between the Government of Liberia (GoL) and development partners and stakeholders from civil society. The objective was to ascertain firsthand, the results and impacts of development assistance in the country.

The Government of Liberia was represented by several government ministers from the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MFDP), the Ministry of Health (MOH), the Ministry of Public Works (MPW), the Ministry of Education (MOE), Ministry of Agriculture (MOA), and the Ministry of Mines and Energy (MME), and other senior government officials.

In attendance were the heads of diplomatic missions of USA, Irish, Swedish, and their development agencies, and multilateral development partners e.g., the World Bank, IMF, EU, UN, UNDP, AfDB based in Monrovia. CSOs and NGOs were also present.

Speaking on behalf of development partners at the end of the joint mission in Ganta, Nimba County, US Ambassador, Michael McCarthy, thanked the Government of Liberia for organizing such a meaningful, interesting, and informative visit to development projects. The high-level field visit, on average, received positive feedback on relevance of projects visited, arrangement of site visitations, and reception from communities, contractors, and consultants on the ground. Partners particularly appreciated seeing how development services are delivered, especially in remote areas where conventional strategies and new development models are at work in the various sectors presented.

The ‘Action Dialogue’ on Development Cooperation

The high-level field mission was followed by an Action Dialogue, on March 16, 2022, at the Ministerial Complex in Monrovia, organized with the objective of strengthening development cooperation and increasing the effectiveness of aid management for results, consistent with national development goals and priorities as enshrined in the Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development (PAPD). The field visit provided a vital backdrop to the discussions in the Action Dialogue.

The Action Dialogue created a unique platform for partners and other stakeholders to share their experiences and lessons learnt from the field, deriving new practical solutions on how to better address the challenges affecting development cooperation and project implementation in Liberia.

The government presented an elaborate dashboard, the Liberia Project Dashboard, for managing and tracking development investments and ongoing projects designed in line with international aid effectiveness principles in the spirit of mutual accountability and transparency.

Development partners urged that the portal should go further to report on progress being made towards achieving the PAPD and SDGs and objectives. A major proposition was that the evaluation of development programs and projects should focus more on measuring development outcomes and impacts, rather than the rate at which development funds are disbursed.

They further asked that the government concomitantly update its own development investments to provide a more complete picture of development financing in the country, as well as to serve as a guide on resource allocation and investment by development partners where gaps exist.

Development partners re-echoed their commitments to support development in Liberia and expressed their willingness to fast-track the implementation of existing projects and programs that are often delayed due to coordination issues and other related implementation challenges. They reiterated the urgency of increasing efficiency by reducing duplicity, minimizing loss of critical resources through corruption, and enhancing transparency and accountability in the race to maximize development gains ahead of the 2030 SDGs deadline.

The delegates were particularly concerned about challenges in impeding effective project implementation on both sides; the government's development investments, and its responsibility in taking ownership and ensuring successful, sustainable implementation of projects, transparency and accountability of aid spending, and development partners' disbursement conditions.

Some of the identified challenges include:

- Lack of concerted coordination amongst development partners, and with government/PIUs, which affects project management and implementation at all levels, limiting the desired development impacts.
- Limited supervision of projects undermines project performance and best value for money.
- Delay in the implementation of the Resettlement Action Plan (RAP) and payment of contractors and consultants affects implementation timeline.
- Absence of strong mutual accountability and transparency, whereby development partners and the Government are not fully aware of major financing within the development space in Liberia

Both government and development partner delegates recognized the need for robust, effective, regular, joint and sustained monitoring and evaluation of projects and programs. They expressed commitment to find actionable ways to promptly address the identified challenges.

Follow-up actions/Next steps.

The Action Dialogue ended with a Draft Action Resolution which was shared with key participants, for onward revision and signature in the context of joint commitment to improve the management and transparency of development cooperation to effectively deliver services to the people in Liberia, and alleviate poverty. [Draft is attached]