



Icampus
Carey Street
Monrovia, Liberia



Project Learning Progress Report

Thematic Area: Government Delivery of Inclusive Services

Reporting Period: May –November 2019

Introduction:

This project which focuses on increasing inclusive service delivery and citizens' participation in local government decision-making processes is aligned and supportive of one of OSIWA's thematic areas: Government Delivery of Inclusive Service. The project was conceived based on the recent passage of the Local Government Act (LGA) in 2018 that gives some political, administrative financial decision-making powers and authorities to local governance structures. The project is implemented in Bong and Grand Bassa Counties, targeting two districts per county.

This project is relevant to Liberia's governance and development framework because there is a general consensus among national and international development partners that one of Liberia's main development challenges is the centralization of power and authority. Despite the passage of the LGA, it will take some time before Liberia can experience devolution, the highest level of decentralization. At the moment, the country is experimenting with de-concentration, the first layer of decentralization. This project also deals with this layer of decentralization.



The project's overall objective is to improve the quality and inclusiveness of public service delivery by local government structures. Against this background, the project has made considerable progress in this direction as a result of its implementation.

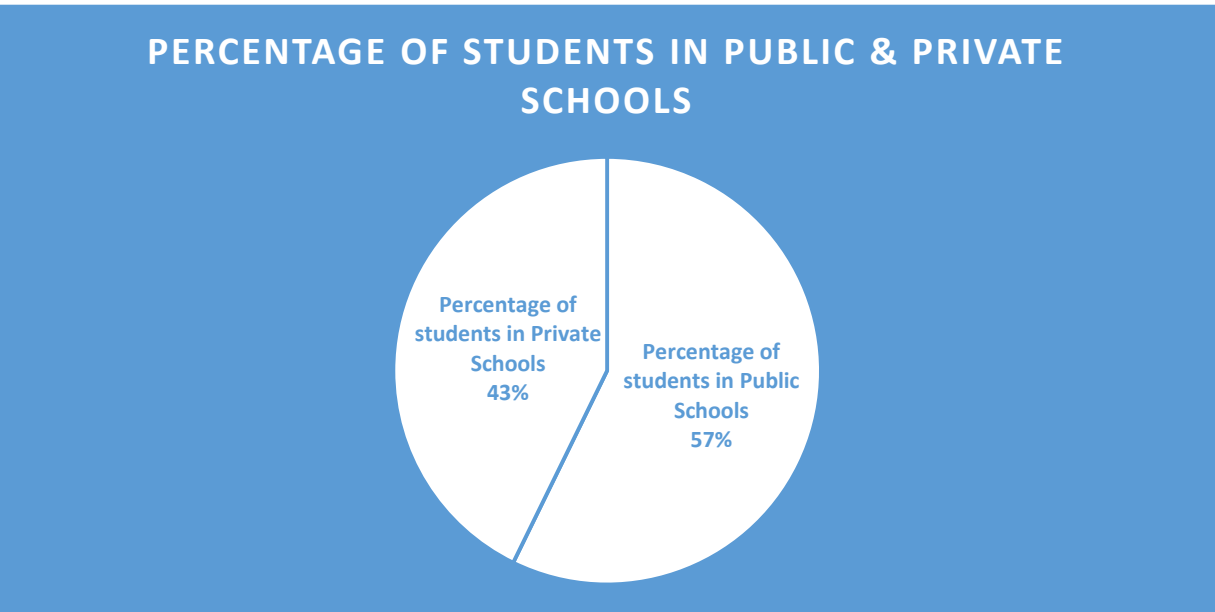
Overall, the knowledge of citizens including local leaders about the contents of the LGA is low. This was observed through pre-test questions administered before the conduct of any policy dialogue or town hall meeting in each of the two counties. In bridging this gap in knowledge, the contents of the LGA were translated into six radio drama series and aired on Radio Gbarnga in Bong County and Radio Gberzohn in Buchanna, Grand Bassa County. The radio drama series were aired on both stations for six months. This has increased more awareness among citizens on their right and responsibilities as contained in the LGA.

In assessing citizens' access to quality and inclusive public service delivery, public schools (elementary) and health facilities (clinics) in two districts each per county were monitored over a period of five months (June-November, 2019). One private school per district in each of the two counties was also monitored.

The findings show that there is no significant difference in the number of students who have enrolled in public and private schools. Access to education has not been an issue but the findings show that quality remains a challenge. This is due mainly to the inability of central government to provide needed financial resources for effective teaching and learning to take place. The monitoring report also reveals that schools do not have the capacity to respond to the needs of students with disabilities. The findings of the monitoring were presented to local leaders and citizens in separate forums held in each of the two counties.

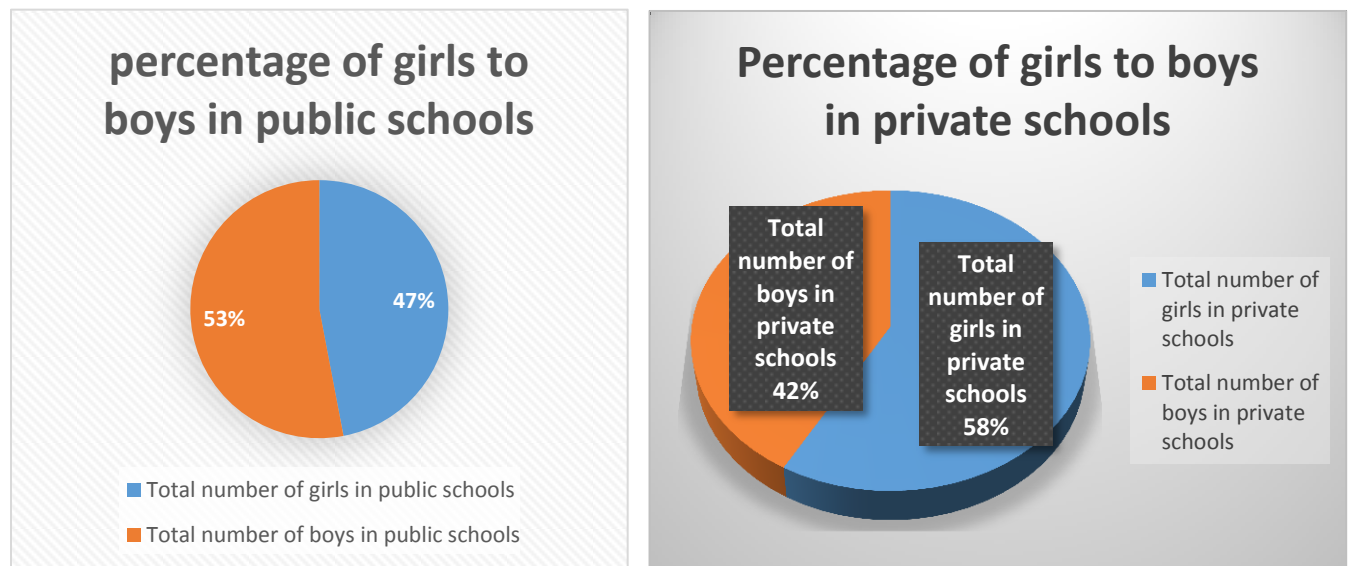
School Enrolment

The total number of students enrolled at the six schools visited in Grand Bassa was 1,892 (one thousand eight hundred seventy two). Public school enrolment constitutes a larger portion with 57% (1,083), while the private school enrolment is 43% (809).



Of the total number of student enrolment in the six schools, there are more girls, 980, constituting 52%, while the boys amount to 912, which constitutes 48%. This means that girls are taking advantage of the educational system to improve their academy status.

On public and private school disaggregation by sex, there are more boys (53%) in public schools than girls (47%), while private schools have more girls (58%) than boys (42%).



Public school students do not pay school fees (tuition) as required by the Ministry of Education. However, all of the three primary public schools visited pay activities, registration and requirement fees. As for private schools, administrations outlined several basic reasons for the increment in tuitions and other charges. The administrations emphasized on the current economic situation which has resulted to inflation and high prices. In order to commensurate income with high prices, the administrations have to pay their teachers well and these salaries are raised from tuitions and other charges. They also emphasized that attractive salaries for the teachers help to minimize bribery and other unwarranted attitudes. Tuitions at the private schools visited range from LD\$3,000 – LD\$7,000.

The total number of students enrolled at the six schools visited in Bong County was 1,837 (one thousand eight thirty seven). Again public school enrolment constitutes a larger portion with 53% (970), while the private school enrolment is 47% (867). There are slightly more girls (994) enrolled within the six schools visited than boys (843). In essence student enrolment in Bong constitutes 54% girls as to 46% boys.

Students with Disabilities:

All private and public schools in the two counties said that there are students with disability in their schools. According to the responses from the schools, disabilities include visual impairment, hearing and speech challenges as well as physical. The schools have to specialized trainings to respond to the learning needs of students with disabilities.

Access to Health Centers:

Unlike the education sector, access to public health services remains a major challenge in both counties. Monitoring reports show that while there is the presence of health practitioners and electricity through solar panels provided by development partners at health centers, there is constant shortage of essential drugs to treat common diseases. Patients are constrained to purchase medication from private pharmacies.

Access to other services: The de-concentration phase of decentralization is implemented through the establishment of the Services Centers. Bong and Bassa have the two oldest Centers. The types of services that are provided at the Centers include the following:

#	Types of Services
1	Birth Certificates
2	Marriage Certificate
3	Vehicle Registration / License Plate
4	Psychosocial Services
5	Business Registration
6	Letter of Administration
7	Deed Registration
8	Other Legal Instruments
9	Labor Inspection
10	Contractor License
11	Labor Cases Adjudication
12	School Permit
13	Resident Permit
14	Work Permit
15	Land Use Permit
16	ECOWAS Biometric ID Card

Analysis of the reports of the Centers shows that not all services such as driver license and birth certificates for adults are provided to citizens. At the same time, the report also shows that the pressure on citizens to travel to access services like vehicle registration, customary marriage certificates and school permit has been reduced.

Further analysis of the reports of the Service Centers reveals that the Centers are generating revenue. For instance, during the period from January to August, 2019 the

Service Center in Bong County generated revenue in the amount of US\$ 20,039.98 and LD\$ 11,078,538.40. See table below for details:

#	MONTH	AMOUNT IN LD\$	AMOUNT IN USD\$
1	January	1,202,011.57	2,205.00
2	February	1,135,159.04	3,050.00
3	March	1,559,802.89	1,945.00
4	April	1,021,790.56	4,534.98
5	May	2,465,010.83	2,380.00
6	June	1,566,689.26	1,580.00
7	July	1,292,111.20	2,330.00
8	August	835,963.00	2,015.00
	Total Revenue Collected	11,078,538.40	20,039.98

2. What worked well?

Several interventions have worked thus far in the implementation of the project. They include:

Public Education: Public awareness and education on the contents of the LGA and the rights and responsibilities of citizens through radio drama;

Community mobilization: Local and traditional leaders as well as leaders of youth and women groups and media practitioners were mobilized to ensure collective participation of diverse stakeholders in the project;

Legal Analysis: The conduct of a legal analysis of the Local Government Act (LGA) showed some of the gaps and deficiencies in the realization of the ultimate goal of decentralization.

Stakeholder Dialogues: Through the conduct of policy dialogues in the two counties on the outcomes of the legal analysis, local authorities, traditional leaders and civil society leaders have an understanding of the challenges the law will face when it is fully implemented. Civil Society Organizations and the media can use the knowledge acquired from these dialogues to advocate their lawmakers for additional amendments to the current law so that it can meet the objective of decentralization.

Monitoring of services: Local residents who are recruited as project animators who to monitor access to public services bring credibility and ownership to the process because of their local knowledge and contacts. Presenting the findings to local actors also engenders new ideas on the scale of the challenges faced by citizens in accessing quality services.

3. Briefly describe any broader takeaways you have (apart from grant/project-specific takeaways described above), including and especially any lessons about your theory of change and related assumptions – How might you apply these lessons going forward, either to work in this grant/project or in other related work?

Broader takeaways especially lessons learnt around theory of change and assumptions include:

- The assumption that government is continuity is not necessarily true. This is because an incoming government may have completely different priorities and approach to governance.
- The assumption that the formulation of statutes can address deep rooted governance problems without Constitutional redress is untrue.

These lessons can be applied in this project and other related work by critically examining theory change and correlating assumptions before formulating them and including them in the design of project.

4. In the implementation of the project, has your initial assumptions about the project changed?

In the design of this project, the initial assumption was that the current government that took office on the mantra of change and grass roots support would be keen on investing in the implementation of the LGA.

5. Issues, Challenges and lessons learned: Briefly describe what, if anything surprised you during this period. What had you not expected? What activities did you undertake that did not have the impact that you had hoped? (Note: These may be changes internal to the organization or related to the external environment.). Please also share any specific lesson learned at this stage of the project,

We did not expect the following:

- That local leaders, civil society and media at the county level would not have knowledge of the Local Government Act.
- That it would take almost a year since the passage of the LGA for the development of regulations and action plan for implementation.

Activities that were implemented that we had hoped for greater impact were:

- The county stakeholders' dialogues where members of the legislature and county administrators were invited did not showed up but sent proxies.

6. Next Step/Phase: What will be your focus for the next reporting period? Please describe how this will factor in lessons learned, or address issues (if need be).

The next focus of the project will be on high level policy advocacy to alert lawmakers on the deficiencies of the current law and the need to make necessary amendments before implementation starts.

7. What are the beneficiaries' perception about the project?

Generally, beneficiaries have a good perception about the project. They see the project as a driving force in enhancing and bringing to reality the much talk about decentralization process. They also see the project as an opportunity to have them ably prepared for subsequent take-over of their own decision-making processes for the betterment of their social and economic well-being. They want to especially set their own development agendas for their respective regions. In both counties, the citizens expressed deep interest in electing their local leaders. At the same time, they think that if some provisions in the Constitution are not amended, their dream of electing local leaders will be shattered.

8. Are there any challenges (internal/external) that have affected the project execution? If any, how are they being addressed? : What's a current roadblock? What's keeping the team from their ideal productivity or results?

Two major challenges have been accessing information from the Service Center in Grand Bassa County and the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the low interest among lawmakers in the implementation of the LGA. This challenge is being addressed by keeping the relevant authorities informed on the status of the project and value of the information that is being requested. While the lawmakers are on constituency break, we will be engaging them to explore ways by which the implementation of the LGA can be an issue on their agenda when they return to regular session in January 2020.

9. Has your initial strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats stated in the proposals you submitted changed? Please provide additional details if they have changed.

There has not been major shifts or changes to the strengths, weaknesses and threats to the project. The one change has been in the area of opportunities where there has not been much interest demonstrated by development partners in supporting the implementation of the LGA.

10. Additional Information: Beyond the programmatic and/or org health outcomes you identified in your proposal are there any other updates you are proud of or want to flag?

Yes, explaining to citizens the gaps in the LGA and if they are not addressed will defeat the purpose of decentralization and reinforce an overly centralized Presidency.