

MCC and Liberia: Educating Girls and Strengthening Land Rights

Liberia's three-year, approximately \$15-million Millennium Challenge Corporation threshold program is designed to improve performance in the policy areas measured by MCC's Land Rights and Access, Girls Primary Education Completion, and Trade Policy indicators. The program focuses on constraints to growth identified in Liberia's participatory Poverty Reduction Strategy.

The program will create a foundation for reforms in Liberia's land sector that will promote equal access and increased land security through better understanding of property rights issues, the rebuilding of land administration and surveying capacity, and increased efficiency in land registration and transfers. The program will also increase girls' primary education enrollment and retention by creating a scholarship program for girls, providing grants to communities to improve the education environment, and coupling these efforts with mentoring programs and awareness campaigns. Finally, the program will improve Liberia's efforts to improve its trade policy and practices, specifically in tariff harmonization, engagement with regional and global bodies, i.e., the Economic Community of West African States, the World Customs Organization and the World Trade Organization, and strengthening the country's regulatory environment.

Program Overview

Component 1 - Strengthen Land Rights and Access

Liberia has a dual land tenure system of formal and customary land tenure. The two separate land tenure systems, poor records management, and a lack of reliable land information systems have caused legal disputes, social conflicts, unequal land access, and significant property registration constraints, which hinder domestic and international investment in Liberia.

Component 1 of Liberia's threshold program is designed to provide the foundation for reforms in land policy and legislation to promote equal land access and increased land security. It will support studies of Liberia's customary land tenure to better understand existing rules and institutions, including women's land access. In addition, studies

of the formal legal framework will be conducted to provide the information needed for legislative reform of the property rights system. Support also will be provided to help rebuild Liberia's technical capacity in land administration and surveying. Finally, the program will rebuild the deed registry system and improve its capacity and procedures, including the management and storage of land records to increase the efficiency of land administration and land transfers.

Component 2 - Improve Girls' Access to Primary Education

Liberia faces several constraints to improving its primary education system. Although primary education is compulsory and entrance is free, the cost of materials and uniforms makes schooling unaffordable for many parents. Component 2 of the program will help increase girls' primary education enrollment and retention in the three communities with the largest number of out-of-school girls. The program will provide over 7,000 scholarships to girls to cover the additional costs required to attend primary school. In addition to the scholarships, mentoring and counseling programs will promote awareness of health issues, including malaria, HIV/AIDS, nutrition, and sanitation, and will provide free or inexpensive medical treatment. Several target communities will also receive performance-based grants to improve the school environment (specific activities to be financed through these grants will be informed by a needs assessment and community consultations to be undertaken by the United States Agency for International Development). Finally, the program will support a sensitization campaign to educate parents and communities on the benefits of sending girls to school and to reduce resistance to girls' schooling.

Component 3 - Improve Trade Freedom

Liberia has the twelfth highest weighted average tariff rate in the world and the second highest in West Africa. In addition, import bans and restrictions, inadequate trade capacity, minimal enforcement of intellectual property rights, poor infrastructure and licensing, and corruption add to the cost of trade. Component 3 of the program will support Liberia's efforts to improve trade policy and practices, and will complement other donor efforts in this area. The program will support tariff harmonization by providing training to Liberian officials and by launching a multimedia campaign to improve knowledge and awareness of these reforms. The program will also support efforts to reduce non-tariff trade barriers through increased knowledge of and engagement with regional and global organizations, and by improving the regulatory environment. With the passage of a new customs code, will update regulations, inform the public of new changes, and train relevant stakeholders. Finally, the program will support protection of intellectual property rights, including legislation amendments and trainings.

Implementation

The United States Agency for International Development will be the primary administrator of Liberia's MCC threshold program and will be responsible for coordination, contracting, and financial management.