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REPORT ON STATISTICAL ACTIVITIES

LIBERIA

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Country Report at the Second Meeting of the Committee on Development Information (CODI) Sub-Committee on Statistics

I. Introduction

The socioeconomic statistics of Liberia have been adversely affected by the civil war in substantive terms that are yet to be fully appreciated and or determined. Almost all of the statistical records, as well as most offices, transportation and data processing equipment of government agencies were destroyed or looted. The statistical institutional memory has been severely weakened due to loss of staff. A number of these staff died during the civil war or are still residing in displaced camps outside the country. This state of affairs has affected the statistical delivery system and policy making since the precise order of magnitudes of socioeconomic structures and processes are unknown.

Under the pre- and post war Statistical Acts of Liberia, the Department of Statistics is charged with the responsibility for the production and dissemination of socioeconomic statistics in Liberia. In this light, the Department of Statistics (the so-called National Statistical Office) collects, compiles and disseminates statistics on National Accounts; Consumer Prices; production, foreign trade, labor market, education, health, crime, vehicle registrations, cinemas, transports (including land, air and sea), petroleum products, business establishment, population and population related statistics, etc. In addition, the Department conducts censuses and surveys in order to collect, compile and disseminate comprehensive socioeconomic data. It is also mandated to coordinate the activities of other statistical institutions operating in the country and to provide statistical concepts, definitions and training guidelines.

However, collection, analysis and dissemination of statistical information have been spread across various sectoral institutions. These institutions have been empowered by Law to collect, compile and disseminate sectoral statistics for their own and public consumption. As a result most of these institutions (both government and private) collect, compile and disseminate statistical information in a largely uncoordinated fragmented fashion and with insufficient regard to each other's needs or to the needs of a statistical delivery system. For example, the below listed ministries/agencies are empowered to produce the following statistical information with or without any reference to the Department of Statistics of the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs:

The Ministry of Finance – collects and compiles government finance statistics, but the Department of Statistics of the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs publishes the information;

The Ministry of Health and Social Welfare – collects, compiles and disseminates vital and health statistics;

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry – collects, compiles and disseminates statistics on commerce and industry;

The Ministry of Labor – collects, compiles and publishes statistics on employment;

The Ministry of Agriculture – collects, compiles and disseminates statistics on agricultural production and prices;

The Ministry of Education – collects, compiles and disseminates statistics on education and educational related activities;

The Ministry of Justice, through the National Police of Liberia and the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization – collects, compiles and disseminates statistics on crimes, migration, etc.;

The Ministry of Transport, through the National Port Authority and the Civil Aviation Authority (Spring Field and Robert International Airport) – collects, compiles and disseminates sea and air transport statistics;

The Ministry of Lands, Mines and Energy – collects, compiles and disseminates statistics on production and sale of minerals, sale of public lands, etc.

The Ministry of public works – collects, compiles and disseminates statistics on trunk road networks and public buildings;

The Ministry of Rural Development – collects, compiles and disseminates statistics on feeder road networks and water and sanitation activities;

Central Bank of Liberia – collects, compiles and publishes money and banking, and balance of payment statistics;

The Bureau of State Enterprise, an autonomous agency under the Ministry of Finance - collects, compiles and publishes statistics on financial and non-financial activities of public enterprises;

The Bureau of Concessions, an autonomous agency under the Ministry of Finance - collects, compiles and publishes statistics on the activities of Concessions owned by both foreigners and Liberians and have negotiated tax and other benefits from the Government;

The Forestry Development Authority, an autonomous agency under the Ministry of Agriculture –collects, compiles and publishes statistics on logging enterprises;

Private or other institutions which include the UN agencies, NGOs, USAID, EU, consulting firms, etc. – collect, compile and publish statistical information of various types for socioeconomic development planning purposes.

The existing institutional arrangements lack coordination and structured mechanism for statistical data collection, analysis and dissemination for quality purposes and vetting for conformity to internationally accepted standards.

Because of the fragmented nature of statistical data management and delivery in Liberia, there is no methodological standard for collecting, compiling, analyzing and publishing data. Each sectoral agency determines a convenient way of carrying out these activities without regard to maintaining a uniform and scientific standard.

2. Sector Constraints

2.1 Institutional Framework

The Department of Statistics of the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs is empowered by Law to request, demand and collect statistical information from sectoral agencies and individuals residing or operating business in Liberia. It is mandated to coordinate the production of the national socioeconomic statistics. The Department is empowered to penalize any sectoral agency or individual who refuses to cooperate when requested to provide any statistical information. However, sectoral agencies (or individuals) have also been empowered by Law to collect, compile and disseminate statistical information with or without reference to the Department of Statistics; thus creating confusion or sending conflicting signals to the data producers.

This weakness affects the statistical delivery system, especially, the coordination of statistical concepts that are used in the substantive data that are published and how they are collected, compiled and presented. No one agency is responsible for determining, maintaining and enforcing uniform standards for production of national statistical information and for ensuring that uniform statistical concepts are properly utilized in the statistical activities of the various public and private ministries and agencies.

Current institutional framework does not provide a clear mechanism that at all times gives feedback loop for users and producers. This leads to a situation where external donors mainly drive production of statistical information. If the responsibility for the production of statistical information is to be maintained by a local institution, the institutional framework must be reviewed in order to provide

a clear mechanism that at all times gives feedback loop for users and producers. This feed back mechanism will be necessary to ensure that the statistics produced are in the form required and reliable, on time and wanted by users.

As a result, in order to strengthen the statistical delivery system, the Government of Liberia passed an Act, in 1971, amending the Executive Law to establish a National Statistics Coordination Committee (NSCC) within the National Planning Council for the purpose of coordinating activities of statistical nature of Government Ministries/Agencies. The Committee was also mandated to secure the balanced and speedy development of Statistics needed for socioeconomic planning and to establish an organization to promote the systematic development of statistics. Specific functions of the Committee are as follows:

- Examines units of Government Ministries whose work is of a statistical nature in order to make any necessary recommendations for organizational improvements in the collection of essential statistics;
- Scrutinizes all activities of a statistical nature and recommend the introduction of any changes to meet the demands of users of statistics;
- Reviews the methodologies and procedures to be followed in the collection, tabulation and analysis of statistical data;
- Recommends the agency of government best suited to collect various types of statistical data;
- Submits the National Planning Council recommendations as to the type of statistics to be initiated in each year together with the resources required; and
- Considers and makes recommendations on measures for the training and recruitment of statistical workers.

The members of the Committee consists of technical personnel engaged in activities of a statistical nature in the following agencies:

The Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs-----Chairman
Ministry of Finance
Ministry of Education
Ministry of Agriculture
Ministry of Health and Social Welfare
Ministry of Commerce and Industry
The University of Liberia

The Committee is authorized, as the needs arise, to co-opt any ministry or agency of Government not listed above. Additionally, the Act mandates that all Government Ministries and Agencies fully cooperate with the National Statistical Coordination Committee in the performance of its duties.

The Committee, however, has never been successful in the implementation of its mandates. The reasons for this are simply because the National Planning Council, to whom the Committee reports, is not functional and the Committee does not

have the authorities to enforce any statistical laws, nor does it have authorities to compel any Government Ministry/Agency, any statistical institution or individual to cooperate. As a result, the timing of publications of various statistical information is not coordinated to ensure that finished statistical products that serve as raw materials or inputs for other statistics are produced on time and reliable.

Additionally, like other statistical institutions, the Department of statistics, the main National Coordination Agency and Chairman of the National Statistics Coordination Committee, lost most of its statistical infrastructures such as office furniture and supplies, transport and data processing equipment, etc. during the civil war. These infrastructures were either looted or destroyed. The Department also lost its databases, statistical printed and reference materials, etc. in war. The replacement of these infrastructures requires massive financial resources from Government, whose inputs are often limited to personnel salaries and office rent, and the international community, whose inputs usually cover the production of statistical information and the cost of statistical infrastructures.

2.2 **Manpower**

The Department of Statistics and most Government Statistical Ministries/Agencies lack the adequate qualified manpower to execute their mandate efficiently. For instant, the Department of Statistics, the main Statistical Coordination Agency, has currently a total of seventy-eight (78) persons from pre-war on its payroll. Out of this seventy-eight (78) employees, six (6) or 8% have Master Degrees in Statistics and other Social Sciences; fifteen (15) or 19% hold first degrees in Statistics and other Social Sciences; thirty-three (33) or 42% are secondary graduates with at least one year of college experience; twenty-two (22) or 28% are secondary graduate and two (2) persons or 3% below secondary education. This implies that twenty-one (21) or 27% of the Department staff has first degree and above; while fifty-seven (57) or 73% staff members are below first degree level. In fact, this situation is aggravated by the seven years of war, wherein most of the qualified statistical staff lost their lives in the war, currently reside in refugee camps in or out of the West Africa region or are traumatized. These deplorable situations need to be addressed, if quality databases for policy decision making and socioeconomic development planning are to be established, and production of statistical information in Liberia are to be effectively coordinated. Therefore the need to provide training for statistical personnel and recruit fresh college graduates can not be over emphasized. In this light, there is a need to organize and provide short-term and long-term training programs locally and internationally for the statistical staff.

Statistics is one of the few professions that do not have any code of ethics/guidelines for either entry into the field or training. As a result, any individual, group of individuals, firm or group of firms without requisite background in statistics can declare themselves as professional statisticians and

offer their services to anyone who is prepared to hire them as consultants. Hence, data produced by these individuals or firms are often substandard in terms of methodologies and concepts used and as such they send the wrong signal to the outside world about the country. In this light, there is a need to draw up a code of ethics/guideline for training and entry into the statistical profession.

2.3 Imposition of Sanction

Currently, the United Nations Security Council placed Liberia under sanction. As result of the imposition of sanction Government domestic and external revenue resources, including bilateral and multilateral financial assistance, has reduced substantially; thereby making it very difficult to implement Government socioeconomic development programs including the production of comprehensive and reliable statistical information.

3. Government Actions

In view of the foregoing and with the assistance of the international community, the Government of Liberia is undertaking the following actions:

- a. Appointed a team of national and international consultants to assess the Statistics Delivery System in Liberia. This assessment includes the review of current institutional framework/arrangements, interrelationship between suppliers, producers and users of statistics, Statistical Acts of Liberia and Statistical Acts and Code of Ethics/Guidelines of other countries. As result of this review, the Government will endeavor to:
 - Development a comprehensive statistics management policy, guidelines and standards;
 - Review and harmonize existing laws on statistics management;
 - Strengthen institutional capacities, including research and technologies for statistical activities;
 - Review legal penalties with a view to making them more relevant to data collection accountabilities;
 - Encourage producers and users statistical information dialogues so as to establish a good working relationship;
 - Promote the use of incentives, such provision statistical publications at reduced cost and tax incentives, to encourage adoption of friendly statistical environment;
 - Enhance regional and international cooperation with a view to increasing bilateral and multilateral statistical information exchange on the control and management of statistics;
 - Plan and implement a national awareness program on the management of statistics to inculcate appropriate attitudes and values necessary for positive environmental management; and

- Devise a scheme of service for professional statisticians with clearly defined requirements for entry and professionalism.
- b. Improved the Department of Statistics deplorable infrastructure situation by providing few transport and data processing equipment, office furniture and equipment, office supplies, short-term local and internal training programs, etc;
 - c. Conducted the 1999/2000 Liberia Demographic and Health Survey (LDHS), the first major survey since after the war and under the National Patriotic Party led Government headed by Dakpannah Dr. Charles Ghankay Taylor;
 - d. Conducted the first Poverty Monitoring Baseline Survey using inputs from the 1999/2000 Liberia Demographic and Health Survey (LDHS) and a limited primary data survey;
 - e. Prepared a project proposal for conducting a National Population and Housing Census in the year 2002. The census is expected to contribute substantially not only towards the production of massive socioeconomic statistical data, but to the capacity building of the Government for the production of statistics. The Government has already approved and committed itself to the undertaking of the National Population and Housing Census by issuing the Executive Order and the Proclamation and appropriating funds in the 2001/2002 Fiscal Year National Budget;
 - f. Discussed with donors, such as UNDP, USAID, EU, ECOWAS, IMF and the World Bank for possible assistance for the production of the following statistics: National Accounts, Foreign Trade, Consumer Price, Industrial Production, Educational, Health, Public Finance and Monetary, Balance of Payment, etc. Currently, we have received some positive response from one or two donors;
 - g. Conducting one-year training certificate program in statistics for junior and middle level personnel in the employ of public and private institutions at the Demographic Unit of the University of Liberia. This program, which is being sponsored by UNFPA, will be conducted every year for the next three years. Furthermore, the UNFPA and the authorities of the University of Liberia are considering the possibility of expanding the program to either a first degree or Ph.D. program. If this is materialized, most of our statistical personnel will be trained locally. For deepening and sustaining training momentum, Government will endeavor to:
 - Encourage continuation of active partnership with donors to strengthening training modalities;
 - Pursue other avenues open to train more statisticians;

- Explore ways and means of how private sector users can actively be involved in the delivery system to train and maintain statisticians producing relevant statistics that users need; and
- Explore ways and means to twine with other regional statistical offices.

4. **Regional Input**

In view of the sector constraints and the commitment of the Government to improve the statistical delivery system in Liberia, we would appreciate it were the regional member states and institutions assist the Department of Statistics mobilize the needed technical and financial resources to undertake its programs, especially the Poverty Monitoring Studies, National Population and Housing Census and the establishment of the autonomous National Bureau of Statistics.