



Seizing the moment: Liberia's 150 day plan

About the Africa Governance Initiative

AGI provides practical advice and support to help Africa's leading reformers bridge the gap between their vision and the ability of their government to achieve it. We do this by strengthening the government's capacity to deliver programmes that will change ordinary people's lives for the better, from public services and rural development to infrastructure and job creation.

AGI works in Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea, Malawi, Nigeria and South Sudan, with new countries on the horizon. We work at two levels: at the political leadership level, Tony Blair draws on his ten years as Prime Minister to offer leaders the kind of advice on reform that only someone who has stood in a leader's shoes can give. At the same time our teams, based permanently in each country, work shoulder-to-shoulder with counterparts to put in place the 'nuts and bolts' needed to get things done.

Having started in 2008, we are celebrating our fifth anniversary in 2013. We will be publishing several pieces looking at our work and codifying our model for supporting effective governance in Africa. This case study is the first in this series.

Case Study 01

Seizing the moment: Liberia's 150 day plan

03	Executive summary
06	Narrative of the 150 day plan process
12	150 day action plan results
13	Analysis and lessons learned
24	Appendix A: Timeline of key events and lessons

Executive summary

This case is about how to use moments of opportunity to achieve change. Governments across the world struggle to deliver results.¹ And many developing country governments face even bigger challenges like capacity and financing constraints. The Liberian Government's 150 day plan at the start of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's second term is a powerful example of seizing a moment of political opportunity. Despite challenges after a difficult election, Sirleaf's government managed to achieve a huge amount in a short period. This case tells the story of this 150 day plan and also identifies lessons that governments and development partners can use to take advantage of opportunities beyond the context of the start of a Presidential term.

1.1 Liberia's 150 Day Plan

On November 8th, 2011, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was re-elected President of Liberia. In the weeks that followed, President Sirleaf and her team decided to begin her second term with a 150 day plan to implement priority projects, define the President's agenda for the public and respond to the tense mood in the country after the election period.

The 150 day plan featured 85 actions categorized into five pillars: reconciliation, youth empowerment and national visioning; jobs, education and better services; infrastructure and economic development; governance, rights and transparency; security, justice and the rule of law. A Steering Committee, chaired by the Minister of Finance and supported by a Task Force as well as a working level Secretariat, oversaw implementation.

1. Tavakoli, Heidi, Simson, Rebecca and Tilley, Helen with Booth, David, *Unblocking Results: Using Aid To Address Governance Constraints In Public Service Delivery* (May 2013). Overseas Development Institute Centre for Aid & Public Expenditure. Available at <http://www.odi.org.uk/publications/7469-governance-politics-aid-service-delivery>.

By the end of the 150 days - which ran from February through June, 2012 - the Government of Liberia (GoL) had completed 74 percent of the actions.² Some of the top achievements were:

- Establishing a Trust Fund to rehabilitate the 64MW Mount Coffee hydropower station and 20MW of heavy fuel oil plants in Monrovia
- Renovating roads from Fish Town to Harper, Caldwell to Louisiana and more than 250km of feeder roads in Bong and Lofa counties
- Reconstructing the first 160 meters of the marginal wharf at the Freeport of Monrovia and dredging that port and the port of Greenville
- Providing scholarships for vocational and technical training for 3000 youths

1.2 Five Lessons Learned

The 150 day plan in Liberia holds lessons for both reforming governments and partners working with them.

1. LESSONS FOR GOVERNMENTS: BUILD A COALITION TO DRIVE DELIVERY. Liberia's 150 day plan succeeded because of a group of government bodies rather than a single dominant coordination or implementation structure. The Steering Committee, the President's Program Delivery Unit and the government's Communications Team each helped to keep government focused on the plan. A lesson for other countries is as long as roles are clearly defined, multiple accountability mechanisms can be an effective approach.

2. LESSONS FOR GOVERNMENTS: CHOOSE THE RIGHT GOALS. The plan succeeded despite challenges with the actions: there were too many; too many that were intangible; it wasn't clear which government institution was responsible for certain actions; and there was a lack of clarity in terms of the actual phrasing of a number of actions. Each of these factors hampered delivery. We developed a basic list of "model action" characteristics for governments to bear in mind:

- **Less is more:** Focusing resources on a smaller number of objectives is more likely to lead to success
- **Feasible:** The action needs to be realistically achievable in the time frame
- **Visible:** Actions people can see have communications benefits and may be more likely to be successful
- **Clarity:** Actions should be precisely described and there should be a shared understanding about who is responsible for executing these actions
- **Fits with vision:** The action should be in line with the government's priorities or signal something about what the government stands for

3. LESSONS FOR GOVERNMENTS: OPEN YOURSELF UP TO OUTSIDE PRESSURE. A local civil society organization, the Liberia Media Center (LMC), tracked and publicly reported on the progress of the 150 day plan which pressured the government into an accelerated and highly successful final 50 days of implementation. The GoL, to its credit, created the conditions that

2. Government of Liberia Ministry of Information, Cultural Affairs & Tourism (MICAT) in collaboration with the 150-Day Action Plan Steering Committee, 150-Day Action Plan Implementation Report (Oct 2012). Available at <http://www.liberianembassyus.org/uploads/PDFFiles/150-Day%20Report.pdf>.

enabled the LMC to play this constructive role by welcoming NGOs to monitor the plan and by sharing information and data. For governments the wider lesson is that government should create the incentives to drive its own performance. Political leaders will, of course, be nervous about raising expectations too high and therefore opening themselves up to criticism. But this case suggests that, if a constructive relationship can be built between government and civil society, then these concerns can be outweighed by an increased chance of successful implementation.

4. LESSONS FOR PARTNERS: ADAPT AS YOU GO ALONG. AGI's role before and during the 150 day plan differed. Before the plan, AGI was a facilitator while after AGI's focus shifted to supporting GoL processes connected to implementation. A lesson for partners is to calibrate your role and support based on the context and timing; in Lant Pritchett's words, take a "Problem-Driven Iterative" approach.³

5. LESSONS FOR PARTNERS: RECOGNIZE AND NAVIGATE THE POLITICAL CONTEXT. AGI was helpful to the Liberian Government in part because it "got the politics" in a macro and micro sense. On a macro level, along with the Liberian Government, AGI recognized that the start of a Presidential term is a ripe moment for government to get things done. On a micro scale, AGI support was underpinned by an understanding of local politics and interpersonal relationships within the political system. The development community fully recognizes today that understanding political conditions is critical. But going one step further, partners don't have to sacrifice their independence to, as the World Bank's Verena Fritz says, work in, "smart ways with existing political economy dynamics."⁴

3. Pritchett, Lant, Andrews, Matthew and Woolcock, Michael, Escaping Capability Traps Through Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA) (June 22, 2012). Center for Global Development Working Paper No. 299. Available at <http://www.cgdev.org/publication/escaping-capability-traps-through-problem-driven-iterative-adaptation-pdia-working-paper>.

4. Fritz, Verena, What A Political Economy Perspective Can Contribute To Development Effectiveness (Feb 14, 2012). World Bank Governance for Development blog. Available at <http://blogs.worldbank.org/governance/what-a-political-economy-perspective-can-contribute-to-development-effectiveness>.

Narrative of the 150 day plan process

On November 8th, 2011, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was re-elected President of Liberia after a hotly contested and, at times, controversial election. With the start of her second term not far off, the President and her team decided to launch a 150 day plan aimed at implementing a number of priority projects and, more symbolically, demonstrating immediate progress to a tense and sceptical Liberia. To understand why this decision was made and how Liberia's 150 day plan unfolded, this case describes events that can be categorized into three phases:

- Phase I: Pre-Election: Mid-2010 – Nov 8, 2011
- Phase II: Election through the Start of the 150 Days: Nov 9, 2011 – Feb 1, 2012
- Phase III: The 150 Days: Feb 1, 2013 – June 30, 2013

2.1 Phase I: Pre-Election: Mid-2010 – Nov 8, 2011

PRESIDENT SIRLEAF'S FIRST TERM

When Ellen Johnson Sirleaf took office in 2006 as the first elected female head of state in Africa, she faced high expectations and enormous challenges. Liberia's 14-year civil conflict, which ended in 2003, killed an estimated 270,000 people while devastating the country's economy, infrastructure, human capital and systems of education and health. Liberia's GDP dropped 90 percent between 1987 and 1995, one of the largest economic collapses ever recorded.

Five years into her six year first-term, President Sirleaf could point to significant successes: strong economic growth, improvements in service delivery in health and education and slow yet notable infrastructure upgrades such as the repaving of roads in Monrovia and the re-establishment of power generation. At the same time, the President's critics said government wasn't responding to high unemployment or widespread corruption, and that improvements in Liberia were not being shared beyond elites in the capital.

In January 2010, President Sirleaf announced that she would seek re-election. The President was frustrated by the pace of Liberia's progress and said she was eager to build on her first term; this despite the fact that she would be 73 years old at the start of a possible second term in January 2012.

AGI BEFORE LIBERIA'S ELECTION

AGI began work in Liberia in 2009, following a request from President Sirleaf. During AGI's first phase in the country, a small AGI team worked in the Ministry of State for Presidential Affairs to support the new Program Delivery Unit and strengthen the Executive Office, Communications team and Cabinet Secretariat.

In May 2011, roughly half a year before the election, AGI Liberia sent a memo to President Sirleaf asking about her priorities and strategy for her potential second term. The note suggested that the President might want to plan ahead for several big issues connected to her possible second term. A 150 day plan, while not the primary focus of the memo, was suggested by AGI as a concrete step or tool to help the government define its priorities and focus on delivery. AGI attempted

to begin this conversation early because the inevitable government-wide shift into campaign mode would start well before the election and because AGI knew President Sirleaf was keen to begin reflecting on her possible second term well in advance of this.

This initial memo triggered a further discussion and was followed by additional communication with the President and her top advisors about the President's possible second term and the potential for a plan were she to be re-elected. Tony Blair also discussed these issues with President Sirleaf in a June 2011 meeting in London. But by August and September 2011 these conversations had been put on hold as the AGI team drew down in advance of the October election.

LIBERIA'S 2011 ELECTION

Liberia's 2011 Presidential contest was fierce and controversial. Liberia's progress over the previous six years included solid economic growth and a return to stability after its 14-year conflict. But President Sirleaf's critics emphasized the country's continued high unemployment and government corruption. On October 8th, Liberia held its general election. President Sirleaf received 43 percent of vote followed by Congress for Democratic Change (CDC) candidate Winston Tubman with 33 percent. Since no candidate received an absolute majority, a runoff was scheduled for November 8th.

Though international election observers found no significant voting irregularities, a number of President Sirleaf's opponents claimed otherwise. On October 14th, nine political parties, including the CDC, announced they were withdrawing from the elections saying the National Election Commission was altering the vote count in favour of President Sirleaf. President Sirleaf, meanwhile, continued to campaign and formed an alliance with the third place finisher, Prince Johnson.

AGI's political independence

AGI is a registered charity and as such acts in an independent, politically neutral manner at all times. We do not engage in 'big P' or party politics. At the same time, a tenet of the AGI model is that all reform is political, and having the right technical answer is often not enough.

AGI took a number of steps to maintain its political neutrality during the election period. In particular, we advised staff on appropriate conduct and risks to be aware of in the heightened political atmosphere of a campaigning period, drew down the team leaving only one team member in country over the elections, and wrote to the main opposition candidates explaining our role and reaffirming our willingness to explore a partnership with any credible, legitimate incoming government.

A final significant pre-election incident occurred the day before the runoff when clashes between the Liberia National Police and CDC protestors led to two deaths outside of the CDC headquarters. The following day on November 8th, President Sirleaf was re-elected with 91 percent of the vote but amid extremely low voter turnout.

2.2 Phase II: Election through the Start of the 150 Days: Nov 9, 2011 – Feb 1, 2012

IMMEDIATE POST-ELECTION PERIOD

After the tumultuous election, the President and her advisors felt they needed to quickly demonstrate action and progress.

The AGI Liberia team – which returned to the country around this time – felt that the brief transition period before the start of the second term was a crucial moment for the Sirleaf Administration to shape its priorities and initial plans. In AGI's view, the problematic election period made this task even more urgent. AGI again began raising the idea of a 150 day plan as a concrete tool for the GoL to define and communicate its second term vision and generate momentum behind delivery.

There were a number of reasons a plan made sense from GoL's perspective. In the wake of post-election uncertainty and tension, senior government officials realised that this would be a perfect moment for the President to re-state her vision for a modern Liberia. AGI Advisor, Peter Harrington noticed that "the President's message was evolving in response to the way the election had gone. The issue of inclusiveness would become more central."

Second was the gap between the end of Liberia's first Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) and the anticipated launch of the second PRS; "the vacuum before the start of the Agenda for Transformation", in the words of Sidiki Quisia, Coordinator of the 150 day plan Secretariat. Liberia's first PRS concluded in December 2011. The GoL was developing a medium-term strategy called "An Agenda for Transformation through Action" which was planned to launch later in 2012 and a longer term strategy dubbed "Liberia RISING 2030". A short-term plan made sense as a way to guide the government's activities during this interim period.

Third, the idea of a 150 day plan was not new to Liberia. The GoL had undertaken a 150 day plan at the start of President Sirleaf's first term in 2006. While this 2006 plan was a more donor driven process and faced a number of challenges, it had accelerated the implementation of projects such as the initial re-launch of power generation in Monrovia.

By late November, AGI was repeatedly discussing the topic of a 150 day plan with the President and her top advisors. Within a fairly short space of time several senior government officials stepped forward to champion the plan and, according to Shaun Chau, "that was a turning point. After that, the process began to move."

DESIGNING THE 150 DAY PLAN

In late November, the President sent letters asking several officials to serve on the task force to design the plan. Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs, Amara Konneh was the senior official overseeing the process while Program Delivery Unit Head, Patrick Sendolo (soon to be named Minister of Lands, Mines and Energy) and Deputy Minister of Planning, James Kollie led the task force to design the plan. They managed an intense week of designing and selecting the plan's 85 actions. The task force worked hard to "validate" that each action a) was achievable in the time period, b) was assigned to a particular ministry or agency, and c) had a budget allocated. "They were really on top of this process," said Peter Harrington; "AGI was in the room with this task force but we were just part of the team."

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150 DAY PLAN AND IMPLEMENTATION STRUCTURE

The eventual plan featured 85 actions assigned to different ministries and agencies. These actions were categorized in two ways: first into actions that were tangible versus intangible; second, into the following five pillars:

- Reconciliation, youth empowerment and national visioning
- Jobs, education and better services
- Infrastructure and economic development
- Governance, rights and transparency
- Security, justice and the rule of law

The implementation structure for the plan, the design of which was supported by AGI's Rupert Simons and Shaun Chau at the request of Minister Konneh, consisted of three levels. At the top was a Steering Committee, chaired by the Minister of Finance, with overall responsibility for monitoring progress, ensuring coordination across government and addressing holdups and challenges. The members of the Committee included 14 senior government officials (mainly Ministers) whose institutions were responsible for the actions in the plan.

Beneath the Steering Committee was a Task Force which tracked actions and supported implementation. The Task Force was staffed by Assistant Ministers and Directors from the institutions whose actions were featured in the plan. Finally, a small Secretariat, led by a senior official at the Ministry of Planning, was responsible for the day-to-day support and tracking of the plan.

Beyond implementation, the Government of Liberia's Communications Team, a joint committee staffed by the Ministry of Information, Cultural Affairs and Tourism (MICAT) and the Ministry of State's Communications' Office led the government's communications effort. The Committee held special Tuesday weekly media briefings focused specifically on the 150 day plan.

2.3 Phase III: The 150 Days: Feb 1, 2012 – June 30, 2012

LAUNCH OF THE 150 DAY PERIOD

The 150 day plan implementation period technically began on February 1st, 2012 but, in reality, at the beginning of 2012, whether the plan would launch remained in doubt. In part this was the result of a busy start of the year which included the President's inauguration on January 16th and her Annual Message to Liberia's National Legislature on January 23rd; "It seemed like there was a bit of a lull during this inauguration, Annual Message period", said Peter Harrington; "This was a moment when people's focus had shifted and we wondered whether it [the 150 day plan] might not happen."

Any questions about the plan happening disappeared when the government held a formal, public 150 day plan launch event on February 28th. President Sirleaf made a speech, at the Ministry of Foreign of Affairs, surrounded by top Cabinet officials, punctuated with sharp rhetoric: "failure to ensure that these actions are implemented will constitute a performance issue [on the part of government officials] and will not be taken lightly." In addition, she said "let me solicit the support and cooperation of the private sector, civil society, ordinary citizens in its [the plan's] monitoring and evaluation."

150 DAY IMPLEMENTATION

The government faced challenges along the way to the plan's eventual success. Early on there was confusion about which institutions were responsible for certain actions; particularly in cases where multiple ministries were supposed to collaborate.

AGI played a supporting role during the implementation period. AGI's new Liberia Country Head, Rupert Simons, was the most active AGI participant during this period. He supported the Steering Committee by encouraging the Committee to convene and participating in these meetings. Lola Kassim, who began working in Liberia as an AGI Governance Advisor midway through the 150 days, worked with the President's Program Delivery Unit. AGI Governance Advisor Ally Arnall also provided occasional support to the plan's coordination from the Ministry of the Finance.

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In early May, the Liberia Media Center (LMC), a Liberian civil society organization, released a report criticizing the implementation of the 150 day plan. The LMC had set up a "150 Day Action Plan Tracking Barometer" and was using an extensive team to monitor the government's progress through approaches ranging from

visiting some of the more tangible projects to requesting information from the Liberian Government using Liberia's Freedom of Information Act. The LMC's May 3rd report stated that 100 days into the 150 day period, "51.1 percent of the promises had not yet even commenced, while only a mere 2.4 percent constitute completed promises" and "the overarching culture of secrecy which permeates most levels of government bureaucracies could seriously hamper successful implementation of Government's 150 Days Action Plan." The report also predicted a "scenario of failure." The media responded with a barrage of coverage aggressively criticizing the government.

Each person interviewed for this case study, including GoL officials, described this as a crucial turning point. The scrutiny following the LMC report refocused ministries on the 150 day plan and also energized other important actors such as the President's Program Delivery Unit which began to play a more involved role following up on actions in priority areas.

On June 29th, a day before the end of the 150 day period, another notable LMC moment took place. The government and LMC had disagreed about which actions had been completed. The GoL and the LMC agreed to hold a validation session to review the disputed actions. The fact that this meeting even took place is a testament to the cooperative relationship that eventually emerged between the government and this civil society organization and to how relevant LMC's reporting was to public perception. "It was the first time we've ever had the chance to meet the government like that," said LMC Executive Director, Lawrence Randall. The session, by most accounts, was animated but positive

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with both sides providing information at different points in the meeting. The result was that the government and the LMC revised their respective progress estimates based on this information. "It was a healthy process for us," said PDU Head, Gyude Moore. AGI's Lola Kassim, who participated in the meeting echoed this: "It was definitely constructive. It was clear to me that LMC had done quite a thorough job checking the actions." The final reports from the government and LMC would still differ but their assessments were relatively close, partially as a result of this meeting.

On June 30th, the 150 day period concluded. Several days later, on July 3rd, the Steering Committee met for the final time to evaluate results of the plan and to double check that the final numbers were the same as those previously agreed on by the GoL and LMC. This presentation would form the basis for the GoL's final report on the 150 days. The GoL report took several months to complete, however, and, when it was published on October 26th, the media seemed to have "moved on" from the story and paid little attention.

150 Day action plan results

According to the GoL's assessment, 74 percent of the actions were achieved, 21 percent were ongoing and 5 percent were "unachievable" within the period. Interestingly, the GoL was more effective in implementing the tangible (27 of the 29 were completed) compared to the intangible (37 of 56 were completed) actions. The GoL was most successful in pillar three, "Infrastructure and Economic Development," completing 79 percent or 22 of 28 actions and in pillar two, "Jobs, Education and Better Services" where it delivered 18 of 22 actions or 82 percent. Its weakest performance was in pillar four, Governance, Rights and Transparency, where GoL completed seven of 14 actions (50 percent).

Specific successes from the period include:

- The establishment of a Trust Fund to rehabilitate the 64MW Mount Coffee hydropower station and 20MW of heavy fuel oil plants in Monrovia
- The renovation of roads from Fish Town to Harper, Caldwell to Louisiana and more than 250km of feeder roads in Bong and Lofa counties
- The reconstruction of the first 160 meters of the marginal wharf at the Freeport of Monrovia and the dredging of that port and the port of Greenville
- A terminal station for the Africa Coast to Europe (ACE) internet cable
- Provision of scholarships for vocational and technical training for 3000 youths

The LMC's final report on the 150 day plan said that the GoL delivered only 66 percent of actions and the LMC said the government's performance was disappointing in several areas. However, the LMC also praised the GoL for stepping up its performance and sharing information more willingly after the LMC's mid-term report.

Analysis & lessons learned

The rest of this case focuses on four areas:

1. An assessment of why the 150 day plan was a success
2. Lessons for governments about the positive and negative design features of the 150 day plan
3. Reflections for governments about why and when to try a 150 day plan⁵
4. Lessons for development partners

4.1 Why was implementation successful?

We argue here that the 150 day plan was successful because of a) enough pressure from a coalition of actors and b) the constructive role of the LMC.

4.1.1 The Coalition

STEERING COMMITTEE

The Steering Committee was the main coordinator of the 150 day process. The Committee was chaired by the Minister of Finance & Planning whose clout and links to the President signalled the importance of the 150 day plan to the rest of government. AGI's Rupert Simons described how the Committee, beyond coordination, "sometimes served as a forum to remind Ministers which actions they were responsible for." Despite this positive role, some argued the Steering Committee could have made an even stronger impact by focusing on the most strategic issues blocking implementation.

PROGRAM DELIVERY UNIT

The President's Program Delivery Unit (PDU) was another body which supported delivery during the 150 days. Sidiki Quisia, the Coordinator of the 150 day plan Secretariat, emphasized that the connection to the Presidency kept government officials engaged with the process. Beyond the role of the PDU as a structure, the Head of the PDU, Gyude Moore, was integral as a central conduit to President Sirleaf and as an overall troubleshooter, particularly when government ministries were not working in coordination. The PDU was also essential in organizing the validation session between the GoL and the LMC which likely led to more accurate final reports on the 150 day plan from both bodies.

GOVERNMENT OF LIBERIA'S COMMUNICATIONS TEAM

The GoL Communications Team also supported implementation. Though not responsible for delivery, the Communications Team actively promoted the 150 day plan which increased the public's awareness of the plan and indirectly amplified pressure on the government. Beyond this, the Communications Team in general and MICAT in particular (which was part of the Steering Committee), pressured other parts of government to live up to their promises along the way. As AGI's Rupert Simons framed it, "the communications tail wagged the delivery dog."

5. We refer to 150 and 100 day plans interchangeably throughout the rest of the document.

DELIVERY INSTITUTIONS

It would be an omission not to mention the role of the institutions that implemented the actions in the 150 day plan. A few are worth singling out. The Ministry of Public Works (MPW) was responsible for the largest number of initiatives and performed well. The MPW completed or supported the completion of 24 of the plan's 85 total actions. A number of other institutions, including the Ministry of Youth & Sports, also executed a large number of actions. While the other actors highlighted in this section created pressure and supported coordination – the enabling conditions for success – it was individual ministries and agencies that implemented the 150 day plan.

4.1.2 Liberia Media Center

Everyone interviewed – both inside and outside of GoL – underscored the importance of the LMC to the success of the plan. But most striking is how much more effective GoL became after the LMC's mid-term report.

The LMC did a few important things well. First, LMC tracked the actions effectively and produced credible reporting. This made it difficult for GoL to ignore LMC's mid-term report and forced GoL to refocus on implementation. Second, the LMC successfully mobilized media attention on its reporting - in part through Executive Director Lawrence Randall - which is what generated the pressure on GoL. None of this could have happened without GoL creating an open environment for civil society to operate.

4.2 Lessons for government: good and bad design features

4.2.1 Good Design To Emulate

BUILD A COALITION TO DRIVE DELIVERY

The Steering Committee, the President's Program Delivery Unit, the government's Communications Team and the LMC each helped to keep government focused on the 150 day plan. This pairing of internal and external accountability is an example of a model use of performance management mechanisms that McKinsey⁶ and others have highlighted. A lesson for other countries is as long as roles are clearly defined, multiple accountability mechanisms can be a powerful approach.

OPEN YOURSELF UP TO OUTSIDE PRESSURE

Civil society generated pressure on government to deliver on its promises. And it was the GoL that helped civil society to serve this function. A lesson for government is that putting the right kinds of pressure on yourself (e.g. through civil society) can lead to results. The international development community is

6. Daley, Eon and Singham, Seelan, Delivery 2.0: The New Challenge For Governments (October 2012). McKinsey Public Sector. Available at http://www.mckinsey.com/~media/McKinsey/dotcom/client_service/Public%20Sector/PDFS/Delivery2_Oct_2012.ashx.

increasingly emphasising this as evidenced by initiatives such as the World Bank led Global Partnership for Social Accountability (GPSA).⁷ But often the choice is up to governments.

Before soliciting civil society monitoring in any context, consider the enabling factors that were present in this Liberia example:

- A civil society actor with the ability, independence and motivation to effectively monitor the government. In Liberia, in recent years, in fact, this has often not been the case. As in many African countries,⁸ there has been a proliferation of NGOs the vast majority of which do not play the government watchdog role effectively.
- Enough genuine support from different power centres in government to allow civil society to monitor it. In Liberia, this stems from the President and several other officials. Civil society organizations globally continue to push this agenda particularly leading up to and following Busan.⁹
- Relevant individuals in both government and civil society capable of having a constructive dialogue. In this instance, Gyude Moore of the President's Program Delivery Unit and Lawrence Randall of the Liberia Media Center stewarded cooperation between government and civil society that otherwise would not have been possible. The importance of effective communication between government and civil society has been highlighted as GPSA was designed.¹⁰

MAKE SURE YOU HAVE THE FUNDS

Most of the 85 actions in Liberia's plan had available financing. In the design of the Liberia plan, the Minister of Finance set aside a specific budget for each action. Timing helped make this possible. Because the plan was launched near the end of Liberia's budget cycle, the GoL had a clear sense of what financing was available. The PDU's Gyude Moore said: "the first term government had already come to an end. In January the new government could just pull from the existing budget."

An (admittedly intuitive) lesson for governments is to make sure funding will be in place in advance, particularly when time is tight, as with a 150 day plan.

GET THE RIGHT TEAM IN PLACE

The involvement of Liberia's most capable government officials is another factor that helped the plan succeed. This was the case at both the Steering Committee

7. The World Bank Group Global Partnership for Social Accountability, GPSA In Brief (December 2012). Available at http://siteresources.worldbank.org/CSO/Resources/228716-1369241545034/2013-05_GPSA_Brief_EN.pdf.

8. Banks, Nicola with Hulme, David, The Role Of Ngos And Civil Society In Development And Poverty Reduction (June 2012). Brooks World Poverty Institute, University of Manchester. Available at <http://www.bwpi.manchester.ac.uk/resources/Working-Papers/bwpi-wp-17112.pdf>.

9. Agreed By The Second Global Assembly, Open Forum For CSO Development Effectiveness, Siem Reap, Cambodia, June 28 – 30, 2011, The Siem Reap CSO Consensus On The International Framework For CSO Development Effectiveness (June 2011). Available at http://cso-effectiveness.org/IMG/pdf/final_framework_for_cso_dev_eff_07_2011-3.pdf.

10. The World Bank Group Global Partnership for Social Accountability, Summary Of Consultation Feedback And Overview Of GPSA Features (March 2012). Available at <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/CSO/0,,contentMDK:23276102~pagePK:220503~piPK:220476~theSitePK:228717,00.html>.

level, led by Minister Konneh, down through the Task Force and Secretariat level where Assistant Ministers and technical staff were in place who had the motivation and ability to drive the process and do the day-to-day work needed to execute the plan. In other contexts, different dynamics, including politics, may make it more difficult for leadership to create the optimal team. The Liberia example suggests this is a critical ingredient and therefore worth pushing for.

INTEGRATE COMMUNICATIONS (PART 1)

The GoL's Communications Team created public interest in the 150 day plan that helped keep pressure on government. "There was definitely a buzz about it," said Sidiki Quisia, Coordinator of the 150 day plan Secretariat. One tool that the government's communications team used was to hold a weekly media briefing specifically focused on the 150 day plan.

Building public support and external accountability can be especially important when you don't have much time to deliver a plan. This is where communications can be valuable. The main recommendation is to integrate a communications plan into the overall development of a 100 or 150 day plan.

While GoL's communications effort was partly positive in this case, below we highlight things that could have been more effective.

4.2.2 Problematic Design To Learn From CHOOSE THE RIGHT GOALS

There were multiple problems with the 150 day plan's actions. First, there were too many of them (85) – though far fewer than had been included in Liberia's first 150 day plan in 2006. This may have hindered delivery. Second is that there were too many "intangible" actions (56). The problem here is mainly that "intangible" actions, such as launching a new government committee on youth employment, are less likely to generate public interest and support –and by extension external pressure to deliver. And, perhaps partly because of this, the government was less successful at delivering the intangible actions: GoL completed 93 percent of tangible actions compared to 66 percent of intangible actions.

A third problem with the actions was lack of clearly defined responsibility or divided responsibility between multiple actors. In a number of cases, this led to the action simply not getting completed. A fourth issue that became contentious during the government–LMC validation session on June 29th is that a number of actions were ambiguously phrased which, according to the LMC's final report, created "loopholes and provided easy escape channels for some implementing agencies." Several of the GoL officials interviewed for this case agreed that an important lesson for future plans was to ensure that the wording of the actions is extremely clear. Also worth noting is that Liberia is far from unique on this. As Bill Gates talked about in his 2013 Annual Letter,¹¹ governments and development

11. Gates, Bill, Annual Letter From Bill Gates (2013). Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Available at http://annualletter.gatesfoundation.org/pdf/2013_AL_English.pdf.

Defining a good action

What makes a good 100 day plan action? Between the lessons directly from this case and previous thinking that AGI has done in other contexts, we can begin to construct a set of criteria. This box outlines this emerging AGI view of what good actions look like:

Less is more: This is a point about the total number of actions in line with AGI's broader view about prioritization: spreading scarce human capacity, financial resources and political capital across a greater number of activities makes success less likely.

Feasible: The action is realistically achievable in the time frame. This means there is the financing and capacity to deliver and no significant impediments likely to derail the action's implementation. At the same time, the action should seem ambitious enough so that the public won't question whether it's actually valuable.

Visible: Visible actions have communications benefits and potentially are more likely to be successful. An action can be visible in different ways. It may be visible in the sense that it's a physical project that people can see or visible in a more symbolic way (e.g. launching an anti-corruption commission).

Clarity: This refers to two factors that were a challenge in Liberia: 1) actions need to be precisely described so that everyone agrees what the action is and 2) there needs to be a shared understanding about who is responsible for executing the action.

Fits with vision: The action should be consistent with the government's priorities and agenda or signal something about what the government stands for.

Other factors: The previous criteria can be used to shape what might be called a "model" AGI action. But there are actions that may not meet these criteria that are still worth including in a plan. For example, perhaps there's a chance to kick-start a stalled initiative by including it in a 100 day plan. Or maybe there's the need to include a few projects that the opposition party considers important to preserve unity.

partners around the world are increasingly emphasizing that clear, measurable targets are essential for effective planning and delivery.

INTEGRATE COMMUNICATIONS (PART 2)

The communication of the 150 day plan was not all successful. One significant weakness was that too often the communications team found itself reacting to negative stories (particularly following the critical LMC mid-term report) and missed opportunities to underscore successes. “Civil society sometimes didn’t understand the challenges that M&As [Ministries & Agencies] were facing and immediately jumped to criticizing; which put us on the defensive,” said Deputy Minister Tweah. This is largely because the communications plan was developed after the design of the 150 day plan itself, in part because it wasn’t budgeted for and in part because of tricky timing around the appointment of a new Minister at MICAT. An additional communications problem is that the GoL did not publish its final report until roughly three and a half months after the end of the 150 days. By this point, most of the media and broader public had long since turned its attention away from the 150 day plan. This is particularly unfortunate because while the GoL was heavily criticized by the media following the LMC’s mid-term report, it missed an opportunity for positive coverage of the plan’s ultimate success.

FIND CREATIVE WAYS TO KEEP THE PRESSURE ON

The GoL mobilized an effective coalition to drive delivery. It also benefitted from welcoming civil society to monitor the plan. But some people interviewed for this case said that incentives should have been even stronger. What could have been done differently?

- Linking leadership to the process through a mechanism such as a regular Presidential stocktake. World Bank-supported “Rapid Results Approach” projects, for example, have illustrated the importance of this connection.¹²
- Making one or more senior government officials responsible for the plan’s overall success. Individual actions were assigned to ministries but no one was accountable for all 85 actions.
- Designing and using creative incentives. For example, were there ways to connect future financing for ministries to results?

4.3 Lessons for government: action plans in other contexts

The main purpose of this case study is to capture the story of Liberia’s 150 day plan and to reflect on lessons from this experience. This section attempts to apply learning from this Liberia case to consider a few high-level questions connected to attempting a plan in other countries. The remainder of this section refers to 100 days as the generic length of time for a plan. The point isn’t whether a plan should be 100 or 150 days – either one can be effective - but to answer

12. Mastri, Lawrence, The Rapid Results Approach A Tool For Leadership Development And Institutional Change (May 2008). The World Bank Institute. Available at <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/9518/449600BRI0Box0327425B0find29001PUBLIC1.pdf?sequence=1>.

1) what are the benefits of such a plan? and 2) when is it a good idea to attempt one?

4.3.1 Why Try A 100 Day Plan?

What does Liberia's experience tell us about why a government would try a 100 day plan? The reasons described here are relevant for most countries. But they may be even more important in post-conflict and developing countries¹³ where getting things done is that much more challenging, where cynicism about government may be that much more prevalent and where the need for government to "get better" may be that much more urgent.

DELIVERING PRIORITIES: While it may sound obvious, it's still arguably the most important positive aspect of a 100 day plan: it provides an opportunity to get things done. There are several reasons why delivery can be more effective during a 100 day plan: a) it's a discrete, short period of time that allows government to stay focused; b) there may be extra pressure and public scrutiny; c) there may be an opportunity to galvanize either a unified government or public behind the plan's implementation. These are each valuable for overall delivery. And they may be especially helpful for kick starting priority projects or stalled initiatives. In Liberia, for example, the government used the plan to overcome long delays to the renovation of several roads and the rehabilitation of the Freeport of Monrovia's marginal wharf.

BUILDING MOMENTUM: A successful 100 day plan can create momentum and potentially change the future trajectory of a Presidency. It's also worth noting the downside to this potential benefit. In theory, if a government does not successfully execute its 100 day plan, it can have negative ripple effects for the government's ability to implement effectively beyond that period.

COMMUNICATIONS VALUE: This applies in several ways. The start of a term is a particularly visible moment when there's an opportunity to demonstrate success and to build credibility and political capital. Related but slightly different is that there's a chance for a government to signal what it's about. The GoL did this well by making sure that the 150 day plan was focused on the President's agenda and that communications reinforced this: "The inauguration and the President's speech there kind of set the mood music," said AGI's Peter Harrington. "The President's Annual Message put flesh on that skeleton by laying out a practical, specific policy agenda. Then the 150 day plan was immediate proof that the government was serious about getting things done and what areas it would focus on."

13. The World Bank, World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security And Development (2011). The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank. Available at <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/EXTDEC/EXTRESEARCH/EXTWDRS/0,,contentMDK:23252415~pagePK:478093~piPK:477627~theSitePK:477624,00.html>.

MAKING GOVERNMENT BETTER: A government can improve its future performance by setting challenging targets and timelines for itself. Mr. Moore of the Program Delivery Unit feels this has happened in Liberia: “this government is getting better. We’re better for having gone through a series of 90 day plans a few years ago and we’re better for having pushed ourselves through this 150 days.”

“The inauguration and the President’s speech there kind of set the mood music. The President’s Annual Message put flesh on that skeleton by laying out a practical, specific policy agenda. Then the 150 day plan was immediate proof that the government was serious about getting things done and what areas it would focus on.” - AGI Governance Advisor Peter Harrington

4.3.2 When Do 100 Day Plans Make Sense?

The previous section describes what the benefits of a 100 day plan can be. However, that only answers why a government might want to attempt one. Even if a 100 day plan is attractive to a government, failure is risky so it should only try one if there’s a reasonable chance of a positive outcome. When is a 100 day plan likely to be successful? This section starts a conversation on this topic rather than providing a comprehensive framework.

First there are a number of characteristics about the government itself:

- **Government Appetite:** Does the President or top officials really want to do this? Is there an interest in seeing the process through for the full implementation period?
- **Government Capacity Part 1:** A difficult but essential question to attempt to answer is whether the government is capable of delivering?
- **Government Capacity Part 2:** Beyond whether government possesses the capacity is the important question, building off the Liberia example, of whether the right team is likely to end up supporting implementation.
- **Dose of Ambition and a Dose of Realism:** While a 100 day plan takes leadership with a vision and appetite for progress, it doesn’t hurt for this to be couched in the reality of the possible (e.g. picking a manageable number of actions).

There are also external (or partially external) factors to the government that need to be in place:

- **Funding:** Funding for a 100 day plan can come from the government, from donors or from a combination of the two but, regardless, in a 100 day period there’s no time for financing delays. The question needs to be asked, is funding going to be available and available fast enough?
- **Time and lead-in:** 100 day plans need to be developed during the typically small time window between a President’s election and the start of their term,

or even during the election campaign where there is no interregnum. There's a huge amount to get done particularly for a newly elected President. Is there enough lead time to design a plan and get it ready for implementation?

- **Factors that may block success:** This will depend on the particular country context. Risk factors may range from the timing of a rainy season to politics to a conflict in a neighbouring country. The point is, those considering a 100 day plan need to carefully think through what may be the applicable issues in their context.

4.4 Lessons for Partners

This section proposes a few lessons for the development community based on AGI's experience supporting the 150 day plan.

ADAPT AS YOU GO ALONG

The shift in AGI's role before and during the 150 day plan reflects a flexibility that can be extremely helpful to partners' engagement with country governments. Before the 150 days, AGI was mainly a facilitator, supporting the GoL to strategize and plan for the start of a new Presidential term. During the development and implementation of the 150 day plan, AGI emerged as more of a supporter than facilitator. AGI's work focused on assisting processes connected to the plan such as Steering Committee meetings and the Program Delivery Unit's tracking of actions.

The point about flexibility is that, at different moments in the 150 day process, AGI was able to be supportive to the government in different ways. In "Escaping Capability Traps through Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation," Lant Pritchett and his co-authors talk about "trying a real intervention in a real context, allowing on-the-ground realities to shape content in the process."¹⁴ While this primarily refers to the actions of agents themselves, as partners we need to find ways to flexibly respond to evolving needs and opportunities at different moments. Admittedly, as David Booth describes in "Facilitating development: An arm's length approach to aid,"¹⁵ this may be more difficult for some partners because of internal structures, rules and mandates. But for all partners, it's worth considering the important question how and where you may be most effective at different moments.

RECOGNIZE AND NAVIGATE THE POLITICAL CONTEXT

Understanding local politics and interpersonal dynamics is particularly important when supporting an initiative like a 150 day plan. There are several examples from this case that were important for AGI. One was a general sensitivity to the constraints around the election period that allowed AGI to pick and choose moments to work with the GoL. In addition, AGI engaged with the officials in President Sirleaf's government most relevant to the 150 day plan and were able to tailor information and advice to fit the political context of the time.

14. Pritchett, Lant, Andrews, Matthew and Woolcock, Michael.

15. Booth, David, Facilitating Development: An Arm's Length Approach To Aid (March 2013). Overseas Development Institute Politics & Government. Available at <http://www.odi.org.uk/publications/7376-facilitating-development-arms-length-approach-aid>.

The development community recognizes today that ‘getting the politics’ of reform is often the difference between success and failure. Honest assessments such as the World Bank’s that, “the political context was misread and the authorizing environment was misunderstood,”¹⁶ during its past work in Africa are a step in the right direction. For the development community, a lesson from this case is that it’s possible to work within political realities without sacrificing independence. Also, as in this example, partners may want to embrace a, “jiu jitsu approach that implies working in smart ways with existing political economy dynamics,” in the words of the World Bank’s Verena Fritz.¹⁷

GoL’s achievements during the 150 day period speak for themselves. This is a powerful example of what a government can achieve when it pairs a moment of opportunity with the right mechanisms to reinforce delivery.

16. The World Bank, Africa’s Future And The World Bank’s Support to It (March 2011). Available at http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTAFRICA/Resources/AFR_Regional_Strategy_3-2-11.pdf.

17. Fritz, Verena.

Building on this case study

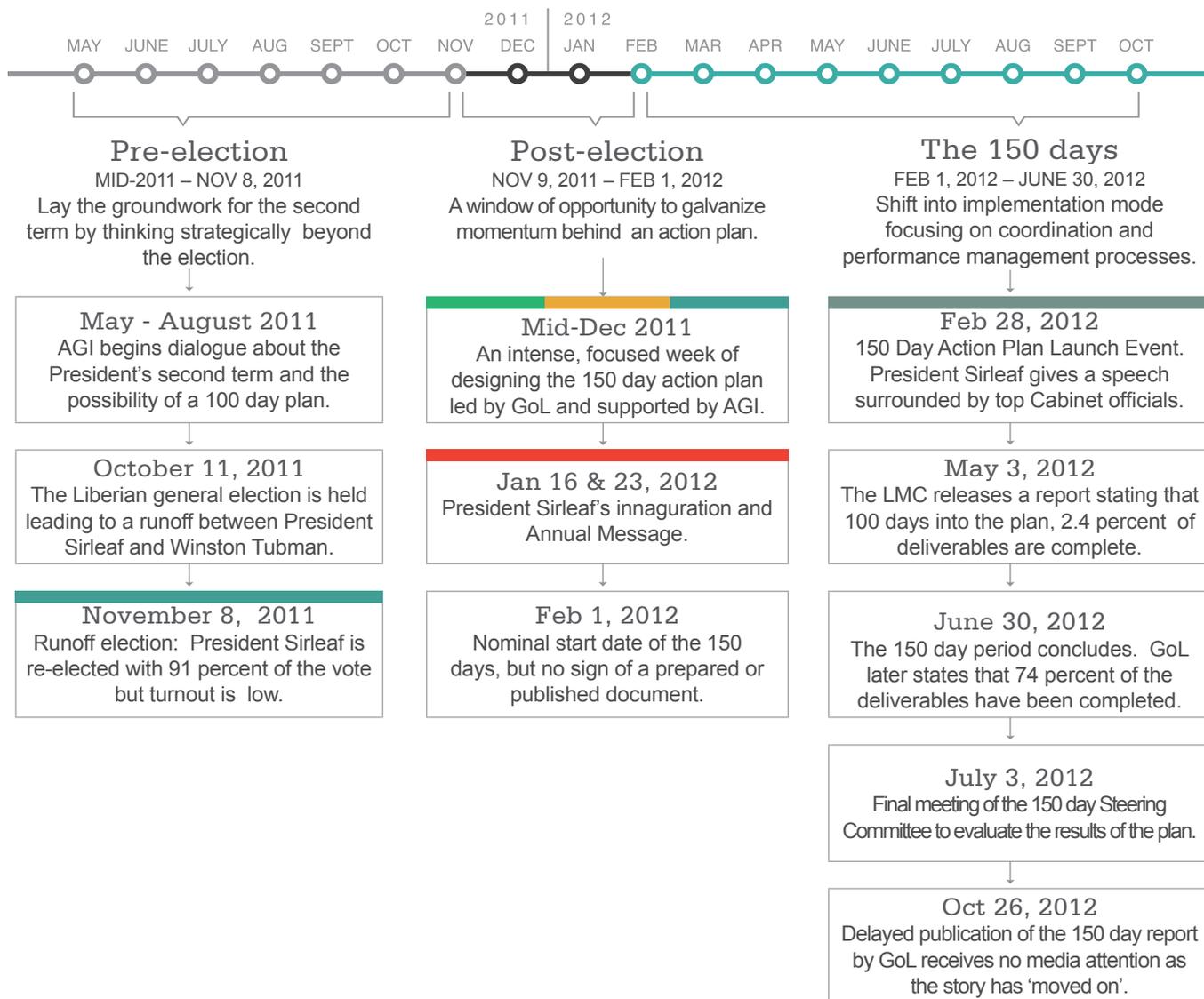
This case study is the first publication from AGI's new Insight and Learning Practice. The organisation celebrates its fifth anniversary this year and we believe we are now in a position to look at our impact and assess what has and hasn't worked. We will be publishing a case study on our work in Rwanda and in the autumn we will be publishing a wider 'toolkit' which we hope will explain our model in more detail and provide lessons which will be valuable for other organisations conducting work similar to ours.

We would like to thank the Government of Liberia for their collaboration on this case study. The 150 Day Plan was conceived and implemented by President Johnson Sirleaf and her team. AGI is glad to have had the opportunity work with the government on this initiative.

If you have any questions about this case study or you would like to learn more about our Insight and Learning practice please do contact us:

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Timeline of key events & lessons



Summary of key analysis & lessons

LESSONS FOR GOVERNMENTS: Build a coalition to drive delivery

Liberia's 150 day plan succeeded because of a group of government bodies rather than a single structure. A lesson for other countries is that multiple accountability mechanisms can be an effective approach.

LESSONS FOR GOVERNMENTS: Choose the right goals

The plan succeeded despite challenges with the actions: there were too many, too many that were intangible, a lack of clarity about which government institution was responsible for certain actions and a lack of clarity in terms of the actual phrasing of a number of actions. The case features a basic list of "model action" characteristics for governments to bear in mind.

LESSONS FOR GOVERNMENTS: Open yourself up to outside pressure

A local civil society organization tracked and reported on the progress of the 150 day plan which pressured the government into an accelerated and highly successful final 50 days of implementation. For governments the wider lesson is that government should create the incentives to drive its own performance.

LESSONS FOR PARTNERS: Adapt as you go along

AGI's role before and during the 150 day plan differed. Before the plan, AGI was a facilitator while after AGI's focus shifted to supporting GoL processes connected to implementation. A lesson for partners is to calibrate your role and support based on the context and timing.

LESSONS FOR PARTNERS: Recognize and navigate politics

AGI was helpful to the Liberian Government in part because it "got the politics" in a macro and micro sense. Partners should try to go beyond understanding to proactively navigating local political conditions.

