

Public-Private Dialogue

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By:
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I. Introduction

With the official launch of the Liberia Public Private Sector Dialogue (LPPD)¹ on July 11 2007, the government and private sector of Liberia officially endorsed the creation of a new mechanism to facilitate dialogue on investment climate issues with the explicit objective of realizing measurable enhancement of the environment for private sector activity and so creating more jobs and alleviating poverty in the country.

The launch was the culmination of a series of activities that began in 2006 when the Government of Liberia requested technical assistance from the World Bank Group's Investment Climate Team for Africa as part of its effort to create the necessary conditions for an open and welcoming business environment for the promotion of domestic and foreign investment.

II. Objectives of LBBF:

- Improve the business culture and ethics in Liberia through joint Public and Private Sector Working Groups partnering to advocate, based on technical analysis of viable options.
- Ensure that the Private Sector is fully engaged as a responsible partner with Government to contribute evidence-based recommendations and inputs into economic planning and policy in a regular and structured dialogue.
- Develop issue-specific Public and Private Sector Working Groups who will focus on analyzing identified issues/challenges/obstacles and barriers to doing business in Liberia and will together, propose and champion viable recommendations for reform.
- Support the development of awareness creation, inclusion, consensus building and cooperation within a Private Sector that will be equally as accountable as the Public Sector for providing technical input into public policy.

III. Progress to Date:

As a result of the Doing Business (DB) Survey and Liberia's inclusion for the first time (170 out of 178), President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf established a Business Reform Committee, a cabinet level committee that also includes the LBBF. This committee has been charged with working towards reforms in four initial DB areas prior to the next survey.

¹ The LPPD is now referred to as the Liberia Better Business Forum (LBBF), which is the Forum for the Public Private Dialogue process.

The 4 initial DB areas of focus are:

- Starting a Business
- Trading Across Borders
- Dealing with Licenses
- Registering Property

The relevant Government Ministries:

- Ministry of Commerce
- Ministry of Finance
- National Investment Commission (NIC)
- Ministry of Lands, Mines, and Energy
- Ministry of Public Works
- Ministry of Justice

Along with members of the LBBF:

- Legal and Regulatory Framework and
- The Streamlining Administrative Processes and Trade Working Groups

The Technical Working Groups have been meeting regularly and have agreed on measures to streamline the administrative processes associated with a number of these areas.

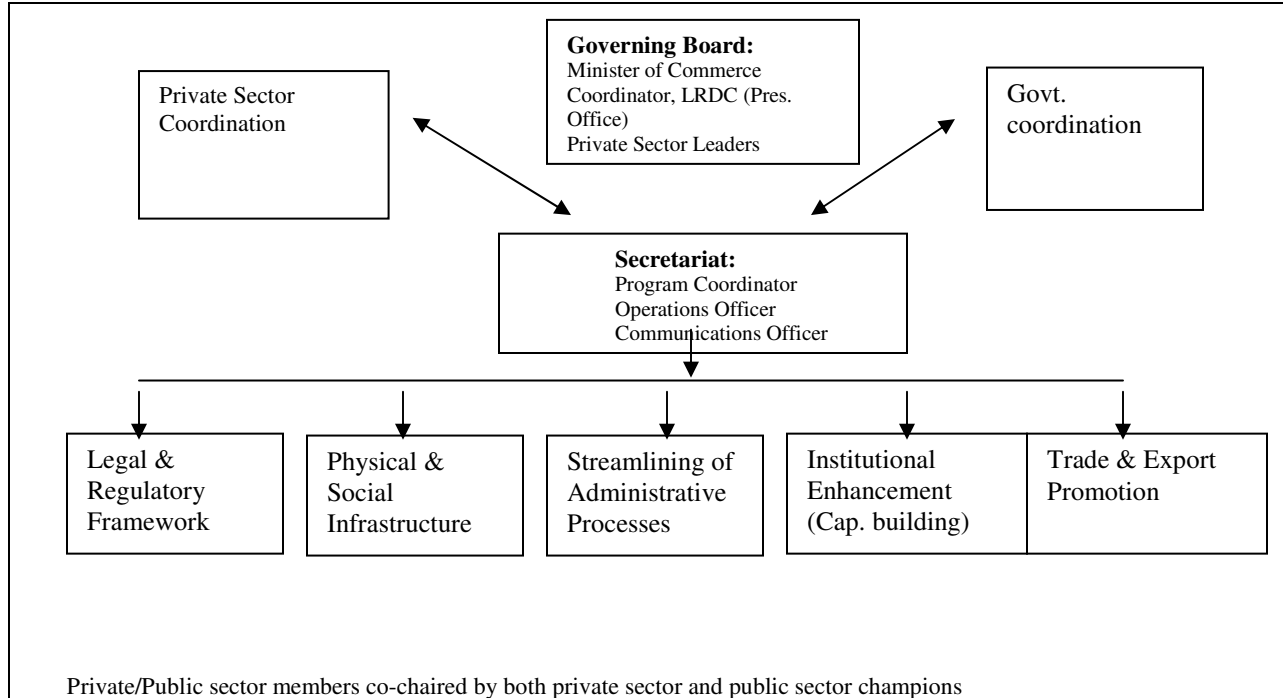
The areas of reforms have focused on reducing the number of steps associated with these areas (ex. starting a business) and the amount of time involved in the process. Three out of four of the areas have significantly proposed reductions in the amount of time for each of these processes (ex. for starting a business, a reduction from 99 days to 10) and implementation of these reforms is anticipated to begin and be published by the beginning of April, which will be in time for the next survey.

Investment Law

The Legal and Regulatory Framework LBBF has been actively involved in the advocacy towards the passage of a new investment law in Liberia. The draft law was written with the technical assistance of the Investment Climate Team for Africa (ICTA) in collaboration with the National Investment Commission (NIC).

The President's Office has requested LBBF assistance in the research associated with best practices of investment laws and assistance with the advocacy and constituency building required for the successful passage of the bill. The Legal and Regulatory Framework Working Group has actively participated and helped organize the consultations held with the private sector, legislature, academia, and civil society.

IV. Structure of LBBF:



LBBF is headed by the Governing Board, which oversees the content and operation of the LBBF. The Board is Chaired by the Minister of Commerce and meets at least four times a year, once at time and place of the Annual Public Private Sector Day. The Board provides managerial and professional advice to the Secretariat on the execution of the day-to-day activities of the LBBF.

The 5 Working Groups, which are comprised of public and private sector participants as well as civil society and academia, meet regularly on a monthly or bi-monthly basis and actively work towards reforms in a number of areas.

Coordinating Secretariat

The staff of the coordinating secretariat provides administrative and technical support to the dialogue process. The Program Coordinator provides leadership support while the Operations Officer will coordinate the research as well as other technical assistance to each working group's work program. There will also be a Program Assistant hired.

The secretariat is responsible for facilitating the work of the groups, holding periodic meetings of all of the groups to foster cross communication and hosting an annual private sector day to highlight the work of the LBBF.

Secretariat staff is operationally located at the IFC offices.

V. Communications Strategy

Newsletter/ Website

A quarterly newsletter that summarizes the activities/meeting outcomes from the LBBF is being developed that provides readers an insight into the membership of the working groups. The Secretariat along with ICTA has designed the format of the publication. The first newsletter will be produced in mid-April 2008.

The newsletter is anticipated to be published along with the LBBF website which should be being developed and scheduled to be launched in mid-April 2008.

Radio

LBBF sponsors a radio program on a local radio station called “Business World”, where topical business issues are discussed weekly. This sponsorship agreement has been in effect since November 2007.

Liberia Economic Journalist Association (LEJA)

LBBF has also organized and sponsored the establishment of LEJA to address the lack of quality economic writing in the newspapers. The association has 12 members and they have had 2 training sessions sponsored by LBBF and ICTA.

Members of LEJA have produced business programs for radio and regular news articles for the newspapers.

VI. Gender Issues:

The LBBF has as part of its membership active participation from women. Both the Liberia Women’s Chamber of Commerce and the Liberian Women’s Initiative (an NGO) from part of the membership of the Forum and these women are dispersed throughout the working groups with the LBBF

VII. Next Steps

Second Annual Private Sector Day July 2008

In mid-June 2008, the stakeholders of the dialogue process will meet with the government, and donors to review the activities of the current year. This process will highlight the success in implementing the reforms for the current period and determine areas for further reform.

Advocacy Training

The LBBF has held discussions and agreed to work with the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE), a non-profit affiliate of the U. S. Chamber of Commerce. LBBF has agreed to work with CIPE on Advocacy Training for the leadership and key members of the Forum. This training is scheduled to occur in mid-June 2008.

LBBF continued participation on the BRC

As mentioned earlier, the Business Reform Committee has been established by the President to work towards reform and LBBF forms part of this committee. There are plans to continue working towards reforms associated with the Doing Business Survey. The upcoming year should be extremely busy working on some of the legislative challenges that currently serve as impediments to a conducive business climate in Liberia.

Work on Legislative Reform

LBBF along with ICTA is in the process of recruiting 2 experts (one international and one national) to conduct a review the underlying policy and text of the Associations and General Business Law, which impacts a considerable amount of the work that the LBBF is trying to undertake for an improved investment/business climate in Liberia.

The Consultants will provide technical assistance to the GoL for the review and drafting if necessary of revisions and amendments to the Associations and General Business Laws. The Consultants responsibilities will be the provision of technical expertise for review of the Associations Law, delivery of recommendations as necessary on reform and translation of mercantile policy developed by the GoL into a transparent and non-discriminatory legal framework for regulating corporate and commercial activity in Liberia.

VIII. W. Bako Freeman – Program Coordinator, LBBF

Mr. Freeman is the Program Coordinator (Head) of the Secretariat for the Liberia Better Business Forum (LBBF). Prior to his current role, he served as Sr. Economic Advisor to the Minister of Commerce under a UNDP-sponsored program that encourages Liberian Diaspora to return and help to capacitate the Government of Liberia. Prior to returning to Liberia in October 2006, Mr. Freeman was a Central Banker specializing in Market Risk Management for 9 years with the Federal Reserve Bank of New York during that period.

Mr. Freeman has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Economics from the University of Minnesota and a Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree from Rutgers University in New Jersey, USA.