

***Advocating for support for Liberia's recovery and transition to development: a position paper by International Non-Governmental Organizations working in Liberia, June 26, 2015.***

***For presentation and use at the International Ebola Recovery Conference, New York, July 9-10<sup>th</sup> 2015***

We, the undersigned International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) working in Liberia, call on international donors to support the Liberia Economic Stabilization Recovery Plan, understanding that the recovery phase needs to address a combination of immediate stabilization actions, continued prevention of Ebola and communicable diseases and the strengthening of long-term systems for health, education and economic livelihoods.

We recognize that while intensive work has taken place in the health sector recovery and resiliency, gaps remain that need to be addressed to ensure full and sustainable recovery. We acknowledge that there are processes and sector review plans ongoing at the moment and these now need to be pulled together into a detailed country recovery plan linked to finances and budgets at the programme and operational level once the ESRP funding requirement has been secured. We support the ESRP's statement that "priorities remain Infrastructure/Energy, Agriculture/Private Sector Development, Health, Education and the Social Development (Children and Youth)". We further support early recovery priorities identified by the UN in Liberia where these combine immediate results with structural reforms for the longer-term.

**We similarly call on donors to view recovery with a lens that combines action towards immediate results and investment in longer-term structural reforms.**

**We underline that successful implementation of the ESRP can be achieved with focus on community engagement as a core principle of the recovery to development process.** We recognize that due to the urgency of the recovery phase, Civil Society platforms and organizations have not been directly involved in the development of the ESRP. However, governance, participation, and decentralization are a strong component that will require that communities not only be informed of, but consulted and engaged in the process. It has been recognized internationally that a significant factor in Liberia's success in slowing the spread of the EVD has been local, informal community leadership; it is time to build on this in-line with the current roll-out of the Government's de-concentration plan of key services.

**Community engagement, together with robust and strengthened accountability mechanisms** can significantly increase the likelihood of *effective* investment in the recovery to development process, and the fulfillment of the plans. As recently as July 1<sup>st</sup>, past ETU workers were on the streets, demanding their unpaid wages. Donors must ensure that their contribution is monitored effectively, with the support of a strengthened civil society able to monitor the effect of donations made in the name of recovery and transition to development.

The technical groups in New York will be working in four sessions. Please see below our comments, by session:

I. Health, Nutrition and WASH (Health Systems Restoration and Strengthening)

The INGOs support the highest priority of continuing to respond to the epidemic as stated in the ESRP by ‘implementing immediately the recovery plans for the Education and Health sectors to safely reopen schools and restore basic healthcare.’ Bridging the emergency responses into development activity will require further flexibility and innovation from donors. The heightened vigilance required in this transition phase shown by the two confirmed EVD cases in Liberia on 30 June 2015, shows that the institutionalizing of the new HR requirements and operational capacities needs commitment now from donors and government alike. This will ensure that the EVD Transition initiatives, such as enhanced disease surveillance, do not wilt in early 2016 and critically will also prevent a stall in activity in the coming months before the consolidated investment plans become funded. The epidemic has re-emphasized the importance of mental health and psychosocial support, especially for health care workers – these disciplines need to become routine and core elements of essential health provision.

II. Governance, Peacebuilding and Social cohesion

Building on the leadership demonstrated by communities throughout the country to address the Ebola crisis is paramount. The decentralization system should be accelerated, and a key first step is that of building up the capacity at local levels. The International NGOs working in Liberia are ready to support local Civil Society Organizations (CSO) and platforms to do so, hand in hand with supporting government authorities in their dialogue and planning processes. Multi-year investment is required to systemically address growth and capacity building to allow CSOs to become full members of all humanitarian programmes and opportunities.

At this time, and due to the speed of events, many international and governmental stakeholders have been involved in the development of the ESRP, but not so the Civil

Society platforms and organizations. We propose to support the Liberian government and civil society in bridging that gap, upon request. Emphasis must also be placed on support to women leadership, a critical aspect of community engagement in ending Ebola transmission in Liberia. It must be redressed, in any case, both for the ESRP and for future plans and activities, given that governance is in itself key to the successful implementation of activities be it in economic revitalization, health, education, protection, natural resource management, livelihoods or risk reduction. Local consultation and CSO consultation are steps that must not be skipped. Support should be given to evidence-based community level trust building initiatives such as socio-therapy groups to help vulnerable people and communities to recover from the Ebola-crisis. These will help build sustainable community-level structures to deal with the lack of trust and stability. Building back confidence in communities and supporting community groups / CSOs to address stigmatization and social cohesion should be prioritized as a consistent theme in all activity.

### III. Education, Social and Child Protection and Basic services

We support the ESRP's call for support for the education system, and in particular the need to "increase access to education, especially in rural areas and among girls." This needs to include health education throughout the school system, and schools equipped with appropriate sanitation services and their maintenance – an integrated approach.

Vocational Education and Training (TVET) need to be aligned with appropriate economic development and the injection of seed funding or access to social and economic development loans. The private sector needs to be a full partner in TVET, involved with curriculum development, training equipment, and outplacement programs to ensure their ownership and to focus the exact skills desired by the Liberian market

Improving the quality of educational services is paramount at all levels. Specifically Alternative Basic Education (ABE) services in the form of community-level numeracy and literacy classes in EVD affected and other vulnerable communities could provide a foundation. Tertiary education, too often neglected as a luxury, needs to be accessible, with extensions or online learning (including appropriate IT services) to the counties, so as to increase the pool of professionals able and willing to remain in the country and contribute to its development. The need for alternative basic

education for children who have dropped out of school, accelerated learning and adult basic education is addressed in the ESRP, as is training in disease prevention for teachers, for immediate stabilization. We agree and call on donors to view this approach as the optimum path for recovery as well as risk reduction. In addition, we underline the need to integrate protection services for women and children to ensure that systems (health, education and justice) are adequately strengthened to provide basic services to women and children and at the same time, protect and prevent violations including sexual abuse and other forms of gender based violence.

#### IV. Socio-economic revitalization (Livelihoods)

It is very clear that the Ebola epidemic has dragged back most advances that had been made to the Liberia national economy. We strongly support the ESRP's call for enhanced support from all international actors, public and private sector towards ensuring that Liberia national economic growth is back on track. However, we also recognize that the crisis has significantly affected the livelihoods of local communities.

We therefore would like to emphasize the need for attention from the international community in looking at investing on economic recovery activities at both the micro and macro levels.

- The Government of Liberia needs substantial investment in both financial and technical resources to rebuild and transform essential services and to respond to national economic priorities.
- Continue the existing cash transfer system to more counties and to more households, prioritizing the EVD affected.
- Invest and support the agricultural sector in order to boost productivity and strengthen the agricultural value chains, particularly investing in processing part of staple crops like cassava, rice and vegetables.
- Increasing access to credit for all Liberians will stimulate growth. This should include training and micro-finance opportunities for the most vulnerable including EVD survivors to foster sustainability of economic revitalization programmes.
- Emphasis should be placed also on women economic empowerment to support access to capital (including micro loans), tools, and resources in agriculture, micro enterprises, and alternate livelihoods to build resilience against future shocks.

**This document represents the voices of the following LINGO members:**

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