



Constraints and Challenges in Managing Project in Post Conflict Countries: The Case of Liberia

Dr. Teakon J. Williams

Programme Management Specialist / Researcher

Liberia Institute for Policy Studies and Research (LiPSR), University of Liberia, Monrovia, Liberia

Tel: +231-886567334/770567334

Email: teakonjwilliams@gmail.com and teakon@yahoo.com

Abstract— Managing projects post-conflict countries are hampered by mounting cost overruns, schedule delays, and lack of scope control often leading to project delays or failure. However, interventions by project management professionals triggered by improved policies and procedures by donors and government organizations have improved these daunting challenges. This paper examines some of the key project management challenges and constraints and existing situations that cause these overruns and delays. The paper provides valuable lessons on how some of these challenges have been tackled and proffers recommendations on how project management in post-conflict counties can be improved, using Liberia as a case study.

Keywords— cost overruns, schedule delays, lack of scope control, challenges in managing project in post-conflict counties.

1. Introduction

Contemporary project managers are adopting new technologies like agile project management, as a new paradigm for minimizing risks and other constraints. Contemporary project managers under the banner “Second Order Project Management” argued that the use of the traditional method is not sufficient to achieve project success but the utilization of contemporary methodologies called agile project management (Laufer et al., 2015).

Agile project management is a new project management methodology for managing projects with enormous levels of flexibility throughout the project’s lifecycle given various complexities (Laufer et al, 2015). Utilizing agile project management effectively reduces execution time and fosters learning given the complex project environment (Hoa et al., 2018).

In post-conflict environments, the traditional method is still highly favored over the agile method. The traditional method requires the use of iterative steps – initiation, planning, execution, monitoring and control, and closing – for the entire project lifecycle, ascribe to the Project Management Book of Knowledge (PMBOK) of the Project Management Institute, while the Agile methodology is based on customer centrality

and result management through open and self-organized works (Linke, 2019). The use of the traditional approach comes with many pitfalls and uncertainties given endogenous and exogenous factors.

The management of donor-funded projects in post-conflict countries, including Liberia, adopts the traditional approach using the PMI iterative steps. There are many challenges associated with project management in post-conflict countries including Liberia.

Overall, there are physical/structural, human capacity, technological, environmental, socio-cultural, political, economic, and many other challenges associated with managing projects in post-conflict countries, including Liberia. In Liberia for example, there are existing binding constraints that hamper project implementation including structural factors (roads access, firm infrastructures, etc.), environmental factors (heavy rains), social factors (low human capital), economic (low income), and other constraints.

In post-conflict countries, project initiation, planning, and implementation are hampered by mounting cost, schedule, and scope controls often leading to project delays, project abandonment, or project failure. For example, in Liberia cost overruns can be as high as 100%, while schedule delays are as high as 30% or more (Collier et al., 2015). The World Governance Indicators found a correlation between post-conflict countries and corruption regarding infrastructure projects (Collier et al., 2015). In Nigeria, for example, overruns in construction projects have an average cost overrun of 44.46% (McCord, 2015). Overall, Collier et al. (2015) emphasized that in South-Saharan Africa, including Liberia, 62-65% of local contractors perform worse and experience long levels of delays.

2. Donor Funding in Post Conflict Countries

Donor support to Africa, including Liberia, continue to increase despite donor-fatigue and decrease in the number of conflicts in Africa. The Official Development Assistance-ODA (2021) reported a total aid disbursement to Africa of \$73.5 billion in 2020 with South Saharan Africa receiving \$63.8 billion of this amount which represents 87% of the total development aid. Development aids to Africa has increased steady from \$53.4 billion in 2015 to \$73.5 billion in 2020, representing a 28% increase since 2015 (ODA, 2021). Similarly, donor aid to South Saharan Africa increased from \$45.5 billion in 2015 to 63.8 billion in 2020 representing a 29% increase from the previous year.

Liberia is one of the donor recipients given post-conflict challenges associated with reintegration of former combatants and At-risk youth as well as other political, governance and socio-economic issues. ODA (2021) reported that Liberia received \$652 million in 2020 representing 1% of the total amount disbursed to Sub-Saharan Africa in 2020. Figure 50 culled from ODA (2021) (<https://stats.oecd.org/WBOS/index.aspx>) displayed increase in aid support to Africa since 2015.

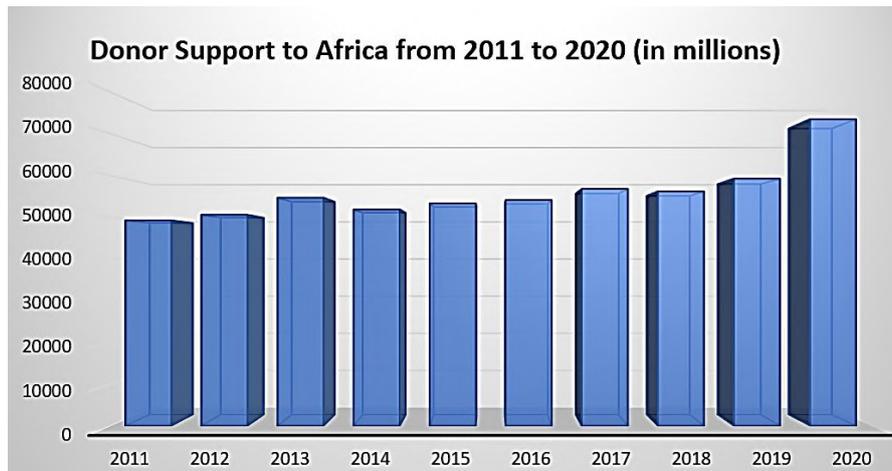


Figure 1: Donor Support to Africa from 2011 to 2020 (in millions)

Support to Liberia by donor has decreased given the many donor challenges and the absent of war in Liberia. The ODA (2021) reported a decrease in support to Liberia from \$725 million in 2011 to \$652 million in 2020. Figure 51 culled from ODA (2021) (<https://stats.oecd.org/WBOS/index.aspx>) provides a graphical trend in donor support from 2011 to 2020.

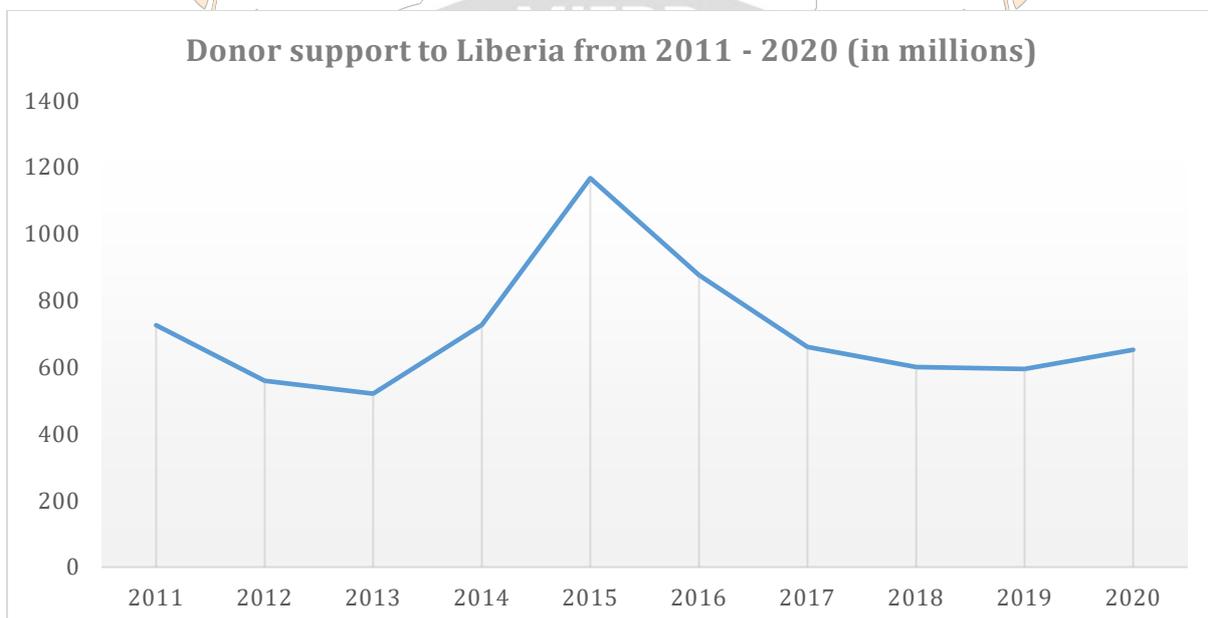


Figure 2: Donor Support to Liberia from 2012-2020

Figure 1 displayed a peak in donor support to Liberia in 2015 of \$1.67 billion. The very high increase in donor aid by 60% (from \$750 million to \$1.67 billion) was due mainly to political goodwill by donors towards Liberia and Liberia's adherence to various governance indicators including corruption, democratic governance, gender equality, press freedom, among others. Overall, Africa received \$133.7 billion each year from donors and multilateral agencies in grants, loans, and aid for private sector development, remittances,

governance, decentralization, and other donor-aid activities (Manji & Yangaus, 2018). As a result of the continuous flow of donor support to Africa in general and Liberia specifically, donor presence is always very likely in Liberia and other post-conflict regions.

3. Challenges in Managing Projects in Liberia.

Globally, giving projects complexities and uncertainties, there are inherent challenges and constraints in managing projects. Oyewobi, et al. (2016) underscored that project complexities, uncertainties and the fragmented nature of projects make it almost impossible to implement contemporary projects using the traditional method. Additionally, Edwards and Kaeding (2015) emphasized technical problems in projects citing materials, labor and optimism bias referring to project planner eagerness for positive results by overlooking possible problems.

Most project evaluation report documents revealed greater challenges in managing projects in Liberia. Most of these challenges are either physical/structural, human capacity, technological, environmental, socio-cultural, political, economic, and ethnic. Three of the key major challenges identified, based on literature review are physical/structural, environmental, and capacity challenges. However, all other projects in Liberia are associated with at least one of more of all of the challenges listed.

3.1 Physical/Structural Challenges

In Liberia most projects face some sort of physical or structural challenges requiring massive effort to rebuild communities. The zest to rebuild these communities sometime required by-passing the regular process and procedures which facilitate fraud and corruption. Guy (2018) proclaimed that the urgency for reconstruction makes corruption often difficult to contain because large amount of money, people and materials are often channelled through a weakened economy thereby making accountability difficult.

Availability of land and land use is often a challenge in Liberia. There are often inherent conflicts regarding the use of land for infrastructure purpose for communities, even if it suits the communities themselves. These long negotiations often lead to project delays thereby affecting project timeline. The Agriculture Sector Rehabilitation Project (ASRP), an African Development Bank (AfDB) project had many physical constraints because most aspect of the project was focused on the use of land for community infrastructure and water management systems. For example, in 2014 in Grand Kru County in Liberia, the project acquired all of the needed documentation for land to construct a community infrastructure for storage and rice processing. However, just before the implementation could commence, the authorities reported that the land was to be used by the county to construct residential compound for the President of Liberia.

There are other instances of land acquisition that are hampering mainly donor funded projects requiring payment for compensation. These payments come in the form of Resettlement Action Plan (RAP), which are payments to inhabitants for use of their lands. The precedent activity for the RAP is a full Environmental

and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) which will address all of the environmental and social issues. The ESIA is a mandatory requirement for both World Bank and AfDB projects at the Initiation Stage of the project.

3.2 Human Capacity Challenges

Available human capacities to steer the affairs of project operations remains a daunting challenge. Liberia experienced serious brain-drain during the civil unrest and the resources and secure environment to lure these capacities back to Liberia, remain a challenge. There have been many interventions to bridge the capacity gap including Senior Executive Service (SES), Transfer of Knowledge through Expatriate Nationals (TOKTEN), and Liberia Emergency Capacity Building Support (LECBS) to lure professionals in the work force.

A review of United Nations Development Programme - UNDP (2008) titled: Mid-term Evaluation Report of LECBS and TOKTEN revealed that LECBS and TOKTEN were conceived as transitional measures for bridging the existing institutional and human capacity gaps as a post-conflict stabilization strategy to bring confidence and sanity into the public sector. They also laid the foundation for effective, efficient, and transparent development administration.

Despite these interventions, the capacity gap in Liberia remains very wide. A review of capacity development of the African Peer Review Mechanism Country Review Report (APRM, 2017) revealed that:

The systemic capacity deficit brought about by many years of conflict and bad governance complicates the issues of the country. The lack of requisite capacity undermines state effectiveness, impedes revenue collection efforts, compromises delivery of basic social services such as healthcare and education, and promotes corruption. In the absence of strong and coordinated support for capacity development, the efficacy of on-going and future reform initiatives will remain in danger of reversal. Thus, the pervasive capacity gaps constitute a threat to ownership, scaling up, and the sustainability of reform efforts.

The issues underscored by APRM is truly manifested in many donor-funded projects where that are little capacities to compete with the herculean tasks of managing larger or medium-size projects. For example, the Project Completion Report (PCR) of the Agriculture Sector Rehabilitation Project (ASRP, 2018) in Liberia revealed low capacities in fragile countries with the view of looking into more effective roles of the World Bank to support these countries.

A further review of the Liberia Youth, Employment, Skills (YES) and the Liberia Youth Employment Program (LYEP) Country Pilot Report (2014) revealed weak infrastructure, limited finance, low institutional capacity and other structure issues which limited the ability of the project to reach its targets. YES/LYEP (2014) then proposed interventions to enhance the capacity of the supply-side of program participants to match the demand-size of available jobs opportunities in the short-term, mainly in the former sector.

3.3 Technological Challenges

Technology is a key driver or enabler for economic growth and development. Technology also drives innovation and social growth and serves as a driver for effective project management. Górecki (2015) reported that effective project management requires smart tools, specifically computer software, to support management processes, and advanced systems that humans cannot handle.

The utilization of technologies for effective project management processes is a serious challenge in post-conflict countries including Liberia. In most projects in Liberia, most project implementors do not have the requisite tools and capacities to use technologies effectively for project use. For example, most project managers do not understand or use MS-Project, a software designed for designing Gantt charts, Activity Diagrams, Performance Evaluation and Review Technique (PERT) charts, milestone charts, among others. Most of them use MS-Excel instead, a software designed for financial analysis, research analysis on a limited basis, and other statistical tools.

Technology is essential for email exchange, internet and intranet connectivity, and antivirus protection. New technologies are focused on online meetings using Zoom, Microsoft Team, Facetime, SKYPE, among others. Other aspects of technology for project use includes the use of mobile phone, cloud technologies, SkyDrive, Google Drives, Dropbox among others for storage of larger data for information purposes and lessons learned.

Technological use is more demanding for effective logistics, Global Positioning System (GPS) for land recognition, information processing, research, reporting, and other project works is more demanding. Górecki (2015) emphasized that efficient information systems, including cutting-edge technologies and appropriate software, are a must for projects to succeed. Most projects in Liberia lack most of the needed technologies and software to effectively manage their activities and achieve results.

Overall, technological use in project environment is a significant challenge in Liberia and other post-conflict nations. A review of donor funded project found out that most farmer organizations lacked modern farming technologies for enhanced production and productivity in the agriculture sector (African Development Bank, 2018). Moreover, effective public sector management required effective biometric technologies for public sector modernization and payment management (World Bank, 2014). A World Bank report on fragility, conflict, and violence requested a more reliable data, design context-specific solution, and measure impact of projects through the use of information and communication technology (ICT) tools and more fit-for purpose software (World Bank, 2020).

3.4 Environmental Challenges

Environment challenges are considered one of the major hindrances of donor and government-funded projects. Environmental challenges are more prevalent given that works or civil works, associated with

environmental challenges, are an integral part of project procurement management. Procurement of works or civil works can be as high as 80% depending on the strategic goals of the project. For example, the total costs for civil works for the World Bank's Smallholder's Agriculture Productivity Enhancement and Commercialization (SAPEC) project were 50% of the total US\$50 million allocated (African Development Bank, 2012). Similarly, a review of the Liberia Urban Water Supply and Sanitation Project Appraisal Report showed that 74.3% of the project (US\$19.4 million of US\$26.1 million) was allocated to civil works or infrastructure (African Development Bank, 2010).

Civil works or works implementation in Liberia face serious implementation challenges given various economic factors that include a dominant rainy season which affects road conditions specifically, and project implementation in general. Most projects in Liberia are challenged by environmental factors given the very high rain density in Liberia. Many contractors are unable to transport working materials to project sites and even for livelihood projects, the growing of crops and transport of produce remains a major challenge.

Environmental challenges will remain a challenge now and in the future. Liberia lacks basic infrastructure to cope with the charged environmental condition. Most projects, especially in the rural areas, can be implemented mainly during the rainy season. For example, the AfDB's ASRP project cited "remoteness of the worksites and long period closure of means of supply due to transportation bottlenecks on unmaintained earthen roads during the rainy season." Another project of interest, the World Bank's Liberia Energy Efficiency and Access Project (LEEAP) cited the cutoff of indigenous population from development due to bad road conditions, particularly in the rainy season (African Development Bank, 2016).

3.5 Socio-Cultural/Ethnic Challenges

Project management in post-conflict countries including Liberia experienced socio-cultural or ethnic challenges. Socio-cultural challenges are all of the issues relating to cultural expectations including values, attitudes, gender, among others (Kapinga & Montero, 2017). Ethnic challenges are risks associated with inter-cultural environment particularly regarding stakeholder identification and management ((StudyCorgi, 2021). The emergence of these challenges is seen in many projects in Liberia. Most projects are streamlining gender, ethnic and other social virtues during the initiation stage of the project.

Managing project in a multi-dimension and multi-cultural environment is also a major challenge. Tabassi et al. (2019) averred that cultural background of team members and the environment in which the team operates are two drivers of team experience. Further exploration of prominent culture and values of individuals is recommended before project inception to minimize socio-cultural challenges (Tabassi et al., 2019).

World Bank, African Development Bank (AfDB), USAID, and other international donors tried to mitigate socio-ethnic challenges through the implementation of Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) at the planning phase of the project. All World Bank and AfDB projects required ESIA as a necessary condition or precursor for the execution phase of the project. The social aspects of the ESIA focus on the management and mitigation of effect of cultural values, ethnic issues, and attitudes and mainstreaming gender in project implementation. Kapinga and Montero (2017) stressed that women experienced barriers from success due to negative social attitude arising from intensely rooted, prejudiced, cultural values, attitudes, practices, and traditional male-controlled cultures.

Despite these mitigation measures by donor agencies, there are still socio and economic challenges associated with many donor-funded and government projects. For example, an evaluation of the Justice and Security Trust Fund (Naumann & Williams, 2021) revealed limited access to justice for disenfranchised Sexual Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) victims with limited or no access to justice. Moreover, there were also key issues regarding attitudinal change of society towards promoting the destigmatization, alleviating/eliminating disenfranchisement, political and socio-economic participation and empowerment of minorities and vulnerable groups (Naumann & Williams, 2021).

3.6 Political Challenges

Political challenges are ever-present in majoring of donor-funded and government projects even in developed nations. Government, as custodian of the project, should play an integral part of project initiation, planning, and implementation. The lack thereof, breeds serious political challenges which can hamper project implementation. Project implementors need to seriously engage political authorities at the pre-implementation stage of the project to minimize the political challenges in projects.

One of the many political issues associated with project is the ratification of loans provided by donor or international partners. In Liberia, those tasked with ratification (the Legislature) usually request some form of compensation before carrying out this process. This situation leads to delays in the commencement of projects often eating into the project timeline. A classic example of this situation is the AfDB's SAPEC which took one year for ratification, thereby infringing on the project timeline.

Another political challenge is the will power of the Government of Liberia to fully participate in the project implementation as stakeholder. Some of the reasons for this situation are imposition of projects by the donors without government buy-in or intervention and lack of initial consultation by project team with government before the commencement of project activities. The importance of initial government buy-in and involvement in the project at the proposal stage is key to mitigating political risks.

There are many instances of political challenges in donor projects in Liberia. A case in point is the evaluation of the *Enhancing Food Security and Nutrition in and around Monrovia and Tubmanburg – UPANI*,

a European Union project in which the evaluator stressed the need for political connection with local stakeholders (MoA, City Corporations, Health Centres) and the successful establishment of Multi-Stakeholder Form (MSF) to give a voice to vulnerable farmers and to influence structural changes (Mauser, 2015). Another project, the Liberia-Swedish Feeder Road Project, Phase 3 (LSFRP 3) in its Midterm Evaluation stressed that political resistance to the formation of Road Authority regarding the utilization of the National Road Fund -NRF (Brewin et al., 2020). Overall, a UNDP approach to projects with political and security connotations require spending more time on preparing the political terrain and understanding the political context of the country (United Nations Development Programme, 2009).

3.7 Economic Challenges

Project implementation falter in waned economic condition and inadequate project management. Bond-Barnard and Steyn (2015) lamented that project management in developing countries have loads of challenges including unpredictable business environment fraught with regulation issues, corruption, culture, limited skills and knowledge, among others. A review of 500-approved World Bank-financed projects on road component between 2000 and 2010 showed allegation of fraud, corruption, or collusion on 25% of these projects (Collier et al., 2015).

Economic challenges are at two levels – unfavorable economic conditions and limited project management. For unfavorable economic conditions, project implementation have been hampered by inflation and negative exchange rate situation leading to loss of income and inability to complete projects. For example, there was an exchange rate deficit of US\$800,000 on the Agriculture Sector Rehabilitation Project (ASRP) based on the decline of the UA (units of accounts) used by the African Development Bank (AfDB) and the United States (US) dollars. This situation led to a project deficit leading to the reduction in the scope of works of the entire project. Similarly, in 2022, there is an exchange rate deficit of US\$300,000 between the SDR (special drawing rights) of the World Bank and the US dollars on the Liberia Land Administration Project (LLAP) leading to the cancellation of some of the project activities and expected deliverables.

Regarding economic challenge from the perspective of limited project management experience by project managers and associated staff, this is a common problem in Liberia. Some project managers do not understand the basic of project management including cost control, scope management and schedule control thereby plunging the project in deficit. Without cost control, there is a change of cost variance deriving from the difference between planned budget and actual expenditure. This negative variance can lead to project delay and in some cases project failure.

Another factor for cost variance is the under-estimation of project cost, using low-cost bidding. For example, Andersen (2016) reported that the behavior of bidders in the bidding process that would cause systematic bias in final costs is the leading cause of cost overruns. This scenario played out in many

construction projects where organizations use low-cost bid as a basis for awarding contracts. The bidders, to win the contract at all cost, often bid lower at their peril.

There are many instances of negative cost variance in donor-funded and government projects in Liberia. For example, the Smallholder Tree Crop Revitalization Support Program (STCRSP) experienced a negative cost variance of US\$319,249 under Component 2 due to relatively high expenditure on capacity building and increased project management cost (World Bank, 2019). Similarly, the ASRP showed high-cost deficits given high cost of transport and other logistics as well as inflation (African Development Bank, 2018).

4. Project Management Constraints in Liberia

There are existing binding constraints, along with different levels of challenges which make achieving project success difficult. For example, there are political challenges, economic challenges, social challenges, ethnic issues, and other environmental challenges which affect project implementation. On top of this, there are existing low capacities to manage projects. Some of the project managers barely understand cost control, scope management, schedule control, quality control or risks management.

4.1 Cost Control in Liberia

Cost control in Liberia remain a major hindrance to effective project management. Project managers in Liberia need the requisite training and practice to effectively manage cost to minimize cost overrun and facilitate cost variances. In Liberia cost overruns can be as high as 100%, while schedule delays are as high as 30% or more (Collier et al., 2015). The World Governance Indicators found a correlation between post-conflict countries and corruption regarding infrastructure projects (Collier et al., 2015). Donor organizations in Liberia are putting in the needed strategies to minimize cost overrun as well as corruption in projects.

Cost overrun in Liberia are derived from too many change or variation orders without the appropriate strategies for verification. Asiedu and Adaku (2019) supported this assertion stating that overruns are attributed to either poor contract planning and supervision, multiple change order requests or lack of effective communication and coordination among project stakeholders. There is often collusion between project managers, contractors and contracting supervisors

Project managers in Liberia have too many powers over the contractors and can therefore, devise scheme to increase project cost without justifiable need for change or variation order. Even in cases where there are supervising contractors to serve as liaison between the project and the contractors, there are usually collusion among them for more change request without proper justification. Donor organizations should set up Change Management Board (CMB) or Change Request Board (CRB) to include different stakeholders from multi-dimensional background to approve or reject change order.

4.2 Scope Control

Most project managers in Liberia do not adhere to the scope management process to minimize the chance of scope creep. There are a multitude of failed projects surpassing project timelines and costs including the community-based Recovery Project of schools and market at various locations in the country. There are instances of other failed projects that include the Bella Yella Road Project, the Bong Technical College Project, and host of national road projects (Diggsville Road, ELWA to Coca-Cola Factory, etc.).

To mitigate scope control, funds for various levels of projects need to be encumbered and utilized only for those projects. Moreover, technical drawings and bill of quantities (BoQs) need to be adhered to for cost control. There should be a Change Control Board (CCB) or Change Management Board (CMB) that should be constituted from different levels of stakeholders to ensure that required changes are deemed necessary and cost-efficient.

4.3 Schedule Management

Effective cost and schedule management are facilitators for achieving project success. In Liberia, most project implementors do not meet schedule requirements due to multiple factors ranging from low capacities and knowledge of schedule management, no penalties for non-adherence, and poor contract management.

Project managers should be able to formulate a reliable and predictable project schedules. However, formulating a project schedule requires the knowledge, skills, and technical ability to include the estimated duration of activities, sequencing of the various tasks, and establishing effective relationships among the various tasks and activities (Aziz et al., 2019).

In Liberia, there are limited skills in effective schedule formulation for meeting project timelines. Most project managers cannot use Microsoft Project, which is the software required to develop Gantt Chart, Performance Evaluation and Review Technique (PERT) Chart, Activity Diagrams, or Activity-on-Arrow or calculate critical path using the Critical Path Method (CPM). Project managers need to be trained with the necessary tools and acquire needed strategies for effective planning and scheduling.

4.4 Quality Control

Quality control is somehow utilized in donor-funded, and government projects in Liberia. Quality control is the utilization of all of the various quality steps including quality planning, quality assurance and quality control for attaining the required product or services based on the scope of work.

However, in Liberia, more efforts are placed on quality assurance without the necessary quality controls to minimize the quality of the products or services. For example, in most infrastructure projects in Liberia, there are issues of lack of quality products due to little effort in quality planning and quality control.

Effective planning on quality and required penalties from deviation is required to encourage contractors and consultants to meet quality standards in line with the scope of work. Donor-funded projects should seek adherence to all of the required quality steps outlined by Salvi (2020) including:

- Ensuring quality planning at the inception of project implementation;
- Training of relevant personnel for carrying out quality practices;
- Provision of clear decisions and directions of quality requirements;
- Regular supervision of project activities for accuracy and completeness documentation of all decisions, assumptions, and recommendations;
- Ensuring that all project elements are economical, accurate, properly prepared, coordinated, checked, and completed; and
- Designs should follow established design policies, procedures, standards, and guidelines.

4.5 Stakeholder Management

Stakeholders' consultation is vital for project success. Project initiators need to consult with project stakeholders because initiating a project because such project may be in the strategic interest of the recipients. For example, the UNDP's Community-based Recovery and Development (CBRD) program initiated many projects relating to construction of markets and schools which were built but abandoned because project initiators did not consult with stakeholders because initiating these projects. There are instances of many of such situation in different types of donor projects in Liberia.

4.6 Risks Management

Risk management is an integral part of effective project management because the lack thereof can affect project implementation, project timeline, and project costs thereby leading to project delays and even failure. Project managers in Liberia do not plan effectively for risks but only act when such occurs.

For example, there are multiple cases of project delays arising from environmental risks due to the heavy rainy season in Liberia. Project manager should be able to put in place effective risks mitigation or risk control strategies to counter the different levels of risks identified at the inception of the project.

4.7 Change Management

Effective change management through the use of a change management plan is essential for mitigating cost variance, schedule variance and scope creep. Most projects in Liberia do not have effective change management mechanism to ensure that change requests are justified or not. Donor along with project stakeholders should set up effective change management boards (CMB) or change control boards (CCB) to track and monitor changes or variation proposed by project managers via supervising consultants or the contractors themselves.

5. Lessons Learned and Recommendations

In the midst of the many challenges and constraints associated with managing projects in post-conflict countries, including Liberia, there are inherent lessons learned and recommendations that mitigate some of these challenges and constraints. These lessons learned situations are similar to other post-conflict settings given similarities in political, structural, economic, technological, and environmental factors. For example, lessons learned can be replicated in Sierra Leone, Sudan, Bosnia- Herzegovina, Cambodia, Rwanda, Uganda, among others. Some of the key lessons learned are as follows:

- **Country Context:** Project implementation is not uniform across post-conflict countries; therefore, project planning should utilize country context, political situation, economic conditions, and other economic and social variables when designing projects. For example, Bond-Bernard and Steyn (2015) stated that most members of project teams in post-conflict countries are geographically closer to each other than members of projects in developed countries. Moreover, in post-conflict countries, there are emerging and continuous challenges associated with infrastructure (road, electricity, water, etc.) which make the cost of implementation higher than in a non-post-conflict country.
- **Project Location:** It is observed that some projects are implemented as far as 500KM from their project office. This situation provides difficulties for field operation leading to delays in critical activities. For example, the Agriculture Sector Rehabilitation Project (ASRP) at the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) experienced serious project implementation delays and challenges given that the project implementation areas were about 600KM from the main office in Monrovia.
- **Political Will:** Project planners should gather or be assured of the required political will before implementing projects. Some projects implemented without political will are often delayed to gather the political will or failed on arrival. There are instances of projects brought to Liberia that are not welcome and faced implementation challenges.
- **Project Appraisal in Consultation with Key Stakeholders:** Project appraisal should include national stakeholders including local personnel. Some donors simply developed the appraisal on their own and try to work with the stakeholders regarding implementation. These types of projects faced challenges because the project objectives may not be aligned with the key development priorities of these locales. For example, some donors tried to impose WASAN projects on inhabitants when these beneficiaries' priority is actually farming.
- **Recruitment of Project Team:** Most donor organizations recuse themselves from the recruitment process leading to the recruitment of the project management team (PMT). Most of these recruitments are fraught with inadequacies and corruption, thereby leading to the recruitment of incompetent staff that provide false start for the project. A classic example is the recruitment of the Project Coordinator of the Liberia Land Administration Project (LLAP) which led to multiple



problems associated with the project including project deficits that the Government of Liberia (GoL) had to pay back to the World Bank.

- **Focus on Capacity Development:** Project planner should place more emphasis on capacity building of relevant staff, partner institutions and civil society organizations. Given the brain-drain situations in post-conflict countries, including Liberia, most projects have limited capacities thereby justifying the needed for more capacity building effort to enhance their works. Project managers and team should be trained on basic project management tools and strategies for effective implementation. For example, project manager should understand basic MS-Project to develop appropriate project management cost and schedule tools.
- **Knowledge Transfer:** Some project organization initiate knowledge transfer for national or local staff to enhance capacities. However, these arrangements are sometime fraught with inadequacies with international staff doing these knowledge transfer over-staying on the project. In some case, they exhaust the entire lifespan of the project. There are many reported cases of international staff overstaying their tenure with limited transfer of knowledge to project staff and other stakeholders.
- **Prioritizing National Staff:** Project should priorities the hiring of national staff for non-technical posts and should only consider international staff if such capacities are not found in Liberia. There are instances where international staff are occupying key national posts including project coordinator, and other consultancies.
- **Utilizing Matrix Organizations:** Most donor-funded projects utilized matrix organization, where projects at stationed at Ministries, Agencies, or Commissions (MACs). However, the management arrangements are often fraught with designating project management authority to a functional manager (like the Minister, Deputy Minister or Senior Officer). The project coordinator, in this setting should assume project management authorities, while the functional managers should assume overseeing and control activities. In some matrix settings, the head of entity wants to sign all of the documents and if not, nothing will go on with the project. The Project Implementation Units (PIUs) or Project Management Units (PMUs) assigned at the MACs should be able to function properly utilizing their project management strengths while the functional managers should supervise or provide oversight.
- **Government Ownership:** Most government do not take ownership of their project but often leaving the project at the will of the donor organization. This situation minimize capacity building efforts and developing national institutions.
- **Synergies of Donor Works:** Donor organizations are making more efforts to bring relief to post-conflict countries and support national institutions. However, there appears to be lack of synergies of different levels of intervention thereby duplicating efforts from different sets of donors. Donors are involved in donor coordination meetings to synergize the different levels of interventions, but these efforts need to be coordinated properly to minimize waste of resources and effort.

- **Set up Effective Mechanism for Change:** Donor organizations should work with stakeholders in establishing boards or committees to manage change. Lack of change control usually results in cost overruns, schedule overruns, and scope creeps. An efficient change control board or change management board will minimize cases of cost and schedule overruns in projects in Liberia.
- **Proactive Risks Management:** Project management teams should fully utilize the risks matrix developed in the Project Appraisal Document (PAD) or project proposal. Project managers usually trashed these risks and only respond when they occur leading to shocks which affect project costs and schedule. They should adequately track the risks and devise risks response mechanism to deal with these risks when they occur.
- **Stakeholder Priority:** Stakeholders should be prioritized at every stage of the project lifecycle from conception to closing. Project stakeholders are an integral part of project initiation, planning, execution, monitoring and closing and, therefore, should be involve in all of its key activities. Most donor and government projects exclude stakeholders in the various stages of the projects thereby leading to challenges in project implementation.
- **Quality Management:** Quality planning, assurance, and controls should be mainstreamed in all donor and government projects. Most projects carry out limited quality controls leading to the delivery of sub-standard products.
- **Adequate Scheduling:** To ensure the development of adequate scheduling project implementers should be adequately trained in MS-Project to develop scheduling tools including Gantt Chart, PERT chart, Activity Diagram, and developing critical path for good schedule estimation. Most project implementors have limited knowledge on project management tools and techniques thereby using unorthodox methods to design schedules. Project implementors should be adequately trained to design effective work plans and schedules.
- **Improved Technologies:** The use of technologies as elaborated on the technological challenge is key for increased outputs and automation of project environment. Given post-conflict challenges, most project implementors lack basic technological skills to carry out their duties. Implementation of key project activities are stalled given limited use of technologies for increased outputs. Donor organizations should priorities personnel with strong technological skills as project managers, who will in turn provide mentorship for other members of the project team.

6. Conclusion

Despite the many challenges and constraints associated with implementing projects in post-conflict countries, including Liberia, there seems to be an improvement in donor processes and procedures which is improving overall implementation. Donor organizations are working closely with government and its counterpart in developing policies and procedures that are conversant with country context. This approach is improving overall delivery and minimizing overruns in projects. The task, however, ahead is still difficult with collusion and fraud by reckless and corrupt project officials and government collaborators. The future

for improved project implementation is bright and donor organizations, stakeholders, and government need concerted efforts to ensure that fundings for the Liberian people are adequately utilized for achieving the needed results presented in the project LogFrame.

References

- [1] African Development Bank (2010). Project Appraisal Report: Urban Water Supply and Sanitation Project. African Development Bank Group.
- [2] African Development Bank (2012). Appraisal Report of Smallholder Agricultural Productivity Enhancement and Commercialization Project. African Development Bank Group.
- [3] Liberia - Smallholder Agricultural Productivity Enhancement and Commercialization Project (afdb.org)
- [4] African Development Bank (2016). Project Appraisal Report: Liberia Energy Efficiency and Access Project (LEEAP). African Development Bank Group.
- [5] African Development Bank (2018). Project Completion Report (PCR), Agriculture Sector Rehabilitation Project (ASRP). African Development Bank Group.
- [6] APRM (2017). APRM County Review Report, No. 21. African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). Country Review Reports - APRM (aprm-au.org)
- [7] Asiedu, R.O. and Adaku, E. (2019). Cost overrun in public sector construction projects: A developing country perspective. *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJMPB-09-2018-0177>
- [8] ASRP (2018). Project Completion Report. African Development Bank Group.
- [9] Aziz, N.M., Mohd-Rahim, F.A., Chuing, L.S., & Le, E.W. (2019). Identification of project scheduling constraints using the quantitative approach. *International Journal of Recent Technology and Engineering*, 8(1S), 374-381. <http://bit.ly/39LcqEk>
- [10] Bond-Barnard, T. & Steyn, H. (2015). Project management in developing countries: Implications for project trust, collaboration and success. Conference Paper. 2015.11IPMAResearchConferenceBond-Barnard_Steyn (2).pdf
- [11] Brewin, M., Clifton, J., Harding, R. & Holmberg, A. (2020). Mid-term evaluation of Liberian-Swedish Feeder Road Project, Phase 3 (LSFRP 3). Final Report – SIDA
- [12] Collier, P., Kirchberger, M., & Söderbom, M. (2015). The cost of road infrastructure in low and middle-income countries. World Bank Group Policy Research Working Paper 7408. <https://doi.org/10.1093/wber/lhv037>
- [13] Edward, C. & Kaeding, N. (2015). Federal government cost overruns. goo.gl/cymRGd
- [14] Górecki, J. (2015). Maturity of project management in polish and foreign construction companies. *Foundations of Management*, 7. 71-82. <https://doi.org/10.1515/fman-2015-0026>
- [15] Guy, D. (2018). The dilemmas of post-conflict reconstruction. Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI).

- [16] The dilemmas of post-conflict reconstruction | The Strategist (aspistrategist.org.au)
- [17] Hoa, K. D., Tran, T., Grundy, J., Ghose, A., & Kamei, Y. (2018). Towards effective AI-powered agile project management. Cornell University Library
- [18] Kapinga, A.F. & Montero, C.S. (2017). Exploring the socio-cultural challenges of food processing women entrepreneurs in Iringa, Tanzania and strategies used to tackle them. *Journal of Global Entrepreneurship Research*, 7(17). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40497-017-0076-0>
- [19] Laufer, A., Hoffman, E.J., Russell, J.S. & Cameron, W.S. (2015). What successful project manager do? *MIT Sloan Management Review*. 42-52. <http://bit.ly/37yCDEp>
- [20] Linke, K. (2019). Traditional and agile management
AgileundtraditionellesProjektmanagement_final.pdf
- [21] Manji, F. & Yangaus, P. (2018). Show the West stop giving aid to Africa? *New Internationalist Debate: Stop giving aid to Africa? | New Internationalist*
- [22] McCord, J., McCord, M., Davis, P.T., Haran, M. & Rodgers, W.J. (2015). Understanding delays in housing construction: evidence from Northern Ireland. *Journal of Financial Management of Property and Construction*, 20(3), 286-319. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JFMPC-07-2015-0028>
- [23] Mauser, H. (2015). Enhancing food security and nutrition in and around Monrovia and Tubmanburg - "UPANI" in Liberia. Final Evaluation Report - European Union. *2015_evaluation_lbr1034_liberia_en.pdf*
- [24] Naumann, C.C. & Williams, T.J (2021). Outcome Evaluation: Justice and Security Trust Fund (JSTF). UNDP Liberia.
- [25] ODA (2021). Aid (ODA) disbursements to countries and regions (DCA2a). Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).
- [26] Aid (ODA) disbursements to countries and regions [DAC2a] (oecd.org)
- [27] Oyewobi, L. O., Jimoh, R., Ganiyu, B. O., & Shittu, A. A. (2016). Analysis of causes and impact of variation order on educational building projects. *Journal of Facilities Management*, 14(2), 139-164. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JFM-01-2015-0001>
- [28] Salvi, S. (2020). Quality assurance and quality control in project effectiveness in construction and management.
- [29] (PDF) Quality Assurance and Quality Control for Project Effectiveness in Construction and Management (researchgate.net)
- [30] StudyCorgi. (2021). Cultural Issues and Their Solutions in Project Management. <https://studycorgi.com/cultural-issues-and-their-solutions-in-project-management/>
- [31] Svejvig, P. & Andersen, P. (2015). Rethinking project management: A structured literature review with a critical look at the brave new world. *International Journal of Project Management*, 33(2), 278-290. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2014.06.004>.



- [32] Tabassi, A., David, A., David, B., Kamal, M., Jane, E., & Jane, D. (2019). Challenges for project management in the 21st century. 4th International Conference on Rebuilding Place (ICRP 2019). <https://doi.org/10.15405/epms.2019.12.63>.
- [33] United Nations Development Programme (2008). Mid-term independent evaluation of the Liberia Emergency Capacity Building Support (LECBS) and TOKTEN projects.
- [34] Evaluation Detail (undp.org)
- [35] United Nations Development Programme (2009). Community Security and Social Cohesion: Towards a UNDP approach. Bureau of Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR).
- [36] UNDP Community Security and Social Cohesion.pdf
- [37] World Bank (2014). Project Appraisal Document: Public Sector Modernization Project. World Bank Document. Public Sector Modernization Project.pdf
- [38] World Bank (2020). World Bank Group Strategy for Fragility, Conflict, and Violence (2020-2025). World Bank Group.

About the Author

Dr. Teakon J. Williams is a Programme Management Specialist and has been working as a project management practitioner for over 22 years spanning from 1999. Dr. Williams is currently a researcher, consultant, and lecturer of project planning and management and statistics at the Stella Maris Polytechnic University and the Liberia Institute of Public Administration (LIPA) in Liberia. He also served as Senior Researcher for the Liberia Institute of Policy Studies and Research (LiPSR) at the University of Liberia. On a part-time basis he works as project coordinator for both the African Development Bank (AfDB) and World Bank (WB) projects in Liberia. He also works as consultant for the UNDP, UN-Women, Office of the UN High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR), the International Labor Organization (ILO), United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), Ministry of Youth and Sports (MoYS), Ministry of Education (MoE), Ministry of Agriculture (MOA), and Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MFDP).