

**Case Title: From Learning to Earning: How a Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Internship Program is Enhancing Youth Employment**

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*Cohort 2 Interns during their most recent refresher training.  
Credit: PERT Consultancy Inc.*

**Summary:**

In post-conflict Liberia, youth unemployment remains a key challenge. Efforts in youth empowerment have often focused on training activities with limited opportunities for transitioning graduates to the job market. A needs assessment conducted during DELTA's co-creation identified MEL competencies and skills gaps among USAID Implementing Partners (IPs) and local organizations. This is one reason why the Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) sector in Liberia has historically been dominated by foreign nationals.

To address these challenges, USAID/DELTA is implementing a MEL internship program aimed at building local MEL capacities and fostering sustainable employment opportunities for young people as future MEL leaders. The program seeks to train and deploy eighty interns over four years. The internship program is designed using a multi-step approach for recruitment, selection, onboarding training, and placement within host organizations to elevate young people's paths to sustainable employment.

DELTA and local partner PERT Consultancy Inc. held pause and reflect sessions, where they reflected upon implementation successes and challenges and employed adaptive management techniques, such as adjusting the number of interns to meet demand and intensifying supervision, mentorship, and the program's focus on personal leadership and emotional intelligence. This adaptability was crucial in addressing challenges, such as limited skilled MEL personnel in some organizations. Additionally, the program emphasized gender inclusion, significantly increasing the number of female interns. As a result, the program saw high employment rates among graduates, with many securing roles in development organizations and government agencies.

The collaboration with local partners ensured that the training was contextually relevant, fostering local ownership and sustainability. Furthermore, the establishment of a professional network among interns facilitated continued support and shared opportunities, underscoring the program's long-term impact on the MEL field in Liberia.

- 1. WHAT: What is the general context in which the case takes place? What organizational or development challenge(s) or opportunities prompted you to collaborate, learn, and/or adapt?**

In post-conflict Liberia, youth unemployment is one of the major challenges facing the country, with young people (ages 15-24 years) accounting for [2.29 percent](#) of a total unemployment rate of [3.80 percent](#). Also, most efforts in youth empowerment have largely focused on equipping participants with technical and vocational education and training without adequate job search and workplace mentoring and coaching support to help them find and keep sustainable employment. There has been little success in Liberia in leveraging opportunities for internship programs that could give specialized hard and soft skills to youth to enhance their employability.

USAID/DELTA collaborated with local partner, PERT Consultancy Inc., to organize a MEL internship program to address these challenges. They launched the MEL internship program to produce qualified MEL professionals who have the skills required to contribute to Liberia's development. Collaborating with a local partner promotes locally-led development and sustainability.

**2. What two CLA Sub-Components are most clearly reflected in your case?**

- Pause & Reflect
- Adaptive management

**3. HOW: What steps did you take to apply CLA approaches to address the challenge or opportunity described above?**

DELTA and PERT undertook a multi-step recruitment and selection process each year, utilizing a robust strategy embedded in recruitment fairs at both national and sub-national levels. They use the fairs to raise awareness about the internship program and publish internship advertisements to attract applications from potential candidates. To promote gender and social inclusion, DELTA and PERT conducted targeted outreach to women's organizations and universities to encourage female graduates to apply.

They shortlisted suitable applicants and conducted in-person interviews to select the most competitive candidates. Successful candidates underwent an onboarding training program designed to equip them with foundational MEL skills before placing them with host organizations. The placement phase lasts nine months, comprising supervision, mentoring, and coaching activities to provide interns with hands-on experience and capacity-building opportunities. PERT places at least two Interns in a host organization, assigning them with experienced professionals who mentor them to enhance their practical knowledge and professional growth in MEL.

This dual-prong approach of theoretical training followed by practical application was crucial in building a competent and confident MEL workforce. At the end of the first year, DELTA conducted a pause and reflect session to learn from the program implementation. The findings from host organizations showed an increased demand for interns based on requests from IPs to increase the number of interns that were assigned in the previous cohort. DELTA also learned

that some IPs had limited skilled MEL personnel to effectively mentor or supervise interns. DELTA and PERT applied adaptive management in adjusting the annual internship cohort targets from twenty (20) to thirty (30) to meet the high demand. Drawing from these lessons, PERT intensified monthly supervision and monitoring visits to interns and enhanced its mentorship efforts to complement host organizations' support. Also, DELTA conducts annual MEL training to enhance IP MEL teams' capacities. Furthermore, DELTA increased the number of females recruited from 50 percent females to 66.6 percent . Currently, monitoring records show high employment rates among program graduates; at the end of the first cohort, seventeen out of the twenty graduates have obtained gainful employment.

#### **4. RESULTS: Choose one of the following questions to answer.**

The DELTA internship program is making meaningful contributions to building a new cadre of qualified MEL professionals in Liberia. Fifty youth have been trained, enhancing the MEL workforce's capacity to contribute to performance improvement and accountability in development programs in Liberia. This initiative has resulted in the creation of sustainable employment as nearly half (48%) of graduates from cohorts one and two have secured employment (11 females and 13 males). Equipped with the relevant MEL knowledge, skills, and experience, these young professionals are working within development organizations and government ministries/agencies undertaking various MEL functions, including Activity Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Plan (AMELP) reviews, data collection, field visits, data entry and analysis, and the implementation of learning events.

DELTA's collaboration with a Liberian MEL firm on the internship program ensures that the training is contextually relevant and inclusive; these are key drivers for local ownership. Additionally, more host organizations are enrolling in the program thereby increasing placement opportunities for the interns. This demonstrates enhanced local engagement, sustainability, and capacity building.

The interns from both cohorts have organized a network to facilitate sharing of job vacancies, learning materials, scholarship adverts, and professional support. Participation in the national MEL community of practice has been encouraged, providing interns with broader exposure and opportunities to engage with national MEL initiatives.

By integrating these CLA approaches, DELTA has not only contributed to the professional development of young MEL practitioners, but has also supported the creation of sustainable employment opportunities and fostered viable professional networks. These outcomes highlight the effectiveness of the CLA approach in promoting collaboration, continuous learning, and adaptive management within development programs.

#### **5. ENABLING CONDITIONS: How have enabling conditions - resources (time/money/staff), organizational culture, or business/work processes - influenced your results?**

Effective adaptive management, a robust recruitment process, and a nine-month placement ensured that interns received comprehensive training and hands-on experience. The nine-month time investment was vital in building a fit-for-purpose MEL workforce.

During these nine months, DELTA provided a monthly stipend of three hundred fifty dollars (\$350) to each intern. This and other financial resources allowed PERT to conduct recruitment fairs, and coaching sessions, organize placement opportunities, and retain the interns for the period of their internship.

The localization strategy of using a local MEL organization as lead facilitator and the placement of experienced professionals within host organizations as mentors greatly enhanced the practical and professional growth of the interns. Using local MEL-skilled professionals to train interns also ensured context-based training and fostered local capacity.

DELTA's focus on gender and social inclusion through coaching sessions with women's organizations and the subsequent increase in female interns demonstrate a strong organizational culture of inclusivity and equal opportunity.

Conducting a thorough review of the program at the end of the first year of the internship program enabled DELTA to identify the high demand for interns and the limited technical support and mentorship from IPs. Also, feedback sessions with interns during refresher trainings have helped to improve the management of the internship program. This continuous learning process informed strategic adjustments, laying the foundation for the program's long-term effectiveness and sustainability.