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GOVERNANCE AND ECONOMIC MANAGEMENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM GEMAP

Implemented by: IBI International

Milestone in Achieving International Connectivity

Following USAID GEMAP's assessment of different international connectivity options available to Liberia, and a period of intense negotiations facilitated by the USAID GEMAP Senior ICT Advisor assigned to the MPEA, Liberia signed the ACE Construction & Maintenance Agreement (CMA) in Paris on June 5, 2010.

The \$700 million, 17,000-kilometre long Africa Coast to Europe (ACE) cable will run from South Africa to France. It will connect 23 countries either directly (for coastal countries) or indirectly through terrestrial links (for the landlocked countries Mali and Niger).

The signing ceremony took place at the Eiffel Tower where senior officials and dignitaries from 23 countries that are part of the ACE Consortium were present. The Managing Director of Libtelco, the Liberian national operator, signed the CMA document on behalf of Liberia and the Cable Consortium of Liberia (CCL), the Special Purpose Vehicle formed by a Public-Private Partnership consortium consisting of mobile operators, Liberia Telecommunications Authority (LTA), Government of Liberia, and Libtelco, all of whom have contributed funds to meet the total investment cost of \$25 million required for Liberia to participate in this project. Liberia is now a full standing member of the ACE Consortium led by France Telecom. The chairwoman of LTA was appointed to serve as the Vice Chair of the Consortium.

Described by the Government of Liberia as an "historic event", ACE brings broadband internet connectivity to Liberia by 2012, replacing Liberia's dependence on costly, slow, and unreliable satellite connections for internet connectivity that present a major impediment to economic development. With USAID technical assistance and facilitation, the CCL was able to successfully raise the \$25 million required for participation in ACE, and attract Grant funding from the World Bank towards the cost of the investment as well as the technical expertise necessary to build the enabling legal and regulatory framework.