

## SUCCESS STORY

### PROICT – A TRUSTED TECHNICAL ENGAGEMENT:

# Realizing Inclusive Connectivity in Liberia

**T**ransmitting data through transparent fibers just thicker than a human hair, the Africa Coast to Europe (ACE) submarine optical fiber cable revolutionized Liberia's Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector. Landing off the shore of Liberia's capital Monrovia in 2011, this 17,000 km cable which stretches from France to South Africa, marked Liberia's introduction to high-speed Internet services. Providing connectivity to 24 countries, the arrival of the ACE also demonstrated a commitment to reduce the digital divide and democratize Internet access in Africa through secure, diverse, and resilient ICT infrastructure investments.

While the ACE optical fiber cable, made possible through a landmark agreement between a consortium of telecommunications companies and member countries<sup>1</sup>, significantly increased Internet connectivity in Monrovia, the lack of optical fiber cables (OFCs) beyond the capital resulted in low connectivity in Liberia's rural areas. Moreover, Liberia lacks a much-needed system of high-speed networks linked together with fiber-optic connections to establish what is formally known as a fiber backbone — a critical prerequisite to fully maximize the ACE cable's reach and potential.

Since the ACE cable's deployment, much work has been done to enhance competition and growth among Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) to provide greater connectivity options to Liberian consumers. Under a revised technology license issued by the Liberia Telecommunications Authority (LTA) in 2015, the regulatory authority authorized wireless carriers to build their own OFC infrastructure. However, the lack of coherent regulatory frameworks to guide the deployment of optical fibers across Liberia and the lack of a concrete national fiber backbone, severely hampered connectivity efforts beyond Monrovia – exacerbating the digital divide.

## ADDRESSING THE CONNECTIVITY CHALLENGE

Recognizing these connectivity challenges, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) deployed Digital Frontiers' Promoting American Approaches to ICT Policy and Regulation (ProICT) activity<sup>2</sup>. Funded under the Digital Connectivity and Cybersecurity Partnership (DCCP)<sup>3</sup> and managed by USAID's implementing partner DAI, ProICT provides technical assistance and capacity-building through embedded experts to help developing country governments establish ICT policy and regulatory frameworks. In Liberia, ProICT technical experts from Integra Government Services International LLC ("Integra") and Atlantic Telecoms & Media Cameroon reviewed the state of OFC deployment and identified strategic ways on how the LTA could strengthen connectivity efforts, develop the nation's fiber backbone, and maximize the use of the ACE submarine cable. Subsequently, ProICT technical experts developed a specific policy and regulatory framework tailored to ensure a holistic and coordinated approach in the deployment of optical fiber cable across Liberia. The framework, disseminated through trainings to upskill government stakeholders, including the LTA, provided concrete recommendations on how the LTA can strengthen its new OFC rollout strategy to drive both competition and widespread Internet coverage in-country.

As a direct result of the ProICT engagement, the LTA successfully negotiated an amendment to its national backbone licensing agreement with CSquared in 2021 to further expand internet coverage nationwide. While CSquared has been an optic fiber wholesale provider in Liberia since 2017 — the result of a \$12 million first-of-its-kind partnership between USAID, Google, and CSquared to further help Liberians rebuild after the 2014-2016 Ebola outbreak — the telecommunications company was limited to providing services to the Monrovia metropolitan area. The amendment, whose licensing conditions drew directly from language drafted by ProICT’s technical experts and provided in the policy and regulatory framework, now authorizes CSquared to deploy fiber optic cables anywhere across the country.

“The amended agreement is good news for Liberian consumers and internet users,” says H Sama Nwana, the Managing Partner at Cenerva Ltd, Director at Atlantic Telecoms & Media, and critical partner to Digital Frontiers’ ProICT Liberia activities. “With the expansion, coverage will extend from Monrovia to Guinea, and to the Cote d’Ivoire border covering counties like Margibi, Bong and Nimbal. It should also cover at least ten major towns, likely including Kakata, Weala, Totota, Gbartala, Gbarnga, Palala, Kpein, Ganta, Tondine, Sanniquellie, Kamplay, and Logatuo. This increase in connectivity will provide more people with access to the digital economy, bringing about a range of benefits to individuals, society, and the economy.”

Capitalizing on the amended agreement between CSquared and the LTA, USAID announced the Agency’s latest public-private partnership with the Africa-based broadband provider under USAID’s Digital Invest program in January 2023<sup>4</sup>. A part of DCCP and a flagship project of the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment announced by President Biden in June 2022<sup>5</sup>, this partnership will enable CSquared to actualize the 350-kilometer open-access fiber backbone in Liberia — bringing quality Internet access to as many as one million people.

For USAID, this public-private partnership marks a strategic push in continuing to support digital connectivity infrastructure and digital financial services that strengthen open, inclusive, and secure digital ecosystems in emerging markets. For CSquared, deploying new optical fiber cables will serve as a catalyst towards universal access to online health, education, banking, and government services — transforming the lives of ordinary Liberians. In granting an amended license to CSquared to expand connectivity to the entire country, made possible through Digital Frontiers’ ProICT engagement, the LTA not only cleared the way for the creation of new broadband infrastructure back in 2021 – it propelled the nation towards greater connectivity and more inclusive economic growth.

***ProICT is a USAID-activity, funded under the Digital Connectivity and Cybersecurity Partnership (DCCP) and implemented by DAI’s Digital Frontiers project.***

1. The [ACE Consortium](#) consists of telecommunications operators and member countries that have invested in the total \$700 million project.
2. [The Promoting American Approaches to ICT Policy and Regulation \(ProICT\) activity, a part of DAI’s Digital Frontiers](#), provides dedicated technical assistance, including embedded experts, for receptive host country ministries and regulatory bodies to assist in the design, development, and implementation of ICT policies. DAI implements the \$90 million USAID-funded [Digital Frontiers project](#), which works closely with the development community to identify successful and sustainable digital development approaches and scale their impact globally.
3. Led by the U.S. Department of State and co-chaired by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the [Digital Connectivity and Cybersecurity Partnership](#) (DCCP) works with partner countries to support the development of communications infrastructure; promote transparent regulatory policies for open, competitive markets; and build partners’ cybersecurity capacity to address shared threats through engagement with the private sector, government, and civil society.
4. [USAID’s Digital Invest](#) is a blended-finance program that supports fund managers, project developers, and other private sector partners seeking to accelerate sustainable market growth for internet service providers (ISPs) and financial technology companies that reduce the digital divide by serving traditionally excluded communities in developing markets. The program is part of the U.S. Department of State’s Digital Connectivity and Cybersecurity Partnership and implemented by USAID in alignment with the Agency’s Digital Strategy. The [program was announced](#) in June 2022 as a flagship program under the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII).
5. The G7-led [Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment](#) (PGII) delivers game-changing projects to close the infrastructure gap in developing countries, strengthen the global economy and supply chains, and advance U.S. national security.

