



## PHOTO & CAPTION

### Where There Are No Desks



Photo: Cynthia Mahoney/DAI

***Jubilant children in Liberia's coastal Sinoe County help unload new desks for their schools delivered by fishing boats and canoes. The desks, made in Liberia, were sponsored by USAID in fulfillment of a promise made on a Presidential visit to Liberia in 2008.***

On his visit to Liberia in 2008, President George Bush promised 10,000 desks from the American people. USAID managed the construction of the desks creating work for Liberian carpenters and apprentices and reducing the transport costs. One hundred fifty six elementary, junior and senior high schools in six of the most remote counties in Liberia received desks for students and teachers. Thirty Liberian micro-enterprises participated in the production of the desks. Liberia's Ministry of Education identified the counties and schools with the greatest need.

The desks were necessary because Liberia's schools were badly pillaged during the protracted years of war that

ended in 2003. Many children sit on floors or cartons, squeeze onto benches, or sit two to a desk.

Delivering the new USAID-supplied desks to some remote areas, inaccessible by roads or air, presented a logistical challenge and required ingenuity and some unusual collaboration. Cestos City in Sinoe County on Liberia's southern coast along the Atlantic Ocean was one of the areas designated to receive the school desks and where local carpenters were engaged in the effort. As desks were assembled they were stored at the local high school. However, some of the recipient schools in nearby Yarnee District are only reachable by crossing the Cestos River as there are no passable roads or bridges. The UN peacekeeping force (UNMIL) stationed in Cestos City provided a truck to transport the desks to the river bank. A local fisherman provided two boats and a principal from a recipient school lent a canoe. Across the Cestos River, some 50 children from two recipient schools waited on the beach to help carry the furniture back to their schools about 15 minutes down a foot path to the first school, and another 15 minutes to the second.

Because of this contribution from the American people thousands of Liberian students now have a more conducive and dignified learning environment—and no excuse not to study.