Conclusion:

consolidating peace
Elizabeth Drew and Alexander Ramsbotham

As Liberia and Sierra Leone strive to consolidate peace and avoid a slide back into war both countries still face persistent peacebuilding challenges and potential triggers for renewed violence.

Case studies in this publication link ongoing problems to failures by successive governments in Monrovia and Freetown to develop credible social contracts with their citizenries. People’s lack of confidence is linked to flaws in respective peace processes and national development initiatives, including a failure to develop inclusive and accountable political systems, neglect of peripheral rural communities, and an inability to meet the needs and aspirations of unemployed youth or involve women in political decision-making.

Said Djinnit in the Foreword to this publication stresses that post-war transitions in Liberia and Sierra Leone are complex and long-term. Both countries have made great strides towards political stability, but Monrovia and Freetown still lack capability and competency to respond to the scale and breadth of their challenges and responsibilities.

In some sectors – for example relating to peace and security in Liberia – international support and leadership remains dominant. As Ambassador Prince Zeid, Chair of the UN Peacebuilding Commission Configuration for Liberia, notes in this publication, Monrovia “could be in trouble when the UN moves out”. But international engagement has delivered limited responses to conflict challenges in both countries, and has not always been best directed to encourage sustainable peace. International assistance has emphasised technocratic support for state-building and post-conflict reconstruction. This is important, given the acute administrative and infrastructural challenges faced by both countries. But it has often been delivered inefficiently, and has been prioritised at the expense of efforts to help to build relationships among communities, and between communities and the state.

Poor governance is keenly felt by groups and communities that are marginalised – politically or socially, such as youth and women, or geographically, such as the many Liberians and Sierra Leoneans who live beyond the reach of the state. Sierra Leone’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) recognised that marginalised provincial populations “played a central role in initiating and fuelling the armed conflict”; and marginalisation remains a key potential destabilising factor for both states today.

Many of the case studies in this Accord Issue refer to informal and customary mechanisms and practices. Traditional leaders and institutions provide essential services across a range of sectors, from local government and law and order, to land disputes and community reconciliation. They do not provide easy or risk-free solutions: many played their part in both conflicts: they can contradict national or international norms and standards; and they can be socially partisan or politically exploitable. But local communities are often more likely to perceive them as legitimate, effective and – above all – available. They can tap into local expertise and understanding, help to build community capacity, and inform and complement state structures that are in the process of being developed.

Post-war governance

Decentralisation and inclusion
Many political and economic resources in Liberia and Sierra Leone today are still concentrated in urban
centres – particularly Monrovia and Freetown. Political decentralisation can help to promote community development, and is intended to broaden political inclusion. But examples from this publication show that in practice community engagement with local government structures in Sierra Leone has been patchy at best: in some places, regular community consultations are usefully strengthening state–society relations; in many others, communication with local people is dysfunctional, for example limited to posting decisions outside local government offices – that communities did not agree, and which most local people cannot read.

A particular problem relates to confusion and contradictions between state and customary local governance structures, which undermine the effectiveness of service delivery and can lead to tension. The 2004 Local Government Act in Sierra Leone, for instance, transferred responsibility to set tax revenue and spending from paramount chiefs to local councils. Chiefs had not been consulted, but were still left with responsibility for tax collection. In response, in Lower Banta Chiefdom in Moyamba district, the paramount chief denied the council access to recover dues from fishermen and stationed vigilantes around the jetty to enforce this.

Civil society has been working to find ways reconcile different sectors. For example, the Sierra Leonean NGO Network Movement for Justice and Development (NMJD) organises ‘accountability forums’ at chiefdom and district levels, which bring together local and central administration, as well as marginalised and community groups, to promote dialogue on key local and national issues, and to provide a forum where citizens can challenge political leaders about their intentions and activities.

**Elections and participation**

Democratisation is a long-term process to transform institutions of state so that they are able to respond to the needs and wishes of ordinary people, not just elites. Elections can be an important component of democratic transformation. But they do not present an inherent or inevitable path to political participation or representation. This is especially evident in post-conflict contexts like Liberia and Sierra Leone where bad governance contributed to violence. Structures of patronage have survived both the wars and post-war elections to permeate a range of institutions of governance, including political parties, parliament and election management bodies.

Although ECOWAS observers approved Liberia’s November 2011 presidential elections as credible, violence marred the run-off vote. Electoral malpractice remains common in Liberia and Sierra Leone: political parties have deployed young former combatants to intimidate voters during post-war elections, while appointing the Chairs of ‘independent’ Electoral Commissions is the reserve of respective presidents. Also, women are grossly under-represented at all levels of government – in Sierra Leone, but also in Liberia, despite having Africa’s first woman president. Electoral candidates seek young people’s votes during elections but subsequently ignore their needs and interests when in power, causing alienation and resentment. Police strategies for elections should prioritise security for citizens’ participation, including training and local dialogue programmes to help and encourage police to build trust with communities. At present, most police capacity during elections goes to protecting politicians and electoral institutions.

Restoring people’s trust in politics and democracy means supporting and encouraging inclusive and responsive governance, and penalising corruption and undemocratic practices. Greater representation of politically or socially marginalised groups should be promoted, in particular women, young people and ethnic minorities, as well as building capacity for civil oversight of parliament and promoting internal democratisation of political parties. A practical measure can be to facilitate exchange between communities and local government, which can strengthen demand for participatory politics and transparency, locally and nationally.

**Natural resource governance**

Wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone were fought in part over access to natural resources, and were funded by them. But violence was also underpinned by interaction between poor governance and gross resource mismanagement. In response, Liberia and Sierra Leone have experienced the full range of available options to improve natural resource governance: military intervention, diamond certification, sanctions, and the Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative (EITI). Broad lessons from these interventions suggest that to be effective they need to be fast and flexible: they must respond to rapidly transforming resource sectors, and fast evolving conflict dynamics and revenue flows.

To have a clearer peacebuilding impact, resource governance reforms should also be built into peace talks and electoral campaigns, so that they become part of broader social discourse and debate, rather than remaining in the domain of elites. The breadth of interested and intervening parties involved in natural resource governance requires close interaction among them: UN sanctions committee expert panels, and peacekeeping and peacebuilding missions; INGOs and the investment
community, and local authorities, communities, business and civil society. Promoting and sharing information locally about the potential impact of resource extraction and development can sensitize and empower affected communities about their rights. A suggestion in this publication is to establish ‘resource forums’ – to facilitate exchange of information about resource sectors. These could help extractive companies and authorities to understand and update local communities and businesses. They could also promote consultation, to link official and corporate policies to local perspectives and concerns, in particular regarding livelihoods and land ownership.

Justice and security

Reforming Liberia’s security sector: the human factor
Many ordinary Liberians are wary of official structures for law and order. Rebuilding and reforming Liberia’s security sector has been slow, especially outside the capital where rural Liberian communities see very little state security presence and many people still feel unprotected and vulnerable. Police-to-citizen ratios are far lower in rural counties than in Monrovia and its environs – and are actually declining in many areas. Police presence is especially weak in Bong and Nimba, two of the most traditionally volatile counties. Meanwhile, rural Liberians take only four per cent of criminal cases and three per cent of civil cases to the formal court system.

Informal security structures have often filled gaps in law and order capabilities in remote and rural areas. A network of white-shirted Liberian ‘women peacekeepers’ have adapted wartime tactics of the women’s peace movement, using shame to persuade young men to withdraw from tense or violent confrontations; and the Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET) mobilizes its members to confront and arrest alleged perpetrators of domestic or sexual abuse and deliver them to the Liberian National Police for charging and prosecution. But policymakers find it difficult to engage with informal security actors. Informal structures can be controversial, or exacerbate inter-communal grievances. For example, some traditional Liberian practices still see rape as an inter-family rather than an individual issue, to be resolved between the perpetrator and the victim and her family through payment or even marriage.

But experience has shown that there are ways to reconcile formal, traditional and informal sectors. Helping local people to learn about their legal rights and options can contribute to developing mechanisms for justice that are locally legitimate and accountable. Dialogue between formal and traditional justice sectors can help to build synergies and a shared understanding for an agreed legal framework. Communities and civil society can work with customary or informal security actors, to regulate their conduct and increase their accountability to local people. Interaction with traditional justice and security mechanisms can also help them to reform and modernise. As discussed below, responses to land disputes have found innovative ways to engage with customary practices.

Mediating land disputes
In post-war Liberia, disputes over land ownership and rights are rife and a major source of tension. Many Liberians found their lands occupied when they returned after the war, leading to multiple claims to ownership and recurrent displacement. Many distrust or cannot afford formal justice mechanisms to settle land disputes. But women and youth are also wary of some traditional resolution structures that they see as discriminatory.

Mediation offers an alternative to formal and informal land dispute settlement, to help disputants arrive at an agreed and mutually beneficial outcome, while also addressing underlying – often war-related – grievances. The Norwegian Refugee Council’s mediation programme in Nimba County in Liberia is just one example of a project that integrates local culture and communities into its mediation approach. It works with local mediators, elders and other community members to promote local legitimacy and to help guarantee implementation of agreements reached. The programme is working with Liberia’s Land Commission and Land Dispute Resolution Taskforce, feeding in its learning and local experience and knowledge. The Commission is holding workshops with customary leaders and is developing an inventory of dispute resolution mechanisms, to try to understand land dispute problems facing rural Liberians and address tensions between formal and customary systems.

Reintegration and reconciliation

Working with alienated youth
The war cost a generation of young Liberians and Sierra Leoneans their education and destroyed their livelihood opportunities. Thousands of young people were left traumatised and struggling even to survive, and lacking social or political status. Poorly reintegrated and rehabilitated former young combatants are prone to being drawn back into violence – political and criminal, as well as mercenary activity in neighbouring states. Although disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programmes in Liberia and Sierra Leone have officially ended, many young ex-combatants remain mentally ‘mobilised’ ready to take up arms when opportunities arise.
To counter youth exclusion in Liberia and Sierra Leone, education and training programmes should better analyse labour markets to match skills to demand. Specific policy areas like land reform should include special provision for youth, who are especially disempowered in land allocations and initiatives to resolve land disputes. International political dialogue should include more engagement with political parties and especially their youth wings, to discourage youth ‘task force’ vigilantism during elections, and to support training and dialogue on democratisation. Sustainable reintegration requires reconciliation and psychological support in communities, so that youth feel more socially embedded.

Reconciling communities and nations
Mistrust and trauma are still widespread after the wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone. TRCs in both countries tried to set a framework for social healing, but TRC processes have been overly bureaucratic and remote from communities – and have ultimately failed to deliver change. From a peacebuilding perspective, Sierra Leone’s TRC report says many of the right things – making recommendations to fight corruption, decentralise economic autonomy and include youth and women in political decision-making. But the process was exclusive and was further compromised by overlap and confusion with the remit of the Special Court. Especially in Liberia, implementation of TRC recommendations has been limited and selective.

Communities in Sierra Leone understand that the war did not end when the guns fell silent: that there was a long way to go to translate this into sustainable peace. This process can begin by restoring victims’ dignity and providing opportunities for perpetrators to acknowledge the atrocities they committed, and to engage in processes of restorative justice. Poverty reduction strategies for Liberia and Sierra Leone need to place more emphasis on reconciliation. Initiatives led by organisations like Fambul Tok work with villages – their communities and leaders – to facilitate reconciliation and to help them find a basis to rebuild lives and livelihoods. In 2011, Fambul Tok teamed up with other Sierra Leonean civil society partners to launch a Wi na wan fambul (We are one family) campaign for national unity. This is aimed at elections in 2012, so that their conduct will be based on tolerance and non-violence, and so that the election process itself can contribute to national reconciliation, and subsequently to democratic consolidation.

Local capacity and international support
International engagement in Liberia and Sierra Leone is diminishing: both direct, such as the presence of UN peacekeepers; and indirect, such as budgetary or technical support, or development assistance.

Case studies in this Accord Issue have illustrated a range of locally-led initiatives in both countries, which can help fill gaps in national capacity and balance the focus of assistance to place more weight on reconciling relationships as a key basis for future stability and progress. They have also shown ways in which peacebuilding actors – national and international, state and non-state – can work with and support local capacity. The challenge for international engagement in particular is how to hand over ownership while not abdicating responsibility?