Consolidating peace
Liberia and Sierra Leone
Consolidating peace

Liberia and Sierra Leone
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# Acronyms

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<td>ACLED</td>
<td>Armed Conflict and Events Dataset</td>
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<tr>
<td>AFL</td>
<td>Armed Forces of Liberia</td>
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<tr>
<td>AFRC</td>
<td>Armed Forces Revolutionary Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>CLA</td>
<td>Community Legal Advisor</td>
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<tr>
<td>CMI</td>
<td>Crisis Management Initiative</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSC</td>
<td>Country Specific Configurations</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSO</td>
<td>Civil Society Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>DDR</td>
<td>Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration</td>
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<tr>
<td>DO</td>
<td>District Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRC</td>
<td>Democratic Republic of Congo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECOMOG</td>
<td>Economic Community of West African States Monitoring and Observation Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECOWARN</td>
<td>Economic Community of West African States Warning and Response Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECOVAS</td>
<td>Economic Community of West African States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EITI</td>
<td>Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative</td>
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<tr>
<td>ERU</td>
<td>Emergency Response Unit</td>
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<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>FPU</td>
<td>Formed Police Unit</td>
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<td>GEMAP</td>
<td>Governance and Economic Management Assistance Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICLA</td>
<td>Information, Counselling and Legal Assistance</td>
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<tr>
<td>INGO</td>
<td>International Non-governmental Organisation</td>
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<td>IPBS</td>
<td>Integrated Peacebuilding Strategies</td>
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<td>JPC</td>
<td>Liberian Catholic Justice and Peace Commission</td>
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<td>LNP</td>
<td>Liberia National Police</td>
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<tr>
<td>LURD</td>
<td>Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy</td>
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<tr>
<td>MIA</td>
<td>Ministry of Internal Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>MODEL</td>
<td>Model for Democracy in Liberia</td>
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<td>MOJ</td>
<td>Ministry of Justice</td>
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<td>NEC</td>
<td>National Electoral Commission</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-governmental organisation</td>
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<td>NMJD</td>
<td>Network Movement for Justice and Development</td>
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<td>NPFL</td>
<td>National Patriotic Front of Liberia</td>
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<td>NRC</td>
<td>Norwegian Refugee Council</td>
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<td>ONS</td>
<td>Office of National Security</td>
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<td>PBC</td>
<td>United Nations Peacebuilding Commission</td>
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<td>United Nations Peacebuilding Fund</td>
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<td>PBSO</td>
<td>United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office</td>
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<td>PSU</td>
<td>Police Support Unit</td>
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<td>RUF</td>
<td>Revolutionary United Front</td>
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<td>SFCG</td>
<td>Search For Common Ground</td>
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<td>SSR</td>
<td>Security Sector Reform</td>
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<td>TRC</td>
<td>Truth and Reconciliation Commission</td>
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<td>UNAMSIL</td>
<td>United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone</td>
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<td>UNIOSIL</td>
<td>United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone</td>
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<td>UNMIL</td>
<td>United Nations Mission in Liberia</td>
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<td>UP</td>
<td>United Party</td>
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<td>West Africa Network for Peacebuilding</td>
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<td>WCPU</td>
<td>Women and Children Protection Unit</td>
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<td>WDC</td>
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<td>WIPNET</td>
<td>Women in Peacebuilding Network</td>
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Map of Liberia and Sierra Leone
Foreword

Ambassador Said Djinnit
Ambassador Said Djinnit is Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for West Africa

The recent history of Sierra Leone and Liberia shows that post-conflict transition is a complex and long-term process, which requires time, resources and continued commitment. The armed conflicts in these countries did not only lead to the disintegration of state institutions and devastating consequences for their populations, but these tragedies also represented some of the gravest threats to regional stability that the West African sub-region has ever faced.

Following the end of the wars, Liberia and Sierra Leone engaged in strenuous rebuilding processes, with the strong support of the international community, including the tremendous added value of their respective United Nations operations, the UN Operation in Liberia (UNMIL) and the UN Integrated Office in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL), both working in synergy with respective UN Country Teams.

The results achieved so far are impressive. The two countries have made great strides towards political stability, with legitimate authorities established through competitive elections. This progress has further consolidated regional stability, while giving new impetus to regional integration.

Despite these gains, however, the situation in the two countries remains fragile, and continues to require vigorous support from the international community. Liberia and Sierra Leone must overcome the numerous political and socioeconomic challenges they face. These challenges include strengthening democratic institutions and national security, as well as building an economy capable of providing security, jobs and basic social services.

In Liberia, although great efforts have been channelled into key recovery areas including security sector reform, infrastructural development and the expansion of state authority, the country is still confronted with numerous security and political problems. Police and justice capacity remains an urgent priority and youth unemployment continues to be very high. Besides, the impact of the crisis in neighbouring Côte d’Ivoire, in particular the influx of refugees and ex-combatants, poses serious threats to Liberia’s fragile stability.

In Sierra Leone huge strides towards sustainable peace have also been registered and the country stands out today as a positive example of security sector reform in a post-conflict situation. The peaceful and democratic election of the opposition leader as head of state in 2007 demonstrates the important efforts the country has made in its recovery process to consolidate democratic governance. But despite significant institutional reforms,
Sierra Leone still faces critical threats to its stability, including the worsening socioeconomic malaise, slow progress in the fight against corruption and dwindling international support.

The overall situation shows that while both Liberia and Sierra Leone have achieved much, a great deal remains to be done if a satisfactory level of stability is to be attained. For example, there has been the challenge of the crucial general elections for Liberia in 2011 – and scheduled for Sierra Leone in August 2012. Dramatically high levels of youth unemployment in situations of modest economic growth are also a critical challenge that both countries face.

This special Accord issue on Liberia and Sierra Leone provides fresh perspectives on the post-conflict transitions in these countries and on the many challenges to their success. UNMIL and UNIOSIL have played and should continue to play critical roles in fulfilling the great expectations of Liberians and Sierra Leoneans. However, unless realistic and practical long-term follow-up mechanisms are established by their respective governments to build on ongoing progress, the countries’ high dependency on these operations may paradoxically become the Achilles’ heel in the international community’s efforts to restore peace and stability.

I am confident that reading these articles will not only assist in understanding the critical issues involved, but also encourage creative thinking on what can be done to prevent conflict and support the emergence of stable and peaceful states, throughout the West African sub-region and beyond.

Said Djinnit is the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for West Africa since April 2008. Prior to this appointment, he was Commissioner for Peace and Security at the African Union, formerly Organisation of the African Unity, where he held various positions notably as Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs.
Section 1

Introduction

Peacebuilding in Liberia and Sierra Leone

Women participate in the “16 days of Activism” campaign, launched by the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) to strengthen the rights of women and stop gender-based violence // © UN Photo/Christopher Herwig
Introduction:

peacebuilding in Liberia and Sierra Leone
Elizabeth Drew and Alexander Ramsbotham

Almost ten years on from the official end of wars in Sierra Leone (2002) and Liberia (2003), attention is shifting from post-war peacebuilding to longer-term development. It is an apt time to consider the headway that has been made, the challenges that lie ahead, and the lessons that can be learnt.

This Issue of Accord draws on multiple perspectives from across societies in both countries to explore comparative lessons and examine progress, building on analysis and recommendations from previous Accord publications on Liberia [Issue 1: 1996] and Sierra Leone [Issue 9: 2000] [see BOX 1]. Both countries have seen a massive reduction in violent conflict, the return of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), successive elections regarded internationally as ‘free and fair’, and the drawing down of UN peacekeeping missions. All of these milestones point to the road to recovery and fuel international expectations that Liberia and Sierra Leone are increasingly stable and able to make it on their own.

While Liberia and Sierra Leone are both making progress away from war, there are still challenges to the long-term sustainability of peace. Underlying causes of conflict persist in familiar and new forms, and social and political violence and unrest still affect the lives of many. Weaknesses in governance, justice and security, and reconciliation undermine trust between people and state. Many national structures, institutions and services remain elitist, corrupt or centralised, and initiatives to repair or build relationships – at local and national levels – have been neglected, fragmented or disconnected from communities.

Political and institutional reform and reconstruction is slow, and across many sectors in Liberia and Sierra Leone faces many obstacles. Customary and traditional structures and initiatives can play essential roles to fill gaps.

Peacebuilding in Liberia and Sierra Leone: comparative analysis and learning
The conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone were deeply intertwined, while responses for peacebuilding and justice also show many parallels. A combined analysis offers useful comparisons for peacebuilding learning, and an opportunity to explore key challenges regarding peace settlements and their implementation.

The original Liberia and Sierra Leone Accord publications were produced when respective peace processes were collapsing: the 1995 Abuja Accords had clearly failed to deliver meaningful peace in Liberia; and the 1999 Lomé Peace Agreement in Sierra Leone broke down soon after it was reached. Numerous peace accords had previously failed to gain traction. Since then, various peacebuilding interventions have helped to end the civil wars and both countries are now classed as ‘post-conflict’.

There have been corresponding national peacebuilding initiatives, such as Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRCs), as well as international engagement: Liberian warlord and former president Charles Taylor has been tried in the Special Court for Sierra Leone; and there have been major regional and international peacekeeping deployments in both countries, which are now also on the agenda of the UN Peacebuilding Commission.

The questions today are: what impact have interventions had? Have Liberia and Sierra Leone really moved on? And what challenges remain to consolidate peace?
The opening section of this publication looks at broad dynamics and trends of conflict and peacebuilding in Liberia and Sierra Leone.

Caitriona Dowd and Clionadh Raleigh describe patterns of violence in Liberia and Sierra Leone from 1997 to 2011, using analysis, trends and data from the Armed Conflict Location and Events Dataset (ACLED). Data are derived from media reports, humanitarian agencies and research publications. Conflict and peace evolve over time and across space. Post-war violence has tended to peak around elections – local and national – and has persisted through cross-border and regional dynamics, notably mercenary activity. Data and analysis suggest that policymakers should pay more attention to the remobilisation of former fighters from both countries’ civil wars, to counter their involvement in various forms of post-conflict political, criminal and mercenary violence.

In an interview with Accord, Ambassador Prince Zeid of Jordan, Chair of the Liberia Configuration of the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), highlights UN priorities for Liberia: security sector reform, rule of law and national reconciliation. Many legacies of violence have survived the official end of hostilities and there is work to be done to build functioning domestic capability. Local civil society and communities have much to offer. They understand the country and culture in a way that the international community never can. But there is still the need for a national frame of reference for reconciliation, as well as for external support: while local communities can identify

Box 1

Why had 13 peace accords in Liberia collapsed up to 1996? Why did Sierra Leone revert to crisis within a year of the 1999 Lomé Peace Agreement?

Peace settlements and governance: Increasing concessions to armed groups and undemocratic elites in peace processes and agreements in Liberia and Sierra Leone progressively eroded the legitimacy of civilian political authority.

In Liberia efforts to include all armed groups in peace negotiations with the capacity or inclination to wreck peace meant that the authority of the Liberian government was steadily ceded to powerful armed factions. In Sierra Leone negotiations focused on including rebel leader Foday Sankoh of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in the belief that others would follow and accept a settlement – despite the fact that Sankoh’s primary objective was not peace but the violent pursuit of power.

These approaches signalled that violence and criminality could be legitimised as a route to political power and undermined the credibility of post-settlement authorities, which were in reality riven by mutual suspicion and factional interests. Accord suggested that peace processes should be broader and more inclusive in order to gain legitimacy and traction, and that peace interventions that protected and promoted civil society could help achieve this.

Economies of war and peace: Diamonds sustained violence in Liberia and Sierra Leone – funding RUF and guaranteeing its supply of weapons, and underpinning rebel leader Charles Taylor’s quest for power in Liberia; they also provoked it: some of the most intensive fighting in Sierra Leone was over control of mining areas. Mismanagement of resources – including diamonds, as well as timber and rubber – were closely linked to poor governance, corruption and poverty that were key conflict dynamics in both countries.

International and national structures compounded problems. Sierra Leonean diamonds were welcomed by an unregulated global market – trafficked via Liberia across the porous border. Lomé appointed Sankoh Chair of Sierra Leone’s Commission for the Management of Strategic Mineral Resources, National Reconstruction and Development. Accord advised that processes that perpetuated and rewarded perpetrators needed to be transformed, for instance through innovative approaches to arms and trade embargoes that focused on peacebuilding, or income-generation programmes that offered alternative livelihoods for fighters.

International involvement: Regional and international engagement was characterised by incoherence, inconsistency and indolence. In Liberia, West African regional interventions were undermined by conflicts of interest among member states, which diverged between diplomatic and military responses, and pro- and anti-stances towards rebel leader Charles Taylor. In Sierra Leone, ECOWAS’ efforts to broker the return to power of President Kabbah in 1998 failed, while RUF took hostage hundreds of UN peacekeepers in 2000, threatening the collapse of the mission.

Accord recommended that external interventions be much better coordinated, with a clear, long-term focus on peacebuilding. International support for regional engagement should prioritise supporting capacity, for instance to accelerate and professionalise deployment of observers.
challenges and contribute to solutions, there are important lessons from global experience to help countries deal with their past.

Emmanuel Bombande, in a second interview, describes how he co-founded the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding in 1998 in reaction to the prevalence of military responses to conflict in the 1990s, such as ECOWAS’ intervention in Liberia, and the absence of organisation to coordinate peacebuilding. Political exclusion, lack of opportunities for youth and cross-border conflict dynamics are among threats to peace today. Many conflict responses – such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions – failed to reach communities. WANEP concentrates on bringing people together to promote social cohesion through reconciliation. On a regional level, WANEP coordinates civil engagement with the ECOWAS Warning and Response Network. WANEP’s relationship with ECOWAS has helped it to incorporate a more bottom-up approach to peacebuilding.

Goverance – democracy, decentralisation and natural resources

International policy uses ‘free and fair’ elections as a yardstick to measure peace. But in post-conflict contexts elections can do as much harm as good. Frances Fortune and Oscar Bloh describe relationships between elections, democratisation, violence and peace in Liberia and Sierra Leone – and their own experiences with Search for Common Ground to promote people’s participation. At a policy level, an over-emphasis on technical issues – such as observing and monitoring polling day – misses more fundamental priorities of promoting inclusion, trust, transparency and human security.

Paul Koroma looks at political decentralisation in Sierra Leone. Local government structures were destroyed in the 1970s as power and resources were concentrated in Freetown. A Local Government Act was introduced in March 2004 to help central government reach and connect beyond the capital, and to encourage development and political inclusion. But in reality, implementing decentralisation has been highly inconsistent and often inappropriate: undermining rather than complementing traditional governance structures, while allowing legacies of patronage to prevail.

Philippe le Billon describes initiatives to improve natural resource governance. Diamonds, timber, rubber and iron-ore played significant roles in wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone, through ‘resource curse’ [resource mismanagement and weak governance], ‘conflict resources’ [which finance belligerents] and ‘resource conflicts’ [fighting over resources]. Formalising extractive sectors can help reduce links with violence: providing that revenues are well managed and conflicts with local communities are prevented. Liberia and Sierra Leone have experienced some of the earliest and most direct forms of governance intervention, and both governments have committed to greater resource revenue transparency through the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI).

Justice and security

How safe do Liberians feel today? Richard Reeve and Jackson Speare draw on consultations with local communities in Liberia, using a human security approach to reveal gaps between formal efforts to reform the country’s security sector and people’s perceptions of their own vulnerability. Police presence is especially weak in rural areas, and women remain wary of state security structures. The withdrawal of UN peacekeepers can only exacerbate gaps and deficiencies. Many Liberians are reliant on customary security arrangements, but these are diverse and can contradict international human rights and national constitutional standards.

Based on their experiences with the Carter Center to promote justice in post-war Liberia, Pewee Flomoku and Counsellor Lemuel Reeves review both traditional and formal justice systems, and in particular how to reconcile the two. Initiatives to improve formal justice structures – training judges, magistrates, prosecutors and public defenders, and renovating court buildings – have not

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**BOX 2**

**Participatory Analysis**

This Accord publication has used a participatory methodology to inform its structure and focus. A joint analysis workshop in February 2011 in Freetown brought together a range of Liberian and Sierra Leonean actors to discuss current threats to peace and security, how peacebuilding initiatives have responded to these and the main peacebuilding challenges ahead.

Participants included: community and women’s groups; local and international NGOs; and representatives of Sierra Leonean Paramount Chiefs, political parties and the Office of National Security. Policy workshops in Monrovia and in Freetown in June 2011 and in Brussels and London in December 2011 reviewed early lessons and conclusions from the research.

Discussions highlighted three common challenges to consolidate peace in Liberia and Sierra Leone, relating to: 1) governance – democracy, decentralisation and natural resources; 2) justice and security; 3) reconciliation and reintegration.
reached citizens, especially outside Monrovia. Many rural Liberians necessarily pursue justice through traditional channels, including chiefs, elders or spiritual leaders.

Many Liberians returning to their lands after the war found them occupied. Multiple claims to ownership have contributed to cyclic displacement. Liberians tend to distrust the formal justice system or have little access to it as a means to resolve territorial disputes. Juliette Syn and colleagues describe their efforts with the Norwegian Refugee Council to address land disputes in Nimba County in Liberia, facilitating engagement with both traditional and nationa institutions, and offering mediation as an alternative.

Reconciliation and reintegration
The TRC in Sierra Leone was more a UN than a national initiative, while the TRC process struggled to access remote areas. Implementing TRC recommendations has been inconsistent and is now a low priority, nationally and internationally. Today victims and perpetrators are neighbours, but with no opportunity for reconciliation.

Jon Caulker launched Fambul Tok (‘Family Talk’) in 2008 in Kailahun District, where the conflict began, to support locally led, community reconciliation. Village bonfire ceremonies provide a ‘sacred space’ for victims and perpetrators to share experiences, apologise and forgive. Fambul Tok is developing initiatives to make local reconciliation self-sustaining, and to expand the programme to the national level.

Excluded youth in Liberia and Sierra Leone remain prone to involvement in political and criminal violence, and mercenary activity. Weak demobilisation processes have failed to reintegrate young former combatants back into society or provide them with alternative livelihoods. Peacebuilding initiatives and political reforms to educate, employ and empower Liberian and Sierra Leonean youth have failed to match the scale of the problem. Ibrahim Bangura and Irma Specht use interviews with young Liberian and Sierra Leonean men and women to shed light on their life experiences – the challenges they face, what leads them back into violence, and their perceptions of national and international youth policy.

Conclusion
A final section of the publication draws together conclusions from the case studies, and makes suggestions for peacebuilding policy and practice: how lessons from the past can support people to consolidate peace. It argues that peacebuilding policy and practice needs to concentrate more on people: on repairing and building relationships among communities, and between communities and the state; and on developing more participatory politics and society that includes marginalised groups. And it suggests that customary practices and mechanisms can help deliver essential services across a range sectors, and that local civil society can facilitate national and international policy engagement with them.

Alexander Ramsbotham joined Conciliation Resources in August 2009 as Accord Series Editor. Before this he was a research fellow in the international programme at the Institute for Public Policy Research. He worked as specialist adviser to the House of Lords European Union (EU) Select Committee in its inquiry into the EU Strategy for Africa, before which he was head of the Peace and Security Programme at the United Nations Association-UK. He has also been an associate fellow in the International Security Programme at Chatham House. Alexander completed a PhD in July 2011.

Elizabeth Drew is Head of Programmes, Peacebuilding, at Sudanese Development Initiative (SUDEIA), a national non-governmental organisation based in Khartoum. She previously worked for the UK Department for International Development’s Conflict Policy Team and, most recently, on the Accord series and International Peacebuilding policy at Conciliation Resources. Elizabeth holds an MPhil in International Relations from Cambridge University.
Mapping conflict across Liberia and Sierra Leone

Caitriona Dowd and Clionadh Raleigh

This article describes patterns of conflict and violence in Liberia and Sierra Leone from 1997 to 2011, a period that coincides with the onset of the second Liberian civil war (1999–2003) and the second phase of the Sierra Leonean civil war (1999–2002).

Each state experienced an intensification of conflict events to devastating levels before the official end to hostilities led to de-escalation. But different forms of violent conflict persist post-war: Sierra Leone has continued to experience relatively high numbers of battles between armed combatants, while in Liberia there has been more violence against civilians.

Analysis, trends and data below draw on the Armed Conflict Location and Events Dataset (ACLED), which collected information on the geographic location of all reported conflict events between January 1997 and 2011 in 50 countries including Liberia and Sierra Leone. Data include the date and location of conflict events, the type of event, the perpetrators and victims of violence, and changes in territorial control over time. Data are derived from media reports from war zones, humanitarian agencies and research publications. There is no minimum number of fatalities per event for inclusion in the dataset.

Conflict across time: patterns of violence

Liberia

Residual rebel and militia groups from the first civil war (1989–96) created a precarious security context in the years preceding the outbreak of the second civil war, which began when the rebel group Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) launched attacks in Lofa County, north-west Liberia in 1999. In early 2002, then President Charles Taylor imposed a state of emergency as LURD fighters moved closer to the capital. Although
government forces regained territory in 2002, the following year witnessed the opening of a second front as a new rebel group, the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL), emerged in the south-east.

The Accra Peace Agreement in 2003 marked the end of the Taylor government and UN peacekeeping forces were able to secure the Liberian state relatively quickly: there was a dramatic drop in the recorded incidence of conflict events between 2003 and 2004 (see Graph 1). Several non-rebel groups were also active in Liberia’s conflict. Political supporters of the Unity Party and the Congress for Democratic Change participated in violent clashes throughout the war. Ethnic militia violence primarily involving Gio and Mano ethnic groups spiked in 2003, linked for reasons to do with their traditional support for Taylor’s government.

At the peak of the war in 2003, over 240 violent events were recorded across Liberia. Since the official cessation of hostilities, violence has continued at a much lower level. Post-settlement, Liberia has experienced an average of 19 violent conflict events per year (2004–10), generally following pro- and anti-Taylor stances.

Sierra Leone

Levels of violence were highest in 1998 due to continued activity by the rebel Revolutionary United Front (RUF), who were allied to the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC). The signing of the Lomé Peace Agreement and the establishment of the UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) in 1999 had a limited impact on violence. But the implementation of the peace agreement and international military support led to a sharp decrease in fighting in mid-2001. The civil war was officially declared over in January 2002.

Several political groups also engaged in violence through political militia activity throughout the recorded period, including the All People’s Congress, the Sierra Leone People’s Party and the People’s Movement for Democratic Change. Violence increased in 2002–03, and again in 2007–08, corresponding with national and local elections, respectively. Violence
Tomoo Kikugawa, Armand Meha, and HBangoy Abdoulaye

remained relatively high for peacetime through 2008 and 2009 (see Graph 2). Local council elections may have provided opportunities for political militia attacks on opponents.

**Conflict across space: the geographic spread of violence**

In Liberia, the majority of battles during the civil war took place in north-west Lofa County, concentrated in Kolahun district. Montserrado County also experienced very high levels of battles, with a predictable concentration in the capital, Monrovia. These areas also have distinct violence profiles. In Lofa, violent conflict primarily involved military forces fighting rebel groups over territory as well as fighting among armed groups. Such battles were more than twice as common in Lofa than in Montserrado, which experienced greater numbers of riots and protests (46 events overall compared to just two in Lofa). Battles in Montserrado mainly involved militant political party supporters.

In Sierra Leone, battles tended to be concentrated in the northern territories, with 357 battles between armed combatants reported, compared to 204 in the east, the region with the second highest levels of violence between 1999 and 2011. The majority of violent changes in territorial control took place in the north. Some concentrations coincide with the presence of natural resources, but not all.

Violent events in Liberia spread geographically in the months before peace agreements. Parts of the country witnessed violence for the first time in the run-up to the Accra talks in June 1999. The proximity of peace talks may have provided incentives for territorial acquisition, either to strengthen conflict actors’ bargaining power at critical junctures or to seize resources before legitimating gains in the peace talks.

In Sierra Leone, on the other hand, this pattern is not as evident in the run-up to the Lomé Peace Agreement in July 1999, although new contestations did take place in Songo in the west and Yele in the centre. The months before the ceasefire that led to the decision to implement Lomé in 2001 are also not characterised by a marked geographic expansion in violence.

**Cross-border violence**

Cross-border conflict activity between Liberia and Sierra Leone peaked in 2001, coinciding with a sudden increase in violent events in Liberia, though violent incidents in Sierra Leone were declining year-on-year at this point.
[see Graph 3]. 2008 saw another small increase in cross-border activity, although the overall level of regional conflict has dropped dramatically since the end of both civil wars.

Cross-border conflict actors between Liberia and Sierra Leone included LURD and RUF. The official military forces most active across borders were Guinean and Liberian. Many reports of cross-border activity identify mercenaries active in neighbouring states; the continuation of this phenomenon post-war – most recently with Liberian mercenaries participating in the Côte d’Ivoire conflict – poses a threat to regional stability.

Peace agreements and beyond
Despite escalations in fighting in the run-up to the talks, the 2003 peace agreements in Liberia brought an immediate reduction in levels of violence. In Sierra Leone, peace agreements had a less dramatic impact: reduced violence here is more closely linked to disarmament from mid-2001 (Map 1 illustrates how violence reduces spatially and temporally in response to peace agreements).

Violence against civilians constitutes around 30 per cent of post-war conflict events in both countries. This reflects wartime patterns; for example, in Liberia, LURD perpetrated a high proportion of violent acts against civilians – possibly the result of a deliberate strategy or of a lack of control over troops. In the post-settlement context, this form of violence, along with riots and protests, links closely with electoral cycles, suggesting that democratic contestation remains a potential trigger for violence, and that civilians will continue to bear the brunt.

Former combatants are remobilised around political contestations in patterns of organisation similar to wartime. The role of remobilised former combatants in electoral ‘task forces’ or ‘squads’ suggests that militias – affiliated explicitly or implicitly with parent political organisations – play a central role in mobilising voters and intimidating opponents through violence.

Although violence in Sierra Leone was low relative to wartime, conflict event reports in 2002 indicate that increased violence coincided with elections and was concentrated in Freetown. Similarly, in Liberia during the election year of 2005, violent riots and protests constituted over one third of overall violent events, mainly in Monrovia.

Conflict data-mapping and peacebuilding
Tracking conflict patterns over time and space helps to see more clearly how violence mutates and develops:

» What types of groups are involved and what are their objectives?
» Who are the victims?
» What events or other stimuli cause violence to intensify, relocate or to diminish?
Map 1: Event types 1997–2011

- **Battle – Rebels overtake territory**
- **Battle – Government regains territory**
- **Battle – No change of territory**
- **Violence against civilians**
- **Riots/Protests**
Levels of violence have dropped in Liberia and Sierra Leone following the official end of the wars. But violence persists and, if left unaddressed, still poses a significant risk to peace. Of primary importance is addressing the violence that surrounds electoral cycles at all levels. In Sierra Leone, for instance, high levels of violence against civilians in 2008 coincided with local council elections, which serve as an explosive arena for ‘decentralised’ violent contestation.

A second security threat relates to regional conflict activity. Although levels of cross-border violence have reduced dramatically since the end of the civil wars, several reports of cross-border activity have recorded the presence of regional mercenaries in neighbouring countries. Persistent pressures emanating from neighbouring states mean that both Sierra Leone and Liberia are vulnerable to external threats (although domestic and regional threats are not mutually exclusive), not just through violence, but also through the economic and institutional impact of neighbouring instability.

Patterns of domestic and regional violence have involved the remobilisation of former combatants, either in the military wings of established political parties or through involvement in cross-border mercenary activity. Post-war disarmament and demobilisation programmes have contributed to a substantial reduction in overall levels of violence. But preventing future instability relies on implementing them fully – especially among specific target groups. There also needs to be much more emphasis on reintegrating former fighters back into society to reduce the likelihood that ex-combatants will be drawn back into fighting. An effective peacebuilding policy needs to pay attention to the whole process of disarmament, demobilisation – and not least reintegration for former combatants.

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Caitriona Dowd holds an MSc in Development Studies from the London School of Economics, and a BA in History and Political Science from Trinity College Dublin. Her research interests include pastoralism and violent conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa. She is currently working on humanitarian programming for Somalia, stationed in Nairobi, Kenya.
The UN Peacebuilding Commission and Liberia’s transition

A conversation with Ambassador Prince Zeid of Jordan

Ambassador Prince Zeid is the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) Chair of the Configuration for Liberia

What is the UN’s overarching strategy for peace in Liberia?
I chair the PBC Configuration for Liberia, but I am not a UN official [see BOX 4 for an overview of the PBC]. From my own point of view the two prerequisites for any well-functioning state are a basic security environment and a working justice system. The UN’s benchmarks for Liberia essentially focus on security sector reform, rule of law and national reconciliation, particularly ensuring that the police are well trained. But it has become clear to the Liberian government that they need help with their judicial structures. Courts, for example, have been hampered by the absence of a simple case management system.

How does PBC relate to other UN bodies supporting peace in Liberia?
There is no established pattern as to how PBC integrates itself into peacebuilding exercises. Much depends on the personality of the individual chairing the Country-Specific Configuration. The role is evolving; for me it is about being honest about the kind of help countries like Liberia need.

In Liberia, we have open discussions with the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) about how it directs its programming. I have excellent relationships with Special Representative of the Secretary General in the UN peacekeeping Mission (UNMIL) and with the Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support, who oversees PBF and the Peacebuilding Support Office. Much depends on these relationships. Over time we hope to institutionalise these, but as long as there can be frank discussion and a common position can be found, it can work.

What are the implications of the ‘Statement of Mutual Commitments’ in terms of who ‘owns’ Liberia’s peacebuilding agenda?
The Statement of Mutual Commitments is a joint framework for peacebuilding and serves as the instrument of PBC engagement agreed between the PBC Liberia Configuration and the Liberian government.

Without these essentials in place, the state could be in trouble when the UN moves out. So our job is to ensure that the courts, for example, function well, that there is a good set of correctional facilities and a well-trained police force.
The Statement of Mutual Commitments was developed from an assessment report produced after a PBC mission travelled to Liberia in summer 2010. It was then agreed to with the government. But the more you bore into a particular problem, the more you begin to understand it and the more the original set of ideas has to change. The statement gave us foundations, but we need a peacebuilding programme that we can adapt over time. This is why we have agreed to review the Statement of Mutual Commitments every nine months in the light of experiences on the ground.

Relationships between international and donor representatives, the private sector, civil society and the Liberian government need to be carefully balanced. If peacebuilding ideas are going to work, they must be authentically Liberian. Then, we in the international community can take them on, embroider them, and draw on lessons from other places.

Like in any post-war situation, the conflict in Liberia is still largely there. Yes, the fighting has stopped and there is a peace agreement, but things are not cohesive. Liberia is a very impressive country and there is plenty of talent from the highest level of office holder down to the district level. But on the question of who is in the peacebuilding ‘driving seat’ in Liberia, I do not like to overplay local ownership. If you hand everything over to the government they will themselves tell you they cannot achieve all their ambitions.

How does PBC engage with civil society in Liberia?

Some of the most interesting discussions I have had in Liberia have been with civil society. Civil society is integral to a comprehensive understanding. The international community will never get to know the country and its cultural rhythms the way its inhabitants do. We can only have a basic understanding, and hope that through our learning from elsewhere we can perhaps offer something useful.

There are also many international NGOs (INGOs) doing outstanding work in partnership with local communities. I worry, though, about what happens when they leave. INGOs need to work towards putting themselves out of business, getting local communities to understand how to do the same work so they can continue it in the longer term.

What is happening regarding national reconciliation?

National reconciliation is vital. Some in the development community feel that you can rebuild infrastructure, train people and have peace. But bigoted, charismatic leaders can whip up sentiments that have never been dealt with after the end of war and upset the peace that was seemingly there.

There is no national reconciliation strategy yet – nothing threading all the disparate ideas together. But in 2011 we have spoken to the President and the articulation of a strategy is going to be led by the Minister of Internal Affairs, in coordination with the national Good Governance Commission and others. I hope the architecture will go beyond the ministerial level. A national reconciliation strategy is long-term, so it has to be supra-ministerial to survive changes of government.

Also, going through the motions of reconciliation without working towards a common version of history can have

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**BOX 4**

**The United Nations Peacebuilding Commission**

The [UN Peacebuilding Commission](http://www.un.org/en/peacebuilding/) (PBC) is mandated to fulfil the following functions:

- Assemble and organise actors to marshal resources, advise on integrated strategies for post-conflict peacebuilding and recovery
- Focus international attention on reconstruction and institution-building in post-conflict environments
- Improve coordination of UN and other peacebuilding actors: develop best practice, promote predictable financing and sustain international attention

PBC comprises three bodies:

- **Organisational Committee**: includes 31 UN Member States to set the PBC agenda
- **Country-Specific Configurations (CSCs)**: consider peacebuilding interventions in individual countries and develop Integrated Peacebuilding Strategies (IPBS); CSCs comprise the Organisational Committee, the country under consideration, regional states and organisations, financial, troop and civilian police contributors and UN representatives, and regional and international financial institutions
- **Working Group on Lessons Learned**: analyses global experiences and best practices

The [Peacebuilding Support Office](http://www.un.org/en/peacebuilding/) (PBSO) works with PBC to provide advice and accompany countries on the PBC agenda; administers the Peacebuilding Fund; foster coherence and coordination, and promote innovative peacebuilding practices.

The [Peacebuilding Fund](http://www.un.org/en/peacebuilding/) (PBF) “support[s] activities, actions, programmes and organisations that seek to build a lasting peace in countries emerging from conflict”.

at best a temporary ‘tranquiliser’ effect – until the next conflict comes. In Lofa county in 2010 there were all the trappings of a reconciliation process that seemed to be working until, on the basis of a rumour, there were suddenly violent clashes and the burning of homes.

We need to anchor reconciliation in a national frame of reference: a single narrative about what happened that all can agree and subscribe to – ‘these are the injustices that I inflicted on you and that you inflicted on me’. A fundamental point is to create a historical commission and establish an archive. Most developing countries have something called an archive, but these are not archives where the documents are vetted, organised and released. Alongside this, you need a historical commission because if each group has a different version of history and its own memory, then you do not have the conditions to create a stable environment.

How might community views or approaches be incorporated into a national vision for reconciliation?
This has to be addressed very carefully. Once a historic commission is set up and begins to produce results, it could introduce community ‘palava hut’ mechanisms to bring in local discussions [palava huts provide space for community leaders to resolve disputes and settle conflicts; in Liberia they evolved after the war – people use them to acknowledge wrongs and seek forgiveness and acceptance from the community].

This enables ‘reckoning’, where each group examines its own past and can recognise a common point of reference. Without reckoning there can be no reconciliation.

Local communities behave in a manner far more mature than parliament. But you still need a national frame of reference. Palava huts are very useful for dealing with local community disputes, but not with deeper issues. When I was in Sanniquellie, north-east Liberia, a Liberian colleague said, “We can sort out the land dispute in the palava hut, but we still have prejudices against one another and there will be bigotry as well”.

I worry that many INGOs believe that all the answers lie in the field and the grassroots. I think there are some key lessons to be drawn and some ingenious things that can come out of local experiences, but it does not necessarily equate to a broader strategy to develop a durable positive peace.

Every community I have gone to see in Liberia can tell you what the problem is from their perspective; but they do not really have the remedy. The remedy has to be gleaned from global experience, because most countries cannot deal with their past. Every country has something to be ashamed about, such as the treatment of minorities or of neighbours, or colonial experiences. The external impetus helps show that they are not unique as well as providing advice on how to reconcile with the wrongs of the past.

What can Liberia learn from other experiences regarding accountability for war crimes and other atrocities?
You cannot simply dispose of the past. People do not just forget things. You need accountability. Multiple amnesties that were issued by various South American governments to their predecessors have all been discredited. Bangladesh now has a commission to investigate crimes committed in 1971. When Liberia is able to take such measures, I think it should. If it does not, longer-term reconciliation will be threatened.

But the court system in Liberia does not currently have capacity to deal with these sorts of investigations and trials. The Truth and Reconciliation Act is very clear that the government shall implement accountability measures, but it does not state which particular government: it could be an administration in 10 years’ time. Liberia needs time to build capacity and then decide whether and when to go ahead with investigations and prosecutions. While there is appreciation that accountability is needed, there is also the realisation that the government is not in a position to pursue it at the moment.

How might PBC work with customary and local justice and dispute resolution mechanisms?
I have discussed this a lot with the UN Executive Representative in Sierra Leone. I agree with him that in the absence of state mechanisms you can refer to some traditional practices. They can work well for civil cases; you can embroider traditional practices onto the civil court system. But for criminal cases it is not so simple.

It is easy to empower traditional mechanisms but difficult to later say, “we are not going to fund you anymore; now we are going to work on the state”. This creates a lot of bitterness. I think it is much better to invest in a fair formal justice system in which everyone has confidence.

PrincZeid is Jordan’s Permanent Representative to the United Nations. In September 2010, he was nominated as PBC Chair of the Configuration for Liberia. He also serves on the advisory bodies to the Institute for Historical Justice and Reconciliation and for the World Development Report 2011 as well as playing a central role in the establishment of the International Criminal Court. He received his commission as an officer in the Jordanian desert police prior to serving as a Political Affairs Officer in the UN Mission in the former Yugoslavia.

Interview by Elizabeth Drew
Regional civil society peacebuilding in West Africa

A conversation with Emmanuel Bombande

Emmanuel Bombande is co-founder and Director of the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP)

How and why was WANEP established?

In the 1990s ECOWAS (Economic Community of West Africa States) intervention in Liberia through ECOMOG (ECOWAS Monitoring Group) was purely military and lacked a clearly defined strategy even for rebuilding the state. There was a need for peacebuilding and conflict prevention efforts, but no organisation for coordinating these existed.

When I was growing up in Ghana I would often see my grandfather convene early morning meetings where he sat with a group of elders in a circle. I later understood that they were solving crises – today you would call it conflict prevention. We advocate professionalising this sort of response capacity. It is indigenous and integral to our way of living. Building the national institutions of the modern state must take into account these indigenous capacities that promote dialogue and consensus.

We formed WANEP in 1998. When Freetown almost fell into rebel hands in January 1999, we worked with several Sierra Leonean civil society organisations to develop capacities to respond. A priority at that time was to build social cohesion. We organised a series of roundtable consultations with different grassroots groups, including victims, ex-combatants and traditional leaders. Meetings discussed what Sierra Leone should become in the next 5–10 years. Consultations were voluntary and informal. These are the sorts of situation where people begin to reconnect and look to their shared future, and that for me is at the heart of peacebuilding work.

Our strategies were tailored to countries’ specific peacebuilding needs. In some countries focusing on peace education was more urgent than focusing on women and peacebuilding; in others vice versa. The network has grown organically across the region. In Liberia, early consultations were not with targeted community groups. They were civil society-led and sought to engage with the government and influence policy through advocacy on specific issues such as statebuilding.

In Sierra Leone we quickly realised that we were men trying to facilitate consultation with victims, the majority of whom...
were women. It was clear that without women facilitators, there were some things we could not do. There was a need to build women’s capacity to lead, facilitate and be involved in peacebuilding. So the Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET) was developed in 2002. WIPNET in Liberia did much to mobilise women for mass action for peace – Leymah Gbowee, a 2011 Nobel Peace laureate, was the coordinator. It was women who got Charles Taylor to accept ECOWAS mediation.

What are the main threats to peace and security in Liberia and Sierra Leone?

First, political exclusion brings suspicion about the integrity of electoral processes, and an environment in which it is difficult to engage in genuine dialogue on policy. Because elections are highly contested and can breed civil unrest, in post-conflict environments like Liberia and Sierra Leone they cannot be organised in the same way as in other countries.

Second, the majority of both populations are very young. Youths do not have the training or skills to be able to get the type of jobs that they need. These countries are recovering from wars in which their economies almost totally collapsed and they do not have the capacities to generate sufficient jobs for youths.

Third, the borders of West Africa are artificial and porous, dividing communities along boundaries that were drawn by colonial powers, but also allowing instability to spread. Problems in one country affect others in the region. For example, demobilised Liberian ex-combatants went to fight in Côte d’Ivoire, so disarmament was both reversed and displaced. This is why a regional approach is very important.

Other problems include the refusal of people driven abroad by war to come back and contribute intellectually to the rebuilding of their own societies, and the intolerance that violence has bred in our societies as a consequence of these wars.

Why did you focus on social cohesion in Sierra Leone?

Formal approaches to reconciliation did not resonate with people. Take the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which effectively became a bureaucratic institution of the state. Its contribution was appreciated as a post-conflict attempt to build peace. Witnesses appeared and testified as if in a court, and the things they said were recorded.

The TRC operated at the national level. Nobody was talking about outlying counties. In communities like Voinjama or Gbarnaga the social humiliation of a family home where women were violated and abducted stretched beyond even the extended family to include the whole clan. High levels of gender-based violence also occurred beyond the TRC timeframe. The TRC did not connect on the ground on emerging challenges; it was too structured and missed what people really wanted from reconciliation.

In communities like Voinjama or Gbarnaga the social humiliation of a family home where women were violated and abducted stretched beyond even the extended family to include the whole clan.”

Can you tell us about processes for forgiveness and healing?

In Sierra Leone, the first priority for reconciliation has been to deal with the anger, resentment and suspicion people have in their hearts. In some instances, we used exercises to ask people what reconciliation should look like from their perspective. The more we did this, the more people were able to ask themselves very deep questions about why they did what they did to one another. I remember a young woman commander with the rebel Revolutionary United Front (RUF). Reconciliation for her meant helping her to see the face of her mother, and to tell her mother how sorry she was for what she did.

People also started to understand that while you could point a finger at those active in the conflict, many others were also implicated less directly by passively allowing the destruction of society. These types of conversation are powerful because they are informal and let people pour out their hearts.

How does WANEP operate, nationally and regionally?

Our member organisations are represented on national secretariats, which consult, identify priorities and discuss strategies and plans. Based on national needs, a regional secretariat advises members on how they can implement their plans. Sometimes we bring in international support: for example, we have just entered into a partnership with the Crisis Management Initiative on a 3-year programme on gender-based violence in Liberia.

We have worked hard to link what is happening at that sub-national level – for example difficult issues like ethnicity, religion or politics – to the national level and make them national priorities.
We coordinate civil society input into the ECOWAS Warning and Response Network (ECOWARN) database across the region and have negotiated common early warning indicators. These facilitate monitoring at the regional level, and through our monitoring and tracking we have identified crucial issues that should be on the ECOWAS agenda. A forthcoming extraordinary ECOWAS summit has come about as a result of our regional monitoring of small arms trafficking. We are also beginning to work more with the private sector.

What are some of WANEP’s key achievements with ECOWAS?
West Africa cannot move forward without a very active civil society. ECOWAS has shifted from an exclusively top-down approach to one in which bottom-up and top-down have become integrated. In this respect it is far ahead of other regional bodies in Africa. This has made it possible for us to engage at the level that we have, in a structured and negotiated way.

We have had a Memorandum of Understanding with ECOWAS since 2003 which provides a framework for mutual partnership in which we need one another. Initially we worked most closely with the Political Affairs and Early Warning Directorates, but in the past three or four years this has broadened to include other departments. Engagement has gradually expanded and we now attend official meetings of ECOWAS with its bilateral partners. This partnership is beginning to improve how civil society is supported in West Africa.

Sometimes ECOWAS officials for reasons of mandate or political sensitivities have preferred that WANEP convey important issues for consideration by the ECOWAS leadership. We can engage in advocacy on issues way before the official ECOWAS line is made public. In our policy briefs we often address gaps that ECOWAS may not find urgent or important.

However, our relationship with ECOWAS does not compromise our role as a civil society organisation as we not only engage on, but also regularly challenge its policies. In the Côte d’Ivoire crisis in 2010, ECOWAS was decisive and would not compromise on political principles in its protocol on democracy and good governance. We praised this stand and commended the ECOWAS leadership for its commitment to the ECOWAS protocols, which constitute a baseline for conflict prevention.

But we objected when ECOWAS advocated military force against President Gbagbo. ECOWAS’ actual engagement in Côte d’Ivoire had in fact emphasised preventive diplomacy. This change of direction helped President Gbagbo to mobilise people on the grounds that they were being attacked by ECOWAS, and suggested that ECOWAS was divided between those who supported a military option and those who did not.

How can ECOWAS develop its conflict prevention and response capability?
ECOWAS should explore the idea of a West African regional electoral body because in some countries there is simply no trust in national election management structures. Extending these responsibilities to the regional level would help to neutralise suspicions regarding how elections are organised.

West African governments need to be more accountable to the people. We need to end the patronage system where those in power can sustain that power by using the resources of the state to protect themselves.

We also need to address issues of social and economic equality, the distribution of wealth and youth employment. Some ECOWAS Member States are not economically viable; they cannot pay the salaries of their civil servants. More integration can help: a vision of supra-nationality can promote building greater regional economic leverage and the ability to negotiate better internationally. A student in Dakar should not be looking for gainful employment in Dakar alone, but in Nigeria or Burkina Faso too.

The international community can help by providing technical expertise that might not be available within countries in West Africa, and by placing greater emphasis on addressing the structural causes of conflict, especially through international policies to prevent countries being exploited by commercial interests, for example on natural resource extraction or tax havens.

Interview by Elizabeth Drew
Section 2

Governance

Democracy, decentralisation and natural resources

Liberians queue in front of a polling station, waiting to cast their ballots in their country’s constitutional referendum, in Monrovia, 23 August 2011 // © UN Photo/Staton Winter
Electing for peace in Liberia and Sierra Leone

Frances Fortune and Oscar Bloh

Free, fair and transparent elections are critical to consolidating peace and building democracy in countries emerging from conflict. But they can contribute to increased tensions, divisions and outbreaks of violence, as experiences in Côte d’Ivoire and Guinea in 2011 have shown. Incumbent state leaders may be wary of losing control and claim premature victory, as happened in Côte d’Ivoire, as well as in Kenya and Zimbabwe.

Many models for post-war elections assume a benign peacebuilding outcome. But without adequate preparation or due consideration of the post-conflict context, they can often do just as much harm as good. Post-war elections in Liberia (2005) and Sierra Leone (2007) were hailed internationally for the extent of their participation, and for their freedom and fairness. But politicians used violence to intimidate people not to vote or to coerce the ballots in their favour.

These problems reflect underlying deficiencies in the citizen-state relationship in Liberia and Sierra Leone, which remains characterised by patron-client affiliations and exclusionary political cultures. In post-war countries where bad governance and citizen alienation have been key causes of conflict, these issues continue to threaten peace.

Donor support for elections has focused on technical issues: observing and monitoring polling day; providing logistical support; distributing ballot papers; and supplying vehicles. These are important, but the people must not be neglected. To help consolidate peace dividends, and to avoid a slide back into violence, electoral processes and institutional reform in Liberia and Sierra Leone should prioritise inclusion, trust, transparency and security.

This article draws on Search for Common Ground’s (SFCG) experience of supporting people’s participation in elections in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Through media work and information-sharing, SFCG works to reduce mistrust and increase people’s confidence in political processes.

Promoting participation and representation

Neither Sierra Leone nor Liberia yet has a genuine participatory democracy, largely due to the control of the state by political elites. While some gains have been made, the ‘politics of exclusion’ that has contributed to numerous past rebellions still endures. Affirmative action is required to strengthen inclusion as cultural and socio-economic...
barriers effectively restrict the political participation of various social groups.

Young people, women and minorities are especially vulnerable. Liberian National Elections Commission (NEC) statistics show that young people make up more than half the registered voters: 18–22 year-olds – 22 per cent; 23–27 year-olds – 18 per cent; and 28–32 year-olds – 15 per cent. Sierra Leone’s demographics are similar. Voting statistics show that young people make up more than half the registered voters: 18–22 year-olds – 22 per cent; and 28–32 year-olds – 15 per cent. Voting 23–27 year-olds – 18 per cent; and 28–32 year-olds – 15 per cent. Sierra Leone’s demographics are similar. Voting statistics show that young people make up more than half the registered voters: 18–22 year-olds – 22 per cent; and 28–32 year-olds – 15 per cent. Voting does not guarantee inclusion in politics. Even though young people’s votes are fought over during elections, their needs and interests are not necessarily protected afterwards. The political exclusion of young former combatants is especially acute, exacerbated through failed disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration exercises.

In both countries political parties systematically use fear and violence for political gain. This increases arms flows and militarisation; and the youths are usually left with nothing afterwards. The only young people to benefit from the political process are those who remain within the patron-client political alignment, which reinforces clientist politics in the longer term.

Women are grossly under-represented at all levels of government in Sierra Leone. The same is true of Liberia, apart from the relatively high number of women in its executive, led by the first female president in Africa. There are still huge cultural barriers to women assuming political leadership roles in both countries. Legal provisions can help to overcome this. For instance there are a number of ways that quotas can be put into place, including obligatory political party quotas for winnable seats.

Ethnic minorities also experience exclusion from electoral processes and politics. Mandingo people in Liberia complained of harassment during the recent voter registration processes to the point that many avoided registering. This perpetuates their marginalisation and frustration.

But the persistent ‘winner takes all’ mentality in both countries can obstruct representation and limit opposition access to state resources. Qualified people politically aligned with the former government find it very difficult to get work or access contracts with the new government. This strengthens the notion that when in power it is ‘our turn to eat’ because deprivation and exclusion will follow when the next group is elected.

Concerted political reform is needed to break down institutionalised exclusion in both countries and ensure that marginalised groups achieve better representation in parties and in government – beyond the traditional women’s wing or youth wing. The creation of pressure groups such as the Sierra Leone’s All Political Party Youth Association and the All Political Party Women’s Association are positive moves. Ambitious goals and means for inclusion are needed. These might include exploring different electoral models such as proportional representation. Civil society, especially the media, also has a key role to play in promoting broad societal participation in politics and, ultimately, shifting the focus from identities to issues.

Transforming institutions: democratisation and electoral oversight

Coming from years of war, the nation building process is only successful if the renewal of the social contract between state and citizens is founded on confidence in state institutions. In Liberia and Sierra Leone, key electoral institutions are compromised by perceived political partiality and flawed procedure. In both countries, appointing the electoral commissioner is the sole prerogative of the president. Although presidential appointments are subject to confirmation by the senate in Liberia or the parliament in Sierra Leone, weak legislatures mean that the presidents have de facto control. The current chair of Liberia’s NEC is a long-time friend of the president. In Sierra Leone, the opposition has had a long-standing court case against the NEC chair. Such questions around transparency weaken confidence in the electoral process.

The legitimacy of NECs and the judiciary in managing grievances poses another challenge to electoral credibility. Almost all election-related grievances in Liberia are handled either by NEC or the Supreme Court. The NEC has made an effort to build up its internal legal team, but its poor relationship with opposition parties means that most grievances are referred to the Supreme Court. Liberia’s Supreme Court is overburdened and opposition groups in particular are sceptical over its independence. In Sierra Leone there is an Electoral Court – a good start – but cases ultimately stop at the High Court where they can be manipulated by the Attorney General, who is also the Minister of Justice and a member of the government.

Delays by NECs in collecting and tallying election results have consequences, including rumours of misconduct and fraud. Since 2004 in both Liberia and Sierra Leone, steps have been taken to boost electoral transparency, including introducing clear plastic ballot boxes and public counting in polling stations. Political parties and civil society have also conducted exit polls with the media broadcasting the figures in near real-time. In Sierra Leone’s 2007 elections almost 500 polling stations were declared null and void as more votes than voters were counted. The NEC chair cited this as international best practice, but it disenfranchised many legitimate voters.
Ultimately, credible electoral institutions are needed to counter mistrust in the process. Although still weak, Sierra Leone’s Political Parties Registration Commission has been playing a constructive monitoring and mediation role between political parties and between candidates. This could be strengthened and a similar capacity developed in Liberia.

Building public confidence in electoral institutions is a way of preventing post-election violence and strengthening the legitimacy of the results and thus the ability to govern. Making appointments to electoral institutions more democratic, such as through a public nomination process or establishing a public committee to vet nominations, would help build confidence.

Political reform
Neither legal frameworks nor election management mechanisms have adequately addressed how political parties operate in elections in either country. Most political parties lack internal democratic practices and are driven by personalities and patron-client networks. In both countries, a small group of men determine the candidates for parliamentary or legislative nomination.

In Sierra Leone, the All People’s Congress determined its candidature in Freetown without involving district party members. Women’s engagement tends to centre on cooking and entertainment within the women’s wing rather than decision-making. Youths largely carry out politicians’ bidding rather than pressing their own agenda. When a party is elected its way of working infuses the state: elites decide how decisions are made and resources are distributed. Political parties should broaden participation and be held to the same standard of democratisation as other institutions involved in the electoral process.

Political patronage also compromises parliament. While the legislatures in Liberia and Sierra Leone are crucial for holding strong executives to account, in both countries parliament is widely seen to play a ‘rubber stamping’ role. This is particularly problematic around elections where accountability is especially sensitive. The centralised nomination of candidates produces a high turnover of MPs with each election so parliament is continuously inexperienced and subcommittee leadership is weak. In addition to reforming the party nomination process, stronger parliamentary accountability and technical support for MPs is needed.

Civil society
SFCG, in partnership with other civil society actors, established the National Election Watch in Sierra Leone to monitor the 2007 elections. Building from this experience, SFCG established a civil society National Coordinating Coalition in Sierra Leone which monitors all aspects of the electoral cycle, including safety and security, observation, electoral education, and electoral reform. The Independent Radio Network in Sierra Leone, and the Association of Liberian Community Radios and the SFCG-chaired Election Coordinating Committee in Liberia are among the many civil society organisations (CSOs) working for credible elections. Civil society has the freedom and flexibility to strengthen public engagement and confidence in the electoral process.

Civil society’s contributions have been recognised informally, yet they are still seen more as service providers than key stakeholders. When electoral institutions and international actors review and revise electoral frameworks, civil society should be included in planning, budgeting and strategising from the outset. This will help to feed in much needed wider perspectives gained through CSOs’ work with communities to help people feel they have a greater stake in the process.

Citizen security in elections: people and process
The threat of violence and the impunity of its perpetrators can make voters highly fearful during elections. Preventing or containing violence are essential security objectives for free and fair elections. But election security means more than police officers at polling stations. Independent candidates, women and the elderly need to feel safe enough to take part. Mechanisms to protect vulnerable social groups in conflict-prone areas are needed; police have a key role in providing human security while civil society...
can empower marginalised people to take part through outreach and oversight.

Both countries have implemented security sector reform, but there is still little confidence in their police forces. People perceive political bias in the administration of election security. Sierra Leone’s police commission is headed by the vice-president; Liberia’s head of police is appointed by the president.

Liberia and Sierra Leone’s police forces also suffer from very limited resources and capacities. They do not yet have the coverage or specific skills necessary for people to feel secure during elections, such as community engagement and mediation. Protection-focused training and mentoring for police is needed, prioritising citizens’ rights and responsibilities, the role of election observers, assuaging fear, deescalating violence, demonstrating impartiality and promoting participation.

National security strategies to protect vulnerable groups could be developed, linking police protection activities with civil society monitoring in order to reduce impunity. Political parties should be encouraged to participate in the strategy, which could be in the public sphere to promote transparency and enable access to state resources for implementation.

Building peace and democracy

Peacebuilding lessons from elections in Liberia and Sierra Leone point to three policy priorities: support political inclusion for marginalised groups; transform institutions; and promote people-focused security.

Support political inclusion for marginalised groups: develop and support mechanisms to break down cultural and socio-economic barriers to political participation and ensure representation of marginalised groups, especially women, young people and ethnic minorities, in electoral processes and in the executive and legislature.

Actions could include exploring mechanisms such as incentives and quotas in political party governance structures, candidate lists and elected and appointed offices to achieve this. Empowering civil society can also help to shift the existing discourse and culture of exclusion and exert pressure for change. CSOs can strengthen civic engagement and the social contract. Their involvement in elections can help to maintain a focus on people over the state, and to build the link between the state and its citizens. The media are especially well placed to create the space for public participation and debate needed for elections to support peace.

Transform institutions: democratise political parties, strengthen parliament, reform election supervision and structures to deal with grievances, enhance civil society’s role and bring ordinary people into the reform process to build trust in elections.

Policymakers could help improve the performance of parliament and promote internal democratisation of political parties by providing technical assistance and encouraging the institution of stronger oversight mechanisms. Broadening representation and strengthening accountability in these institutions will help mitigate perceptions of exclusion and suspicion of corruption that contribute to electoral violence and undermine state-society relations. Enabling opposition parties to access state resources would help to ‘level the political playing field’. Criteria for access should be developed through a broad-based consultative process. An option could be to link resource access to internal democratisation, such as increasing the diversity of parliamentary and local council representatives.

Policymakers should encourage a more participatory process for the appointment of key electoral officials involving civil society and political parties. CSOs should be regarded as partners throughout the electoral cycle, rather than as service providers on election day. Civil society actors could be involved in strategy development, planning for elections and overseeing peaceful processes.

People-focused security: reform, refocus and capacitate police to emphasise protecting vulnerable people.

Police strategies for elections should focus on ensuring the security and participation of citizens, not just safeguarding the voting process. Strategies should be based around reducing fear and ensuring accountability for political violence. They should include election-specific training and mentoring programmes for police to build trust with communities. They should also link with civil society conflict prevention strategies. This could be part of wider strategy of democratising security governance, including building in greater civilian oversight and depoliticising the appointment of senior police officials.

Frances Fortune has been the chair of National Election Watch (NEW) in Sierra Leone since 2004. A civil society leader, Ms. Fortune has worked in complex post conflict environments to support increasing stability. Ms Fortune is the Africa Director for Search for Common Ground.

Oscar Bloh serves as Country Director of Search for Common Ground in Liberia. With ten years experience of civil society sector work, he has significant experience of human rights training, governance issues and peacebuilding in post-conflict environments. He has recently served as chair of a national civil society coalition of 30 organisations tasked with monitoring the 2011 Liberian elections.
Decentralisation and peacebuilding in Sierra Leone

Paul Koroma

By the time Sierra Leone emerged from 11 years of devastating civil conflict in 2002, it was clear that exclusion, marginalisation and the over-centralisation of resources had been a critical part of the country’s problem. This was articulated clearly in the report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2004:

Key stakeholders in society including students, youth and the populace of the provinces were marginalised by political elites. Ultimately, these marginalised groups played a central role in initiating and fuelling the armed conflict... The provinces had been almost totally sidelined through the centralisation of political and economic power in Freetown. Local Government was in demise across the country. Chiefs and traditional structures did little more than the bidding of the power base in Freetown. Regions and ethnic groups were polarised by the contrasting treatment they were afforded.

Effective local government can contribute to political inclusion, peace and development, but Sierra Leone’s local government structures were eradicated by President Siaka Stevens in the 1970s. Power and resources were concentrated in Freetown while local infrastructure and services including roads, health clinics and schools collapsed. Recognising these problems, the government of President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah passed the Local Government Act in March 2004.

The new local government system

In the new system the highest level of political authority is the local council. The 2004 Act created 19 local councils: 12 district councils, 1 rural district council, 5 municipal councils and 1 town council. Councillors are elected through universal suffrage and represent wards: three to a ward in municipal councils and one in district councils. District councils are headed by chairs; municipal councils by mayors. District councils also include paramount chiefs.

Local councils promote development and welfare, mobilising resources by setting tax rates and implementing budgeted spending. They can also make and enforce by-laws – for instance on taxation, the use of streams and rivers, domestic violence and cultural practices. These must be consistent with the constitution and the Local Government Act, and must be approved by the Attorney-General. Councillors are responsible for maintaining close contact with wards and chiefdoms, consulting on key issues, communicating council decisions and promoting development activities.

Councillors reside in their local communities so citizens can engage decision-makers more easily. Ward Development Committees (WDCs) comprise every councillor in the ward, the paramount chief, and not more than 10 other persons, at least five of whom must be women. Ward representatives are elected.
Along with local councils and WDCs there are chiefdom councils, comprising paramount chiefs, chiefdom speakers, section chiefs and village headmen. They work closely with local councils, collect taxes, make and enforce by-laws and hold land in trust. They are the highest decision-making bodies in the chiefdoms and serve as their ‘parliaments’.

The Office of National Security has also set up chiefdom, district and provincial security committees to collect data on local conflict and security developments and identify potential conflict triggers or hotspots. They report to the President’s Office.

Civil society groups can complement decentralisation through ‘bottom up’ initiatives that build governmental accountability and community empowerment. They are involved in strengthening transparency and monitoring the implementation of public projects. The Network Movement for Justice and Development (NMJD), for example, organises accountability forums at chiefdom and district levels. The forums bring together members of parliament, councillors, WDC members, chiefs, women and youths to discuss issues that affect their lives. Citizens (rights holders) are encouraged to ask their leaders (duty bearers) questions about their actions – or inaction.

To further strengthen local accountability, NMJD has trained and deployed human rights paralegals in communities to help people access justice-providing institutions, to promote alternative dispute resolution, to educate people about their rights and responsibilities and to observe and report on human rights abuses and violations.

Local government action
Local councils are making significant contributions to Sierra Leone’s development. Many have embarked on infrastructural projects, providing water and sanitation facilities, renovating primary schools, and building classroom blocks and office buildings. Councillors in the Freetown municipality have used self-help projects to repair roads, bridges and other public infrastructure. Some local councils offer educational scholarships. A 43-year-old woman of Panguma Village, Kakua Chiefdom, said that:

“There is no provision in local councils for special representation for young people – even though they form the bulk of the population”

Many WDCs are also implementing development activities: rebuilding roads, community centres, schools, health clinics and water and sanitation systems. Where necessary WDCs, in conjunction with the local people, provide locally-available materials and monitor the implementation process to ensure value for money.

Problems facing decentralisation
WDCs have not lived up to expectations. In many cases members have been handpicked by politicians rather than elected, in contravention of the Local Government Act. Most appointees are there as a political reward, not as a matter of merit. This contributes to local tensions or apathy.

Many WDCs face acute financial problems and are unable to hold meetings regularly. Under-resourcing and weak oversight foster corruption. Procurement procedures are a particular problem, as council officials encourage their relatives and friends to set up companies that are then awarded contracts. The Anti-Corruption Commission has been working with local councils and civil society groups to address this, but with limited success so far.

A lot of problems in the local government system stem from uncertainty about how different parts relate to each other. The line demarcating the functions of the local councils and chiefdom councils is blurred. They are meant to support each other but the extent of collaboration expected is not clear. For example, Paramount Chief Alhaji Issa B. Kamara-Koroma of Gallinas Perrie chiefdom
in Pujehun district complained about ‘the exclusion of chiefdom functionaries from the implementation and monitoring of development projects in their chiefdoms’, which he called ‘a major sticking point between local councils and chiefdom authorities’.

Development is implemented mainly at the chiefdom level. However, when contracts are awarded by local councils, no reference is made to chiefdom authorities, who are excluded from the process. As a result, contractors do not allow chiefdom authorities to monitor the work they do, although local councils still require chiefdom authorities to report on the progress of projects. Chiefdom authorities have refused to provide reports, which has led to tensions with councils.

The Local Government Act has transferred paramount chiefs’ responsibility to set tax rates and spending to local councils, while maintaining chiefs’ responsibility to collect taxes. This is seen by many people as a barrier to sound financial accountability. Some chiefdoms are denying local councils access to collect revenue. In Lower Banta Chiefdom in Moyamba district, the Paramount Chief has not allowed the council to collect dues from fishermen and has stationed vigilantes around the jetty. There are similar cases in Gbondapi in Kpanga Kabonde Chiefdom, Pujehun District, and the Barmoi Lumor (Trade Fair) in Mambolo Chiefdom, Kambia District, where there were stand-offs when the Kambia District Council first attempted to collect dues, and it took the intervention of the Minister of Local Government to resolve the resulting impasse. Local councils have also refused to approve budgets for chiefdoms that delay payments from local taxes.

Another source of tension relates to decision-making between chiefs and Members of Parliament (MPs). A conflict between the paramount chief of Sahn-Malen Chiefdom in Pujehun District and the local MP arose when the chief leased land to an agricultural company, SOCFIN, for 50 years without consulting local people. The MP confronted the chief, who regarded this as undermining his authority. The conflict polarised the chiefdom, resulting in violence. When the MP’s supporters prevented SOCFIN staff from accessing their lands, supporters of the chief responded with machete attacks. The Provincial Security Committee was unable to manage the dispute. Violence was eventually quelled by the Pujehun District Council Chair after civil society requested his involvement. But no agreement has been reached and tensions have been mounting again.
Centrally appointed District Officers (DOs), who had been removed following the establishment of local councils in 2004, are now being re-introduced. DOs settle land and chieftdom boundary disputes, supervise chieftdom authorities and serve as a hub for governmental activities. But parts of their role are perceived to usurp functions played by district councils and chiefs. Many feel the Local Government Act and also Chieftaincy Act (2009) obviate DOs and that their reintroduction cast doubts over the government’s commitment to the decentralisation of power.

Chiefs also organise (technically illegal) local arbitration processes, widely referred to as ‘kangaroo courts’. Chiefs and designated community elders determine verdicts on cases presented by fee-paying ‘complainants’ and ‘defendants’. The losing party is usually ordered to pay a fine and the winning party’s court costs. This can generate grudges and polarise communities. The fined party often feels aggrieved and seeks revenge. To pay fines many people resort to selling cherished property or borrowing at high interest rates. Where an offender is unable to pay, they sometimes flee their communities for cities where conditions are often poor.

Local MPs are not admitted to local government structures, as they are not members of WDCs. Some MPs use this to avoid supporting development efforts in their constituencies. Even where they receive money and other resources for the development of their communities, some MPs clearly do not use them for the intended purposes.

There is no provision in local councils for special representation for young people – even though they form the bulk of the population. They contest elections like everyone else, but in most cases stand little chance of being elected for economic and cultural reasons. In the 2008 local council elections in Small Bo Chiefdom in Kenema district, the major political parties denied youth aspirants the ‘party symbols’ they needed to contest the polls under party banners. The youths consequently stood as independent candidates and lost, with most voters continuing to vote on party lines. In the event, many youths resorted to civil disobedience by refusing to pay local taxes or participate in communal work. It took the effort of NMJD ‘Animators’ to get them to cooperate with the local authorities.

Making decentralisation work
Decentralisation is important to building peace in Sierra Leone, particularly in rural communities. Given the disconnect between government and people, and many Sierra Leoneans’ sense of alienation from the state, more effective local government bodies will mean they are better able to mediate disputes and spot conflict warning signs. Better relationships between local and central government can help connect marginalised citizens with central political structures.

Talking decentralisation is not enough. Freetown and its donor partners need to follow up on how decentralisation works in practice, consulting communities about whether and how their political voice is being heard, and how local governance structures respond to their needs and deliver essential services.

A clearer definition of roles and responsibilities within Sierra Leone’s local government system would help to reduce ambiguity and the potential for conflict between its various components, and facilitate better collaboration and cooperation. Chieftdom councils and district councils in particular must work together more effectively, where blurred lines of authority have led to tensions and community violence in the past.

Focusing on ‘bottom-up’, people-led approaches to promote accountability and empower communities can help. Civil society initiatives like NMJD’s accountability forums can link people with local and central administration, incorporating marginalised groups to promote dialogue on key local and national issues. NMJD-sponsored human rights paralegals have also helped to connect traditional and national justice mechanisms and processes.

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Peace matters:
transforming resource exploitation in Liberia and Sierra Leone
Philippe Le Billon

Resources played a significant – although often overinflated – role in the Liberian and Sierra Leonean conflicts. Not only did resources such as diamonds, timber, rubber or iron ore provide belligerents with the bulk of their finances (conflict resources), but they also provoked numerous conflicts between resource companies and local communities (resource conflicts). The long-term mismanagement of resources both reflected and contributed to weak governance and prevailing poverty that set the stage for hostilities (resource curse).

Efforts to improve natural resource governance in both Liberia and Sierra Leone have been comparatively thorough in global terms. Given their relatively small size, limited financial autonomy, and the background of their new leaders (both former international agency staff), Liberia and Sierra Leone have been perceived – at least internationally – as ‘manageable’ and ‘open’ for resource-directed interventions. This contrasts with Angola, Colombia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), three other countries in which resources also have played a major role in conflict, but where interventions have been more limited by political, logistical or financial factors. The Liberian and Sierra Leonean resource sectors have come to experience the whole gamut of recent interventions.

Military intervention
The first interventions to control natural resource exploitation were military. In Liberia, West African regional peacekeeping forces [ECOMOG – 1990–99] set up a military blockade to assume control of Charles Taylor’s main port in Buchanan in April 1993, from which his National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) had imported arms and exported timber, rubber and iron ore. In Sierra Leone, President Kabbah’s government procured the mercenary forces of South African private security company Executive Outcomes, in the mid-1990s to secure the major diamond mines in Kono district.

UN missions in Sierra Leone [UNAMSIL – 1999–2003] and Liberia [UNMIL – 2003–present] evaded combat operations to control resource areas and export routes. UNAMSIL was not mandated to do so, while UNMIL conservatively interpreted its mandate to “assist the transitional government in restoring proper administration of natural resources” as part of the implementation of the peace process – and the war was anyway over by the time of the UNMIL deployment.

Experiences from Liberia and Sierra Leone suggest that peacekeeping missions are not well suited to taking control of resource areas by force. Not only are they often poorly equipped and not properly mandated, but their operations have been tainted by allegations of involvement in trafficking. Claims by UNAMSIL force commander, General Vijay Jetley, against Nigerian troops led to a major political clash and withdrawal of the Indian contingent. In DRC, the relative success of UN military operations targeting mining areas under Security Council resolution 1856 have been undermined by the corruption and abusive conduct of local military counterparts.

By seizing key resource areas, military interventions carried out by mercenaries occasionally proved tactically successful, yet proved short-lived in their impact due to lack of effective demobilisation and broader peacebuilding efforts.

Both the NPFL and the rebel Revolutionary United Front in Sierra Leone lost significant portions of their income as a
result of military interventions, but the remaining diamond and timber trafficking sustained both insurgencies and enabled them to negotiate favourable peace agreements – with Taylor being elected president in 1997 and RUF leader Foday Sankoh given the chair of a new (but largely powerless) Commission for the Management of Strategic Mineral Resources, National Reconstruction and Development – a position that brought him to Freetown where he was eventually arrested in May 2000, the arrest contributing to the downfall of his movement.

Sanctions and governance intervention
Both conflicts have seen other types of intervention to curtail the exploitation and trafficking of commodities for conflict. These have proven protracted affairs. Many large-scale interventions were too slow and results have been mixed. UN Security Council sanctions were imposed on diamonds in 2000 in Sierra Leone (resolution 1306) and 2001 in Liberia (resolution 1343), nearly a decade after diamonds had started financing insurgencies. Sanctions on timber exports from Liberia remained stalled at the Security Council until finally being imposed in 2003 (resolution 1478).

As demonstrated by the relative success of the Kimberley Process in its early years, a combination of sanctions, certified international trade, and local monitoring can help a great deal in reducing the volume of ‘conflict diamonds’. But with no major diamond-financed wars today, and unwillingness on the part of many member states to broaden the definition of conflict diamonds to include human rights abuses, the Kimberley Process has been losing steam and legitimacy, notably for lack of action in the face of massive abuses against diamond miners in Zimbabwe.

Overall, targeted sanctions against resources sustaining conflict – and, more broadly, military parties committing human rights abuses – need to be swiftly imposed and rigorously implemented.

Effective implementation of natural resource regulation mechanisms is now being sought through more stringent supply chain monitoring. This puts the onus on international importers and regional traders to demonstrate ‘due diligence’ in sourcing their resources. Businesses complicit in exploiting and laundering conflict resources have enjoyed immunity for too long, despite being well known in part due to the valuable investigative work of UN sanctions committee expert panels and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Clearly, prosecutors in importing countries need to intervene early, something that Belgian and Dutch courts finally did by the mid-2000s. One example is Dutch timber merchant Gus van Kouwenhoven,
who was initially sentenced to eight years in prison in 2006 for breaking a UN arms embargo in Liberia and is now under re-trial.

Liberia and Sierra Leone have also seen some of the earliest and most direct forms of governance intervention. In 2005, the Liberian transitional government reluctantly agreed to demands of supervision by international donors through the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Program (GEMAP). This was extended under the government of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, which – along with UN expert panels and NGOs – has kept a close eye on resource sectors. GEMAP increased both donors' and investors’ confidence while consolidating civil service capacity and processes. Welcomed by a local population distrustful of politicians, the programme was denounced by some Liberian politicians for undermining Liberian sovereignty and blurring lines of responsibility and accountability between Liberian officials and international experts.

Nothing so drastic occurred in Sierra Leone, but about $13 million in aid projects was spent on diamond management, including grassroots participation in mining governance, attempts to increase returns from tax revenues to local communities in diamonds areas, and help to train miners get better returns from mining, notably through cooperatives and diamond valuation workshops. An international ambassadorial level advisory group also worked with the Minister of Mines to supervise governance progress.

These activities contributed to peacebuilding by facilitating communication between industry, government and the population around artisanal mining and generating an albeit limited sense of empowerment among some miners and local communities. Yet they have left largely unaddressed the main source of tension around resources; those resulting from industrial ventures setting off land conflicts, competing with small-scale operations, and often resulting in unfulfilled expectations from populations witnessing major investments and vast resource extraction.

**Contrasting Liberia and Sierra Leone**
The results of efforts to turn around resource sectors in Liberia and Sierra Leone are contrasting. In Liberia even after the fall of Charles Taylor in 2003, the UN Security Council continued to require that guarantees of proper fiscal governance be in place before allowing some extractive sectors such as logging to restart – thereby stopping all (large-scale) commercial operations, many of which had already been interrupted as a result of the collapse of Taylor’s regime. The Security Council only lifted import restrictions on Liberian timber in 2006 and on diamonds in 2007.

What ensued included a vast array of legal reforms, including on concession allocation processes (eg public bidding), forestry regulations (eg stakeholder consultation, community rights over forests), resource revenue transparency (eg the Liberian Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative), and the establishment of a land commission.

> **Effective implementation of natural resource regulation mechanisms is now being sought through more stringent supply chain monitoring**

These reforms vastly improved the regulatory context, while capacity-building efforts consolidated institutions. Yet investigations, notably by the UN expert panel group over the past five years, revealed major deficiencies in implementation, including in the awarding or renegotiation of concessions, an issue that also arose in Sierra Leone and that led many to argue for continued external supervision of resource sectors.

**Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative**
Governments in both Liberia and Sierra Leone have committed to greater resource revenue transparency through the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) – a international voluntary process through which governments and companies are required to publish audited revenue collection from resource sectors. By increasing transparency and thereby facilitating accountability, the EITI is expected to reduce corruption and further legitimise both governments and resource extraction companies, thereby supposedly contributing to peace.

The scheme, however, still requires strong local accountability mechanisms to be effective, including through civil society, and does not sufficiently address transparency in revenue expenditure as well as the level of taxation of resource companies.

Both countries made this commitment in 2006. By 2009 Liberia had become the second EITI Compliant Country (having completed an EITI validation) and had extended revenue transparency to timber and agricultural sectors. Strong backing from President Johnson Sirleaf has been a major factor in this outcome, but also the heavier
international presence and a greater sense of urgency in dealing with revenue mismanagement given the massive contracts at stake.

In contrast, Sierra Leone only published its first report in 2010 and was still not compliant at the time of writing of this article (the validation deadline is now December 2012). Sierra Leone’s new Mines and Minerals Act, passed in 2009, does require revenue disclosure and increased taxation. Yet the implementation of this law is patchy and some concessions were recently re-approved despite contradicting the new act. This could contribute to higher levels of corruption, or at least the perception thereof among the population, lower tax revenues over a prolonged period as a result of low tax rates, and weaker donor support – all factors that do not help to consolidate peace.

**Resource contracts**

Resource contract issues also differ between the two countries. Several controversial deals signed before or during the transitional government in Liberia were subsequently cancelled or thoroughly revised, including the cancellation of all logging contracts and revisions to the massive Mittal and Firestone contracts. But in Sierra Leone, most controversial contracts – primarily large-scale mining – have been left unchanged despite the promise of contractual revisions having featured prominently in the electoral campaign of the new President Ernest Bai Koroma.

More attention was devoted to improving contractual terms in Liberia by international agencies and international NGOs, as well as by domestic civil society. The same goes for revisions to logging policy, which in the eyes of former Liberian forestry officials were in fact too thorough, resulting in stalling investments.

From this perspective there should be less tension over resources in Liberia than Sierra Leone – both nationally, arising from unfair contracts and embezzled revenues, and locally, arising from tensions between resource companies and local communities. But this is not necessarily the case. There is more at stake in Liberia given the size of its mining projects, where abuses and ‘bad habits’ are also more entrenched, the capacity of bureaucracies and civil society remain low, and there is limited political will to prevent contracts flouting the law.

The importance of resource sectors will be further magnified if current oil prospecting leads to major discoveries. For now, conflicts mostly remain within the usual realm of extractive sectors, such as the impacts of mining operations on local communities, and the working conditions and pay in industrial ventures, as in the case of some workers from Mittal’s subcontractors.

**Resources, conflict and response**

Formalising extractive sectors in Liberia and Sierra Leone should reduce the contribution of resources to future conflicts – that is, if revenues are well managed and conflicts with local communities are prevented in a fair and effective manner. Some initiatives mentioned above have also helped to consolidate civil society movements and foster constructive debates about the environment, development and security, thereby contributing not just to greater civil society mobilisation and demands for accountability, but also to mutual understanding between communities, resource companies and government authorities.

Conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone have brought about greater awareness internationally of the importance of resource factors in conflicts, and have emphasised the need for swifter resource-focused interventions as well as more thorough implementation of resource-related measures.

In light of the rapid transformation of resource sectors, there is a need for greater flexibility in interventions, so that assistance addresses fast evolving resource conflicts and revenue flows – rather than either old problems that are no longer relevant, or micro-level issues that miss the ‘big picture’ [such as the industrialisation of the mining sector].

Because of the breadth of resource governance issues and the large number of stakeholders and intervening parties, close interaction is required between expert panels, UN peacekeeping missions, international NGOs and the investment community, as well as local communities, civil society and authorities; this demands specific communication channels such as local information exchange. As much information as possible about the potential impacts of resource development, including the rights of communities in resource areas, should be actively promoted locally to sensitise and empower those communities. Institutional safeguards should be put in place while civil society movements are fast growing and [hopefully benevolent] international leverage is relatively strong.

One option is to set up a ‘resource forum’ through which information about resource sectors can be circulated among stakeholders so that companies and authorities at various levels can understand and inform the views of communities and local businesses, while also serving as a consultation process so that official and corporate policies can better reflect local perspectives and respond to concerns, especially around local livelihoods and land
ownership. A resource forum can be set up even during conflict, and can consolidate demographic reach and geographical coverage as security improves and the economy recovers.

More broadly, no major contracts should be signed by transitional authorities, or at least any contracts should include clauses leaving them open to renegotiation by an elected government and when conditions ensuring a fair and representative context are met. Resource governance reforms should be discussed during both peace negotiations and electoral campaigns, so that they become part of broader societal debates rather than fall under the purview and control of elites.

There should not be an abrupt and safeguard-free changeover from transitional to elected government rule. It is important to maintain a degree of civil society and international supervision, capacity building, and accountability via formal mechanisms – if necessary through sanctions regimes.

Finally, a combination of personal backing at the highest level [the head of state] and targeted external supervision are often necessary to ensure that the self-interests of elites are kept in check and reforms get passed, at least until robust and relatively independent institutions are in place – a process that requires many years if not decades and can easily unravel.

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### Table 1: Resources, conflict and response

A number of initiatives can help address the three main types of linkage between resources and conflicts, according to the relative objectives of interventions – and understanding the (dis)continuities and overlaps between these idealised response phases.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intervention</th>
<th>Peacemaking</th>
<th>Peacekeeping</th>
<th>Peacebuilding</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conflict resource</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>(Resources finance belligerents)</td>
<td>Address financial interests of belligerents</td>
<td>Use peacekeepers in conjunction with sanctions and due diligence to curtail resource financing and profiteering while considering local livelihoods implications</td>
<td>Consolidate the demilitarisation of resource regions, in association with local communities</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Resource conflict</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>(Fighting over resources)</td>
<td>Resolve resource ownership and revenue sharing issues</td>
<td>Deploy peacekeepers in resource areas to prevent human rights abuses and conflict escalation</td>
<td>Promote inclusive forms of resource ownership, control and access</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Resource curse</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>(Resource mismanagement linked to weak governance)</td>
<td>Integrate resource governance reforms into peace agreements</td>
<td>Regulate the post-conflict ‘resource-rush’</td>
<td>Improve developmental outcomes, notably through governance reforms and capacity-building</td>
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Deputy Commissioner Rose Stryker of the Liberia National Police cuts the ribbon to open a new security depot in Dolo’s Town, Margibi County, Liberia // © UNMIL Photo/Staton Winter
Human security in Liberia

Local perspectives on formal and informal security sectors
Richard Reeve and Jackson Speare

Despite extensive initiatives to reform and enhance the security sector in Liberia since the end of the war, many Liberians still look to UN peacekeepers or informal security structures for their safety. As the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) draws down, how is human security really being delivered?

In 2010 International Alert spoke to communities in Bong, Grand Gedeh and Lofa counties about their perceptions of their own security. Research comprised focus groups and interviews in urban and rural locations across the three counties. In total 187 people were consulted.

Transforming Liberian security
Dismantling and rebuilding Liberia’s security services was a priority when its 14-year civil conflict ended in 2003. All parties to the war, including the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL), had been implicated in serious human rights abuses. Outside Monrovia, there had been virtually no civilian police presence since 1990.

Formal security sector reform (SSR) began soon after disarmament and demobilisation of ex-combatants in 2004, with the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and the US government leading the reorganisation of the police and military respectively. UNMIL has around 1,300 police and 7,770 armed troops with helicopters and armoured vehicles under a Chapter VII peace enforcement mandate. As well as back-stopping the fledgling Liberian security forces, UNMIL is mandated “continue to develop national security and the rule of law institutions that are fully and independently operational”.

In contrast to many post-conflict countries, SSR in Liberia has not privileged ex-combatants. The emphasis has been on creating small, financially sustainable and professional forces with recruits screened against past rights abuses. Not engaging the huge numbers of unemployed ex-combatants has particularly rankled with the 14,000 former members of the AFL who were laid off in 2005.

This approach has meant that re-establishing security institutions has been slow, with UNMIL filling the vacuum, especially outside Monrovia. At the time of writing, UNMIL still greatly outnumbers, outguns and outspends Liberian forces.

UNMIL re-launched the Liberia National Police [LNP] in 2004 and over the following year dissolved or consolidated many irregular security forces that had been established during the 1990s. Police stations have been constructed or refurbished, and some 4,200 police recruited, vetted, trained and deployed with UNMIL support. Larger posts now include specialist Women and Children Protection Units [WCPUs].

Despite these positive steps, police presence is barely felt in much of rural Liberia, where national police are vastly overshadowed by the presence of UNMIL troops and riot police. The informal security sector is also significant, including vigilantes and the authority of chiefs and elders. Many areas, particularly in the isolated interior or border regions, remain volatile, as shown by high incidence of lynching and arson, or the deadly inter-communal violence that erupted in Voinjama in February 2010.
The 2,100-strong AFL remains a work in progress and is unlikely to be fully and independently operational at least until 2014, the envisaged date of becoming ‘mission capable’ (ready to protect Liberia’s frontiers, for example). Limited numbers of armed Emergency Response Unit (ERU) and Police Support Unit (PSU) personnel reinforced the sparse LNP presence in Liberia’s hinterland counties, notably Grand Gedeoh, in 2011.

Community perceptions of state security services
The SSR process has engaged local communities relatively openly, at least with regard to LNP. There were county-level consultations at district and county levels informed the security components of Liberia’s Poverty Reduction Strategy (2008–11) and accompanying County Development Agenda. Since 2009 the LNP has made efforts to adopt community policing models.

Despite this, research by International Alert during 2010 indicated that public perceptions of the police were often negative. In Grand Gedeoh county, police officers were generally viewed as insufficiently motivated to adequately respond to crime, and lacking resources to patrol or be proactive in crime prevention. Women’s groups asserted that police often dropped cases of sexual or domestic violence, especially where the suspect was powerfully connected. Many women stated that they were reluctant to approach WCPUs in cases of domestic violence due to shame or fear of abandonment by their partners.

Many respondents said that it was necessary to pay police to investigate a reported crime – at least for fuel, stationery and telecommunications. Local police deny they ask for payment to investigate crimes but concede they face major logistical problems in operating anywhere outside the main towns, and sometimes find it too dangerous to patrol at night, even within towns.

In Bong and Nimba counties a number of police stations have been burned down by mobs enraged by the LNP’s perceived impotence or implication in crime. Burglary, sexual violence and disputes over land remain serious concerns to ordinary Liberians, along with worries over instability in neighbouring Guinea and Côte d’Ivoire.

In Grand Gedeoh, people’s confidence in the armed forces was strikingly higher than in LNP. Numerous respondents advocated deployment of the new AFL to replace UNMIL in the county, because, for historical and ethnic reasons, the local people generally have closer ties to AFL than LNP. The withdrawal of Ethiopian peacekeepers from

Grand Gedeoh during 2009 was a source of concern to several respondents in Toe Town close to the Nimba and Ivorian borders.

Security sector challenges
Police lack sufficient equipment, resources and infrastructure, especially outside of Monrovia, where human power, vehicles and equipment are concentrated. A typical county LNP detachment has one or two functional pick-up trucks and a few motorcycles for perhaps 100 officers spread over several thousand square kilometres. LNP commanders acknowledge that large areas without road links are simply beyond their reach. In the three counties surveyed, there were no radios or secure communications, no computers or forensic equipment and rarely any electricity. There is seldom a budget for fuel, stationery or telecommunications. LNP remains effectively confined to towns and highways.

Only the thousand-or-so ERU and PSU are armed and trained to deal with violent public disorder owing to, among other things, concerns over police officers’ past over-readiness to use firearms. The regular LNP often retreats from situations of violent confrontation. The ERU relies on UNMIL helicopters for remote deployment and back up.

Police are also seen as unable to collect, preserve and present evidence sufficient for conviction – one of many weaknesses in the statutory courts system. One magistrate complained that many cases had to be dismissed due to LNP’s inability to prepare correct charge sheets. Without secure prisons, bail and transport, prisoners often escape or abscond. Conviction rates are low and slow. There also can be social stigma attached to pursuing retributive justice instead of resolving disputes through the family or clan. Corruption is a further problem, as some officers solicit investigation fees from those seeking protection.

Despite offering inducements in the form of access to secondary education prior to recruitment, LNP has struggled to reach its target of 20 per cent female officers. As of 2011, 16 per cent of LNP personnel were women. There is a shortage of female candidates with high school diplomas or the willingness to attend accelerated learning programmes.

Human and other essential resources are concentrated in Monrovia and coastal counties and there is an extremely low ratio of police to citizens outside these areas. According to figures compiled for the 2008 County Development Agenda, most coastal counties have a police-to-citizen ratio of 1:900; police in hinterland counties are much more scarce at 1:1700. In Bong and Nimba, two of the most volatile counties, this ratio was less than 1:3300.
In Grand Gedeh the number of police fell by one-third between 2007 and 2010. Lofa similarly registered a sharp drop in police numbers and Bong has also recently lost personnel. LNP commanders blame difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff due to poor pay, deployment to remote locations, competition from private security contractors, the lure of better training and opportunities in Monrovia and hostility from local communities.

Informal security providers: filling the gaps
The informal security sector in Liberia is very mixed in terms of its integrity and effectiveness. But given weaknesses in official structures and their limited reach beyond Monrovia, informal security and justice are an essential reality for many Liberians.

UNMIL deploys civilian police, formed police units (FPUs) for riot control, and armed troops. But UNMIL's strength has been reduced by more than 40 per cent since 2007 and many units have been withdrawn or merged as the gradual shift to national security provision has progressed. The remainder are steadily being drawn down following elections in late 2011. UNMIL has enforced public order effectively; but it is remote from many Liberians, and responds to requests from the Liberian authorities rather than from communities.

Informal security providers have filled the gaps: traditional leaders, civilians deputised by chiefs or elders, community security groups and vigilante night patrols in urban areas. These can hold a considerable degree of local support. But they have no formal mandate, accountability is weak, their levels of legitimacy are mixed and their relationship with the police and courts can be antagonistic.

In Gbarnga and elsewhere, patrols are conducted by unions of motorcycle taxi riders, many of them former combatants who felt vulnerable to violence and interference by the police and have taken the initiative to provide security for themselves and their communities. Not everyone feels safer as a result but there does appear to be a significant level of support for the bikers among ordinary people. Business-protection groups also deliver informal security. Trading unions such as the Liberian Marketing Association take it upon themselves to regulate market areas.

Women’s groups have their own informal network of white-shirted ‘women peacekeepers’ who revisit the tactics of the wartime women’s peace movement and use shame to persuade young men to disengage from tense or violent confrontations. The Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET) mobilises its members to confront and arrest alleged perpetrators of domestic or sexual abuse and deliver them to the LNP for prosecution.

Chiefs have significant influence over informal security mechanisms, though their authority over youth has waned since the war. Secret societies, usually known in north-west Liberia as Poro (for men) or Sande (for women), retain much authority in rural areas. They paradoxically represent both a force for social order and a potential impediment to the ability of the state to protect citizens and investigate crimes, having co-existed in a sometimes-uneasy partnership with ‘modern’ Liberian state security and justice institutions since their creation in the nineteenth century. LNP officers report the invocation of sacred forest reserves or the appearance of ‘bush devils’ (masked oracles) to deter police presence in certain areas and to protect customary investigations or punishments.

Regulating the informal security sector
There have been some efforts by LNP and the UN to reach out to community watch groups in order to make them aware of key rights and laws, provide basic equipment such as torches and high visibility clothing, and encourage them to liaise with community policing initiatives. Community police have engaged trade union security groups to deter them from enforcing their own justice.

In Gbarnga, the mayor is involved in community policing in an effort to discourage mob justice (lynchings) and has divided the city into zones with elected representatives who report to her office. Complainants have a choice of dispute-resolution mechanisms, including ‘city corporation police’ (civilian municipal employees), LNP or traditional chiefs. There has been tension between informal security structures and formal authorities over responsibilities and rights of adjudication. There is also a risk of ‘forum shopping’ by plaintiffs, with richer citizens favouring the formal circuit courts where entry costs may be prohibitive for poorer people.

The formal security sector will not be able to assume fully and responsibly the security functions exercised by UNMIL in the near future. A range of informal actors will continue to service the demand for security at the community level. With local security actors set to become more disparate
and subject to varied or weak forms of official oversight, community oversight and an active civil society will be increasingly important in holding all security actors to account.

**People-centred security**

Considerable progress has been made since 2004 in reforming Liberia’s security sector and there have been valuable initiatives to include and consult local people. But reform is slow and still has a long way to go, while LNP capacities have declined in key areas even as the drawdown of UNMIL transfers greater responsibilities to Liberian institutions.

Overall, interviewees perceived that security had improved markedly since the end of the war and return from exile or camps, exemplified by the very low incidence of re-displacement. However they felt this owed less to security provision by LNP and more to UNMIL’s presence or regime change in Monrovia and Guinea. Some respondents felt violence had continued in forms that were inaccessible to the international security presence, for example within the family, and was disproportionately affecting girls or women. Regardless of their capacity to provide security and justice, the Liberian security forces are at least no longer widely seen as perpetrators of violence.

Targeted police reforms are required to improve security provision nationwide, with an emphasis on conflict-affected rural areas, where police presence is most needed and least evident. Conditions for police need to be improved – including better pay, accommodation, training opportunities and equipment – to promote recruitment, retention, standards and effectiveness. Deployment to hinterland counties could be incentivised to close the personnel gap. Recruiting local people in these areas could boost retention and build local trust. Building on progress to date, more attention should be paid to recruiting women police officers.

More broadly, investing in the transport infrastructure for hinterland counties by (re)building all-weather highways that link settlements to other towns and counties would improve mobility for more effective security provision.

Given the widespread negative perceptions of police in rural areas, initiatives to build community relations are also needed. Communication between local communities, police and government on security issues could be promoted through local dialogue forums and community radio stations using vernacular languages. Training and sensitising police, magistrates, justices of the peace, chiefs and local medical professionals on the protection of vulnerable girls and women is a priority.

Even expedited police reforms will take time to meet the population’s human security needs. Policymakers need to engage pragmatically with the country’s spectrum of informal security actors. The government and its donor partners should develop programmes with communities and civil society that work with informal security actors, to regulate their conduct, increase their accountability to local people, and – where appropriate – boost their capacity. Ongoing dialogue between communities and formal and informal security providers, and local and national government and donors, is crucial.

Initiatives like the Mayor of Gbarnga’s community policing projects show how informal and formal security structures can collaborate and complement each other. Guaranteeing the security of Liberian citizens who most need it means working with and supporting communities and civil society to engage both official and unofficial security actors and prioritise their accountability to the people whose welfare they purport to protect. Liberian and international civil society can facilitate dialogue among these disparate actors.

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Formal and informal justice in Liberia

Pewee Flomoku and Counsellor Lemuel Reeves

How can we ensure that all Liberians will have access to justice they understand and believe in?
We should ask each other how dedicated members of our formal and customary justice system can ensure all Liberians are afforded their rights under the Constitution.

President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Access to Justice Conference, Gbarnga, Bong county, April 2010

In this article, Pewee Flomoku and Counsellor Lemuel Reeves from the Carter Center describe their organisation’s experiences in promoting justice in post-war Liberia, in particular in linking traditional and formal justice systems.

The justice system that President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf inherited when she came to office in 2006 was in tatters. Particularly in rural areas, police and magistrates were largely unpaid and unregulated, and were often operating in their own interests.

A critical peacebuilding challenge for Liberia has been to build its citizens’ trust in the justice system – to persuade them that it acts in people’s interests. In recent years, much work and international support has gone into improving the formal justice system: training judges, magistrates, prosecutors and public defenders; renovating court buildings; and regularising salaries.

But the benefits of these reforms have so far been slow to trickle down to ordinary citizens, especially those beyond the capital, Monrovia. In the absence of strong oversight mechanisms, there are no guarantees that corrupt practices will change.

Rural Liberians pursue justice almost entirely through traditional means. A 2008 survey by Oxford University [see Further Reading] found that rural citizens took only four per cent of criminal cases and three per cent of civil cases to the formal courts.

Chiefs, elders or spiritual leaders resolve disputes based on widely accepted cultural paradigms. But some traditional approaches are at odds with formal mechanisms, and can be highly controversial. A rape may traditionally be ‘talked through’ because it is seen as a problem between families and it is for the perpetrator and his family to make the victim and her family whole again; this can include payment, or sometimes even marrying the victim. The statutory system, by contrast, sees rape as a crime against the individual, which requires individual punishment.

When the newly elected government took power in 2006, the rule of law was so weak in most rural areas that an immediate priority for the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) was to educate citizens on how the law should be implemented, as well as to teach people about important reforms such as amendments to law governing rape and changes to the inheritance law to allow women in customary marriages to inherit property.

In partnership with the MOJ, the Carter Center initially worked with three rural community organisations to do this work. Over the course of one month rural citizens in eight of Liberia’s 15 counties were asked about their experiences of the law; based on this research, messages for community dramas and radio were developed by the MOJ for civic education campaigns. This programme made a simple but significant contribution. It showed rural Liberians that the government recognised the daily realities of ordinary people and was trying to act in their interests by providing them with the knowledge needed to exercise their rights, even while formal justice mechanisms would take longer to reform.
Through cooperating with the MOJ and the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA), the Carter Center’s programming has supported justice reform. We have also increasingly developed a significant ‘bottom-up’ complement to formal international post-conflict rule of law interventions. This has helped to provide information and services to marginalised rural populations, and build bridges between customary and formal justice systems and between rural citizens and the state.

**Strengthening formal justice and improving access**

The Carter Center has provided capacity and technical support to the MOJ. We seconded a Liberian attorney to work with it and have been helping to place US law fellows within it. We also supported the creation of the Sexual and Gender Based Violent Crimes Unit. Our Liberian staff has collaborated with Liberian organisations to provide regular training for magistrates, city solicitors, county attorneys and the police.

**In the early phases of the work, civic educators were being approached regularly to solve disputes for citizens who trusted community NGOs more than the formal and customary systems**

Progress has been made. In 2010 the MOJ finalised a code of conduct for prosecutors and fully complied with the UN Human Rights Council’s Universal Periodic Review process. It sponsored legislation to strengthen the rights of prison detainees, created a position for a dedicated juvenile justice attorney, and is actively leading taskforces to reduce pre-trial detention, implement probation programmes and strengthen juvenile justice.

The Carter Center has provided small grants and training to local civil society organisations (CSOs) in eight counties (Maryland, Grand Kru, River Gee, Sinoe, Grand Gedeh, Bong, Nimba and Lofa). They use drama, community forums, radio programming and music to ‘tell the story’ of the rule of law to rural Liberians. Civic educators focus on existing and new laws, including those on inheritance, rape, domestic violence, *Sassywood* (trial by ordeal), land disputes and bond and court fees. The CSOs comprise traditional, religious and women’s organisations. In 2010, roughly 56,000 people received direct civic education in 587 community visits.

In the early phases of the work, civic educators were being approached regularly to solve disputes for citizens who trusted community NGOs more than the formal and customary systems. In response, in 2007 the Carter Center and the Liberian Catholic Justice and Peace Commission (JPC) developed a Community Legal Advisor (CLA) programme that now provides 34 CLAs in six counties. CLAs are trained to guide local people through the formal, informal and traditional options for settling disputes. With support from USAID, they provide rural citizens with free information on their rights and the law; help people interact with government, courts and traditional authorities; mediate small-scale conflicts; and engage in advocacy around justice.

CLAs give individuals and communities the opportunity to see the law working in practice. They help to set standards for local justice provision, encouraging other justice providers, customary and statutory, to improve and to become more accountable. In 2010, CLAs opened 1,704 new cases and closed 1,562 – 72 per cent successfully – following review by Carter Center legal staff. In all, as of July 2011 over 4,400 cases had been opened since 2008.

**Strengthening community institutions**

Most Liberians still rely on traditional justice. But its structures have been weakened over time and by the war. A lack of resources and unclear mandates have undermined the ability of chiefs and elders to resolve local disputes. Some traditional practices are inconsistent with national laws and international standards. Trial by ordeal, in which guilt is determined or confession elicited through sometimes harmful practices informed by traditional beliefs, is one example. Certain approaches to rape, as mentioned earlier, are another.

Where there are conflicts between traditional practices and the law, the Carter Center’s approach is to explain the law and the reasoning behind it, and to facilitate a respectful discussion on the pros and cons of each approach. This enables problem solving and mutual understanding. Rural leaders often ask: if you take away our way of determining guilt and innocence, what will you replace it with? This is a very challenging question, where the idea of evidence-based due process is largely alien and the necessary tools, such as police and courts, may be inaccessible due to distance, cost, or mistrust. County Dispute Resolution Monitors have developed guidelines to work with chiefs when approaches to the law are in conflict (see BOX 6).

The Carter Center is helping to build the dispute resolution capacity of traditional leaders, women and youths at the national, county and district levels in a manner consistent with Liberian law. It has used dialogue and training to
introduce traditional leaders to new laws and dispute resolution approaches that promote inclusion. It also provides modest financial support.

The approach has been extremely effective in energising the country’s first line of justice providers so as to strengthen community and inter-communal problem-solving and healing, even as rural citizens wrestle with the challenges of land disputes, changing gender roles, and the legacy of the war. For example, following an outbreak of mass violence in Voinjama, Lofa County in February 2010 between youths of Lorma and Mandingo ethnicity, the National Traditional Council was able to bring together Mandingo and Lorma elders from the area and reach agreement on how to restore peace. In Bong County in December 2010, a village elder used the mediation skills he had learned through Carter Center training to resolve a 50-year-old land dispute between the Zaye, Queekon and Tonnie communities. In this case, which concerned approximately 500 acres of land, each party claimed that the other was ignoring an agreed traditional boundary and was growing crops on land they did not own. Following mediation, the disputants worked together to demarcate a new boundary, and agreed to share a common agricultural space.

**Linking formal and informal justice**

To help bring rural perspectives to policy reform processes, the Carter Center has facilitated meetings between CSO partners and justice officials, including the Minister of Justice. It has also helped analyse the legal framework governing rural areas and suggested reforms.

A national Access to Justice Conference in April 2010, co-hosted by the MOJ, MIA and the judiciary, examined the dual customary and statutory justice systems within which tribal courts under the executive branch coexist with the formal courts of the judiciary. This difficult but critical discussion is on-going within the Law Reform Commission and in the Committee on the Role of Non-Lawyers.

The Carter Center’s experience suggests a number of recommendations for policymakers in Liberia and other post-conflict environments.

First, focus on community-based legal empowerment, including educating local people about their legal rights and options and capacitating existing community structures. Community justice can be a locally legitimate and cost effective means of providing marginalised citizens with ownership of and access to justice. It is more effective to work with home-grown dispute resolution mechanisms accepted by communities than to create new ones. Timeliness is also an important factor. Building and embedding formal justice is a long-term endeavour, while societal divisions and fragility in the aftermath of war makes fast and functional conflict management a priority. Working toward accessible local justice can provide a tangible ‘peace dividend’ to neglected populations.
Second, support dialogue processes between the formal and traditional justice sectors to build synergies and a shared understanding of an agreed legal framework. Existing justice practices need to be harmonised with the country’s governance reform programme and international commitments. Most importantly, justice processes that are accepted and employed by local populations must be developed.

Third, promote civil society participation in and oversight of local judicial reform processes. The CLAs’ work shows that civil society groups are often trusted more than statutory or customary justice providers. CSOs are an important resource for policymakers fighting local level corruption. Civil society and community involvement will also help to build people’s trust in governance more broadly and to reduce the sense of exclusion that has been a root cause of conflict.

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Mediating land disputes in Liberia

Juliette Syn and the Norwegian Refugee Council Information, Counselling and Legal Assistance Team in Nimba County

Liberia has experienced years of war, mass displacement and explosive population growth. Many who fled the war returned to find that their land had changed hands several times and was now occupied. Even if they could get their land back, there was no guarantee that someone else would not later claim it, continuing the cycle of displacement. As Liberians realised that there might not be an endless supply of land, ‘palavas’ (confusions) proliferated: different people claiming the same piece of land; arguments over boundaries that had never been identified; and different interpretations of what rights had been given.

Just a few generations ago, land in Liberia was plentiful. Today, the fight for land is desperate because many people have nothing else and nowhere else to go. Nimba, one of the country’s most volatile counties, has been acutely affected.

The establishment of the national Land Commission demonstrates the Liberian government’s desire to address land issues. The commission’s Land Dispute Resolution Taskforce has initiatives to analyse land disputes and coordinate the increasing number of actors in this sector, and it has endorsed the use of alternative dispute resolution, including local mediation.

In Liberia, land is not just earth: it is a symbol of identity, heritage and hope. Liberians who live in abject poverty declare themselves rich if they have “a small place to sit down”.

**NRC mediation**

Today, multiple systems of land use and ownership exist side-by-side, complicating the resolution of land disputes. Against this backdrop, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) opened its Information, Counselling and Legal Assistance (ICLA) project in Nimba County in 2007, using mediation and education to peacefully address emerging land disputes. It has since helped to resolve over 700 disputes.

The mediation process begins when a party reports their problem to an NRC mediator. Parties often come to NRC of their own accord, but they may also be referred, for example by local authorities. Once a case is reported, NRC will ask disputants if they are willing to participate in mediation. Not all parties to a dispute will agree; some prefer the formal justice system and others are not interested in discussing the case at all. In such instances, NRC cannot intervene.

NRC engages traditional and formal institutions to garner their support, but offers its mediation as an alternative to both. Many Liberians still distrust the formal system, seeing courts as ‘just eating money’, while women and young people are understandably dissatisfied with traditional forums where gender and age may count against them. However, NRC mediators ensure that parties know
what options are available to them, and will explain the advantages and disadvantages of both mediation and litigation. Parties will sometimes withdraw from mediation and open a court case, but it is not unusual for them to return, not least because of the cost of judicial proceedings.

If the parties agree to mediation, NRC registers the case and begins a fact-checking exercise. The mediator holds separate discussions with each side about their fears, goals and interests. Parties often refuse to speak to each other at first; a large part of the mediator’s work is helping parties prepare to listen. Depending on the level of frustration and anger involved require the mediator to try to prevent a complete breakdown of the parties’ relationship. Mediators will continue with a case as long as parties are willing to work toward a solution, as there is often no other viable option for them.

Tenure and tradition
Disputes over land tenure in Nimba are common and illustrate clashes between evolving notions of individual ownership and customary systems of collective use. In the past, when land belonged to a clan or family, there was a clearly identified elder who would speak for the collective regarding rights to use their land. Communal discussions were part of the process, so many people could attest to traditional boundaries. Today, the younger generation often sells land without consulting anyone, resulting in too many buyers for not enough land.

Knowledge imbalance between wealthy urban, and poorer rural Liberians is significant. According to NRC mediator Rebecca Secklo, “the secret of how to acquire land was hidden from the country people” who, without education, would forever be at a disadvantage. There are numerous cases in which deeds from the capital show individual ownership of lands that have been occupied by communities for decades. Mediators encourage parties to consider each other’s needs, which can often lead to shared use instead of eviction.

Land disputes can mask more sensitive social problems, relating to gender, ethnicity and tradition. NRC mediator Nathaniel Kiala explains that “the method we use is different from what [the people in Nimba] were doing. They were not going into the root cause”.

In an illustrative case, a woman reported that a man was trying to remove her from her late husband’s land, claiming to be his son. The man maintained that she had not legally married his father, so the land was his. Under Liberian law, litigation would have favoured whoever could prove either marriage or bloodline, and neither party had such evidence. But the mediator’s background investigation revealed that the two had lived together on the land for another area. This may include helping buyers understand each other’s needs and situations and bringing buyer and seller together, to understand how the dispute occurred and how to move forward.

The length of the process depends on the facts at hand. If two people bought the same piece of land but the seller has additional land, it is common for one buyer to relocate willingly and the matter can be resolved in a few months. If, however, a buyer is repeatedly relocated because each new plot turns out to be occupied, the increasing levels of frustration and anger involved require the mediator to try to prevent a complete breakdown of the parties’ relationship. Mediators will continue with a case as long as parties are willing to work toward a solution, as there is often no other viable option for them.

Elders and other community members are included in the process to ensure factual accuracy and legitimacy. Most cases registered between individuals do not stay that way; land is rarely a private affair and many community members soon become involved. Community participation is also useful in enforcing agreements, which the NRC does not have the power to do itself.

The importance of social reinforcement is reflected in boundary disputes, one of the most commonly reported issues. Mediation in these cases typically helps parties move from absolute positions. Many disputants will later admit uncertainty over a boundary line and be open to a new move from absolute positions. Many disputants will later admit uncertainty over a boundary line and be open to a new demarcation, which will be agreed in writing and witnessed by NRC staff and other community members, thereby ensuring multiple ways to attest to the agreement.

The role of the mediator is not to determine who is telling the truth, but to encourage the parties to be honest with each other. To maintain their credibility, mediators do not impose their personal opinions on the outcome. They try to bridge power imbalances by educating vulnerable parties and protecting against unfair tactics; but parties ultimately choose their own way forward. This neutrality can be frustrating, but without it many would refuse to participate. Ensuring that solutions come from the parties greatly increases the likelihood that they will abide by their agreement.

All NRC mediators are Liberian, which helps ensure that culturally appropriate agreements are reached. In many places in Liberia, if a piece of land has been sold to multiple parties the law would seek to determine one legitimate owner. A different notion of a fair procedure exists in Nimba, where in the same situation mediators would seek to help the buyers decide among themselves who will stay on that particular spot, and who will accept relocation to another
years, and had long recognised each other’s relationship to the deceased. In working with the two parties, the mediator learned that the rift occurred when one party’s attempts to start a romantic relationship were spurned. The parties eventually agreed to find a way to recognise their shared ownership.

Legacy of violence
Land issues are complicated by Liberia’s recent violent history. There is often a threat of bloodshed: many case histories feature burned houses and bridges, destroyed crops and threats to ‘chop’ anyone who enters a contested area. “Before the war, people didn’t think like that”, says NRC mediator Marcus Sougbay. He is particularly concerned about youth: “We know what war was like. It is our little brothers who are willing to fight”. Youths are often involved in land disputes as they fight for control of land to assert their identity and status. Mediation is an especially important recourse for this group, so the process involves youth leaders to help them feel included.

Ethnic tensions in Nimba that were fuelled and exploited during the wars remain and different groups have different perceptions of the past. In one version, innocent people of the Mano and Gio ethnic groups were killed by the Doe Government and its Mandingo supporters. In another, the Mano and Gio ran the Mandingo out of the country. There are still many disputes between Mano, Gio and Mandingo people over land ownership. Mechanisms to resolve these disputes non-violently are vital.

Land and peace
Mediation over land disputes can have significant long-term peacebuilding benefits. It can look beyond litigation, to enable disputants to deal with underlying – often war-related – grievances and arrive at an agreed and mutually-beneficial outcome. Local mediation helps to embed practices of dialogue and conciliation and can promote greater community cohesion.

NRC’s mediation programme in Nimba relies on local participation, government support, and good relationships with both customary and formal bodies. The effectiveness of the programme derives from the work of talented and dedicated local staff; from integrating culture and communities; and from patience and sensitivity in promoting principles like women’s rights in traditional settings. Specific policies such as using only Liberian mediators have also had significant positive impact, as this fosters a sense of unity regardless of ethnicity, and builds trust and understanding among Liberians themselves. Mediators’ neutral role and the focus on ownership of solutions of disputes by the parties themselves help to embed their sustainability.

Our experience suggests that local mediation can prevent and property disputes from becoming violent. While an effective, legitimate and accessible justice system is gradually being built, mediation can complement legal recourse, which is inaccessible in many rural areas and can sometimes aggravate discord. Mediation may sometimes be a slow and lengthy process, but for the parties involved the existence of an imperfect or long avenue to peace is often better than none at all.

Liberia’s government is working its way through myriad issues surrounding land use and ownership, including title and registration systems, the interplay of traditional systems and statutory laws, and growing pressure on land. Through methods that include workshops with customary leaders and developing an inventory of dispute resolution mechanisms, the Land Commission and its Land Dispute Resolution Taskforce actively seek to understand the problems facing rural Liberians as the interplay of formal and customary systems increases. Though it is not yet certain how the country will proceed, these actions are at least a sign to the people that their voices are important, and that their government wants to hear them – an important but often underestimated element of building peace.

In the meantime, NRC is working alongside the Land Commission in the hope that its experience and knowledge can contribute to national efforts in land dispute resolution, and will continue to use mediation to diffuse fear and anger in Nimba. Certainly, mediation alone cannot solve Liberia’s land problems, but if “this land business can never finish”, as most Liberians say, it can at least help ensure that it does not destroy the peace.

Juliette Syn is an American-trained lawyer with a background in international human rights law. Her work in Liberia has focused on land and natural resource-related issues, disputes and policies; displacement issues; and customary law and practice.
Section 4

Reconciliation and reintegration

Literate ex-combatants raise their hands at an educational meeting held by the NGO LOIC (Liberia Opportunities Industrial Centres), Buchanan, Liberia // © Betty Press/ Panos
Fambul Tok:
reconciling communities in Sierra Leone
John Caulker

In the late 1990s, I played a leading role in calling for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) to be part of any peace deal ending the conflict in Sierra Leone, partly inspired by what I knew about the South African version, with its ‘truth for amnesty’ provisions.

Human rights activists like me were worried that a future peace agreement might include a blanket amnesty, which would do nothing to promote post-conflict accountability or reconciliation. Unfortunately, in the end, despite providing for the establishment of a TRC, the Lomé Agreement of July 1999 did just that.

I decided to work hard to make the TRC, which began its hearings in 2002, as credible and effective as possible. My thinking was not to go with an elitist, top-down approach. I wanted to involve the people in the rural communities and called for grassroots ‘mini-commissions’ which would feed into the official Commission, stressing the importance of local dialogue and ownership. But the idea was dismissed by the TRC.

My colleagues and I within civil society then formed a TRC Working Group, a consortium of some 60 non-governmental organisations (NGOs), with the aim of ensuring that the views of Sierra Leoneans about how the TRC should go about its work were seriously considered. But the TRC often ignored those views.

The TRC: an opportunity missed
The TRC published its final report in 2004. It was certainly a worthy ‘research project’ and its report was good – but the process was less so. It was always more a UN than a Sierra Leonean initiative. The TRC did not go beyond short hearings in the main district towns. Very few perpetrators testified, partly because they were worried about incriminating themselves and ending up before the Special Court for Sierra Leone, also established in 2002.

The official description was that the TRC and the Special Court were complementary, but, as the TRC Working Group had warned, it did not work out like that in practice. The Special Court has spent about $200 million in bringing eleven people to trial, with former Liberian president Charles Taylor the last case before it. There has been no provision for victims, while promises about a ‘legacy’, in terms of a more effective national judicial system, have not been honoured. It was more of an international tribunal with limited national accountability. Maybe, as we argued at the time, some kind of sequencing of the TRC and Special Court might have been better.

Implementation of the recommendations of the TRC has been slow and patchy, including for the establishment of a reparations programme and a special fund for war victims. Successive governments have given many of the TRC’s recommendations a low priority and the attention of the international community has largely moved on. Ordinary Sierra Leoneans are now either cynical about the TRC or have forgotten about it. The truth is that, in the countryside, many were barely aware of it in the first place. Victims and perpetrators at community level still often find themselves living uneasily next door to each other, without having had any opportunity for meaningful acknowledgement or reconciliation.

Fambul Tok: origins and values
By 2007 I was frustrated and burnt out. I could not see a way forward. But just as I was about to withdraw from the scene, everything came together to create Fambul Tok (Krio for ‘Family Talk’). I met the head of the US foundation Catalyst for Peace, Libby Hoffman. She shared my vision of
a grassroots process of reconciliation in which perpetrators and victims at the local level might come together, drawing on Sierra Leonean culture and tradition, and she offered to support a programme based on this vision.

Above all, we both agreed that the people most affected by a conflict are the ones who know best what their needs are — an insight often missing from the work of outside experts involved in conflict resolution work. In February 2008, Fambul Tok began in Kailahun District in the east of the country, where the conflict began. Today we are working in five districts: Kailahun, Kono, Koinadugu, Moyamba and Bombali. In future we would like to extend our work to other parts of the Mano River region, in partnership with Liberians, Guineans and Ivorians.

In Fambul Tok it is the people themselves who organise the programmes. Reconciliation processes led by the people are more sustainable. We do not go into a community with promises. We are careful not to be seen as NGOs going in with aid handouts. For us, the most important thing is building community ownership. While we do have a small, talented group of paid staff at district and national level, most of the day-to-day work of Fambul Tok is being done by volunteers within their own communities.

Before the conflict, Sierra Leoneans used to describe ourselves as one big family. “The family tree will bend but never break”, as we say here. In Fambul Tok, family is not merely biological, but the community as family, the district as family, and even the nation as family. We have found that there is little interest in Western notions of punishment at the community level. We have our own way of addressing justice, our own ways of disciplining people, but it does not involve sending them to prison. Nor do we send them into exile.

There is an adage in our local dialect that says: “There is no bad bush to throw away a bad child”, which means that when a person has done something bad the most important thing is to try and rehabilitate them, not simply throw them out of the community. Our culture is built around conversation, centred in storytelling, where people sit around the fire at night to talk about the day’s events.

Also, part of our tradition is in talking to our ancestors. If you do not please them, you will have bad luck. If you appease them, you are bound to have a good harvest. Fambul Tok communities have ceremonies that involve invoking the spirit of ancestors and asking for their blessing. This is a very important part of the reconciliation process. To sum up, the communities involved in Fambul Tok are drawing on our culture and traditions, sometimes adding some new elements, in order to promote grassroots reconciliation.

**Bonfire ceremonies: the sacred space**

Bonfire ceremonies, which usually involve the whole community, have become central to Fambul Tok. But before we have a bonfire we undertake consultations in a community for a minimum of three months. We train a reconciliation committee that includes the head of the youth, head of the women (‘mommy queens’) and religious leaders in basic trauma healing, listening and mediation skills. Because they stay in the community, they are always there to talk through with offenders as and when the need arises. It takes a lot of time and a lot of training to help people feel comfortable to tell their stories and not be afraid. We have a district team that goes in regularly before and after the bonfire to find out if the victims and offenders are healing. It is a long process. Time is fluid, controlled by the community.

I would call the Fambul Tok bonfire the sacred space in the sense that it is only within that circle, within that bonfire that you can say anything you want relating to the war. Once you are in that sacred space you feel empowered, because you know the community is behind you. It is also the same for offenders. There they can discuss what they did, have a dialogue with the victim, and apologise. That apology is essential; people acknowledging their deeds is the basis for reconciliation. If there is not enough time to hear everybody’s stories during the bonfire, storytelling continues over the period ahead under a peace tree. After the bonfire, there are always cleansing and purification ceremonies.

**Sustaining and extending Fambul Tok**

Relationships can take a long time to heal, so we also have community farms, peace mothers’ groups and football matches, through which processes of reconciliation are sustained and deepened. Community farms have had some excellent harvests and women who have been involved with Fambul Tok have often taken on leadership roles within their communities. Once they have found their voice, they refuse to return into the background and often work together in new economic ventures. Fambul Tok provides some support but strongly encourages economic self-reliance. It looks increasingly clear that our reconciliation efforts are having real development benefits. These are some of the ways in which Fambul Tok is a catalyst for positive change at grassroots level.

As we hoped it would, Fambul Tok has taken on a life of its own. Increasingly, communities where we are not working are not waiting for us to come to them. They are beginning their own Fambul Tok processes anyway.
Radio programmes and word of mouth spread the word for us. Fambul Tok has already produced hundreds of extraordinary stories of reconciliation and forgiveness. Some of these feature in the documentary film about our work which film-maker Sara Terry has produced and which is now being screened in Sierra Leone – and around the world. (www.fambultok.com)

In March 2011 we launched, with a number of civil society partners, a national unity campaign, *Wi na wan fambul* (We are one family), which has the goal of helping to ensure that the 2012 elections in Sierra Leone are conducted on the basis of tolerance and non-violence. You only have to look around the rest of Africa to see just how dangerous elections can be for peace and stability. The 2007 elections were reasonably free, fair and peaceful but, in the long term, democratic consolidation will only happen if there is a genuine process of national reconciliation. There is still much work to do on that front. Hopefully, *Wi na wan fambul* can make a big contribution.

From the international community’s viewpoint, they say Sierra Leone had peace once the war ended. If you talk to the average Sierra Leonean in the village, however, they say what they want is sustainable peace. They understand that the conflict does not end when the guns are silent. Peace comes when we really acknowledge what went wrong, when we really restore the dignity of victims, when offenders have the opportunity to explain why they committed the atrocities they did, and to apologise. Then one could say that we are at the beginning of the long road to peace.

Since we started Fambul Tok we have found that working with a community does not mean coming with a checklist, but rather coming with an open mind. You have to work with people and see through their own lens how they see things, not coming watching through your own prism from the outside. We hope that the international community, the NGO community and the Sierra Leonean Government can all learn from the approach of Fambul Tok. We are open to exploring what those lessons are with other activists and practitioners in the field of peacebuilding.

John Caulker is the Executive Director of Fambul Tok. Previously, he was the Executive Director of Forum of Conscience, a national human rights NGO, and played a leading role in the Truth and Reconciliation Working Group, a civil society coalition which engaged critically with the Sierra Leonean Truth and Reconciliation Commission during its existence.
Work not war: youth transformation in Liberia and Sierra Leone
Ibrahim Bangura and Irma Specht

I fought for nine years with the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) as one of their middle level commanders before the war came to an end in Sierra Leone. I then moved over to Liberia in search of a job so I could forget about war and live a decent life. I was not able to get a job and ended up suffering until the second war started in 1999. Through a friend I got recruited to fight on the side of the Liberian government forces. I had to escape and come back to Sierra Leone as soon as former president Charles Taylor left Liberia as I had made many enemies there.

Julius Kamara, a young former fighter from Bo

Liberian and Sierra Leonean youths have faced alienation and economic hardship. This has led some into violence. Peacebuilding initiatives have sought to educate, employ and empower youths. But political reforms so far have not met the scale of the challenge and excluded young people are still involved in political violence, criminal gangs and mercenary activity: the cycle has not been broken.

This article discusses young people’s experiences and perspectives before, during and after the wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone. It is based on semi-structured interviews conducted by the authors with 30 young people between the ages of 18 and 35 from both countries: 17 men and 13 women; ex-combatants and non-combatants; from rural and urban communities. Interviews were conducted in June and July 2011. Interviewees were selected based on their age and personal experiences of youth issues and the challenges faced by young people in their countries. The article also draws on past interviews and research conducted by the authors and others from 2004 to 2011.

Exclusion and conscription
Ishmail Tarpeh, a former combatant in Liberia, outlines some of the circumstances that preceded his involvement in the war:

We had no access to farms, education was expensive and our parents could not afford to send us to school, so we got stuck in illiteracy and had no place in society. The government of Samuel Doe did not care as they were using the money of the country to send their own children to schools and universities overseas. We spent the evenings as frustrated people discussing this in our little corners, waiting for the right moment to seek revenge.

Before the wars in Sierra Leone and Liberia there was a high rate of illiteracy among young people that impeded their access to the job market. Young people also had little or no access to land.

Many youths perceived the justice system as hostile. Hassan Konneh describes his experiences of the local court in Pujehun, southern Sierra Leone:

Young people were given fines that did not correspond to crimes committed and in most cases the court system was used to intimidate them.

Girls and young women have experienced acute challenges through war and peacetime, including domestic and sexual violence and poor access to education and employment. Reporting wartime abuses was often frowned upon and risked bringing shame to households or communities. Women and girls have also faced exclusion from peace processes.

During the war, forced conscription to armed groups through abduction was common and children were easy targets. But many young people also volunteered to fight as a means to political, social or economic advancement, or to right perceived wrongs.

An idle mind is the devil's workshop; we were dreaming and sometimes imagining we had guns to kill those
who were making us suffer. The war gave us the guns, which made us our own masters.

Santigie Kallay

Youth conscripts sought to escape their existing circumstances, to pursue potential opportunities for personal development or to access resources. Jobs and money were high among desired rewards from fighting. Some RUF youth members were enticed with prospects of future educational opportunities such as scholarships abroad.

After the violence: youth fighters’ post-war trajectories

The destruction wrought by conflict has entrenched disadvantages for young people in Liberia and Sierra Leone, depriving a generation of education and livelihood opportunities. Youth and children accounted for significant proportions of fighters in armed groups during the wars, and there are still many factors that render young people prone to recruitment into violence today.

Some Sierra Leonean and Liberian youths, frustrated by their economic circumstances and familiar with violence as a possibility, have gone on to fight in the recent conflict in Côte d’Ivoire. Former RUF fighter Momoh Kamara says:

Regardless of how hard I tried I just could not get a job. I am educated and tried even applying for jobs that I am over qualified for with no success. So I went through Liberia into Ivory Coast to become part of any group looking for a potential fighter. I was told by my friend that Sierra Leonians and Liberians are immediately accepted. I met many of my colleagues from the RUF there and within days we were back in action and big guys once again.

For youths who did participate in DDR, reintegration initiatives were weak. Programmes to help ex-combatants forge sustainable livelihoods were poorly resourced and were not linked to real employment opportunities. Many youths’ expectations were not managed or met. Foday Fofana, a former member of Sierra Leonean armed group the West Side Boys, describes his experiences of DDR:

Our caseworkers [from the National DDR Commission, tasked with assessing ex-combatants’ needs and capacities and providing advice on reintegration options] told us we would be whatever we wanted to be in life. I wanted to become a computer hardware technician. I was put in a computer school where there were only two computers – hardly working properly – with 50 of us in my class. By the time I got to touch a computer the programme had ended. I was left angry and frustrated as the knowledge promised was never gained. We were given sweet words. Now they have the weapons and we have nothing, not even hope.

Youth policy: national and international

National and international policy reforms and programmes have focussed on youth exclusion and underemployment in both Liberia and Sierra Leone. The Liberian Joint Programme on Youth Employment and Empowerment seeks to boost youth employability and enable young people
to contribute to peacebuilding. In Sierra Leone, a National Youth Commission established in 2010 engages and advises government ministries and stakeholders on the needs of young people.

The UN, the German Development Cooperation, the World Bank and the European Union set up the $46 million Joint Response to Youth Employment for Sierra Leone in 2010. This includes a Youth Employment and Empowerment Programme, which hopes to generate 61,000 jobs in 2011, rising to 174,000 by 2015. Sierra Leone’s Ministry of Labour in 2008 reported that 65.8 per cent of all unemployed Sierra Leoneans (3 million of a population of 6.5 million) were youths [see Further Reading].

Quick impact projects, such as road-building, digging wells and supporting agriculture, have been aimed at kick-starting local economies and normalising economic conditions for young people in the short-term. Numerous non-governmental organisations also try to complement the efforts of governmental and inter-governmental actors. But economic challenges for West African youths remain. Private sectors in Liberia and Sierra Leone are small and can only create a limited number of jobs. Public sectors cannot afford good salaries. Employability remains a problem. Many Liberian and Sierra Leonean youths, especially girls and young women, are illiterate and there are few educational opportunities in either country. Even educated youth lack specific employment skills or vocational training.

Many young people have migrated to cities or to other countries in search of opportunities. Freetown and Monrovia have become overcrowded and living conditions are poor. Ami Kanneh describes life in Monrovia:

I have no place to call home. I have to wait every night for the market to be empty so I can find a place to sleep. I eat from leftovers in restaurants and market stalls. Before the war, I had a home and there was food to eat no matter how little. Now I have nothing except my death to wait for.
Youths in Liberia and Sierra Leone feel that there is a lack of will on the part of politicians to help them. They express their anger in different ways. Musicians such as Emerson Bockarie, Pupa-Bajah, the Bow-Wow Society and Dry-Yai Crew are an important voice for young people's frustrations. Information and communication technologies such as cell phones and social networking are linking young people together.

Many Liberian and Sierra Leonean youths, especially girls and young women, are illiterate and there are few educational opportunities in either country”

Conclusions
Peacebuilding policy responses to youth exclusion in Liberia and Sierra Leone must reflect the scale and urgency of the challenge, and reach those most vulnerable to recruitment into violence. The challenges are economic, political and social.

To empower young people economically, access to quality education must be increased dramatically to combat illiteracy and build skills in both countries. Vocational training should be linked to labour market analyses and demand. In the short term, young people living in rural areas should be helped to engage in cash-crop production. Land reform processes must be expedited through technical support to the Land Commissions to help youths to access and own land. Longer-term, creating jobs requires donors to support domestic private sector development, particularly in agriculture and tourism.

To foster political inclusion and prevent the violent instrumentalisation of youths, international engagement with political parties should be extended to include their youth wings: to discourage parties from acting as recruiting agencies for ‘task force’ vigilantism during elections, and to support training and dialogue on non-violence, leadership, multi-party elections, human rights and the rule of law.

Sierra Leone’s Youth Commission aims to champion youth development and young people’s participation in politics. It is new and untested but it deserves attention, encouragement and support. Youth commissions could help young people in Sierra Leone and Liberia, especially ex-combatants, to play active peacebuilding roles in their communities. Youth commissions could also be hubs of learning, exchange and potential collaboration on youth inclusion policy between the two countries, whose challenges are so intertwined.

The less tangible dimensions of youth inclusion, such as social integration, are too often neglected. There is an urgent need to recognise and address the incomplete reintegration of young ex-combatants in particular. DDR in Liberia and Sierra Leone has officially ended; but many young ex-combatants remain jobless, alienated and mentally ‘mobilised’. Reintegration is a long-term process encompassing reconciliation and community-wide peacebuilding. Policymakers should assess young ex-combatants’ outstanding needs and support reintegration initiatives that explicitly involve communities in order to avoid perceptions of unfair peace dividends and build community confidence in and inclusion of young ex-combatants.

Ibrahim Bangura has wide-ranging experience in the fields of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of ex-combatants (DDR), gender, child protection monitoring and rehabilitation, and research and monitoring and evaluation. He holds a bachelor’s degree in political science and history, University of Sierra Leone; a master’s degree in gender studies, University of Sierra Leone; and a master’s in international development studies, University of Amsterdam. He is currently pursuing a doctorate in economics at the HHL Leipzig Graduate School of Management, Germany.

Irma Specht is an anthropologist with expertise in the field of the reintegration of ex-combatants and child soldiers. She is the co-author of Young soldiers: why they choose to fight (2004), and Red Shoes, experiences of girl combatants in Liberia (2006). She is currently the Director of Transition International, a consultancy firm based in the Netherlands.
Section 5

Conclusion

Consolidating peace
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 instance 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) mobilises 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 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?
Sierra Leone: Gaenga, a former child soldier, sits with his children and his wife, a former sex slave during the war // © Alfredo Caliz/ Panos

Accord standard features

Chronology, Profiles, Key texts, Further reading, Key websites
Chronology

Liberia


1989–90
The National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) launches an incursion from Côte d’Ivoire into Nimba County, northern Liberia. Composed mainly of Gio and Mano, the group is led by Charles Taylor and aims to overthrow President Samuel Doe. NPFL is supported by the leaders of Côte d’Ivoire.

As the civil war escalates, the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL), a breakaway group of NPFL led by Prince Johnson, captures and executes President Doe. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) takes the lead in peace negotiations. A Nigerian-dominated ECOWAS regional peacekeeping force, ECOMOG, secures Monrovia and prevents an early NPFL victory. A civilian interim government is installed and ceasefire established, but there is little commitment from the main faction leaders.

1991–92
Liberia is effectively partitioned and war spills over into Sierra Leone through the NPFL-backed Revolutionary United Front (RUF). The United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy (ULIMO) is formed in Guinea and Sierra Leone by ex-Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) fighters and Krahn and Mandingo supporters of the late President Doe. ULIMO enters western Liberia from Sierra Leone to attack NPFL.

Côte d’Ivoire assumes leadership of the ECOWAS diplomatic process. NPFL is pressured into a series of tenuous peace accords, but subsequently reneges on peace commitments, re-arms and attacks Monrovia. ECOMOG turns to partisan ‘peace enforcement’, arming AFL and allying with ULIMO. Côte d’Ivoire draws back from the diplomatic process.

1993–94
An ECOMOG offensive severely weakens the NPFL. The diplomatic process moves ahead with signing of the Cotonou Accord (July 1993), which allows representatives of armed factions to join the transitional government. The Liberian Peace Council (LPC) emerges as a new rebel group supported by AFL and ULIMO. The UN Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL) is established to work with ECOMOG to monitor and verify the ceasefire, the arms embargo, and the disarmament and demobilisation of combatants.

The Cotonou Accord unravels due to factional squabbles over the composition of the transitional government, the emergence of new armed groups, and the limited resources of peacekeepers. The ECOWAS diplomatic process is renewed under Ghanaian leadership, further accommodating the armed factions (especially NPFL). ULIMO splits.

1995–96
There is rapprochement between Taylor and Nigerian President Abacha, as well as discontent and divisions spread among Krahn factions. The ECOWAS-mediated Abuja Accord (August 1995) draws all armed groups into a transitional government, with Taylor and ULIMO-K leader Alhaji Kromah assuming prominent roles.

ECOMOG is unable (and unwilling) to prevent a serious escalation of hostilities. Heavy fighting in Monrovia leaves hundreds dead, severely undermining the credibility of the transitional government and the Abuja Accord.

1997
July – Presidential and legislative elections are held in accordance with the Abuja Accord. Voter turnout is high and the elections are considered free and fair by international observers. Widespread fear that Taylor would return to arms should he lose the election influences voters. Taylor is returned with more than 75 per cent of the vote. Former UN official Ellen–Johnson Sirleaf finishes second. Taylor’s National Patriotic Party (NPP) wins an equally large majority in the National Assembly.

1998
September – Fighting breaks out in Monrovia between supporters of Roosevelt Johnson, head of the ULIMO-J, and government forces seeking his arrest in connection with an alleged coup plot. Johnson is transported out of the country after sheltering in the US embassy.

1999
January–April – The UK and US threaten to suspend aid to Liberia, accusing President Taylor of supporting Sierra Leone’s RUF rebels. Rebel fighters, backed by Guinea, attack the northern town of Voinjama, close to the Guinea border. Fighting displaces more than 25,000 people.

December – After falling out with Foday Sankoh, RUF commander Sam ‘Mosquito’ Bockarie is granted exile in Monrovia by Taylor. Bockarie and his group of fighters are incorporated into Taylor’s notorious Anti-Terrorist Unit.

2000
February – Dissident groups establish the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Primarily composed of former ULIMO-K fighters, LURD is supported by Guinea and senior figures in ECOMOG. An alliance is formed between LURD and Sierra Leone’s Kamajor militia.

June–December – Taylor intercedes in negotiations with RUF to secure the release of UN peacekeepers held hostage in Sierra Leone since May. The US and UK accuse Taylor of trading arms for diamonds with RUF. LURD is reported to have invaded Liberia from Guinea after shifting its base from Sierra Leone. Government troops and Guinean dissidents launch a major offensive against Guinea-backed forces in northern Liberia. In a coordinated move, RUF forces simultaneously invade Guinea from northern Sierra Leone.

Guinea accuses Liberia of entering its territory. Guinea launches a counter-offensive to repel RUF forces and Taylor-backed dissidents. Artillery and helicopter gunships are used to support a ground assault by LURD fighters and Sierra Leone’s Donso militia. A UN special panel links Taylor to diamond smuggling and arms trafficking with RUF.

2001
January – After successfully repelling an invasion by RUF and dissident fighters, Guinea backs the Donso militia’s pursuit of RUF
into Sierra Leone. It also supports LURD in pushing deep into Liberia’s Lofa County. Taylor announces the cessation of support for RUF and calls for UN-led disarmament in Sierra Leone.

March – The UN Security Council imposes an arms embargo on Liberia, and bans it from trading in rough diamonds from Sierra Leone. Liberia expels ambassadors of Sierra Leone and Guinea and closes its border with Sierra Leone.

November–December – Reinforced with recruits from the Kamajor militia and dissidents based in Sierra Leone, LURD launches a fresh offensive in western Liberia. It captures Voinjama but is forced to return north.

2002

January–September – Sierra Leone deploys troops along its Kailahun border, blocking the remnants of the RUF from fighting with pro-Taylor forces, and allowing LURD to defeat the AFL in Kolahun. LURD advances towards Monrovia. Taylor declares a state of emergency and rejects calls by ECOWAS for a ceasefire. AFL is increasingly implicated in atrocities as it recaptures territory from LURD. Fresh fighting breaks out along the Guinean border.

March – LURD advances to within 10km of Monrovia. A new rebel movement emerges in south-eastern Liberia, the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL), which has links with LURD and comprises former ULIMO-J fighters. It is supported by Côte d’Ivoire and rapidly gains ground in Sinoe County.

June – LURD lays siege to Monrovia and, together with MODEL, occupies almost two thirds of Liberia. ECOWAS and civil society groups, in particular the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) exert pressure on the government to seek a negotiated settlement. The Special Court for Sierra Leone unseals an indictment against Taylor on charges of supporting RUF and war crimes in Sierra Leone. MODEL and LURD refuse to acknowledge Taylor as head of state.

On 17 June, at talks in Accra, Taylor agrees to relinquish power as part of a ceasefire. Resisting pressure from the US and regional partners, Ghana declines to arrest Taylor, allowing him to return to Monrovia where he reneges on his promise to stand down.

July–August – Fighting breaks out between LURD and government forces in northern Liberia. LURD attacks Monrovia, with heavy shelling causing civilian casualties and destruction of infrastructure. MODEL captures Buchanan, Liberia’s second city and an important port for Taylor’s regime.

The US deploys an amphibious taskforce to the coast of Liberia. On 29 July, LURD declares a ceasefire and calls for the deployment of ECOWAS and US peacekeepers. ECOWAS confirms that it will deploy a peacekeeping force of at least 3,000 troops to Liberia to monitor a ceasefire.

The UN Security Council authorises deployment of a regional peacekeeping force to be followed by a UN stabilisation force in October. The first of the ECOWAS Interposition Force to Liberia (ECOMIL) to arrive are 300 Nigerian peacekeepers redeployed from Sierra Leone. Taylor flees into exile in Nigeria. LURD lifts its siege on the capital, allowing ECOMIL to deploy. The US deploys 200 marines to Monrovia to assist ECOMIL.

On 18 August, talks in Accra result in the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). Businessman Gyude Bryant, seen as a political neutral, is chosen to head an interim administration composed of representatives of LURD, MODEL, the former government and civil society groups.

October – US forces withdraw as 3,500 ECOMIL peacekeepers transfer to the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). Fighting in Monrovia between LURD and former Taylor militia underlines the limited capacity of the nascent UN mission.

December – The Disarmament, Demobilisation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration programme (DDRR) is launched. Former AFL fighters, unhappy over the initial payments received for handing in weapons, riot in Monrovia and clash with UNMIL troops. The DDRR programme is suspended as UNMIL awaits reinforcements.

2003

April–November – UNMIL deploys to 13 of Liberia’s 15 counties, allowing the disarmament programme to resume. The UN launches a voluntary repatriation programme to assist the return of an estimated 340,000 Liberian refugees from across West Africa.

The disarmament and demobilisation phase is completed with the symbolic handing over of arms by 48 commanders of LURD, MODEL and AFL. A total of 101,495 combatants have been disarmed. The factions sign a declaration officially disbanding their forces.

2005

September – The government consents to international oversight of state finances in a bid to counter corruption and facilitate the lifting of sanctions imposed during Taylor’s regime. The EU establishes an Election Observation Mission and provides financial support for October election preparations.

October–December – In national elections, the Congress for Democratic Change (CDC) wins the parliamentary vote; Ellen Johnson Sirleaf wins the presidential vote. EU and ECOWAS observers deem the process free and fair. The National Electoral Commission (NEC) rejects allegations of electoral fraud and CDC agrees to accept the results.

2006

February–March – President Sirleaf inaugurates the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) to investigate human rights abuses committed between 1979 and 2003. Taylor is arrested in Nigeria and transferred to Sierra Leone to appear before the Special Court.

June–October – The UN Security Council eases the arms embargo on Liberia to enable the reform and training of its army and newly-recruited police force.

Liberia announces it is to implement the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI).

2007

April–July – The UN Security Council lifts its diamond export ban on Liberia. Taylor’s trial begins in The Hague. Former AFL General Charles Julu is arrested along with former National Assembly speaker George Koukou and charged with attempting to smuggle weapons from Côte d’Ivoire to enact a coup.
December – Negotiations with the World Bank lead to the clearance of Liberia’s debt arrears.

2008
January – TRC begins public hearings.

August – The National Defence Act provides for restructuring AFL. Protests follow the dismissal of 15,000 soldiers. The Supreme Court rules the dismissals constitutional.

2009
July – TRC presents its final report, which names serving President Sirleaf and former INPFL leader, Senator Prince Johnson, among 50 individuals to be barred from public office. It also recommends the prosecution of former leaders of warring factions.

October – Liberia is awarded EITI Compliant status.

2010
January – Sirleaf announces she will stand for re-election, reneging on a previous promise to stand down at the end of her term. US Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton, publically endorses Sirleaf’s decision.

February – Violent religious clashes in Lofa County lead to the burning of churches. The government imposes a curfew as police and UNMIL forces deploy to the area.

June – The World Bank and IMF grant Liberia US $4.6 billion debt relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries initiative.

December – President Sirleaf warns Liberia’s ex-combatants not to become involved in political violence in neighbouring Côte d’Ivoire after reports confirm recruitment of Liberian mercenaries.

2011
March–April – Continued fighting in Côte d’Ivoire brings the number of Ivorian refugees in Liberia close to 90,000. Police arrest 95 Liberian fighters entering the country from Côte d’Ivoire where they were involved in recent post-election violence. UNMIL tightens border security.

August – Spates of political violence occur as tensions mount ahead of national elections. Sirleaf condemns attacks against political figures and calls for peaceful campaigning.

September – In Côte d’Ivoire, Liberian mercenaries clash with the Republican Forces of Ivory Coast (FRCI) close to the Liberian border, reportedly leading to 23 fatalities. The UN and ECOWAS call on Liberia to tighten border security amid concerns over the return ex-combatants.

October – Sirleaf is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize days before national elections, a move strongly criticised by domestic opposition figures. Seventy-one per cent of the electorate take part in national elections, which are judged to be free, fair and peaceful by observers from AU, Carter Center, and ECOWAS. Sirleaf receives close to 44 per cent of the vote.

On 15 October, nine opposition parties, including the CDC and Prince Johnson’s National Union for Democratic Progress, announce their withdrawal from the second round of voting in protest over alleged electoral fraud. A Monrovia office of the Unity Party is burnt.

November – Ahead of the 8 November second round of voting, Tubman and the CDC announce they are boycotting the election due to alleged instances of fraud and will not recognise results. On 7 November, Liberian police clash violently with CDC protestors in Monrovia. The police are accused of shooting dead two protestors. The government closes a number of radio and television stations associated with CDC, claiming they are provoking unrest.

Voting in the second round takes place on 8 November. A low turnout of 38 per cent is attributed to voters’ fears of further violence and the call for a boycott by Tubman. On 15 November, the NEC announces Sirleaf has won the election with over 90 per cent of the uncontested vote.

2012
January – Following talks with President Sirleaf, the CDC agrees to recognise the government and cancel planned protests. On 16 January, Sirleaf is sworn in for a second six-year term. As Sirleaf is inaugurated, Tubman is chased from CDC offices in Monrovia by angry youths who accuse him of selling out the party.

Sierra Leone


1991–92
The Revolutionary United Front (RUF), a group of about sixty Sierra Leoneans, Liberians and Burkinabes led by Foday Sankoh, invade eastern Sierra Leone from neighbouring Liberia. When the Sierra Leone Army (SLA) is unable to repel the attack, disgruntled young officers overthrow the government of Joseph Momoh and form the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC), vowing to defeat RUF.

1993–94
NPRC leader Captain Valentine Strasser bows to international pressure and agrees to return the country to civilian rule within two years. Public support for NPRC fades as the military engages in abuses and soldiers are accused of colluding with RUF rebels for economic profit.

1995–96
A government-sanctioned peace initiative by local elders in Pujehun fails. NPRC brings in South African mercenaries who push RUF back from the environs of Freetown and key mining areas. Large street demonstrations are held in Freetown led by women’s organisations calling for the government to hold elections in February 1996 and pursue a negotiated settlement with RUF.

In February 1996, Strasser is ousted by deputy Julius Maade Bio in a palace coup. Bio agrees to hold elections and former UN bureaucrat Ahmad Tejan Kabbah is elected president. A peace agreement brokered by Côte d’Ivoire is reached, but the Abidjan Accord is soon undermined by continued fighting.

1997–98
Sankoh is arrested in Nigeria on weapons charges and Sam ‘Mosquito’ Bockarie assumes RUF field command. In May 1997, junior officers calling themselves the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) stage a coup. AFRC invites RUF to Freetown to share power under the leadership of Major Johnny Paul Koroma.
In early 1998, Nigerian forces serving with ECOWAS regional peacekeeping force (ECOMOG) and backed by local Civil Defence Forces (CDF) militia drive the AFRC-RUF junta from Freetown and several provincial towns.

1999
The junta returns to Freetown in January to devastating effect, committing widespread atrocities and killing an estimated 5–6,000 people. The junta is pushed back by Nigerian forces, but international pressure leads to the signing of the Lomé Agreement in July 1999, providing for power-sharing between Kabbah’s government and RUF, and the deployment of UN peacekeepers to assist disarmament and demobilisation.

2000
**May–September** – RUF seize 500 peacekeepers of the UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL). UK troops arrive to secure the international airport and evacuate foreign nationals. Sankoh’s bodyguards fire on civilians protesting outside his residence; Sankoh attempts to flee Freetown but is captured and placed in custody. After intervention by Liberia’s President Charles Taylor, RUF agrees to release UN peacekeepers taken hostage in May.

A renegade armed group known as the West Side Boys takes eleven British soldiers hostage. Meanwhile, the Sierra Leone government recognises thirty-year-old Issa Sesay as the new RUF leader. British forces mount a rescue operation, which effectively destroys the West Side Boys group. UK intervention is seen as instrumental in convincing many RUF fighters to disarm. Meanwhile, RUF forces launch attacks on villages within Guinea. Guinea accuses Taylor of sponsoring the attacks.

**November** – An ECOWAS-brokered ceasefire agreement is signed in Abuja, Nigeria, providing for a 30-day ceasefire and return of all weapons seized from peacekeepers. However, amid ongoing insecurity the disarmament and demobilisation process does not begin. A British naval taskforce carrying 500 marines begins military exercises in and around Freetown.

2001
**January** – Scheduled national elections are postponed due to continuing insecurity. RUF suffers military reversals in the north as Guinea continues its counter-offensive, supporting Sierra Leone’s Donso militia with artillery and helicopter gunship raids on suspected RUF bases.

**March–May** – UNAMSIL deploys to rebel-held territory. The UN Security Council authorises an increase from 11,000 to 17,500 peacekeepers and imposes sanctions on Liberia for supporting RUF. RUF agrees to a renewed ceasefire following mediation by ECOWAS and the UN in Abuja. SLA deploys to RUF-held areas as disarmament begins.

2002
**January** – President Kabbah declares the war over at a ceremony marking the completion of disarmament. The UN confirms that over 47,000 combatants were disarmed between May 2001 and January 2002. The government and the UN sign an agreement to establish a Special Court to try those bearing greatest responsibility for crimes against humanity committed after 30 November 1996.

**May** – National elections are generally peaceful with a high turnout, but the Freetown offices of the newly established RUF Party (RUF-P) are ransacked after fighting between RUF and supporters of the Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP). Kabbah and SLPP win more than two thirds of the vote in a landslide victory against main opposition party the All People’s Congress (APC), led by former businessman Ernest Bai Koroma. The Peace and Liberation Party (PLP) finishes third but leader Major Johnny Paul Koroma, former head of AFRC, receives most military votes, sparking concern that soldiers may not support the civilian government. RUF fails to win a seat.

**June–July** – The SLA dispatches troop reinforcements to the border with Liberia amid concerns that fighting will spill over from the neighbouring state. UNHCR reports an increased influx of refugees from Liberia: an estimated 40,000 since January.

A Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) is inaugurated in accordance with the 1999 Lomé Peace Accord, tasked with providing an account of human rights abuses committed during the conflict, but without powers to grant amnesty or sentence perpetrators.

On 28 July, the UK’s military taskforce departs, leaving behind over 100 military trainers to assist with retraining the national army as part of the International Military Advisory Training Team.

**September** – The UN Security Council makes provisions for a phased withdrawal of UNAMSIL, to be reduced from 17,380 peacekeepers to 13,000 within a year.

2003
**March–May** – The Special Court issues its first indictments for war crimes, including Sankoh, Bockarie, Sesay, former RUF commander Morris Kallon, former AFRC commander Alex Tamba Brima, Johnny Paul Koroma, and Interior Minister and former head of CDF Sam Hing Norman. The Special Court calls on Liberia to hand over and Bockarie. Bockarie is killed by Liberian security forces in May.

**June–September** – The Special Court unseals an indictment against Taylor. Koroma is reportedly killed in Liberia by Taylor-loyalists. The UN Security Council lifts its ban on diamond exports from Sierra Leone. Sankoh dies of natural causes while awaiting trial by the Special Court. Taylor resigns and goes into exile in Nigeria. Nigeria agrees not to hand Taylor over to the Special Court. The UN Security Council outlines a reduction in UNAMSIL strength to 5,000 troops.

2004
**February** – DDR is officially completed after processing more than 70,000 combatants. Local elections are held successfully as the security situation continues to improve. Trials begin at the Special Court.

**September** – UNAMSIL completes the handover of security responsibilities to the government.

October – The TRC publishes its final report, which warns that many conditions that rendered Sierra Leone vulnerable to conflict, such as widespread corruption and the marginalisation of youth, remain in place. Recommendations include the establishment of a reparations programme and the mainstreaming of youth issues in national policy.
2005 August–December – The UN Security Council establishes a new assistance mission, the UN Integrated Office in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL). UNAMSIL completes its five-year mission with the withdrawal of its remaining 3,200 peacekeepers.

March – Under pressure from the US and Liberia, Nigeria arrests Charles Taylor, who is transferred to The Hague.

June–December – The government announces that the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) is to be applied in the mining sector. The newly established UN Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) recommends the allocation of at least US$25 million to support Sierra Leone’s peacebuilding efforts. The World Bank and IMF confirm that Sierra Leone has met completion conditions to receive debt relief nearing US$1 billion under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries initiative. Combined with debt relief under the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative, this cancels roughly 90 per cent of Sierra Leone’s US$1.6 billion debt.

2006 January – The Paris Club of creditor nations agrees to cancel Sierra Leone’s existing debt, worth US$218 million.

June – The trial of Charles Taylor gets under way. Taylor boycotts proceedings. In Freetown, the Special Court issues its first verdicts, finding three former AFRC leaders guilty of multiple charges, including committing acts of terrorism, murder, rape and the conscription of children under the age of 15.

July – RUF announces it is disbanding and will not contest August elections. In the run-up to elections, fighting between party supporters is reported across the country, raising concerns about Sierra Leone’s capacity to manage security.

August–September – Presidential and parliamentary elections on 11 August are the first since the end of the war for which Sierra Leone’s security forces take sole responsibility. Voter turnout is high and initially peaceful. APC wins the parliamentary election, gaining 41 per cent of the vote. SLPP is second with 40 per cent, and the People’s Movement for Democracy and Change (PMDC), a breakaway from SLPP, finishes third with 15 per cent.

In the presidential elections no candidate receives the necessary 55 per cent of votes. As campaigning intensifies in a second round, pro-party rallies frequently descend into fighting between rival supporters, commonly involving youths and ex-combatants. Curfews are imposed in Kailahun and Kono; outgoing President Kabbah threatens to impose a state of emergency.

Voting takes place on 8 September in an atmosphere of mutual distrust between the parties. Ballots from 477 polling stations are discounted after they return more votes than registered voters. Nevertheless, the election is not derailed and on 17 September Koroma is declared the winner with 55 per cent of the vote. After Koroma is sworn in as president, police are forced to use teargas to disperse rioters ransacking SLPP headquarters in Freetown.

2007 January – The UN Security Council establishes a new assistance mission to replace UNiosil. The UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPISIL) is tasked with providing political support in resolving tensions and areas of potential conflict while coordinating the ongoing work of the various UN funds, agencies and programmes.

June–July – Violence between SLPP and APC youths in Kono accompanies campaigning ahead of July’s local elections. Local elections on 5 July are judged free and fair by ECOWAS and UN observers. Sporadic violence between supporters of the two main parties takes place in Freetown and Kono, however, with a number of poll stations attacked.

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April – On 2 April political tensions are diffused as the political parties sign a joint communiqué, mediated by UNIPSIL, in which they agree to work together to promote peaceful political interaction.

2008 January – With PBF support, the government designates responsibility for overseeing reparations payments to war victims as recommended by the TRC to the National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA).

February – Sierra Leone is accepted as a Candidate Country for the EITI scheme.

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2009 March – Sierra Leone publishes its first EITI report. Discrepancies from 2006–07 are deemed indicative of the failure of government agencies to declare revenues and a lack of capacity to confirm payments reported by extractives firms.

April – The UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women provides NaCSA with funds for a two-year reparations programme for 650 female victims of war and war wounded. Each victim is to receive US$500. NaCSA reports a funding shortfall in its reparations programme. In 2009 cash allowance payments were made to 20,107 victims of war and war-wounded, but 12,000 registered victims still await payment.

September–November – The UN Security Council removes an arms embargo and travel ban imposed on Sierra Leone since 1997, the last of its remaining sanctions. Sierra Leone’s deadline for reaching EITI Compliant status expires.

2011 June – PBF provides US$384,000 for the reparations programme. NaCSA issues payments to approximately 330 victims of war and war-wounded in Western Sierra Leone. Amputees receive up to US$220;
other war-affected and victims of sexual violence receive US$80. The EITI board renews Sierra Leone’s Candidate status, setting a new validation deadline of 9 December 2012.

**August** – SLPP selects the former head of the NPRC government, Julius Maada Bio, as its candidate for 2012 presidential elections. Bio, popular in parts of the south and east, is criticised by opposition figures for alleged past abuses and his involvement in the 1992 coup.

**September** – Bio is struck on the head with a rock during a visit to Bo, Sierra Leone’s second city. Several APC buildings are torched in retaliation and violence breaks out between rival SLPP and APC supporters. A temporary ban on political rallies is imposed. The UN Security Council renews the UNIPSIL mandate for a further year with specific instructions to provide assistance during 2012 elections.

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**Profiles**

### National

**Liberia**

**Charles Taylor**

Charles Taylor was leader of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) rebel group that invaded Liberia in 1989, sparking years of civil war. Backed by Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire and Libya, he successfully deposed the government of Samuel Doe and in 1997 won the national elections that followed the Abuja peace process. Throughout his time as NPFL leader and President of Liberia (1997–2003), Taylor was strongly implicated in supporting Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels in Sierra Leone and other rebel groups operating in Guinea and Côte d’Ivoire. Taylor was indicted by the Special Court for Sierra Leone in 2003, which, combined with impending military defeat by LURD and MODEL rebel forces, convinced him to accept exile in Nigeria.

Taylor’s exile ended in 2006 under US pressure. He was arrested on return to Monrovia and handed over to the Special Court to face trial on multiple counts of war crimes. The trial was moved from Freetown to The Hague amid concerns that it might destabilise the tentative peace in Sierra Leone. Despite repeated delays and postponements, the prosecution and defence completed their cases in 2011. If Taylor is convicted, the UK has agreed to provide for his imprisonment.

**Congress for Democratic Change (CDC)**

Widely considered the most potent challenger to President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and the Unity Party in the 2011 elections, CDC was formed by ex-footballer George Weah and had fared well in 2005 presidential elections, losing a second round ‘run-off’ vote. Weah and CDC received much support from ex-combatants and youths, who engaged in violent protests over the election results. Experienced politician and former UN worker Winston Tubman was CDC presidential candidate in the 2011 election, with Weah running for vice-president. CDC withdrew from the second round of voting alleging electoral fraud. Following unrest, the CDC cancelled further protests and recognised the government.

**Ellen Johnson Sirleaf**

Since taking office in 2006, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has built an international reputation as a progressive reformer. A former World Bank and UN official, Sirleaf first stood for election in 1997 and was part of the transitional government from 2003–2006. She was appointed President in elections in 2005. In her first year Sirleaf enacted a series of reforms aimed at fighting corruption and improving financial accountability. She successfully lobbied the UN to lift sanctions and secured major debt relief from the World Bank. Sirleaf has faced criticisms domestically, most notably her slow implementation of recommendations made by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which controversially recommended that she be barred from public office. Her decision to contest 2011 presidential elections broke her earlier promise to stand down after one term in office.

**Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD)**

LURD fought in Liberia’s second civil war. It was a coalition of former armed groups, primarily fighters from the former United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy (ULIMO). LURD received strong backing from Guinea, greatly facilitated by the close relationship between Ayesha Conneh, wife of chairman Sekou Conneh, and Guinea’s President Conté. It was also allied with Sierra Leone’s Kamajor militia. Invading Liberia from bases in Guinea in 1999 and 2000, LURD controlled much of Liberia by 2003, eventually helping to force Taylor into exile. LURD was part of Liberia’s transitional government (2003–06), but its leadership became racked by internal disputes as its rank-and-file members were demobilised. Sekou Conneh publically backed the 2005 election results. Many former combatants, disillusioned with reintegation, remain vulnerable to recruitment into conflicts in neighbouring Guinea and Côte d’Ivoire.

**Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL)**

MODEL entered Liberia in 2003 from Côte d’Ivoire, occupying much of the south and contributing to Taylor’s removal. Composed primarily of ethnic Krahn and former ULIMO fighters, the group was backed by Côte d’Ivoire. Its leader, Thomas Nimely, became Foreign Minister in the transitional government.

**National Electoral Commission (NEC)**

The NEC has played a crucial role in steering Liberia’s post-conflict elections, including a national referendum and presidential elections in 2011. In 2009, USAID provided a five-year grant to the NEC of US$18.5 million to increase capacity and provide support for the 2011 elections. CDC accused NEC of bias towards the government as well as electoral fraud during the 2011 vote. Under pressure form CDC leader Winston Tubman, NEC Chair James Fromayan stepped down, replaced by Co-Chair Elizabeth Nelson. International observers from the Carter Center and ECOWAS commended NEC and judged both voting rounds...
to be free, fair and transparent. In early 2012 the CDC accepted the results of the elections.

National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL)
Charles Taylor’s NPFL invaded Liberia in 1989. Initially backed by Libya, Côte d’Ivoire and Burkina Faso, NPFL supported RUF in Sierra Leone from 1991, later trading arms for diamonds with the group. Following the end of the first civil war and Taylor gaining the presidency in 1997, many NPFL fighters were incorporated into the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) or joined regional insurgencies at Taylor’s behest.

National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL)
The NTGL was established in 2003 as part of Comprehensive Peace Agreement that officially ended the war, following the exile of Charles Taylor. Its chair, former businessman Charles Gyude Bryant, struggled to reign in various elements of the transitional government, which included former rebel groups and Taylor-loyalists. The administration was hampered by corruption and competition for lucrative positions, leading donors to impose the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Plan (GEMAP) in 2005, to counter misappropriation of development aid. Bryant handed power to the newly elected government headed by Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf in 2006. He was later arrested for embezzling state funds during the NTGL period, but was acquitted in 2009.

National Union for Democratic Progress (NUDP)
NUDP was formed by Prince Yormie Johnson as part of his bid for the 2011 presidential elections. Formerly leader of the rebel INPFL, a breakaway faction of NPFL, Johnson was responsible for the capture and execution of President Samuel Doe in 1990. In 2005 he was elected Senator for Nimba County. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommended he be barred from public office.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)
TRC was established by President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in 2006 to investigate human rights abuses committed between 1979 and 2003 and document the events of the civil wars. It called a number of prominent politicians before it, including Prince Johnson, Sekou Conneh, and Sirleaf, who apologised for having initially supported Charles Taylor’s movement. In 2009 its final report included Sirleaf among a list of prominent politicians it recommended be barred from public office for 30 years. Implementation of TRC recommendations has been limited. In 2011 the Supreme Court ruled that barring Sirleaf from public office would breach the right to due process.

Unity Party (UP)
The UP finished a distant second in 1997 elections won by Charles Taylor and his National Patriotic Party. In 2005 UP candidate Ellen Johnson Sirleaf won the presidential elections, becoming the first elected female head of state in Africa. In parliamentary elections, UP only won 9 of 64 seats in the House of Representatives and 4 of 30 in the Senate. In 2009, the Liberia Action Party (LAP) and the Liberian Unification Party (LUP) merged with UP, bringing support from figures such as former senior INPFL rebel commander and senator for Nimba County, Adolphus Dolo.

Sierra Leone

Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC)
AFRC comprised disaffected soldiers in the Sierra Leonean military. It staged a coup against Ahmad Tejan Kabbah’s civilian government in May 1997, in collaboration with rebel Revolutionary United Front (RUF) fighters. A more detailed profile is available in Accord 9 [2000]: Paying the Price: the Sierra Leone peace process [www.c-r.org].

Ahmad Tejan Kabbah
Elected president on a Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP) ticket in 1996, former UN bureaucrat Ahmad Tejan Kabbah guided Sierra Leone’s first post-war government through the difficult process of national reconstruction. Kabbah’s 1996–2002 term was characterised by conflict and instability, including a coup in 1997 and a brutal AFRC/RUF attack on Freetown in January 1999. Kabbah’s administration was only able to secure peace and implement disarmament following the intervention of UK and UN forces in 2000. By January 2002, Kabbah was able to declare an end to the war, winning a landslide victory in elections in May. Support for Kabbah’s government waned as the slow pace of development exposed systemic problems of corruption and limited capacity. Popular disillusionment reflected the immense challenges faced, not least in managing public expectations of peace dividends. Kabbah stood down in 2007 having served a maximum two terms and was succeeded as president by Ernest Bai Koroma of the All People’s Congress (APC).

All People’s Congress (APC)
APC returned to government in 2007 after fifteen years in opposition. Having been removed from power via military coup in 1992, the party struggled to overcome its association with political abuses and economic mismanagement widely blamed for fomenting the war. After successive electoral defeats in 1996 and 2002, APC won the 2007 elections under the leadership of reformer Ernest Bai Koroma, securing the majority of support from its traditional heartlands in the northern Temne districts and the Western Area.

Civilian Defence Forces (CDF)
CDF local militia comprised primarily traditional Kamajor hunters from the eastern Mende districts, established to defend communities against RUF attacks. At their height they proved highly effective in reversing RUF gains and by the end of the civil war they had inflicted devastating losses on the rebel group. Following the end of conflict they largely disarmed and demobilised. Ex-CDF fighters were generally indistinguishable from the wider youth population.

Ernest Bai Koroma
Ernest Bai Koroma was the first APC president of the post-war era, defeating the SLPP’s Solomon Berewa in 2007 elections. A former businessman, Koroma promised reform, promising to tackle corruption and unemployment.

Koroma has increased the Anti-Corruption Commission’s powers of prosecution and forced government ministers to declare their assets. He has overseen development of the nascent private sector, promoting investment in tourism and agriculture, and has managed resuscitation of the mining sector. His dealings with foreign mining firms have been criticised, mirroring pre-war concerns over corrupt practices in granting concessions. Affected communities have also protested at the environmental impact and limited local economic benefit of large-scale industrial mining. Despite continuing high unemployment, Koroma retains strong support, particularly among the northern Temne-dominated provinces.

Foday Sankoh
Foday Sankoh was founder and leader of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). He inspired cultish loyalty from many of his recruits,
particularity child soldiers who commonly referred to him as ‘Papa’ Sankoh. A Temne from northern Sierra Leone, Sankoh was a former army corporal and received insurgency training in Libya in the 1980s. Following RUF’s invasion of Sierra Leone in 1991, Sankoh largely remained in the bush. In 1996 he travelled to Abidjan for the signing of the Peace Accord. He was arrested for treason in Nigeria in March 1997, leaving control of RUF with his deputy, Sam ‘Mosquito’ Bockarie. He was eventually released and pardoned as part of the July 1999 Lomé Agreement, which appointed him as Vice-President of Sierra Leone and head of the mineral resources commission. In 2000, Sankoh was again arrested after his bodyguards killed protestors outside his residence in Freetown. In March 2002 the Special Court for Sierra Leone indicted Sankoh on 17 counts of crimes against humanity, and violations of the Geneva Conventions and international humanitarian law. Sankoh died in custody on 29 July 2003.

**Lomé Agreement**

The Lomé Agreement, signed between Foday Sankoh and President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah on 7 July 1999, officially ended nine years conflict in Sierra Leone – although it collapsed soon afterwards. A more detailed analysis of the agreement is available in Accord 9 (2000): *Paying the Price: the Sierra Leone peace process* (www.c-r.org).

**Revolutionary United Front/Revolutionary United Front Party (RUF/RUFP)**

The rebel RUF invaded Sierra Leone from neighbouring Liberia in 1991, aiming to overthrow the APC government of Joseph Momoh. Through the ensuing decade of civil war, RUF was responsible for widespread atrocities and became notorious for its involvement in lucrative diamond mining. By the end of the war in 2002, RUF was a greatly weakened force, with many exhausted rank-and-file combatants seeking to disarm and demobilise for good. Prosecution of senior RUF leaders by the Special Court further contributed to the dissolution of the group and its command structures. With RUF largely dismantled, attempts to establish a viable RUFP/RUFPI were unsuccessful: it failed to win a single seat in 2002 and did not contest the 2007 elections.

**Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP)**

SLPP is the main opposition party in Sierra Leone. It relies on support from Mende in southern and eastern provinces. The party was in government between 1976 and 2007 led by Ahmad Tejan Kabbah. The loss of the 2007 elections was blamed on rampant corruption and the role of a break-away party, PMDC, in splitting the Mende vote. Infighting in 2011 delayed the process of choosing a new candidate to contest 2012 elections, but among those in contention are likely to be former head of the National Provisional Ruling Council, Julius Maade Bio.

**Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)**

TRC was established in July 2002 in accordance with the terms of the 1999 Lomé Peace Accord. Comprising seven commissioners – four Sierra Leoneans and three international members – the TRC compiled a history of the conflict and its abuses, holding public hearings around the country. It has been criticised for failing to engage with local communities. TRC had no powers to pass sentence or grant amnesty, but it made recommendations that the government was required to implement. In practice, implementation has been limited. The sluggish progress of a reparations programme, for instance, has reinforced perceptions that ex-combatants have been prioritised over victims in post-conflict assistance.

**Regional**

**Côte d’Ivoire**

Côte d’Ivoire was the launching point for Charles Taylor’s NPFL invasion of Liberia in 1989. Taylor was supported by President Houphouët-Boigny, who harboured a personal grudge against then Liberian President Samuel Doe. Taylor’s relationship with Côte D’Ivoire changed after his forces supported rebels fighting against President Laurent Gbagbo in 2000. In response, Gbagbo supported MODEL rebels in Liberia in 2003, enabling them to open a southern front in the war against Taylor’s regime. MODEL made swift territorial gains, hastening Taylor’s exile and the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. Côte d’Ivoire has continued to suffer from political and military instability as Liberia and Sierra Leone emerge from conflict. Liberian ex-combatants have been recruited as mercenaries in Côte d’Ivoire.

**Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)**

ECOWAS is an organisation of sixteen West African states initially established in 1975 to promote economic cooperation and integration. It has intervened militarily in both conflicts, led by Nigeria. In 1990 the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) was deployed to Liberia and maintained a peacekeeping force in the country until 1998. The spread of war to Sierra Leone in 1991 was due in part to Charles Taylor’s anger at the use of Freetown as a base for ECOMOG operations. Subsequent ECOMOG deployment saw the peacekeeping force intervene to restore Sierra Leone’s civilian government in 1998. In 2003, the ECOWAS Mission in Liberia (ECDMIL) was deployed to Monrovia to police a ceasefire and facilitate deployment of a UN peacekeeping mission. ECOWAS military interventions were complemented in both countries by diplomatic involvement to try to broker peace agreements.

**Guinea**

Bordering both Liberia and Sierra Leone, Guinea has been heavily involved in civil wars affecting its neighbours. It supported rebel groups launching raids on Liberia from its territory, including ULIMO and LURD. In 2000, Guinea responded to a coordinated attack by Taylor’s forces and RUF by arming Sierra Leone’s Donso militia and supporting their advances with helicopter gunship raids on RUF bases. Guinea also increased support to LURD in the lead up to LURD’s siege of Monrovia in 2003, which was followed by the peace settlement in Accra and the exiling of Taylor.

**Nigeria**

Nigeria has been involved in the conflicts in Sierra Leone and Liberia primarily through its military and diplomatic leadership of ECOWAS. Its forces played a crucial role in safeguarding the civilian government in Sierra Leone in 1998. Nigeria’s increasingly costly mission to promote peace in that country became linked with efforts to remove or restrain Taylor in Liberia. Nigerian commanders serving with ECDMOG helped LURD link up with Sierra Leone’s Kamajor militia and, in 2003, Nigeria agreed to deploy peacekeepers to Monrovia to facilitate Taylor’s standing-down. Nigeria provided for Taylor’s exile and protection from prosecution by the Special Court on condition he stopped meddling in regional affairs. Abuja was initially reluctant to release Taylor to the Special Court in 2006, but did so under pressure from the US and at the formal request of Liberia.
International

Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative – Liberia

The Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) is a coalition of governments, extractive companies and civil society groups intended to tackle corruption and increase transparency in the oil, gas, mining and other extractive sectors of resource-rich countries. Membership is based upon reaching a standard of transparency in all extractive interactions, particularly with regard to transactions between government and extractive firms. Liberia became an EITI candidate country in October 2006. In February 2009 Liberia produced its first EITI report, followed in July by the introduction of the Liberian EITI Act. Liberia was validated as EITI compliant on 14 October 2009. Liberia has received praise from the EITI board for going beyond the core areas of gas, oil and mining to include the timber and rubber trade.

Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative – Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone announced its intention to join EITI in 2006 and was accepted as a candidate country in 2008. The country’s first EITI report in March 2010 showed a number of discrepancies in transactions between 2006 and 2007. President Koroma announced a commitment to improve the monitoring and reporting mechanisms, and in July 2011 re-launched Sierra Leone’s EITI process (SLEITI). A new deadline to reach compliant status was set for December 2012.

European Union (EU)

The EU has provided extensive post-conflict support to Liberia and Sierra Leone. In Sierra Leone, efforts have focused on budgetary aid and development in agriculture, energy, governance, transport, and the environment. The EU has assisted in the rehabilitation of infrastructure, supporting the building of roads, schools and health facilities. It was the only donor to remain in Liberia throughout the conflict and provided support to the 2003 peace process and DDR, as well as the establishment of TRC. Budgetary support for Liberia has been targeted at improving delivery of basic social services, building roads and infrastructure and strengthening the capacity of public institutions.

Kimberley Process

The Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS) was established in 2003 to address the international trade in so-called ‘conflict diamonds’ – rough diamonds which provided a lucrative source of income for a number of armed groups in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in Angola, Liberia and Sierra Leone. KPCS was sanctioned by the UN General Assembly in 2003, requiring all international traded rough diamonds to be certified. Liberia joined the scheme in 2007. Although Kimberley has been credited with reducing the number of conflict diamonds in circulation, it has been criticised by a number of NGOs and civil society groups for not going far enough. Global Witness left the scheme in 2011, complaining that conflict diamonds were still being traded from Côte d’Ivoire, while both Venezuela and Zimbabwe were in breach of KPCS rules. In November 2011, a ban on diamond exports from Zimbabwe’s Marange field was lifted, despite allegations of military involvement in the mining operation.

Special Court for Sierra Leone

Since its creation in 2002, the Special Court has sentenced eight indictees to jail terms in Rwanda. At the time of writing, the trial of Charles Taylor at The Hague remains outstanding. The Special Court’s mandate has been to try those bearing greatest responsibility for serious violations of international humanitarian law and Sierra Leonean law committed in the country after 30 November 1996. The first indictments, issued in March 2003, targeted former RUF, CDF and AFRC senior commanders. The Special Court unsealed its indictment against Charles Taylor in June 2003, but he accepted exile in Nigeria on the promise of protection from extradition. Also in 2003 Foday Sankoh died in custody in Freetown. Taylor was finally handed over in 2006.

UN Integrated Peacebuilding Support Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL)

The UN Integrated Office (UNIOSIL), which had taken over from the UN peacekeeping mission (UNAMSIL – see below) in December 2005, transferred to the Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL) in August 2008. With around 70 staff, UNIPSIL provides political advice to promote peace and political consolidation, supporting national police and security forces and building the capacity democratic institutions.

UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL)

UNAMSIL peacekeepers took over from ECOMOG in 1999, to monitor the delicate Lomé peace agreement and oversee disarmament and demobilisation. After the abduction of 500 peacekeepers by RUF in 2000, UNAMSIL was bolstered and, with assistance from British forces, was eventually able to deploy to rebel-held areas. After the completion of disarmament in early 2002, UNAMSIL remained in Sierra Leone to provide support and security to recovery efforts and national elections. The force gradually drew down, handing over primary control of security to the government in 2004 and eventually withdrawing in 2005.

UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL)

UNMIL was established in October 2003 to take over responsibility from a 3,500-strong ECOMOG peacekeeping force. The mission was mandated to reach a force strength of 15,000 troops. Initial deployment saw Nigerian troops ‘rehat’ and the force lacked the strength and presence to control the various warring factions. This led to a postponement of the disarmament and demobilisation programme in December 2003 as ex-combatants clashed with UNMIL troops in protests over benefits. Disarmament and demobilisation was recommenced after the full force size was reached in 2004. UNMIL continued to play a vital role in the country’s security and plans to draw down the force in 2008 were met with concern by Liberia’s government. Liberia’s insecurity was underlined in February 2010 when UNMIL forces were deployed to Lofa County following violent religious clashes. With persistent land disputes and crime, concerns remain that a drawdown in UNMIL numbers will seriously destabilise the country.

UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC)


United Kingdom

The UK is the former colonial power in Sierra Leone and was strongly involved in diplomatic efforts to end the Sierra Leone conflict. British military intervention in May 2000 brought RUF to the negotiating table and the UK has remained the lead donor in Sierra Leone, providing financial and technical assistance in reforming governance, restructuring and retraining the military and police, developing the justice sector and supporting the Anti-Corruption Commission. The Department for International Development has outlined plans to spend an average of US$108.4 million per year in Sierra Leone until 2015.
**United States**
The US has close historical ties with Liberia and has been the lead donor in the country’s post-war reconstruction efforts. Washington initially backed ECOWAS’s efforts rather take a lead role, but progressively became more directly engaged, exerting pressure on Taylor’s regime – including sanctions and the withdrawal of aid. It helped convince Taylor to stand down in 2003. US marines deployed briefly to Monrovia to support ECOMIL peacekeepers. Following Taylor’s exit, the US invested heavily in humanitarian assistance and took a lead role in reconstruction, particularly in reforming the armed forces. In 2006, pressure from the US was at the heart of Nigeria’s decision to transfer Taylor back to Liberia and the Special Court.

**World Bank**
The World Bank has provided funding for a broad range of post-conflict rehabilitation programmes in Sierra Leone and Liberia. In December 2007 Sierra Leone met the conditions to receive debt relief nearing US$1.6 billion under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries and related initiatives. Liberia received US$4.6 billion debt relief under the same initiative in June 2010.

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**3 October 1973, Mano River Union Treaty**

**Liberia**

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www.fambultok.org

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www.fambultok.com

Interpeace/UNDP Platform for Dialogue and Peace Liberia (P4DP)

Network Movement for Justice and Development
www.nmjd.org

Search for Common Ground
www.sfcg.org

United Nations Mission in Liberia
http://unmil.unmissions.org

United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Support Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL)
http://unipsil.unmissions.org/

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