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, fragmentated 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 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.

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

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Structure of the publication

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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
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.

Governance – 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.

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