REFLECTING ON PEACE PRACTICE PROJECT

Cumulative Impact Case Study:

The Cumulative Impacts of Peacebuilding in Liberia

June 2010

Christof P. Kurz
This document was developed as part of a collaborative learning project directed by CDA. It is part of a collection of documents that should be considered initial and partial findings of the project. These documents are written to allow for the identification of cross-cutting issues and themes across a range of situations. Each case represents the views and perspectives of a variety of people at the time when it was written.

**These documents do not represent a final product of the project.** While these documents may be cited, they remain working documents of a collaborative learning effort. Broad generalizations about the project's findings cannot be made from a single case.

CDA would like to acknowledge the generosity of the individuals and agencies involved in donating their time, experience and insights for these reports, and for their willingness to share their experiences.

Not all the documents written for any project have been made public. When people in the area where a report has been done have asked us to protect their anonymity and security, in deference to them and communities involved, we keep those documents private.
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Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACC: Anti-Corruption Commission
AFELL: Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia
AFL: Armed Forces of Liberia
CDA: Collaborative for Development Action
CHAL: Christian Health Association of Liberia
CPA: Comprehensive Peace Agreement
DDRR: Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration
ECOMOG: ECOWAS (see below) Monitoring Group
ECOWAS: Economic Community of West African States
GEMAP: Governance and Economic Management Assistance Programme
GOL: Government of Liberia
GRC: Governance Reform Commission
ICG: International Crisis Group
ICTJ: International Center for Transitional Justice
ICLA: Information, Counseling and Legal Assistance Programme
INGO: International non-governmental organization
INPFL: Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia
IPRS: Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy
LA: Landmine Action
LEGAP: Liberia Economic Governance and Action Plan
LURD: Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy
MODEL: Movement for Democracy in Liberia
MARWOPNET: Mano River Women’s Peace Network
NGO: Non-Governmental Organization
NPFL: National Patriotic Front of Liberia
NRC: Norwegian Refugee Council
NTGL: National Transitional Government of Liberia
OECD: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PBO: Peacebuilding Office
PRS: Poverty Reduction Strategy
ROL: Republic of Liberia
RPP: Reflecting on Peace Practice Project
SCSL: Special Court for Sierra Leone
SRSG: Special Representative of the UN Secretary General
TRC: Truth and Reconciliation Commission
ULIMO: United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia
UNDP: United Nations Development Programme
UNHCHR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNMIL: United Nations Mission in Liberia
UNSC: United Nations Security Council
USAID: United States Agency for International Development
WANEP: West Africa Network for Peacebuilding
WIPNET: Women in Peacebuilding Network
WONGOSOL: Women NGO Secretariat
“Liberia is at a crossroads – it can go either toward anarchy or violence, or toward democracy and peace.”

1. Introduction

During a June 2009 visit to Monrovia, United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton hailed Liberia as “a model of successful transition from conflict to post-conflict, from lawlessness to democracy, from despair to hope” (Kaufman 2009). Without doubt, Liberia in 2009 had come a long way as compared to the war days. With large international support, it disarmed and demobilized more than 103,000 former combatants, collected 30,000 arms and provided assistance for the former fighters’ social and economic reintegration. Approximately 200,000 refugees returned from neighboring countries and an estimated 500,000 internally displaced persons went home. After a contentious but largely peaceful transitional period with an appointed caretaker government representing all warring factions, it held successful presidential and parliamentary elections in October 2005 and made history as the first African country to elect a female head of state. GDP growth resumed after the war with annual growth rates of more than 7 percent in 2006 to 2008 and 5 percent in 2009 (UNSC 2009, p. 4). Some critical infrastructure, notably in the capital Monrovia, has been restored and several hundred schools and health facilities have been rebuilt across the country. Until recently, the country had not produced data reliable enough to be ranked in the United Nations Human Development Index, but its human development indicators have gradually inched up. For example, the mortality rate for children under five, a key indicator of human development, fell from 194 in 2000 to 111 deaths per 1,000 births in 2007 (ROL 2008, p. 30).

Despite these achievements, however, Liberia's problems remain daunting. General life expectancy stood at only 45 years in 2008 and its child and maternal mortality rates remain among the highest in the world, with maternal mortality having worsened in recent years (Ibid.). Only about one quarter of Liberians have access to safe drinking water and serious inequalities remain. In 2008, 63.8 percent of the Liberian population lived below the poverty line (a total of 1.7 million Liberians), with 48 percent or 1.3 million living in extreme poverty (below one USD per day). Two-thirds of the rural and more than one half of the urban population lived in poverty (Ibid., pp. 25). Widespread poverty is also reflected in the fact that in 2008, five years after the end of the war, almost 40 percent of Liberian children were found to be growth stunted and one third of children under five years of age were underweight as a consequence of hunger and lack of access to proper nutrition (Ibid. pp. 60). Violence against women and girls continues to be rampant, with 1,835 reported cases of sexual and gender-based violence in the first half of 2009 alone (Office of the Joint Programme on SGBV 2009).

Although many former warlords have swapped military fatigues for smart suites and positions in armed groups for seats in parliament and other influential positions, and Liberia has been stable and free of major security incidents or threats, multiple signs of instability remain. For example, ethnic tensions and disputes over land remain largely unresolved, and violent incidents at community level are not uncommon. The International Crisis Group reported in 2009 that several violent conflicts over land and community boundaries led to up to twenty deaths and

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1 Statement by Liberian civil society representative during interview in Monrovia, December 2010.
significant damage to buildings in a number of communities in Margibi, Maryland, and Bong counties in 2008 alone (ICG 2009, p. 8). Lofa County has been the scene of occasional communal violence between Loma and Mandingo ethnic groups. As recently as early March 2010, communal violence led to four deaths, 19 injured, and the destruction of several churches, mosques, and schools in several towns in Lofa County, including the county capital of Voinjama (IRIN 2010).

When the Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission issued its provisional final report in July 2009, six former armed faction leaders singled out for prosecution by a mixed international-Liberian tribunal held a press conference and condemned the report, which reportedly caused a significant number of people in Monrovia to pack their bags and head to the countryside for fear that a new outbreak of violence was imminent.2

If Liberia’s achievements in peacebuilding are ambiguous, it is certainly not for a lack of trying or a lack of resources. The international investment in the reconstruction of Liberia has been significant, and international donors experience high stakes in seeing Liberia succeed in its endeavor to rebuild the country and to create an environment for sustainable peace. Consequently, international donors and diplomats have been keen on highlighting Liberia as a success story in post-conflict peacebuilding and reconstruction, just as Secretary of State Clinton did during her abovementioned visit in 2009.

Liberia ranks among the largest recipients of international aid of the past few years. With a population of 3.5 million3, Liberia received USD1.25 billion in overseas development aid in 2008, as much as the significantly larger Ghana (USD1.3bn with a population of 23.4m) and more than three times as much (in per capita terms) than neighboring Sierra Leone at a similar stage in its post-conflict reconstruction process.4 It received one percent of overall US ODA in fiscal year 2007/2008, almost as much as much larger and arguably more politically influential African states such as Nigeria and South Africa.5 Almost 50 percent of U.S. aid to Liberia in 2008 was allocated to what can be roughly considered 'peacebuilding' activities, including what USAID terms "stabilization operations and security sector reform," and governance and democracy promotion6 (USAID 2009).

Overwhelming international support for Liberia’s reconstruction extends far beyond official development assistance. Since 2004, despite the country’s small size7, Liberia at one point hosted the largest number of United Nations Peacekeeping troops in the country with the deployment of

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2 Several interviewees mentioned that the press conference by seven former warlords challenging the TRC findings and threatening to take action if the report were implemented sent jitters through Monrovia and Liberia.
3 Or, to be specific, 3,489,072, according to the 2008 national census. See LISGIS 2008, p2.
4 In 2007, five years after the end of the Sierra Leonean conflict, the country received approximately USD98 per capita overseas development aid while Liberia received USD330 per capita in 2008 (also five years after the end of its war) - data from OECD DAC database – Give website!
5 Liberia received USD163 million in U.S. Government assistance in 2008. It thus received roughly one percent of all U.S. ODA in fiscal year 2007/2008, while Nigeria received 1.2 percent of the total U.S. ODA budget with a population of 151m in fiscal year 2007/2008; South Africa got 1.2 percent of total USA ODA allocation in the same period with a total population of 48.7m. OECD [citation?]
6 For USAID, this includes support for the rule of law and human rights, good governance, political consensus building, and civil society.
7 At 43,000 sq. miles it is roughly the size of the U.S. state of Ohio.
over 15,000 troops from 2004 through 2008, more than 8,000 of whom will remain in the country at least until after the 2011 presidential and parliamentary elections.  

This is the backdrop to this RPP case study on the cumulative impact of peacebuilding in Liberia. This report will briefly provide background to the Liberian conflict and describe the various approaches taken to peacemaking (until 2003) and toward longer-term peacebuilding after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in August 2003.

2. **Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all the individuals who took time out of their busy schedules and sat down with us to patiently answer our questions and to reflect on the progress toward peace in Liberia and the process of how best to achieve genuine peace, which has eluded Liberian society for so long.

A number of individuals contributed greatly to this study either organizationally or logistically or by providing information and input. David Kirlee Swen provided able and reliable research assistance and contacts on the ground and offered invaluable insights into the workings of Liberian society before, during, and after the war.

My gratitude goes to CDA, specifically to Diana Chigas and Peter Woodrow, for conceptualizing the RPP project, entrusting me with the Liberia case study, and for providing expert guidance along the way. They were also patient during the write-up. Peter, as always, was a very able and efficient editor and helped to greatly improve the draft.

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An informal pre-departure chat with Cheyanne Church as well as information on Cheyanne’s work with the UN Mission in Liberia and the contacts she shared were also immensely helpful in preparing for the field trip.

3. **Scope of mission and methodology**

This case study tells the story of recent peacebuilding efforts and their cumulative impact or lack thereof on the post-conflict environment in Liberia in 2009, six years after the official end of the Liberian war. While this study relies on existing academic research for analytical and background information, its main findings are the story of peacebuilding in Liberia as seen and interpreted by more than three dozen Liberian and non-Liberian actors in the peacebuilding process or observers of the efforts to rebuild the country. It reflects a diverse number of views and aimed at documenting a genuinely Liberian vision of peace, major peacebuilding initiatives and how they did or did not contribute toward constructing peace in the country. This case is one of a series of similar cases developed by the Reflecting on Peace Practice Project (RPP) of CDA Collaborative Learning Projects (CDA), based in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Methodology

The information for this study was mainly collected during a thirteen-day field mission to Liberia from December 7 to 19, 2009. During this time, 38 interviews were conducted with 44 peacebuilding actors and observers from a wide range of backgrounds, including representatives of the Government of Liberia (GOL), Liberian civil NGOs and civil society organizations, International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs), as well as observers such as Liberian academics and journalists (see full list of interviewees and their affiliations in annex I).

Interviewees were selected purposefully after informal consultations with CDA staff and people knowledgeable of the situation in Liberia, as well as upon suggestion by David Swen, the Liberian researcher for this case study. As suggested by RPP’s Terms of Reference (TORs) for cumulative impact case studies, the study aimed at consulting a wide range of actors at different levels of the overall peacebuilding enterprise, but focused specifically on key leaders within Liberian civil society, key government agencies, and a few international NGOs explicitly involved in peacebuilding. It also attempted to solicit a broader view of peacebuilding by interviewing observers such as journalists and academics, as well as activists who do not see themselves as traditional peacebuilding actors, including student leaders and representatives of the business community.

Since time for on-the-ground research in Liberia was very limited and CDA has had considerable contact with UN personnel and international peacebuilding actors since 2007 (see below), this study focuses primarily on the views of Liberian civil society and government actors, as well as some key international NGOs, rather than on the views of international donors or UN representatives.

Interviews were conducted as conversations guided by a predetermined set of open-ended questions. The interview questions followed the parameters set by the RPP cumulative case study TORs.9 Specifically, it aimed at soliciting reflections on the following "key questions:"

- "What efforts and processes had cumulative impacts on peace? How did multiple efforts have positive cumulative impacts?
- What linkages – between levels, within levels, between and within different constituencies, between and within peacebuilders, between and within different sectors, etc. – contribute to cumulative impacts?"

In addition to the interviews, this study builds on a literature review and on previous RPP-related studies of specific peacebuilding activities in the country. RPP performed an evaluation of INGO work in Lofa County in 2006 and conducted two case studies regarding UN activities in Liberia. The first of these explored lessons from reoccupation of the Guthrie Rubber Plantation and the second examined the process of infusing the concepts of conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding into the UN systems in the country. These CDA reports,11 have informed this case study to varying degrees.

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9 See interview protocol in annex II.
11 This includes several unpublished case studies and documents, notably a 2006 evaluation of a USAID-funded local peacebuilding project in Lofa county, a 2007 case study on UNMIL’s management of the repossession of
Constraints and limitations

This case study is limited in its scope and ambition. RPP cumulative case studies present a snapshot of peacebuilding efforts and progress toward peace taken at a specific moment by looking backward at efforts over multiple years and projecting forward, to the extent possible, by considering the future prospects for peace, given current trends and unfinished business. While relying on a significant number of interviews and on an extensive document and literature review, it is neither a scientific study of peacebuilding in Liberia nor does it aim to provide a comprehensive overview or analysis of all peacebuilding efforts in the country. Instead, true to the nature of RPP, it captures reflections by peace practitioners and observers about their activities and contributions to peace and their subjective assessment of overall progress toward peace. It thus aims to correctly represent the views of those interviewed and to analyze them, very broadly, through the prism of RPP analytical frameworks.

The heart of the analysis in this document centers on peacebuilding efforts that have occurred since the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in August 2003. Therefore, it only provides a brief overview of the history of Liberia’s wars, which is also the history of many failed and somewhat successful peace negotiations and interventions, but it does not analyze in any depth efforts that led to the peace agreement in the first place. Interviewees, when asked open-ended questions about the status of peace, successful and unsuccessful peacebuilding initiatives and remaining gaps, naturally focused on events since 2003, which explains in large part the focus on peacebuilding since the CPA. To focus on pre-2003 events in the interviews would have required more time and to some extent a different selection of interviewees. Significant pre-CPA activities or contributions that led to the CPA (such as the role of the women’s movement) mentioned by interviewee will be reflected here.

Despite the researchers' best efforts to interview as wide a range and as large a number of actors as possible from a variety of perspectives, the short timeframe (11 ½ days on the ground) naturally imposed certain limitations on the availability of certain actors and our ability to gain access to them. This was specifically true for getting appointments with higher ranking government officials, as well as civil society actors (notably church leaders) and some international NGOs. In light of Liberia’s history of focusing most development efforts on the capital Monrovia and surrounding areas, and in spite of the short timeframe for field research, a conscious effort was undertaken to gather views from citizens from rural areas during a one-and-one-half-day visit to Nimba County. Nimba County had been one of the most contested areas during the war and a flashpoint for communal tensions and land conflicts since the end of the war. It is within reasonable distance from Monrovia (approximately five hours) and promised to offer views from frontline actors in the overall peacebuilding enterprise. Naturally, the views gathered in Nimba faced similar constraints as those gathered during interviews in Monrovia in Guthrie rubber plantation from control by former combatants in 2006; and a 2009 study of how the concepts of conflict-sensitivity and peacebuilding were integrated into UNMIL’s strategy in Liberia.

12 For example, despite requests and several follow-up visits, we were unable to get appointments with any government minister, notably the Minister of Public Works and the Minister of Labor, who were both former civil society activists and had been recommended as keen observers of the peace process in Liberia.

13 It would have been desirable to explore the role of religious actors in Liberia’s peacebuilding process further. However, the researchers were unable to get access to key church leaders, notably representatives of the Council of Churches and the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission. Similarly, several actors involved in rule of law work (for example the Carter Center) were not available during our stay.
terms of access to and availability of interviewees. It is also important to recognize that Nimba is only one of fifteen Liberian counties with its own history and conflict issues. The views gathered in Nimba thus offer an interesting counterpoint to those provided by peacebuilding actors in Monrovia, yet they are by no means representative of all counties or rural areas of Liberia.

Finally, it is important to note that this is neither an impact assessment of specific peacebuilding activities in Liberia nor an evaluation of peacebuilding projects or the overall peacebuilding strategy in Liberia. Any judgments made in this document about the efficacy of different peacebuilding initiatives in Liberia reflect the opinions of the 44 peace actors interviewed or mirror critical assessments offered in academic or policy studies, writings, and reports on post-conflict development and peacebuilding in Liberia.

4. Brief history of peacemaking and peacebuilding in Liberia

Liberia’s history since its founding as the first independent republic on the African continent in 1847 and the history of the Liberian are summarized in annex III. After a brief discussion of the root causes of conflict in Liberia, this section reviews attempts at mediation and peacemaking throughout the 14-year long war. This information will serve as an important backdrop to the subsequent analysis of Liberians’ views of the status of peacebuilding and an examination of how individual initiatives “add up” to generate larger peace.

Root Causes of the Liberian War

Many actors, scholars, and organizations have put forward a large number of factors that contributed to the outbreak of violent conflict in Liberia. Most of them revolve around two common themes:

- **Exclusion and marginalization of large parts of the population:** From its inception, the Liberian state was built on the distinction between Americo-Liberians, who controlled the state apparatus and the economy, and indigenous ethnic groups who were largely marginalized, except for a small number who were assimilated into the Americo-Liberian ruling class. This translated into deep social, political, and economic inequality which resulted in widespread impoverishment of indigenous groups and rural areas while Americo-Liberians grew richer and controlled most resources.

- **Centralized power and decision-making within the Liberian presidency:** Government in Liberia was organized like a large patronage network, dominated by all-powerful presidents with no significant checks or balances. Liberian presidents before 2006 were almost absolute rulers, only concerned about reproducing the power and influence of powerful families and groups among the Americo-Liberian elite in government and controlling the country's resources. Most indigenous Liberians were coerced into submission, excluded from all political decision making and had little recourse to address injustice.

Official analyses of the causes of the Liberian conflict identify a larger number of causes that contributed to conflict, some of which are deeply structural, others related to specific historic events or developments. They also vary in their weighting of those different factors. For example, the Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper of 2006 and the Poverty Reduction
Strategy of 2008, the key documents that have defined the first truly elected Liberian government's agenda for post-conflict development, focus only on two factors:

a) the "marginalization" of large portions of the population due to the monopoly on control of the state enjoyed by Americo-Liberian settlers as a deeper, structural problem within the Liberia system of governance since its inception; and

b) "economic collapse" as a more contingent causal effect that helped trigger conflict in the late 1980s (ROL 2006, pp. 1-2; ROL 2008, p. 14).

Most other joint assessments by the United Nations, other international actors and the Liberian government list a number of factors, often mixing up causes and consequences of conflict. For example, the UN Common Country Assessment of 2006 identifies the following “conflict dynamics”:

- poor leadership and misuse of power;
- weak justice systems;
- lack of shared vision;
- poverty and food insecurity;
- mismanagement of natural resources; and
- regional dynamics (UN 2006, pp. 7-8).

A conflict analysis conducted by CDA with Liberian peacebuilding actors in 2007 generated the “systems chart” of the Liberian ongoing conflict presented below. It offers a similar analysis and illustrates the linkages between various factors and groups them into four clusters: social relations, governance, economics, and security. As the above analyses, it places deeply unequal social relations and ethnic tensions between the small groups of settlers and the vast majority of indigenous Liberian groups at the core of the conflict. These unequal social relations have been institutionalized in a system of governance based on the rule of the few over the many, perpetuated by nepotism and widespread corruption to the benefit of those in power and on the backs of those excluded from power. Patron-client relations or the “big man” (and ‘big woman,” in a few instances) syndrome structure political and social life in the country, controlled (at least in the past) by an authoritarian president at the top. Past regimes ruled with a strong hand and human rights abuses were common. Unequal social relations continue to be mirrored in economic relations, with an extremely unequal distribution of resources. Government does not work for the benefit of Liberia as a whole, but only for the small minority, which produces widespread underdevelopment, illiteracy, and unemployment. This, in turn, generates resentment and desperation among the majority of Liberians, makes them vulnerable to political rhetoric and manipulation, which, over time, exacerbates ethnic tensions.

As discussed in Section 6 below, many interviewees suggested that peacebuilding initiatives have barely touched these fundamental social, political, and economic relations; significant changes have not occurred since the end of the war in 2003.

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14 This systems chart is the outcome of a joint conflict analysis effort by a number of Liberian peacebuilding actors in March 2007, facilitated by CDA staff.
Conflict Issues in Liberia: A Systems Dynamics View
Peacemaking and Peacebuilding (or the lack thereof) 1989 - 2000

More than a century of exclusion and marginalization and a closed political system generated increasing frustration among indigenous Liberians. With growing economic problems in the 1970s, this led to a revolt among indigenous junior officers within the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL), which produced the coup d’état of 1979 and the accession to power of Samuel Doe. Doe continued to run the country in the client-patron mode, governing by coercion and relying largely on associates from his Krahn ethnic group (as well as Mandingo supporters), while repressing challengers and the ethnic groups they represented. Dwindling state revenue led to the breakdown of many state functions, and the institutions of the state were thus not strong enough to counter an armed attack by Charles Taylor’s National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), supported by backers in Libya, Burkina Faso, and Côte d'Ivoire, in 1989. Taylor’s attack led to all-out fighting between deeply divided ethno-regional groups and interests from 1989 to 1997, and again from 2000 to 2003 over control of the country's institutions and resources.

Once central authority and the minority rule of Americo-Liberians had been successfully challenged, the fragile Liberian state disintegrated. As a result, the first phase\(^{15}\) of the Liberian war from 1989 to 1997 (see Annex 3 for an overview of the conflict) appeared chaotic to outsiders, since it saw the multiplication of warring factions, a succession of powerless caretaker presidents whose forces barely controlled the capital, Monrovia, and a heavy-handed intervention by forces from member countries of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), led by Nigeria, which sometimes acted at cross-purposes due to the competing interests among the ECOWAS states and quickly became itself an actor in the conflict (Adebajo 2002). In the words of Stephen Ellis, one of the most respected analysts of the region, "Liberia became a zone of contention among military and commercial elites in Abuja, Abidjan, Conakry and other regional capitals, themselves allied with interest groups as far away as France, Lebanon and Ukraine" (Ellis 1998, p. 156).

The multitude of actors and the lack of credible interlocutors representing the state, as well as the open partiality of the ECOWAS forces (called ECOMOG, as in “ECOWAS Monitoring Group”) made the Liberian war seem intractable for many years. After countless ceasefires and 14 failed “peace” agreements between the warring factions, mainly under ECOWAS mediation, the two most powerful actors, Charles Taylor’s National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) and the Nigerian-led ECOMOG troops, came to the conclusion that an outright battlefield victory was not possible, and that a compromise solution would have to be found. Taylor finally agreed to the terms of an agreement reached in Abuja in August 1996, to disband his armed groups and to compete politically in elections. Taylor knew that he still had by far the strongest forces and genuine support among portions of the population, which would put him in a strong position to win eventual elections. Taylor used a mix of promises of abandoning his brutal tactics and

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\(^{15}\) There is some disagreement among analysts on whether Liberia experienced two distinct wars, a first one from 1989 to 1997, and a second one from 2000 to 2003, or whether they are two phases of one 14-year war. The period from 1997 to 2000, while experiencing less open violence or combat, was hardly different from periods of lull during the 'hot' phases of the war, at least in terms of most of the actors and the fundamental practices employed to control the country and the population. The only difference was that Charles Taylor had risen from rebel leader to president of the country. It thus seems to be defensible to portray the period from 1989 through 2003 as ONE Liberian war with different phases of more or less intensive combat.
intimidation of opponents and the population to score a clear victory in the July 1997 elections with 75 percent of the vote (Harris 1999).

With his election victory, Charles Taylor officially became the head of state, although he hardly abandoned his fundamental warlord way of operating. Having the official seal of approval of heading an internationally recognized sovereign state, Taylor ran the Liberian state as his personal fiefdom. Most of the fighters from his NPFL rebel group were either integrated into the official Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) or National Police or found a home in one of the multiple security forces that made up the state security apparatus and whose main purpose seemed to be to protect Taylor personally and to crack down on opposition, including Taylor’s Anti-Terrorist Unit, the so-called Special Security Service and the paramilitary Special Operations Division, nominally under the Liberian National Police. Under the mantle of legitimacy bestowed by an internationally recognized and formally democratic election, Taylor was then in a position to legally get rid of or repress former leaders of opposing rebel factions or other political opponents (Reno 2004).

Taylor ran the country like a business corporation,16 based on a complex patronage network, mainly concerned about his personal security and accumulation of funds to pay off associates and the large security apparatus. Taylor's wartime accumulation of wealth was significant, mainly from business deals within the territory he controlled, notably with the Firestone Rubber Company and with Malaysian and French timber companies (Ibid., p. 128). According to one estimate, Taylor made approximately USD400m from 1990 to 1997 alone, when he only controlled parts of Liberia. His personal revenue from business deals he personally controlled once he had taken over the state during that period was an estimated USD200m per year as compared to an official state budget of a mere USD64m in 1999, the bulk of which was spent on national security (Reno 2004, 2008). Social services such as health care and schools only barely functioned in the country thanks to generous international assistance. The USD159m of official development aid Liberia received between 1997 and 1999 served the purpose of barely keeping the country alive while Taylor as the chief patron enriched himself and paid off his clients in the large security apparatus, among certain ethnic leaders and key business associates (Reno 2004, p. 135).

Conflict resolution and the Comprehensive Peace Agreement

The Taylor regime’s heavy-handed tactics and his plundering of the country with minimal efforts toward reconstruction and development, resentment grew again and former and new opponents united to organize, once again, armed resistance to the regime. A new rebel coalition, Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy formed in Sierra Leone and Guinea in the late 1990s. While limited to attacks and territorial gains in Lofa County at first, it quickly grew into a formidable military force and challenged Taylor’s control of more and more parts of Liberia. By 2003, the war had again engulfed almost all of Liberia and fierce battles were fought for the control of Monrovia and its surrounding areas, while at the same internationally brokered peace talks sought an end to the conflict.

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16 The International Crisis Group dubbed Taylor’s running of Liberia like his own private company 'Liberia Inc.' See ICG 2002, pp. 16.
After many breakdowns of negotiations between the government and the rebel groups an end of major hostilities was finally achieved with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in Accra on August 19, 2003. The CPA mainly came about due to major developments on the battlefield and a combination of international and internal pressures for Charles Taylor to negotiate and ultimately to step down.

The well-funded and externally supported (mainly by Guinea) LURD rebellion gained significant ground in early 2002 and reached the gates of the capital Monrovia on various occasions and almost took Monrovia in May and June 2003. The emergence of a second rebel movement, the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL), a Krahn-dominated new group supported by Côte d'Ivoire's president Laurent Gbagbo, in the northeast and east of the country put Taylor's government under serious military pressure. His control of Liberian territory significantly decreased.

At the same time, Taylor started to feel the financial squeeze imposed by UN sanctions against Liberian diamond and timber exports after a United Nations expert panel started documenting Taylor's support for the RUF rebellion in neighboring Sierra Leone and his illegal international business connections (UNSC 2000). While both the LURD and MODEL insurgencies had significant support from Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire as well as from within the Liberian Diaspora, Taylor's funding channels got squeezed.

Due to his sinking fortunes on the battlefield and increasing international pressure by the newly formed (in September 2002) 'International Contact Group for Liberia' – the representatives of the UN, ECOWAS, the European Union, the African Union, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Nigeria, Ghana, and Morocco - Taylor agreed to ECOWAS mediated ceasefire and peace talks in early 2003. The noose around Taylor's neck tightened further when the war crimes tribunal for Sierra Leone, the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL), announced that Taylor was indicted for war crimes for his role in organizing and supporting the RUF insurgency in that country. The announcement was made in June 2003, just as Taylor was attending Ghanaian-sponsored peace talks with the leaders of all warring factions in Accra. Taylor left the talks in a hurry and Ghanaian president Kufuor refused to have him arrested at that time. From that moment on, Taylor became internationally isolated and within the country he was a President under siege. LURD and MODEL increased their attacks on Monrovia in June and July 2003, and Monrovia became increasingly cut off from supplies. Taylor had to compromise, and, under significant international pressure, he ultimately accepted an offer from Nigerian President Obasanjo to go into exile in Nigeria against reassurances that he would not be extradited to the Special Court, unless Nigeria received a request from an "elected" Liberian government.

17 Violence continued in more remote counties where rebel groups held sway, until they were disarmed starting in early 2004. See ICG 2004.
18 In 2001, the United Nations Security Council imposed sanctions on diamond exports from Liberia (UN Resolution 1343 (2001) due to its role in supporting the Revolutionary United Front rebels in Sierra Leone and supposedly receiving payments in diamond. It also imposed a travel ban on key Liberian officials and international businessmen seen as undermining regional security. In 2003, the UN Security Council also imposed sanctions against timber exports from Liberia (UN Resolution 1478).
19 Apparently Obasanjo had a close personal relationship with Charles Taylor's sister. See ICG 2002, p. 25.
Taylor subsequently spent three years in Calabar, Nigeria, under house arrest. His fate changed, however, after the swearing in of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf as head of state in January 2006. Although Johnson-Sirleaf was a former Taylor ally, she ultimately requested his extradition under pressure from the United States. When Taylor attempted to flee Nigeria in March 2006, the U.S. government intervened with Nigerian president Obasanjo and Taylor was arrested near the Cameroonian border and sent to Liberia, where he was arrested by UN troops on March 29, 2006 and taken to Sierra Leone. He has been on trial before the Special Court since.20

5. Peacebuilding since 2003

Interviewees named a number of key peacebuilding initiatives, which they considered to have significantly contributed to building peace in Liberia. This section offers a description of these critical interventions and initiatives and assesses their contributions to peacebuilding through the comments made by the interviewees for this case study. Although the majority of interviewees were Liberian civil society members they largely agreed that what could be described as key “macro-level” peacebuilding initiatives were the most critical building blocks for setting the country on the route to peace peacebuilding. This includes primarily initiatives mandated by the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, including the deployment of peacekeeping troops, the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of members of armed groups, elections, security sector reform, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

The section starts out with a description of several of these macro-initiatives identified by interviewees and discusses their role in peacebuilding as seen by the interviewees. This includes a discussion of the role of Liberia’s poverty reduction strategy, a UN-led process and document which is seen by the Liberian Government and key international actors as the central planning tool for all post-conflict development and peacebuilding initiatives.

Subsequently, we will look at the role of women and land conflict, two areas of conflict and peacebuilding which were frequently mentioned by interlocutors as central arenas of peacebuilding, where promising initiatives have been taken despite the lack of coherent peacebuilding strategies in those domains. They also exemplify how social, economic, and political issues are intertwined and often do not lend themselves easily to institutionalized approaches to conflict resolution. Finally, we will discuss issue areas that are very important to the GOL and the international community, notably the areas of good governance and the role of the Peacebuilding Fund and the GOL Peacebuilding Office.

The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL)

The United Nations Mission in Liberia has been the central international actor in the Liberian reconstruction efforts due to its basically having taken over the entire security sector of the country after the war with its peacekeeping and civilian police forces.

20 To follow Taylor’s trial, visit http://www.sc-sl.org/, the SCST website, or the site www.charlestaylortrial.org, sponsored by the Open Society Institute.
Through the offices of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General (SRSG) and its involvement in many core issues related to peacebuilding beyond the security sector (governance reform, elections, human rights, civil society support etc.), UNMIL was an important presence at the political level as well as at the level of planning and monitoring reconstruction strategies.

The United Nations was present in Liberia throughout the second phase of the war through its United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in Liberia (UNOL) established in late 1997 and continuing until 2003. Its original mission to assist the Liberian government “in consolidating peace following the 1997 multiparty elections” as well as to work toward reconciliation and promote human rights (UNMIL website) was severely hampered by the escalation conflict after early 2000. As peace negotiations between the parties progressed and Charles Taylor seemed ready to depart Liberia, the UN Security Council authorized the deployment of a multinational force to Liberia under Chapter VII of the UN Charter (UNSC Res. 1497) and signaled its willingness to send a peacekeeping force upon the signing of a peace agreement. The original multinational force consisted of Nigerian troops under ECOWAS banner, which had been redeployed from neighboring Sierra Leone and were later re-hatted to become UN troops. Consequently, the UN Mission in Liberia was established in October 2003. At its height, it comprised 15,000 troops including 250 military observers and 875 civilian police officers, as well as numerous civilian support staff (UNMIL website). UNMIL was considered a “multidimensional” peace operation which, in addition to the military and police component, included significant political, civil affairs, human rights, gender, child protection, DDRR, public information and support components.

In the early days, in particular during the NTGL, whose planning and implementation capacity and will was severely limited, UNMIL was the driver of post-conflict reconstruction and development planning. Although the CPA provided many broad parameters for key peacebuilding activities, including Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction (DDRR) of ex-combatants, security sector reform, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), the priorities for broader reconstruction efforts were determined under leadership of the major international actors and donors, notably UNMIL, the World Bank, the European Union, and the U.S. Government together with the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL).

A joint needs assessment in early 2004 between the United Nations, the World Bank, and the Transitional Government (National Transitional Government of Liberia et al. 2004) set out the first priorities for the rebuilding of the country. It identified nine priority ‘clusters’ for reconstruction efforts:

- Security
- DDRR
- Reintegration of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), Returnees and Refugees
- Governance and Rule of Law
- Elections
- Basic Services (health, education, water and sanitation)
- Productive Capacity and Livelihoods
- Infrastructure
It also suggested six cross-cutting themes that would be taken into consideration during planning and implementation of programs: gender, HIV/AIDS, environment, human rights, shelter, forestry and media.

It was noticeable, that the term peacebuilding was largely absent from NTGL or early donor planning documents. Theirs was largely a security and recovery agenda, whereby elections, governance programs and the advancement of human rights were seen as automatically promoting conflict resolution.

Subsequent planning documents for the Liberian reconstruction effort gradually started to pay more and more attention to issues of conflict and peacebuilding, although the government’s focus remained squarely on economic development and on rebuilding the security apparatus. In terms of process, most documents placed heavy emphasis on capacity-development and infrastructure (re)construction. The view that the establishment of the rule of law is in itself a sufficient peacebuilding strategy seemed to be widespread among government officials.\textsuperscript{21} And even within the international community and the UN system, the terms ‘conflict-sensitivity’ and ‘peacebuilding’ and their deeper meaning and implications for post-conflict programming were unfamiliar to many UN staff beyond a few conflict and peacebuilding experts.\textsuperscript{22}

Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf’s government, which came to office in early 2006, in its first planning document, the Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy (IPRSP), more explicitly dealt with the causes of conflict and the need for building peace. Already its sub-title, “Breaking with the Past: from Conflict to Development” suggested a more serious engagement with questions of conflict and peacebuilding. In its own words, the IPRSP presented “a broad vision for a new Liberia…[that] will aim to do away with the divisions, marginalization and exclusions of the past” and promote “inclusiveness and empowerment of Liberians through effective decentralization, accountability, transparency and participatory engagement in governance…” (ROL 2006, p. xi).

Despite this analysis and the general programmatic proclamations, the IPRSP continued to focus heavily on development, capacity building, and infrastructure. It identified four priority pillars around which all its rebuilding efforts would be organized:

- “Enhancing national security
- Revitalizing economic growth
- Strengthening governance and the rule of law
- Rehabilitating infrastructure and delivering basic services” (Ibid., pp. xiii)

\textsuperscript{21} One interviewee mentioned a meeting he once had with the president in 2006, during which he suggested that the government was not doing much to advance peacebuilding and reconciliation. According to the interviewee, she replied that the government was putting a lot of effort into establishing the rule of law, which she seemed to equate with peacebuilding.

\textsuperscript{22} Cheyanne Scharbatke-Church/RPP did a comprehensive study on how the concept of peacebuilding was understood and translated into policy in UNMIL and those UN agencies most closely involved in peacebuilding programming. See Scharbatke-Church 2009.
This indicates that peacebuilding as such was not a separate and explicit priority area. Most proposed activities that were supposed to address causes of conflict or conflict issues were again subsumed mainly under the governance and rule of law pillar, as well as under the security sector pillar.

**The Poverty Reduction Strategy: Peacebuilding Blueprint or Development as Usual?**

The subsequent full Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) of 2008, which defines the development and post-war reconstruction framework for the country from 2008 to 2011, maintained the four-pillar structure, but gave more weight to a number of cross-cutting issues. Peacebuilding was explicitly recognized as an important cross-cutting issue, which is supposed to be considered under all four pillars of post-conflict reconstruction and development (ROL 2008, pp. 170).

The PRS’s definition of peacebuilding is more nuanced and complex. It recognizes that peacebuilding was not about a set of specific activities that should be left to outsiders, but that “it embodies a vision of a society that is peaceful, respects and protects the rights of citizens and ensures that disputes and tensions which are normal to any society are handled in a way that prevents their escalation into organized violence” (Ibid.).

With respect to how to implement peacebuilding through the poverty reduction strategy, it suggests that the process of implementation needs to be different rather than the activities themselves:

“...integrating peacebuilding into the PRS does not necessarily change what is being done, rather it focuses on the “how”. An integrated peacebuilding and conflict sensitive approach to poverty reduction implies that poverty reduction and development objectives need to be weighed against the peacebuilding objectives of whether such efforts aggravate conflict situations or help to strengthen the foundations for peace and a respect for human rights” (Ibid.).

The PRS subsequently acknowledges that peacebuilding in Liberia means to tackle the “structural conditions and processes and attitudes that sustain social and political division and encourage the use of violence” (ROL 2008, p. 171), and lists six priority areas that require immediate attention to build peace and avoid the outbreak of violence in the future, including land conflicts, opportunities for youth, “political polarization,” how natural resources are managed, how the state interacts with its citizens, and “weak and dysfunctional justice systems” (Ibid.).

While for UNMIL staff, the inclusion of peacebuilding as a specific cross-cutting issue area to be considered across all areas of post-conflict development was seen as a major accomplishment (Fukuda-Parr and McCandless 2009), interviewees for this study were much more skeptical as to the role the PRS might be able to play in Liberia’s peacebuilding process. In fact, interlocutors offered widely divergent analyses with respect to the extent to which the Liberian government in the PRS showed concern for peacebuilding and has truly embraced a peacebuilding agenda.
Unsurprisingly, most interviewees working with or close to the government pointed to the PRS and its discussion of the causes of conflict and its chapter on peacebuilding as providing a framework for building peace in Liberia. However, among all the peace actors interviewed, only two considered the PRS to reflect a sufficient vision and plan for how Liberia can achieve peace. Others conceded that the PRS was at least an attempt to integrate peacebuilding into the country’s reconstruction strategy.

There was a great deal of variation with respect to interviewees’ assessment of the peacebuilding content of the PRS. Several of them were of the opinion that peacebuilding was barely mentioned in the PRS or that the discussion of conflict and peacebuilding was greatly insufficient. Most of them felt that the Liberian government and Liberians generally had no overall vision for what a peaceful Liberia would look like and how it could get there. And they felt strongly that the PRS was not a document that would further such a vision, but rather a technical document with a strong focus on traditional development focused on infrastructure development and technical skills that might greatly benefit those currently in power rather than the broader population.

Several interviewees thus concluded that the PRS is an elite document that reflects the government’s interests rather than the interests of the broader population. Although the process of developing the document was hailed by its authors (Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Planning, together with World Bank and IMF technical support) as a highly consultative process, based on public consultations and the district and county level as well as public input on some of the cross-cutting issues, several interlocutors suggested that the broader public had little idea about the actual content of the PRS. One international NGO representative criticized in particular that the PRS consultations in the counties were focused on chiefs and male elites, but no women in any meaningful way. Despite frequent public information messages broadcast on radio programs across the country about the importance of the PRS, interviewees felt that while people have heard the acronym PRS, they were not familiar with any of the content. One informant suggested that the PRS document was not even widely distributed among government officials, and that few officials had detailed knowledge of its substance.

While there was a diversity of views on whether the PRS is a useful document that lays out a proper agenda for building peace, the large majority of interlocutors, even those working in or close to the government, conceded that the implementation of the PRS has not yielded many visible results for peacebuilding on the ground since its launch in early 2008. This general statement came in different guises.

A majority of the interlocutors simply doubt that the way the PRS approaches poverty reduction will achieve that goal. They feel that the deep inequality from which the country suffers has not been tackled, and that the way the PRS has been implemented to date is following the same patterns of power and wealth distribution that has existed in the country previously, notably:

- a heavy focus on Monrovia to the neglect of the countryside
- a focus on foreign investment in large-scale plantations and mineral resource extraction, rather than a focus on small-scale agriculture and small and medium indigenous enterprises
• a neglect of basic service delivery, notably in education and health to the detriment of the poor and disadvantaged.

One informant summed this view up as follows:

"The Government has the PRS, but it is unclear how much impact it has. Building roads and primary schools is good, but the true essence of poverty reduction is to live a decent life and have something to eat...the bulk of the people do not see that."

Another interviewee (who openly supports an opposition party) remarked, poignantly, that the "poverty reduction strategy has turned into a poverty reproduction strategy." According to this critical perspective, the PRS neither represents a true vision for peacebuilding nor does its implementation help to construct peace in the country.

Another group of critics was more ambivalent about the PRS implementation process. They felt that the PRS was an important first step, but that it could not be the final word on peacebuilding in the country, and that an additional explicit ‘national vision’ or ‘national peacebuilding strategy’ was needed to truly work toward peace and reconciliation in Liberia.

Despite all the criticism, one positive outcome of the PRS seemed to be that the PRS planning process allowed at least a number of Liberian civil society groups and NGOs to provide input on important peacebuilding topics, notably through the participation of a small number of civil society representatives in the PRS working groups on the four pillars and on the cross-cutting issues. Among the representatives interviewed, a small number of them mentioned that their participation in working groups helped put important issues on the PRS agenda, notably with respect to women’s empowerment and human rights, but also with respect to peacebuilding.

Now that the PRS exists, it has definitely become the key reference documents for all development and reconstruction efforts, no matter the sector or issue area. Top government officials, led by the President herself,23 constantly refer to it in their public pronouncements and donors stress that all internationally-funded activities in Liberia need to be within the PRS framework. Similarly, the 2008 Priority Plan for the Peacebuilding Fund (ROL and UNMIL 2008) emphasizes that all peacebuilding related activities would have to contribute to the realization of the Poverty Reduction Strategy. This attachment to the PRS is to an extent that one NGO worker interviewed complained that genuine peacebuilding activities needed to be highly flexible and that it was almost impossible for NGOs to obtain funding for more creative activities, which they see as critical to building peace but do not fit neatly into any of the activities identified by the PRS.

A few NGOs are also trying to use the document as a tool for their advocacy and public outreach efforts. For example, the women’s NGO secretariat has decided to use the promises and plans set out in the PRS and focus its efforts on holding the government accountable to its declared goals and closely monitor government action.

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23 President Johnson-Sirleaf worked for the World Bank and for UNDP in the 1990s, so she is very familiar with their agendas, terminology, and planning processes, which might explain the importance the Liberian Administration attaches to the document.
Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration (DDRR) of Former Combatants

The DDRR program was a crucial element in the transition from war to peace and the major peacebuilding initiative undertaken under the transitional government from 2003 to 2006 (see Article VI, CPA). In a country where warlords had held sway for over a decade, disbanding armed groups and taking weapons out of circulation were essential first steps in imposing order and starting to build peace. The rehabilitation, retraining and reintegration of young men and women whose life had been determined by armed force and armed groups for many years was also seen as critical in reducing tensions and preventing future conflict.

After some false starts in December 2003, when the United Nations Mission in Liberia was completely overwhelmed by the large number of combatants who claimed benefits and services, the disarmament and demobilization phase occurred largely throughout 2004. Reintegration programs, including support for schooling, vocational skills training and university education, continued until 2009.

At the end of the program, 103,019 individuals had been demobilized, including 83,669 male and 7,570 female adults, as well as 11,780 children (11.4 percent of the total), 9,042 boys and 2,738 girls under the age of 18.

Compared to earlier estimates, the program was completely oversubscribed. The highest estimate of combatants and members of armed groups (such as porters, cooks, wives or women held captives) was 53,000 before the program started, but, in the end, the UN had demobilized almost twice as many individuals (Pugel 2009, p. 74). This combined with the fact that fewer than 30,000 arms were collected in the process raised doubts about the program. Critics have contended that either too few arms were collected and remain in circulation, which would pose a future security risk, or large numbers of people who benefited through the program were in fact civilians (Nichols 2005; Paes 2005). There were widespread reports of corruption in the process, since the UN had to rely largely on armed group leaders and commanders to identify combatants, which allowed for a lively market to develop where arms and ammunition were distributed to family members and loyalists to armed group leaders, although they had not fought in the war.

Similarly, there are numerous accounts of individuals who bought DDR cards from combatants to subsequently benefit from subsidized schooling or skills training.

Despite those concerns, and despite the fact that the reintegration program was slow, underfunded, and often delivered poor quality skills training or livelihood support, most international officials consider the DDRR program to have been a success (Pugel 2009, p. 83). Although there is a lot of anecdotal evidence of an increase of violent crime and drug use in Monrovia, due to the alleged large presence of unemployed former combatants, there are no good statistics to back up this claim (Ibid.).
The sentiment that unemployed former combatants, in particular young men pose a significant future security threat was repeated widely among the interviewees. Most of them referred to unemployed youth one way or another and suggested that job creation for young men is key in maintaining the country’s future. This is also a common theme in UN and other international organizations’ reports on Liberia. In a 2009 assessment of the progress Liberia has made toward peace, UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon gave the following assessment:

“UNMIL continued to monitor security challenges related to ex-combatants, whose residual organizational capacity and command structures, although so far mainly utilized for economic activities, are often contributing factors in the escalation of security incidents. In July, President Johnson-Sirleaf officially closed the national disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration programme, which had successfully disarmed and demobilized more than 101,000 ex-combatants, and provided reintegration assistance to more than 90,000 former combatants since 2003. However, high unemployment, particularly among young people, continues to be a security risk.” (UNSG 2009, p. 4)

As a response, international agencies have stressed the importance of the provision of large-scale temporary employment schemes to keep former combatants and other young men off the streets and allow them at least temporarily to make a living. The World Bank, the UN Development Programme and the World Food Programme thus reported the creation 13,000 temporary jobs in road repair projects in the first half of 2009 alone, targeting mainly areas they considered unstable, that is, near the country’s borders and near rubber plantations (Ibid., p. 5).

Many interviewees for this case studies agreed that the DDRR program was essential to laying the foundation for peace in Liberia. They credited the United Nations Mission in Liberia with playing a key role in the process in the disarmament and demobilization phase, although a few interlocutors raised doubts about whether sufficient numbers of weapons had been collected in the process, surmising that many weapons are still in circulation or are hidden just across the border in Guinea and Côte d’Ivoire.

However, while many of the interviewees agreed on the utility and importance of the disarmament and demobilization process, they were much more critical about the reintegration portion of the program. Several interlocutors saw the reintegration process as compromised by corruption and poor quality of educational or training services. They also generally questioned the effectiveness of short-term DDRR programs and contended that former armed combatants or otherwise idle young men remained at risk of being remobilized, unless they are offered more meaningful longer-term livelihood options.

Landmine Action (LA), a British NGO whose original mission was the location and destruction of landmines and unexploded ordinance, started an innovative project in cooperation with the Liberian Ministry of Agriculture to assist former combatants to receive more thorough training in agricultural skills and a more comprehensive and longer-term support through counseling and “life skills” training. LA has established two ex-combatant training ‘farms’ in rural areas, one in Bong county, and a second one in Sinoe county, to provide in-depth skills training in various agricultural techniques for former combatants (Landmine Action 2009).
The LA project was originally started to deal with a specific caseload of former combatants who had occupied Guthrie rubber plantation in Bomi County, approximately 40 miles from Monrovia. The LA project is built on several premises. First, it aims to offer support for former combatants who were left out of the original DDRR program. Second, it offers longer-term training and reintegration assistance with an emphasis on strengthening the social ties between former combatants while breaking the relationships with former commanders. Finally, it stresses the importance of providing ex-combatants with the appropriate skills to reintegrate in their rural areas of origin or in other rural areas, where agriculture is the main source of livelihoods. It thus aims to reduce the numbers of former combatants who remain in urban areas with few opportunities for longer-term employment and fewer livelihood options. It is unemployed former combatants in urban areas who are mainly seen as a security risk by political leaders and international policymakers, a view which was shared by many interviewees.\(^{24}\)

The Landmine Action project was conceived after detailed anthropological research on the former combatants in Guthrie rubber plantation found that large numbers of them did not enter the DDRR program and were staying near the rubber plantation with few options for making a living after they had been chased from the plantation in August 2006 (Landmine Action 2006). The LA project also engaged a number of political scientists to conduct rigorous monitoring and evaluation of its programs.

**The 2005 Elections**

The 2005 elections were a key turning point in peacebuilding in many respects. The presidential and parliamentary elections of October 11 and the presidential run-off elections of November 8 were, according to experts, the first truly free and fair elections for political office the country had ever known. While earlier leaders had sought popular legitimization through the ballot box, including Samuel Doe in 1985 and Charles Taylor in 1997, those polls were marked by deep ethnic divisions and a climate of violence and intimidation. Elections prior to 1979 were held within the limitations of the one-party state controlled by the True Whig party and were by no means an open political contest.

As a consequence, the 2005 polls were not only the most open democratic political contest the country ever had, but also signaled a clear break with the power-sharing arrangement that had largely paralyzed the NTGL since October 2003. The 2005 vote was, nonetheless, a true post-conflict vote, in that the conflict had left its deep marks on the political landscape. A large number of former warlords and war actors managed to translate their wartime prominence into political capital and found themselves elected to higher office. The best known examples included former NPFL commander and then INPFL (splinter group of the NPFL) leader Prince Johnson, who now represents Nimba county in the Senate, Charles Taylor's wife Jewel Howard Taylor who is a senator from Bong county, Adolphus Dolo (NPFL), also a senator from Nimba county, and representative Edwin Snowe (NPFL), who was speaker of parliament from 2006 to 2007.

\(^{24}\) Interview with senior Landmine Action staff, Monrovia, December 11, 2009.
However, while individuals were able to translate wartime influence into political capital, this was not true for any of the armed groups as a whole. None of the prominent armed groups of NPFL and other militias affiliated with Charles Taylor, LURD, or MODEL managed to transform their war organizations into political forces. Although a number of political parties had affiliations with or were dominated by former armed groups and their leaders, notably the All-Liberia Coalition Party (ALCOP) affiliated with LURD and the National Patriotic Party (NPP) affiliated with the NPFL, none of them emerged as a political movement with wide support. The elections were largely a vote for individuals (27 out of 94 members of the House were elected as independents), with six parties represented in the House and Senate, and none of them commanding more than nineteen percent of the vote (Harris 2006).

The presidential election was hotly contested between the two frontrunners of the first-round election, former professional soccer player George Weah and former government minister and UNDP and World Bank official Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf. Johnson-Sirleaf won the second round by a wide margin (59 percent vs. 41 percent for Weah), and became the first female elected head of state of a Sub-Saharan African country. Remarkably, given the context of a war-torn and deeply divided country, the polls took place without major violent incidents. Even angry protests by supporters of George Weah after his loss in the second round resulted only in some stone-throwing against the U.S Embassy in Monrovia, and these were diffused by his concession six weeks after the poll (Harris 2006, p. 391). This relatively peaceful process was most likely due to the numerous international and local election observers and, certainly, the presence of 15,000 UN peacekeeping troops. The holding of truly competitive but nonetheless peaceful elections only two years after the end of a divisive fourteen-year war was seen by many observers as a major accomplishment and milestone in the transformation of Liberian society and its polity from conflict to a peaceful and stable democracy.

This theme also resonated with many of the peace practitioners and observers interviewed for this study. When asked about key milestones for peacebuilding in Liberia, many interviewees mentioned the 2005 elections as a major achievement. They considered it an achievement not only for the more obvious reasons, notably that it was the first truly democratic and largely free, fair, and competitive elections in Liberia’s history, but also for its boost to broader civic life and activism. The elections provided the most open political playing field ever in the country and encouraged truly open debate. It thus allowed for long established civic groups as well as for newcomers to broaden their messages related to peace, reconciliation, and the recognition of human rights and freedoms to be spread to a nation-wide audience and to the new political class about to take office. With the election came significant international attention and funding, and many civil society groups were able to expand their programming to get involved in civic and voter education campaigns or election monitoring activities. Similarly, the more open public debate around the elections allowed many media outlets to expand their activities and for new ones to spring up.

Some observers warned that in a country where civil society have always been beholden to political interests, and many civic groups and NGOs are associated with political parties, the increased political openness in the post-conflict phase also might have led to an increased politicization of civil society. However, overall, the surge in civic activism around the elections,
some of which was carried forward into other peacebuilding activities in the broader sense, seems to have benefited civic life overall.

For example, parts of the women’s movement were heavily engaged in voter registration, mobilization, and civic education activities. While the encouragement of women was clearly in the political interest of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf and arguably helped her win the elections (Bauer 2009), it also assisted the somewhat informal women’s movement that had come together toward the end of the war to continue their activities, to institutionalize some of their networks, and to extend what had been a largely Monrovia-focused initiative to other parts of the country. Therefore, the heavy involvement of women’s networks contributed not only to the accession to power of the first elected female African head of state, but also promoted increased mobilization of women, greater visibility of women in the public realm, and, after the elections, the expansion of women’s rights, including the passing of the country’s first anti-rape law in 2006.

**Security Sector Reform (SSR)**

Although the CPA only mandated the “restructuring” of the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) (CPA 2003, Art. VII), many parts of the military were closely associated with former armed groups or had been hired during Charles Taylor’s regime from among former NPFL or other militia forces. Simple restructuring was considered to be insufficient to give the AFL a fresh start and to build a genuine Liberian capacity for self-defense. Consequently, donors, and in particular the U.S. government, who was specifically tasked to oversee the reform of the armed forces in the CPA, argued in favor of a complete dismantling of the existing AFL and a reconstruction of a much smaller force of properly vetted, well-trained and equipped Liberian soldiers. With most of its forces tied down in the Middle East and Afghanistan, the U.S. government opted to contract out the military restructuring process. After a scoping in 2004, the military contractor DynCorp won the contract for the recruitment and training mission, while a second private military company, Pacific Architects and Engineers (PAE) became a major partner in reconstructing the main military base (Camp Schiefflin) near Monrovia and to train future AFL officers.

From October 2003 until today, Liberia has been almost entirely dependent on UNMIL for its security needs. UNMIL’s rapid reaction force has generally intervened in crisis situations, and UNMIL forces assisted the Liberian Government in wresting control of two large rubber plantations (Guthrie and Sinoe plantations) from ex-combatants in 2006 and 2007.

After the careful vetting of many thousands of applicants for the new Armed Forces of Liberia, the first 110 recruits started basic training in August 2006. The vetting process was “the best…witnessed anywhere in the world” (ICG 2009, p. i), requiring high standards in terms of literacy, health, and personal history (no involvement with armed factions before). There was also a pledge to employ recruits from all counties and ethnic groups, as well as twenty percent females, although these two goals have proven difficult to achieve so far.25 The new AFL started

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25 According to the ICG, despite significant efforts, these goals have not been achieved. Apparently ninety percent of the initial recruits were from Monrovia and only approximately five percent of the recruits were female (ICG 2009, pp. 11).
to be operational at some levels in mid-2009, but is not expected to be fully functional until late 2010 or 2011.

The complete disbanding of the former military and the resource-intensive and lengthy rebuilding exercise have been criticized for a number of reasons. Many, including some of the interviewees, argue that the cost of up to $200,000 per soldier for recruitment and training seems excessive in a resource-poor environment like Liberia. Many doubt that the small force of 2,000, even if well trained, will be able to truly keep peace in the country after 2011, when UNMIL is scheduled to depart. In fact, many interlocutors warned that nobody will know whether peace will hold in Liberia until after UNMIL’s departure, and many of them were skeptical that peace was strong enough for Liberia to be able to do without UN peacekeepers.

A few informants also referred to several recent clashes between the new AFL and the National Police forces, which does not bode well for the future. There is also a significant overlap in duties between an elite rapid reaction force, or “Emergency Response Unit”, located within the national police and the mandate of the AFL, which might lead to significant competition between the security forces in the future (ICG 2009, p. 18).

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)

Article XIII of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement mandated the establishment of a Truth of Reconciliation Commission “to provide a forum that will address issues of impunity, as well as an opportunity for both the victims and perpetrators of human rights violations to share their experiences, in order to get a clear picture of the past to facilitate genuine healing and reconciliation” (CPA 2003). It explicitly linked the mission of the TRC to uncovering “the root causes of the crises in Liberia, including human rights violations” and mandated it to “recommend measures to be taken for the rehabilitation of victims of human rights violations” (Ibid.). The provision on the establishment of a truth commission in the CPA was the result of demands by civil society groups for some mechanism of accountability. Rebel group leaders acquiesced to the TRC formation, since they felt relatively safe from criminal prosecution, due to the almost nonexistent Liberian justice system (Hayner 2007). Under strong international pressure, the NTGL passed the TRC Act in June 2005 and oversaw the selection of its members. Consequently, many of the interests of former armed groups, which were represented in the NTGL, were equally represented among some of the TRC Commissioners.

Despite a slow and rocky start in 2006, marred by capacity and management issues, political struggles, and financial problems, by 2009 the Commission had collected 20,560 individual statements from Liberian men, women and children in Liberia as well as among Diaspora communities in the United States, Ghana, and Nigeria. It held 512 public hearings, as well as additional thematic hearings and validation workshops in all counties, between January 2008 and June 2009 (TRC 2009).

In its final report, the TRC singles out 124 individuals for prosecution for war crimes by a mixed Liberian-international criminal tribunal, and further recommends prosecution by Liberian courts of 58 perpetrators, and lustration (barring from public office) of 49 individuals. Among those recommended for criminal prosecution are a number of current senators and parliamentarians,
and many current government members are among those recommended for lustration (ICTJ 2010). In addition to criminal prosecution and public sanctions mechanisms, the TRC recommends the establishment of a traditional, community-based truth telling and accountability mechanisms called the “Palava Hut” mechanism, which provides for local community meetings, during which perpetrators are supposed to confess their wartime deeds and either receive forgiveness from victims and survivors, or face some form of non-criminal community sanction (TRC 2009b). The TRC also recommends a Reparations Trust Fund for the compensation of war victims and various measures for memorialization. As suggested in the CPA (Art. XII), the governments was expected to establish an Independent Human Rights Commission, which was to be in charge of overseeing and monitoring the implementation of the TRC recommendations.

The final TRC report, published in a preliminary version on July 2, 2009, and in its final version on December 2, 2009, caused a stir within the Liberian political establishment. Due to its controversial recommendation to bar current president Johnson-Sirleaf and many members of her administration from public office for 30 years, two of the TRC’s nine commissioners refused to sign off on the final document. It was then received with little enthusiasm by the Liberian government and parliament, which quickly announced that senators and representatives had to take time to study the report and deferred debate until early 2010, when parliamentarians would be returning from their annual agricultural break. The presidency has been relatively quiet about the report, although President Johnson-Sirleaf on two occasions endorsed those TRC recommendations that are within the TRC’s mandate and conform to the Liberian constitution (ICTJ 2010, p. 11). This line of reasoning has been pursued by some politicians and other individuals who have launched a legal challenge against the TRC, arguing that the Commission overstepped not only its mandate but its recommendations also violated the country’s constitution, notably the separation of powers. In February 2010, parliament also rejected all candidates nominated by President Johnson-Sirleaf for the Independent Human Rights Commission (Ibid., p. 12). At the time of writing, the fate of the TRC report and whether it will ever be implemented remained highly uncertain.

Despite the high profile launch of the report in early July and the complete report launch in December, only few copies had been distributed by early 2010, and most regular citizens had little knowledge of the report’s content. A number of interviewees felt that a major shortcoming of the TRC exercise has been that the follow up on the report and the public dissemination of the report had not been given sufficient attention in the TRC’s mandate. They thus contended that it was essential for civil society to keep the issues on the agenda and engage broader constituencies in discussions on national reconciliation and the pros and cons of prosecutions for war crimes.

While the international community has been decidedly lukewarm about the TRC report and the controversial recommendations, the report nonetheless provided a rallying point for many civil society groups. Overall, the entire TRC process offered opportunities for a significant number of civil society organizations to get more deeply involved and design programs to address questions of transitional justice and reconciliation.

A transitional justice working group, made up of key international and local NGOs working on issues of accountability and reconciliation, has been accompanying the TRC process critically from the beginning, and a group of 36 civil society organizations published a statement in July
2009 in strong support of the report and urging government to take action. Many local civil society organizations have also started to get involved in a number of information and dialogue programs around the TRC report and its recommendations, including long-established local organizations such as Democracy Watch, the Women's NGO Secretariat, the Foundation for Human Rights and Democracy (FOHRD), and the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission.

Several interviewees seemed optimistic that the TRC process will produce positive results for Liberian society in the future. As one interlocutor put it, “We need to look at our past…it might create tension right now, but it will be important fifteen years down the road…people need to be held accountable for their actions, otherwise we will never have a justice system.”

**Land Conflict and Conflict Resolution**

Control over access to agricultural and forest land has been a central issue, an indirect cause of conflict, and one of the central stakes in ethnic group disputes over belonging to communities and to Liberia as a nation. Such conflicts were generally latent before the war, but were brought out into the open during the war, and the war dynamics significantly exacerbated tensions and land conflict.

There are several dimensions to land conflicts in Liberia. First, scholars have shown that conflict over access to land was a central feature of the evolution of the Liberian state, since it was founded by settlers on land partly purchased, but often expropriated or seized by coercion from local chiefs. Thus, the expansion of the state and the exploitation of its natural resources by settlers and their commercial associates came largely at the cost of indigenous peoples' access to land and resources (Levitt 2005). One key modern manifestation of this issue is the large-scale rubber plantations. The largest and most prominent of these has been run by the Firestone company since the 1930s, established on land that once belonged to indigenous communities. The tensions between indigenous Liberians and settlers or Americo-Liberians over access to power and a fair distribution of resources was always rooted in conflict over ownership and control of access to land.

At the local level, land conflicts have erupted between distinct ethnic groups. The most prominent and widely reported cases relate to conflicts between Mandingos and Loma ethnic groups in Lofa County and between Mandingos and Gios and Manos in Nimba County. Mandingos are mostly Muslim traders with family links reaching into Mali and Guinea. They have settled in various parts of the country since the 19th century, but are seen as 'strangers' by the largely Christian/animist communities of Loma and Kpelle in Lofa and Gio and Mano in Nimba, who consider themselves the 'original' inhabitants of those regions (Rincon 2010). Over time, Mandingos often negotiated access to land with local chiefs and paid tributes to local landowners and chiefs for the use of land.

Mandingos were specifically targeted by Charles Taylor's NPFL and faced retribution locally, after many Mandingos had sided with Samuel Doe in his repression against Gio and Mano in Nimba County in the 1980s. They later joined the ULIMO rebel group in the early 1990s, and many were active in the LURD militia in the later period of warfare. The rival ethnic groups were frequently aligned with warring militia factions that engaged in mutual massacres—a further source of ongoing distrust and tension.
As a consequence, almost all Liberian Mandingos fled to neighboring countries, mainly Guinea, during the war. The land they previously occupied was often taken over by other community members or members of armed groups, which prevented many Mandingo families from returning after the war. These conflicts are particularly acute in Ganta town, the main trading center in Nimba county and second largest town of Liberia. Since Mandingos were the main traders in Ganta, they owned much of the prime real estate in the center of town, which until today is occupied by former combatants and other community members from the rival Mano ethnic group.

There are similar conflicts in some smaller towns in Lofa County. These conflicts have also taken on an added dimension, since there was destruction of houses of worship and sacred forests of both sides during the war. As a consequence, many Mandingos have still not returned from exile in Guinea, although most other refugees have long since returned to their communities of origin. Conflicts over ownership and access to those lands still divide many communities in Lofa and Nimba counties, and the fact that powerful people from all groups have become politicians, and that up to 40,000 Mandingos are still refugees in Guinea, has raised the national stakes of land conflicts in Lofa and Nimba counties.

Community land conflicts are by no means limited to Lofa and Nimba counties, nor to those ethnic groups. There are multiple overlapping land regimes through which state-controlled land agencies have given titles to territory which communities administered under customary law—including concessions to foreign-owned companies. This has led to multiple localized land disputes lasting for decades, of which most are, in fact, between claimants from the same ethnic group, in many instances between rival land-owning families. Many of these localized disputes were exacerbated by the war, since local systems of conflict resolution and land management were disrupted, and members of armed groups often occupied land at will during the war and sometimes continued to do so after the war (NRC 2010; Rincon 2010). In some cases this was done at the instigation of rival landowning families or family members. Land conflicts are often also tied to the exploitation of timber or other forest resources, and, in some areas, mineral resources such as diamonds or gold.

Local land conflicts between and within ethnic communities have occasionally erupted into violence in recent years. For example, violent conflicts over ownership of land led to more than twenty deaths and significant damage to buildings in separate incidents in Margibi, Maryland, and Bong counties in 2008 (ICG 2009, p. 8). Violence in Lofa County claimed four victims in early 2010, while the conflicts in Nimba are marked by latent tensions and occasional threats of violence (IRIN 2007; ICG 2009, p. 8; Rincon 2010).

All of this demonstrates that land conflicts of various types and at various levels of society are an important dimension of violent conflict in Liberia and are still seen by all observers, as well as the Liberian government, as one of the main sources of potential future conflict (ROL 2008, pp.

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26The Norwegian Refugee Council, which manages a program of alternative dispute resolution regarding land conflicts (see below), reported that the majority (62 percent) of more than 2264 land disputes registered in Bong, Lofa, Margibi, Montserrado and Nimba counties are within communities and non-ethnic in nature. Information shared by Gregory Kitt, NRC Project Manager, in email communication of June 23, 2010.
However, concrete action to tackle land conflicts was slow after the end of the war. This might have been in part due to the contentious nature and political sensitivity of land issues. During the NTGL, all warring parties were in government and had obviously come to an internal arrangement whereby they would avoid overly controversial issues and focus on their personal enrichment. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf’s government depends in part on support from groups in Lofa County and, at least in the beginning of her tenure, on former associates of Charles Taylor. Since many of those former associates and former NPFL leaders who represent communities in Nimba county are still in the Senate and House as political leaders, the new government apparently did not want to tackle the underlying land issues in Lofa and Nimba counties.

The government has focused primarily on developing a mechanism to defuse acute conflict and reduce tension. In 2006, President Johnson-Sirleaf appointed an ad-hoc commission to deal with immediate land conflicts. However no mechanisms were put in place to address longer-term land use issues. The multiple systems of land management continue to operate, including an official state-run land registration system and multiple local systems, ranging from county administration to chiefs and traditional institutions.

Inaction by the government was such that INGOs and the United Nations (notably UNHCR) felt that they had to find ways to tackle land conflict on their own, in order to facilitate the return of the remaining Mandingo refugees in Guinea to their former homes in Lofa and Nimba counties. The GOL seemed quite content to let international organizations try to find solutions to local land conflicts.

The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) has thus has managed its Information, Counseling and Legal Assistance (ICLA) program in Nimba county since 2006, which was later expanded to Bong, Lofa, Margibi and Montserrado counties. The program uses alternative dispute resolution techniques and assists local communities to resolve land disputes and establish durable solutions. It does this by offering legal advice, clarifying legal land tenure, and offering assistance with court cases, as well as land surveying and titling, to avoid conflict re-erupting. The program also offers training on the legal framework of land tenure in Liberia and in alternative dispute resolution techniques to community leaders, local government officials, civil society representatives, women and youth leaders (NRC 2009; IRIN 2010).

The NRC program was mentioned as particularly successful by several interlocutors. Even informants representing ethnic interests who were skeptical of many other initiatives suggested that the NRC program was helpful in settling land conflicts in Nimba County and that NRC was trusted by all sides. The program had registered more than 2,000 land disputes in five counties (Bong, Lofa, Margibi, Montserrado, Nimba) by April 2010 and has assisted in the resolution of more than 400 local land conflicts between 2006 to 2009 (NRC 2009). Its success can be attributed to its careful approach to researching all interests and details of land conflicts that it helps mediate, its ability to offer a combination of legal, technical, and process (mediation) skills, as well as its efforts to link with different official and traditional authority structures and offices, each of which have a say in the management of land ownership and access in Liberia. NRC also collaborates closely with various local NGOs to build on their local knowledge and expertise, such as the Center for Justice and Peace Studies in Nimba County. NRC is currently
working with local NGOs to set up local peace councils that are supposed to be able to adjudicate land disputes in the future.

After many ad-hoc attempts at tackling land conflicts, such as the Presidential Committee on land disputes in Nimba County appointed in 2006, which, according to some informants, had been largely dormant in recent years, a permanent National Land Commission was appointed by President Johnson-Sirleaf in August 2009. The Commission, whose mandate is to adjudicate existing land disputes and to make suggestions for a more comprehensive legal and land reform that would clarify the multiple overlapping land management regimes for the future, took office in early 2010 and has started to travel the country on fact finding missions to more fully understand the nature of land disputes (Daffah 2010) and to devise proper procedures for mediating land disputes. President Johnson-Sirleaf declared a moratorium on all public land sales until the land commission has clarified land tenure regimes and mechanisms for dealing with conflict (Land Commission 2010).

**Women and Peacebuilding**

Moran and Pitcher, in a comparison of the role of women in peacebuilding efforts between Mozambique and Liberia found that there were more women's organizations in Liberia across all levels of society, "from the most powerful urban elites to illiterate villagers" (Moran and Pitcher 2004, p. 504).

In pre-war Liberia, women’s networks across social, ethnic, and class divides had been built mainly through religious organizations. Moran and Pitcher suggest that "the many Christian denominations present in small towns and regional centers beyond the capital provided an important site of cross-class contact and collaboration between educated and illiterate women. With Liberia's long history of 19th century settlement and 'missionization', these organizations have forged multi-generational ties between 'native' an 'civilized' women (to use Liberian terms) who have had the experience of working together and respecting each other's talents and abilities" (p. 509). They suggest that, although war and social upheaval have cut many of these social ties, "the memory of these alliances remains a resource to be used in the process of rebuilding" (Ibid.).

Although they are largely rarely mentioned in the mainstream literature on war and efforts at peacemaking in Liberia, a number of women's groups were active throughout the conflict. During the first phase of the war from 1989 to 1997, a group called Concerned Women of Liberia connected women in Monrovia and the rebel-held territories and organized mediation and negotiation for local level and family conflicts and held prayer meetings. The Federation of Liberian Women organized conflict resolution trainings, and the Christian Health Association of Liberia (CHAL), an organization of mainly female Liberian health workers, provided humanitarian relief and offered reconciliation workshops throughout the country. The Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia (AFELL) and some small Monrovia-base NGOs documented sexual violence and abuse against women. A number of civil society groups, including the Women's Peace Initiative, organized mass demonstrations for peace in Monrovia to impress on the international community that Liberians rejected violence and wanted the fighting to end (Moran and Pitcher, p. 507).
While civil society had been significantly decimated by the long war and Charles Taylor's oppressive regime since 1997, the authoritarian president faced increasing peaceful protest and pressure in the early 2000s from at least one social group: Liberia's women. Although the influence of the Liberian women's peace movement in bringing about the Comprehensive Peace Agreement is probably overstated in some quarters,²⁷ many interviewees agreed that women’s groups were among the more outspoken civil society actors during the war and added a genuine popular voice to the international pressure for peace and had an influence on the peace negotiations in Accra and on some clauses of the CPA. Women involved in the Liberian Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET) started organizing in early 2003 in Monrovia and formed a movement called the Liberian Women Mass Action for Peace. They used personal connections and Christian and Muslim women's networks to mobilize numbers of women for peaceful protests and started an around-the-clock vigil at a central intersection in Monrovia where they knew President Taylor had to drive by at least every morning and evening to see their protest. They drafted a 'women's manifesto' and asked to meet President Taylor to tell him firsthand about the plight of women in the war-ravaged country. Taylor largely ignored the women's demands, but given that the women's movement grew in numbers and all their protests were peaceful, at least he did not seek to violently repress them. Once Accra peace negotiations began in June 2003, even though the women were not invited to officially participate in the talks, they raised funds for a group of them to continue their protest at the venue of the talks in Accra. The women camped outside the conference hotel and tried to remind delegates constantly of their mission, while at the same time trying to influence individual delegates to include their positions in the negotiations. The women drew international attention most notably for forming a human cordon around the conference building, not letting any delegates out until they had come to an agreement at a stage when the negotiations seemed to unravel in July and August 2003.

Professional and urban elite women from the three neighboring countries of Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, with support from regional (ECOWAS), continental (Organization of African Unity), and the United Nations started one of the more internationally prominent initiatives, the Mano River Women’s Peace Network (MARWOPNET) in 2000.²⁸ Their initial impetus was to get the leaders of the three countries to meet and to discuss regional peace issues. MRUWNET comprised female politicians, diplomats and wives of senior politicians. They were key in bringing about a presidential summit between the three countries in February 2002, at a time when diplomatic relations had been cut between Liberia and both Guinea and Sierra Leone. To their great disappointment, the women were shut out of the meeting (Moran and Pitcher 2004, p. 507). However, they continued to exist as a group and subsequently organized conflict resolution workshops with participants from all three countries in an attempt to improve communication channels between the countries.

Since the international community focused its assistance efforts mainly on urban and formalized women's civil society groups, notably those that resembled Western NGOs and access to rural

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²⁷ The Women Mass Action campaign and their contributions to the peace process is chronicled in the documentary “Pray the Devil Back to Hell” (see http://www.praythedevilbacktohell.com/v3/). By mainly focusing on the involvement of the Women Mass Action movement at the expense of broader political and diplomatic events, the film might slightly overstate the role women played in the process.

areas was often difficult, there is little documentation on women's initiatives outside Monrovia during the war. It seems logical, though, that women were heavily involved in local peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts through their roles in traditional institutions and 'secret' initiation societies and local self-help networks (Moran and Pitcher, pp. 508).

In 2009, women’s groups and network such as WONGOSOL and WIPNET, according to several interviewees, are still among the more active and capable civil society actors. As shown above, women played an important role in electing a female President and a number of former female civil society leaders have been appointed to government positions by President Johnson-Sirleaf. The Ministry of Gender has been active in organizing urban and rural women throughout the country to assist them in having their voices heard in local decision making and many internationally sponsored peacebuilding projects at least nominally require the involvement of women in local peace committees. Although there is a risk that women’s groups advocacy efforts get pigeonholed as focusing largely on what is perceived as typical “women’s issues”, the more prominent women’s networks remain engaged in advocacy on issues such as public accountability and transparency, notably with respect to the implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy, as well with some of the civil society advocacy and civic education activities around the TRC final report.

**Good Governance and Anti-corruption**

The National Transitional Government of Liberia was a compromise government representing all the war actors and some civil society representatives. Unelected and facing little accountability other than to each other and, to some extent, the international community, most NTGL members were seen as openly corrupt and mainly concerned with personal enrichment during their short, two-year tenure, before they would have to face voters' scrutiny in elections.

Frustrated with the apparently high level of corruption within the NTGL and what donors perceived to be a lack of concern with progress in key areas that were seen as crucial to state reconstruction and macro-economic stabilization, the main donor agencies devised a plan that instituted close supervision of key Liberian institutions and, in part, robbed them of their autonomy and limited their sovereign decision-making powers.

A report by the UN, European Union, World Bank, and U.S. Government representatives in 2005 laid out an ambitious anti-corruption plan titled Liberia Economic Governance and Action Plan (LEGAP). Apart from concerns about addressing the perceived rampant corruption, which, in the eyes of donors, was putting the reconstruction and peace process in danger, the plan drew inspiration from academic debates at the time, which advocated an international ‘trusteeship' approach to rebuilding war-torn poor states (Keohane 2003; Fearon and Laitin 2004; Ellis 2005). According to this school of thought, poor conflict-ridden countries had neither the capacity nor political stability to quickly reconstruct, and thus had to rely on imported senior civil servants in areas that are strategic to revenue collection and fiscal management, in order to set the countries back on a path of sustained economic development and lay the groundwork for rebuilding strong government institutions.
Despite significant resistance within the NTGL (and even among other Liberian and West African leaders who were otherwise critical of the NTGL) based on the erosion of national sovereignty due to the intrusive 'neo-trusteeship' approach outlined in LEGAP, donor agencies made future funding conditional on the adoption of the plan. Consequently, NTGL Chairman Gyude Bryant had no choice but to sign what ultimately came to be known and the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Programme (GEMAP) in October 2005. Its initial three-year mandate was extended until October 2009, with additional technical assistance provided by the World Bank, USAID and other donors until the end of 2010 (U.S. Embassy in Liberia 2009).

Under GEMAP, all the heads of Liberian Government agencies that are critical to revenue collection, procurement, and disbursement are shadowed by an international expert who is appointed by donor agencies and who has co-signing powers on all operational and financial decisions. This includes the Executive Director of the Bank of Liberia, the country's central bank, the heads of the General Services Agency and the Public Procurement and Concessions Commission, both in charge of all government procurement and contracts, the Ministry of Land, Mines and Energy, the Bureau of Customs and Excise, the National Port Authority, the Forestry Agency, the Bureau of Maritime Affairs, Roberts International Airport and the Liberian Petroleum Refining Corporation (Boas 2009, Fn 4).

Donors consider the program to have been successful, since corruption in those key agencies has significantly decreased and revenue collection for the state treasury has greatly improved. For example, the National Port Authority more than doubled its revenue from 2004 to 2008 under GEMAP management (USAID Liberia 2010). However, GEMAP is disliked by many Liberian decision-makers as overly intrusive and stripping the Liberian Government of its sovereign decision-making powers. While high-level corruption might have decreased in the agencies under international supervision, this has had few impacts on ordinary Liberians, who interact with government agencies at much lower levels and are subject to the same 'informal fees' and side payments as before (Boas 2009,p. 1338). Critics contend that GEMAP was largely planned by the international community with little local input, and that it is a short-term remedy to a deeply structural problem (Reno 2008). The intrusive international anti-corruption program has thus allowed the Liberian government to neglect fighting corruption in other sectors, while at the same time making the government accountable to the international community, rather than to its own people (Boas 2009).

As a result, some observers question what the long-term impact of GEMAP will be and suggest that it is not sustainable and will hardly generate lasting change to corrupt practices rooted in deeper social and political structures (Reno 2008).

A number of other steps have been taken in the fight against corruption in Liberia. The GOL established an Anti-corruption Commission (ACC) in September 2008 and the Governance Reform Commission also has a good governance and anti-corruption mandate. In addition, a number of mainly donor-funded civil society initiatives are attempting to add a grassroots dimension to holding government accountable and advocating in favor of greater transparency in budgeting and accounting of public funds. 29 These efforts include a recent initiative to protect...

29 For example, see the Liberia Corruption Watch website, supported by many international organizations and NGOs, including Transparency International at [http://www.liberiacorruptionwatch.org/](http://www.liberiacorruptionwatch.org/).
and assist whistleblowers who report on corruption and offer them a twenty-four hour whistleblower hotline.30

These initiatives are largely donor-driven. Although many interviewees mentioned corruption as a significant problem, almost none of them mentioned existing initiatives to fight corruption when they were asked about key peacebuilding interventions. There seemed to be a general feeling that corruption within government was condoned from above, and that existing efforts had little impact.

**Peacebuilding Fund and Peacebuilding Office within the Ministry of Internal Affairs**

In October 2007, the UN Secretary General declared Liberia eligible to receive funding from the UN Peacebuilding Fund. According to various observers, Liberian leaders adopted the term “peacebuilding” and the term subsequently became much more prominent in Liberia, notably within government circles and even in civil society, as the abstract term now came with concrete funding attached (see also Scharbatke-Church 2009). The Peacebuilding Fund allocated $15 million in a first tranche, disbursed in 2008 and 2009.

In combination with ongoing discussions within UNMIL and attempts by certain sections within UNMIL to get the UN system as well as the Liberian Government more involved in conceptualizing a peacebuilding agenda for the country (Ibid.), the promise of funding from the Peacebuilding Fund spurred a number of institutional innovations in the Liberian peacekeeping landscape.

A 2008 Priority Plan for (the) Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) was developed based on earlier UNMIL and GOL peacebuilding documents. The Priority Plan proposed, among other things, to strengthen the capacity of the Liberian government, with the goals of “elevating peacebuilding in the executive branch,” “mainstreaming peacebuilding” within government (ROL and UN 2008, pp. 5), and building its capacity in conflict sensitive analysis and peacebuilding.

At the same time, administration of PBF funding required institutional support capacity for proposal vetting, selection, oversight, and monitoring. This was provided through the establishment of the Peacebuilding Fund Joint Steering Committee co-chaired by the Minister of Internal Affairs and the UN Deputy SRSG for Recovery and Governance.31 Subsequently, the Liberian Peacebuilding Office was created within the Ministry of Internal Affairs with a dual mission and wearing two hats: a) as the Peacebuilding Fund Secretariat in Liberia it supports the Peacebuilding Fund Joint Steering Committee in the management and oversight of PBF grants in Liberia; and b) as the Peacebuilding Office, its main task is to organize trainings to build up the

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30 This initiative operates under the name of the Advocacy Legal Advice Center. For more information see [http://www.cental.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=67&Itemid=41](http://www.cental.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=67&Itemid=41).
31 The Peacebuilding Fund Joint Steering Committee for Liberia is made up of 17 members: four Government Ministers, heads of UN agencies, representatives from ECOWAS, the World Bank, the EC, representatives of bilateral donors from the U.S., UK, and Sweden, one civil society representative and one representative of the business community (see Peacebuilding Support Office website).
capacity for conflict-sensitive analysis and peacebuilding planning within the Liberian government.32

A few interviewees suggested that the advent of the Peacebuilding Fund was beneficial to overall peacebuilding in Liberia, mainly because of the funding it injected in support of causes related to peacebuilding, but also in terms of introducing and establishing peacebuilding as a concept. A number of peacebuilding actors particularly mentioned the Interpeace land project in Nimba County as a valid initiative funded by the Peacebuilding Fund. However, an almost equal number of interlocutors were skeptical about the Peacebuilding Fund’s impact on building peace in Liberia. Specifically, they questioned the usefulness of many of the projects funded and were particularly critical of the fact that only UN agencies and no Liberian organizations could apply directly for funding.33 This, according to some critics, led to a simple relabeling of projects UN agencies had planned on doing already as peacebuilding activities. A number of observers also wondered whether the Ministry of Internal Affairs was the best institutional home for a peacebuilding office. Several interviewees recommended the creation of an Independent Peacebuilding Commission that is not directly part of the government, as a more appropriate mechanism to advance a peacebuilding agenda in Liberia.

However, funding from the PBF did allow some organizations to launch more innovative peacebuilding activities. For example, the U.S.-based Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars received funding from the PBF, through UNDP, to work with Liberian Government Ministers, parliamentarians, and key decision- and opinion-makers. The effort aimed to build trust between opposed camps at the elite level and facilitate decision-making on particularly thorny issues, which, in the past have sometimes paralyzed the governmental and legislative machinery. After a hiatus from 2007 through 2009, the project is still at an early stage, but, based on experience from other countries, specifically Burundi, its implementers have high hopes that it can help to create a more cooperative environment at the elite level to further reconciliation and peacebuilding.34

6. Cumulative Impact of Peacebuilding Initiatives and Projects

The 44 peacebuilding actors and observers interviewed for this case study gave their subjective assessments of the peacebuilding achievements and shortcomings Liberians have witnessed since 2003. Many international observers and policy-makers consider Liberia to be a great success story in peacebuilding. Like U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, other influential decision-makers have hailed Liberia for the progress the country has made after fourteen years of war and conflict. For example, the UN Secretary General in 2007 hailed Liberia for “emerging as a pillar of stability in the region” (UNSG 2007).

As of early June 2010, the website of the Liberian Peacebuilding Office seemed to be suspended. See www.liberiapacebuildingoffice.org. Further information can be found on the website of the UN PBF, at http://www.unpbf.org/liberia/liberia.shtml.

Liberian and international organizations (ministries or NGOs) could apply in partnership with a UN entity. In late 2009, the Peacebuilding Fund had approximately $450,000 leftover from the first tranche of funding, which it was planning to allocate to Liberian civil society organizations.

See the Wilson Center website for more information on the general methodology and activities in Liberia, at http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?topic_id=1411&fuseaction=topics.home.
Liberian President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf has been celebrated as a global hero and champion for peace. She has received numerous international peace prizes, including the 2006 Common Ground Award by peacebuilding NGO Search for Common Ground, the 2006 Freedom Award by the International Rescue Committee, as well as the 2007 Civil Rights Museum Award and the 2007 United States Presidential Medal of Freedom. President Johnson-Sirleaf has been remarkably successful in projecting a positive image abroad for Liberia, while continuing to raise significant funds for reconstruction efforts and attracting international investors, mainly in the natural resource sector.

Unsurprisingly, the assessment of Liberia’s accomplishments so far are more nuanced and considerably less optimistic among those who work at the ground level of peacebuilding implementation and those who experience day-to-day the impact or lack thereof of the large-scale internationally supported efforts at rebuilding and remodeling Liberia from a narrow one-party dictatorship and more than a decade of warlord-rule to a stable free-market democracy.

Interviewees first shared their views on how they define peace and whether, according to their own definition, there was peace in Liberia in late 2009.

**General Assessment of Peacebuilding by Liberian Peace Actors**

**Defining peace**

There is wide disagreement among scholars and practitioners on what the term 'peacebuilding' exactly means and, even if it is clearly defined, how to go about constructing peace. Peace can be conceptualized narrowly or as “negative peace,” that is, the “absence of war,” or more broadly, as “positive peace”, which could include anything from a "modicum of participatory politics…that can be sustained in the absence of an international peace operation" (Call and Cousens 2008, p. 4) to a more comprehensive, "basic needs" approach. The basic or 'human needs' approach aims at the satisfaction of fundamental human needs in terms of physical security, shelter, health but also the ability to live in communities and have meaningful social and cultural relations (Galtung 1980, pp. 19). Proponents of a human needs view add that group conflict can only be avoided if fundamental "human values" or the "ideas, habits, customs and beliefs that are a characteristic of particular social communities" such as “the linguistic, religious, class, ethnic or other features that lead to separate cultures and identity groups” are satisfied at the group level (Burton 1990, pp. 36). Almost all interlocutors in Liberia, no matter at what level or in what profession - government, NGO, international, private sector or at the grassroots - understood peace as much more than the absence of war and fighting and provided various definitions of positive peace.

**Is there peace in Liberia currently?**

Virtually all interviewees agreed that there was some form of peace in Liberia, since there had not been any significant armed conflict or fighting in the country since late 2003 (ICG 2004, p. 11). However, almost all of those consulted saw the need to add a qualifier to the term 'peace' in the Liberian context. Many interlocutors spoke of "relative" or "fragile" peace, indicating that, although physical security in the country has greatly improved, many challenges remain.
Others were less sanguine. For example, one observer suggested that there is a mere "semblance" of peace in Liberia, i.e. peace only at the surface, lacking any real substance. This sentiment was echoed by other interviewees who commented that there is no "real" or "true" peace, but rather what they termed "ambivalent" or even "false" or "shadow" peace in the country. One peace actor added that people had no “trust and confidence” that peace would last in the medium to long run. Others gave more technical answers. One government official suggested that on peacefulness scale of 1 to 10 (with 10 being complete peace), Liberia scored a four or five only. A civil society representative saw Liberians to be "60 percent satisfied" with the status of peacebuilding. Another found Liberian society to be between 40 to 60 percent peaceful. Those who took a more optimistic view of peacebuilding suggested that peace was fragile, but at least they considered it to be "in progress."

Almost all interviewees thus explicitly gave fairly comprehensive definitions of positive peace. They all agreed that security - alternatively defined as the "absence of war" or the "absence of fighting" or "when guns are silenced" or "when nobody can come and take me from my house" - is a fundamental pre-condition, but is not by any means sufficient for the situation to be called peace.

**Why is Liberia not fully peaceful?**

Interviewees offered a variety of views and argument at different levels when asked why they considered Liberia to be not fully at peace yet.

Almost all interviewees found the peacebuilding process in Liberia to be deficient. Many of them stated that peacebuilding so far has not been able to address the deeper causes of conflict and they identified the root causes of the conflict as including:

- Widespread inequality and marginalization of large segments of the population;
- What Liberians generally term ‘tribalism’, that is, ethnic preferences and conflict between groups along ethnic lines and the concomitant absence of a national identity and sense of unity;
- Disputes regarding access to land and other natural resources; and
- Blatant corruption and patronage within the state and all across society.

These match fairly closely the causes of conflict identified in official documents by the government of Liberia and the international community (see above, section 4).

A number of interlocutors even went beyond these core causes of conflict by emphasizing that widespread poverty and hunger and the lack of opportunities for young people, in particular young men, were persistent conditions which could lead again to violent conflict. As one interviewee put it, “when people are hungry, they are not peaceful. There are many hungry people in the streets of Liberia, and there is uneasiness that grows out of those conditions.” Many interviewees thus embraced the broadest possible definition of positive peace, which is perhaps not surprising in a country where the Poverty Reduction Strategy is at the same time considered the main peacebuilding plan (as discussed earlier).
Many informants argued that neither the current security situation nor the socio-economic living conditions allow them to feel fully at peace. They cited high crime rates as evidenced by occasional armed robberies in downtown Monrovia in plain daylight, as well as incidents of mob justice, which, in their views, demonstrates the inability of the police and security forces to enforce the law and the lack of trust among ordinary citizens in the justice system.

Equally, despite the nominal macro-economic growth reported by the Liberian government and international financial institutions, many Liberians have not felt much improvement in their socio-economic conditions. Informants cited a lack of investment in Liberia and the weak overall economic situation, but specifically high unemployment, a lack of new jobs generally, even for university graduates, and many of young people on the street as signs that Liberia was not fully at peace. One interviewee who represents young people’s interests suggested that, “Most people continue to languish in abject poverty…resources are not benefiting the people [and] the rich get richer. This breeds high level of disgruntlement on the part of sections of society that feel marginalized and oppressed.”

With respect to the country’s politics, some interviewees found that little had changed. They felt that political leaders had not shown any desire or ability to work together to transform the conflict or pursue a common agenda. Naturally, rampant government corruption was mentioned frequently as a problem, and some observers even felt that corruption had gotten worse, stating that “government has become the main route to enrichment” nowadays.

Many interviewees, apart from those subjective assessments of the current situation in Liberia, stressed that they found the conditions in post-war Liberia to resemble pre-war Liberia and that the root causes of the war had not been properly addressed. One observer noted that the fact that many people were “disgruntled and marginalized” had not changed. Widespread poverty, underdevelopment, exclusion of parts of the country and the marginalization of parts of the population were all cited as root causes of the conflict that have largely remained unchanged. According to those interviewed, most development remains focused on Monrovia at the expense of the countryside, and “resources are not being distributed as they should be.” The government is seen to take action mainly for its own benefit or for the benefit of the rich. One informant summed it up as follows: “Those who were wealthy sent their kids abroad and they are coming back now and get all the good jobs. Corruption and lack of opportunities [continue], just like in the history of our country.”

**Why has peacebuilding not been entirely successful?**

Interviewees gave a number of reasons why the peacebuilding in Liberia is not occurring to the extent they would like or has not been successful so far.

Two clusters of reasons can be identified, a first one related broadly to the understanding and process of peacebuilding in Liberia, mainly by the Liberian government and the international community. The second one relates to deeper issues in Liberian society.

Several informants maintained that peacebuilding was not a familiar term for many Liberians until recently and that it was a concept brought by the international community. In fact, a few interlocutors raised concerns about the fact that peacebuilding as a concept had only become
prominent once the UN Peacebuilding Fund had decided to offer peacebuilding funding to Liberia. Before, they maintained, the concept had never been used in Liberian government circles. As a consequence, they also found the process of peacebuilding to be largely driven by the international community. Several informants criticized what they generally described as the top-down approach to peacebuilding, a lack of genuine involvement of the grassroots and a continuing wide gap between elites and people at the grassroots.

Many interviewees were critical of the Liberian government’s hiring of many expatriates – through the GEMAP and other donor-funded programs – but even more so by hiring Americans of Liberian descent and other members of the large Liberian Diaspora community. One interviewee suggested that the Liberian government had largely “borrowed manpower” and that its interests were not the interests of ordinary Liberians. Several informants felt that donor money was often spent to meet the interests of those small elites with ties abroad rather than to truly invest in Liberia’s future.

A few interlocutors contended that the government was only rhetorically committed to peacebuilding, and most said the government had not shown a genuine effort so far to put the rhetoric into practice. The fact that the government and Liberia as a society was lacking a true vision for peace and how to achieve it came up frequently in a number of interviews. Those interviewees felt that without such a vision for a unified and peaceful Liberia, it was unclear how peace could be achieved and how peacebuilding as a process could be successful.

As evidence, some pointed to the Government budget, which, according to them, did not reflect the peacebuilding goals set out in the PRS or in government pronouncements, but had allocated most funding for administrative expenses and little for the provision of basic services. Several interviewees mentioned that most Liberians had not seen much of the “peace dividend” they all had hoped for.

A related concern focused on what interviewees considered an overly technical approach with an emphasis on physical reconstruction and a largely institutional approach to peacebuilding, or, in the words of one peace actor, a “hardware” approach to peacebuilding rather than a “software” approach. Informants said that physical reconstruction and setting up various commissions (Governance Reform Commission, Anti-Corruption Commission, TRC, Human Rights Commission) was not the right way to tackle all the structural conditions that contributed to war. In addition, a few interviewees noted that several of the commissions had overlapping mandates and that there was infighting between those bodies, which rendered them less effective in achieving their goals. One informant extended this criticism to the PBO and raised the question of whether the government needed an office labeled ‘peacebuilding office’ to actually conduct peacebuilding activities?

A second cluster of reasons given for the lack of success in peacebuilding so far in Liberia was more introspective and focused on deficiencies within Liberian society itself. One interviewee deplored that Liberians lacked a “love for their country,” and another added that there was a general lack of understanding and acceptance among the different peoples. The notion of a lack of social trust
was frequently mentioned in conversations, and, despite all the criticism of government and international efforts at peacebuilding (or the lack thereof), a few informants stressed that genuine “social peacebuilding” needed to happen as well for the country to become truly peaceful. Others related this to the lack of a genuine national vision for Liberia that all citizens of Liberia could aspire to and work toward. 

A lack of trust was also mentioned by some when it came to the role of civil society in peacebuilding. While informants could point to influential civil society initiatives, such as the mobilization of women around the Accra Peace Agreement or the mediating role that the churches and Interreligious Council were able to play at times, they also described civil society as fragmented, politicized, and often uncooperative. Several observers warned that many people in organized civil society got involved mainly due to the financial rewards, with one informant using the term “briefcase NGOs.” Some civil society members interviewed confirmed that true coordination with other organizations was difficult, and that there was a good measure of duplication of work and many small, disjointed, donor-driven initiatives, which too often focused on Monrovia or Montserrado County (the county surrounding Monrovia), rather than on needier parts of the country.

What needs to be done?

For peace to be fully realized, interviewees listed a wide range of aspirations:

*Human dignity and human needs*

One theme mentioned by several interviewees related to the realization of fully human dignity and included “the presence of all necessities of life” and “a life free of tension. One informant suggested that Liberians had to be “at peace with themselves” for there to be complete peace in the country.

*Peace as justice (writ large) and equality*

A frequently mentioned aspiration was to achieve full justice. Some interlocutors mentioned this in the more concrete sense of fixing and restoring trust in the “justice system,” but others had a broader meaning of justice in mind, in the sense of a just society and full reconciliation. Justice for many informants also related to equality. As one interviewee put it, there will be peace in Liberia “when people are no longer marginalized, participate in decisions that affect them, and when people respect the rule of law and the constitution.” Another framed it more in terms of economic development: Peace will exist “when every part of the country gets a taste of development and when people can see and feel it.”

*Realizing individual freedoms*

Several interviewees made reference to the full respect of individual freedoms as a key condition to achieve full peace. They mentioned that significant progress had been made with respect to the more clearly defined freedoms, such as the freedom of movement, expression, and association, but that more work remains for Liberia to become a society free of fear and oppression, where all individual opinions are respected, and all have access to economic opportunities. The latter theme of economic freedoms and the ability to choose employments and career was frequently mentioned. At the most basic level, one informant suggested that Liberians just want to be free “to do what you have to do to raise your family.”
Livelihoods and food security
Being at peace has a tangible dimension related to livelihoods for several interviewees. They suggested, very concretely, that the availability of “rice to eat” and a successful “fight against hunger” and overall “livelihood security” are important foundations for peace.

Social relationships
Unsurprisingly, given the significant social tensions and conflict within Liberian society, many interviewees referred to improvements in social relationships for there to be true peace. Interviewees mentioned “peaceful coexistence,” “respect for each others’ values, views, and ideas” and “that people from different cultures can sit together and talk.” The notion of “togetherness” instead of being divided seemed to resonate with many interlocutors, in particular those in ethnically divided Nimba County.

A functioning government and institutions
Many informants recognized that a societal peace will not be possible without the institutional underpinnings, notably of a functioning state and government apparatus. This is particularly true with respect to the abovementioned justice system, but also with the police and security forces. One interlocutor put it in simple terms: peace will be achieved in Liberia when “you can pick up the phone and call someone for help” in case of a threat to safety and security. Several interviewees also mentioned that full peace would only be possible once government was able to provide proper health, education, clean drinking war and once all people have “unhindered access to social services.”

How are Peacebuilding Activities “Adding Up?”

It was not always easy interviewees to focus on the question of how individual peace initiatives “add up” and contribute to peace at a larger, macro-level, or “peace writ large.” For most interviewees, there is little doubt that the initiatives that they are involved in contribute to peace in small ways, but they were not always able to identify the specific contribution. However, as discussed, virtually all interlocutors agreed that peace was still highly deficient in Liberia, so most conversations spent much more time on discussing the many shortcomings in the peacebuilding process in Liberia rather than what and how micro-level initiatives contribute to larger peace.

Research and evidence-based programming
One important theme was that more and more organizations felt that good programming has to be based on a deep understanding of issues at stake and a thorough contextual analysis. This theme was particularly prominent among those who work on land issues. The Norwegian Refugee Council’s intervention in land conflicts already stresses the importance of first gathering proper information in its title, since it is called the ‘Information, counseling, and legal assistance’ (ICLA) program. The NRC program stresses the importance of thoroughly investigating the issues for every land dispute in which the organization’s program intervenes in. NRC officers first talk to all relevant parties and authorities and research land titles, and only after they have
gained an understanding of the facts do they proceed to the actual mediation and dispute resolution phase.

Similarly, Interpeace’s intervention in land dispute resolution in Nimba County was based on a thorough study of the conflict dynamics and multiple levels of the land issues before they started their intervention. Research on land conflict has revealed many different patterns of land conflict (intra-communal, inter-family, intra-family, inter-communal, about district boundaries, inter-ethnic) and made it obvious that the complexity of land disputes thus goes far beyond the inter-ethnic dimension most frequently reported in the media.

To be useful, research has to be tied closely to the purpose of the program, and research findings must critically inform program strategy and decisions. Research not only informs NRCs approach to each individual case, but regular information and knowledge sharing through trainings, consultations, and advocacy are other key components of the program. In addition, NRC and Interpeace both have, in part, published their studies to share findings with the broader peacebuilding and development community (Interpeace and UNDP 2008; NRC 2009).

A third initiative that is heavily research-based and which was occasionally cited as being exemplary is Landmine Action’s rural reintegration program for ex-combatants. The program was originally based on an anthropological study of the hierarchy and structure of a particularly group of ex-combatants who had occupied Guthrie rubber plantation in Bomi county from 2003 through 2006 (Landmine Action 2006). The study identified the interests of different groups and proposed to design a program that would address the concerns of rank-and-file ex-combatants from rural areas to allow them to reintegrate into their communities of origin, instead of joining the growing group of uprooted young men in Monrovia or other urban areas. During its implementation, the program has hired a prominent political scientist to track and study the behavioral patterns of ex-combatants who return to their home communities or settle in other areas.35

This effort is in line with a general trend in international development assistance and post-conflict interventions to emphasize the importance of properly studying and documenting program impact (Humphreys and Weinstein 2009; Levy Paluck 2010; Moehler 2010).

**Connecting different levels of intervention: ‘key people’ AND ‘more people’**

Many interviewees seemed to feel that true progress to peace could only be achieved at a larger level and depended ultimately on the government’s actions. Many suggestions on the “adding up” aspect of peace initiatives thus related to the “key people vs more people” distinction presented in the RPP Matrix (analytical framework)36 or to questions of how to link different levels of intervention.

The theme of connecting different levels of intervention was prominent among several peacebuilding initiatives. The Norwegian Refugee Council’s ICLA land dispute resolution

program’s main focus of intervention is at the community level where land conflict is most acute. To do so, it first had to navigate a complex system of overlapping authority structures with respect to land management: local landlords and traditional chiefs and elders; district and county government offices; the national land administration and titling authority; and the Ministry of Land and Mines, and, where political interests are at stake, national level ethnic representatives or Monrovia-based politicians. In its interventions, NRC has made sure to consult at all of these different levels in their conflict resolution efforts.

Similarly, in particular in land disputes that have an inter-communal or inter-ethnic dimension, the involvement of different levels of actors is needed to defuse flare-ups of tension and to mediate longer-term settlements. In fact, there has been a flurry of activities at different levels and with little coherence when it comes to tackling land conflicts. Initiatives at the national political, the county level, by international organizations, international and local NGOs as well as within communities are all mentioned in studies and news reports on land conflict, notably in Lofa and Nimba Counties, and were mentioned by interviewees. It appears that these initiatives are able to achieve some limited goals. In particular, intervention by high-level politicians and powerbrokers seems to be needed to prevent escalation of acute tensions. The ad-hoc Land Committee on Nimba County, appointed by the President, which included the county’s main political heavyweights (and former leaders of armed factions), seems to have been mainly useful to avoid an escalation of interethnic tension. It did little to tackle any of the longer-run conflict issues. Various local initiatives that encouraged dialogue between conflicting parties and ethnic groups as well as technical assistance and mediation at the county and local level by relatively neutral international bodies, such as the NRC’s ICLA program, had to connect the grassroots level with county initiatives and with national institutions of land management as well, as lobby with policymakers. Over time, these multiple initiatives and the connecting interventions have led to the resolution of several hundred local-level land conflicts, while at the same time avoiding a flare-up of interethnic tensions and contributing to advancing institutional reform in favor of permanent solutions to conflict and more fundamental and lasting land reform at the national level (NRC 2009).

A similar approach has been taken by a number of other peacebuilding actors. The international NGO Action Aid’s legal empowerment program for women in southeastern Liberia combines training, mobilization and legal advice at the local level with concrete advocacy at the political level in Monrovia on topics selected by the communities themselves. Action Aid thus serves as mobilizer, conduit, facilitator and organizer of community advocacy initiatives on national policy decisions that can make a difference to local people’s lives. Action Aid also targets media to offer reports on issues of concern to communities, and to help them get their views heard in Monrovia.

Many Liberian organizations highlighted the importance of linking programs at the local level in the counties with initiatives in Monrovia. In light of the heavy focus of policymakers and donors on programming in and around Monrovia, it is essential to channels information on needs from local communities to the center and to include local communities to a greater degree in policy- and decision-making processes.

37 As of June 2009, the NRC project had registered 1,272 land conflicts in the three counties of Nimba, Bong, and Grand Bassa, 474 of which had been successfully resolved.
 Faith-based organizations such as the Interreligious Council as well as various Liberian civil society networks and coalitions such as WANEP Liberia, WIPNET (Women in Peacebuilding Network), and WONGOSOL (Women NGO Secretariat) cited their ability to link different actors and activities and to disseminate information and advocate at different levels. Without further study, it is hard to say how systematic and effective these efforts have been, but it seems to make sense that such organizations provide essential channels of communication and input in policymaking in a society where such linkages do not easily exist outside limited patronage networks and mass media is extremely weak and its reach limited. This might be particularly important to get the view of marginalized groups such as rural farmers or rural women heard in the capital.

There also seemed to be a number of existing consultations and forums for dialogue at the county level that are not formally connected to higher-level efforts. Interviewees mentioned informal initiatives such as a ‘Sinoe dialogue’ in Sinoe county between influential members of opposing groups of Americo-Liberians and Kru and Sapo to discuss local conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Similar informal dialogues are reportedly taking or have taken place in the past in and between other counties or ethnic groups, such as between Grand Gedeh and Nimba County and between Mandingos and Lomas in Lofa county. These existing dialogue structures could be linked to higher-level mechanisms in a more formal way.

**The importance of ‘rallying points’**

Initiatives that interviewees considered to be successful or at least as having an influence on peacebuilding were often those initiatives that tied into ongoing dynamics at the political level or were linked to higher-level political policies or reform efforts.

For example, the women’s lobbying in favor of peace in 2003 was considered to be highly successful since it fed into an existing peacemaking dynamics, while being able to advocate for specific issues and achieve specific objectives that were tied to the larger peace negotiations. Similarly, WONGOSOL suggested that its outreach and civic education work before the 2005 elections were key in mobilizing a broader slice of the female population by assisting with the registration of illiterate women and informing them about their rights and about the electoral process. The elections and the opportunities they offered for civic participation in decision-making thus provided a space and a rallying point for existing organizational capacity. They also brought with them additional funding for civic education and electoral outreach activities, which women’s groups were able to use to extend their existing work and networks of women and women’s groups. In addition, this indicates that when government, international intervenors and donors, and local civil society all work toward the same purpose, significant progress toward peace can be achieved. Unfortunately this is much harder for less obvious and more contentious reform efforts, such as, for instance, those proposed in the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

More recent civic education and policy advocacy by women’s groups has again centered around the realization of UN Resolution 1325 on women and armed conflict, trying to ensure adequate representation of women at all levels of conflict resolution and post-conflict peacebuilding and
on holding policymakers accountable to the promises made in the Poverty Reduction Strategy with respect to women and in areas that affect women.

This suggests that it should not be underestimated the importance of major national policy initiatives and reforms, not only in achieving their obvious and stated objectives, such as establishing elected political authorities in the case of elections or passing laws that defend women’s rights. Instead, they also might have significant secondary effects and help support or create processes, such as extending existing civil society outreach and strengthening their communication and advocacy capacity around topics that are crucial to peacebuilding.

This also underscores the importance of good planning and strategy documents, again not only for the purpose of streamlining and coordinating peacebuilding activities, but also for providing clear agendas and objectives around which civil society organizations can rally and which can be used to hold policymakers and international organizations accountable to their promises made in such documents.

This context also offers a different perspective regarding the frequent complaints by interviewees about the lack of a clearly defined peacebuilding strategy and the absence of a clearly articulated national vision for Liberia. Most interlocutors seemed to feel that the PRS as the main post-conflict planning document, while discussing peacebuilding at the analytical level, remains rather vague and cautious about how those analyses can be translated into practice. There is a need for more clearly and explicitly defined objectives for peacebuilding and reconciliation that define peacebuilding more broadly than traditional security sector and police reform and also go beyond the definition of new national symbols (coat of arms, anthem etc.) as proposed by the Governance Reform Commission. These would allow civil society to engage at a more concrete level in peacebuilding activities and strengthen their ability to hold government accountable to specific peacebuilding outcomes.

A clear code of conduct for government officials and members of Congress, as a few interlocutors suggested, could equally allow civil society to shape its advocacy strategy around clear principles and hold government officials to certain clearly defined standards.

**Matching action and words**

As one interviewee commented, "if you talk about peace and reconciliation but it is not seen in your action and some people are still marginalized, it defeats your argument." This was a frequent theme in many interviews. Most interlocutors felt that actions by the Liberian government and, to some extent, by the international community, betrayed the rhetoric put forward in public speeches and policy documents.

Many informants mentioned the general lack of trust within Liberian society and between Liberians and their leaders and representatives. They suggested that it would be essential for the government to truly follow its words with actions that make concrete changes to people’s lives and truly address what they consider to be the root causes of conflict – inequality, marginalization of many parts of the country and the population, and rampant nepotism and corruption. While the government has pledged to address those deep-rooted problems, their actions, which include the protection of corrupt government officials with the right connections,
the continued extraction of natural resources with little benefit for local communities, and the disappearance of county development funds that were supposed to improve infrastructure and service delivery in counties are in obvious contradiction to those pledges.

**Long-term engagement and effort needed**

A number of interlocutors emphasized the temporal dimension of peacebuilding, mentioning that it is a longer-term process and cannot be accomplished overnight. They stressed the fact that fifteen years of civil war have profoundly shattered all systems - social, political, and economic - in the country and profoundly transformed society. The fact that peacebuilding is a long-term process was often discussed in the context of the deep ethnic divisions that mark society and with the general lack of trust between individuals and communities today.

Several interviewees, notably those in civil society, but even those involved with some of the projects sponsored by the UN Peacebuilding Fund mentioned how uncertainty about funding and short duration of funding impeded their efforts to offer any meaningful intervention. This has two dimensions. First, for peacebuilding related programs, funding needs to be committed for the longer term to start working on repairing or rebuilding social relationships. Second, funding also has to be continuous, reliable and flexible to allow peacebuilding initiatives to work on longer-term relationships, while, at the same time, allowing funded activities/programs to react flexibly to changing circumstances and respond to acute crises.

The oft-cited ICLA project by the Norwegian Refugee Council again seems to offer a good example. Originally started in one county 2006, the program only became fully operational in two more counties in 2008, and is still going strong and expanding in 2010, thanks to funding mainly by one bilateral donor. Had the program only received funding for six months or one year, as seems not uncommon in many post-conflict situations, its impact would probably have been greatly reduced.

**Participation, transparency and accountability**

Peacebuilding is about building trust, and trust between social actors cannot and between advocates or external intervenors and social or political actors cannot be established unless agendas and intentions are well-known and activities are conducted in a manner that inspires confidence that all actors are pursuing the same objective. Initiatives that allow for true participation and follow a transparent process that allows for policy- and decision-makers to be held accountable are to work toward the transformation that many interviewees seem to have in mind, in order to achieve genuine peace in Liberia. Again, the NRC ICLA program seems to perform well, in that its approach is transparent and inclusive of all stakeholders. The solutions are derived by the conflicting parties with input from community and other authorities and facilitated by NRC. However, they are never imposed from above. All compromise solutions are clearly documented with the help of professional land surveyors and document stating the resolution are signed both parties and community authorities as proof for the future.
7. Conclusion

As can be expected in a country and society torn apart by fourteen years of violent conflict, peacebuilding in Liberia is a highly complex, controversial, and non-linear process. The Liberian peacebuilding actors and observers interviewed for this study expressed great ambivalence when asked to evaluate the progress their country has made toward achieving peace. For most interviewees, peace is a long process, and Liberia is, depending on the point of view, at an early stage or somewhere on the way toward peace.

Most interviewees acknowledged that the country has come a long way since the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in August 2003. They highlighted some of the country’s achievements, particularly the end of combat and overt violence, the disarmament and demobilization of combatants, the return and reintegration of large numbers of internally displaced persons and refugees, the successful 2005 elections, the greater freedom that the country’s citizens enjoy today—to move around, assemble, voice their opinions, and generally to go about their daily lives—as well as the increased role women play at all levels of society.

Interviewees attributed these visible signs of progress mainly to the large-scale peacebuilding initiatives such as the deployment of UN peacekeepers, the DDRR program, and the elections as laid out in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. However, while Liberians and the international actors have been successful at ending the war and dismantling its most obvious structures and institutions, they have only made tentative steps toward building genuine and lasting peace.

A majority of the Liberian peace actors interviewed feel that, while the war is clearly over and the formal institutional make-up has changed, most of the root causes of the conflict have not been addressed.

They point out that exclusion and marginalization of large parts of the population, one of the main structural causes of conflict, continues unabated. They hint at the fact that most development and investment has gone to Monrovia and its suburbs, and that most regions of the country continue to suffer from barely existing and barely functioning infrastructure. They contend that a peace dividend is hardly visible for the 1.3 million Liberians, nearly one half of the population, who still live in absolute poverty (roughly under 1USD per day) and the thousands of street children in Monrovia and other urban areas (TRC 2009a, p. 89). Several of the more remote counties still have barely functioning schools and health facilities and secondary schools are scarce in the southeast of the country, which means that social and economic mobility is highly limited for young people growing up in those counties. Political and economic power remains in the hands of certain ethnic groups, and access to economic resources depends on successfully navigating the all-pervasive patron-client system of “big men” or “big women”.

Similarly, although political institutions have opened up and accountability through elections has improved, interviewees shared a widespread view that various cliques of elites attached to the presidency closely control the government. There is a definite sense that outsiders – members of the Diaspora whose links to Liberia are tenuous or foreigners - continue to control a disproportionate share of government positions and economic assets.
Ethnic tensions remain across the country, in particular in Nimba and Lofa counties, but also in some southeastern counties. In these areas, underlying questions of access to and control of natural resources and land have not been addressed in a systematic fashion.

Many interviewees observed a lack of fundamental change in the political and economic power structures in the country and what many perceived as a lack of commitment on the part of the Liberian Government and its supporters within the international community to tackle these deep-seated structural factors. Peacebuilding efforts so far have not addressed deeper power or distributional structures in a systematic fashion. Many interlocutors cited a perceived lack of interest within the government to see the TRC process succeed, and a hesitancy within international diplomatic circle to push for true accountability of war actors—as suggested in the TRC final report—for fear of upsetting the current power structures.

This inability of peacebuilding initiatives in Liberia to tackle deeper issues could be due to, in part, an inherent lack of capacity within the international toolbox of peacebuilding to address deeper political, social, and economic issues. However, it is due in part to the fragmented, small-scale and short-term nature of most peacebuilding efforts, apart from the major initiatives mandated in the CPA, such as DDR, elections, or the TRC process.

Liberia in 2010 is far from being fully at peace. It has taken important steps toward restoring the minimum requirements for a state; the central government is largely in control of its territory and treasury. However, on most metrics of long-term peacebuilding and post-conflict development, it falls short of the standards that are required to achieve what most interviewees in this study consider peace and much unfinished business remains:

- **With respect to “hard” security**, until the end of the training and commissioning of all 2,000 of the reconstituted Armed Forces of Liberia, the Liberian government has largely outsourced security to the international community. Full responsibility for security will be achieved only after UNMIL departs and an elected government oversees the armed forces and the police force has evolved into a professional force that can be relied upon for maintaining internal security. Recent tensions between police and army staff suggest that much trust building needs to be conducted for both forces to properly fulfill their mandates and work together in the future.

- **Land reform** is a central arena of many social and economic tensions that is key to constructing peace in the long run. While it has been very slow in coming, the dispute resolution mechanisms put in place by international and national NGOs and by the Land Reform Commissions (which become operational only recently) are promising and need to be expanded. If these mechanisms are successful and free from political interference in individual land disputes, they could go a long way in diffusing tensions within communities. A broader political process combined with land disputes is needed to tackle inter-communal conflict over land and property rights. While efforts to settle acute disputes will serve to quell potential conflicts in the short run, several interlocutors felt

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38 These disputes are between Mandingo and Gio and Mano ethnic groups in Nimba County and between Mandingo and Loma communities in Lofa County.
that a broad national dialogue over land reform and attempts to put property rights onto more solid and fair legal grounding are needed to assure longer term sustainable peace.

- In the eyes of most interviewees, efforts to genuinely deal with the country’s painful past are crucial to achieving long-term reconciliation and social peace. Most informants felt that the TRC hearings and its report were a flawed but important first step in that direction. Genuine reconciliation will only be possible if the findings of the TRC report are openly debated and implemented in a way that restores a sense of justice among the millions who suffered during the war.

- There was a pervasive sense among interviewees that economic resources are still unequally distributed within Liberian society among interviewees. Many suggested that the sustainability of all future post-conflict development and peacebuilding measures will largely depend on how they affect this skewed income distribution. The sense of exclusion among certain social and generational strata, regions and ethnic groups is acute and will require special attention for peace to truly hold in the long term. Many interlocutors felt that only true empowerment of Liberian entrepreneurs and farmers and full participation of disadvantaged groups in political and decision-making processes can, over time, help to address the distributional disequilibrium.

Since most of the interviewees were highly critical of the current peacebuilding efforts and found them insufficient, they often had difficulties identifying clear peacebuilding strategies that “work” and thinking about how individual activities “add up” to generate larger societal peace. Nonetheless, interlocutors’ accounts of successful peacebuilding activities highlighted a few broad lessons on which the Liberian and international peace actors could build in their future activities, including:

- Sound peacebuilding programs have to be based on sound research and clear evidence.
- Different levels of interventions have to be connected for peacebuilding activities to add up. This is true for linking intervention targeting key individuals with those targeting larger groups, as well as for connecting interventions at the national or central government level with initiatives at the county or local level.
- Major political or societal initiatives, such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, provide crucial rallying points for all peacebuilding actors to work on different aspects of peacebuilding and reconciliation, and as many actors as possible should work at different levels to complement those major initiatives.
- Peacebuilding cannot only be rhetorical – policies and initiatives that claim to contribute to peacebuilding are ineffective unless rhetoric is matched by actions.
- Peacebuilding is a long-term process, and donors and implementers need to design their programs and organizational strategies with a long-term perspective, and should plan for and commit to staying engaged in the long run.
- Principles for sound development programming, notably with respect to transparency, local ownership and accountability to participants, are crucial for peacebuilding programs to succeed.
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Annex 1: List of Interviewees

1. Richard Panton, Deputy Director-General, Liberia Institute of Public Administration, Monrovia
2. Peter Quaqua, President Press Union of Liberia (PUL), Monrovia
3. Frances Greaves, Voice of the Voiceless, chief executive officer, second vice-chair for WONGOSOL (Women’s NGO Secretariat of Liberia), Monrovia
4. Alex Cuffy, Governance and Economic Management Program (GEMAP), Monrovia
5. Phillip N. Wesseh, Managing Editor, The Inquirer, Monrovia
6. Korto Williams, Program Manager, Action Aid, Monrovia
7. Cerue Kona Garlo, Executive Director, WONGOSOL, Monrovia
8. Rev. Bartholomew B. Colley, Resource Center for Community Empowerment and Integrated Development (RECEIVE), Monrovia
9. Joe Wylie, Lecturer, Kofi Annan Institute for Peace Studies, University of Liberia, Monrovia
10. George Sie Williams, President, University of Liberia Student Union (ULSU), Monrovia
11. A.K. Siebo Nimley Sr., Administrator, Landmine Action, Monrovia
12. Rufus Kortee Moiseemah, Assistant to the Country Manager, Landmine Action, Monrovia
13. Kwame Ross, Liberia National Student Union (LINSU), Monrovia
14. Richmond Nuvia, Secretary General, LINSU, Monrovia
15. Martie Peters, Gender Officer, LINSU, Monrovia
17. Mohammed Sherif, Executive Director, Interreligious Council of Liberia, Monrovia
18. Prof. Debev Sayndee, Director, Kofi Annan Institute of Peace Studies, University of Liberia, Monrovia
19. Laura Cunial, Project Manager, Norwegian Refugee Council, Monrovia
20. James Suah Shilue, Programme Coordinator, Interpeace, Monrovia
21. Wilfred Gray-Johnson, Peacebuilding Coordinator, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Monrovia
22. Ernest Gaie, Country Director, Action Aid, Monrovia
23. Cllr Jerôme Verdier, Chairman, Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Monrovia
24. Alaric Togba, Professor of Political Science, University of Liberia, Monrovia
25. Lindora Howard-Diawara, Acting National Network Coordinator, West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), Monrovia
26. Thomas Doe Nah, Center for Transparency and Accountability in Liberia, Director, Advocacy Legal Advice Center (ALAC), Monrovia
27. Oscar Bloh, Talking Drum Studios/Search for Common Ground, Monrovia
28. Dr. Karn Carlor, consultant, Governance Reform Commission, Monrovia
29. Parley Harris, Ministry of Gender, Monrovia
30. Kebbeh Mongai, National President and President for Grand Bassa, National Women’s Network
31. Priscilla Elms, The World Bank, Monrovia (former Social Development Advisor, Arcelor-Mittal Steel, Buchanan)
32. Taylor Guanu, Elder and representative of the Mano community, Ganta
33. Samuel A. Mitchell, JR, President, Liberian Business Association (LIBA), Monrovia
34. Mohamed B. Keita, 2nd Imam, Gorupa City, Director, Transport Union, Guinean Border, Representative of Mandingo community, Guinean-Liberian border (near Ganta)
35. Musu Kardami, Chair, Ganta Concerned Women, Ganta
36. Mico Baye, youth, Ganta
37. Meleton Gongloe, youth, Ganta
38. Prince Sawol, youth
39. G. Matthew Lugon, youth
40. Daniel Rich, Youth Council President, Ganta
41. Daniel N’GBoe, Project Officer, YMCA, Ganta
42. Morris Turay, Field Supervisor, Center for Justice and Peace Studies (CJPS), Ganta
43. Ruth Sey, Community-based Organizations Advisor, CJPS, Ganta
44. Ophelia Nyanzee, Social Worker, CJPS, Ganta
Annex 2: Interview Protocol

CDA-CLP Liberia Case Study

Interview protocol

December 2009

Method:

- Open-ended qualitative interviews: ask open-ended questions about the respondents' understanding of 'peace' and 'peacebuilding' and specific approaches utilized in Liberia and their impact on 'peace writ large'
- Interviews should be conducted as ‘guided conversations’ during which the respondent is given time and space to ‘tell a story’ of peacebuilding in Liberia prompted by the below questions

Interview questions:

Personal profile of interviewee:

- Name, position, contact information
- Personal involvement in peace efforts
- Organization's profile and involvement in peace efforts (mission, types of programs)

'Peace' and 'peacebuilding' and their impact in Liberia?

- How do you define 'peace' and ‘peacebuilding’?
- Is there 'peace' right now in Liberia?
- How has 'peace' been built in Liberia?
- Has peacebuilding been successful in Liberia? Why? Why not?
- (And how do you define success?)
- Name individual activities, initiatives, or programs that have contributed to peace?
- Which aspects of these initiatives have contributed to peace?
- Did they contribute to peace at a small scale or to peace 'writ large'?
- How did they contribute to peace 'writ large'?
- Do smaller projects generally 'add up' to building peace on a larger scale? If so, how?
- Were there any key turning points toward peace in the peacebuilding process in Liberia? What were those turning points? Why were they turning points?
- What needs to be done for there to be peace in Liberia or to improve on current peacebuilding efforts?

Linkages

- How are individual initiatives coordinated?
- Who determines overall peacebuilding direction or strategy?
- What are links between different levels of initiatives – int’l, government, civil society, grassroots?
- What are linkages between the political process and peacebuilding in initiatives?
Annex 3: History of Liberia and its War

In 1822, the American Colonization Society (ACS), a private organization based in the United States, brought a group of freed slaves from the U.S. to settle at Cape Mesurado and establish an African-American colony. The ACS facilitated the settlement of additional freed slaves from the U.S. as well as re-captives intercepted by the U.S. Navy in the Atlantic Ocean who founded the independent Republic of Liberia in 1847.

The descendants of freed slaves, called “Americo-Liberians” or “Congos,” dominated Liberia’s political and economic institutions under the True Whig Party until 1980. Liberia saw significant economic growth under President William Tubman’s rule (1943-1971) due to his opening of the economy to foreign investors, mainly in the exploitation of natural resources, such as iron ore and rubber and agricultural cash crops such as cocoa, coffee, or palm kernel. William Tolbert, Tubman’s successor, opened the Americo-Liberian controlled political system and military gradually to indigenous persons. Tolbert weakened the tight Americo-Liberian political patronage system in the military alienating an important constituency. At the same time, he was not able to manage the rising expectations among indigenous ethnic groups to gain a share of the resources of the state.

In April 1980, Samuel Doe, a young Army Master Sergeant from the Krahn ethnic group successfully led a military coup and took over the Presidency. While the coup was welcomed by most indigenous Liberians, many Americo-Liberians fled the country after Doe had deposed President Tolbert and murdered and ordered the public execution of 13 of Tolbert’s cabinet members. Subsequently, Doe’s People’s Redemption Council suspended the constitution and over the years increasingly relied on members of his own Krahn ethnic group, who made up only 4% of Liberia’s population, as well as on influential members of the Mandingo ethnic group to rule the country. After an unsuccessful coup attempt by Doe’s former ally, Armed Forces Commander Thomas Quiwonkpa, a member of the Gio ethnic group, in 1985, Doe’s regime exacted revenge by killing large numbers of ethnic Gio and Mano in Nimba county, which further exacerbated ethnic tensions in the country. Despite Doe’s blatant rigging of elections in 1985, his autocratic rule, and his exclusionary ethnic politics, Liberia received several hundred million US dollars in U.S. aid until the late 1980s.

With the large international aid flows drying up with the impending end of the Cold War by 1989, Doe’s rule became increasingly tenuous and vulnerable to violent challenges. On Christmas Eve 1989, Charles Taylor and his National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) launched an incursion into Liberia from Côte d’Ivoire with the declared aim of deposing Samuel Doe’s regime. Charles Taylor was a former head of the Government General Services Agency under Doe who fled the country in 1983 under charges of embezzlement of large amounts of public funds. Taylor was arrested in Massachusetts in 1984 where he had attended Bentley College in the 1970s. He subsequently escaped from prison in 1985 and trained in Muammar al-Gaddafi’s Libya in insurgency and rebel tactics. Backing by Burkina Faso and Côte d’Ivoire, financial and material support from Libya as well as a reliance on the large Americo-Liberian diaspora and an ethnic alliance of Gio and Mano greatly facilitated Taylor’s insurgency.

Samuel Doe, after initially holding on to power thanks to an intervention by mainly Nigerian peacekeeping troops from the Economic Community of African States (ECOWAS) Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), was killed in September 1990 by Prince Johnson. Johnson was a former close ally to Thomas Quiwonkpa and an erstwhile ally and subsequent rival to Charles Taylor who created a splinter group of the NPFL called Independent National Patriotic front of Liberia (INPFL).

39 Originally, the term “Americo-Liberian” was used for descendants of slaves from the United States; the term “Congo” was applied to descendants of freed slaves from slave ships who had not been to the U.S. Nowadays the two terms are often used interchangeably.

40 Liberia was host to important U.S. intelligence and VOA relay stations.
During seven years of fighting, Charles Taylor established an alternative government with its headquarters in Gbargna, Bong County. Through his support for the Sierra Leonean rebels of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), and his personal, political, and business connections in Côte d’Ivoire, Burkina Faso and internationally with Libyan, French, Lebanese, Dutch and Eastern European interests, Taylor had access to large amounts of regional and international resources. However, Taylor and the NPFL’s rule was also widely challenged by numerous groups and Liberia saw a proliferation of fighting factions in the early 1990s. Those factions included another NPFL splinter group called NPFL Central Revolutionary Council (NPFL-CRC) under Sam Dokie; the United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia (ULIMO), split between a Krahn-dominated faction led by Roosevelt Johnson (ULIMO-J) and a Mandingo-dominated grouping led by Alhaji Kromah (ULIMO-K); the Loma-dominated Lofa Defense Force (LDF), the Liberian Peace Council (LPC) under George Boley.

After 13 ceasefires and eight peace agreements between 1990 and 1995, ECOWAS finally successfully brokered the tenuous Abuja I peace agreement in August 1995, which gave all warring factions a stake in a new “Council of States.” After foiled attempts by Taylor and his allies to win control of Monrovia militarily and large-scale fighting in 1996, Taylor finally agreed to a negotiated settlement (Abuja II) in August 1996, which provided for disarmament and demobilization and elections by May 1997.

Charles Taylor won the presidential elections of July 1997 and was inaugurated as President of Liberia in August 1997. However, Taylor’s authoritarian and divisive rule and his reliance on personal networks and militias (such as the so-called Anti-Terrorist Unit led by Taylor’s son, Chuckie) soon provoked renewed violent challenges. After various groups of Liberian dissidents, many of them ethnic Krahn and Mandingo, formed the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) movement in Sierra Leone in 1999 or early 2000, LURD forces attacked Voinjama, the capital of Lofa county in January 2001. With support from Guinean President Lansana Conté, LURD gradually won control of most of Lofa County in 2001 and advanced toward Monrovia in early 2002. Charles Taylor came under increasing international pressure due to revelations about his active engagement in the Sierra Leone conflict and his hosting of RUF rebels. International arms, timber and diamond embargoes are imposed on Liberia between 2001. After the emergence of a LURD splinter group called Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) with support in Côte d’Ivoire, LURD/MODEL expanded their control of Liberian territory and were close to taking Monrovia in early 2003. Domestic and international pressure including the announcement by the Special Court for Sierra Leone that Charles Taylor would be indicted for war crimes in that country led Taylor to leave Liberia in August 11, 2003 for exile in Nigeria.

International mediators brokered a peace agreement and all warring factions signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in Accra, Ghana, on August 14, 2003. The three warring factions, LURD, MODEL, and those allied with Taylor’s Government and the Armed Forces of Liberia agreed to a two-year power-sharing National Transitional Government of Liberia led by businessman Gyude Bryant. The United Nations Security Council started deploying its largest peacekeeping mission at the time in September 2003. After the disarmament and demobilization of approximately 103,000 individuals by the end of 2004, presidential and parliamentary elections held in October 2005 led to the election of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, a former Finance Minister and World Bank official, to the presidency of Liberia. The inauguration of President Johnson Sirleaf’s and her government on January 16, 2006, completed the transition period.