

Evaluation of the Interpeace Project in Nimba County

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Executive Summary

While Liberia's civil war touched every county in the nation, Nimba was considered a conflict hotspot throughout. A common home to many tribes that clashed violently during the fourteen years of fighting, many of Nimba's communities are struggling to maintain a fragile peace. Highly publicized clashes over land ownership between Manos and Gios on one side and Mandingos on the other have been drawing the attention of the government and international actors since 2005.

In 2006, based on a recommendation from Ad-Hoc Presidential Commission, the Ministry of Internal Affairs invited the United National Office for Project Services (UNOPS) Joint Program Unit for UN/Interpeace Initiatives to Liberia in the hopes of creating a national dialog project. A contribution from Interpeace's US Board of Governors allowed Interpeace to establish a presence in Liberia and begin to pursue a strategy for the project. In 2008, however, Interpeace put their plans for a national program on hold and accepted funding through the Emergency Window of the Peacebuilding Fund to launch the project "Supporting Reconciliation in Nimba County," in an effort to address the postwar tensions that have proven especially severe in Nimba. Interpeace is a Swiss-based organization working in close collaboration with the UN with over fourteen years of experience in peacebuilding in high-conflict areas. Interpeace's methodology is to engage all sectors of society in a highly inclusive and participatory dialog in order to create locally-owned conflict resolution mechanisms, foster co-existence and consolidate peace.

Interpeace is now in the process of applying for funds to implement their program on a national level. In order to understand their progress in the consolidation of peace in Nimba and assess the applicability of such a program on a national scale, Interpeace commissioned an independent evaluation of their work thus far. The evaluation, conducted between September 4 and September 20, 2008, consolidates the perspectives of 44 informed individuals, ranging from focus group participants from Tappita district to members of the House of Representatives. The evaluation drew the following main conclusions:

- The project clearly contributed to meaningful communication and reconciliation between participants of different ethnic groups. Many of the successes of the Interpeace project are captured in what interviewees feel are small but highly significant gestures between participants of opposing tribes—the sharing of food, jokes and conversation. These

¹ New York University & NEPI, Inc. gwendolyn.taylor@nyu.edu. The author would like to first thank the staff at CDA in Boston, whose support was tireless and advice was indispensable. Second, the staff of the Interpeace project, who, though they are no longer formally Interpeace employees clearly remain wholly committed to Interpeace's work. Thirdly, the many interviewees who made time in their very busy lives to speak with me about these very important issues. Lastly, and most importantly, my colleagues at the National Ex-Combatant Peacebuilding Initiative, who outperformed my ever increasing expectations, as always.

gestures were all but impossible prior to the Interpeace intervention. The ability to talk and joke has led to an ability to bring issues out into the open and speak to members of other tribes sincerely. This could, with additional support and more time, lead to peaceful conflict resolution on a larger scale.

- The project has developed a cohesive, realistic set of policy recommendations that are community generated and locally owned. However, community members feel that government will have to sincerely consider their recommendations and implement problem-solving mechanisms before the project can truly be called a success.
- Nearly all interviewees agreed that Interpeace was perceived to be credible and neutral by donors, the communities and the government, which allowed them to facilitate reconciliation in their focus groups in a way that state actors could not.
- Interpeace's role in the implementation of the drainage project contributed to peace in Ganta. Occupying the time of youth in a productive way was useful during the tenure of the project. More importantly, by ensuring that working teams consisted of multiple tribes and both genders, youth had the opportunity to learn about Interpeace methodology—lessons they say continue to have a positive effect on their daily relations with other tribes.
- There was considerable strain between Interpeace and their local NGO partners, many of whom expected to play a much larger role in the project than they actually did.
- Overall, while in six months the project has had a highly positive effect on the individual participants, most communities need further intervention before the attitudinal and behavioral change can take place on a socio-political level. Without continued support to reconciliation efforts and dedicated government action to resolve land disputes, there is a risk that Interpeace's considerable progress will be lost, and that communities will, once again, find their expectations unmet.

Introduction

Liberia's civil war started in Nimba County, and Nimba had the unfortunate distinction of being ravaged multiple times over the course of the fourteen years of fighting. It is currently one of the counties in Liberia most in need of a peacebuilding intervention. Tensions are still running high and manifest themselves in the numerous land disputes that plague every corner of Nimba. Under the surface, however, these tensions are not just about land ownership. Resentment over side-taking in the war, ethnic hostility, rifts between elders and youth and mistrust of the local government all fuel the land conflicts that stall the peace process and retard development.

In light of these festering issues, numerous advisory bodies have expressed a need for locally-owned reconciliation strategies in Liberia generally and Nimba specifically. For example, the ICG, expressing deep concern about the potentially explosive role of land disputes in Nimba County, advised that "Community-based approaches to fostering reconciliation should also be

useful in dealing with tensions sparked by land tenure and ownership disputes.”² In a similar vein, one of the key recommendations to come out of the 2004 Liberia Rapid Social Assessment and then confirmed in the 2006 update was that for community-driven development programs to succeed, aggressive action would have to be taken in peacebuilding and community-led conflict analysis, mediation, and conflict resolution.³ A conflict analysis prepared for UNMIL Civil Affairs in 2006, which features a case study on Nimba County, concludes the following:

“Grassroots peacebuilding can contribute to reconciliation over the long term. This is necessary emotionally, because the previous attitudes of hostility and fear cannot simply be excised. They must be replaced or at least balanced by some more positive feelings. It is also necessary practically, since failure to co-operate on issues of mutual concern will inevitably engender hostility which might contribute to re-igniting the conflict.”⁴

The need for a move away from short-term, quick-fix consultancies in favour of in-depth, locally-based initiatives is echoed in the Report of the National Consultant on Outreach and Reconciliation prepared in 2007 for UNMIL.⁵ Clearly, then, there has been consensus on the need for a program that focuses on helping to facilitate locally-generated peacebuilding and reconciliation processes.

In 2006, based on a recommendation from Ad-Hoc Presidential Commission, the Ministry of Internal Affairs invited the United National Office for Project Services (UNOPS) Joint Program Unit for UN/Interpeace Initiatives to Liberia in the hopes of creating a national dialog project. A contribution from Interpeace’s US Board of Governors allowed Interpeace to establish a presence in Liberia and begin to pursue a strategy for the national dialog. In 2008, however, Interpeace put their plans for a national program on hold and accepted funding through the Emergency Window of the Peacebuilding Fund to launch the project “Supporting Reconciliation in Nimba County” in an effort to address the postwar tensions that have proven especially severe in Nimba. Interpeace is a Swiss-based organization working in close collaboration with the UN with over fourteen years of experience in peacebuilding in high-conflict areas. Interpeace’s methodology is to engage all sectors of society in a highly inclusive and participatory dialog in order to create locally-owned conflict resolution mechanisms, foster co-existence and consolidate peace.

The Nimba program consisted of three activities. The first activity, broken down into three phases, intended to contribute to peacebuilding and reconciliation in Nimba by 1) conducting participatory research on root causes of conflict by consulting with individuals all over Nimba county; 2) facilitating dialog sessions with key actors representing every sector of society to confirm these causes and generate policy recommendations; and 3) bringing these recommendations to the attention of key policymakers in Monrovia. The second activity

² *Liberia: Resurrecting the Justice System*. Crisis Group Africa Report N°107, 6 April 2006, pg 16.

³ *Liberia Rapid Social Assessment Update—Phase I*, by Steve Archibald (IDL Group, June 2006).

⁴ *Conflict Analysis and Peacebuilding in Postwar Liberia*, by Christiana Solomon, September 2006.

⁵ *Final Comprehensive Report of the National Consultant on Outreach and Reconciliation in Nimba, Lofa, Bong, Gbarpolu, Grand Gedeh, and Margibi Counties*, by Morris M. Dukuly, Sr., May 2007.

consisted of the production of an in-depth research report on tensions between customary and statutory law. The third activity was the construction of a drainage system for two new roads in Ganta City, to be implemented using local youth from different ethnic groups in order to contribute to the peacebuilding process.

In order to track progress so far and to assess the practicality of launching the program on a national scale, Interpeace engaged CDA Collaborative Learning Projects to conduct an evaluation of the project. CDA is a Boston-based NGO that has distinguished itself through its peace and conflict impact assessment methodology. This report will offer an evaluation of the first and third activities as described above. The results from the second activity, the research report, has not yet been made available to the Evaluator.

The principle objectives of this evaluation are as follows:

- Record key parties' opinions and perceptions regarding the changes achieved and intended and relevance of those changes
- Document unexpected features of the program's implementation process
- Understand which program components thus far were successful and which were challenging
- Provide initial analysis as to what could be done to improve future iterations of the program, particularly on a national scale.

The evaluation will proceed as follows. After discussing the evaluation's methodology and limitations, the first section will consider whether the program has contributed to a *momentum for peace*. A significant short-term goal of the project is to foster a climate in which conflicts can be productively resolved in using community-generated mechanisms in Nimba County. While it is clearly too early to evaluate whether the project is creating sustainable change and influencing policy, it is possible to assess if it has contributed to this momentum for peace by facilitating the creation of a shared vision for peaceful conflict resolution and a feeling of ownership over the conflict resolution process.

The second section will assess the project's contribution to *capacity-building*. Specifically, by training those involved in the project in the Interpeace methodology, participants should be able to assist in more productive interaction with authorities and use of conflict resolution tools. Additionally, the project was intended to build the capacity of local government by involving the Nimba representatives from the MIA in the project.

The third section will examine the project's *relevance and added value*. One key project activity was to identify major sources of tension and violence in Nimba County. Of course, the most well-known sources of tension are the ongoing and highly publicized land conflicts in Nimba County, which have led to severe violence in the recent past. However, the project's Track 1 Listening Phase was intended to offer a more refined understanding of conflict in Nimba. The question of relevance and added value will also apply to the drainage component of the Interpeace project. Rather than evaluating from an engineering standpoint, the evaluation will focus on whether the implementation of this project component contributed to Interpeace's overall peacebuilding framework.

The fourth section will consider the efficiency of the project’s implementation, in terms of training and logistics. The final section will begin to explore the possibility of taking the project to a national scale.

Methodology and limitations

The preponderance of the information collected for this evaluation came from one-on-one interviews done in Monrovia and Nimba County. 15 of the interviews were conducted in Monrovia. The Evaluator first conducted a number of interviews with the staff from UNMIL, MIA, and various NGOs in Monrovia. These top-level interviews were intended to give a broad perspective on the project’s goals in relation to other national-level peacebuilding strategies. A set of interviews with various members of the project staff, from the Program Coordinator down to the staff researchers, helped the Evaluator understand the project’s strengths and weaknesses from the perspective of those that were implementing it on the ground.

The Evaluator and her team then spent a week in Nimba County interviewing a broad array of project participants, staff members, government officials, UN employees and tribal authorities. These were arguably the most important interviews, since they offer a perspective on the project from the very people the project was intended to benefit. These interviews were also crucial since they provided insight on Interpeace’s ability to speak directly to the problems in Nimba County. Whenever possible, interviewees were asked to give concrete examples of their experience with the project, and these “vignettes” have been incorporated into the text here in order to give the reader as full a picture as possible of the project’s activities and results.

In order to be sure that interviewees in Nimba, particularly the elders, were able to speak freely and comfortably, the Evaluation team consisted of two Mano staff members, Johannson Dahn and Sam Layledoe, and two Mandingo staff members, Haja Kamara and Ansu Kaba. Many of the interviews were done in Liberian English, and a handful were conducted in either Mano or Mandingo. Moreover, the presence of members from these two ethnic groups was intended to demonstrate the neutrality of the evaluation effort.

Breakdown of Nimba Interviews		
	Government Official	Community member
Mano	5	5
Gio	4	5
Mandingo	0	7

Note: UNMIL representatives and local NGO employees in Nimba not included.

Unfortunately, due to time and resources constraints, the Evaluation was unable to interview anyone from the Gbei or Krahn tribes. Gbei and Krahn populations are found primarily in Tappita District, which is a significant distance from Nimba’s major towns. The project also recognized the challenge presented by the remoteness of the Gbei population, and made special arrangements to carry out consultations near the Gbei forest.

The Evaluation team was also unable to interview any Mandingo government officials, since for the most part they do not exist. In fact, the promotion of the political inclusion of the Mandingos is one of the locally-generated recommendations that Interpeace published in their final report and presented to the Minister of Internal Affairs.

The Evaluation team also benefited from attendance at the County-wide conference on September 19, at which the policy recommendations were presented to the Minister of Internal Affairs and his staff. The Evaluation team also reviewed written material about the situation in Nimba, the policy recommendation document produced by the Interpeace team and the Interpeace project staff's self-evaluation.

Because the evaluation has been conducted in such a compressed timeframe, areas of inquiry had to be prioritized. The Evaluation team tried to be as thorough as possible in assessing the project's contribution to a momentum for peace and ability to build capacity in other organizations and individuals. However, a full analysis of the project's potential to work in a national context was simply not possible. Additionally, it is not possible to generalize the findings from the evaluation, as the resource constraints simply did not allow for a sufficient number and variety of interactions with individuals connected to the project.

Evaluation results

Momentum for peace

This section will explore the extent to which the Interpeace project created a momentum for peace—that is, whether it has generated a strong interest on the part of project participants, if not the community at large, in developing strategies to solve conflicts through dialog and negotiation rather than through violence. It will also explore the extent to which Interpeace has helped at least participants, if not the community, with the reconciliation process—where individuals of different tribes, ages and genders can speak openly and honestly with each other, understand and respect their differences and work together productively when necessary to better their community.

In particular, this section will consider the following questions:

- Did the project inspire a genuine commitment to Interpeace's methodology of participatory dialog?
- Did the dialog sessions include all of the relevant actors? Was anyone key left out of the process?
- Were there any important issues that participants were still not able to discuss, even in the facilitated dialog sessions?
- Did the project support Progress towards community-owned conflict resolution mechanisms?
- Did the project inspire new initiatives to continue Interpeace's work in the communities?
- Did the project displace any other community efforts, such as those by NGOs, the local government or national efforts like the Presidential Ad-Hoc Committee?
- Were there any "spoilers" that might try to hinder Interpeace's efforts at promoting peace?
- Has Interpeace been able to communicate its policy recommendations effectively to the national government?

Investment in the Interpeace methodology

If the Interpeace project is to create a momentum for peace, it is necessary to earn the “buy-in” of the participants. Those trained in the Interpeace methodology have to agree that it is likely to be a productive use of time and that using this method will indeed bring Nimba closer to peace and reconciliation, thereby improving the residents’ quality of life.

The research groups met with some resistance early on by some influential people and groups in Nimba. Unsuccessful past efforts by NGOs and the government to resolve land conflicts in Nimba had caused some bitterness in the community, and researchers were often met with indifference, or even outright hostility. Ganta, Nimba’s most heavily populated city, presented a special challenge. Initially the project teams were met with resistance from the Mandingo side. Interpeace came in after several programs had already come through town working on land issues. The expectations of the community had been raised in the past that their land issues would be resolved, but these expectations had yet to be met. Many initial contacts believed working with Interpeace would be a waste of time.

One project researcher recalled one particular spokesperson, a Mandingo who was very vocal and well-known in the Ganta community. He informed the project team specifically that he had “sat here so many times with no result.” He refused to speak to the project team, and quite adamantly refused to be filmed. It was revealed to project staff that during past projects, Mandingos were told (often by government officials) to produce their land deeds in order to resolve land conflicts. When the Mandingo community realized that Interpeace was not interested in seeing these sorts of documents, they became much more pliant. This signaled to the Mandingos that Interpeace was not interested in mediating in specific land conflicts, reducing the pressure to make an argument and introducing the possibility of having a frank dialog.

There were also suspicions on the part of the community that the Interpeace project would actually create further fissures rather than heal those that existed. According to one project researcher:

“There were challenges in the beginning in managing the social and political space. Local authorities thought Interpeace was trying to unveil misdeeds they had committed. Some residents thought their process was going to put them at loggerheads with their leaders.”

In order to counter this resistance, Interpeace spent the first two weeks of the project doing community sensitization. Rather than immediately commencing the research, the teams made several “acquaintance visits” to the different towns with the intent of explaining the project, answering questions and generally putting minds at ease. By fully addressing community concerns before the work even began, Interpeace researchers were able to convince most initially reluctant parties to give Interpeace’s methodology a chance. In fact, some individuals were interested enough in the participatory dialog process that they made significant sacrifices to be part of the project. Some Mandingos refugees, for example, traveled from Guinea to participate in the focus group sessions.

Concerns have been raised that project participants were involved only to earn some sort of remuneration. Participants, however, were given nothing at all during the consultation phase of the project, when the bulk of the research was done. Those invited to the first focus group were clearly informed that while many NGO workshops paid a sitting fee, Interpeace would not. They would, however, buy food to make lunch. Focus group participants in the first dialog session were not compensated for transportation, though when possible Interpeace drivers would try to help people get home. After the first focus group ended, the Interpeace staff decided that they would have to compensate for transportation in the future as people were traveling substantial distances. They did not inform participants of this, however, until the second focus group session had ended. That group members were willing to come back for a second session, not knowing that they would receive help with transportation costs, shows that participants were willing to commit not only time but scarce resources to the project. Given the fact that a) the consultation phase was completely free of inducements of any kind, b) no sitting fees were paid for the focus groups, and c) participants appeared willing to cover their own transportation costs, it seems unlikely that participation was driven by material interests. While it is possible that some individuals attended dialog sessions because of the promise of lunch, it is unlikely that this small token drove most participants. Moreover, even if the lunch did play a disproportionate role in motivating participation, it does not mean that the participants' input was invalid or insincere.

One unique aspect of Interpeace's methodology is the filming of the consultations and dialog sessions. This film component won the approval of all participants interviewed for the evaluation, and appears to have helped convince participants that the Interpeace project would be different, and more credible, than past NGO projects. Interviewees appreciated the video aspect because it provided validation for what they said and what others said—it was a way to keep everyone “on the record.” During the focus groups, they were shown tapes from the Consultation phase, which allowed participants to hear from individuals from all sectors of society directly, rather than having their opinions filtered through a report. Moreover, the videos offered undeniable proof concerning what was said, so that no one had to fear misrepresentation of themselves or others. Finally, the videos held people to their words. One UN representative described how in the past, a resolution would be made, both parties would agree, then two days later, one party would deny having come to an agreement. Filming the process kept people from trying to recast past events.⁶

Of course, communities that cannot afford paper and pens surely cannot be expected to purchase a video camera on their own. Moreover, few in rural Liberia could be expected to know how to use a video camera effectively. There is a risk, then, that Interpeace's departure—and the concomitant departure of the video equipment—will lead to a reversion back to the status quo, where commitments were routinely abandoned and agreements violated. Of course, it is impossible to know now, but it seems unlikely that six months can undo years of strategic deception—if it were that simple to change dishonest behavior, the video cameras would not have been necessary in the first place. Thus, while the A-V component of the process was

⁶ International staff at Interpeace had hoped that the films from the session could be condensed, edited and used as “mini-documentaries.” While plenty of footage exists, the editing was not complete at the time of the evaluation. It is expected to be finished before November 2008.

extremely valuable for the focus groups, it is not necessarily a sustainable strategy for community dialog in the absence of further international intervention.

Inclusion of all relevant community actors

For the project to truly create reconciliation and peace, staff must be sure they are including representatives from all stakeholding groups in the community. All groups need to be committed to the same goals and have the same understanding of the process for the dialog method to work. Moreover, if a key group—or even a key actor from a represented group—is left out of the process, the fallout in the form of feelings of exclusion and resentment could actually prove harmful to peacebuilding efforts.

The Interpeace field staff appear to have taken great pains to include all relevant actors. No one could cite a single key individual or group that had not been called upon to attend at least one of the dialog sessions. Indeed, at the recommendation of the participants at the first focus group, influential people that had been overlooked were invited to the second and third meetings. For example, according to one of the project researchers, one influential Mandingo business man called Lasana Keita was accused by the Manos and Gios of Ganta of being behind the invasion and destruction of Ganta by LURD forces in 2003. Keita was able to attend the second focus group in Ganta after participants from the first focus group recommended his invitation.

Representatives from Concern Women were satisfied that in all Interpeace activities, women were taken as seriously as the men, and their opinions were as influential in the final recommendations as those of their male counterparts. They were pleased with the work Interpeace was doing because, as one representative said, “When violence happens, in is women who feel the weight of it.” The dialog sessions gave them an opportunity to highlight issues that pertain specifically to women, such as rape and domestic violence—issues that had been neglected in the past.

A Clan Chief from Yarwin-Mehnsoneh District insisted that Interpeace researcher “never forgot about any tribal chief” at a time in which tribal chiefs’ powers are being undermined by the government. According to this Clan Chief, the Superintendent of Nimba County patrolled the district announcing that Chiefs should no longer issue writs of summons; rather, they should just discuss issues with them verbally. The Chiefs feel stripped of their authority and unable to exercise control over their people. The Interpeace dialog sessions gave them an opportunity to pose several questions to government authorities regarding the roles of traditional leaders in the communities. The Clan Chief did not feel that he was given a satisfactory answer by the government, but was pleased to have a forum in which this issue could be raised. Other traditional leaders and elders echoed this sentiment.

It is possible that the project would have benefited by establishing connections with other NGO field offices working in Nimba on land issues. One Interpeace researcher said that while it was necessary, it was extremely difficult to get the NGO people on board. Most simply did not have time; for example, NRC, TEAR, and Africare—three NGOs working on land issues in Nimba—were not able to attend focus groups.

One NGO representative, however, said his NGO had not been invited to participate at all until he raised the issue with his superiors in Monrovia. This representative only heard about Interpeace's project when one of the clients they were advising in a land dispute mentioned that her issue was being addressed in the dialog sessions. The Evaluator was told that in the mini-conference, which NGO representatives attended after requesting that the Monrovia office contact Interpeace to establish a connection, this client's issue had been declared "resolved" through Interpeace's work despite this NGOs action in addressing the case. Follow-up on the part of the Evaluator showed that this particular land dispute had not, in fact, even been resolved.

It is likely that this confusion resulted from a simple oversight in the early stages of the project, when Interpeace staff did not introduce their work to other relevant NGOs. Part of the problem clearly stems from the fact that the Research and Operations Manager (ROM), who was the field manager based in Ganta, had to be suspended early on the research process for failing to perform his job function. NGO-Interpeace relations seems to fall quite naturally under the scope of the ROM. The absence of an ROM in the field appeared to have other repercussions, as well. For example, there is an NGO meeting every other Wednesday for Nimba County, but in the absence of the ROM, Interpeace has not typically been represented at these meetings. One Interpeace staff member mentioned that he was concerned about the reputation costs of Interpeace's absence.

Issue Sensitivity

The objective of the dialog sessions was to allow participants to discuss root causes of highly sensitive conflicts. These discussions have the potential to be quite wrenching emotionally for the participants, given that some of the topics being discussed are truly personal in nature, such as identity, family history, marriage, religion and even wartime experiences. For the project to be truly successful it must be able to create a forum in which all of these challenging issues can be brought to the table. If issues are left to fester unaddressed, they can continue to cause conflict in the community and prevent peace and reconciliation from being achieved.

The Evaluator sought to discover whether there were conflicts that remained too sensitive to discuss publicly, even in the Interpeace forums. No one could cite a single issue that was "off the table" in the focus groups. In fact, that in the late 1990s there existed a Mano-Gio committee seeking to convince residents and leaders that Mandingos would never return to live in Liberia came out during the focus group, which took some Mandingos by surprise and was potentially explosive. It was discussed peacefully, however, and one Mandingo man said they even joke about it now.

The Evaluation team spoke to two focus group participants from Tappita, both of whom referenced one particular breakthrough in a focus group session. This breakthrough dealt with one of the most sensitive issues of all—the killing of one family by an individual from the same community during the war. A Gio man had been accused of killing a Krahn family in the Kpabili region. This man, having been asked to participate in the dialog sessions, admitted to having committed this act and asked the community members to forgive him. The dialog session

provided a safe space where participants felt they were able to speak the truth, even on an issue this sensitive.⁷

Some of the more delicate conversations took place between community people and local authorities. Many community residents thought the local authorities were corrupt and had too much power. Sometimes the community would rebel. There were, on occasion, heated discussions. One project team leader provided the following example:

A high-ranking authority in one of the main towns did not attend the first or second dialog session; rather, he sent representatives. For the third session, they asked him not to send a representative, but to appear in person. He came and attempted to dominate the meeting. When he was criticized by participants, he said that the community members were just there to get the money. They informed him that they had not even been paid during the first focus group. He was told that everyone was an equal participant in the process, and that his power must be left outside. He eventually apologized.

One individual expressed concern that these sorts of frank dialogs could actually create friction, rather than resolve it. He gave an example: there was one meeting in Ganta in which the district commissioner told the committee that traditions needed to be respected, and one of the female participants objected, insisting that their traditions were flawed. According to the participant, the commissioner appeared to resent the comment, and might have been somewhat embarrassed. The concern is that this sort of interaction could actually cause more bitterness than it heals. No other participants, however, raised this concern—it was widely agreed upon that the act of bringing all issues to light, even if difficult at the time, resulted in the ability to have productive conversations about how to establish peace in the community.

Progress towards community-owned conflict resolution mechanisms

Because of the project's short timeframe—this project was six months, while standard projects are eighteen—it was unrealistic to expect significant progress in the resolution of actual land conflicts. The project document, then, did not promise conflict resolution as an outcome of the project. Rather, Interpeace had hoped to create the momentum for peace described above, which should lay the groundwork for easier conflict resolution in the future. Fostering understanding between formerly hostile parties can make it negotiations easier by allowing individuals to put themselves in the shoes of their opponent. Greater communication between those in conflict can facilitate the process of creating a compromise that both parties will understand and uphold.

The Interpeace effort clearly resulted in more harmonious relations between participants of different ethnic groups and greater understanding and communication between participants from all sectors of society. Indeed, it appears that some conflicts had not even come to light until Interpeace's intervention. One Interpeace staff researcher gave the following example:

⁷ This individual is currently preparing to meet with and formally apologize to any remaining members of this Krahn family. No community retaliation has taken place up to this time.

An individual living in Loguatu describe being approached by Interpeace and told that the people of Karnplay had complained that her family had been occupying their land. This individual claims she had no idea anyone else felt they had claim over her property. “If Interpeace had not come, we would not have been told about this serious issue,” she said. This woman and an Interpeace staff research consulted her son in Buchanan to describe both the land issue that had arisen and Interpeace’s project. Not only was this woman granted permission to attend, but the son in Buchanan, realizing both the importance of the issue and the novelty of the Interpeace approach, attended as well. Said the woman: “Just imagine, he lives as far as Buchanan. His coming shows that we are in the interest of peace and the good work done by Interpeace.” This conflict is still pending resolution.

The project even appears to have helped in the resolution of some of the more simple conflicts in Nimba County. The Evaluation team was given a few examples in each community. One example follows:

Multiple sources described a group of ungoverned and sometimes violent boys that used to hang around the mosque, “embarrassing” Muslims while they prayed. These boys would cause chaos around the Mosque and use its environs as a toilet. One Muslim man even showed me a scar where he had been hit by a rock thrown by one of these boys. Interpeace, in one of the focus groups, was able to bring these boys together with the Muslims so that they could try to reconcile their differences. Lunch was served at the focus group, and eating together seemed to cement a new bond. They are now able to talk and the problems is considered resolved.

Some disputes, however, remain intractable despite Interpeace’s ability to foster more cordial relations between the conflicting parties. A description of one such conflict follows:

In Saclepea, two parties, Varfee Kromah and J. Menwo Karnwie, were involved in a serious land conflict. Mr. Kromah and Mr. Kromah’s father had both been born on a piece of land in town. During the war, Mr. Kromah’s home was destroyed, he went into exile and in his absence, the government sold his land to Mr. Karnwie. In 1997, Mr. Kromah returned to Saclepea to find Mr. Karnwie building a house on his former property. Mr. Kromah registered his complaint with the superintendent, who issued an stay. Case was taken to the Vice President, who determined that Mr. Kromah should be given two lots of land as compensation for the land that was sold. Mr. Kromah refused this offer. After he refused, according to Mr. Kromah, four Mandingo people were killed in retaliation, his new house was burned, and his Land Cruiser was damaged because of this dispute. Mr. Kromah fled again to Guinea. After the 2005 election, Mr. Kromah returned. Mr. Kromah again requested to have his land returned, and the dispute entered the court system. The case is currently with the Supreme Court in Monrovia.

Prior to the Interpeace project, these men were not speaking to one another. They had no interaction whatsoever. The Interpeace project, by encouraging dialog between ethnic groups, allowed them to begin to make small talk. Mr. Kromah and Mr. Karnwie met in the street one afternoon, and Mr. Karnwie, having noticed that Mr. Kromah had not been around, asked Mr. Kromah where he had been. Mr. Kromah responded that his daughter had gotten married in Monrovia.

Despite the parties' ability to converse and a shared interest in ending the conflict, they both claim that because the case is with the courts they can do nothing until the courts issue a verdict, and that neither will be satisfied unless they are granted rights to that particular parcel of land. Said one party in the dispute: "We can talk for 10,000 years, but if the land problem is not resolved, the conflict is not resolved."

This example is illustrative of the limbo in which the conflict resolution process as a whole finds itself at present. Hostile groups are communicating effectively in ways that have not been seen since before the war, and minor conflicts have been resolved through this open communication and common understanding. Several participants recognize that the fears they had of the other ethnic group—stemming largely from experiences during the war—were erroneous, and reported being able to let go of some of their anger from the war. Recommendations for the government have been drafted and presented. However, for the project to truly succeed in influencing the more serious land conflicts—which are arguably the most dangerous to peace in Liberia—the work must be taken further. Some other party will need to take up Interpeace's recommendations and take firm steps towards creating a community-supported lasting solution for the resolution of the more difficult conflicts.

One UNMIL representative, reflecting on this issue, brought up the highly volatile conflict over the market land in Ganta city. The land that the Manos and Gios would like to use for the market is being claimed as private property by Mandingos. Currently, no one is using the land due to the inability to find resolution to this conflict. While Interpeace is able to encourage parties on opposing sides to discuss their differences constructively in a way that had not been possible prior to their intervention, it is not within Interpeace's budget or scope of work to provide the funds to build a new market somewhere else. The groundwork, then, has been laid for a peaceful resolution to this problem—but unless someone takes responsibility for this final step, the issue will not be resolved.

A similar situation exists in Karnplay. According to one project participant, the Interpeace project has led to a negotiation between the Marketing Association and the individual claiming ownership of the disputed land. It has been agreed by the both parties that the market be relocated with the help of the local authority. An acceptable new site has already been identified, but this participant said that the community has asked Interpeace to help with the preparation of the area so that the dispute can be finally laid to rest. This, of course, would be the purview of the government rather than Interpeace.

Responsibility at this stage falls to the MIA. The MIA commissioned Interpeace's work and was recipient of their recommendations. The ball, so to speak, is in their court—many of the

community-driven suggestions will require funds, and the MIA must find a source, either from the government budget or from donors, to ensure that Interpeace's work is not in vain.

New initiatives

In most of Nimba's major towns, it does not appear that since Interpeace left any new groups have sprung up to take its place. In Ganta it appears that former focus group members are waiting for Interpeace's funding to be renewed in order to take up the work where it was left off. In Zoegeh and Sanniquellie, participants had promised to form a committee but have not yet done so. Karnplay has taken positive, concrete steps. There used to be separate youth groups for youth of different tribes, but because of the Interpeace intervention, the youth decided to merge their groups into one, and to form a football team composed of all the ethnic groups residing in Karnplay.

Saclepea was particularly proactive in continuing Interpeace's efforts, even in their absence. At the end of one of the dialog sessions, one participant, the Reverend Beatrice Mehlor, asked everyone to stay so they could organize themselves into a permanent committee. According to the Interpeace team leader at the focus group, Interpeace staff were present for this, but were uninvolved in this aspect of the planning, and stood at a distance taking photos. Nine individuals were nominated and approved to sit on the "District Community Dialog Committee," which is chaired by a Mano and co-chaired by a Mandingo. This committee meets on Sundays, and is making headway in resolving not only land conflicts, but other conflicts as well, such as disputes over intermarriage.

On Sunday afternoon at 4:00, the DCDC was scheduled to meet to try to finalize the resolution of a land dispute between two town members. The Evaluator intended to attend the meeting to observe the process, but discovered upon arrival that one party to the conflict was bereaved and that resolution would have to be postponed.

Further research should be done to determine which particular characteristics of Saclepea allowed it to maintain Interpeace's work while other towns did not. One Interpeace team leader offered up a theory of the relevant difference between Zoegeh and Saclepea. He noted that in Zoegeh, the issues were intratribal much of the time—Gio vs. Gio, Mano vs. Mano. These sorts of issues tend to be thought of as "family" issues, and do not necessarily call for the involvement of an entire committee. He called the conflict in Saclepea more "visceral," requiring a more formalized, community-based mechanism to resolve problems. Unfortunately, this explanation fails to account for the lack of a DCDC in Ganta, where the problems are the most severe.

One barrier to the process continuing without Interpeace's involvement is the difficulty community groups face in raising money. Transportation costs are a major issue. Interpeace focus groups pulled together members from various communities—but without Interpeace, it is not clear how they would secure money to hire motorbikes. They would also not be able to provide food, which while not absolutely necessary, was certainly helpful for morale.

DCDC representatives made clear that they have the manpower and commitment to address conflicts—but not the resources. Transportation is an issue, as are basic supplies like paper and

pens, which in a country such as Liberia are costly enough to put a real strain on an individual's budget. Additionally, some DCDC members felt that the video recordings were a key element to the success of the Interpeace project and that operating without them would compromise the work of the DCDC.

Displacement of NGO efforts

One risk of bringing in a major international NGO to do sweeping projects is that the initiatives of other international NGOs, local organizations or local government get pushed aside. Funding gets diverted to the institution that has the most credibility with the donors and community attention is given to the organization with the most signboards. It is necessary to establish whether Interpeace, in bringing their project to Nimba, displaced the efforts of other parties trying to accomplish the same goals.

Some NGOs, particularly the prospective partners, felt that they had the capacity to significant peacebuilding work. IRCL, which has been doing local peacebuilding since Taylor's administration, feels that it has developed expertise in the process. What it lacks is funding to carry out its own projects. Similar sentiments came from other NGOs. In the opinion of the Evaluator, these NGOs do have considerable expertise in peacebuilding, and a deep knowledge of the issues on the ground. However, they most likely lack the capacity to run a project of this magnitude, and it is unlikely that donors would feel comfortable putting such large sums under their management in the absence of a proven track record. It is, then, unrealistic to imagine these NGOs conducting a project of this scale, though it seems eminently reasonable that they should play a significant role in Interpeace's work, particularly given their local knowledge.

Other international NGOs appear to be working on different aspects of land conflicts. NRC and DRC, for example, focus on the settlement of land disputes, rather than the facilitation of dialog. In principle, Interpeace's efforts should be complementary to any efforts made to actually mediate or resolve disputes of any kind by breaking down barriers between hostile parties and encouraging open dialog and mutual understanding.

Displacement of government efforts

One lead researcher thought that the government felt relieved that the Interpeace project came to them—they felt under pressure by the land conflicts, and it was helpful to have someone assisting them in dealing with it. For example, several government officials from Monrovia had been involved in a Land Reconciliation Conference that was financed by NDI in December 2007, but that could not be built upon due to resource constraints. This conference functioned largely according to Interpeace principles, trying to bring all stakeholders from Monrovia and Nimba, including elders from towns around Saclepea who were more likely to be neutral on issues, together to explain the government's vision for development. During this conference, participants were asked to air all of their grievances—even if they were not around land issues—so that tensions between hostile groups could be reduced and development could take place. They had agreed to continue holding these conferences, but NDI could not make the funding available—so in Honorable Koah's opinion, Interpeace picked up where the government conference had left off, which took some burden off of the government considering the constant

inquiries they received about the follow-up conference and the fact that the government does not provide funding for this type of activities. He said that he had been invited to participate in the Interpeace focus groups, and had been able to send a representative from his office.

Even with sufficient resources, however, it is unlikely that the government could replicate Interpeace's work. The government is simply not a neutral party in land disputes, and is often accused of "trying to be a player and referee in the same game." Mistrust of government will have to be overcome before it can play a serious role as a facilitator of dialog, rather than a participant in dialog.

Displacement of the Ad-Hoc Presidential Commission

Looming in the background of many discussions on land dispute resolution is an implicit comparison with the work of the Ad-Hoc Presidential Commission, set up in 2006 to deal with the increasing reports of conflict coming out of Nimba. The Presidential Commission consisted of fifteen mostly high-ranking individuals appointed by the President. A subset of these members were selected to be on the technical committee, which did a more in-depth investigation of the situation in Nimba and forward its recommendations to the committee as a whole.

While the work of the Commission was both timely and admirable in many ways, Interpeace was able to add significant value in the resolution of conflicts and reconciliation process above and beyond what the Commission was able to accomplish.

One key difference between Interpeace and the Presidential Commission was the fact that Interpeace was perceived as an entirely neutral party, while from the outset, the Commission was plagued by "political" issues. Selection for the technical committee of the Presidential Commission was controversial, since some of the original members—in particular, the mayor of Ganta, the land commissioner and the chief surveyor from Nimba—were accused of being both referees and players in the same game. The MIA was concerned that without their participation, nothing would get done to address the conflict, but at the same time, to keep them on the technical committee compromised its credibility.

Interpeace was also a grassroots effort, while the Presidential Commission involved only the highest levels of government and society. One focus group participant alluded obliquely to one flaw of the Presidential Commission's work in the community: "People saw the Ministers come in with big cars, drinking cold water, and people saw that they were making money." Concern, then, with the role of money overshadowed the real issues in the conference. The Interpeace project, in contrast, was effective in keeping all participants on a level playing field.

Finally, where Interpeace provided the motivation and resources to tackle Nimba's problems in the most aggressive way possible, the Presidential Commission was seen by some of its members as lacking in political will. One went so far as to say that the Presidential Commission could have provided considerable resolution to the problems in Nimba, had it really tried. His sentiments are summarized as follows:

The people of Nimba fear the strong hand of government, and many would have been appeased with a simple resettlement package. Government could have enforced eviction and stay orders. But the Presidential Commission lacked the political will to solve the land problems in Nimba. It was not a serious effort—the longest period of consecutive time the members ever spent in Nimba was two weeks, and over the last three years they have not even spent a total of 100 days there. While their mandate was supposed to be all of Nimba, they never even left Ganta. There would be six-month gaps with no activity—it was impossible to keep momentum. Both resources and security were scarce. While ultimately they did write a report, it is not clear if it has ever even been read.

Even if the recommendations of Interpeace and the Presidential Commission end up being quite similar, it is crucial to note that the Presidential Commission's worked only in Ganta City, while Interpeace's recommendations were generated by a process that involved all of Nimba. It would have been very difficult for the government to cover the terrain that Interpeace did without investing significant resources and overcoming government employee's reluctance to work in the difficult bush conditions.⁸ This aspect of the research was absolutely necessary, though. There was no way to know a priori whether recommendations generated in Ganta would be relevant to the rest of the county. For that reason, even if Interpeace's recommendations overlap with those of the Commission, their work should be considered much needed validation of the Ganta results.

There is speculation that some people on the Presidential Committee resent Interpeace's involvement. The Evaluator was told that one member of the House Standing Committee on Peace and Reconciliation wrote a letter to the MIA stating that the Interpeace project had been undermining the efforts of the Presidential Commission. For the reasons described above, it is the opinion of the Evaluator that Interpeace was better positioned to carry out this project.

Spoilers

Anytime someone endeavors to establish peace and reduce conflict, there will be individuals who will try to limit that person's success. Certain parties will always benefit from conflict, whether emotionally, by feeling revenge is being taken on their enemies, financially, by capitalizing on weapon sales or looting goods, or politically, by exploiting tensions or using fear tactics to garner votes. Any peacebuilding project needs to be cognizant of the potential for spoilers and guard against their efforts.

Some focus group members said that there would always be some people "pushing fire." No one could specify who, but said that in every community troublemakers exist. The Interpeace project, however, appears to have equipped participants with the tools to resist them.

Multiple interviewees pointed out elected officials' conflict of interest when it came to conflict mediation. While everyone benefits from peace, elected officials that allow their constituents' land to be re-allocated to others, even if the transfer is just, risk losing votes. In that sense, some

⁸ The Clan Chief for Yarwin-Mehnsoneh was especially impressed by Interpeace in this respect, saying that the research team covered each of the district's 31 towns, by foot if necessary.

politicians actually stand to lose from the adoption of policies to reduce land conflict if the outcome if the policy does not benefit the majority that elected them.

In the Evaluator's experience, elected officials seemed to view the Interpeace effort as a way to bring development needs to the attention of the MIA, rather than lobby for specific policy recommendations to please their constituents. Whether or not elected officials stand in the way of progress as far as conflict resolution is concerned in the future is an open question. Because Interpeace's work thus far has been focused on research and dialog, and the policy recommendations were only just unveiled, it is too early to say whether politicians will try to stand in the way of policies that might prove costly to them on election day.

Communication of policy recommendations

The centerpiece of Interpeace's effort was a County-wide conference in Ganta City on September 19th, at which Interpeace formally unveiled its policy recommendations to UNMIL and MIA representatives from Monrovia—including the Minister himself, then serving as the Acting President—in the presence of an array of local government officials from Nimba, project participants, traditional authorities and community members.

The conference was highly anticipated by many of the participants interviewed for the evaluation. The Evaluation team was visiting the Sanniquellie administrative building the Thursday prior to the conference, and overheard considerable discussion about the importance of the conference the following day. At least three focus group participants insisted on retrieving their conference invitation and showing it to the Evaluator while emphasizing their intention to attend.

Participants in the conference were issued a highly professional report detailing not only the recommendations, but an explanation of the methodology, a description of the main research results and reader-friendly justifications for each recommendation made. Not only is this report useful in delivering recommendations to national actors, but its distribution to focus group participants reinforces the ongoing community involvement in and local ownership of the process.

Local media coverage of the conference was extremely favorable, and for the most part gave an accurate characterization of Interpeace's activities in Nimba. The one exception was the reference to Interpeace's "mediatory" role, which suggests that they were in the business of resolving disputes. The description of activities, however, put an emphasis on Interpeace's efforts to uncover the root causes of Nimba's current problems.

It was clear that many Nimba residents expected that President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf would attend the conference. The presence the Acting President did, however, appear to mitigate any serious disappointment. Interpeace, as well, had hoped for the attendance of the President. Implementation of many of Interpeace's policy recommendations will require joint efforts from multiple ministries. This joint effort is most likely to take place if the directive comes from the President herself. Thus, it will be extremely helpful if Interpeace can attract the attention of the President. It is an encouraging sign, however, that the Minister of Internal affairs brought

several staff members to Ganta as further indication of his firm commitment to the resolution of Nimba's problems. From this point forward, it will be up to the Ministry to promote Interpeace's recommendations to key members of the national government.

Capacity building

Capacity building, though widely discussed and highlighted as a key area for evaluation, does not feature prominently in the project document—it is mentioned only once, to be exact. However, it has been repeatedly expressed that one objective of the Interpeace project is to build capacity on the part of the project staff, MIA staff and NGO partners. The concept of capacity building is ill-defined in most written documents associated with the project, but was explained quite articulately to the Evaluator by an individual who works for Interpeace: It is the process of enabling anyone that is targeted or involved with the project to have the ability to use the project's methodology and replicate the project activities.

Local organizations

It is to Interpeace's credit that the project intended to work with local NGOs in the national dialog project in order to draw upon their local knowledge and ideally, build their capacity at the same time. Unfortunately, due to the time constraint on the project (a result of the "Emergency Window" funding received by the PBF), it was deemed impossible to incorporate the partner institutions in the manner envisaged for the national dialog. This resulted in disappointment and unmet expectations on the part of the NGOs, as the possibility that some aspect of the project could proceed without them had never before been raised. Interpeace, however, had not had any way of foreseeing the existence of a pilot project, which is highly unusual for the organization.

In the project's early stages, eight local NGOs participated in a series of workshops determine the applicability of Interpeace's approach to the Liberian context and to devise a plan of action for a national dialog. A concept paper was prepared, submitted and critiqued. A MOU was signed, common to all of the NGOs.

The initial breakdown appears to have taken place as a result of misunderstandings about the MOU. Representatives from three of the NGOs criticized the MOU for being too vague and failing to outline the specific nature of the partnership between Interpeace and the NGOs. Part of the problem, according to one Interpeace staff member, is the use of the word "partner," which local organizations tend to interpret as a commitment to equality in decision-making power and resource sharing.

The more significant impasse appears to have taken place once Interpeace was requested to apply for funding through the Emergency Window. Interpeace/JPU felt that it would be impossible, in a six month project, to incorporate all eight institutions into the implementation as they had intended for the national project. This was explained to the organizations both through written communication and during a workshop in which the Nimba strategy was discussed with representatives from the Presidential Commission, the MIA and other governmental agencies. During that workshop the envisioned role of the NGOs in a national strategy was discussed.

However, it appears that at this point that the organizations felt their status had changed from “partner” to “observer.”⁹

When the Emergency Window funding came through, the NGOs were each invited to nominate two employees to participate in the training at the Kofi Annan Institute and potentially, if chosen, work on the project. This was done in order to keep the NGOs involved, familiarize their employees with the Interpeace methodology and utilize their knowledge of conditions on the ground. Six of the eight organizations chose to send employees for the training, but the representatives from the NGOs had several concerns about the process. One representative confessed that he had no understanding of the criteria Interpeace used to determine if their representatives should be involved with the project, and another felt that it was unfair and insulting to be asked to send individuals to “apply” for a project on which they were supposed to be collaborating.

Another issue appears to be confusion about the use the NGOs’ proprietary logos by Interpeace. One representative from a partner NGO said that Interpeace had asked them to provide letters committing themselves to the process on their letterhead. Their logos, he said, were taken from the letterhead and used to secure funding for the project, and then once funding was provided the NGOs were dropped from the process. This issue was so sensitive that while the representative agreed to provide the Evaluator with some of the organization’s research on land conflict, he would not allow the Evaluator to remove any papers bearing the organization’s logo from the building. Interpeace has said that the use of the organizations’ logos in the original project document (requesting funding for the national dialog) had been not only approved but requested by the NGO partners as an indication of the project’s local ownership. Drafts bearing the logos were submitted to each NGO well before the submission of the project document. The project document used to apply for funding through the Emergency Window did not bear the organizations’ logos.

In the opinion of the Evaluator, this confusion is a natural result of a project being suddenly and unexpectedly changed midway through the planning phase. It is quite reasonable, given the availability of Peacebuilding funds, the emergence of the Emergency Window, the instability of Nimba at the time and Interpeace’s preparation to act quickly, that Interpeace should have shifted gears in favor of an immediate pilot project. However, any major change to a project with many actors has the potential to cause upset and misunderstandings. The NGO partners were understandably disappointed that a major part of the project would proceed without the level of involvement they expected. They are also right to expect that their future role in the project be spelled out clearly and formally. Interpeace, however, does appear to have made a major effort to communicate the nature of the situation to the NGOs and to keep them as involved as they could, given the quick and dramatic shift in strategy.

Capacity building for local NGOs, then, was not as dramatic as it might be in a national project. The NGO staff that went through the initial training benefited from the expertise of international

⁹ It should be noted that all organizations made mention of the regular updates sent to them by the Program Coordinator. It appears these updates were instrumental in preserving some sense of participation among the partners, and were quite useful to the Evaluator as well.

peacebuilders and were given a certificate of participation at the end. Those that were hired to work on the project will return to their organizations with an entirely new skill set and sophisticated understanding of some of Liberia's most complex issues. Ideally, a national project will afford the opportunity to further enhance the abilities of local organizations.

Local Government

Local governmental authorities was one of the sectors that Interpeace sought to involve in all aspects of the project in order to build the capacity of local MIA staff. They were highly successful in spreading awareness of their work in Nimba County government offices, and took pains to incorporate government into each project phase.

The extent to which the government officials seized the opportunity to connect with the community and participate in sincere efforts at reconciliation and capacity-building seemed to vary. While some local officials seemed to ignore the Interpeace methodology altogether and use the dialog sessions as a way to make development requests to the government in Monrovia, others appear to have been highly influenced by the Interpeace process. One city mayor, who was an enthusiastic participant in all three of her district's dialog sessions, said she was even able to personally reconcile with a woman of another tribe with whom she had feuded in the past. According to another district official, Sanniquellie-Mahn was the first district in which all of the tribal governors were re-established. She said they were able to accomplish this task because "Interpeace augmented our efforts to put our people together."

It appears that there was a selection effect at work: those local officials that were already invested in reconciliation and dialog were the ones most involved, and most influenced, by the process, while those individuals most in need of an intervention simply sent representatives to dialog sessions, or came but only to made funding requests of Monrovia. In the opinion of the Evaluator, Interpeace has been able to build peacebuilding capacity among those members of local government that were already invested in reconciliation and peacebuilding issues. Those who were never fully enrolled in the process, however, remained largely untouched by Interpeace's efforts.

The ministry did appoint four supervisors for the drainage project, who were notably diverse with respect to ethnicity and gender. While these supervisors performed well, unlike their Monrovia-based colleagues, they did not have the benefit of participation in any of the staff training, thus they did not have the opportunity to learn about Interpeace's methodology and goals. In the event that the project is taken up on a national scale, it might be advisable to either put a training program in place for ministry employees or incorporate ministry employees into the broader Interpeace training program, even if they are not working directly with focus groups or conducting interviews. The direct benefit of this sort of training would be to ensure that all project staff working for Interpeace have a unified message and a common understanding of goals. The indirect benefit—which might prove more important in the long run—is that the project would be able to contribute directly to the capacity of the ministry by educating its employees on peacebuilding practices.

National Government

Keeping the MIA involved at the national level appears to have been a challenge, due not to a lack of interest on the part of Ministry officials, but rather to the scarcity of human resources at the MIA combined with the substantial tasks they must perform.

The MIA played the leading role in bringing the concluding conference together in Nimba. They intend to use it as a platform to hear about the traditional issues from the community and communicate the legal issues to the community. Community members will have the opportunity to have their voices heard by the highest levels of government, who are invited to the conference. They will then take the strategies that are suggested and figure out which are reasonable once the legal issues are taken into account. At that point, they will draft letters to the key people in government suggesting short-term and long-term strategies to manage the land conflict in Nimba.

According to one staff member at the Ministry, the MIA was hoping to be very involved with the project overall, but their time has been occupied with the PBF. Involvement at the highest level, then, has been limited to briefings and visits. Five staff from the MIA went through training in Monrovia in order to be able to act as coordinators for the project. While none of these staff spent a significant time on the project over the course of the six months, the training alone was intended to enhance their skills in the area of peacebuilding and research.

The Minister of Internal Affairs acts not only as the Minister, but also as the Acting President in the event that President Johnson Sirleaf is traveling. Thus, his increased agenda, coupled with the stringent security protocols, makes access to the Minister challenging, even given his expressed commitment to the program. Moreover, the endemic human resources deficiency at the MIA, combined with the turnover of certain key employees midway through the project, made a consistent relationship with national Ministry staff difficult to achieve. It is crucial that the lines of communication between the Ministry and Interpeace stay open so that the Ministry can augment national peacebuilding capacity.

Relevance and added value

Research component

One key project activity was to identify major sources of tension and violence in Nimba County. It was this research effort that sought to make the project fully relevant to the situation on the ground, not just in Liberia as a whole but in each of the individual counties in Nimba. The Evaluation team had the opportunity to speak with participants from five of Nimba's six districts, and each confirmed that the research results, as presented in the mini-conference in August and then again at the larger final conference in September, did indeed capture the root causes of Nimba's many conflicts and present them in a way that reflected the participants' original intent. Moreover, the Evaluator had a chance to speak to several informed individuals in Monrovia, who further reinforced Interpeace's main conclusions and recognized the value of their more nuanced findings.

Land disputes in Nimba was a hot topic long before Interpeace's arrival on the scene, and resources had been invested in clarifying the nature of the problem. Interpeace provided a very solid interpretation of the land issue from the perspective of this Evaluator. Most of the value of the research, however, lies in Interpeace's nuanced presentation of the lesser-known but still emotionally charged conflicts in Nimba County. In particular, it highlighted the following:

- Property disputes were both a rural and urban phenomenon, and while some disputes stemmed from ethnic or political conflicts, other property disputes had no ethnic overtones at all, and were fundamentally economic in nature.
- Ethnic tensions were not always necessarily between what are considered the traditional adversaries in Nimba (Mandingos versus the Manos/Gios). Tensions also exist between other tribes, as well as between youth and elders, and civilians and ex-combatants.
- Ethnic tensions were not always centered on land disputes, but also involved questions of intermarriage, representation in government, social exclusion, recognized citizenship and discrimination.
- Local authorities in some instances contributed to tensions through involvement in land grabs, failure to provide basic services and accusations of corruption.

These issues receive far less publicity but still have a serious impact on the potential for peace and reconciliation in the interior of Liberia. It would have been impossible to put together such a comprehensive list of tensions had Interpeace not endeavored to visit even the most remote parts of Nimba. In particular, the conflict over encroachment on the Gbei forest is an issue that is largely ignored simply because the area is difficult to access. Researchers and governments ignore rural areas at their peril—rebel groups have been known to consolidate power in remote areas such as these, where they can take advantage of resident's feelings of having been neglected.

The Evaluator made some additional observations during the field research component of the evaluation that she feels compelled to add:

- Some land issues are contributing to social breakdown in unexpected, less obvious ways. For example, abandoned buildings in disputed areas on the outskirts of the city are being used as havens for criminals in Ganta. If the land conflicts were resolved, the property could be developed and used, thereby depriving the criminal element of their base. This issue heightens the already urgent matter of addressing land disputes.
- Misunderstandings about the very meaning of land ownership abound in the community. One significant barrier to solving the land conflict is the perception that land belongs to groups rather than individuals. Several citizens expressed how unproductive it is to claim that while no knowledge exists as to the official individual land owner, a certain group de facto "owns" the land. While the government appears to see land ownership documents as existing in a sort of hierarchy, where a deed signed by the president trumps a deed issued by local government, which trumps a certificate issued by tribal authorities, which trumps nothing at all, no one outside of government seems to know about this. In fact, it appears that even though the government asserts that tribal certificates, which are only the first step of a much larger land ownership process, expire in 90 days, many local

residents are making land claims based on the very fact that they have held their certificate for decades, expecting that this will strengthen, rather than weaken, their claim. These very fundamental misunderstandings about the land ownership process seem at the root of many conflicts, making land ownership education a necessary step towards peace.

- Elders said that even if the land conflicts were never resolved, they would not support violence in the community. They were quick to point out, however, that they could not guarantee reprisals and violence in future generations over the issues Liberia is grappling with now. It is incumbent upon the government to take action to address these issues not just to secure peace in the present, but in the future as well.

The recommendations Interpeace proposed to the government were clearly tied to their research results. Some of the recommendations echoed those made by the Ad-Hoc Commission, among other governing and international bodies, such as developing a community-based mediation capacity. Others were intended to address some of the fundamental conflicts of which issues like land disputes are born—particularly those addressing inter-ethnic reconciliation. For example, the recommendation to re-establish a national identification card is specifically intended to address the persistent rumor that Mandingos are not, in fact, truly Liberian citizens. A national identification card held by citizens from all tribes would help to send a message that the government considers Mandingos to be full-fledged citizens, with the same status, rights and responsibilities as all other Liberians.

There are a suite of recommendations aimed at improving the relationship between local government and communities. These ideas are sound. The establishment of a Code of Conduct for government officials, as recommended, will help solidify and publicize our expectations of local authorities. Social audit mechanisms will enhance accountability, which is sorely lacking in rural government. However, it is the opinion of the Evaluator that the corruption that plagues local government is directly linked to the absence of salaries and support from the national government, and thus, while Interpeace's suggestions are reasonable (and highly implementable), it will take a dramatic change coming from the national level to truly overhaul problems at the local level.¹⁰ It is important that communities recognize these obstacles to major reform so that their expectations can be set accordingly.

Drainage project

The drainage project was a highly unusual component for an Interpeace, which does not typically incorporate development efforts into their peacebuilding projects. In this respect, it had the potential to actually “subtract value” by undermining the project's main peacebuilding goals. When social programming is combined with a development project, there is always the risk that the social aspect—in this case, peacebuilding and reconciliation—will take a backseat in some people's minds to the more tangible and visible development effort. Indeed, it appears that some local officials saw the drainage construction as the core of Interpeace's work in Nimba, and only

¹⁰ Local government salaries in Nimba tend to range between \$50 and \$75 per month, while a bag of rice is currently selling for \$34. Government officials are frequently without means of transportation, basic office supplies, or access to computers.

referenced the research and dialog as an afterthought.¹¹ Additionally, a few individuals did not seem to realize that the drainage project was linked to a larger peacebuilding project.

These erroneous perceptions, however, do not appear widespread. The latter seem mostly confined to government officials, who themselves are under significant pressure by constituents to develop the town. This risk seems to have been largely mitigated by a thorough community sensitization by the Interpeace teams at the inception of the project. Overall, it appears that the drainage component did indeed add value to the total project

There are two separate elements involved with the implementation of the drainage project. The first element is the actual engineering of the drainage project. This, of course, involves the process of budgeting, competitive bidding, contracting and finally implementing the work. The drainage element of the project absorbed only approximately 15% of the project budget, but was also costly in terms of the time James Shilue, the Program Coordinator, had to spend on the activities listed above. While these activities are important in their own right, they will not be considered in this evaluation. This is not to say that an evaluation of these activities would not be worthwhile, particularly if future projects intend to incorporate infrastructure development into broader peacebuilding projects. Infrastructure development is, however, neither the expertise of Interpeace nor of the Evaluation team, and thus will be put aside at the present.

The second element of the drainage project is the implementation of this project component in a way that contributed to Interpeace's overall peacebuilding framework and did not cause any further tensions in Ganta City. In this respect, it appears that the project was extremely successful.

Selection of the workers for the project was done by the engineer, some community elders and some community youth from the various tribes. The joint meeting during which the selection took place was the first time members of the various tribes had come together in that manner. Selection criteria were as follows:

- Candidates had to be available and willing to work.
- Candidates had to be willing to accept one another, and "let bygones be bygones."
- Candidates had to contribute to the gender and ethnic balance of the teams
- Candidates had to be able to do the labor, which was physically demanding.

It is possible that a selection effect is at work: the candidates chosen as the most suitable for the project were those that were most inclined to try to reconcile with other tribes in the first place. In that sense, it is possible that this intervention was treating only the "easy cases," leaving out entirely the youth that were the most bitter towards other ethnic groups, most disinclined to work on equal terms with the opposite sex, and most disrespectful to elders. If this is true, then any celebration of the project's success at reconciliation must be tempered by a knowledge that the youth who pose the highest risk to peace and stability remain untouched by Interpeace. This is

¹¹ These were by and large the same local officials that tended to want to use the focus group as a platform to make development request to Monrovia. These officials, it appears, are inclined to view any project in their community through a development lens, summarily ignoring all aspects of a project that do not draw funds directly to their localities.

not to say that there is no value in building the skills and enthusiasm of those youth already inclined towards the Interpeace philosophy—this is indeed a reasonable endeavor for a short-term project. In a longer-term project, however, it might be worthwhile to be sure to integrate the more difficult cases.

There is always a risk that those youth not chosen to work on the project will be unduly upset, causing additional strain in the community. Thankfully, it does not appear that widespread hard feelings were created in the course of choosing employees for the drainage project any more in this project than in any development project. We were told that many youth who had not been chosen as employees gathered around the job site, hoping to serve as a replacement for an unavailable employee, but that, again, is a standard aspect of any development effort in a country suffering from 80% unemployment. This particular road construction effort came at a time in which several NGOs were simultaneously hiring local youth to do road-related projects, so the Interpeace project, while providing important opportunities to certain youth, did not stand out in a way that would generate bitterness among those youth that remained unemployed.

The drainage project, like any employment project, took youth off the road, which several residents of Ganta said directly resulted in reduced tensions in Ganta City. Several interviewees agreed that the employment distracted those that were hired from creating problems, and made them productive—one interviewee likened it to “indirect counseling.” The real innovation was that teams were intentionally constructed to be mixed by both ethnicity and gender. During the work, they could be observed eating together, singing songs from each tribe and sharing jokes. According to the project engineer, “Elders would come around, and some would shake their heads in wonderment to see such a thing.” Some community officials, in the presence of the Evaluator, shared their surprise at seeing a Mandingo woman acting as a supervisor.

Hard though it is to believe, some of the work actually ran ahead of schedule—brushing for which three days were allocated was completed in one; trash removal expected to take four days was completed in three. Sitting around on the job, a problem that seems endemic to Liberian construction projects, appeared minimal. The only very minor conflicts anyone could cite were the times when payments were delayed, which caused, according to one supervisor, “some grumbling.”

According to a representative from the MPW, the drainage project has paved the way for the MPW to recreate the road maintenance teams in a way that is ethnically integrated and conducive to harmonious interaction between genders and tribes. Prior to the war, road maintenance teams used to manage road brushing and basic maintenance for their designated area. The MPW has not yet been able to reestablish these teams, though they are expected to in the future.

In the final analysis, however, it appears that the drainage project was in fact an unexpectedly key component in the overall peacebuilding strategy. The youth that it employed were too young to participate in the focus groups, but saw their parents participating and wanted to play a role in the effort to bring tribes together as well. These youth, then, did not just do a job for money, but rather saw themselves as part of a larger reconciliation effort, which they expected would have a lasting effect—where temporary employment and income might not. Harmony between genders

and tribes was visibly on display in the city center, and employees seemed proud not just of their employment, but to be part of the larger peacebuilding project.

Granted, development projects are not standard fare for Interpeace. Incorporating younger participants might also be achieved in the future through sports competitions with ethnically mixed teams or other integrated activities. If future development efforts are to be pursued in conjunction with peacebuilding projects, it might in many cases make more sense for Interpeace to partner with dedicated development agencies that have the necessary technical expertise. It is the recommendation of this Evaluator, however, that direct development efforts be a) undertaken when they can be designed to have synergies with Interpeace's central peacebuilding efforts in the community, and b) accompanied by sensitization efforts to make sure that the development aspect of the project does not eclipse the larger goal of peacebuilding.

Efficiency

Challenges on the ground

One of the most significant challenges on the ground was the poor performance and ultimate disappearance of the ROM. One of his most important responsibilities was to provide guidance and supervision of the Interpeace teams in the field. Without his presence, teams were forced to take much more responsibility for day-to-day challenges than they were expected to. While they appear to have risen to the occasion, clearly project operations would have been even smoother had the ROM performed to task.

It appears that logistics were an ongoing struggle for the project teams. The second phase of the project took place during the height of the rainy season, which made travel difficult. If teams were traveling in vehicles that, while more than adequate in dry conditions, were not necessarily powerful for the muddy roads. Vehicles were said to lack four-wheel drive and manual transmission. While they ultimately the teams went everywhere they had wanted to go, there were times they had to push their vehicles, and some vehicle-related problems took up to four or five hours to resolve. If Interpeace remains committed to reaching even the most rural environments, it will have to choose vehicles carefully.

It was also challenging to work during the farming season, when people are occupied at all times save the early morning and the evening. This problem was mitigated by the fact that the project team slept in the communities, which made them able to access people for consultation without asking them to sacrifice time that would be spent making a living.

Budget, funding and training

It does appear that delays in the release of funding from Geneva caused minor but frequent inconvenience. Payment to employees both for research and for work on the drainage project came late on occasion. Some dialog sessions had to be delayed and rescheduled because funding did not come in time to pay for the food and transportation for participants. A district conference was changed to a mini-conference because of funding issues. None of these delays disrupted the

project to a large extent, but it might be helpful to try to streamline the movement of money prior to any further work on the ground.

The training on Interpeace methodology was widely considered to have been high quality, though at least one employee said that it came a bit late—some facilitation training did not take place until the staff was already in Nimba, in part to compensate for the A-V training done by FIND which was considered somewhat insufficient.

In Interpeace’s self-evaluation, some project staff, who had been trained in facilitation, had suggested the possibility of being trained in mediation as well. While the Evaluator can understand the natural desire to try to help resolve disputes between parties, training in mediation could actually compromise the fundamental goals of Interpeace’s work: to provide space and facilitation for dialog between parties experiencing tension. The fact that Interpeace was there only to facilitate discussion was well-known to focus group participants, and seemed to take considerable pressure off these individuals, who had grown accustomed to scavenging for deeds and presenting their case. If Interpeace became known to actually mediate disputes, the Evaluator feels it would be impossible for them to facilitate dialogs, in that parties could never “let down their guard,” so to speak. Ironically, then, it can be seen as an advantage that Interpeace researchers have no mediation training.

Relevance as a platform for a national policy

Due to the limited timeframe for the evaluation, it was not possible to fully investigate the program’s potential relevance on a national scale. However, there are some preliminary indications that this project would be highly successful if implemented countrywide.

The Evaluator has substantial experience working in Lofa County, in both the major towns and in the smallest villages. It is her opinion that Interpeace’s program could be highly influential in reconciling conflicts between religions and between ethnic groups, particularly the Lormas and the Mandingos. While many towns in Lofa are ethnically homogenous, several large towns in are “divided” between tribes.¹² Because these towns experience tensions similar to those described in Nimba County, there is reason to believe they would benefit from a similar intervention.

A nationwide intervention could begin to address county-level conflicts, as well. There is reason to worry about relations between counties, not just within them. A number of interviewees expressed concern about potential conflict between Nimba and Grand Gedeh over land issues. Evidently, events as far back as the 1986 coup attempt by General Thomas Queewonkpah (a Mano) against President Samuel Doe (a Krahn) contributed to tensions between Nimbians and Grand Gedehians. One participant had suggested that Interpeace hold a dialog meeting on the border of these two counties. This, of course, was outside of the project’s mandate and was clearly not possible in the compressed time frame, but suggests that a project on a national scale might be useful in addressing conflicts between counties as well as within them.

¹² Examples include Nikebouzu, Kugbemaï and Zewordemaï.

Recommendations

Based on the findings above, the Evaluator makes the following recommendations for the proposed national dialog:

- Establish a clear focal point at the MIA, who attends the training and is expected to continue working at national headquarters throughout the life of the project;
- Revisit the MOU agreed upon between the NGO partner organizations and Interpeace, ensuring
 - a) That it spell out clearly the roles and responsibilities of the partner NGOs.
 - b) That it avoid use of the word “partner” if the NGOs are not expected to have equal influence over the project.
 - c) That it makes clear under what conditions Interpeace may use proprietary logos from other institutions;
- Train all staff on Interpeace’s philosophy and methodology—regardless of their role in the project—to facilitate a consistent message from and set of goals for all staff, and to contribute to national capacity-building;
- Streamline the process of moving money between Geneva and Liberia, particularly funds on which time-sensitive activities depend;
- Revisit the logistics plan to be sure that vehicles are adequate for the field and that activities are coordinated with Liberia’s seasons as much as possible;
- Consider partnerships with development organizations or complimentary activities for youth when appropriate;
- Set clear objectives and precise definitions for concepts that tend to be vague and difficult to measure, such as “capacity building,” “reconciliation” and “peace;”
- Consult police reports, UNMIL reports and other information sources periodically to see if the project is having a measurable impact on conflict reduction and to assess whether there have been any changes in the nature of conflicts since the project’s inception;
- Emphasize Interpeace’s goals and methods to local government officials and incorporate them into the project as much as possible.

Conclusion

Given that Interpeace's project lasted only a short six months, they have been quite successful. Root sources of conflict have been revealed. The lines of communication between project participants of different ethnic groups have been opened. Problems and potential solutions have been discussed freely between focus group members. Representatives for women, youth, ex-combatants and other vulnerable groups felt that their voices were heard and that they influenced the list of government recommendations. In short, many individuals report that their lives were profoundly affected by the process, though it is too soon after the project to rigorously evaluate the claim.

More time would be needed, though, to see the Interpeace project effect socio-political change. It has taken a step in that direction by drawing up recommendations for government action presenting these recommendations to major players in the national government. Moreover, participant interviews—which were almost uniformly positive—indicate that it has motivated focus group participants in Nimba to seek social change, and has given these individuals tools they can use to achieve it.¹³ The DCDC in Saclepea is a sound example of certain people using the skills they learned to try to resolve community problems in a new way. But for reconciliation to take place between ethnic groups on a large scale, rather than just within the confines of the dialog sessions or in the few community initiatives that have followed this project, more work needs to be done. More people need to be trained; mechanisms need to be devised to ensure lessons filter through the communities—beyond direct participants.

There are also questions about the sustainability of Interpeace's progress given the six month timeframe. Most communities need further intervention before the attitudinal and behavioral change can be firmly entrenched, and before broad-based, locally-owned conflict resolution mechanisms can be established. For example, one concern is that communities will have difficulty managing highly sensitive discussions in the absence of Interpeace facilitators. It is not clear whether six months is enough time for participants to be truly comfortable discussing highly sensitive topics without a neutral facilitator present.

Clearly, six months has not been long enough to fully engage local government officials, which is an absolute prerequisite if the project is to “develop local capacity for sustained conflict management and transformation,” as is stated in the project document objectives. Any reasonable conflict resolution mechanism must involve local authorities, even if it they are not the initiators. Local authorities have been, for the most part, entirely untrained in any kind of conflict management, starved of resources, and disconnected from communities—this has not, and cannot, be overhauled in a half-year.

It is imperative that more be done to sustain the progress that has been made and to create these community-approved conflict resolution methods. While it is a very positive sign that relations between ethnic groups are thawing—mostly among project participants, but also situations such as Karnplay's newly created football team and merged youth group—there is far more to be done before conflicts, particularly over land, can be resolved. One Mandingo elder in Ganta, who had

¹³ Slightly fewer than 100 people took place in the focus groups, but over 1000 individuals participated in some aspect of the project as a whole, many during the initial consultation phase.

heaped praise upon Interpeace, put it best to the Evaluator: “Whomever solves these land conflicts will leave a lasting footprint in this town,” he predicted. “But if you come in and can’t solve the land conflicts, then you can pack up your footprint, put it in your bag and take it with you when you leave.”

List of Acronyms

DCDC	District Community Dialog Committee
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
FIND	Foundation for International Dignity
GC	Governance Commission
ICG	International Crisis Group
IRCL	Interreligious Council of Liberia
IPC	Institute for Positive Change
LURD	Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPFL	National Patriotic Front of Liberia
MIA	Ministry of Internal Affairs
MPW	Ministry of Public Works
NDI	National Democratic Institute
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
PBF	Peacebuilding Fund
ROM	Research and Operations Manager
UNPOL	United National Civil Police
UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia

List of Interviewees

Brown, Garmeh	Special Proj. Coordinator	Ministry of Internal Affairs
Chester, Elizabeth		UNMIL RRR
Coleman, Princess	Lead Researcher	Interpeace, Liberia
Cooper, Dorr	Staff Researcher	Interpeace, Liberia
De Wit, Paul	Consultant	Governance Commission
Dolo, Edward	Elder	Mano Community, Ganta
Flomo, Nyah	Supervisor	Norwegian Refugee Council
Garlo, Cerue	Head	Women NGO Secretariat
Gonlepa, Mary	Mayor	City of Sanniquellie
Gbatu, Ranny	Youth Leader	City of Ganta
Gbatu, Milton	Secretary	Concerned Women, Ganta
Jabateh, Hawa	Supervisor	Drainage Project
Jabateh, Vamala	Elder	Muslim Community, Ganta
Johnson, Wilfred Grey	Nat'l Coordinating Officer	UNMIL
Leewar, Joseph	Head Engineer	Interpeace, Liberia
Kaita, Mohammed B.	Elder	Muslim Community, Ganta
Kardamie, Musu	Chairperson	Concerned Women, Ganta
Karnwie, Harrison	Manager	Cocopa Rubber Plantation
Karnwie, J. Menwo	Member	DCDC, Saclepea
Kiawhen, Mohammed	Lead Researcher	Interpeace, Liberia
Koah, Evans V.	House Representative	Government of Liberia
Koisee, Molley	Lead Researcher	Interpeace, Liberia

Konneh, Emma Yei	District Commissioner	District of Sanniquellie-Mahn
Kromah, Varfee	Resident	City of Saclepea
Kumen, Maxin	Head	Initiative for Positive Change
Larmie, Betty	Women's Leader	Town of Karnplay
Myers, Alphonso	Youth Leader	Town of Tappita
Nagbe, Horace P.	Staff Researcher	Interpeace, Liberia
Sahn, Arthur	Chairman	DCDC, Saclepea
Sahn, Thomas	County Inspector	County of Nimba
Sandee, Rachael	Participant	Gbehlay-Geh dialog sessions
Sannoh, Sekou	Youth Leader	City of Karnplay
Sheriff, Habib	1 st Nat'l Vice-Chairman	Nat'l Muslim Council of Liberia
Sherif, Mohammed M.	Head	Interreligious Council of Liberia
Shilue, Jimmy	Programme Head	Interpeace, Liberia
Toure, Alieu	Co-Chairman	DCDC, Saclepea
Tuazama, David	Head	Faith Development Construction
Vokar, Rowina	Secretary	Office of the Mayoress, Ganta
Vonleh, Patrick	Land Commissioner	County of Nimba
Wesley, Natana	Sanniquellie Coordinator	UNMIL Civil Affairs
Vanmore, M. Mambia	District Superintendent	District of Tappita
Vapond, Joseph	Nimba Resident Engineer	Ministry of Public Works
Yelegar, Willie L.	Clan Chief	District of Yarwin-Mehnsosnoh
Zardah, Darius	Township Commissioner	City of Loguatu