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Nimba County Reconciliation Project



Findings and Recommendations

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Joint Programme Unit for UN-Interpeace Initiatives – Liberia Programme
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Implemented by:



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In February 2008, the UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS) and the Swiss based organization, Interpeace, launched a project aimed at supporting reconciliation in Nimba County in order to contribute to the process of sustaining peace in Liberia. During the years of war in Liberia, Nimba County served as a major theatre of combat. Polarization and violence led to the destruction not only of physical infrastructure - but of lives and the entire social fabric. The effects of this period are still a source of tension, and stand in the way of reconciliation between former rivals. In conducting research for this report, extensive consultations were carried out in the County, and a broad range of people participated in the process including members from all ethnic groups, local and traditional authorities, religious leaders and youth and women's groups. The findings presented in this report reflect the views of these participants.

The project was conceived as an inclusive and participatory consultation process to be implemented in three phases: Listening, Visioning, and Action Planning. As this report will highlight, the project phases involved identifying key actors and issues, facilitating discussions, recording areas of convergence and shared vision, and finally putting forward recommendations for action. Over one thousand inhabitants from different settlements in Nimba County participated in this six-month process. The project was implemented by a fully Liberian project team, with three Research Teams being deployed in the six districts of the County to implement the research strategy.

Results indicate that conflict in Nimba County is not exclusively due to tension between Mandingo, and Mano and Gio over private property in urban settings as has been widely reported. Conflict can be found across all districts, and is present in both urban and rural communities. The causes of conflict are varied; most are about land, but there are other important sources such as inter-ethnic disputes, poor governance practices, and apprehension over the relationship between modernization and traditional practices. Conflict in Nimba is therefore not defined by ethnicity - even though in some areas of the County tensions between ethnic groups assume explosive and worrisome levels, in other areas there are reports of successful inter-ethnic collaboration.

It is important to stress that conflict in Nimba seems to be more the result of the *absence of capacities for conflict mediation* than of the existence of deep-seated grievances. In the absence of a strong state presence and with the erosion of traditional structures of authority, normal conflicts - such as community boundary disputes and political disagreements arising from political allegiances forged during the war - remain unresolved and can multiply. In this context, every conflict becomes potentially explosive in itself - and a spark for the rest of the County. Land disputes, ethnicity, and limited state capacities combine to explain the more persistent and explosive conflicts, and are compounded by the absence of effective conflict resolution mechanisms.

At the same time, communities expressed a will to co-exist peacefully and pointed to existing social practices of cross-cutting cooperation. Communities also articulated the need for effective state intervention to support conflict resolution (and development in general),

and demanded the establishment of spaces to conduct dialogue with national authorities and among themselves, as well as suitable methodologies to bring this about.

The consultation process allowed for the identification of conflicts as they are perceived and understood by the population of the County. Participants were asked to identify what they saw as problems and gaps, and to identify measures through which they think each problem can be addressed. They then integrated these measures into a coherent set of activities that if implemented, would help foster overall coexistence and reconciliation in the County. Three basic parameters have been used for the definition of the activities presented here: immediate action; sustainability of effort, and local ownership.

The following recommendations have been formulated from the suggestions, comments, and proposals voiced by participants throughout this process and validated by them:

On land and property disputes:

- Address the urgent and more explosive land disputes as recommended by the Ad-Hoc Presidential Commission on Nimba
- Develop a sound policy framework for the development of a community-based mediation capacity

On inter-ethnic reconciliation:

- Collectively design and implement a public awareness campaign
- Establish Peace Committees: a network of community-based Peacebuilding bodies
- Promote political inclusion of Mandingos
- Re-establish a National Identification Card

On the relationship between local Government representatives and the communities:

- Collectively design and implement Social Audit mechanisms
- Collectively develop a Code of Conduct of the local Government officer

On the tensions between modernization and tradition:

- Establish Peace Committees: a network of community-based Peacebuilding bodies
- Collectively design and implement a County-wide Youth Integration Program

The project was designed to motivate local actors to get involved and take action to address the problems they are facing. Together, these recommendations and the disposition of local actors to engage in constructive activities constitute an important contribution that government authorities need to consider when making policy-decisions in their effort to consolidate peace and promote reconciliation.

The proposed activities outlined in this report do not contain fully developed policy recommendations or operational details that can be immediately put into practice. The

project worked within a limited time frame and included a reasonable scope of action. The recommendations now require further work to put in place procedures to consider the different options, decide on the specific mechanisms for implementation, and arrive at operational detail. This is precisely the right time to establish a collaborative process based on shared principles and goals, in which local actors and national authorities combine efforts - and in the process learn to collaborate and thereby strengthen their relationship. A joint effort between Government and different groups in society to develop such a strategy will be in itself a very important contribution to reconciliation in the County.

1. INTRODUCTION

In April 2008, the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) - Joint Program Unit for UN/Interpeace Initiatives launched a project titled *Supporting Reconciliation in Nimba County* as an effort to contribute to the sustainability of peace in Liberia - a country that has gone through fourteen years of war.

The objectives of the project are to:

- Foster coexistence and reconciliation between ethnic groups in Nimba County;
- Strengthen local capacity for sustained conflict management and transformation;
- Develop policy frameworks and laws that support continued property dispute resolution;
- Facilitate arrangements for compensation over property disputes through the road expansion of Ganta City; and
- Increase employment opportunities for disaffected youth in a way that encourages cooperation between groups.

This report summarizes the activities completed in Phases One (Listening) and Two (Visioning) of the project. The findings and recommendations it contains reflect the views of the residents of Nimba County, as well as their recommendations for appropriate measures to take to mitigate tension around issues such as land and property, inter-ethnic conflicts, inter-generational crisis, and others.

2. BACKGROUND

Liberia was founded in 1822 and became independent on July 26, 1847. Since independence, Liberia has essentially been governed by a dual system of administration - one modern and the other traditional. A settler representative system of government was created to coexist with the existing traditional modes of governance based on either Chieftaincy or Acephalous structures. The difference between modern and traditional is especially apparent in the realm of law, where there is one set of laws governing the hinterland, and another set of laws governing the state. Liberia has also suffered through

long years of autocratic rule and military dictatorship. Among others, these issues form the basis for conflict, and have determined the nature and character of the Liberian state and society.



Years of war exacerbated these problems, making it difficult to move towards a peaceful and reconciled society. Liberia suffered from a complete collapse of the state and its authority, and its social structures were either weakened or collapsed entirely. All fifteen political sub-divisions in Liberia were affected by the mayhem and plunder that characterized the war years.

Nimba County is one of the political sub-divisions most affected by the war. Located in the northeast, the County has been plagued by perennial problems of inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts, land and property disputes, and inter-generational

discord among others. Consequently the occurrence of a series of disputes over property rights in the County led the Liberian government to set up an Ad Hoc Commission to investigate the matter in 2006. The tensions that were reported resulted from the refusal of Mano and Gio individuals to turn over the property of Mandingoes returning from exile which had been occupied during the war years. This led to confrontation between the affected parties and to a riot in Ganta in the middle of the year.¹ There were also reported tensions in other parts of the county between the Gio and Mano on one side and the Krahn on the other, as a result of the legacy of war.

Nimba County was the prime theatre for combat operations during the 14 year civil war and as a consequence has the highest number of ex-combatants; especially from the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) and the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL). Ethnic tensions in the County increased during this period as factions and allegiances began to emerge on the basis of ethnicity, and communities have been left with scars and memories that are still fresh. Moreover, some of the County's current political leadership is associated with war-time armed factions, raising the spectre of the possible use of local ethnic tensions for political gains. Even though many of these issues reflect post-war challenges, the relationship between these communities began to deteriorate long before the war.

It is the combination of these factors that makes Nimba County a case study and an entry point for understanding and explaining potential sources of conflict in post-conflict Liberia, and also the basis for understanding how to consolidate peace in Liberia. The re-emergence

¹Liberia: Refugee returns creating ethnic "time bomb" <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWB.NSF/db900SID/RMOI-6Y93HM?OpenDocument>

of armed conflict in Nimba could politically destabilize the whole country, spreading violence to other parts of Liberia, and threaten economic recuperation by impeding the development of its considerable existing economic resources. The delay in the repatriation of an estimated 40,000 refugees stranded in Guinea as a result of the conflict could lead to instability in the already fragile Guinean state and thereby potentially spark regional conflagration.²

As part of its programs, and upon request from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and UNMIL, UNOPS/JPU-Interpeace decided to undertake a dialogue and research project in Nimba County in order to assist government efforts to address ongoing conflicts in the County and promote coexistence. Interpeace is a Swiss Association that operates in association with the United Nations, with over 14 years of experience in the facilitation of locally-owned and inclusive participatory strategies that strengthen national capacities for consolidation of peace and coexistence.

The project in Nimba, developed together with local actors in Government and Civil Society, aims to facilitate the establishment of a locally owned, consensus-based strategy for reconciliation and coexistence that would commit all stakeholders in the County to a series of concrete measures to prevent conflict and promote durable and peaceful coexistence. The development of an open and inclusive process of consultation, using interviews, workshops and conferences has led to the identification of areas of convergence and understanding, and promoted consensus around specific recommendations that can then be developed into a truly locally-owned and participative plan of action.

Given that Interpeace is proposing the development of a similar effort with a national scope, the project also serves as a pilot for the proposed National Dialogue for Liberia that will be implemented jointly with eight local organizations.

3. METHODOLOGY

The Nimba County Reconciliation Process has been a participatory and inclusive consultation process seeking to understand the way local actors perceive conflict, its causes and its effects, as well as to facilitate a process in which they identify possible ways to address these. The project has been implemented in three phases: Listening, Visioning and Action Planning.

- During the first “Listening phase”, Research Teams engaged in consultations all over the County in order to “map” the issues, which involved identifying the conflicts as

² See **Traditional Forms of Reconciliation in Liberia** (a research project undertaken by the Resource Center for Community Empowerment and Integrated Development for UNDP-Liberia, p 40), Christina Solomon, Sept. 2006, **Conflict analysis and Peacebuilding in Post war Liberia**, and Morris Dukuly (May 2007), **Final Comprehensive Report of the National Consultant on Outreach and Reconciliation in Nimba, Lofa, Bong, Gbarpolu, Grand Gedeh, and Margibi Counties**

perceived by the local population, and then identifying the actors involved and which actors in society relate to each problem and how.

- During the second “Visioning” phase, the Research Teams organized representative Focus Groups in each district to validate the findings, further analyze the identified problems, and facilitate convergence around common goals and recommendations on how to address these.
- During the third “Action Planning” phase, the Research Teams developed specific recommendations to address each identified problem, as a strategy for reconciliation to be implemented through collaboration between national authorities, local communities and civil society. This phase was in itself divided in two tracks:
 - Validation of the proposed recommendations with participants in the previous phase
 - Discussion of the findings and proposed recommendations with the Ministry of Internal Affairs to identify a plan of action.

The present report covers the results of phases One and Two, and its recommendations have already been validated with participants to the Focus Groups as part of the activities in Phase Three.

The research for Phase One covered the six districts in Nimba County, located in northeastern Liberia. The six districts are Tappita, Yarwinmensonoh, Saniquellie-Mah, Saclepea-Mah, Zoegeh and Gbehlay-Geh. These districts have a combined population of 484,602.³ The major ethnic groups in the County are Gio (Dan) Mano (Mah), Krahn (Kruan), Mandingo, and Gbei.



Consultations were undertaken in sixty-four (64) settlements in the various districts: fourteen (14) in Tappita, seventeen (17) in Yarwinmensonoh, four (4) in Gbehlay-Geh, four (4) in Saniquellie-Mah, twelve (12) in Zoegeh and thirteen (13) in Saclepea-Mah. In some of the settlements, such as Ganta and Saniquellie-Mah, consultations were made in several communities / neighborhoods within it. Some of these settlements were visited more than once, in order to conduct follow-up consultations, for a total number of one-hundred and thirty two visits (132) of which eighteen (18) were overnight. See Appendix I for a list of all of the settlements visited.

Over one thousand people participated in this process, be it as interviewees, participants in the public meetings and Focus Groups, or both. Consulting such a large number of

³ United Nations Mission in Liberia, **Nimba County Profile**, gives estimates of the various districts in the County. The estimates are also based on the 1984 census report of the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs. The results of the 2008 census have not yet been released.

people implied a great deal of commitment and effort from the Research Teams, as access to many of the agricultural communities was over extremely difficult terrain. Many of the consultations took place in the evenings and over weekends, in order to adapt the process to the agricultural cycles of the communities.

The settlements are divided between urban and rural. Urban settlements serve as the commercial centers, provider of services, local seats of government agencies, and so on, whereas rural settlements are those in which the community is overwhelmingly dedicated to agricultural activities such as farming and logging.⁴ There are two major industries in the County - Mittal Steel and Cocopa Rubber Plantations - but these are not yet fully operational.

The methodology employed involved the selection and training of local researchers in Participatory Action Research Strategy design and facilitation, including the use of Audio Visual media (A/V) as tools for facilitation. A workshop was organized jointly with the University of Liberia's Kofi Annan Institute for Conflict Transformation (KAICT) in which JPU staff from Geneva and a member of Interpeace's Rwandese partner Institute of Research and Dialogue for Peace (IRDP) provided basic training in the approach and the use of Participatory Action Research methodologies. They visited the Teams during field work to provide direct practical advice. The local non-governmental organisation FIND was a partner in the implementation of the project with direct responsibility over the training and use of A/V for research, implementing a training workshop as well as monitoring A/V activity. After the training workshop, and taking into consideration balance and representation (ethnicity, religion, gender, age), the most suitable candidates were selected as researchers and were divided into three Research Teams, composed of four researchers each. The County was divided into three zones of two districts, making each research team responsible for two districts.



In line with the overall strategy of the project, each research team was responsible for designing and implementing its own operational plan. In selecting the settlements in which the Teams would engage in consultations, the Teams followed pre-established criteria: level of conflict (based on reported tensions); geographical location (central/peripheral); nature of economic activity and type of settlement (urban/rural); and demography (ethnicity, age and gender). The consultation methods included individual

interviews, Focus Group discussions and public (town-hall) meetings.

A basic guideline questionnaire was developed. The Teams carried out two hundred and

⁴ Current distinctions between cities, towns and villages in Liberia do not keep any reference to the relative demographic, commercial or political relevance of a settlement; the Government of Liberia is undertaking an effort to regularize the use of such distinctions. The project is using the neutral term "settlement", distinguishing between them according to the above mentioned parameter.

seventy eight (280) individual interviews, four hundred and sixty nine (469) people participated in public meetings and collective interviews, and two hundred and seventy eight (278) people participated in Focus Group discussions.⁵ In total one thousand and twenty seven (1027) people were consulted. Besides geographic location, the following key social categories were used to structure the consultations: ethnic group (Mano, Gio, Mandingo, Krahn, and Gbei), religious affiliation (Christian, Moslem, and African Traditional Religion), gender (male/female), age (youth/adult/senior), occupation (agriculture, commerce) and position of authority (traditional and statutory). See appendix II and III for a sample Questionnaire and a breakdown of actors consulted.

In Phase Two, the information gathered during the listening phase was used to establish three Focus Groups, one for every two districts in the County. These Focus Groups were composed in a way that was representative of the social actors identified in the previous phase. Thirty persons from different settlements in the districts and different relevant social sectors identified were invited to participate. The participants included youth, women, traditional authorities, religious leaders (Christian, Muslim, and African traditional religion), local authorities, and the main ethnic groups of the County, namely Mano, Gio, Mandingo, Krahn, and Gbei.

Each Focus Group met three times, for two days each session, to discuss the issues reported in the first phase and to identify recommendations on how to address them. Local assistants were recruited to assist with interpretation in each Focus Group. To stress the participatory and inclusive nature of the process each meeting took place in a different settlement. Transportation and lodging costs were covered for participants coming from other settlements.

A workshop on Focus Group Facilitation was organized in collaboration with the local non-governmental organization Initiative for Positive Change (IPC) to strengthen the research groups' skills and allowed them to review and refine their strategies. In the Second Phase participants validated the findings of the previous phase; held discussions on issues raised, identified shared concerns and areas of convergence, and developed proposals would serve as the basis for the Third Phase. At the first sessions, after the group had validated the findings of the previous phase, participants were asked to identify additional persons who in their opinion should participate in the discussion given the nature of the problems on the agenda. Those identified were invited to join the group for the following sessions. As a result of suggestions made by Focus Groups, additional consultations were carried out by the Teams on particular issues and in certain settlements, in order to provide further input for their discussions. 25 additional settlements were visited in this context.

A special note must be made in reference to the Gbei population. During the workshop at the end of the second phase, the Teams recognized that a problem of access to the Gbei-Doru region of Tappita district resulted in an under-representation of the Gbei population in the process. In order to ensure that the project captured their perspectives, it was

⁵A letter of Invitation and informed consent was read and discussed with participants.

agreed that a special effort would be made during the action-planning phase to engage with them directly, carrying out a consultation and Focus Group discussion. Sixty (60) persons from five (5) towns in that region participated in the Listening phase, and one Focus Group session with twenty seven (27) persons took place. The results were consistent with those obtained across the rest of the County; however the Gbei identified encroachment on the Gbei Forest as an additional source of tension.

The Research Teams collectively analyzed the results of their work in a workshop, and together with the Project Coordinator, identified a series of recommendations for activities that could address the problems and gaps identified throughout the two initial phases of the process. These results were validated in a joint session of participants in the three Focus Groups carried out in Ganta City, during which additional suggestions were made by participants.

4. DISCUSSION: Problems and Gaps as Perceived by the Communities

The findings of the Listening Phase of the research are diverse. The Research Teams explored not only areas of tension, but also issues surrounding coexistence. Findings indicate that despite the existence of simmering conflicts and potential new conflict areas in the County, there are elements of coexistence that can be explored to consolidate peace and prevent conflict.

4.1 Problems and Gaps

The Research Teams found that tensions exist across all districts with regard to issues of land, ethnicity, functioning of the state, social change, and the absence of effective conflict-resolution mechanisms. With regard to coexistence, communities referred back to traditional and secret societies, as well as expressed a desire for government intervention.

Thus, despite rifts among and between these groups, there was generally a constructive attitude in the discussions, and the Focus Groups were able to identify consensual recommendations. In addition, they expressed willingness to continue with the dialogue process through the creation of a committee to mitigate the existing problems. The following sections outline the problems and gaps identified across all districts.

4.1.1 Land and Property Disputes

This issue is paramount across all districts because of its economic significance. There are economic benefits attached to the acquisition and ownership of land. Land can bring income from housing, agriculture and mining, and land-related activities are the economic basis of the whole County. The Research Teams found property disputes over land to be widespread in the six districts of Nimba, affecting all types of settlements. Teams found that these property disputes were not only about private property in urban settlements - the type reported in Ganta and leading to confrontation between Mano / Gio and Mandingoes - but extended to other types of property disputes.

Two large categories of land disputes were identified. The first relates to property disputes over privately-owned 'urban' plots of land that are a result of armed confrontation and exile, with both ethnic and political overtones related to alliances developed during the civil wars. The central example of this is the aforementioned conflict over land and property between Mandingo and Mano / Gio in cities like Ganta and Saclepea. This is the type of conflict that has been widely reported in the news and analyzed in reports such as the Ad-Hoc Presidential Commission on the Nimba County Inter-Ethnic Land and Property Disputes in 2006⁶.

In Ganta, the main street is being contested by the Gio/Mano on one side and the Mandingoes on the other. This has stopped the construction of the Ganta General Market, an area claimed by both groups. A Mandingo elder claims that the contested market area is owned by a Mandingo family, while a Mano elder claims that it was Mano who labored as 'plutters.'

Both men made the statements during an FGD in Ganta; the term "plutters" refers to persons subjected to forced labor.

It represents a complex type of conflict, composed of layered tensions (pre-war and war-generated; ethnic and political; economic and social) that combine to form an explosive mix that is difficult to address. Its implications are not limited to the County itself, but extend to national politics through political linkages that originate in war-time allegiances but maintain some relevance today.

The second category has no ethnic or political overtones and is not so clearly related to the history of the civil war. It is largely prevalent in the more 'rural' environments, and concerns encroachment on agricultural land (including forests in the case of the Gbei region) for economic reasons. Its scope is variable; from conflicts between families around specific plots of small dimension in a given town, to issues of communal land demarcation that refer to large swaths of agricultural land. These can be categorized into the following types:

- Disputes over communal boundaries between two or more communities, or between individuals
- Disputes over property between different groups within the same community

Both types of land disputes originate from ambiguity and uncertainty over property rights and boundaries in these areas. These are problems that have existed in these communities over a long period of time but have become more acute because the war has exacerbated the relationship between different ethnic groups and communities.

⁶ Finding- Ad Hoc Presidential Commission on the Nimba County Inter-Ethnic Land and Property disputes (2006)

The motives for encroachment seem to be fundamentally economic, and relate overall to agricultural activity (the Teams did not report disputes around land used for extraction of mineral resources). Some of these disputes find origin in the confusion caused by the introduction - albeit partial and incomplete - of written transaction records and deeds into an environment that until a few decades ago relied solely upon oral agreements and procedures, which themselves have also eroded. These ambiguous procedures, combined with demographic pressures and economic competition both within and between communities, can translate into disputes that given the absence of effective dispute resolution capacities, can turn into violent conflicts that affect both property and people.

Also noted during discussions was the detrimental impact such disputes were having on the general social fabric of the communities. When describing the issue of land, participants often referred to negative qualities such as greed, distrust, dishonesty, lack of love and respect for one another, lack of unity within communities, and disregard for traditional boundaries, relationships, and legal provisions. They also identified a number of factors that constitute sources of land disputes in the County. These include but are not limited to the following; abuse of power and arbitrariness by local authorities who allocate land without due regard to existing property rights both modern and traditional; citizenship and identity; and ignorance on the part of local people about the limits of the power of local authorities.

Although Nimba County is covered by the current laws governing property and land rights and ownership, coexistence with traditional land tenure often leads to situations of tension and ambiguity as referred to above. Among others, the laws governing land and property ownership can be found in the following legal documents: Constitution of Liberia (1986), Public Lands Law, Title 34 Vol. V of the Liberian Code of Law Revised; Aboriginal/Customary Law of Liberia; Property Law of Liberia, Title 29 Vol. V of the Liberian Codes of Law Revised; Natural Resources Law, Title 23 Vol. IV of the Liberian Code of Law Revised; National Forest Reform Law of 2006; and others.

The implementation of these laws in rural areas however, has been made difficult for a number of reasons. Currently, many people living in these areas hold firm to the traditional tenure of land ownership; and it therefore constitutes the predominant form of land ownership. Also, some of the laws governing property and land ownership are obsolete and require reform in order to be seen as relevant.

Gaps Identified

The research identified the absence of dispute resolution capacities in both state and society as a major gap. The origins of this gap include:

- Remoteness, lack of access, dysfunction of and lack of trust in governmental capacities (justice, local governmental officers);
- Erosion of traditional structures of authority, which results in the loss of mediating capacity in the community; and

- Persistent ambiguity and uncertainty regarding property rights, which is expressed in the relationship between traditional and modern legal land tenures.

District	Urban Complex, ethnic and political overtones, related to the conflict	Rural Concerns encroachment on land for economic reasons	
		Between communities	Within communities
Sanniquellie-Mah	Several disputes in Ganta City over individual property between Gio/Mano and Mandingo returnees. Also, both groups are claiming the land in the General Market area, thereby putting a halt to construction.	None recorded	None recorded
Saclepea	In Saclepea City, some Mandingoes are gearing up to fight back (some through violent means and others through legal means) to get back their lands from their Mano/Gio kinsmen.	In Kpein, citizens (Mano) represented by Youth Chairman accused one Jabateh (Mandingo) of taking over several acres of land which belong to the township.	In Nyao Town a rice kitchen (store) was burnt down over dispute for farmland.
Tappita	Dispute in Tappita City, between a family and the District Land Commissioner over the family's claim to private land.	Disputes over farmland between the Kwepea and Zodru communities, and the Doumpa and Zuaplay communities.	Dispute over farmland exists in Yourpea Old Town. Planting has been halted due to the dispute.
Gbehlay-Geh	Disputes in Karnplay City between Gios and Mandingoes. Prior to the Liberian civil war, the site (present market) was owned by the Mandingoes but now contended for by the Gios and Mandingoes.	None recorded	Dispute in Logatuo recorded among members of an extended family over a plot of land.
Yarwinmensonoh	None recorded	Dispute between the Kaipa and Gblougee (Tappita District) communities over Gblougee's alleged encroachment on Kaipa lands. Interventions from the County Authority have not had an effect as yet.	Dispute in Guotoin among members of a family over farmland.
Zoegeh	In Bahn City, the Muslim Community is demanding the plot of land that their mosque was previously on. Presently, a video club is on the spot.	Dispute between Gwalay and Miahplay communities over boundary land led to an incident of minor violence.	Recorded dispute in Beadatuo Town between two families who are related through marriage.

Examples of the different types of conflict by district

Action needs to be taken in order to ensure that these gaps are filled appropriately. Land disputes negatively impact the overall level of conflict in Nimba, and make reconciliation very difficult to achieve - thus making the issue one that must be quickly addressed. For a country emerging from fourteen years of war, the issue of reconciliation constitutes a major pillar for national security.

See appendix IV for an overview of reported characteristics and consequences of disputes by district.

4.1.2 Ethnicity

Although ethnicity is indeed an important factor contributing to overall tensions in the County, it is not singularly responsible for creating tension. The relationship between ethnicity and conflict is not straightforward or clear-cut.

There is the well-documented conflict between Mandingo on one side and Mano and Gio on the other around property disputes in urban settings in the County (Ganta, Saclepea, Saniquillie, Karnplay and Bahn). These tensions pre-date the war, and relate to the processes of historical settlement of the Mandingo community in the County. However political allegiances that developed along different phases of the conflict deepened and expanded these tensions considerably, and are currently being manifested in the problems around property in key settlements such as Ganta.



Although previous documentation from other sources focused particularly on the dispute over property that the displaced Mandingo wish to claim back, this 'fault line' also expresses itself in other ways:

- Around the question of intermarriage - There is resentment arising from Muslim Mandingo men marrying women from non-Muslim ethnic groups, but not allowing Mandingo women to marry into these groups;
- Social exclusion and also self-exclusion of Mandingoes, as expressed in the segregated social interaction reported in some settlements;
- Political exclusion of Mandingoes as evidenced by severe under-representation in the structure of local authority, whose posts are primarily by appointment;

- Reported socially accepted discourse challenging the Liberian 'citizenship' of the Mandingo by other groups, and
- Reported harassment and discrimination of Mandingoes by the authorities at checkpoints and border crossings.

At the same time, it is important to note that inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts are not limited to the aforementioned groups, but are reported to exist between other ethnic groups as well - notably between Mano and Gio or Mano and Krahn and in patterns that change from district to district. Some tensions - such as those involving Krahn and Gio in the district of Tappita - derive from political events in pre-war Liberia as well from events that occurred during the war. During the decade of military rule in Liberia, power struggles arose within the ruling military junta for example between President Samuel K. Doe and one of his colleagues, Thomas Quiwonkpa, the Commanding General of the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL). This situation degenerated into a serious clash between Doe's Krahn ethnic group of Grand Gedeh County, and Quiwonkpa's Gio and Mano people of Nimba County. This resulted into the Nimba raid of 1983 and the subsequent armed incursion led by General Quiwonkpa in November 1985. The outcome of this incursion led to the systematic victimization of people from these ethnic groups.

Similarly, during the Liberian civil war the Krahn generally supported the late President Samuel K. Doe, while the Gios and Mano largely supported the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) and Charles Taylor. While the support of the Mano and Gio people for the NPFL was based on the fact that they saw themselves as victims during the Doe years, many also flocked to the NPFL because of the brutality meted against them by government troops when the conflict started in 1989. Taylor and his fighters invaded Liberia through Nimba County and the government responded with brutal measures against the people of Nimba. Thus, ethnicity was not the source from which the conflict arose, but the conflict generated ethnic hatred and mistrust that continues today. It is within this context that the current tensions should be explained and understood.

In many cases however, the cause of the current ethnic tension is the result of competition over resources within or between communities, with neither ethnicity nor war as originating factors. Therefore, while the origins of these problems may not be rooted in ethnicity, the resulting situations are ethnic-based.

Despite the high incidence of ethnic divisions, there were several reported cases of inter-ethnic coexistence and collaboration in the County. Several of the multi-ethnic communities consulted did not report inter-ethnic tensions and referred to regular practices of collaboration.

Gaps Identified

As was identified with regard to the land dispute issue, there are currently no systematic efforts aimed at reconciling inter-ethnic disputes and preventing ethnic discrimination.

Even within the communities, there is an acute absence of dispute resolution capacities that could be used to address ethnic tensions.

See appendix IV for an overview of reported characteristics and consequences of disputes by district.

4.1.3 Functioning of the State

A perennial feature of the Liberian state has been the lack of good governance, characterized by a problematic relationship between citizens and state authorities. Rather than serving as safeguard for the security of its people, the state has been a source of insecurity. During consultations critical perspectives were expressed in many areas about problematic relationships with local authorities, for the following reasons:

“One day... I saw somebody painting the place and I asked the man ‘who told you to paint this place?’ He said it was [a local authority]. So I said, but I built the place, you didn’t ask me. Why are you painting it? The man ... went back to the local authority. The local authority told him, ‘I tell you to paint the place then you say somebody says you must leave it. Go and paint the place.’ The man came back for a second time... I went there and stopped him, the man left. But, when I went back again the whole place was painted. When I said to [the local authority], he said he wanted to use the place for the NPP office.”

Statement made by a woman involved in a property dispute in Saclepea

- Reported abuse and misuse of power by local authorities, including involvement in land grabbing or in the sale of land and properties under dispute;
 - I.e. in Ganta, a citizen alleged during an interview that the Mayor and City Council have given squatter rights to ex-combatants and other citizens who have since constructed houses on private lands.
 - I.e. in Saclepea it was reported that a group of Mandingoes were told by the Statutory District Superintendent to leave their house, and the house still sits empty.
- Reported failure to deliver basic services to the population and limited coverage of the districts in terms of policing, courts, schools, health centers, etc.;
 - I.e. Tappita, Saclepea, Zogeh, Gbehlay, Geh and Yarwinmensonoh have no referral hospitals. There are two hospitals located in Sanniquellie Mah District.
 - I.e. Communities lack confidence in the judicial system, and mob violence has been on the rise, including revenge attacks and the burning of police stations in Saclepea and Tappita.

- Reported insufficient accountability by local authorities for the expenditure of development funds, and lack of capacity building for the judiciary and infrastructure to support state functioning;
 - I.e. in Yarwinmensonoh, there is a rift between the community and the local authority due to suspected misappropriation of the District Development Fund (DDF).
 - I.e. in Tappita, citizens contend that local authorities are not accounting for funds gained from the sale or lease of public land.
 - I.e. in Saclepea, citizens claim to be excluded from development meetings and activities.
 - I.e. reported charging of fees and kickbacks within the courts.
 - I.e. citizens reported a lack of vital equipment - such as land commissioners without surveying tools.

According local people, one of the factors explaining the incompetence of judicial system is that the magistrates and justices of the peace are greedy and corrupt. Local people regularly complained that *'justice is sold to the rich, while the poor has been denied justice'*. The shortcomings in the judicial system in Nimba County however, are located within the overall weaknesses of the legal and judicial system in Liberia. There are few adequately trained lawyers; those who are trained prefer to work in Monrovia as wages are higher. Moreover, many of those serving as magistrates do not have college degrees; they are graduates of the apprenticeship system, even though the law dictates that to become a magistrate, one must acquire a law degree.

Another reported factor is the interference of informal networks into the working of formal institutions. In the settlements that were involved in this study, there is an increase in the activities of freemasons and associated bodies like the United Brothers Friendship (UBF). The general belief is that members of this fraternity are under oath never to betray each other. For example, if a member of the fraternity has a case against a non-member; all the former needs to do is to use UBF signs and symbols in court for the case to be ruled in their favour. This encourages corruption, abuse of power, and impunity. Therefore, the overall picture seems to suggest that 'local authorities', by omission or commission, are perceived by their communities as part of the problem, rather than as resources for finding a solution.

See appendix IV for an overview of reported characteristics and consequences of disputes by district

Gaps Identified

Based on the experiences narrated above, it is evident that certain gaps exist in the way that the state functions within local communities. These gaps can be categorized as follows:

- Currently, there is the lack of appropriate mechanisms and spaces for a dialogue between the local state authorities and the community;

- The governance system in these areas is seen to be characterized by non-democratic practices by local authorities who continue to abuse their powers with impunity;
- Local people are poorly aware of their rights and there are perceptions of remoteness and lack of interest by local authorities.

These gaps reflect the historical problems that have beset Liberia since independence in 1847. One reason for this has been that modern Liberia is a product of a complex African past. In its formation, the state imposed Chieftaincy power structures on acephalous indigenous structures and in the process adapted indigenous modes of governance to the politics of patronage.⁷ This means that one of the challenges to overcome is the way in which the modern state will coexist with traditional systems of governance. Until now, Liberia has been governed by a dual system of administration and governance with different sets of rules governing the urban and hinterland areas.

Against the backdrop of the above, any attempt to explain and understand the complexities of the relationship between the local communities and the state authorities should be placed within the context of this historical challenge.

4.1.4 Modernization and Tradition

Although many parts of Liberia have been urbanized since independence in 1847, traditional practices continue to have an impact on the way of life of the vast majority of the people. There are many people even in the urban areas that still hold on to their traditional beliefs. This includes those living in the capital, where people form communities inhabited predominantly by people from the same rural communities. In Monrovia there is New Kru Town, Buzzy Quarter, and Bassa Community, inhabited by people from the Kru, Lorma and Bassa ethnic groups respectively. In each of these communities, there are traditional power structures that exercise influence over the inhabitants. Many people stated that they would prefer using such structures for the arbitration of cases then to refer them to the modern systems of governance. In these communities, decision-making and dispute resolution is based on dialogue and mediation; and such informal structures of justice are not only easily accessible, they are also embedded in their culture, and are less costly than the formal court system.

The fact that people maintain these beliefs demonstrates that there is a discord between modernization and tradition in the country. The Listening phase revealed apprehension

⁷ D. Elwood Dunn, "Liberia's Internal Responses to ECOMOG's Intervention Efforts" in Karl P. Magyar & Earl Conteh-Morgan (eds) **Peacekeeping in Africa. ECOMOG in Liberia** (London: Macmillan press Ltd, 1998) p.78

among the Nimba population about the effect of the weakening of traditional structures of authority in the communities as a result of the war and modernization. This is largely manifested in the relationship between elders and youth, the role of ex-combatants in society, and the implementation of the concept of human rights. These issues are discussed below:

Contending social norms and values: While there is an apparently strong campaign in Liberia (driven by both government and non-government actors) against 'traditional practices' that are contrary to basic principles of human rights and due process, such as trial by ordeal, there appears to be concern over simultaneously discarding traditional practices that are worth preserving, and that play an important role in maintaining social cohesion and order. Beyond the very clear trial by ordeal cases, there seems to be uneasiness regarding the introduction of 'rights-based' approaches in a way that is perceived as not considering their effects on traditional norms and values. In some cases these approaches may appear to contradict fundamental customs and values; for example campaigns for children's rights that contradict patterns of family-based economic activity and/or the traditional rights and duties of parents.

"...If you're going to preach Human Rights tell the people their limitations too. Where your rights end, someone else's begins."

Statement made by an elder at an FGD in Tappita

In these communities, children's rights are linked to community rights and norms. For example, the upbringing and development of every child in the community is considered as the responsibility of the entire community. There is therefore a strong notion of a 'community child' as opposed to child rights based on individuality. This does not suggest that children do not have rights in these communities; only that they must be protected and educated in a way that conforms to the norms and cultures of the community.

Tension between youth and elders: Linked to the disruption of community life during the war, communities report inter-generational tensions where elders believe that young people are not treating them - or the social norms and values that they represent - with respect, while young people argue that the elders have made mistakes that de-legitimize them as authority figures. This adopts an extreme form in the case of reported ex-combatants - mostly youth - who held positions of power during the conflict. Some of these youth held positions of authority as town commanders or liaisons of their various military factions, where they made decisions that affected their communities and protected their communities against external encroachments by rival armed factions. They view themselves as 'saviors' of these communities - as it was they who defended their towns and villages during this period, while elders could not do so. They also served as the bread winners for both the old and the young under their authority. Many of these ex-combatants are reported to have maintained a close affinity and have created quasi-communities that do not follow traditional social patterns, but instead are following what has been called a 'law-upon-themselves'. Such experiences during the war years undermined traditional authorities and have constituted a major source of tension in the communities.



Gaps Identified

There are a number of gaps that were identified during the study and these include the following:

- Erosion of community structures that could easily mediate and regulate the crises and conflicts arising from processes of social change;
- Limited awareness of external actors such as the NGOs, CSOs and the government of the perceptions and reactions of the community; and
- Limited capacity of local authorities to support the communities in conflict prevention, management, and resolution.

All of these gaps constitute a real challenge in relation to the increasing tensions between and within the communities that are the subject of this study.

See appendix IV for an overview of reported characteristics and consequences of disputes by district.

4.1.5 A Fundamental Gap: The Absence of Effective Conflict-Resolution Mechanisms

Overall, the fundamental gap identified throughout the consultation process is the absence of effective conflict resolution mechanisms in both State and society. State institutions have not developed the presence or the capacity to resolve conflicts, and the traditional mediating structures of communities have been eroded by the combined effect of wars and modernization. In the absence of a strong state presence and of community-based capacities, normal conflicts such as community-boundary disputes and political disputes such as those emerging from political allegiances during the war, remain unresolved and can multiply. In this context, every conflict becomes potentially explosive in itself, and a spark for the rest of the County.

In addition, the perceptions of remoteness, weakness and lack of fairness in the functioning of the local justice system ('no money, no justice'), and abuse of power by local authorities, point to a worrying gap between state and society. The local population demands state institutions that are effective in addressing their needs and concerns, and state institutions require the local population to rally around their efforts to address these, thus validating and legitimizing their authority. The local interface between state authority and local population is therefore critical, for it is around it that this relationship can be established. However mistrust resulting from perceptions of bad performance of local government representatives prevents such convergence and dilutes the link between

national authorities and population in the County, allowing the emergence of authority voids such as the ones expressed in “mob justice” cases.

4.2 Elements of Coexistence

In the context of their consultations, the Research Teams also explored activities and values that in the eyes of the local population play a role in ensuring social cohesion, and can therefore be used in the context of establishing a strategy for reconciliation and coexistence. The following sections detail the factors that local actors have identified as necessary contributions to establishing such a strategy.

4.2.1 Adapting Traditional Social Structures

Traditional and Secret Societies: The traditional societies are the Poro (for men) and the Sande (for women). Both have served as sources of social cohesion and order in Nimba. The decisions taken by their structures of authority are respected and in some cases considered irreversible. These institutions are so powerful that even ministers or other state authorities that belong to a secret society are supposed to continue obeying its norms, customs, and decisions, or risk being fined or ostracized by the rest of the community. Even in the context of overall the weakening of traditional structures mentioned above, they continue to play an important role in community life.



Among their functions, they have a role in the mediation of community disputes and as such, they constitute an asset in terms of the development of local capacities for conflict mediation and, potentially, for the promotion of reconciliation. Some aspects of their traditions however, are incompatible with principles of basic human rights and statutory Liberian law, such as trial by ordeal and female genital mutilation (FGM), and some have been known to engage in partisan and discriminatory practices. The calls for the strengthening of traditional community structures that emerged from consultations included requests for their reform and adaptation to the new social context - i.e. the integration of representatives of women and youth into the structures of authority. Such changes would be necessary in order to effectively integrate these practices into a strategy for reconciliation.

4.2.2 Cross-Community Activities

As discussed below, the other activities that constitute the basis for coexistence include Cooperative/Koo system, and sports.

Cooperative/Koo System: This is traditional system where members of the community get together and work freely on each other's farms. The owner of the farm is obliged to provide meals and refreshments for people on the day of work. This has become formalized into cooperatives and Susu clubs (money keeping clubs) that establish social solidarity networks that cut across ethnic and religious divides.

"Prior to the civil war, a major unifying factor for the district was a football team called the Fifteen (15) Professional, comprised of all ethnic groups irrespective of their background."

Statement made by an elder at an FGD in Ganta

Sports: The Research Teams found that sporting activities are reported to have a unifying effect in the community. On occasion, sports activities have been held as a way to foster reconciliation. Communities reported that if utilized properly, sport has the potential to help mitigate conflicts and divisions in the County.

4.2.3 Strengthening the Relationship between the Community and Government

Notwithstanding the reported lack of trust in some local authorities, communities openly expressed their wish for government intervention in addressing disputes and assisting them in resolving their problems. Critiques and complaints about Government performance and references to individual cases were usually made in the context of expectations for a stronger and more effective Government presence. There was an express demand for "dialogue" as direct interaction with authorities around the communities' needs and concerns, and for collaborative action such as in the demand to integrate traditional structures into official procedures to address land disputes. Openness to dialogue and a pro-active attitude towards addressing problems are assets to be cultivated on both sides in order to achieve an integrated approach to reconciliation.

5. Addressing the Gaps: A Plan of Action

In the context of the consultation process carried out in the Listening and Visioning phases, participants expressed a variety of suggestions on the ways by which the identified problems and gaps could be addressed. These included demands for action by local and national authorities, calls for dialogue and concerted action between authorities and the communities, and initiatives that could be undertaken by the communities by themselves. There was a common pro-active attitude; the communities readily engaged in the discussion on how to address the problems and promote reconciliation, and in some instances went ahead and implemented a coordinated effort to resolve a problem.

Communities expressed these ideas in their own terms, sometimes with reference to a specific problem, other times as suggestions of a general nature; some were more elaborate while others covered a single aspect of a larger problem. In each Focus Group,

individual participants expressed suggestions that were received with varying degrees of acceptance by the group. The Research Teams registered those that enjoyed a high level of convergence. Two areas in particular registered consensual suggestions in all the Focus Groups:

On the issue of land property disputes:

- The restoration of traditional capacities for mediation in the form of community land committees;
- The reform of traditional committees' membership to acknowledge new social actors: women, youth, Muslims.
- The standardization and clarification of land-related procedures and the training of local traditional authorities on them
- The undertaking of a Land Survey in coordination with local traditional authorities

On the relationship between community and local authorities:

- The need to develop accountability of the local governmental representative vis-à-vis the community
- The need to ensure adequate training of public servants
- The need to institutionalize mechanisms for direct dialogue between local government representatives and the communities



In a workshop in which the Research Team collectively analyzed the information gathered through the process, these diverse suggestions - consensual and those that had a high degree of convergence - were integrated into specific recommendations for each problem and its specific gaps. The intention is to identify initiatives that effectively respond to the perceptions of the consulted population and capture their suggestions and sense of priority,

therefore facilitating eventual implementation and enrolling cooperation for that effect.

Three basic parameters have been used for the definition of the activities presented here:

- Immediate action: these proposals address problems - some of them urgent and explosive- in a way that can illustrate governmental resolve and leadership
- Sustainability of effort: these proposals can be implemented in a way in which they contribute to the development of capacities for on-going community-based conflict resolution, and means to support them
- Local ownership: these proposals directly involve the communities and civil society in the design and implementation of policy responses, in collaboration with national authorities.

These suggestions were validated in a final, general meeting in which the strategy was presented to participants to the Focus Groups and discussed with them to ensure that even though now in a different format and using a different language, their suggestions have been effectively captured and the activities proposed respond to their perceptions and interests. We recommend therefore the following actions as elements that can contribute to the prevention of conflict and the promotion of reconciliation in Nimba County, to be implemented as a collaborative effort between national authorities, local civil society, and the communities in the County:

5.1 Actions addressing land property disputes

Conflict over land is the most prevalent source of conflict in the County; in scope as it is present in every district of the County; in complexity, as it varies from intra-communal disputes to problems that acquire inter-ethnic dimension; and in explosiveness, as land disputes of various nature have led to acts of violence and still have a high potential for violence.

- There is a need to **address the urgent and more explosive land disputes** around private property in cities like Ganta and Saclepea, which involve confrontation between returning Mandingo refugees with Mano and Gio townfolk. Aware of the existence of a previous and important effort by the Government through a Presidential Commission, *we strongly suggest that its recommendations be re-visited and implemented as appropriate.* Addressing these very explosive and urgent cases will contribute significantly to preventing the escalation of violence and to the development of a receptive atmosphere for other reconciliation efforts.
- To address the problem on a more mid- to long-term perspective, it is also vital to **develop a sound policy framework that will lead to the creation of a community-based capacity** that would allow local communities to be able to monitor and mediate issues concerning property disputes, as an integral part in an overall national framework that regulates land acquisition, ownership and disputes.

Accordingly, we would like to recommend that a sort of *multi-stakeholder (Government, civil society, international community) Technical Working Group* be established to develop an integrated framework for the achievement of the following goals and objectives:

- *Development of a methodology for community-mediation*, and capacity for training and support for community bodies;
- *Establishment of community bodies (land committees)* that integrate traditional authorities and new social actors;
- *Harmonization of customary traditions on land ownership* and management with statutory law through land law reform; and,
- *Implementation of land surveys* in coordination with community bodies.

Such a working group should be established as part of general and coordinated efforts that the Government of Liberia is making to address the issues of land reform.

5.2 Actions addressing inter-ethnic reconciliation

Inter-ethnic tension contributes significantly to the overall level of conflict in the County. It is also an issue on which participants in the Focus Groups have been less able to converge. Although initially there is a commonly expressed will to coexist, once the discussion breaks down to everyday expressions of coexistence, the distance between the different groups begins to appear, especially in certain towns and regions of the County. At the same time, there seem to be a series of committed local actors that clearly understand the need to transcend ethnic discrimination and that could lead to a locally-owned and led process. These are actions that could foster such a process:

- ***A public awareness campaign*** should be launched throughout Nimba County under the slogan: *"We Are All One"*. In order to fulfill this task, a Nimba Alliance comprising state, civil society - NGOs, CBOs, Churches, etc., should be created to jointly design the campaign and its plan of action, and monitor its implementation. A range of activities, from collaborative inter-ethnic and inter-faith events -such as sports competitions and reconciliation meetings- to sensitization activities-such as radio programs and sermons- can be integrated under common principles and goals.
- ***Community-based Peacebuilding bodies*** should be created and led by a leadership committed to sustaining peace and reconciliation. A network of County-wide *Peace Committees* could be set up formally throughout the County for this purpose. Local and external NGOs could be identified to carry out training, monitoring and programme development support. Importantly, there is the need to develop community facilitation and mediation methodology in order to achieve the above objective.



- There is also the need to ensure ***political inclusion*** specifically with regard to the relationship between the Mandingos and the rest of the ethnic communities in the County. In this light, Mandingo political participation should be promoted in order to have a balanced representation in government and public bodies. This will also require providing support for on-going efforts aimed at restructuring the immigration service in this County. This relates to border and check point personnel and location. Action must also be taken to pro-actively address the issue of discrimination and abuse of power by

government officers, and towards developing a dedicated capacity and program of work to prevent its occurrence.

- The *National Identification Card* should be re-introduced with clear and non-discriminatory parameters, in order to raise the issue of identity and citizenship above speculation.

5.3 Actions addressing the relationship between community and national authorities

Improving the relationship between the communities and local authorities constitutes an area in which concrete actions addressing problems and gaps can result in big dividends for peace and reconciliation. Participants stressed the need to promote and strengthen an accountable and democratic system of governance at the local level. Given the reported practice of mismanagement of funds allocated for local use by local officials, the participants recommended that a mechanism should be put in place for the former to be accountable to the latter; and that there should be a procedure for releasing funds from the central to the local level that will reduce corrupt practices. Public sector reform should therefore include decentralization of authority as one of its principal ingredients. Through decentralization, local people can have say in who becomes their leader and how decisions are made about their human security needs.

As a concrete measure that could be explored in the short term, we would like to propose the following actions for consideration:

- A **Code of Conduct** should be developed for local government officials. The development of such a code should involve the participation of civil society and other local public bodies in order for it to be locally owned and legitimate. There must be a commitment to effective implementation of this through investigation of violations and subsequent imposition of sanctions when required;
- A **Social Audit** mechanism institutionalizing the relationship between local government officers and wider society should be developed, including a commitment to effective implementation through investigation and sanctions for violation.
 - As an initial part of this, a *Local Governance Survey* should be implemented in order to map out existing deficits;
 - A County-wide *Social Audit Programme* addressing these deficits should be established;
 - The aforementioned *Peace Committees* could provide and manage the social space where constructive government-community interaction takes place, and
 - A *Public Awareness Campaign* should be developed jointly with civil society and community actors.

5.4 Actions addressing problems of modernization and tradition

Given the increasing tensions between modernization and tradition and its effect in communal life, it is also important to take certain measures that could strengthen the capacity of communities to address tensions emerging from this process. These include but are not limited to the following:

- The need to establish **community based Peace-building bodies** that can facilitate and mediate tensions and conflicts arising within communities. These *Peace Committees* could promote and strengthen consensus building approaches to resolving problems. These bodies can also work to strengthen the relationship between the communities and national authorities through regular dialogue, consultations, and awareness-raising activities.
- Given the demographic change in the County and rising youth population, there is a need to develop a **County-wide youth programme** through which government, communities, NGOs and the international community can collaborate in the development of a series of activities that aim at ensuring the integration of youth in their communities. The focus of such a programme should be education, training, and economic and social integration of youth into wider society.

6. CONCLUSION: A STRATEGY FOR RECONCILIATION

It is important to stress once more that conflict in Nimba seems to be more the result of the absence of capacities for conflict mediation than of the existence of deep-seated grievances. In the absence of a strong state presence and the erosion of traditional structures of authority, normal conflicts such as community-boundary disputes and political disputes such as those emerging from political allegiances during the war, remain unresolved and can multiply. In this context, every conflict becomes potentially explosive in itself, and a spark for the rest of the County.

The consultation process carried out in this project has permitted the identification of conflicts as they are perceived and understood by the population of the County. Beyond the problems and gaps identified however, the purpose of this project has been to facilitate the identification of measures through which local actors believe each problem can be addressed, and integrating them into a coherent set of activities that will foster overall coexistence and reconciliation in the County. The process envisaged mobilizing local actors to take action and address the problems they are facing. Together, these recommendations and the disposition of local actors to engage in constructive action constitute an important contribution to the policy decisions that governmental authorities need to take in their effort to consolidate peace and promote reconciliation. These measures would be complementary to those that the Ad-Hoc Presidential Commission on Nimba has formulated.

The proposed activities outlined in this report do not contain fully developed policy recommendations or operational details that can be immediately put into practice. The project worked within a limited time frame and included a reasonable scope of action. The recommendations now require further work to put in place processes to consider the different options, decide on the specific mechanisms for implementation, and arrive at operational detail. This is precisely the right time to establish a collaborative process based on shared principles and goals, in which local actors and national authorities combine efforts and in the process learn to collaborate and thereby strengthen their relationship.

The Government of Liberia, with the support of the international community, has already been developing initiatives to address at the national level some of the problems identified in this project for Nimba. We do not believe that any of the recommendations proposed for Nimba should substitute or duplicate on-going efforts. The intention is to integrate different institutional undertakings into a focused and concerted effort to address the problems of a conflict-ridden part of Liberia and not to develop a centralized body of activities under the responsibility of a single agency. A joint effort between national authorities and local actors in this endeavor will be in itself an important contribution to the reconciliation of the County. Our team hopes to be able to continue contributing to the development and implementation of these policies as may be needed.

Attachments:

APPENDIX I: Districts and Settlements Visited

APPENDIX II: Sample Questions

APPENDIX III: Overall Number of Participants divided by District and Type of Activity

APPENDIX IV: Reported Characteristics and Consequences of Disputes by District

APPENDIX I: Districts and Settlements Visited

(Additional settlements visited during the Visioning phase appear in italics)

Sanniquellie -Mah	Zoegeh	Tappita	Saclepea-Mah	Gbehlay Geh	Yarwinmensonoh
1. GANTA CITY	1. BAHN CITY	1. TAPPITA CITY	1. SACLEPEA CITY	1. KARNPLAY CITY	1. ZAHNZAYEE
2. SANNIQUELLIE CITY	2. MIAHPLAY	2. DIALAH	2. LOYEE	2. LOGUATUO	2. DORPA
3. ZULUYEE	3. GWALAY	3. KWIPKA	3. BLEEVALAY	3. KPAIRPLAY	3. KWENDIN
4. GBUYEE	4. GBLAH	4. ZOULAY	4. BLEEVALAY GARAGE	4. LOWLAY	4. GEAPA
5. YEKEPA	5. LOUPLAY	5. GBLONLA	5. NYASSIAN	5. DOUPLAY	5. BOYEE
6. GBARPA	6. GBARPLAY	6. ZUAPLAY	6. NYAO		6. DAHNPA
7. SEHKANPA	7. BEHYEEPEA	7. ZEONGEN	7. DUOMPA		7. SAHNPA
8. SEHGEH	8. BEADATOO TOWN	8. ZUOTUO	8. GBANQUOI		8. GANWEE
9. DAHNLORPA	9. BEEPLAY	9. YOURPEA OLD TOWN	9. KPEIN		9. BEINGLAHN
	10. WHEA NEW TOWN	10. YOURPEA NEW TOWN	10. BOYEE		10. GLEHYEEZORPEA
	11. GBORLAY	11. BEATUO	11. VADUKI		11. GUOTOIN
	12. GROUZANPLAY	12. BEHWALLAY	12. WEINTIA		12. ZEKEPA
	13. BEEPLAY	13. KPARBLEE	13. VENN		13. VOIPA
	14. MIAHPLAY BONA	14. GRAIE	14. NYAO		14. KARYEE
	15. WEA BEADATUO	15. DORGBOR TOWN	15. GBANQUOI		15. SENDIN TROPA
		16. GLAHN TOWN	16. KPEIN		16. KAIPA
		17. FREEMAN TOWN			17. KPOWIN
		18. ZARWULOGBO TOWN			18. BEINGLAN
		19. CAMP No.1			19. GOKORPA
		20. ZEONGHEN			20. TUHNWIN
		21. ZODRU			21. YEEFIAN
		22. TUANPEA			
		23. BOE-BONGLAY			

APPENDIX II: Sample Questions

SOCIAL / RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PEOPLE

What are the major issues or things that you think could help all of us, including your children and mine to live together as one people?

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

How are disputes settled within the community?
Where & by whom?
Are you satisfied with the way in which disputes are settled?

CULTURAL / RELIGIOUS

According to your faith/belief, what strengthens and what undermines peace?
Which kind of cultural practices do you think can help us to come together?
Which ones divide us?

COMMUNITY DECISION MAKING PROCESSES AND STRUCTURES

How are decisions reached in this community?
Who are the decision makers?
Are women involved in decision making?
Are youth also part of the decision making mechanism?

ECONOMIC

In case someone wants to purchase a piece of land to build for example their house or a factory, what is the means of acquiring it?

GENERAL

Name some of the major issues if not handled will be an obstacle to peace in this region

Who are those that you think can help to remove potential obstacles to peace and development in this community?

APPENDIX III: Overall Number of Participants by District and Type of Activity

In every district Research Teams ensured that there were participants from all groups across the communities. This means that Women, Youth, Traditional Leaders (and their community members), Religious Leaders (and their community members), and Local Authorities were as widely consulted and represented as possible. The following tables present the overall number of participants by district and type of activity.

Overall Number of participants

	Saclepea-Mah	Zoegeh	Sanniquellie-Mah	Gbehlay-Geh	Yarwinmen-sonnoh	Tappita	Total Number of participants per type of activity
Individual Interviews	42	28	21	75	36	78	280
Public Meetings	175	81	13	74	110 (approx)	16	469
Focus Groups	73	30	24	47	57	47	278
Total Number of Participants per district	290	139	58	196	203	141	1027

APPENDIX IV: Reported Characteristics and Consequences of Disputes by District

Saclepea-Mah

Issue	Characteristics	Consequences
Land Dispute Farm land House Spot Boundary land	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Authorities using their influence to acquire land. ▪ Lack of knowledge on the part of local authorities in terms of their power/function with regard to land. ▪ Failure to follow the proper procedure in acquiring land – by those who seek to acquire land. ▪ The feelings of some members of groups that they are more citizens than others -and therefore more entitled to the land or to be sole owners of the land. ▪ Disregard for traditional boundary land– by contending parties. ▪ Dishonesty on the part of those that sell land illegally as well as on the part of those that purchases the disputed land. ▪ The breach of established traditional relationships –I.e. prior to the civil war there was friendship between the Mandingoes and Manos in Saclepea City. ▪ The lack of love for one another. ▪ The demographic pressure on land due to increase in population – there is a need for more land, especially for farming. ▪ The economic benefits attached to the acquisition and ownership of land. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The burning of whole villages and rice kitchens, and the cutting down of cash crops (rubber, cocoa, and coffee) in Nyao. ▪ The creation of ethnic divisions between the Mandingoes and Manos, especially in Saclepea City and its surroundings. ▪ The demand for land has also turned family members against each other (reported with an example referring to a situation among a Mano family). ▪ Animosity has reportedly developed between the local authority (Commissioner) and citizens in Kpein.
Intermarriage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tensions arise between groups of different faiths - It is reported that the Mandingoes said that the Manos/Gios are not Muslims and do not pray). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Animosity between the Mandingoes and Manos, especially in Saclepea City.
Poor Judicial System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The impression that justice is available for the rich, but not for the poor. ▪ Partiality – on the part of the local authorities in handling cases ▪ Magistrates and JPs are seen to lack proper training to dispense equal and balanced justice ▪ Societal interests -- e.g. Fraternity (United Brothers of Friendship). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A series of mob violence in the District, especially in Saclepea City (burning down of the police station) ▪ Reported animosity between/amongst community members, and existing dispute resolution mechanisms are either ineffective or weak
Lack of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Corruption and greed are reportedly prevalent. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Perceived increased/continued corruption among local authorities.

Saclepea-Mah

Issue	Characteristics	Consequences
Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Disregard for the plight of citizens by local authorities. ▪ Exclusion of citizens from development meetings and activities. ▪ Neglect on the part of local authorities to carry out development activities within the district. ▪ Reported refusal of local authorities to account for development funds given by government and other humanitarian agencies, as well as GSM companies operating in the district. ▪ Reluctance of citizens to critique the authorities for fear of reprisals. ▪ Perceived refusal of authorities to accept the views of citizens. ▪ Lack of communication between local authorities and citizens. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Under-development of the District and communities.

Zoegeh

Issue	Characteristics	Consequences
Land Dispute Farm land House Spot Boundary land	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The economic value attached the acquisition and ownership of land (i.e. rubber, cocoa, and coffee). ▪ Partiality/Biases on the part of those that handle land cases. ▪ Root causes of land conflicts are not being addressed by those that handle the disputes. ▪ Failure to come up with permanent boundary demarcation. ▪ Dissatisfaction over judgments/decisions taken by the authorities that handle land issues. ▪ Continual use of violence in the retrieving of land. ▪ Failure to respect formal agreements – e.g. land sale agreements. ▪ Influence of government officials. ▪ Influence of money in the outcomes of cases. ▪ Ignorance on the part of those that sell and buy land, in terms of the procedure to follow in acquiring and owning land. This can lead to future disputes over who is the rightful owner of the land. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The land problem has resulted to the burning of whole villages and rice kitchens, and the cutting down of cash crops (rubber, cocoa, and coffee) in Nahla. ▪ Divisions have arisen amongst Gios themselves, and between the Gios and Mandingoes. ▪ The demand for land has also turned relatives within the same town against each other – reported in a case where two families have are related through inter-marriage.

Zoegeh		
Issue	Characteristics	Consequences
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Failure to follow the proper procedure in acquiring land ▪ Disregard for traditionally established boundary lines ▪ Lack of love, respect, and mutual understanding. ▪ Breach of established traditional relationships. ▪ Demographic pressure on land – i.e. increase in population. 	
Intermarriage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tensions arise between groups of different faiths - It is reported that the Mandingoes said that the Manos/Gios are not Muslims and do not pray). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Animosity between the Mandingoes and Gios/Manos, especially in Bahn City.
Poor Judicial System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The impression that justice is available for the rich, but not for the poor. ▪ Partiality – on the part of the local authorities in handling cases ▪ Magistrates and JPs are seen to lack proper training to dispense equal and balanced justice. ▪ Social/Fraternity groups are active - e.g. United Brothers of Friendship. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Created animosity between/amongst community members, and within families. ▪ Existing dispute resolution mechanisms are either weak or ineffective. ▪ Created extra financial burdens on people, in that if one wants to seek redress of an issue, he/she has to have enough money to register a case and get the process started. ▪ Led to mob violence, especially in Nahla, where one family burned down the village and rice kitchen of another family.
Lack of Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Perceived corruption and greed on the part of the authorities. ▪ Reported refusal of local authorities to account for development funds given by government and other humanitarian agencies, as well as GSM companies operating in the district. ▪ Reluctance of citizens to critique the authorities for fear of reprisals. ▪ Perceived refusal by authorities to accept the views of citizens. ▪ Lack of communication between local authorities and citizens. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reportedly increase in corruption among local authorities. ▪ Ongoing under-development of the district and communities.
Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of relationship between police and citizens. ▪ Reported lack of proper training for community police on how to appropriately deal with civilians. ▪ Lack of awareness and sensitizations between the police and community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Communities now feel that police are not concerned for their security. ▪ Animosity between the police and the communities. As such, community members are often opposed to police arrest of any citizens.
Breakdown of Traditional/Cultural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Introduction of western ideology and culture into rural/traditional communities, by Human Rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Animosity between children and parents, resulting in disrespect of elders and parents.

Zoegeh		
Issue	Characteristics	Consequences
norms and values	<p>organizations which are seen to erode traditional/cultural practices and beliefs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Intrusion of religious beliefs (Christianity & Islam) into the African Traditional Belief (ATB). ▪ Some youth believe that they have money while the elders do not, a reason why youth have no respect for the elders (according to the participants). ▪ Lack of traditional and formal education. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ During the war some schools were used as training grounds by rebel groups. Similarly, sacred institutions like the Sande and Poro societies that once provided traditional education for youth were severely destroyed and their relevance as well as status effectively challenged by young rebel soldiers. ▪ High illiteracy

Tappita		
Issues	Characteristics	Consequences
Land /Property Disputes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Property disputes occur over urban, rural and boundary lands amongst a variety of actors; individual families versus local authorities or other families, or between different groups. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ I.e. Urban land dispute (a family vs. the District Land Commissioner) ○ I.e. Farmland dispute (Doumpa and Zuaplay) ○ I.e. Boundary land dispute (Kwepea and Zodru) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Dishonesty ▪ Violation of laws governing the land ▪ Lack of respect for each other ▪ Lack of unity among citizens
Ethnicity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Problems with intermarriages – the Mandingoes are said to refuse to give their daughters’ hands in marriage to men from other tribes. ▪ Rift between the tribes due to their involvement with warring factions – Primarily between Gio, Mano, Mandingo and Krahn tribal groups. ▪ I.e. Longstanding tension exists between Krahn and Gio in the District because of atrocities meted against each other during the civil war. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tribalism ▪ Lack of trust ▪ No love and forgiveness
Human Rights Versus Traditional Norms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Erosion of traditional means of child rearing - it is felt that Human Rights organizations interfere in the traditional way of up-bringing of children. ▪ Impression exists that the rights of criminals have overtaken the traditional means of punishment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Citizens are perceived to violate traditional norms when/if they follow western/modern practices and/or Christianity. ▪ Children are no longer working for their parents.

Tappita		
Issues	Characteristics	Consequences
<p>Poor Judicial System</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Citizens lack confidence in the Justice System. ▪ Bond fees are charged at the sole discretion of the Magistrate and not according to statute. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Citizens lack education/ information on the functions of the people in authority. ▪ Citizens take the law into their own hands. ▪ Lack of respect for the rule of law. ▪ Long stay of some law enforcement officers in one location - the Government is failing to effectively enforce its rotational assignment policy. Settlements are deprived of checks and balances, accountability and transparency.
<p>Discord between Community and Local Authority</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Existing rift between the community and the local authority in which the local authority reportedly overuses their power and the community revolts and refuses to cooperate in response. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Delay on the part of local authority in handling cases brought before them. ▪ Some Mandingoes are voluntarily returning from exile having lived in neighboring countries for a protracted period. As a result of ties established outside, people are illegally bringing in foreigners (Guineans & Ivoirians) and introducing them as their brothers and sisters. As reported by the Tappita Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization (BIN). ▪ It is reported that Immigration officers harass some Mandingo citizens as a way of getting money in spite of possession of legal documents.

Sanniquellie-Mah		
Issues	Characteristics	Consequences
<p>Land</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Wide spread and explosive tension. ▪ Construction of the Ganta Market has come to a standstill due to separate claims over the land being made by Mandingo and Mano. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of trust
<p>Ethnicity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No intermarriage between Mandingo women and non-Mandingo men – while non-Mandingo women are married to Mandingo men. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of trust ▪ Groups are demonstrating religious intolerance (majority Mandingoes are Muslims and majority Manos and Gios are Christians)

Gbehlay-Geh

Issues	Characteristics	Consequences
Land	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Split between the tribes over land disputes has brought development activities such as market, clinic and school to a standstill. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of trust amongst the various tribal groups and by implication GoL authorities responsible for handling governmental activities in the district.

Yarwinmensonoh

Issue	Characteristics	Consequences
Land Dispute Farm land Boundary land	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Land disputes exist within and between communities over farmland and traditional boundary land. ▪ i.e. Farmland dispute (Kaipa and Gblougea) ▪ i.e. Traditional boundary land dispute (Kwedim and Gbei – Camp # 1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increase in population; ▪ Self-proclaimed ownership and illegal possession of land; ▪ Planting of tree crops – especially rubber as opposed to food crops. The shift is contributing to an increase in the rubber sector; ▪ Lack of harmony; ▪ Parents planting seeds of hate and hostility among future generation
Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of information on how development fund is being used and a system to ensure same; ▪ Lack of proper accountability to citizens. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The District has bad roads and bridges that have not been conditioned by Government since 1984. ▪ The District lacks all basic social services.
Poor Judicial System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of proper training for judicial staff; ▪ Judges accepting bribes; ▪ Overlapping of functions by judicial officers; ▪ Lack of rotational assignment of judicial officers; ▪ Insufficient number of police officers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Community dwellers do not have confidence in the Justice System, thus resulting into taking the law into their own hands
Rift between Community and Local Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Local authority don't know their functions; ▪ Citizens do not know their roles/rights and they overlook the authority; ▪ Human Rights organizations are pushing citizens against their local authority 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Existing rift between the community and the local authority in which the local authority on one hand overuse their power and the community on the other, revolt or refuse to cooperate
Spread of Epilepsy through Witchcraft	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increase in the number of affected people in Gokorpa, Gbah and Yeefen. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of treatment and/or care centers for epileptics ▪ The witches responsible for the spread still live among us