

JOINT PROGRAMME UNIT
FOR UN/INTERPEACE INITIATIVES
JPU

Peace in Liberia

Challenges to Consolidation of Peace in the eyes of the communities



A Report by the
Platform for Dialogue and Peace in Liberia



Made possible with the support of the UN Peacebuilding Fund

Foreword

Interpeace and all of its collaborating partners are immensely pleased to release this report that highlights local communities' views of conflict as they feel its pinch in their respective communities. We release it with the fond hope that the government and people of Liberia, the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and all stakeholders -those like us, with the avowed and common pursuit of consolidating peace and stability in Liberia- will pay keen heed to its prescriptions.

The report covers diverse issues of conflict generated after nearly one year of intense field work, copious record keeping, and audio-visual tracking of the field processes. Research teams from our local partners applied lessons from participatory methodologies developed by Interpeace, along with their own knowledge of the socio-economic, political and cultural context of three regions, in a nationwide research consultation. They reached remote villages and towns in northwestern, central and southeastern Liberia using introductory letters from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and obtained essential briefings by UNMIL regional military commanders and civil authorities in designing strategies for sampling key communities for consultation in the fifteen counties. Those consulted included local authorities, traditional leaders, youth, women, elders, religious and other citizens and residents, ensuring the participation of marginalized and disabled persons.

Key findings of the research are diverse. These issues have nonetheless been categorized under five themes including: (1) land and property disputes; (2) local governance; (3) rule of law and security; (4) discrimination in citizenship/differences in identity, ethnicity and religious/cultural practices, and (5) unemployment and access to resources.

Community suggestions to resolve these multiple conflict issues range from calls for further dialogues in determining the ways forward, the need for direct intervention by the administration and other stakeholders to concerted sensitization and educational initiatives to enhance trust, national solidarity and co-existence for lasting peace in the country. Full itemizations of these suggestions are included in various annexes to the report. A key concern also expressed by participants is that problems specified in this report should be analyzed and included in subsequent phases of the Platform for Dialogue and Peace in Liberia (P4DP) for the derivations of policy options that help respond to the identified conflictive issues in order to seal possible relapse of violent conflicts in the country.

And indeed, this is our intention. The information hereby presented will serve as the basis for the continuation of the engagement between key actors in state and society in Liberia, in the search for policy recommendations that will allow our country to consolidate peace and prevent relapse into war.

On behalf of the Director General of Interpeace Scott Weber, the Director of the Joint Programme Unit for United Nations/Interpeace Initiatives (JPU), Bernardo Arevalo de Leon and colleagues in Geneva, as well as our strategic partners the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Civil Affairs Unit of UNMIL, we remain grateful for all the support and cooperation accorded to this project. We also remain highly indebted to the eight collaborating Civil Society Organizations. The success of this participatory research effort and of the Nimba follow-up interventions has been the result of the dedicated efforts of FIND, PBRC, IPC, LDI, WANEP, KAICT, IRCL and WONGOSOL that implemented the field level work in the 15 counties.

It is my delightful pleasure to extend heartfelt thanks and appreciation to Dr. Sam Gbaydee Doe, who continues to collaborate with this effort providing his insights on challenging peacebuilding problems. Special thanks go to the Liberian people for effectively participating in this phase of the research and for confiding in P4DP that has enabled us to make this achievement. It is hoped that we can further count on your trust and that the cooperative spirit will continue until, we all as Liberians, through these endeavors, find solid anchors of peace.

In this public manner, I wish to state that this project would not have been possible without the institutional support of the Interpeace Liberian staff. They included the Research and Operations Manager, Edwin Dorbor; Audio-Visual Coordinator, Paul Samuels; Administrative and Operations Officer, Doe Tugbeh; Research Support and Monitoring Officers: Princess C. Coleman; Fatoumata Fofana, Horace Nagbe and Yourfee Kamara. Others were office assistants: Ruth Brown and Joyce Wilson, chauffeurs: Kwame Toffoi and Abraham Kromah. Exceptionally, I am eternally indebted to the unflagging loyalty of my Administrative Assistant, Gbawu Flomo Woiwor. To you all, I must say, we have done this great task together and must individually be proud of ourselves.

Our appreciation goes to the Peacebuilding Fund, to the Liberian Peacebuilding Office and its staff under the leadership of Wilfred Gray Johnson. Similarly, we say thank you to our colleagues at UNOPS, UNDP and other UN organizations that directly or indirectly supported our programme. Above all, we like to thank all of those who participated in this effort but due to space and time we cannot mention all of you.

James Suah Shilue
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Platform for Dialogue and Peace in Liberia (P4DP)
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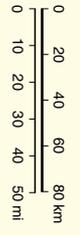
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The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.



LIBERIA

- International boundary
- County boundary
- National capital
- County capital
- Town, village
- Road
- Railroad
- Airport



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Glossary of Abbreviations

AFL	Armed Forces of Liberia
AU	African Union
CDF	County Development Fund
CDSS	County Development Support Secretariat
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Accord
CRC	Cavella Rubber Corporation
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DDC	District Development Committee
DDF	District Development Fund
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
FDA	Forestry Development Authority
FIND	Foundation for International Dignity
ICGL	International Contact Group on Liberia
IPC	Initiative for Positive Change
IRCL	Inter Religious Council of Liberia
ITI	International Trade Industry
JPU	Joint Programme Unit for UN/Interpeace Initiatives
KAICT	Kofi Annan Institute for Conflict Transformation
LACC	Liberian Anti Corruption Commission
LDI	Liberia Democratic Institute
LISGIS	Liberian Institute of Statistics & Geo-Information Services
LMEM	Land Mines and Energy Ministry
LNP	Liberia National Police
LURD	Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy
MIA	Ministry of Internal Affairs of Liberia
MODEL	Movement for Democracy in Liberia
NBVA	National Bureau of Veteran Affairs
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
NPLF	National Patriotic Front of Liberia
PBRC	Peace Building Research Center
PBSO	Peace Building Support Office
PMC	Project Management Committee
P4DP	Platform for Dialogue and Peace in Liberia
SCDC	Special County Development Council
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's' Fund
UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
UNRISD	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
WANEP	West Africa Network for Peacebuilding-Liberia Chapter
WHO	World Health Organization
WONGOSOL	Women NGO Secretariat for Liberia

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“There will come a time for the peacekeepers to leave this country. When they leave, we, ourselves, will have to settle our own problems.”



*It goes like this:
In solving our own problems, we must not use violence. I believe that is what will make us to come back together.”*

Zwedru, Grand Gedeh County

The Platform for Dialogue and Peace in Liberia (P4DP)

In 2006 the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) invited Interpeace to explore, through the Joint Programme Unit for United Nations/Interpeace Initiatives (JPU), the possibility of developing an intervention in support of efforts by national authorities and the international community to consolidate peace in the country. In the course of its initial explorations and in coordination with the Ministry of Internal Affairs, it was agreed that a pilot project should test Interpeace/JPU's approach in Nimba County, given the level of tensions and conflict in that county and the need to support ongoing governmental efforts addressing them. The Nimba Reconciliation Project, funded by the Peacebuilding Fund, engaged the population of the six districts of the county in a research and dialogue process intended to identify critical issues and a series of concrete recommendations to foster reconciliation among the county's different social groups. After its completion in 2008 the project was successfully evaluated, with the ensuing decision to roll-out the effort at the national level: a nation-wide consultation process would identify critical issues as perceived by the communities, to be followed by a collaborative in which state and society would join forces in the development of concrete policy recommendations that provide a response to the identified needs. This is the Platform for Dialogue and Peace in Liberia (P4DP). It seeks to achieve a broad national consensus and foster concrete measures addressing critical issues for the consolidation of peace in the country.

The JPU, which is an operational unit of the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), is implementing P4DP in coordination with the Ministry of Internal Affairs. A fully Liberian team of the JPU coordinates the implementation of this effort with a key group of eight Liberian civil society organizations: Liberia Democratic Institute (LDI), West Africa Network for Peacebuilding - Liberia Chapter (WANEP), Initiative for Positive Change (IPC), Kofi Annan Institute for Conflict Transformation (KAICT), Foundation for International Dignity (FIND), Peace Building Resource Centre (PBRC), Women NGO Secretariat for Liberia (WONGOSOL) and Inter-Religious Council of Liberia (IRCL). Implementation through a national team and a group of key partners in civil society is intended to ensure that the project responds to Liberian perspectives, goals and interests, and that local capacities for peacebuilding are sustainably developed.

Methodology

This is the report of the consultation phase of the Platform for Dialogue and Peace in Liberia. Two more phases will follow: national level dialogue and dissemination of recommendations. The consultations were carried out by research teams comprised by members from five of the eight collaborating local organizations and deployed in the different regions, supported by a Monrovia based Research Support and Monitoring Team from P4DP that regularly visited them during their work. The research teams met people in their own communities, with no predefined agenda of issues. The guiding principle for the consultation phase is that the local people are the ones who identify the critical challenges and decide on the most urgent needs that can bring peace to their communities, with the research team merely capturing their perceptions. Before being dispatched to the field, the research teams were thoroughly trained in methodological and research techniques, audio visual tools and peacebuilding approaches. Overall, including Nimba, a total of 10,800 persons participated in the consultation process, 59 districts were covered and 273 urban and rural communities visited.

Main Sources of Conflict

This report integrates the results of the consultations carried out by the different teams and provides a thorough presentation of the sources of conflict that the local population identified. It is neither an investigative report on the issues reported that establishes the degree of their accuracy, nor a technical report on the issues identified. But it clearly maps how Liberians understand their challenges and what issues are causes of concern and tension among the population.

- *Land and property disputes*

Disputes about land were identified by the population as the most prevalent, countrywide source of tension. Most of the land disputes reported to our research teams in rural settings were about boundaries of agricultural land: boundaries between individual properties in a community; boundaries between communal lands; boundaries between private -statutory- and communal -traditional- titling; boundaries between communities and administrative districts and even between counties. In urban settings the problem most frequently reported was multiple ownership of plots of land, which occasionally also affects rural properties. The fact that Liberia has a dual system of land tenure which overlaps and sometimes contradicts itself is part of the problem. All these disputes are a great source of anxiety for the population which feels that the government and local authorities together with the justice system are absent in assisting them to resolve the disputes, and result on a feeling of vulnerability.

The relationship between land disputes and ethnicity is not straightforward. Some land conflicts have a clear inter-ethnic tinge, but others do not; nor are inter-ethnic tensions about land restricted to specific ethnic groups. But the combination of ethnicity and land makes disputes more volatile and dangerous, as they can lead to the mobilization of ethnic allegiances that can transcend the local dimension, turning a localized affair into a question of regional or national political dimension. And in certain regions, the conflation of land, ethnicity and -in some cases- religion, can result in conflicts that threaten consolidation of peace at the national level. This is particularly true in places where this combination happens in the context of unresolved and simmering tensions that date back to the war.

In terms of the nature of the conflicts around land and property, the cases belong to three categories:

- Intra-communal*: disputes within the same community were reported in 13 out of the 15 counties surveyed. The population perceives these disputes as most directly threatening the social fabric of their own community, whether it is mono- or multi-ethnic. It might also involve disputes between individuals or between the community and state authorities, such as disputes about the use of private or community land for public services purposes.
- Inter-communal*: disputes between different communities were reported in 13 out of 15 counties. These disputes are more complex, might have inter-ethnic overtones, and have a greater potential for transcending their local setting and become disruptive to peace and governance at a more general level. Inter-communal disputes often have complex histories, with origins that date back to war or pre-war occurrences, several iterations along the years with varying degree of virulence and violence, sometimes with previous and unsuccessful attempts to resolve them, and with a scope and nature that change depending on the specific historical and political context.
- Extra-communal*: disputes involving districts and counties were reported in 9 out of 15 counties, with few examples in each county. These are political disputes in origin and nature. They involve local authorities at different levels, with motivations that are no longer directly related to the land but that use it in the context of a power struggle. In these disputes, communities can be

active participants, supporting their own district or county authorities, or can become the helpless subject of a dispute between contending bureaucrats and politicians. When conflated with inter-ethnic or inter-religious overtones, these disputes have the potential of becoming dangerously explosive. It is also a type of problem that can be expected to augment as the country undergoes its process of territorial harmonization

- *Local Governance*

Problems in the relationship between local authorities and communities seem to be a constant all over the country. Notwithstanding the specific policies and concrete monitoring mechanisms developed by the government, there were numerous reports on alleged misappropriation or misapplication of County Development Funds (CDF) across the country and a demand for participation in the decision-making mechanisms. Many communities expressed concerns over different aspects of the decision-making processes used in the context of the CDFs. Nepotism and clientelism were also widely reported as part of local patronage networks or as expression of national networks reaching to Monrovia. And there were complains -sometimes voiced by local government officials themselves- about problems in the functioning of local government and in the delivery of public services as a result of the absence of coordination and in competition between officials from different branches of government.

There is a feeling that activities about and in the committees are not sufficiently shared and explained with the majority of the community and that this is an intentional strategy to allow the deviation of the funds for personal gain. Women and youth expressed especially strong perceptions of exclusion from decision-making processes and from local authorities in general, and did so independently of ethnicity or place of residence. Women linked this exclusion with the lack of response to the level of violence they are victims of, and youth were vocal in their demands, with occasional threats to relapse to violence.

The overall perception is one of pervasive mistrust. The notion that authorities do not serve the common interest and are corrupt and inefficient in fulfilling their duties is the source of considerable tension and conflict, especially when it is associated with other conflictive issues such as ethnic discrimination, land property disputes or insecurity. From this perspective, the relationship between local authorities and communities in Liberia appears as problematic and local governance as a weak link in the process of consolidating peace and security in the country.

- *Rule of Law and Security*

“*Weak justice*” was an expression often used by participants to describe the combination of poor performance of the police and of the judicial system that afflicts urban and rural communities in many parts of the country. Some issues are related to problems of capacity and performance of institutions and officials; others refer to the prevalence of corrupt practices; and others point to tensions inherent to the implementation of modern notions of justice and security in the context of communities which, until very recently, relied mostly on traditional systems. These three dimensions of the problem often become entangled around a single case.

The inability of the government to provide rule of law and security to its population was voiced strongly throughout all counties in Liberia. Many communities indicated that there were insufficient facilities: limited number of police stations, court rooms and prisons. What is more, existing facilities are often understaffed, with untrained officials. In some parts of the country these institutions are completely absent but government officials and communities alike indicated that even where there is an institutional presence, its effectiveness can be severely limited by insufficient budgets. But beyond problems derived from reduced institutional capacity and budgetary limitations, the judicial system is

perceived to be rife with corruption. In many communities there is a prevailing notion that justice is often sold or procured through personal or political influence, and the expression “*no money, no justice*” was often mentioned. Many communities expressed that this combination of ineffectiveness, corruption and clientelism breeds impunity.

The teams found that gender violence is a widespread and dominant phenomenon all over the country. A sense of insecurity was reported as part and parcel of the daily experience of the ordinary Liberian woman, who is exposed to all forms of abuse without consideration of age or physical condition, inside and outside their homes. In addition, gender discrimination forces many victims of violence to refrain from complaining to authorities, as it might not only be ineffective but even add more suffering to their ordeal.

In general, there is a palpable lack of trust in the judicial system. Coupled with perceptions of insecurity, this can be the source of potential conflict. In many parts of the country, communities decidedly expressed that unless their security and justice needs are effectively addressed by national authorities, they will have to take justice into their own hands, by expedients such as the reinstatement of Trial by Ordeal, or by “mob justice”: direct action by the community to arrest the assumed culprits and punish them for their alleged activities. In the context of complex conflicts that easily mobilize ethnic, religious or “sectional” allegiances, such acts could easily escalate into problems of national significance that constitute a threat beyond the specific community itself. Nevertheless, in most parts of the country the reaction has been not to detach from national structures and frameworks, but to demand stronger and more effective presence by responsible authorities.

- *Discrimination, Identity and Citizenship*

Liberians have competing ethnic and religious identities, weakly integrated under a feeling of belonging to a political community as defined by the institutions and laws of the republic, the Liberian nation. Liberians consulted along this process expressed competing rather than confronted identities. But two critical factors make competing identities and perceptions of discrimination a source of concern and a potential source of conflict: the weakness of an overall national identity that serves as the integrating core for all other identities and the vulnerability of ethnic and religious allegiances to opportunistic mobilizations.

During the consultations, participants often expressed notions of citizenship that are subordinated to ethnic, religious or local identity and that assume the existence of differential rights that are expressed in the form of discrimination, and that were particularly evident in the case of the relationship between Mandingoes and other tribes in the country. Complaints by Mandingoes regarding concrete cases of discrimination were often matched with notions about their “*Liberianness*” and differential citizenship rights expressed by members of other ethnic groups about them. Many of the other registered perceptions about ethnic based discrimination usually focused on more specific issues and locations and responded more to local dynamics -the relationship between minority and majority being central- that were not reflected in the inter-ethnic relations in neighboring districts or counties. Overall, although ethnicity can be an important factor contributing to the level of tensions around a dispute, it is rarely the source, but every dispute is susceptible of becoming volatile through the development of opportunistic discourses that mobilize ethnic allegiances.

Perceptions of inter-religious tensions were not widespread in the country, according to our consultation. When reported, cases fell within two main categories: tensions between Christians and Muslims; and tensions between the monotheistic religions and African traditional religions.

There is a perception among Muslims that they are discriminated against by the state, notwithstanding the secular character of the Liberian state as defined by the constitution. Besides these cases, inter-religious tensions appear as the result of opportunistic mobilization of allegiances by the parties involved in a conflict, as masks that foster individual goals more than as expression of intrinsic enmities between believers at the community or national level. Nevertheless, even if they are not the fundamental reason behind a conflict, inter-religious tensions can result in violent explosions leading to the death of innocent citizens and loss of properties.

Some reported tensions emerged from processes of cultural change in traditional communities. The expansion of Christianity and Islam into traditional communities implies frictions which communities often find difficult to manage and lead to reciprocal accusations of discrimination. Poro and Sande, deep-rooted traditional cultural institutions in Liberia, are the subject of diverging views and tensions involving parents, traditional religious authorities, school teachers and administrators within the communities. Child rights advocacy emerged in several communities as another example of these tensions. Finally, perceptions of gender discrimination from decision-making processes at community level were highlighted in individual interviews as well as in collective consultations.

- *Unemployment and access to resources*

Issues of access to economic resources and governmental services were not reported as potential/immediate sources of conflict. But development issues become a source of tension and potential conflict when combined with perceptions of corruption or discrimination from the part of responsible authorities, or when capacities to resolve controversies are absent. For many communities around the country though, unemployment clearly is a potential source of conflict by itself, linked to the “idle hands” of unemployed youth or as a direct source of criminal activity. Youth angrily complained all over the country about the lack of economic opportunities and of unemployment. Sometimes their complaints were accompanied with more or less veiled threats of violence. The disgruntlement of demobilized Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) soldiers was an issue, linked to unemployment, which is directly linked to active tension and conflict.

Challenges to Consolidation of Peace

Tensions and frictions are widespread in the Liberian society today. Our consultation process has allowed us to identify the critical issues around which the Liberian society accumulates tensions and frictions which, depending on how they are addressed and resolved, are actual or potential drivers of conflict. Communities identified and prioritized challenges to peace fundamentally in terms of problems threatening their own community’s peace. But the recurrence of some of these issues across the different regions of the country allowed the teams to identify reported problems that are local variations of general ones, which therefore acquire national dimension and relevance as fault-lines of potential conflict, threatening peace and governance at the national level. Other reported issues were the expression of more localized problems, with limited or no recurrence beyond a certain community or district, captured in the specific county summary reports.

Two factors emerge to explain the prevalence of these multiple and different tensions and frictions all over Liberia: the fractured nature of Liberian society and the precarious presence of state institutions in the communities. In the context of multiple ethnic, religious, and local identities, an ethnic or a religious identity can easily become a rallying point that divides a community -or confront different communities- around specific problems even if there is not a strong intrinsic confrontation. This situation is allowed by

the weakness of an overall Liberian national identity defined above these competing identities and allowing the development of cross-cutting trust and collaboration between members of a political community.

The situation of Mandingo communities in the country reflects these problems at their worst. This is the one inter-ethnic cleavage that is actively explosive, prone to periodic outbursts and because of its prevalence in several important parts of the country, has considerable potential for destabilization. It is a critical problem that needs urgent attention. But the relative weakness of the bonds of trust and collaboration across competing identities makes the heterogeneity of Liberian society a challenge for consolidation of peace beyond this specific case. As the consultation has evidenced, any ethnic, or religious, allegiance can be mobilized in ways that turn disputes into explosive conflicts. Without the development of a stronger national identity that creates and foster overall bonds of trust and collaboration that cut across the competing ethnic, religious and local identities, heterogeneity can be fertile ground for conflict.

The integration of society and the development of an overall political identity is one of the main functions of political institutions in a democratic state. The government is making efforts to develop and strengthen the institutions responsible for security, development and governance, but with very limited financial, institutional and human resources. And the gap between existing needs at the community level and capacities within governmental institutions means that the reconstruction of the Liberian state to a point of full national presence -the capacity of its institutions to effectively and efficiently perform its functions in every corner of the country- is a task that will take many more years. In the absence of a strong governmental presence throughout the country, frictions and tensions within and between the communities can more easily develop into violent conflict and can acquire dimensions that threaten governance and peace. Traditional dispute resolution mechanisms can provide some respite at the local level, but there is a need for the development of stronger dispute resolution capacities that can weave together, integrate and complement these community mechanisms where they exist and are effective.

Perceptions of remoteness, injustice and abuse of power by local representatives and agencies of national authorities are an additional problem. The local population demands state institutions that are effective in addressing their needs and concerns and state institutions require the local population to rally and support their efforts to address these needs, thus validating and legitimizing their authority. The local interface between state authority and local population is therefore critical; for it is around it that a bond 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.

The Road Ahead

Aware of these challenges, the Liberian Platform for Dialogue and Peace is proposing to begin a new phase of its work, engaging national authorities, political actors and civil society in a collaborative effort: a common search for concrete policy recommendations that can strengthen the capacity of the country to prevent the development of violent conflict. Through the implementation of a dialogue and research methodology, our intention is to identify the critical stakeholders of the specific issues in state and in society to participate in this effort and to jointly understand the problem, identify the different efforts and proposals that exist around the subject and agree on specific measures through which the efforts of

national institutions, the international community and civil society can be brought together to address the problem.

Our proposal therefore is to concentrate our efforts in three areas in which we believe there is an urgent need to create spaces where different actors in state and society can collaborate in the search for concrete measures that address them and that can have a catalytic effect in the development of elements of social cohesion and institutional legitimacy that are the foundation of cohesive societies:

- *Identity and Citizenship*

There is a clear need for an effort that begins to explore the difficult problems existing at every level in our country regarding the relationship between its different ethnic groups, between its different religious identities, and between these and national institutions. Some of these problems already require urgent attention, as their explosiveness is not potential but actual, as in the case of the Mandingo community. Others are the source of ongoing frictions that, even if they do not have the national dimension of the previous case, have a direct impact on specific communities and a potential for destabilization and disruption at a national level. Moreover, the identification of a weak national identity and different and contrasting notions of “who is Liberian” and “what is being Liberian” requires a concerted effort to identify viable avenues to address this situation.

- *Local Governance*

The relationship between local government representatives and the population was evidenced as one of the major weaknesses throughout the consultation. Perceptions of lack of transparency, of corruption and nepotism around the CDF process, or around issues of security and justice, are a considerable obstacle to governmental efforts in these areas and a source of friction and conflict at the local level. Whether these perceptions respond to reality or not, they need to be addressed through mechanisms that increase transparency and participation, and efforts that improve the quality of the communication between authorities and society. Moreover, this issue is linked to the previous one: questions of rights and duties –the core of the notion of citizenship- are experienced and expressed first and foremost in the daily interaction of the population and local authorities. The strengthening of the relationship between the population and the local representatives of national authority will aggregate into a stronger bond between state and society.

- *Peacebuilding Frameworks*

Tensions and conflicts will be part and parcel of Liberian reality in the foreseeable future. The heterogeneous nature of our society and the relatively weak implantation of the state in the communities imply that the type of problems registered in this report will not disappear any time soon. The process of political and economic development that the country is undergoing will inevitably be mired by potential conflict: competition over economic resources, disputes over political rights, frictions derived from the modernization of culture, are natural sources of conflict that, if not effectively addressed, can result in renewed cycles of violent conflict and destabilize our fragile peace. Liberia needs to strengthen its capacity -in the state but also in society- to effectively deal with conflict: a capacity to identify actual and potential sources of conflict; to develop interventions that can prevent these from becoming the source of renewed violence; and to coordinate and harmonize efforts by all institutions and sectors of society to contain its negative effects. In summary, Liberia needs to develop a Peacebuilding Framework.

INTRODUCTION



INTRODUCTION

The Joint Programme Unit for United Nations/Interpeace Initiatives (JPU)

The Joint Programme Unit is a United Nations operative outfit with a mandate to assist peacebuilding efforts by the UN around the world. It specializes in the implementation of strategies that can contribute, through locally owned dialogue and action processes, to efforts of other UN agencies and departments for consolidation of peace and development in countries and regions emerging from violent conflict.

It was created as a result of an agreement between UNDP and what was then WSP International (now Interpeace) with the intention of making the latter's ten years of operative experience in different conflict contexts available to UN teams as an in-house capacity. The agreement between UNDP and Interpeace allows implementing initiatives through UN execution both upon request of Interpeace, as the current programmes in Israel and Palestine, or upon request of UN agencies, as in the case of Cyprus and Liberia

In April 2009, after a successful pilot project implemented in Nimba County in 2008, the JPU launched a project contributing to consolidation of peace in Liberia. The project was conceived as an inclusive and participatory consultation process to be implemented by eight civil society organizations in collaboration with the JPU. 9,800 inhabitants from different urban and rural settlements, in fourteen counties participated in this one year process. The population of the fifteenth county, Nimba, had already been consulted in the context of the Nimba County Reconciliation Project implemented in 2008. The project was implemented by a 100% Liberian project team, in collaboration with eight Liberian CSOs and from a local JPU team. Under the coordination of a central unit based in Monrovia, three research teams were deployed to undertake the consultation of the fourteen counties, two teams were deployed in Nimba County to follow-up on the recommendations of the previous pilot project, and three thematic teams provided specific capacities required for the intervention. All along this process the Liberian team received technical support from the JPU Geneva team.

The expected overall impact of the project is its contribution to the development of better capacities of Liberian state and non-state actors to deal with conflict through collaborative action. These capacities will increase social and political cohesion in Liberian society, the foundations of durable peace. They also are a necessary condition for the success and sustainability of other aspects of peacebuilding, such as post-conflict reconciliation, institutional reform, and socio-economic development. Overall, they are intended to contribute to

improve governance and to prevent the resurgence of armed conflict.

The specific objectives of the project are to:

- Foster a broad national consensus around strategic policies that address key challenges for consolidation of peace in Liberia;
- Develop a social network of key social and political actors engaged in effective dialogue and collaborative action;
- Improve collaborative attitudes and behavior in a core group of social and political actors;
- Strengthen the capacity of key institutions in state and society to provide technical support and assistance to the implementation of action-oriented dialogue processes;
- Strengthen reconciliation in Nimba County through collaborative action between state and society.

This report summarizes the activities completed during the consultation phase of the project which was implemented between March 2009 and March 2010. The findings and recommendations it contains reflect the views of residents from every corner of the country regarding critical issues for the consolidation of Peace in Liberia as well as their recommendations for appropriate measures to mitigate tensions and conflicts.

The research has taken the teams to all the counties and to many of their districts. They have visited urban and rural settlements, spoken to members of the different ethnic groups and religious affiliations. Through individual interviews and collective meetings, they have engaged with local authorities, traditional and religious leaders, local community activists, women and youth. The report presents the perceptions that Liberians all over the country have of challenges and opportunities for consolidation of peace.

The consultation phase is only the initial phase of the programme. Its intention is to gather information about the way Liberians understand their challenges for consolidation of peace and to launch a participatory and inclusive dialogue that builds consensus around concrete measures addressing these challenges. This takes place during the next phase in which the full potential of the findings gathered through the countrywide consultation, presented in this report, will be realized: a facilitated process that brings together key actors in state and civil society will identify key challenges that need to be addressed immediately. This research and dialogue space will be participatory and inclusive, incorporating representatives from different sectors of social and political life in Liberia, including groups that have different political tendencies, as well as social groups usually excluded from policy dialogues, such as women and youth.

The goal is to produce high quality policy proposals to guide the action of both state and society institutions to address the identified challenges towards peace. And given that they will be the result of a process of convergence and consensus around common visions and actions, such proposals will carry the political weight and legitimacy that results from a participatory, inclusive process. Thus, the future implementation of these proposals is more viable and their potential for effectively transforming social, economic and political realities of post war Liberia will be actualized.

Beyond its concrete results, this engagement is expected to foster trust between and among individuals, communities and institutions; to instill attitudes and skills that promote collaboration; and to improve relationships between previously opposed social and political groups. Finally, the proposals will also help towards the development of channels of communication and social networks across social and political divides, specifically between the authorities at the different levels and civil society, with the ultimate aim of contributing to the consolidation of democracy and its institutions.

Interpeace

Interpeace started as a project of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) in 1994 which explored better mechanisms through which the international community can better assist local actors to face the post-conflict challenges of reconstruction and reconciliation.

Interpeace works in partnership with local teams to reinforce existing capacities to manage conflict peacefully. Sustainable solutions can only come from within a society: while outside forces can help stop violence, it is local people that have to make peace with each other and find solutions to avoid falling back into conflict. Interpeace helps societies address the most fundamental issues that make or break the peace, help them solve these differences through constructive dialogue and create home grown solutions for a more peaceful future. Interpeace works with and through an alliance of peacebuilding teams and partners in Africa, Latin America, the Middle East and Asia. (see www.interpeace.org)

BACKGROUND



Liberia is Africa's oldest independent republic. It was founded in 1822 and became independent on 26 July 1847. The nation pioneered the search for greater freedom, self determination and unification of the continent. Despite its achievements, the domestic situation of the country has been characterized by uneven social relationships largely resulting from the marginalization by the dominant elite of large parts of the society from political and economic power. Since its independence, successive leaders have maintained significant sectors in society systematically excluded from participation in political institutions and access to key economic resources. The founding constitution was designed to meet the needs of the settler population, with little consideration and involvement of the indigenous people. In the early days, land and property rights of the larger indigenous population were severely limited. Later, marginalization was perpetuated by the urban-based policies of successive administrations. Political power was concentrated in Monrovia, the capital, with a centralized executive branch.

Most infrastructure and basic services were concentrated in Monrovia and a few other cities. Exclusion and mismanagement of national resources contributed to the development of striking inequalities in the distribution of national resources. In addition, concentration of power bred corruption, restricted access to decision-making processes and limited the space for civil society participation in governance. Although the settlers and their direct descendants constituted a small minority among the Liberian population, they retained hegemonic control of the country by instituting a system of governance embedded with political repression and socio-economic inequalities. Characterized by some authors as "black imperialism", these policies generated divisions between the population at large and the ruling elite and deep resentment ensued over the lack of attention to social needs.¹ All these factors contributed to the bloody military coup of 1980, led by Samuel Doe, a junior military officer and the first non-Americo-Liberian President.

However, the 1980 military coup marked a sequence of events that plunged the nation into 14 years of civil war. The new political party in power soon intensified the divide between settlers and indigenous groups. New inter-ethnic divisions emerged that surpassed the ones that were evident during the previous True Whig Party dominance of the political system. These ethnic tensions resulted in frequent hostilities, initially between the politically and militarily dominant Krahn and the other ethnic groups in the country, leading to the 1985 rigged elections which exacerbated the tensions and made war inevitable. In December 1989, what appeared to be a scuffle by yet another group of rebels bent on overthrowing the government became a full-scale revolt that shattered the political, social and cultural fabric of the country. A small group of rebels, grouped in the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) and under the command of Charles Taylor, invaded the country. The invasion launched what would be one of Africa's bloodiest civil wars that ended in 2003. The brutal civil war claimed the lives of more than 200,000 people and led to the internal and external displacement of over a million citizens.

The war only compounded many of the economic and social problems that had already resulted from Liberia's history. It left the state weak, with its institutions incapable of generating policies that benefit the population in general and thus resulted in a highly polarized society, prone to conflict. This severely damaged the social fabric, weakening the possibility of reconciliation, as attested by the recent work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the discussion that ensued regarding its recommendations.

The conflict left deep scars. However, most Liberians want to advance in the direction of reconciliation. Many years of war and destruction made evident that violence does not bring any positive change in people's lives. The new authorities are building upon this feeling and are striving to create a stable political environment where there can be economic opportunities for all. That is the context in which the government, through the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA), requested the Joint Programme Unit for UN/Interpeace Initiatives to undertake a dialogue and research project in Nimba County in 2008 to assist its efforts to address ongoing conflicts in the county and promote co-existence.

The project in Nimba started in February 2008 and lasted 8 months. It was funded by the UN Peacebuilding Fund. The project applied Interpeace's methodology of consultation and consensus building, as a pilot project to test the approach for the nation-wide effort covered by this report. An external evaluation requested by UNMIL, MIA and PBSO at the end of the programme concluded that *"the project clearly contributed to meaningful communication and reconciliation between participants of different ethnic groups."* The UN Secretary-General also acknowledged positively the project in Nimba, indicating that it *"succeeded in developing a model for conflict resolution, including mechanisms for settling property disputes. The success of this project in fostering reconciliation and post conflict reintegration led to the roll-out of a similar approach at the national level."*²

In March 2009, the Peacebuilding Fund in Liberia approved a new grant for the consultation phase of the national programme, implemented between April 2009 and June 2010. The programme has undertaken broad-based consultations in 14 counties to understand the root-causes and challenges to sustainable peace in Liberia from the perspective of the local actors. The 15th county, Nimba, where consultations had already taken place during the pilot project in 2008, was chosen to pilot the second phase of the programme that is the follow-up to a select number of findings and recommendations from the Nimba project.

The project is a collaborative effort, developed together with local actors in government and eight Civil Society Organizations, aiming to strengthen the capacities of state and society to deal with conflict in a non-violent way. This first phase has been mostly dedicated to facilitate an open and inclusive process of consultation, using interviews, focus groups and multi-stakeholder meetings to identify the main sources of tension in the communities as perceived by them and registering their own suggestions on possible solutions to address some of these problems.

This will now lead to a process in which national authorities and civil society will work together to delineate possible plans of action and policies that would respond to and take into consideration the voices of the citizens from all walks of life. That, in turn, will strengthen the capacities of participant individuals and organizations to address difficult questions using dialogue instead of confrontation as a tool and will create new inter-sectoral networks of committed social actors, who will foster a new type of relationships based on collaborative action.

METHODOLOGY



The National Consultation: Part of a Wider Process

This section explains the methods that were used to gather the information presented in this report. This has been the first phase -local consultations- of P4DP. This is an initiative with a medium to long-term perspective that is implemented in three phases: local consultations, national level dialogue and dissemination of recommendations. The outputs of the first phase provide the main input for the second phase: the information gathered through the local level consultations will feed the discussions at the national level and will be the basis upon which proposals will be developed to try to address the main challenges for peace in Liberia, and then disseminated. The intention is to enhance and strengthen collaboration between state and society in the implementation of these proposals, on the basis of the strategies agreed upon in the final stage of the second phase. This should result not only on relevant and action-oriented policy recommendations, but in higher levels of trust between groups in society and its institutions, a critical element for the consolidation of peace.

The process for the first phase has been designed and implemented using the same participatory tools that were used during the successful pilot intervention in Nimba County. The basic principle put in practice is that it should be the local people, in a safe and open environment, who should identify the critical challenges and decide on the most urgent needs that can bring peace to their communities. In keeping with this basic principle, the teams went on to meet different actors in their own communities, having no pre-established agenda of issues, but instead having open, general questions, -often referred to as a “*blank sheet*”- prepared to explore the perceptions of local communities about what makes peace sustainable and what threatens it.

Perceptions don't always match reality and the teams were very aware of that. The programme's mandate was not to establish whether these perceptions were right or wrong, but to capture the prevalent perceptions, either in specific regions or as national concerns, as seen by the locals. Furthermore, as a result of the consultation process, we can confirm that people understand these perceptions to be real, and that these perceptions inform their attitudes and their actions. Perceptions therefore breed reality: individuals and communities act upon what they perceive to be real and the consequences of these actions are real independently of whether these perceptions reflect a reality or not.

The mandate of the teams was to register the perceptions of people in the communities, along and across the Liberian geography, and not to do a technical report on the issues they encountered. Thus, the report does not pretend to be a survey of the key problems, such as land disputes, the origins and the scope of practices of corruption, or of the nature of inter-ethnic discrimination. Technical reports of this nature, on many of the issues here reported, already exist or are being produced by national institutions and civil society organizations, often in collaboration with international actors. Others will need to be produced in the context of promoting good understanding of the problems in our society and the development of adequate measures addressing them.

Therefore, this report aims to present a picture of the way in which the people of this country feel, understand and react to these issues. Our interest, succinctly captured in the name of this document, is to map out their relative prevalence and importance as actual or potential sources of conflict, and to use

this information to launch a process of engagement between state and society, in Monrovia and the rest of the country. We believe that through this collaboration, Liberians will be able to develop adequate measures to resolve their own problems, and foster the new relationships that consolidation of peace requires.

Operational Strategy

In order to ensure adequate geographic coverage, the country was divided into four regions, each one covered by a Research and Facilitation Team belonging to one of the partnering institutions in this effort. These teams had the support of a Research Support and Monitoring Team based in Monrovia that regularly visited the different regions to review the process and deliver remedial support if necessary.

The eight CSO are:

NAME of CSOs	FUNCTION
<i>Liberia Democratic Institute (LDI)</i>	To promote governance in post-war Liberia. It focuses on budget monitoring, decentralization, citizen participation, civic education, capacity building and economic justice.
<i>Foundation for International Dignity (FIND)</i>	FIND's focus is on human rights and peacebuilding among refugees, IDPs and their host communities in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea. The CSO also specializes in audio/visual documentation, research and capacity building.
<i>Peace Building Resource Centre (PBRC)</i>	To create an enabling environment where sustainable peace and development are guaranteed. PBRC conducts participatory action research, training, community peacebuilding and development, information dissemination, networking and relief.
<i>Women NGO Secretariat of Liberia (WONGOSOL)</i>	Focuses on training and capacity building, lobbying and advocacy, information/experience sharing and dissemination.
<i>The Kofi Annan Institute for Conflict Transformation (KAICT)</i>	A school within the University of Liberia with an aim to produce adequate manpower with transformation skills for national recovery.
<i>Initiative for Positive Change (IPC)</i>	IPC focuses on community peacebuilding and reconciliation, research and training, livelihood, human rights and governance.
<i>West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) –Liberia Chapter</i>	The Liberia chapter of WANEP was the first national network of the regional organization. WANEP has over 20 members who actively provided development, peacebuilding, and reconciliation services across Liberia.
<i>Inter-Religious Council of Liberia (IRCL)</i>	A local inter-faith organization that rallies Christians and Muslims of the country as a safeguard against large-scale conflicts with sources of religious intolerance.

The four regions are:

- Central (Montserrado, Bomi, Margibi, Grand Bassa, and River Cess Counties): in charge of Initiative for Positive Change (IPC).
- North West (Lofa, Gbarpolu, Cape Mount and Bong Counties): in charge of Peacebuilding Resource Center (PBRC).
- South East (Grand Gedeh, Grand Kru, Sinoe, Maryland, and River Gee Counties): in charge of Liberia Democratic Institute (LDI).
- Nimba County: Already the subject of an in-depth consultation carried out in the context of the Nimba Reconciliation Project implemented by Interpeace/JPU in 2008. The West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) and the Inter-Religious Council of Liberia (IRCL) were asked to follow-up on three of the recommendations that emerged from that process.

The other three CSOs, namely the Women NGOs Secretariat (WONGOSOL), the Foundation for International Dignity (FIND) and the Kofi Annan Institute for Conflict Transformation (KAICT) were in charge respectively of gender mainstreaming, audio-visual and training support.

Each field team was composed of four researchers and a driver, with a clear division of labor and specific responsibilities:

- Lead Researcher: responsible for the whole team. S/He is in charge of the preparatory work, making sure that participants receive timely invitations and that the criteria of diversity and inclusiveness are respected, ensures strategy for effective mobilization of participants, ensures that the place identified for debate is appropriate and ready, observes the debate and intervenes if necessary to help the facilitator take notes, organizes a debriefing session after each meeting in the field, and adjusts the process and activities according to the need of participants and the particularity of the area.
- Facilitator: the most visible during the meeting itself. S/He guides the debate and explains in a simple way the approach and why it is so important, organizes presentation of the team and participants, listens carefully to participants and looks at all nonverbal communication, facilitates the dialogue in a sensitive manner, leads the collective definition of the “ground rules” and allows all participants to intervene.
- Note Taker: responsible for registering substantive discussions during collective meetings. Supports the Facilitator by tracking the issues throughout the debate and suggesting avenues to pursue them. Systematizes the information for its analytical consideration.
- Camera person: in charge of recording the activity with the AV equipment. S/He has to ensure that the whole session is recorded adequately, including both general shots of the whole meeting and head shots of the main participants while they are making their statements. It is especially important to capture a good quality sound, so that it can be included in the final video that will be made to accompany the conclusions of the written report.

A group of Research Support and Monitor Officers under the leadership of the Research and Operations Manager was established to support the work of the field teams. These officers went on long field visits to observe the activities on the ground, identify challenges and needs of the teams and give feedback on how to address them, including technical remedial support. This allowed continuous coaching of the teams so that their understanding of the methodology increased and the quality of the data improved throughout the duration of the project.

Training

An initial training was provided to all eight CSOs responsible for the implementation of the field activities of the project. Staff from the CSOs and from the Ministry of Internal Affairs participated in a two week (1-12 June 2009) training and practical workshop that provided in-depth understanding and practical experiences of Interpeace's approach and the lessons learned from the Nimba Project. The training included a field pilot: three communities around Monrovia -Wein Town, Jacob Town and West Point- were identified where the different teams had an opportunity to test their new skills and understandings, enhancing their confidence and competence for their future deployment.

A Gender Mainstreaming training workshop was implemented by WONGOSOL on 14-15 July 2009, to prepare the teams for their engagement with women during their work, with 36 participants.

A one week training on audio-visual tools was carried out by the AV coordinator and one of the local partners, FIND, on 6-10 July 2009 to train the audio-visual specialists in each team.

P4DP is currently working with KAICT in the development of a course module on participatory approaches to peacebuilding in Liberia. The course, to be part of KAICT's regular curriculum, is intended to serve as a peacebuilding capacity building hub for training of government officials and civil society in the use of these tools and their applications in other initiatives.

Field Research Design

After the substantive training, a series of field work planning meetings were carried out with the CSO partners. This allowed additional space to decide on critical aspects of the methodology to be put in practice by the teams. These key methodological aspects were agreed upon during these meetings:

- Duration of the research: with adaptations according to county size, heterogeneity and population, it was agreed that approximately one month would initially be dedicated to each county, with further visits at the end of the process to complete areas that were not well covered.
- Sampling criteria for communities: it was agreed that communities would be chosen based on relevant criteria, like level of exposure to the conflict, rural or urban nature, demographic composition/ethnicity; geographical location and economic activity. Special emphasis was assigned to conflictive areas or settlements.
- Election of participants: it was important to carefully balance the number of participants from different groups: local authorities and government officials, elders and traditional authorities, religious leaders, ethnic groups and civil society associations, farmers and businessmen, women and youth and specific categories relevant locally, such as demobilized soldiers.
- Composition of the research teams: a great effort was made to ensure research teams would represent several identities (gender, tribal, age, etc.), as this would allow them to "show by example" the importance of wide participation, while, at the same time, allowing better access to different groups who may feel more at ease with someone from the same group. To this effect, at least one of the team members was a woman and at least one was a young person.

- Community entry: in order to prevent tensions, it was agreed that the Ministry of Internal Affairs would provide each team with a letter of introduction addressed to local authorities. Following this, initial explanatory meetings would take place with key social and religious leaders, explaining the intention and scope of the consultation. With their support, participants to individual interviews and collective meetings were identified. Additional interviews or meetings were conducted as a result of further identification of relevant issues and persons.
- Initial questions: a list of open questions was prepared as a guide for the conversation with the communities. These questions were intended to trigger a conversation during individual interviews or a discussion in collective meetings and were general in nature, in order to avoid unintended suggestions of any specific topic or issue. The responses to these questions were registered not only in terms of the information they provided on the perceptions of participants, but served to map out additional individuals and groups that needed to be included in the consultation process.
- Individual and collective interviews: it was agreed that in order to ensure wide participation and open expression by different groups in the communities, different methods would have to be used: individual interviews, small group discussions, and ad hoc sessions with homogeneous groups, community inclusive focus groups, and town hall meetings.
- Adaptation: teams were asked to first understand the basic social dynamics of the places where they were working, before calling for meetings that would require dedication and attention from community members for a long period of time. That implied adjusting to the community's working and leisure cycles, so that the payment of "sitting fees" -monetary compensation for "working time" invested in participation- would not be necessary. It implied, for example, adapting the timing of a meeting in a farming community to late afternoon or weekends so that these would not interfere with the regular economic activities.

Audio visual recording took place throughout the consultation process as a way to adequately capture the richness of the discussions. Video also allows the team to bring the opinion directly from the rural communities of Liberia to the decision-makers in Monrovia.

Statistics about participants and the contents of the dialogue sessions were registered first hand by the Lead Researcher and the Facilitator during the meetings based on a pre-established data registry format defined jointly with the project team; the teams took additional notes in their notebooks.

Periodic debriefing sessions were held to share notes and to agree on the main issues and proposals. The data gathered throughout the process was then analyzed together with the leadership of each institution, after returning from the consultations and put together in field reports addressed to the coordinating team.

The final summative analysis took place in a one week workshop where all field teams participated and shared their main findings with the other groups, leading to the identification of the general problems and common trends described in this report. The central coordinating team subsequently integrated this information into the present report.

Participation

This report combines the results of the consultation hereby described with those ones carried out in Nimba the previous year using a similar methodology. The specific information for the consultation carried out in the 14 counties can be found in the table below. In combination with Nimba, a total of 10,800 persons participated in the consultation process, 59 districts were covered and 273 urban and rural communities visited.

COVERAGE OF RESEARCH		DETAILS PER LOCATION		DETAILS PER GENDER			PERCENTAGE	
Region	County	Districts	Communities	Females	Males	Total	Females	Males
North West	Lofa	5	13	293	521	814	36%	64%
	Gbarpolu	3	18	492	511	1'003	49%	51%
	Cape Mount	4	12	305	423	728	42%	58%
	Bong	7	15	291	363	654	44%	56%
	Total	19	58	1,381	1,818	3,199	43%	57%
Central	Montserrado	4	20	933	957	1'890	49%	51%
	Bomi	2	20	452	489	941	48%	52%
	Margibi	4	16	149	207	356	42%	58%
	Bassa	4	3	110	143	253	43%	57%
	River Cess	3	3	38	34	72	53%	47%
	Total	17	62	1,682	1,830	3,512	48%	52%
South East	Grand Gedeh	3	17	389	485	874	45%	55%
	River Gee	4	16	105	508	613	17%	83%
	Grand Kru	3	23	158	386	544	29%	71%
	Sinoe	4	16	113	521	634	18%	82%
	Maryland	3	17	176	248	424	42%	58%
	Total	17	89	941	2,148	3,089	31%	70%
GRAND TOTAL		53	209	4,004	5,796	9,800	41%	59%

Table 1. Project participants from the different counties.

CHALLENGES



Land and property disputes

Land is the Main Source of Conflict

The main source of tensions and conflict in the 15 counties of Liberia is land. As in any agricultural country, land is the main source of wealth from the national to the community level. Land is the fundamental resource for agricultural and forestry activities, but it is also the basis for mining, an important economic activity in some counties. Moreover, in urban environments, it is the basis for housing and commercial activities. Land is a fundamental resource in Liberian society, not only as an economic factor but also as a key element in the structuring of social life of the communities and in the definition of ethnic and local identities. Its importance therefore goes beyond the realm of economics to acquire important socio-political, cultural and psycho-social dimensions. The teams found that tensions and conflicts regarding land in Liberia have implications at all these levels.

Land disputes were reported by interviewees in every single county and in almost every community consulted. It is also usually perceived by the population as the most important source of friction between communities, within communities, between individuals or individuals and the community, and between communities, individuals and authorities.

Sources of Anxiety: Uncertain Boundaries and Multiple Sales

Most of the land disputes reported to our research teams in rural settings are about boundaries of agricultural land: boundaries between individual properties in a community; boundaries between communal lands; boundaries between private -statutory- and communal -traditional- titling; boundaries between communities and administrative districts and even between counties. In urban settings the problem most frequently reported is multiple ownership of plots of land, which occasionally also affects rural properties. Demographic pressures upon agricultural land are expressly cited as one of the main drivers of disputes of this nature.

Whether due to legitimate confusion or conflict between tenure systems, or as a result of intentional bad faith or fraud, these situations create widespread anxiety among the population. The teams reported that in different districts and counties there is a common preoccupation: the permanent threat of encroachment into agricultural land and other communal natural resources. Communities around Liberia perceive that there is a deliberate and generalized disregard for established boundaries, affecting communal and private property, and consequently feel threatened. The number and variety of cases is fostering a perception of general vulnerability that is in turn reinforced by another perception: the insufficient protection by authorities.

“If government does not pay attention to this land dispute I foresee eminent war emerging in the district”

River Gee County

The absence of a qualified and sufficient governmental presence, the indifference of local authorities or their involvement as parts in these disputes, the remoteness and ineffectiveness of the justice system, and the erosion of their own communal structures of mediation are cited in every corner in Liberia as a source of concern. There is a strong call for more effective governmental intervention: to resolve the

ambiguity of the legislation and land tenure system and provide certainty, to undertake land surveys that establish firm and reliable boundaries for communal and private property, to ensure effective, accessible and prompt resolution of conflicts, to prevent abuse of authority and corruption from interfering in land disputes.

This call is consciously made out of the perception that without such interventions, the feelings of

....people were killed in boundary disputes, which we do not want to happen here. We are law abiding citizens. So we are asking the government to come in and investigate this boundary dispute to avoid bloodshed in the future.

Bapolo, Gbarpolu County

grievance and hopelessness might result in violence between individuals and between communities. Fortunately, there seems to be a clear perception among the population of the negative effect these conflicts have in the social fabric of their communities and a wish to prevent them by effectively resolving outstanding disputes. Their expectation is that the government will assist them to do so.

Contradicting Land Tenure Systems Breeds Conflict

In Liberia, land tenure consists of two active systems which overlap and sometimes contradict each other: the Customary System and the Statutory System. Public land is given by the government to customary authorities to administer it on its behalf. In the Customary System of land tenure, land is viewed as communally owned, chiefly for agricultural purposes, non-saleable and a generational asset. Land is regarded by indigenous people as a common property of the clan or tribe and the chief acts as the trustee with the power to distribute land among the people. Traditional land tenure is used by ethnic groups for communal settlement and farmland. The Statutory System, on the other hand, distinguishes between public land tenure and private land tenure.

- Public Land is the property of the state, including land given in tenure. Land in this category is to be used by the government for general benefit and can as such be given in custody to ethnic communities as a tribal trust and leased -but not sold- to foreign concessions for renewable periods of 30 to 99 years for economic development.
- Private Land Tenure allows for ownership of land by individuals or groups. In this case a Title Deed is issued by the state. Land can be owned privately in rural and urban settings in the country. Individuals owning land under this tenure may transfer it to others, rent, mortgage, donate and/or sell.

Land Reform

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.

According to some studies, some of the regulations governing property and land ownership are obsolete and require reform in order to be relevant and functional.

As a result, in August 2009, the Land Commission was formally established by the Government of Liberia. Its mandate is basically to propose, advocate and coordinate reforms of land laws, policy and programmes in the country. Additionally, the commission has the mandate to carry out fact-findings studies to recommend remedies to inadequacies of all land-related issues.

In so doing, the commission also has the responsibility to propose amendments to the constitution and work closely with other agencies with similar functions to consider complex issues, with the intention of setting up a system that deals with these issues in a comprehensive, transparent and equitable fashion.

The dual system of land tenure in the country is a result of the introduction of the Anglo-American system of land tenure in the 1800s and the subsistence of pre-existing traditional land ownership systems, with overlapping and partial integration between both systems derived in part of the limitations for full implementation of statutory regulation in rural areas. This ambiguity has been a source of constant tension between the communities and the state. 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. But the tension between these two systems is growing. As modernization and demographic pressures over land are generating tensions within the communities, the existence of these parallel but not integrated systems becomes a source of ambiguity. Participants in a dispute might have the possibility of settling a dispute according to customary procedures or statutory ones. They might try to choose the one they believe will be more favorable to their particular case. The other party might try to recur to the other system; or once an issue is settled, the losing party might try to bring it to the other system. A dispute over property then can become a dispute over jurisdiction, between judicial authorities and traditional leaders, etc.³

An Explosive Combination: Land and Ethnicity

The relationship between land disputes and ethnicity is not straightforward. Some land conflicts have a clear inter-ethnic tinge, but others do not. There are disputes about private property between individuals of different ethnic identity, between individuals belonging to an ethnic group and a community of a different ethnicity and between communities that belong to different ethnic groups. But the same type of land disputes take place between individuals and communities of the same ethnic group, often in the context of multi-ethnic settlements or districts, and in parallel to or in absence of inter-ethnic land disputes.

The research teams did not find a situation that could be described as generalized confrontation between specific ethnic groups around issues of land: groups that can be bitterly confronted in property disputes in one part of the country -a community or a district- can coexist peacefully in another. And disputes about private and communal land involve different groups in different parts of the country: Mandingo and Mano; Mano and Gio; Sapo and Kru; Gola and Mende; Bassa and Kpelle; Mandingo and Lorma; Belleh and Kpelleh; Fula and Fanti; Krahn and Gio, etc.⁴

What is certain is that the combination of ethnicity and land makes disputes more volatile and dangerous, as they become issues not only of property rights but of ethnic allegiance. A land problem then becomes an inter-ethnic problem with political overtones. But the mobilization of ethnic allegiances can also transcend the local dimension of what in essence is a localized affair to turn into a question of regional or national political dimension. And in certain regions, the conflation of land, ethnicity and -in some cases- religion, can result in conflicts that threaten consolidation of peace at the national level. This is true particularly in places where this combination happens in the context of unresolved and simmering tensions that date back to the war. Thus, problems over urban property between returning refugees from the Mandingo ethnic group and other ethnic groups in Nimba and Lofa have become a problem of national political importance.

A Tentative Classification

The characteristics of land and property disputes reported vary according to the specific conditions of each community, district or county, but can be clustered in three main categories:

- a. Intra-communal: disputes within the same community;
- b. Inter-communal: disputes between different communities,
- c. Extra-communal: disputes involving districts and counties.

- a. *Intra-communal* disputes between individuals in a community or individuals and their community are widely extended, and have been reported in 13 out of the 15 counties surveyed. The population perceives these disputes as most directly threatening the social fabric of their own community, whether the community is mono- or multi-ethnic⁵. It might also involve disputes between individuals or the community with state authorities, such as disputes around the use of private or community land for public services purposes⁶. At the same time, this type of disputes is also one which communities have more resources to address on their own, if traditional community mediation structures are still legitimate and functional. In some instances, the teams' presence was sufficient to spark intra-communal mediation processes that resolved an outstanding dispute. But in terms of the sustainability of these arrangements, in cases where community structures are not currently functional or are challenged by conflicting tenure claims - traditional versus statutory- and where the disputes acquire an inter-ethnic nature, internal capacities are not sufficient.⁷

Traditional Land Tenure

"In Grand Kru County, land is the only property we have for our children to inherit in most instances. That's why the land confusion is all over the place in the county even if the land is a virgin forest". Po River community, Trehn District, Grand Kru County.

Land in most part of Liberia is inherited through the customary land tenure system, which consists of a set of rules and procedures based on the traditions of indigenous Liberian ethnic groups, regulating acquisition and holding of property at the community level with land conceived primarily as a collective good. The customary land tenure system is agrarian in nature and regulates subsistence agriculture activity of small and mostly impoverished farmers.

Urban-based agricultural entrepreneurs interested in cash-crop agriculture, on the other hand, buy and hold properties under non-customary, statutory frameworks, based upon notions of individual, private property. The lack of coordination between both property frameworks has been a fertile soil for tensions and conflict around land sale processes and has rendered communities vulnerable to processes of dispossession of communal property through private sales.

Harmonization and integration of these contradictory frameworks is one of the goals of the Land Reform Commission.

Spontaneous Mediation Efforts

P4DP teams were not trained as mediators and were clearly instructed to avoid assuming mediation roles. But in some instances, their consultation process led to spontaneous decisions to use community structures to resolve a process, either in the context of the workshop or subsequently.

This happened in Maryland County, where after a series of consultations by P4DP's research team, stakeholders decided to engage in dialogue in an attempt to resolve the ongoing boundary dispute between the communities of Big Town and Rock Town. In a session with the participation of the County Land Commissioner, Harper City's mayor, governors from the different tribes in the district and civil society leaders, leaders from both communities agreed to return to the ancestral boundary and close the dispute between both towns.

In Nimba County, the community of Saclapea decided to use traditional mediation mechanisms to settle a private dispute between claimants from their community. A special session was organized with the presence of the research team in which traditional authorities successfully resolved the problem.

b. *Inter-communal* disputes between different communities or individuals of one community and a different one are as prevalent as the previous category: it was reported in 13 out of 15 counties. These disputes have a greater potential for transcending their local setting and become disruptive to peace and governance at a more general level⁸. Disputes in this category are complex, if happening between communities of different ethnicity or religion they can mobilize allegiances that turn them into problems that threaten relations between bigger groups in society, and therefore become political problems. But often these disputes happen between communities that belong to the same ethnic group. Often inter-communal disputes have complex histories; with origins dating back to war or pre-war occurrences, several iterations along the years with varying degrees of virulence and violence, sometimes with previous and unsuccessful attempts to resolve them, and with a scope and nature that change depending on the specific historical and political context⁹.

c. *Extra-communal* disputes are less prevalent. It was reported in nine out of 15 counties, and with few examples in each county. These are political disputes in origin and nature. They involve local authorities at different levels, with motivations that are no longer directly related to the land but that use it in the context of a power struggle. In these disputes, communities can be active participants supporting their own district or county authorities, or can become the helpless subject of a dispute between contending bureaucrats and politicians. When conflated with inter-ethnic or inter-religious overtones, these disputes can become

dangerously explosive. It is also a type of problem that can be expected to augment as the country undergoes its process of territorial harmonization¹⁰.

A Weak Link: Local Authorities and Population

Problems in the relationship between local authorities and communities seem to be a constant all over the country. In every county and almost in every district covered in this consultation, people expressed opinions to this effect. These were voiced as perceptions of corruption, lack of transparency, nepotism and clientelism, marginalization of specific social groups, and general lack of participation in decision-making processes. Perceptions are not realities and the teams did not have the skills or the mandate to investigate claims or establish their accuracy. We cannot therefore ascertain as to the extent to which these perceptions reflect reality. We do report, however, that these perceptions are prevalent among the population of the country and that, independently of the accuracy, inform their actions.

Individuals and communities act upon what they perceive reality to be and the consequences of these actions are real even if the underlying perceptions were not. From this perspective, we can say that the relationship between local authorities and communities in Liberia is problematic and that local governance is a weak link in the process of consolidation of peace in the country. The notion that authorities do not serve the common interest and that they are corrupt and inefficient in fulfilling their duties is the source of considerable tension and conflict, especially when it is associated with other conflictive issues such as ethnic discrimination, land property disputes or insecurity. Overall, there is a perception of bad governance that is coupled with a demand for more effective, intervention of state authorities in support of the communities' needs.

National Policy: Decentralization of Development Funds and the Fight against Corruption

The government of President Johnson Sirleaf has recently been allotting funds for county development projects in the national budget. Up until then, county level projects were executed directly by central government offices and the new policy aims to foster a process of decentralization. County officials including legislative officials are working along with private citizens to define and manage the projects. As established in the operational guidelines for the implementation of the county development projects, a County Development Support Secretariat (CDSS) has been set up by the Ministry of Internal Affairs to provide technical and administrative support to county administrations for effective implementation of projects undertaken with these funds.

At the level of the county, a Special County Development Council (SCDC) set up by the County Legislative Caucus and integrated by opinion leaders from the administrative district convene to define the use of the funds, identifying communities or areas to benefit from the CDF. With allotted amounts to these selected areas, residents are supposed to meet and decide which specific project to undertake. Once a decision is reached, residents are to submit the information on their request to the Office of the County Superintendent for transmission to the CDSS for analysis and advice.

Upon approval of specifications by the CDSS, the Project Management Committee (PMC) will be authorized to commence the bidding process as required by the Public Procurement & Concession Commission guidelines. Projects of non-infrastructure nature will have to be reviewed for feasibility and the appropriate advice offered. Funds are disbursed into individual CDF accounts by the Ministry of Finance following the preparation of accompanying vouchers and verification from the Ministry of

Internal Affairs. The management of funds and processing of transactions is in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles. Financial reporting must be submitted to the CDSS by the PMC two days after the end of each month. Finally, on one hand, a team of monitors is assigned by the CDSS in each county to closely monitor the projects and report on a monthly basis. On another hand, the District Development Committee (DDC), working closely with the PMC and the Office of the Superintendent, is charged with the responsibility of monitoring the project's implementation at every stage.

In addition and with the intention of curtailing practices of corruption and lack of transparency between public servants, the Governance Commission of the government of Liberia created the Liberian Anti Corruption Commission (LACC). The commission has established a series of reporting and monitoring mechanisms intended to enhance accountability of government officials.

Misuse of County Development Funds

Notwithstanding the specific policies and concrete monitoring mechanisms developed, the numerous reports on alleged misappropriation or misapplication of CDFs across the country and the demand for participation in the decision-making mechanisms, evidence the scope of the challenge. Decentralization of funds is taking place in the context of a prevalent perception that corruption is ingrained in every level of Liberian society, from individuals to communities, from communities to authorities, from local to national level. It is as if an age-old problem continues to thrive despite efforts attempting to curtail it.¹¹

These perceptions are often expressed around very concrete cases, following these general categories:

- Disappearance of funds approved for projects that fail to be implemented, such as for purchase of equipment that cannot be accounted for; or for construction work that is never implemented.¹²
- Projects that are left incomplete without explanation of use of funds, such as town hall buildings and buildings for governmental services, or unfinished road construction.¹³
- Projects that have inflated budgets, while their actual building cost is lower than projected.¹⁴
- Inaccurate disclosure of CDF amounts, with communities allegedly finding out that funds approved were higher than reported.¹⁵
- Projects built with international funding -from international organizations or NGO's- are assigned CDFs that then disappear.¹⁶

“When development funds are provided by government, the country’s legislative caucus, including the senators and legislators, eat the money. For this reason, there are neither roads nor any form of actual development in this place....we are appealing to them to stop eating our development funds.”

Kabada, Sinoe County

But they also can appear in the form of generalized statements without any concrete reference, from general blanket assertions that county officials misuse CDFs to perceptions that if a community is not getting its fair share of development funds it's because of their misuse by local government officials.¹⁷

Nepotism and Clientelism

Nepotism and clientelism were often cited in the context of the misuse of CDFs. Allocation of contracts to relatives of committee members, to a specific ethnic group -or a “section”- in detriment of another one, or to political supporters of committee members or authorities, were provided as examples of corruption and as a source of grievance. It is important to mention in this context that there were two

“...they do not consider how qualified that person is, but because that person is not from that particular tribe, he cannot get the job.”

Greenville, Sinoe County

different perceptions: In some places, the clientelistic arrangements are supposed to be of a local nature; the result of local -county, district or community- dynamics and expressed in local networks. In another cases, there was a perception that clientelistic networks often link the local and national levels, with patrons, living in Monrovia even if originally from the locality, working through local connections. Communities clearly identified these perceived conducts as an abuse of power by their authorities.¹⁸

Transparency and Marginalization

Linked to perceptions of corruption and clientelism is that of lack of transparency. Many communities expressed concerns over different aspects of the decision-making processes used in the context of the CDFs: comments recorded by the teams referred to doubts over the process of the selection of committee members, over the real nature of interests supposedly standing behind the committees or over specific decisions on projects. There is a feeling that activities about and in the committees are not sufficiently shared and explained with the majority of the community and that this is an intentional strategy to allow the deviation of the funds for personal gain. The overall perception is one of pervasive mistrust.

Mistrust is also a by-product of perceptions of remoteness and marginalization. When communities express mistrustful attitudes towards the proceedings of these committees it means that they neither feel represented by them, nor assign legitimacy to the members of the committee to speak on their behalf, nor believe that the committee’s work is in their interest. These perceptions were expressed by a wide variety of actors in different parts of the country, both in individual interviews and in focus group meetings, but two large social categories were particularly vocal. Women and youth expressed especially strong perceptions of exclusion from decision-making processes and from local authorities in general, and did so independently of ethnicity or place of residence. They perceive themselves as being unduly excluded from these processes by traditional authorities and by government officials and systematically questioned committee decisions based on the fact that they had not been represented.

A Concrete Demand: Participation

They also clearly expressed the other side of the coin: a demand for inclusion and participation. Women and youth feel that they have a right to be represented in decision-making structures in communities and local government, both in terms of being able to defend their rights and promote their interests, but also so that they can strengthen their contribution to the general good of their communities.

Women expressed this exclusion in terms of the need to participate in the decision-making process that can help them resolve the constant situation of insecurity in which they live. During the consultations, women expressed the vulnerability they suffer in all forms of violence -domestic violence, rape, etc. - is a result of their subordinated role in society. They want to participate in decision-making processes in order to ensure that their needs for security are acknowledged and acted upon, since their perception is that the male figures of authority at community and local government level do not care for them. They also expressed that their contributions to social life in their communities -as service providers, as an element for social cohesion- is not matched with a right to participate in decisions that affect their lives.¹⁹

The Physically Impaired Community

In some districts, our research teams found groups of physically impaired persons -including the blind- that were well organized and vocal in the defense of their rights. These groups underlined that the extremely limited funds available at national and local level to attend to their specific needs deepens their marginalization within society. From discrimination in employment to lack of public buildings adapted to their mobilization and access needs, these groups demanded concrete action from governmental authorities and participation in decision-making bodies so that their rights and needs can be adequately considered at the moment of distribution of public funds.

As an example, the blind community in Montserrado and surrounding counties pointed to the absence of textbooks in Braille as a major obstacle to their productive integration in society, a situation that condemns them to miserable life conditions. Officials from the Ministry of Education, on the other hand, pointed to financial constrains as the reason for this gap.

Youth also demanded to be allowed to play an active role in the life of their communities and the country. In their case, this demand is related to an awareness of the important role played by youth during conflict, both as actors and victims. It is also linked to perceptions that their seniors in the community and in local government are intentionally excluding them from rightful participation, forcing them into a passive and obedient role that they are no longer willing to play. With a note of concern, the teams registered that youth groups or individuals were also very belligerent in their assertions and expressed lack of patience. In contrast to women, their demands came accompanied with veiled or explicit threats of violence that, given the recent history of the country, are particularly worrisome. As the history of Liberia evidences, perceptions of disenfranchisement and injustice make youth a potentially violent segment of the population and are also vulnerable to political manipulation.

Quarreling Leadership

In some parts of the country there were reports regarding tensions and frictions that emerged as a result of disputes between governmental officials. In these cases, there were complaints -sometimes voiced by local government officials themselves- about problems in the functioning of local government and on the delivery of public services as a result of the absence of coordination and of competition between officials from different branches of government. Where these cases were reported, people expressed feelings of helplessness and exasperation given the fact that the local leadership that is supposed to assist the communities to prevent conflict and foster their development is actually the source of the problems. In some cases it had to do with elected legislative officials who allegedly overstepped into issues of county administration that fall under the authority of the executive branch. In others, it was about officials of the judiciary overreaching into non-judicial matters. Others reported problems in the relationship between appointed local government officials and elected local government officials -paramount and clan chiefs.²⁰

“Weak Justice” was an expression often used by participants to describe the combination of poor performance of the police and the judicial system that afflicts urban and rural communities in many parts of the country. With the exception of three counties where no reference was made to these types of issues, people in every corner of the country pointed in a direct way to a series of problems that they perceived as sources of concern and that threaten peace and security in their communities. Some belong to problems of capacity and performance of institutions and officials, others refer to the prevalence of corrupt practices and others point to tensions inherent to the implementation of modern notions of justice and security in the context of communities that, until very recently, relied mostly on traditional systems to do so. Often these three dimensions of the problem become entangled around a single case.

A Precarious State Presence

The precariousness of governmental capacities to address security and judicial needs of the population was repeatedly referred to as a critical problem. Many communities indicated that there were insufficient facilities: a limited number of police stations, court rooms and prisons and the distance between their communities and towns where these services are concentrated, makes the recourse to justice difficult and inefficient. Moreover, existing facilities were often understaffed, its officials poorly trained, badly equipped and unmotivated due to low salaries and lack of any other incentive to provide service. In some parts of the country these institutions are completely absent, but government officials and communities alike indicated that even where there is an institutional presence, its effectiveness can be severely limited by insufficient budgets, to the point that sometimes the community or the affected individual have to provide the funding necessary for the public service to be provided.²¹

Judicial officials, both at the national and local levels, expressed awareness of the precarious state of the country’s judicial system. Most judicial officials acknowledge that the judiciary is plagued with several problems but, the government is trying to establish the necessary mechanism to address some of them. The introduction of the public defense system and the recent Judicial Conference organized by the Supreme Court in March 2010 are some of the steps being taken to improve the plight of the judiciary.²² The public defense system will allow equal opportunity for counsel during trial at the expense of the state. The Judicial Conference assembled judicial personnel from every sector of the judiciary (including magistrates, judges, members of the bar association, etc) with the view of taking a critical look at the jury system, court practices and procedures, jurisdiction before hearing, the importance of the rule of law, access to justice and others, with a view to improve effectiveness of and access to the justice system.

“When people are arrested...by the next day...we hear...that person escaped the prison. No good cell, no good prison. So criminals just break jails and go free.”

Kongbor, Gbarpolu County

Corruption, Clientelism and Impunity

“...because we don’t have money, those with money are coming and taking our lands from us, you see! When you take the case to court you have to carry money. If you don’t have the money, how will you talk?”

Fish Town, River Gee County

Beyond problems derived from reduced institutional capacity and budgetary limitations, the judicial system is perceived to be rife with corruption. In many communities there is a prevailing notion that justice is often sold or procured through personal or political influence. “No money no justice” was a common phrase registered in many parts of Liberia, rural and urban. In others, political and social affiliation -personal, sectional, ethnic or religious- was considered to be the most important factor in determining the verdict by judges.

The perception is similar with regards to security officials: there were reports about fees charged to register a complaint or launch an investigation, about goods retrieved in burglary cases -or confiscated in the context of investigations- that are never returned to their rightful owners; and on religious or ethnic prejudices influencing the carrying out of complaints and investigations.²³

Many communities expressed that this combination of ineffectiveness, corruption and clientelism breeds impunity: corruption means that only the rich or influential have access to justice; culprits roam free if no extra fees are provided by victims, complicated legal requirements make justice not only slow but uncertain. And for them impunity means that the community is exposed to all sorts of misconduct, since perpetrators no longer fear the consequences of their acts. This is particularly worrisome when linked to violent crimes.

A Widespread Problem: Gender Violence

The teams found that gender violence is a widespread and dominant phenomenon. A sense of insecurity was reported as part and parcel of the daily experience of the ordinary Liberian woman. The research teams report that in urban as well as in rural settings, in different communities all over the country, women expressed being exposed to all forms of abuse without consideration to age or physical condition. Within the walls of their own homes, women are victims of different forms of domestic violence, from “wife-battering” to sexual assault. Outside their homes, they are exposed to sexual assault and rape. Women reported that this vulnerability is due to the fact that they are considered “secondary” members of the communities and that men in positions of leadership at the local level do not care for their security.

Moreover, women are exposed to a double ordeal: they are not only exposed to the acts of violence themselves, but to the prejudice of males in positions of customary or statutory authority in their communities and in the security and justice

Gender Based Violence

During the conflict years, gender based violence was rampant and directly affected the majority of women and girls. 90% of women were victims of sexual violence, with 3 out of 4 being raped. Large numbers of women were abducted and turned into sex slaves, were gang raped, or were forced into survival sex.

The problem continues to exist. According to a recent study at a Monrovia hospital out of 658 victims of rape, 85% were under 18 years of age, with 48% between 5 and 12 years. Most perpetrators were known to the victims before the attack and 20% were victims of gang rape.

WHO Multi-Country Study on Women’s Health and Domestic Violence against Women: initial results on prevalence, health outcomes and women’s responses. WHO 2005

system to which they have to bring their cases. Many reported prejudiced and humiliating treatment; others pointed to dismissive attitudes and lack of interest. In consequence, many women victims of violence chose not to complain to the authorities as it might not only be ineffective but actually might add more suffering to their ordeal.

A General Perception of Insecurity

Reports about ongoing violence of other types were not widespread, and only in a minority of county communities complained about it as a major concern. But even where there were no mentions to ongoing violence affecting the community, in most places there was a concern about eventual explosions of violence as a result of accumulated tensions, and their potential effects in social and political life. In some parts of the country, the conflict is a vivid memory and communities are still dealing with the complex legacy of its destructive effects. Communities feel vulnerable to violence, and reports about “flare ups” of violence in other parts of the country reinforce the perception about their exposure to it.

Where violence appeared as an actual motive of concern and tension for communities its sources varied. In some cases violence originated within the communities themselves, as part of unresolved disputes in which one party commits an act of aggression against the other party, often causing a violent response.²⁴ Common crime was also cited as a source of violence, with cases of assault and murder linked mostly to robbery.

But some of the reported cases point to perceived threats of a different nature: some communities expressed concerns about “foreigners” roaming in areas close to Liberia’s international borders and encroaching upon natural resources.²⁵ Others pointed to the prevalence of ritualistic murders conducted by secret societies, including crimes committed using “spiritual means”.²⁶

A Retreat into Customary Justice

A different, if not less worrying attitude was reported by teams operating in the South East. Some communities in these counties expressed that ineffectiveness of the statutory security and justice system was rendering them exposed to violence and criminality of all kinds, including ritualistic crimes. This was accompanied by assertions that the community was better protected against all threats, including spiritual ones, when traditional methods currently prohibited by law were used. Their demand was therefore to reinstate customary law to its full extent: to reintroduce trial by ordeal practices and allow communities to procure security and justice as they have done traditionally. In some cases, the demand came with a warning that if necessary they would resort to trial by ordeal even against governmental authority.

“Government is not in the position to fight crimes. There are communities with no law enforcement officers. There is need for the substitution of delayed justice with instant justice: Sassywood”

Customary authorities in Takeway Town, Grand Bassa County

Unconstitutionality of Trial by Ordeal

Trial by ordeal that endangers life is prohibited according to Liberian laws and regulations. Article 73 of the Revised Rules and Regulations Governing the Hinterland of Liberia explicitly forbids the trial by ordeal practice known as “sassywood”: *“trial by native ordeal shall not be allowed in cases where the bark of the sassywood which is generally made or concoction or preparation, with mineral or vegetables and administered internally; any person who shall administer, or shall authorize, permit, order, aid, promote, or otherwise participate in the administration of such an ordeal shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor and punishable according to law. The administering doctor, together with all persons responsible therefore shall be made to pay a fine not exceeding \$200.00; where death occurs as a result of the trial, they shall be held to answer criminally in any of the courts of this republic of competent jurisdiction to try said crime. Ordeal, however, of a minor nature and which do not endanger the life of the individual, shall be allowed and is hereby authorized.”* Therefore, trial by ordeal is prohibited only partially.

A general principle of Liberian law is that the burden of providing evidence against a suspect is on the accuser, not the accused. Trial by ordeal, including but not only sassywood, puts the burden of proof on the accused. Furthermore, according to Liberia’s constitution a person accused of a crime *“shall not be compelled to furnish evidence against himself”*, which is the essence of trial by ordeal. Finally, Article 2 of the constitution states that any laws found to be inconsistent with the constitution shall be void and of no legal effect.

A Confidence Crisis

At the same time, because of and in result of these perceptions, there is a palpable lack of trust in the judicial system. It is part of a wider perception of disfunctionality of local governance reported elsewhere in this report. Perceptions of ineffectiveness and corruption of justice erode the trust of individuals and communities in authorities and become a worrying gap in the relationship between national authorities and the population. Coupled with perceptions of insecurity, they can be the source of potential conflict: in many parts of the country, communities expressed decidedly that unless their security and justice needs are effectively addressed by national authorities, they will have to take justice into their own hands.

Sometimes these claims have pointed to a return to customary practices, as explained above. But most of the times they refer to “mob justice”: direct action by the community to get the assumed culprits and punish them for their alleged activities. Sometimes, these actions confront them directly with local officials from the police and the judiciary and result in further erosion of the incipient governmental presence. Furthermore, in the context of complex conflicts that easily mobilize ethnic, religious or “sectional” allegiances, such acts could easily escalate into problems of political significance that constitute a threat beyond the specific community itself.

But with the exception of communities in which the reaction to perceived insecurity is to retreat fully into customary justice, in most parts of the country the reaction is not to detach from national structures and frameworks, but to demand stronger and more effective presence by responsible authorities.²⁷ Even when mob justice was cited as the only option in case there would be no reaction from local and national authorities, it was used as a way to underline their demand for more police stations, more courts of justice and more prisons, with better-trained personnel and sufficient budgets. The tragic contradiction between expectations and actions, though, is that it can result in further erosion of incipient capacities the state is trying to implement: police stations burned, prisons destroyed, government officials repealed from the communities.²⁸

Discrimination, Identity and Citizenship

Liberians have competing identities. There are 16 indigenous tribes with which individuals and communities clearly identify with. A separate group is constituted by the Americo-Liberians,

Restricted Citizenship

The decision to restrict citizenship to non-whites has its origin in sentiments shared by the country's founding fathers about securing a homeland for people of Negro descent. In their quest for a home in Africa, the settlers needed to ensure a safe space to sustain their hopes and aspirations. Hence, they sought not only to establish a new state but also to enshrine in this basic document a guarantee against the prospects of white control or domination.

Therefore, Article 22 A of the 1986 constitution of the Republic of Liberia states that *"Every person shall have the right to own property alone as well as in association with others; provided that only Liberian citizens shall have the right to own real property within the republic"*. Article 28 further states that: *"Any person, at least one of whose parents was a citizen of Liberia at the time of the Person's birth, shall be a citizen of Liberia; provided that any such person shall upon reaching maturity renounce any other citizenship acquired by virtue of one parent being a citizen of another country. No citizen of the republic shall be deprived of citizenship or nationality except as provided by law; and no person shall be denied the right to change citizenship or nationality"*, adding in Section B that *"In order to preserve, foster and maintain the positive Liberian culture, values and character, only persons who are Negroes or of Negro descent shall qualify by birth or by naturalization to be citizens of Liberia"*.

descendants of the freed American slaves that founded the country. There is also a prominent Lebanese community established over a century ago, as well as immigrant communities of Fulani, originally from Guinea and of Fanti fishermen from Ghana. There are also different religious identities: there are expanding Christian and Muslim communities and African traditional religions are still dominant in many parts of the country. There are localized, clannish and regional identities -*"sections"*- that sometimes cut across tribal and religious ones.²⁹ And there is of course a Liberian identity, centered on a feeling of belonging to a political community as defined by the institutions and laws of the republic: the nation.

Multiple identities in a society are not rare. All over the world, nationals of many countries hold multiple allegiances that make them feel part of different groups or communities within their society simultaneously, without this being the source of violence or disruption. But in other places and linked to processes of social, cultural, political or economic exclusion -access to political power, access to resources, access to equal rights- competing identities can be sources of violent conflict.

With the exception of mounting tensions around Mandingo communities, often laden with additional conflictive connotations reaching back to the war, the research teams found no deep, societal cleavages between specific ethnic or religious groups that were intrinsically conflictive. Liberians consulted along this process expressed competing more than confronted identities. These competing identities lay at the root of reported perceptions, prevalent in different parts of the country, of discrimination along ethnic, religious and sectional lines, but also along lines of gender and literacy. And two critical factors make competing identities and perceptions of discrimination a source of concern as a potential source of conflict: the weakness of an overall national identity that serves as the integrating core for all other identities; and the vulnerability of ethnic and religious

allegiances to opportunistic mobilizations.

Disputed Notions of Citizenship

The Liberian constitution clearly defines citizenship: only persons of Negro descent, naturalized or born in Liberia, or children of at least one Liberian parent, can be full citizens. This means that between the members of the 16 tribes and Americo-Liberians there should not be any differential notion of citizenship: they should all hold equal rights, independently of any ethnic, religious or “sectional” considerations. This is not always understood to be the case. During the consultations, participants often expressed notions of citizenship that are subordinated to ethnic, religious or local identity and that assume the existence of differential rights that are expressed in the form of discrimination.

Ethnic Discrimination

Perceptions of ethnic-based discrimination were very evident in the case of the relationship between Mandingoes and other tribes in the country. Settled in many parts of Liberia and dedicated mostly to commercial activities that imply a high level of mobility inside the country and constant travel across the frontiers, Mandingoes complained about systematic discrimination by other ethnic groups, who allegedly question their citizenship rights as well as their “*Liberianness*”. This discrimination is supposedly expressed on a range of issues: around access to land, in the questioning of the right of Mandingoes to own property in what might be considered “traditional land” and on the validity of their deeds once they acquire it.

The 1973 Customary law of Liberia Article 66 (a) and (b) says the right and title for farming areas and other essential necessities of a tribe is inherent in the tribe. When the tribes procure deeds from government, it gives them title to the land against any person or persons. Article (b) further states that once the land is surveyed, the trusteeship goes to the paramount chief who does not have the right to pass it to the community. This is part of the controversy in the Nimba crisis. The Mano and Gio ethnic groups are seen as the original tribes that inherited or secured the land in Nimba before the arrival of the Mandingoes who are considered ‘strangers’. In the way they are treated by authorities: Mandingoes often complained of harassment by police and immigration officers in the context of their travels, be it when they cross international borders or inter-county borders and of being referred to and treated as foreigners on the basis of their ethnicity. And there were concrete references to the fact that they are not sufficiently represented among the staff of local government institutions: police, immigration service, county authorities.

“..Once you say ‘I am Mamadee or Konneh’ they will take your documentation from you on the grounds that you are not a citizen of this country.”

Zwedru, Grand Gedeh County

Some perceptions about the Mandingoes, recorded by the research teams, seem to confirm that members of other ethnic groups hold discriminatory perceptions against them. In some instances, these resulted from Mandingo attitudes that were considered by other ethnic communities as insulting, such as their refusal to give away their daughters in marriage to non-Muslims while taking non-Muslim girls in marriage. Others referred to a resentment developed during the conflict, in which different warring groups mobilized ethnic allegiances in their fight for political power and economic spoils. But they came also from the identification of Mandingoes as “newcomers” into the country, pointing to their comparatively late arrival into Liberia as the basis for differing rights.

The notion of differing rights was evident in the context of property disputes linked to ethnic alignment between conflicting groups during the war. But even in the context of positive comments around peaceful co-existence, communities expressed notions of differential political rights according to which it is the “original” ethnic group the one that “grants” -and takes back if needed- rights to the newcomers.³⁰ These are notions of citizenship that clearly differ from those established in the constitution. It means that the notions of equal rights to people of Negro descent established in it are not shared by everybody, and that in parts of the country, ethnic discrimination is justified by the population. Or beyond, it might mean that some groups understand that being a Liberian is not a function of the criteria established in the constitution, but of ethnicity, with some groups living in the territory not part of the nation.

“The Mandingoes are interested in equal rights, equal opportunities, equal representation in government at county level, failing to know that they are secondary in this county.

In fact, they do not meet the academic criteria set for achieving leadership positions. A stranger cannot be more powerful than the stranger’s father.”

Voinjama, Lofa County

The tension between Mandingo and other ethnic groups in Liberia is prevalent but not the only one. Members of the Lebanese community complained about the discriminatory nature of the constitutional limitation of citizenship and property ownership to persons of Negro descent. From their perspective, their community has roots in the country that date back over a century and is an important part of its economy, making continuous contributions to the development of the country. But the current constitutional limitations, which they qualified as unfair and discriminatory, means that they are treated as foreigners.

Many of the other registered perceptions about ethnic-based discrimination usually centered on more specific issues and locations and responded more to local dynamics -the relationship between minority and majority being central- that were not reflected in the inter-ethnic relations in neighboring districts or counties. A tribe accused of discrimination against another group in a county may appear as the victim of discrimination in

another one, the cases are usually about localized disputes about property rights or access to natural resources or employment.³¹

Overall, although ethnicity can be an important factor contributing to the level tensions around a dispute, it is rarely the source. The majority of cases registered did not evidence the systemic inter-ethnic tension that exists around Mandingo communities. But as recent examples in River Cess, Sinoe, Maryland and Lofa have shown, every dispute is susceptible of becoming volatile through the development of opportunistic discourses that mobilize ethnic allegiances.

Inter-religious Tensions

Because Mandingoes are Muslim, from their point of view ethnic discrimination often appears intertwined with religious tensions, with discourses in which ethnic identity is mixed with religious allegiances and mobilization. But there is no full overlap between these two categories.

Not every Muslim community in Liberia is ethnically Mandingo: for example the Vais, Gbandees and Mandeas also have larger Muslim populations as well as Fulani who are predominantly Muslim. And the teams recorded inter-religious tensions that were not related to inter-ethnic tensions. Perceptions of inter-religious tensions were not widespread in the country, according to our consultation. Where they

Ethnicity and 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 in 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 Manos 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.

Ethnicity per se was not the source from which the conflict arose, but conflicting forces coalesced around ethnic allegiances. The resulting resentment and mistrust continue to permeate inter-ethnic relations in some parts of the country today.

were reported, cases fell within two main categories: tensions between Christians and Muslims and tensions between the monotheistic religions and African traditional religions.

Among Muslims there is a perception that they are discriminated against by the state, notwithstanding the secular character of the Liberian state as defined by the constitution. The official nature of Christianity reflected in discourse and ceremonies, the fact that none of their religious holidays are recognized as national holidays in contrast to Christian celebrations and the difficulty in securing land for ritual needs such as burials was underlined as proof of discrimination and a matter needing urgent attention. Where tensions between Muslims and Christians were reported, they were about places of religious significance: burial places, location of mosques or churches, etc. It is indicative to note that Mandingoes said they are referred to as "Mandingo dogs", something which has corroded their honor and dignity. This is common in Buchanan City, Grand Bassa. But most tensions reported to the teams were found to be linked to other, pre-existing disputes, for example over property rights. Inter-religious tensions appear in these cases as the result of opportunistic mobilization of allegiances by the parties involved in a conflict, as masks that foster individual goals more than as expression of intrinsic enmities between believers at the community or national level.³²

Nevertheless, even if not the fundamental reason behind a conflict, inter-religious tensions can often result in violent explosions leading to the death of innocent citizens and loss of properties. This makes efforts to prevent and mediate inter-religious conflicts critical for consolidation of peace in the country and the existence of an organization of Christian, Muslim and African traditional religion leaders actively committed to these goals, the Inter-religious Council of Liberia, an important asset.

Tradition, Religion and Cultural Change

Some reported tensions emerged from processes of cultural change in traditional communities. The expansion of Christianity and Islam into traditional communities implies frictions which communities often find difficult to manage, and lead to reciprocal accusations of discrimination. In some places, the continued operation of customary practices was resented by

members of the community that felt these to be a source of coercion³³; in others, customary practices were perceived as necessary for the strength of the community, and a “lack of respect” for these traditions by community members that converted to Christianity or Islam were perceived as a threat.³⁴

Poro and Sande, deep-rooted traditional cultural institutions in Liberia, are the subject of diverging views and tensions involving parents, traditional religious authorities, school teachers and administrators within the communities. For traditionalists, adherence, upholding and protection of traditional values is necessary for the preservation of their culture and the well-being of the community, Poro and Sande fulfill this role. But for parents, the “bush school” of Poro and Sande undermines their children’s possibility to obtain the education imparted in state, church and mosque educational institutions. The forceful recruitment of their daughters into the Sande, against the will of children and parents, was registered as a source of strong resentment and tension, particularly due to the lengthy time spent in the bush, ranging from one to three years. School teachers and administrators expressed their strongest conviction that the practice has an unbearable impact on the academic activities in the communities, hindering the academic advancement of youngsters. High level officials at the Ministry of Education have expressed serious concerns over this situation, noting that some of the personnel assigned to communities where these practices are deep-rooted are being threatened to join these traditional practices. At some point, personnel had to be transferred to different assigned areas due to the gravity of these threats. At the same time, a negotiation aimed at shifting and restricting the calendar of the “bush school” to the months of school vacations has been initiated by the Ministries of Education, of Health and of Internal Affairs, in an attempt to reconcile the parallel educational cycles.

Child rights emerged in several communities as another example of these tensions. Child rights advocacy focuses on the need to protect children from all forms of abuses and exploitation, such as child labor and early marriage. The government of Liberia, in collaboration with international institutions, has launched a campaign to this effect. UNICEF partners with the government of Liberia, through the Division of Children Protection within the Ministry of Gender and Development, to advocate the need to protect the rights of children, thus protecting them from all forms of abuses and exploitations such as child labor, boys’ preference, early marriage, etc. But some traditional authorities perceive that this campaign is an infringement on their cultural values, which threatens the basis of traditional authority of the

A Plan of Action against Discrimination

Women have played a major role throughout the history of Liberia. They are 54 % of the labor force in both the formal and informal sectors. In agriculture they constitute the majority of smallholder producers and it is estimated that they produce approximately 60 % of agricultural products, carry out more than 80 % of trading activities in the rural areas and are heavily engaged in the artisanal fishing industry, in addition to fulfilling daily household chores. Yet women remain among the most disadvantaged sectors in society. They are disproportionately clustered in the least productive sectors, with 90 % employed in the informal sector or agriculture. Trapped into the informal economy, they are condemned to low productivity, meager earnings and exposure to exploitation.

The government has expressed its commitment to achieving gender equality and women’s rights as a means to maintaining peace, reducing poverty, enhancing justice and promoting sustainable development. The country has achieved some noticeable progress towards gender equality, and being the first African country to elect a female head of government is one. Under a joint Government-UN Programme, strengthening the capacity of the Ministry of Gender and Development to deliver on its mandate of coordination and mainstreaming gender into all national development processes remains a key target. Two key documents that incorporate these goals into government policy aiming to transform the landscape of gender imbalance and to enhance women’s position in the development of Liberia are currently being finalized: the National Gender Policy and the National Action Plan on Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

community, and the result of “western imports” unsuitable for African contexts. In their view, children are no longer adhering to what are considered acceptable social norms and values -their responsibilities- making them “ungovernable”.

Finally, customary practices can be the source of tensions and frictions in a different way. In several parts of the country communities expressed concerns about practices associated with traditional beliefs: reports of ritualistic killings, criminal acts conducted through spiritual means or roaming devils and witches.³⁵ These perceptions are often associated with concrete suspects -individuals or groups that are intentionally seeking to harm the community- or to abstract categories that are liable to be applied arbitrarily to individuals in the community or passing through it and evidently become a source of tension that might lead to acts of violence which, in the volatile context of the country, might acquire a different dimension.

Gender Discrimination

Gender based discrimination was a recurrent theme among women participating in our consultation. In different parts of the country, perceptions of marginalization of women and their exclusion from decision-making processes at the community level were highlighted in individual interviews as well as in collective consultations. Women noted that they have absolutely no say in the formulation of those decisions which affect every member of the society, including those affecting women directly. Most of the time, men occupy the helm of the leadership of every town, village, clan and chiefdom; only a handful of women hold local leadership posts. Their views, opinions, suggestions are never consulted for incorporation into decisions at the community level, and their interests are therefore neither protected nor promoted.

Unemployment and Access to Resources

Issues of access to economic resources and governmental services were consistently mentioned in the individual interviews and collective sessions all over Liberia. Communities were vocal in expressing that, with the end of war, they expect national authorities to assist the communities in their development needs. Better roads to facilitate communication and trade, accessible schools and health services, police stations and courts that can provide security, were among the most recurrent demands. But these expectations, by themselves, were not reported as potential immediate sources of conflict. In different ways and degrees, communities expressed -sometimes implicitly- awareness that as a result of the war the whole country needs to be rebuilt and that this is an enormous and time consuming task. And there was recognition of efforts made by national authorities through the allocation of County Development Funds that can be used to address some urgent needs.

But development issues become a source of tension and potential conflict when combined to perceptions of corruption or discrimination from the part of responsible authorities, or when capacities to resolve controversies are absent. As presented elsewhere in this report, perceptions of abuse of power, of discrimination in favor of a specific group -ethnic, religious or political-, of promotion of self-interest in disregard for the common good, were often referred to as intolerable conduct that negatively affect the well-being of the communities. And if legitimate mediating capacities to resolve contentious issues -statutory or customary- do not exist to adjudicate on land disputes, to prevent discrimination or to deal with corruption; tensions can result in conflict and conflict can result in violence.

Unemployment and Youth

For many communities around the country, unemployment clearly is a potential source of conflict by itself. In some communities, it was remarked that recent cases of unrest or violence in their midst was linked to the “idle hands” of unemployed youth. In others, unemployment was perceived to contribute directly to criminal activity. Youth itself angrily complained all over the country about the lack of economic opportunities and unemployment. Sometimes, their complaints were accompanied with more or less veiled threats of violence. Unemployment was consistently mentioned in communities surrounding rubber plantations, where it was held in contrast to the intensive economic activity of the agricultural enterprises, and usually explained as a result of the discrimination of the community in favor of somebody else, be it of another ethnic group, another county or another country.

“...politicians...pay those people who are not working to rise against...[a]... situation. In that way, we will be going back to where we are coming from”.

Greenville, Sinoe County

Demobilized Soldiers

The re-structuring of the Armed Forces of Liberia was one of the key recommendations put forth in the 2003 Comprehensive Peace Accord that put an end to hostilities in Liberia. Part four, article II section B of the CPA states: "The Armed Forces of Liberia shall be restructured and will have a new command structure. The forces may be drawn from the ranks of the present GOL forces, the LURD and the MODEL, as well as from civilians with appropriate background and experience. The Parties request that ECOWAS, the UN, AU, and the ICGL provide advisory staff, equipment, logistics and experienced trainers for the security reform effort. The Parties also request that the United States of America play a lead role in organizing this restructuring programme." Between 14,000 to 15,000 AFL elements (including approximately 5,000 pre-war soldiers and about 9,000 1990 recruits) were retired, certificated, given medals and severance pay ranging from US\$540 to US\$ 3,000. In 2008, a legislative act created the National Bureau of Veteran Affairs (NBVA) as a state institution with the mandate to promote the welfare of retired soldiers. Accurate data on the exact distribution of former soldiers across the country does not exist.

Demobilization and Unemployment

Linked to unemployment, another source of conflict registered during our research was the disgruntlement of demobilized Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) soldiers. Communities in different parts of the country expressed concerns about the potential of this group to generate conflict in the country. But it has to be underlined that this is not a potential but rather an actual source of conflict with concrete, negative effects for governance. Our research teams met with demobilized AFL personnel in Grand Gedeh, who complained about having been unfairly demobilized, without adequate compensation or gainful employment. These perceptions of unfair treatment were usually accompanied by demands for employment, including a return to the army ranks. To press their demands -which national authorities consider illegitimate since benefits have been delivered as established by law- demobilized soldiers have resorted to violent demonstrations and road blocks, which not only disrupt the peace and the daily life of specific communities, but threaten good governance in the country. In other parts of the country, communities expressed concern about this issue, without claiming that they were directly affected by it.

CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD



Critical gaps in Liberian society

Conclusions and the Way Forward: Critical Gaps in Liberian Society and an Invitation to Dialogue

A Fragile Peace

Armed conflict has effectively disappeared. The warring groups that fought for 14 years are dissolved. Communities are no longer subject to the destruction and violence caused by the columns of fighters that roamed through the countryside. Youth is no longer forcibly recruited to die for reasons they do not understand.

The Accra Peace Accords and a Transitional period allowed Liberia to escape the cycle of war and elect new democratic authorities. The first female head of state of Africa, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, was sworn as President of the Republic of Liberia in 2006, ushering a new chapter in the country's history. With the support of the international community, the new authorities have embarked in an ambitious programme of reconstruction and consolidation: rebuilding the economy, restoring basic services, promoting development, and revamping democratic institutions. In the seven years that have passed since the signature of the Accra Peace Accords, Liberia has made important strides in each of these areas, from the disarmament and demobilization of former combatants with considerable efforts aimed at their reintegration and rehabilitation, to the improvement of the business climate attracting large-scale investments in mining, energy and other related industries.

The Challenge Ahead

And yet, the future cannot be taken for granted. The challenges of rebuilding a country ravaged by years of war are considerable. Many years will have to pass until basic services that were destroyed during the conflict are rebuilt; many more will have to pass to extend these services to the majority of the population that did not enjoy access to them before the conflict. Reforming and consolidating democratic institutions of governance is a time consuming, ongoing process which does not allow shortcuts. And although Liberia is a resource-rich country, the development of its mineral and agricultural resources into an economy that benefits fairly all groups in its society cannot happen overnight.

This means that in the foreseeable future, the country will have to deal with the tensions and contradictions inherent to this gradual and progressive process of social and political development. And the way it deals with these tensions and frictions will determine the fate of the peace it now enjoys: is it a transient moment, will it become a chronically fragile condition, or will it evolve into a strong reality?

Multiple Tensions and Frictions

Tensions and frictions are widespread in Liberian society today. Our consultation process has allowed us to identify the critical issues around which Liberian society accumulates tensions and frictions which, depending on how they are addressed and resolved, are actual or potential drivers of conflict. Urban

and rural communities shared with the teams their concerns and pointed to the issues they believed stand in the way of peace, explaining them in their own terms.

These “obstacles to peace” were not expressed primarily as “national” problems: issues that threaten countrywide social or political processes and that, because of the general crisis, would have a negative impact in the local well-being. Communities identified and prioritized challenges to peace fundamentally in terms of problems threatening their own community’s peace, independent of considerations of the scope of this problem beyond their communities. But the recurrence of some of these issues across the different regions of the country allowed the teams to identify reported problems that are local variations of general ones, which as such acquire national dimension and relevance as fault-lines of potential conflict, threatening peace and governance at the national level. These recurrent issues were grouped under the five categories presented as “Challenges to Peace” earlier in this chapter.

Other reported issues were the expression of more localized problems, with limited or no recurrence beyond a certain community or district. For the affected communities these issues may be no less relevant than the ones related to a national fault-line, but their impact as a source of conflict at a national level is limited. Its impact tends to be confined to the specific places where it occurs. These are indicated in the specific County Summary Reports attached to this report.

A Fractured Society

Two factors emerge as explaining the prevalence of these multiple and different tensions and frictions all over Liberia. The first one is the fractured nature of Liberian society; the second is the precarious presence of state institutions in the communities.

Liberia is a country with a heterogeneous society. There are multiple ethnic, religious, and local identities in Liberian society. Yet the teams recorded few deep-seated enmities: intrinsic tensions between one ethnic group and another -or a religious identity and another- that consistently pitches them in confrontation everywhere over the country. But at the same time, individuals and communities assign trust and solidarity fundamentally along ethnic, religious or local lines: trust exists primarily between the members of the same identity group, and the relationship with the other goes along different variations of mistrust.

Therefore, an ethnic or a religious identity can easily become a rallying point that divides a community - or confront different communities- around specific problems. Parties in a dispute seek and obtain support for their claim among those with whom they identify primarily, thus turning what could otherwise be a banal dispute into one of social dimensions. And sometimes mistrust and rumors suffice: an incident can be misinterpreted along inter-ethnic or inter-religious claims and mobilize collective allegiances into major confrontations.

A Weak National Identity

This situation is allowed by the weakness of an overall Liberian national identity defined above these competing identities and allowing the development of cross-cutting trust and collaboration between members of a political community. People consulted in the communities did refer to this overall Liberian identity, and sometimes related it to the notion of citizenship. But in practice, the national identity appeared most of the time as a secondary identity subordinated to an ethnic, religious or local one. Linked to this, it also appeared as a notion that received different meanings according to the primary

identity, with some groups defining arbitrarily who was not a Liberian, or considering different degrees of *Liberianness* and, therefore, rights. The ties that weave together these different identities into a coherent, integrating one are weak.

A Particularly Explosive Situation and Many Potential Cleavages

The situation of Mandingo communities in the country reflects these situations at their worst. In many parts of the country, relationships between Mandingo communities and their neighbors are laden with layers and memories of past conflicts, with perceptions and realities of discriminating practices, with deep levels of mistrust and apprehension. This is the one inter-ethnic cleavage that is actively explosive, prone to periodic outbursts, and that because of its prevalence in several and important parts of the country has considerable potential for destabilization. It is a critical problem that needs urgent attention.

But it is not the most important one: the relative weakness of the bonds of trust and collaboration across competing identities make the heterogeneity of Liberian society a challenge for consolidation of peace beyond this specific case. As the consultation has evidenced, any ethnic -or religious- allegiances can be mobilized in ways that turn disputes into explosive conflicts. Without the development of a stronger national identity that creates and fosters overall bonds of trust and collaboration that cut across the competing ethnic, religious and local identities, heterogeneity can be fertile ground for conflict.

Only an overall political identity that clearly defines and practices equal rights and duties to all Liberians, independently of ethnic, religious or local allegiances, will be able to turn what now seems to be a multiplicity of communities and collectivities into a functional political body. And in order to prevent this overall identity itself from becoming a source of conflict, it should not be an identity that suppresses or denies religious, ethnic or local identities, but rather one that integrates them into a heterogeneous but cohesive reality: the Liberian nation.

Precarious State Institutions

The integration of society and the development of an overall political identity is one of the main functions of political institutions in a democratic state. It is achieved by the combined effect of institutions that provide for the security needs of its population, promote development so that their basic needs are cared for, and foster the allegiance between the population in its territory and the political institutions of the state.

But the Liberian state has not been democratic until very recently: until 1980, the country developed institutions serving the political and economic domination of its immigrant founders over the indigenous inhabitants, and concentrated functions and services around Monrovia and a few other cities, with extremely limited presence beyond them. The descent into armed conflict in December 24, 1989 destroyed the already limited institutional capacities of the state, and left the communities to cater for their needs -security, development, justice, etc. - by their own. The institutional presence of the state across Liberia became precarious.

The government is making serious efforts to address this challenge. It is trying to develop and strengthen institutions responsible for security, development and governance. But it is doing so with very limited financial, institutional and human resources. It is an enormous challenge. And the gap

between existing needs at the community level and capacities within governmental institutions means that the reconstruction of the Liberian state to a point of full national presence -the capacity of its institutions to effectively and efficiently perform its functions in every corner of the country- is a task that will take many more years.

The Need for Conflict Resolution Capacities at Different Levels

In the absence of a strong governmental presence throughout the country, frictions and tensions within and between the communities can more easily develop into violent conflict, and conflict can acquire dimensions that threaten governance and peace.

Sometimes, traditional community dispute resolution mechanisms have the capacity to intervene and resolve some of these disputes. The teams witnessed cases where, in the context of their work, these mechanisms were implemented with effective results. But when the disputes cut across communities or ethnic groups, or when the legitimacy of traditional authorities and mechanisms is challenged within the community -linked to processes of modernization, cultural change, political competition, etc.- the effectiveness of these mechanisms is challenged.

In recent years there have been important efforts undertaken to try to develop and strengthen community dispute resolution capacities, reinforce customary practices with new methodologies and tools that can render them more effective. This is positive and should be encouraged, as it allows the development of capacities in places where there are no alternative mechanisms available. But the scope of the work of these traditional mechanisms is inherently limited to the local space. Therefore, there is a need to develop stronger dispute resolution capacities that can weave together, integrate and complement these community mechanisms where they exist and are effective. And that can provide alternative, judicial and non judicial mechanisms where they are not.

There is a need to strengthen conflict resolution capacities at the different levels of social life in Liberia, and this is an important role that governmental institutions have to play. Their presence at the local level through institutions that can perform their functions and support the communities is a critical one to prevent and contain disputes and conflicts. This is not only a result of the specific functions themselves: delivering services, protecting the community, ensuring rule of law. It is also the result of the cooperation and collaboration that is developed through the normal interface of the relationship between local government and the population, a key integrating factor between population and national authorities.

Bad Governance at the Local Level Threatens Consolidation of Peace

This is why perceptions of remoteness, injustice and abuse of power by local representatives and agencies of national authorities become an additional problem by themselves. Under such perceptions, communities feel that it is not only about the limited resources that state authorities have to assist them, but about its will to do it. The local population demands state institutions that are effective in addressing their needs and concerns, and state institutions require the local population to rally and support their efforts to address these, thus validating and legitimizing their authority.

The local interface between state authority and local population therefore is critical, for it is around it that the bond between national authorities and local population 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.

Three Critical Areas to Strengthen Liberian Resilience to Conflict

Aware of these challenges, the Liberian Platform for Dialogue and Peace is proposing to begin a new phase of its work, engaging national authorities, political actors and civil society in a collaborative effort: a common search for concrete policy recommendations that can strengthen the capacity of the country to prevent the development of violent conflict. Through the implementation of a dialogue and research methodology, our aim is to facilitate convergence between relevant actors around concrete policy recommendations that can address some of the gaps identified throughout our consultation.

The research aspect of this process will enable participant actors to gain better understanding of the specific problems and develop a shared understanding of its main characteristics. The dialogue aspect of this process will allow actors in state and society to gradually converge around concrete proposals for action. The intention is to identify the critical stakeholders of the specific issues in state and in society to participate in this effort, and to jointly understand the problem, identify the different efforts and proposals that exist around the subject, and agree on specific measures through which the efforts of national institutions, the international community, and civil society can be brought together to address the problem.

Not every one of the critical issues highlighted in this report will be covered during the next phase of our work. On the one hand, as a project with limited resources, it is beyond our capacity to facilitate such an intensive process of participative engagement on every issue. On the other hand, some of these issues are already the object of attention by different national institutions and international organizations, with similar policy development intent, despite different methods. And there is no need to duplicate or interfere with such efforts.

The range of issues surrounding land disputes are the focus of attention of the Land Reform Commission, who is working on the development of a modern and efficient legal and institutional framework that can address and prevent property disputes. Questions of unemployment and socio-economic development are the core of the government’s Poverty Reduction Strategy, which it is implementing with the active support of the international community. Concrete efforts to fight corruption, reform the judiciary, and combat gender discrimination are underway.

Our proposal is therefore to concentrate our efforts in three areas in which we believe there is an urgent need to create spaces where different actors in state and society can collaborate in the search for concrete measures that address them, and that can have a catalytic effect in the development of elements of social cohesion and institutional legitimacy that are the foundation of cohesive societies:

a. Identity and Citizenship

There is a clear need for an effort to explore the difficult problems that exist at every level in our country regarding the relationship between its different ethnic groups, between its different religious identities, and between these and national institutions. Some of these problems already require urgent attention, as their explosiveness is not potential but actual, as in the case of the Mandingo community. Others are the source of ongoing frictions that, even if they do not have the national dimension of the previous case, have a direct impact over specific communities and a potential for destabilization and disruption at a national level. Moreover, the

identification of a weak national identity and different and contrasting notions of “who is Liberian” and “what is being Liberian” requires a concerted effort to identify viable avenues to address this situation.

b. Local Governance

The relationship between local government representatives and the population was evidenced as one of the major weaknesses throughout the consultation. Perceptions of lack of transparency, corruption and nepotism around the CDF process, or around issues of security and justice, are a considerable obstacle to governmental efforts in these areas and a source of friction and conflict at the local level. Whether these perceptions respond to reality or not, they need to be addressed through mechanisms that increase transparency and participation, and efforts that improve the quality of the communication between authorities and society. This issue is, moreover, linked to the previous one: questions of rights and duties -the core of the notion of citizenship- are experienced and expressed first and foremost in the daily interaction of the population and local authorities. The strengthening of the relationship between the population and the local representatives of national authority will aggregate into a stronger bond between state and society.

c. Peacebuilding Frameworks

Tensions and conflicts will be part and parcel of Liberian reality in the foreseeable future. The heterogeneous nature of our society and the relatively weak implantation of the state in the communities imply that the type of problems registered in this report will not disappear any time soon. The process of political and economic development that the country is undergoing will be inevitably mired by potential conflict: competition over economic resources, disputes over political rights, frictions derived from the modernization of culture, are natural sources of conflict that, if not effectively addressed, can result in renewed cycles of violent conflict and destabilize our fragile peace. Liberia needs to strengthen its capacity -in the state but also in society- to effectively deal with conflict: a capacity to identify actual and potential sources of conflict; to develop interventions that can prevent these from becoming the source of renewed violence; and to coordinate and harmonize efforts by all institutions and sectors in society to contain its negative effects: a Peacebuilding Framework.

AFTERWORD



Afterword

This report presents the results of a year-long research consultation conducted all over Liberia with the goal of determining the viewpoints of inhabitants regarding conflict issues and how they think resolution can be found to consolidate peace in the country. While it is true that the research did not touch every village and hamlet of the country, what was essential for the process was the requirement that Liberia's diversity be tapped in contributing to the contents of the report.

The report gives a vivid picture of the legacy of Liberia's historical conflicts, of their impacts on the population and on the continuing legacy of polarization in the current period. It evidences a series of different tensions which, when diligently accorded careful attention, could lead ultimately to sustainable peace and stability, the condition catalytic to the sprouting and germination of a thriving democracy, economic growth and development.

Liberians from all walks of life have spoken and their speech is rather loud and clear. It is a speech indicative of a country opposed to internecine warfare, trying to overcome the widespread dislocation of its citizenry and the devastation of its socio-economic infrastructure and institutions. Fourteen years of destruction have made evident to almost all sectors of society that reconciliation is noble and necessary, and that a united society can rapidly forge ahead developmentally, with the support of international goodwill. Liberians are saying there is a need for improved service delivery at all levels of governance, so that the citizens of this country can realize their full potential.

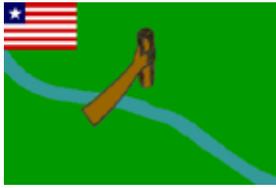
Moreover, the war has shown us that the grievances of both rural and urban populations were used by insurgent groups during the nearly two decades of their armed campaigns to rally the population around their cause and dislodging social harmony. The agonies expressed by participants concerning concrete problems, including the problematic relationship with local authorities, can become highly explosive and require timely action. Unless the lessons of history serve the current generation of Liberians well, the mistakes of the past would be repeated and the same ugly pattern of retribution for perceived or real grievances could befall the nation.

The multitude of problems and the challenging goals of a post-conflict environment with limited resources requires a continuous peacebuilding engagement that is carried out to ensure that peace and stability rain in this once sweet land of liberty. As we embark upon the next phase, all Liberians need to take heed from the inspiring words, recorded during one of our meetings, who reminded us of our collective responsibility in the search for peace and express at the same time the yearning of our nation:

“There will come a time for the peacekeepers to leave this country and when they leave, we, ourselves, will have to settle our own problems...In solving our own problems, we must not use violence. I believe that is what will make us to come back together.”

COUNTY SUMMARIES





Lofa was created in 1964 by an act of the national legislature after the abolition of the province status. It has a population of 276,863 (LISGIS 2008) and includes six of the 16 ethnic groups: Lorma, Kissi, Gbandi, Mende, Mandingo and Kpelle. The county has seven political sub-divisions and is headed by a county superintendent.

The Peace Building Resource Center (PBRC) started working in Lofa in August 2009. A team of four researchers undertook a total of 19 small group meetings, 17 focus group discussions, 73 individual interviews and four public meetings during consultations. Participants included local leaders, youth and women, the physically challenged and religious authorities among other stakeholders. A total of 815 inhabitants participated in these consultations.

Table 1: Districts, Settlements and Participants consulted in Lofa County

District	Settlement	# of Persons
Zorzor	Zorzor City, Borkeza and Konia	173
Voinjama	Voinjama City, Selega, and Larwallazu	195
Quadu Gbondi	Samadu and Borkedou	170
Kolahun	Kolahun City, Bolahun and Massabolahun	137
Foya	Foya City and Madikoma	140
Total		815

Key Findings

The following issues were characterized by participants as both widespread and explosive or potentially explosive sources of conflict:

- **Land/Property Disputes:** land disputes were reported around issues of traditional farmland boundaries and houses on challenged land. A classical example of one of the long standing disputes which has claimed national and media attention is the boundary dispute between the newly created Quadu-Gbondi District and Voinjama District, derived from an act of legislature that created Quadu Gbondi within Voinjama District. As a result, the 8 mile radius of Voinjama City extends in the heart of Quadu Gbondi and several towns already in Voinjama District appear as part of Quadu Gbondi.
- **Rule of Law and Security:** as reported by the population, there is a high level of corruption in magisterial courts and within the police system, with problems such as delay and/or denial in dispensing justice, favoritism/nepotism and the trial of cases by courts which lack jurisdiction.

- **Bad Governance and Corruption:** Lofa is reportedly characterized by corruption, greed for power, lack of trust between those in authority and the community, overlapping of functions among those in power and lack of leadership skills. Rift in the county leadership has been both internal -between government appointees and other local leaders -and external- with members of the Lofa Legislative Caucus influencing leadership decision-making in the county.
- **Ethnicity and Identity Discrimination:** according to information gathered during the research, minority ethnic groups are marginalized by majority ethnic groups in various communities. In some cases, minority groups are even referred to as strangers. For example, Lorma and Mandingo, the former being the majority tribe.
- **Lack of Respect for Institutions:** Lofa is a highly traditional county and a rift has been created between traditional and religious leaders. The issue of lack of respect for religious/traditional institutions is reported to have the following characteristics: failure to adhere to institutional norms and values, misinformation regarding the institutions and imposition of one's tradition and authority on others. Examples of the rift between the church and the traditional society have been cited as evident in Zorzor and Voinjama districts.

Recommendations

Land/Property Disputes

- National government should institute a land reform policy.
- National government, in collaboration with local authorities, should intervene quickly in settling the land disputes, before these blow out of proportion.
- The county authorities, in consultation with the relevant agencies of national government, establish a land dispute committee to investigate all land disputes in the various counties.

Rule of Law and Security

- The national government increases the number of police officers and builds depots in all districts.
- The national government, in collaboration with local authorities, constructs prison facilities in all districts of the county.

Bad Governance and Corruption

- The Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) establishes conflict management committees to address and help resolve some of the conflicts at the local level.
- The national government addresses the issues of corruption in the management of the County Development Fund.
- Decisions reached at the administrative levels in terms of development should be shared with the community members through their representatives.
- The youth, women and disabled are included in decision-making processes and meetings for development projects in the counties.

Ethnicity and Identity Discrimination

- A massive awareness campaign is created to address the issues of discrimination/marginalization of women, youth and the disabled through the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Lack of Respect for Institutions

- The national government, through the Ministry of Internal Affairs and in collaboration with the Inter-religious Council of Liberia organizes a national conference on religion, placing the issue of "religious tolerance" high on the agenda.



The P4DP research activities were undertaken in Bong County from December 2009 to January 2010 by a research team of three people from the Peace Building Resource Centre (PBRC). 15 communities in seven of the county’s 12 districts were covered with a total of 648 persons participating in one small group discussion, 42 one-on-one interviews and four public meetings. Consultations included among others local government officials, community elders, women and youth.

Bong County was formerly known as the Central Province until it became a county in 1964. It is administered by a superintendent, assistant superintendent for development, county inspector, county agriculture officer, project planner and a city mayor. The county is divided into several political subdivisions: 12 districts, 13 chiefdoms, 42 clans and 27 cities.

Table 1: Districts, Settlements and Participants consulted in Bong County

Districts	Settlements	# of Persons
Jorquelleh	Gbarnga City, Folobai	150
Suakoko	Suakoko	21
Yelequelleh	Gbartala, Tailorta	57
Salala	Salala, Saysayla	55
Kokoyah	Rock Crusher, Gbecohn, Botota, Gbartala	79
Fuama	Handii, Bong Mines	47
Kpai	Zowienta, Palala	75
Total		648

Key Findings

Bong, like any county, was hit hard during the civil war. Disintegration among the population is manifested along social, political, ethnic, religious and economic lines with discrimination perpetrated against women in all spheres. As identified and summed below, a weak justice system, discrimination, corruption and land disputes were widely reported across Bong, while insecurity is especially relevant in Jorquelle, Kpai and Suakoko Districts. Emerging religious rivalry was reported in Jorquelle District.

- **Weak Judiciary:** bribery and delay in the adjudication of cases were stressed in almost all of the sessions held in the county with participants laying specific emphasis on the prevalence of bribery at Gbarnga courts. The meddling into judicial affairs by some top county official who use their power to influence decisions taken by the courts was also reported. Residents further noted deliberate delays by counsels and frequent absence of judges from the county as factors responsible for prolonging docketed cases. For instance, the court is yet to probe into the brutal killing in 2008 of Madadee Koshannee and Sunday Kollie.
- **Land Conflicts:** participants in five of the seven districts researched reported this issue, which is characterized by encroachment, multiple sales of land/house spots, etc. The prevalent nature of these conflicts was attributed to the increase in population and the expansion of tree crop planting (rubber, palm, and cocoa).
- **Emerging Religious Rivalry:** is unique to Jorquelleh District, especially Gbarnga City, where a bulk of the county's Muslim population is concentrated. The issue is a double-edged conflict source: Muslims feel discriminated due to long-standing perception from Christians' that Liberia was founded on Christian principles, while the Christians believe that the Muslims are aiming at controlling the state. Muslims also explained that they are left out of the county's administrative structure, which translates into them being denied access to the county's decision-making power.
- **Insecurity:** participants reiterated this as a primary issue of concern. Arbitrary killings by motorcyclists, ritualistic killings as well as gender-based violence leading to murder have left the population with a growing fear of insecurity.
- **Corruption/Bad Governance:** widespread corruption in terms of allocation of the county's development funds was reported by participants to be common in 6 of the 7 districts. They said that projects are being unilaterally decided by local authorities, which are not addressing social and development needs of the citizens.
- **Marginalization:** socio-political discrimination and tribal/sectional dominance were reported by members of the Mandingo ethnic group. They explained that they have no representation at the county administrative level while their youth are being deprived of benefiting from the county's scholarship scheme. Moreover, constant arrest of the Mandingoes at immigration checkpoints and being referred to as foreigners or Kola Traders were also cited as discriminating factors. Meanwhile, the youth and those with disabilities complained about their exclusion from participating in decision-making processes. Marginalization against these groups is cross-cutting across the county.

Recommendations

Weak Judicial

- Judges should be assigned rotationally and full attention should be given to criminal cases as a judge takes office.
- National government should provide adequate logistics; incentives and equipment to enhance the work of the police.
- Fast track courts should be established for speedy trial of cases.

Corruption

- The district authorities should give account of the social benefit given to the district by geo-services.
- The budget of County Development Funds should be broadcast on radio and other media as a way of educating the citizens.

- A portion of the County Development Fund and the Mittal Steel Social Development Funds should be exclusively controlled by the citizens of each district.
- The Project Management Committee should be audited.

Land Disputes

- The legislative caucuses of Gbarpolu and Bong Counties should organize a joint citizen meeting for the resolution of the land dispute.
- The national government should institute a land reform policy.
- The government should regularize prices for land.
- The people involved in multiple sales of land should be punished.

Religious Rivalry

- The clause in the previous constitution of 1847 which states that Liberia was established on Christian principles be put back in the constitution of 1986 and that Liberia becomes a Christian state instead of secular state.
- The Muslims recommend that Muslim Holidays, especially Fridays be enacted into law.

Insecurity

- The law on the books of 1979 concerning murder for murder should be reinstated.
- Murderers should be convicted in the same community where they committed the crime.
- Criminal cases should not be delayed so that they can serve as a deterrent to those who may want to do the same act.

Marginalization

- Youth are considered important component of society and should therefore form part of the decision-making process.
- Job opportunities should be given to qualified disabled persons.
- The Mandingoes should be considered as citizens with equal rights by all and they should be given job opportunities in the local administration.





Gbarpolu became the newest political sub-division of Liberia after it was detached from Lofa County by an act of the national legislature in 2003. The population of the county (80,186) (LIGIS 2008) is spread over six political districts and depends primarily on subsistence farming, small scale illicit mining, pit-sawing and petty trading.

The consultation was implemented by the Peace Building Resource Center (PBRC) beginning in September 2009 and lasting for a month. A team of four researchers undertook a total of 30 focus group discussions, ten small group discussions and 70 individual interviews. A total of 1,003 persons in three districts participated, including local leaders, youth and women, religious and traditional leaders and physically challenged persons.

Table 1: Districts, Settlements and Participants consulted in Gbarpolu County

District	Settlement	# of Persons
Bopolu	Bopolu City, Sapplimah, Totoquelleh, Mendina, Farsu Town, Bambu-ta, Small Bong Mines and Saw Mills	450
Gbarma	Gbarma, Zuo, Yangaya, Parker Town, Beatoe, Vaye Town, Weafua and Nyaboi	391
Kongbor	Kongba and Tima Village	162
Total		1,003

Key Findings

The following issues were reported as both widespread and explosive or potentially explosive sources of conflict:

- **Land/Property Disputes:** are widespread and may become explosive if not addressed by the national government in collaboration with the local authorities. Land disputes have the following characteristics: farmland disputes, traditional boundary disputes, illegal possession of land without proper documentation, encroachment onto communal land for planting purposes and illegal mining. Some examples are the land disputes between Gbarpolu, Bomi and Bong Counties over a plot of land adjoining the three counties, the tussle between Gbarpolu and Bomi over Saw Mill. Such cases are frequent and they constitute an issue towards which the participants have strong feelings.
- **Bad Governance and Corruption:** is reported in every part of the county visited, characterized by misappropriation of community funds/resources and abuse of power, such as the awarding of contracts for the purchase of road equipment to bogus companies, or the extraction of mineral resources without any benefit accruing to their communities but rather to county and government officials.

- **Rule of Law and Security:** reported insecurity involves illegal mining, influx of illegal aliens, theft, murder and pit sawing. For example, Kongbor District has many illegal hunters reportedly from other counties and aliens from Sierra Leone. The lack of prison facilities and defense counsel was mentioned as a reason for weak justice, expressed in delayed court cases and other problems.
- **Ethnicity and Identity Discrimination:** is an isolated problem, but has the propensity to create chaos in Bopolu District, particularly in Totoquelleh Town. Religious rivalries between Christians and traditionalists are centered around intolerance and forceful recruitment/initiation into secret societies. For instance, Christians in Totoquelleh Town claim that the traditionalists often use their service time or worship time to carry on their traditional rites without regard and respect especially on Sunday. On the other hand, the traditionalists assert that the Christians preach against their traditional practices. Moreover, the issue of marginalization and discrimination is prevalent amongst youth, women and the disabled, since they feel excluded from the decision-making process regarding issues such as the selection of projects and use of the County Development Funds.

Recommendations

Land/Property Disputes

- The county authorities in consultation with the relevant agencies of the national government should constitute a land dispute committee to investigate all land disputes in Gbarpolu County.
- The process of acquisition of permits for mining and pit sawing should be done by the local authorities in collaboration with the national government.

Rule of Law and Security

- More manpower should be assigned at border posts in the county to address the issue of illegal aliens and insecurity.
- The government should improve the judicial system by building detention centers, police depots and assign more qualified and trained judicial personnel to the county.

Bad Governance and Corruption

- The relevant agency of the government should monitor all County Development Funds as well as development projects initiated by the county authority, local and international NGOs.

Marginalization of Minority Ethnic Groups

- The Ministries of Gender and Development, Internal Affairs and Youth and Sports, should organize training workshops on leadership skills to address the issue of marginalization of youth, women and the disabled in the county.
- A massive awareness campaign is launched to address the issues of discrimination/marginalization of women and youth through the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Lack of respect for Institutions

- The national government, through the Ministry of Internal Affairs in collaboration with the Inter-religious Council of Liberia, organizes a national conference on religion, with the issue of “religious tolerance” being high on the agenda.
- The Inter-Religious Council of Liberia in collaboration with the Ministry of Internal Affairs should conduct training workshops for religious and traditional leaders in Totoquelleh Town on religious tolerance.



GRAND CAPE MOUNT

Research in Grand Cape Mount County was carried out between mid-October and early November 2009 by the Peace Building Resource Centre (PBRC), through a three-person research team. 12 communities in four of the county's five districts were covered with a total of 728 persons participating in 18 focus group discussions, seven small group discussions, 42 one-on-one interviews and six public meetings. Consultations drew participants from all walks of life including local government officials, community elders, women, youth, among others.

Grand Cape Mount County is divided into five statutory districts: Commonwealth, Garwula, Tewor, Gola-Konneh and Porkpa Districts. The county has a majority Islamic population, with sizable Christian and traditional religions. The population of Grand Cape Mount County is 127,076 inhabitants (LISGIS 2008) and its capital is Robertsport.

Table 1: Districts, Settlements and Participants consulted in Grand Cape Mount County

Districts	Settlements	# of Persons
Commonwealth	Robertsport, Torsor	112
Garwulor	Senji Town, Vonzua, Menivalda, Mesila	185
Tewor	Tienii Town, Wonde Town, Bo Waterside	130
Gola-Konneh	Than, Lofa Bridge, Jarwajeh–Danda	115
Total		728

Key Findings

Grand Cape Mount was particularly caught-up in the 14 years of the civil war, which resulted in a polarized population. Visible signs of fragmentations are along social, political, ethnic, religious and economic lines with discrimination perpetrated against women in all spheres. The following issues are considered by the locals as widespread sources of conflict: insecurity, corruption, bad governance, land conflicts, discrimination against women and youth and political rivalry. They are summed up as follows:

- **Corruption/Bad Governance:** residents were particularly disturbed with what they said was widespread corruption and the resulting limited growth and development. This issue is perceived as deeply entrenched in all four districts. Locals disclosed that they have no trust in their leaders -both local executive and legislative officials- since they are involved in the mismanagement of the County Development Funds and unilaterally decide what is good for the people rather than hearing from them what their needs are. This lack of consensus-based approach to leadership is a prime conflict source identified by the study.

- **Land Conflicts:** participants expressed serious concerns about the explosive nature of this issue across the county. The underdeveloped nature of Robertsport City is attributed to multiple ownership of land in the area. An inter-district land ownership crisis between the Gola-Konneh and Porkpa districts was reported by participants to be centered on the Israel community, rich in mineral resources including gold, diamond and logs.
- **Discrimination against Women and Youth:** according to the participants, women and youth are not being considered as decision-makers and are, therefore, not invited to be a part of the process. Cultural and religious practices - Islamic Religion- are identified as underlying factors enforcing such discriminative acts. For example, in Robertsport City development meetings were solely held by elders and chiefs, excluding women and youth.
- **Political Rivalry:** county officials with diverging political ideologies are undermining the county's development as these officials are prone to place party interests before that of the county.
- **Insecurity:** of the 44 border posts officially recognized by the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization (BIN) and Joint Security, only four have security personnel. Participants, therefore, expressed grave concerns about the increasing influx of aliens from neighbouring Sierra Leone and Guinea. These aliens are reported to be involved in illegal mining activities in the county.

Recommendations

Corruption/Bad Governance

- All county officials connected to the County Development Fund misappropriation should be investigated and the recommendations from the investigation should be acted upon promptly by the President of Liberia.
- The Ministry of Internal Affairs should intervene to address the issue of bad governance.

Land Disputes

- Vacant land should be sold to people who are willing to cultivate it.

Political Rivalry

- The Ministry of Internal Affairs should intervene in the leadership crisis among the county officials.

Discrimination against women and youth

- The local authorities should place it as their priority to resolve discrimination.

Insecurity

- The national government through the Ministry of Justice should increase the presence of BIN Personnel in Grand Cape Mount County.
- The national government should provide logistics such as vehicle, computers for security personnel.





Extensive consultations took place in the county in the context of the Nimba Reconciliation Project implemented in 2008. Nimba has a population of 484,602, with six districts -Tappita, Yarwinmensonoh, Saniquellie-Mah, Saclepea-Mah, Zoegeh and Gbehlay-Geh- and the capital in Saniquellie. The major ethnic groups in the county are Gio, Mano, Krahn, Mandingo and Gbei. Three teams of four-persons each visited the six districts in the county during a period of four months. 280 individuals were interviewed, 469 persons participated in public meetings and collective interviews, and 278 people participated in focus group discussions that included special sessions with youth, women, elderly and faith based leaders. In total 1027 people were consulted.

Table 1: Districts, Settlements and Participants consulted in Nimba County

Districts	Settlements	# of Persons
District #1	Ganta City, Saniquellie City, Zuluyee, Gbuyee, Yekepa, Gbarpa, Sehkanpa, Sehgeh, Dahnlorpa	58
District #2	Bahn City, Miahplay, Gwalay, Gbalah, Louplay, Gbarplay, Behyeepea, Beadato Town, Beeplay, When New Town, Gborplay, Grouzanplay, Beeplay, Miahplay Bonah, Wea Beadatu	139
District #3	Tappita City, Dialah, Kwipea, Zoulay, Gblonla, Zuaplay, Zeongen, Zuotuo, Yourpea Old Town and New Town, Beatuo, Behwallay, Kparblee, Graie, Dorgbor Town, Glahn Town, Freeman Town, Zarwulogbo Town, Zeonghen, Zodru, Tuanpea, Boe-Bonglay	141
District #4	Saclepea City, Loyee, Bleevalay, Bleevalay Garage, Nyassian, Nyao, Duompa, Gbanquoi, Kpein, Boyee, Vaduki, Weintia, Venn, Nyao, Gbanquoi, Kpein	290
District #5	Karnplay City, Loguatu, Kpairplay, Lowlay, Douplay	196
District #6	Zahnzayee, Dorpa, Kwendin, Geapa, Boyee, Dahnpa, Sahnpa, Ganwee, Beinglahn, Glehyeezorpea, Guotoin, Zekepa, Voipa, Karyee, Sendin Tropa, Kaipa, Kpowin, Beinglan, Gokorpa, Tuhnwin, Yeefian	203
TOTAL		1027

Key Findings

The causes of conflict 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 reach explosive and worrisome levels, in other areas there are reports of successful inter-ethnic collaboration.

- **Land Dispute:** This issue is paramount across all districts because of its economic significance. The research teams found property disputes over land to be widespread in the six districts of Nimba, affecting all types of settlements. 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. The second category has no ethnic or political background, 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.
- **Ethnic tensions:** 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 predate 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.
- **Bad Governance:** During consultations the participants expressed the following issues:
 - Reported abuse and misuse of power by local authorities, including involvement in land grabbing or in the sale of land and properties under dispute. For example, 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.
 - Reported failure to deliver basic services to the population and limited coverage of the districts in terms of policing, courts, schools, health centers, etc. For example, in Tappita, Saclepea, Zoegeh, Gbehlay, Geh and Yarwinmensonoh there are no referral hospitals.
 - Reported insufficient accountability by local authorities for the expenditure of development funds and lack of capacity building for the judiciary and of infrastructures to support state functioning. For example, in Yarwinmensonoh, there is a rift between the community and the local authority due to suspected misappropriation of the District Development Fund (DDF).
- **Tensions between Modernization and Tradition:** the participants expressed apprehension 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. While there is an apparently strong campaign in Liberia against 'traditional practices' that are contrary to basic principles of human rights there appears to be concern among the participants over simultaneously discarding traditional practices that are worth preserving. 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.

Recommendations¹

Land Disputes

- Address the urgent and more explosive land disputes as recommended by the Ad-Hoc Presidential Commission on Nimba.
- Develop community-based mediation capacities.

Ethnic Tensions

- Establish a network of community-based peacebuilding bodies.
- Promote political inclusion of Mandingoes.
- Re-establish a national identification card.
- Develop an awareness campaign for tolerance.

Bad Governance/Corruption

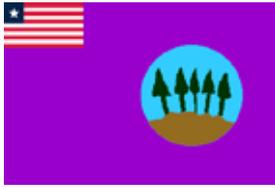
- Establish social audit mechanisms over local authorities.
- Develop a code of conduct of the local government officer.

Tensions between Modernization and Tradition

- Establish a network of community-based peacebuilding bodies.
- Develop a county-wide youth integration programme.



¹ In the case of Nimba County, the recommendations presented are not those formulated by the community -as in the other counties- but those prepared by the research team on their basis and presented to national authorities at the end of the process that took place under the Nimba Reconciliation Project in 2008.



Consultation in Bomi County took place between November and December 2009 by a four-person research team from Initiative for Positive Change (IPC). 21 communities of the county’s four districts were covered for a total of 941 persons that participated in 18 small group discussions, 140 one-on-one interviews and 13 town hall meetings. Local government officials, community elders, women and youth, members of the different ethnic groups in these communities and civil society groups were consulted during the process.

Until 1984, Bomi County was a territory of Montserrado County. The capital city is Tubmanburg. There are four administrative districts (Klay, Dewien, Suehn Mecca and Senjeh), subdivided into five chiefdoms and 18 clans. Its population stands at 84,119 (LISGIS 2008) people of diverse backgrounds and orientations from all of the 15 political sub-divisions of the country.

Table 1: Districts, Settlements and Participants consulted in Bomi County

Districts	Settlements	# of Persons
Klay	Tubmanburg City, Merry Camp, Mambu Camp, Sasstown, Demeh Town, Quanyondee	241
Senjeh	Kay Town, Coleman Hill, Saw Mill, Beajah, Beafine	292
Dowein	Government Farm, Zomablay, Zarmayean	355
Sueh-Mecca	Suehn Town, D.C. Clark Town, Beajudah, Gbojay, Big Giveh, Mecca Town	53
Total		941

Key Findings

The research revealed that the population in Bomi County remains fragmented along socio-economic, religious, political and gender lines as a result of the country’s 14-year civil crisis. As summed-up below, the role of religion in suppressing people’s views was identified as a unique conflict source to the county. However, land and boundary disputes, high illiteracy rate, corruption and unemployment were reported as sources of tension in the county.

- **Land and Boundary Dispute:** participants said these issues are prevalent across the county and are characterized by encroachment on private land and double sales of land in urban areas. In the rural context, land issues are characterized by crises over the preservation of ancestral domains or tribal land reserves. Land crisis in Bomi is also manifested through inter-county boundary conflicts involving Bomi and other neighboring counties including Gbarpolu, Montserrado and Bong Counties. These inter-county boundary disputes have influenced the population’s political identity, by strengthening or diminishing it. For instance, residents of

Cheesemanville community could not participate in the 2009 senatorial by-election because they did not know whether they belong to Bomi or Montserrado.

- **Corruption:** the misuse of the County's Development Funds by local officials was one of the main perceptions. It was made clear that there was lack of transparency and accountability by those entrusted to manage the funds, as there were no records detailing how the funds were being used across the various communities and districts of the county.
- **Unemployment:** youth participating in violence and the increase in crimes across the various communities were brought forth as inevitable effects of unemployment and source of much concern. High rates of unemployment were reported in Merry and Mambu Camps of the Guthrie Rubber Plantation, which reportedly serves as a haven for hundreds of ex-combatants.
- **High Illiteracy Rate:** community dwellers of the county told researchers that high illiteracy rates are creating a major divide amongst them. The views of the illiterate are never considered in formulating policies of the county. Exclusion in this context has the propensity to translate into a sense of insecurity on the part of the illiterates in the presence of the literates. The predominance of this issue was recorded in Sasstown and Mecca Town where participants explained that boys' education was highly prioritized while the girls were being forced to marry in their early or teenage years.
- **The Role of Religion in Suppressing People's Views:** people are constrained to swallow their agonies in the Sueh-Mecca District because religious leaders in that area forbid it. A common Islamic version: "Bisimilahi", meaning "what we say here, let it remain here" was identified as a religious tool being used to suppress flammable issues confronting members of that community. This is something, participants feel, highly infringes on their individual and collective rights as citizens who deserve to air out their grievances for possible redress. This issue is unique to this community.

Recommendations

Land Disputes:

- Clearly demarcate boundaries between counties such as Bomi and Gbarpolu around the Sawmill community and Bomi and Montserrado around the Cheesemanville community.
- Provide and protect farming land for poor community members who cannot afford to purchase private land.
- Work with traditional (tribal) elders to re-demarcate or identify tribal land boundaries especially in the Senjeh District around the communities of Beajah and Beafine between the Mende and Gola tribes.
- Involve traditional land owners (Elders) in the settlement of land disputes alongside government certified surveyors and other relevant local authorities involved with land issues because the elders are custodians of land and the surveyors act on behalf of the government.

Corruption

- Enforce laws to punish individuals found guilty of misusing or misappropriating public funds.
- Cases of misappropriation of County Development Funds should be tried in Bomi in full public view.
- Public servants found guilty of corruption should be banned from taking public office through the enactment of an appropriate law.
- A law should oblige persons who are guilty of corruption to retribute stolen money or properties.

Unemployment

- Employment opportunities should be provided for eligible residents, especially those around the Guthrie Plantation. This would discourage young people from engaging in activities detrimental to peace in these communities.

High Illiteracy Rate

- Government should build more primary schools in rural communities and ensure compulsory primary education, especially for girls.
- Make salaries and benefits more attractive to encourage more qualified teachers into rural Bomi County.
- Support the management of rural public schools to reduce the burden of rural school management on local inhabitants.
- Work with development partners in the education sector to provide optional learning opportunities such as life skill training, especially for rural inhabitants to supplement formal education.
- Adult literacy programmes should be conducted especially for teenage mothers to build their capacity for community participation and development.





The Initiative for Positive Change (IPC) conducted consultations in Margibi County in January 2010 with a four-person research team. The consultation covered 16 communities in the county’s four districts with a total of 356 persons that participated in 54 individual interviews, ten small group discussions, seven focus group meetings and three town hall meetings. Participants were drawn from all sectors of society including local government officials, community elders and women and youth.

Margibi was established as a county when Marshall and Gibi Territories, which were part of Montserrado County, merged in 1985. Margibi has a total population of 209, 923 (LISGIS 2008). The county has four districts: Gibi, Firestone, Mamba-Kaba and Kakata Districts.

Table 1: Districts, Settlements and Participants consulted in Margibi County

Districts	Settlements	# of Persons
Firestone	Unification Town, Dolo’s Town, Cotton Tree	137
Gibi	Bong Mines Road, Fourteen Road, Dennis Farm, Henry Sander Town, Weala	82
Kakata	Kakata City, Gbandi community, Lango Town	57
Mamba-Kaba	Marshall City, Henry Town, Ben Town, Kpakpacon Town, Duazhon No.2	80
Total		356

Key Findings

Signs of division within the population in Margibi are visible along social, political, ethnic, religious, gender and economic lines. Widespread reports of corruption, bad governance, rape, exclusion of youth and people with disabilities from decision-making and land disputes are major sources of conflict. Also, high unemployment was identified everywhere, while conscription of teenage girls into the Bush Schools and pollution by Salala and Firestone rubber plantations are unique to certain communities across the county. The findings are summarized below:

- **Corruption/Exclusion:** participants described acts of mismanagement of public funds on the part of local leaders as a major divisive issue limiting the development of their communities. They said: *“We will not participate in any community development activity because individuals in charge of County Development Funds have misappropriated the funds and are parading around as heroes when they should be prosecuted.”* Corruption is perceived as a common practice in the Mamba-Kaba district where an entire community reported being denied access to what it understood to be its portion of development funds.
- **Land Dispute/Exclusion:** as manifested in the form of encroachment on private land, double sales of land and boundary land issues was also reported by locals.

- **Conscription of Teenage Girls into Sande School:** participants were against the forceful recruitment of their young daughters into the Sande Society, which they described as provoking in nature.
- **High Rate of Unemployment:** young participants told researchers that they have no access to employment opportunities and as a result, they are left idly roaming their communities. People want this issue, which is widespread in the county, to be dealt with.
- **Pollution by Firestone and Salala Rubber Plantations:** participants of Dolo's Town particularly blamed Firestone rubber plantation for polluting the air in the area and the Farmington River. They expressed that their communities now suffer numerous health hazards owing to this problem: *"Pollution of the air sometimes causes sneezing, burning of the nose and eyes."* Also, locals of Weala equally expressed frustration regarding the dumping of waste into the Weala River by the Salala rubber corporation. This case is specific to Weala and Harbel, Firestone.
- **Rape:** is reportedly prevalent in Unification Town with participants blaming the re-occurrence of this crime on the police, as perpetrators go free with impunity while the police continuously extort money for victims in the form of complainant's fees, facilitation of transportation and tips. *"Victims are not given any care by the police while in most cases rapists roam about freely."*
- **Youth and Disabled Exclusion:** participants revealed that they have no direct representation in the county's project management committee which, they said, undermines their developmental aspirations. Those with disabilities noted that their welfare is ignored when it comes to the construction of public building, bridges, school and hospitals. *"These facilities are discriminatively constructed for the mere fact members of the disable community are not considered as active users who deserve special passage in these public places."* The issue was highlighted across the county.

Recommendations

Exclusion from Development Funds

- County development funds should be supervised by laws enacted by the legislature so as to punish individuals misappropriating funds.
- The county legislators, local authorities and all citizens of Margibi should work collectively and put the county interest first.

Land Dispute

- The legislature should regulate land reform laws to avoid land conflict.
- Individuals found in the double sales of land should be prosecuted.
- Traditional leaders should work alongside with the Ministry of Lands, Mines and Energy (LMEM) and the Ministry of Internal Affairs to resolve land disputes.
- Local elders along with government, through the LMEM, should probe/redefine the traditional boundaries among tribes.
- The government must get involved in the settlement of the land dispute regarding the site for the construction of the community clinic at Weala.

Environmental Pollution by Firestone and Salala Rubber Plantation Company

- The government should visit its concession arrangement with Firestone so as to investigate some of these abuses levied by the local people against Firestone. It should also appoint a community representative on the committee for settling the accusations of pollution conducted by the Salala rubber company.

Corruption

- Individuals involved in the misuse of community funds, materials and resources should pay and turn back materials to the community.

Rape

- Harsh punishment for rapists and public condemnation of the act.





MONTERRADO

Consultations in Montserrado County were undertaken between mid-July to late August 2009 by the Initiative for Positive Change (IPC) through a four-person research team with a lead researcher, an audio-visual person, a note-taker and a facilitator. The consultation covered 23 communities in four districts and included a total of 1,889 persons that participated in 18 town hall meetings, 28 small group discussions and 390 one-on-one interviews. Consultations included local government officials, community elders, women and youth, members of the different ethnic groups in these communities and civil society groups, including special sessions with the Lebanese and Fulah communities and with the physically impaired.

Montserrat County is administered by a superintendent and assistant superintendents, who are aided by other subordinates at the district and municipal levels. These include district superintendents, commissioners, paramount, clan, general and town chiefs. The administrative centre of the county is Bentol city which has a population of 1,118,241 persons (LISGIS 2008) from diverse social, political, cultural, religious and professional orientations.

Table 1: Districts, Settlements and Participants consulted in Montserrado County

Districts	Settlements	# of Persons
Greater Monrovia	Ducor, West Point, Nyen Town, Group of 77, Fulani community, Lebanese community	770
Todee	Camp Todee, Duport Road, Goba Town, Borough of Rehab/ELWA, Raymond Field, Kolleh Town	314
Careysburg	Careysburg City, Jacob Town, New Georgia, Weihn Town, Bensonville, Pipeline	537
St. Paul River	Brewerville, Virginia, New Kru Town, Caldwell, Arthington	268
Total		1,889

Key Findings

Montserrat County was especially exposed to the prolonged and devastating civil war, resulting in a disintegrated and polarized population. The fragmentation follows social, political, ethnic, religious and economic lines with disparities in women participation at various levels. Key sources of explosive conflicts as revealed by the local people and summarized by the research team include the following:

- **Bad Governance/Corruption:** participants are particularly annoyed with what they describe as the 'misuse' of County Development Funds allotted to citizens by the central government for restoration of basic infrastructure and social amenities in their areas. Residents of Brewerville

said: *“Corruption is at the level of local authorities because there are no checks and balance systems in place.”*

- **Land and Property Disputes:** multiple sale of land, forceful seizure of land and properties as well as encroachment on private properties by strong and powerful authorities are reported to be prevalent in the county, especially in Greater Monrovia. In the same vein, members of the Lebanese community in Greater Monrovia told the study that: *“A Lebanese man is considered a foreigner who has no right to own land in Liberia and as long-term investors, we should be entitled to land and property ownership in this country. That clause in the Liberian constitution needs to be amended because it is extremely discriminative”*.
- **Weak Justice:** participants explained that the court system compromises justice in favor of rich people. They said that the poor masses rarely receive their due share of justice in cases involving them. The disabled community especially complains they have no access to justice and that they have no legal representation thereby causing their loss of faith in the system and the rule of law. The Fulas stated that judicial and police authorities deprive them from access to justice on grounds that they are foreigners and so they have no rights compared to Liberian citizens.
- **Discrimination/Marginalization:** the physically challenged believe that their condition is being used against them by other citizens by preventing them from realizing educational, employment and other rights and opportunities. *“Our disabilities have been seen as our inabilities and in this way, we are discriminated against. Our rights have been abused in our own country. We are seen as some ‘useless’ people in this society.”* This includes lack of textbooks in Braille for the blind, who noted that they are being discriminated by the government, which made no effort to foster their educational rights. *“It is a weakness on the part of government to look down on our plight; to pay deaf ears to our cries. What can we do? We are powerless, voiceless...”* said members of the Community Association of the Blinds.
- **Citizenship and Identity:** Muslims in the Fulani and Mandingo communities said that their rights to Liberian citizenship were abused because of their names, religious and social affiliations, and that this includes being denied Liberian passports. *“There is a high level of injustices perpetrated against us and nothing; absolutely nothing is being said about them all because we are perceived as foreigners and therefore there is no justice for us. We suffer from lost identity. We want our right to Liberian citizenship; if not we will turn around and that wouldn’t be good for the Liberian society”*. But also the Lebanese community underlined the fact that by law they are denied the right of citizenship and to own land, notwithstanding their considerable investments in the economy.
- **Religious discrimination:** potential ethno-religious tensions were uncovered during the research where some residents claimed that discrimination against them includes setting aside Christian holidays with none for the Muslims. *“This issue of inequality along the religious line is completely unbearable,”* a Fula Governor exclaimed.

Recommendations

Bad Governance

- Setting up checks and balance systems for the county’s resources to be evenly distributed.
- Citizens at the grassroots level should be fully involved in the decision-making process regarding the allocation and distribution of resources.
- The current legislature should enact laws requiring seizure of corrupt public officials’ properties after they are dismissed.
- Public declaration of officials’ assets disclosed to the general public, with their activities being routinely monitored and expenditures audited.

- Officials convicted in audit reports need to be turned over to Liberia’s Anti-Corruption Commission (LACC) to be further investigated and subsequently prosecuted.
- Government need to decentralize its policies and programmes to all counties to ease urban congestions and create space for more employment opportunities in other counties.

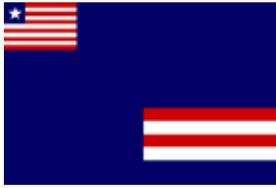
Land and Property Disputes

- The clauses on foreign land ownership and citizenship in Liberia’s 1986 constitution should be revised and amended.
- Laws on the purchase and sale of land should be revised.
- Land surveyors should be penalized for involvement with double or multiple sale of land.

Discrimination and Marginalization

- Recognize and respect the religious practices and social affiliations of all individuals or groups in the county. In particular, create holidays in favor of the Islamic faith.
- Give voice and equal justice to those at the grassroots level to encourage peaceful co-existence.
- Equal educational and employment opportunities should be provided for all, including vulnerable groups and that such practices like favoritism, nepotism and all forms of discriminations should cease with perpetrators being swiftly dealt with under the laws of the land.
- The government’s poverty reduction strategy should earmark addressing the basic needs of the people through provision of basic social services and printing of textbooks in Braille for blind people.





The consultations in Grand Bassa County started in February 2010 and were conducted by a four-person research team from Initiative for Positive Change (IPC). Five communities in two of the county’s four districts were covered with a total of 305 persons participating in ten individual interviews, ten small group discussions, five focus group discussions and three town hall meetings. The consultations were all-inclusive, with participants the different sectors of the county.

Grand Bassa County is one of the three original counties, along with Montserrado and Sinoe that first formed the Republic of Liberia. It was established in 1833 and its capital is Buchanan City. The county has four districts (district #1, #2, #3, and #4) and 45 clans and its population is 224,839 people.

Table 1: Districts, Settlements and Participants consulted in Grand Bassa County

Districts	Settlements	# of Persons
District #1	Gbor Town, Sendeh Town, Owensgrove	94
District#2	Takeway Town, Waka Town, Buchanan City	211
Total		305

Key Findings

Issues reported throughout the communities regarded bad governance and corruption as well as inter-ethnic and gender discrimination, followed by tensions between traditional and academic institutions of learning and calls for reintroduction of trial by ordeal. Issues unique to this county include complaints about pollution allegedly generated by the Firestone plantation, discrimination of illiterates, and fishing boundary conflicts. The findings are summed below:

- **Land Dispute:** participants in Owensgrove reported that government has denied them ownership rights to over 1000 acres of traditional land, due to legislation limiting to 400 acres the amount of land that to such effect can be owned by a section. Although land disputes were reported everywhere in the county, the frequency of inter-ethnic or inter-sectional land, farmland and multiple ownership disputes was higher in district #1.
- **Bad Governance/Corruption:** locals expressed frustration not only over the misuse of Development Funds but also over the exclusion of some communities from having their share of the funds, as in Owensgrove, where people complained that their community has been excluded from benefiting from Development Funds. In Gbor Town, participants attributed to corruption the fact that their community was not benefiting from the Social Development Fund provided by Arcerlor-Mittal.

- **Pollution:** environmental pollution by the Firestone rubber plantation was reported in Owensgrove. Residents told researchers that pollution of the Farmington River and the air has detrimentally affected species in the river while they themselves suffer from health problems.
- **Clash between Traditional & Academic Institutions of Learning:** this was reported as an undermining factor to the academic growth and advancement of girls. Participants of Takeway Town are particularly bothered by the “bush school” interference with their girls’ educational ambition. But traditional chiefs and elders of the town are adamant on the adherence to these cultural practices. School administrators in the area agree on the negative impact the practice has on academic activities in the community. This tension was reportedly widespread throughout district #2.
- **Reintroduction of Sassywood:** participants are especially discontent about the banning of the practice of trial by ordeal by the government and are calling for its immediate re-instatement. Demands for this ritual were strong among chiefs and elders of Takeway Town who said they feel extremely unprotected, exposed to danger and vulnerable to perpetrators of heinous crimes, such as witchcraft, without sassywood. Their frustration has been summed in this quote: *“There is need for the substitution of delayed justice with instant justice—Sassywood. Sassywood ritual helps to bring to light hidden secrets.”*
- **Exclusion of Women from Decision-Making:** this was a cross-cutting issue documented throughout the study. However, its predominance was particularly noted in district #2 where women have absolutely no say in the formulation of decisions which affects every member of the society. For instance, women said that they are excluded from deciding the allocation of funds generated for the sale of scrap-metals collected by both sexes.
- **Dominance of the Lettered over the Unlettered:** chiefs and elders of Harrisville told the research team that the unlettered people are being discriminated against by the literates. As a result, the illiterates are ignored, discriminated against, deprived and marginalized. *“Whenever, we gather for P.T.A meetings, and we try to make a point, we are told that illiteracy is a disease.”* This issue is, however, unique to this community.
- **Fishing Boundary Conflicts:** Fanti, Kru and European fishermen are in constant clashes over this issue. Participants of Buchanan City said conflicts often arise over interference with each other’s fishing terrain. This issue is typical of Buchanan.
- **Citizenship/Discrimination:** Mandingoes/Muslims said these issues have filtered down to ‘hateful acts’ perpetrated against them by other tribal groups because of their names, social and religious affiliations. According to them, they have, for decades, being referred to as: “Mandingo dogs”, something they said has corroded their honor and dignity. *“With a Mandingo or Muslim name, one automatically becomes an enemy and as a result we are being molested on a daily basis. We cannot bear it anymore.”* This issue is cross-cutting across the county. However, its pervasiveness was documented in Buchanan.

Recommendations

Land Disputes

- The government’s land commissioners must abstain from unlawfully selling private land.
- Leaders and designated government authorities should re-demarcate most of the conflicting land in accordance with the new land reform law.
- More awareness on land laws must be carried out in the rural parts of the county to have individuals educated on the law regarding methods of land acquisition and ownership.
- Squatter’s rights must be clearly spelled out in order for them to know that a squatter can, at no time, claim ownership of a land.

Bad Governance/Corruption

- Properties of people who are guilty of misusing public funds should be impounded until proven not guilty by a court of competent jurisdiction.
- Every public servant, by law, should be made to declare his/her assets before taking on public office.
- Individuals guilty of corruption should return stolen money/properties and should be denied future job opportunity.

Pollution

- Government should do more to protect its citizens against the harmful effects that result from companies operating in Liberia, without meeting the proper operating conditions.

Traditional/Academic Calendars

- Government needs to ensure that the traditional institution of learning operates for three weeks only or should operate only during the vacation period of the academic year.
- The Ministries of Education and Internal Affairs should conduct community-level awareness on the importance of traditional and formal institutions of learning.
- Government should ensure speedy trial of cases to ensure that justice is not delayed if Sassywood is to be abolished.
- Law enforcement officers should be empowered to effectively combat crimes, otherwise the practice of trial by ordeal should be re-instated.

Citizenship

- The various tribes should be given a clearer understanding on issues of nationality and citizenship.





Consultations in Rivercess County were undertaken in February 2010 by Initiative for Positive Change (IPC), through a four-person research team. The consultation covered three communities in three of the county’s eight districts and included a total of 72 persons that participated in two focus group meetings, three small group discussions and five one-on-one interviews. Participants included local government officials, community elders, women and youth, members of the different ethnic groups in these communities and civil society groups.

River Cess is a small county in terms of size, population and economic activities with a sizeable portion of some of its district completely inaccessible and isolated. It has a population of 71, 509 inhabitants (LISGIS 2008). The county is situated 320 kilometers southeast of Monrovia. Cestos City, its capital, is situated on the coast, alongside the Cestos River. Its eight districts include Bearwor District, Central River Cess District, Doedain District, Fen River District, Jo River District, Norwein District, Sam Gbalor District and Zartlahn District.

Table 1: Districts, Settlements and Participants consulted in Rivercess County

Districts	Settlements	# of Persons
Timbo	Cestos city	19
Yarnee	ITI	42
Central River Cess	Yarpa	11
Total		72

Key Findings

Rivercess County was no exception as to the exposure to Liberia’s prolonged and devastating civil war. This has resulted in a polarized population, divided socially, politically, ethnically, religiously, as well as along gender and economic lines. The prime source of conflict is land disputes.

- **Land Conflicts/Boundary Conflicts:** crisis over the Rivercess territorial location prior to it becoming a county, farmland encroachment, crisis over the creation of Yarnee District are reported to be predominant across the county with specific emphasis placed on the International Trade Industry (ITI) in Yarnee District. Participants were vocal about an emerging boundary land conflict between the county and the sister county -Sinoe- over the traditional demarcation. Farmland encroachment by some inhabitants of northern Nimba County was also reported as a frequent source of clashes between residents of both counties.

- **Sectionalism:** participants reported that internally a deep sense of division exists among citizens of the county. They cited leadership disparities, as reflected at the county’s administrative level, among those of upper and lower Rivercess. Of the 18 superintendents of the county, only three hailed from upper Rivercess because locals of upper Rivercess are being regarded as unlettered and uncivilized. Meanwhile, the clan system is said to be breeding conflict in northern Rivercess due to population growth and disregards for traditional boundary demarcations.

Recommendations

Land

- The government needs to intervene to put these inter-county land disputes to rest, with a comprehensive, clearly defined and broadly publicized plan.

Sectionalism

- The qualified citizens from both upper and lower Rivercess need to be given equal chance to be represented at the county administrative level to end disparities.





After the abolition of the province status in Liberia, Grand Gedeh became one of the newest counties in 1964. The county is mainly inhabited by the Krahn and Grebo with a population of 122,913 inhabitants (LISGIS 2008). It is administered by a county superintendent who is seated in Zwedru along with a host of other local officials.

The Liberia Democratic Institute (LDI) implemented the research with a three-member team in October 2009. The team carried out consultations in 17 communities and settlements within three of the eight administrative districts including six town hall meetings, six small group discussions, 86 one-on-one interviews and three focus group discussions. A total of 874 persons participated in these consultations. Details of the districts and settlements covered are provided by the table below:

Table 1: Districts, Settlements and Participants consulted in Grand Gedeh County

Key	Districts	Settlements Covered	# of Persons
	Tchien	Zwedru, Polar Town, Toffoi Town, Tuzon	391
	Gbarzon	Toe Town, Zleh Town, Techienla, B'hai Town	265
	Konobo	Ziah, Boundary Town, Buway & Penuken	218
	Total		874

Findings

At the end of the month-long intensive consultations the local people spoke passionately about issues they considered most divisive in their communities including the following:

- **Land and Property Disputes:** border disagreement over territorial and farmland boundaries, multiple sale of a plot of land by landlords to multiple buyers at different time periods, encroachment as well as illegal occupancy of homes and properties of others. For example, some instances of land disputes that were highlighted involved disputes over land boundary between Boundary Town in Konobo District and Kanneh Clan in the Tchien District, the seizure of land by the Krahn from the Mandingoes in Zwedru City, land boundary land dispute between Gorbo and Gborbo ethnic group both in Tchien district.
- **Bad Governance and Corruption:** the local people, especially women and youth, were very vocal about their lack of participation in decision-making processes in the county and expressed strong dislike regarding the insincerity, lack of transparency and accountability on the part of local government officials. Concerns also included the misuse of County Development Funds and the dismissal of local elected officials, such as paramount and clan chiefs, by local authorities. The decisions to use the CDF to build the Triangle in the city center of Zwedru and the

commissioner compound in Toffoi Town was unilateral and non-participatory, according to the youth.

- **Rule of Law and Security:** the justice system of the county is reported as generally characterized by corruption, limited and poorly trained judicial personnel, limited facilities, very low salaries and fringe benefits and the interference of the executive. The referring of criminal cases by the police to the county superintendent, the use of fraternities such as the Masonic Craft, nepotism/favoritism by judges and the long travel in search of justice were identified by the citizens as key examples of the weak justice system in the county.
- **Unemployment and Access to Resources:** residents expressed concern over the mass unemployment existing. The youth and members of the local marketing association spoke of non-existent work opportunities and the lack or poor state of the road network, which impedes the movement of people and goods.
- **Others Issues:** other issues identified by the locals as divisive relate to payment of the ex-combatants and the re-introduction of sassywood or trial by ordeal. In the case of the former, the citizens claimed that the ex-soldiers, highly trained, are now left demobilized, without adequate compensation and employment and constitute a threat to future peace of their communities. The re-introduction of sassywood to compensate for the slow pace of the judiciary that is tainted with corruption was also brought up by the participants. Gender-Based violence in the form of rape was also highlighted.

Recommendations

Land and Property Disputes

- The enactment of a robust, transparent land reform law to be implemented by the government.

Bad governance and Corruption

- The citizens, especially the youth, call for participation in decision-making processes that involve all key stakeholders of the county, when it comes to the selection of development projects and the use of public funds including the County Development Fund.

Rule of Law and Security

- Training and better salaries for the judiciary and harsh punishment for those caught in mal-practices should be established.
- The reform of the judicial system should be advanced in order to gain the confidence of the people.

Unemployment and Access to Resources

- The government of Liberia should encourage the opening of companies in the county to provide employment opportunities for the citizens.

Others

- The government should include a training package for ex-AFL soldiers in addition to monetary benefits.
- Create more awareness on rape across the county and prosecute perpetrators.



River Gee is one of the 15 counties of Liberia with Fish Town as its capital. The county has ten districts with an estimated population of 64,330 inhabitants (LISGIS 2008). It is mostly inhabited by the Grebo and Krahn ethnic groups. The main sources of livelihood are subsistence farming, petty trading and small scale illicit mining of gold and diamond.

The Liberia Democratic Institute (LDI) deployed a team of three researchers to River Gee. The team engaged different stakeholders, including local community leaders, youth and women groups, elders, disabled and marketers across the selected communities. As a result, the team conducted a total of 45 individual interviews, six small group discussions, seven town hall meetings and two focus group discussions in 16 settlements. A total number of 613 residents participated in these consultations.

Table 1: Districts, Settlements and Participants consulted in River Gee County

District	Settlement	# of Persons
Gbeapo / Chidepo/Fish Town	Fish Town, Karweaken, Putuken, Jarkarken, Palebo, Karkarken	318
Webbo	Webbo, Sewroken, Glao, Nyenneh	134
Sarbo	Sarbo Sweeken, Kaytiabo	161
Total		613

Key Findings

The research findings revealed deep seated disintegration of the basic elements of community co-existence. Generally, the citizens identified prolonged division along social, political, economic and religious lines which manifest themselves in several different issues:

- **Unemployment and Access to Resources:** The county reportedly suffers from mass unemployment, which is exacerbated by the lack of viable economic institutions and employment along section or tribal line instead of competence, as well as employment of friends and relatives of NGO workers at the expense of locals. The removal of more than 300 government employees from payroll and the deplorable road conditions which discourage investment were also mentioned with results such as stealing, burglary, and parental neglect of children.
- **Land and Property Disputes:** disputes over land property in River Gee County are expressed in several forms, such as disrespect for traditional land boundaries involving communities, districts and counties. It emerged during consultations in Putuken that land conflict between Putuken and Palebo, Kaydiabo and Jaydepo and between Putuken in River Gee County and Jeadapo in Sinoe County were an issue. Multiple sales were also reported by local officials in Kanweaken as

well as the seizure/encroachment on private land by county authorities in Fish Town. The legislative enactments to create new districts without clear territorial demarcation are serious sources of land conflict in some communities. The citizens pointed to the creation of Tarjuwon Statutory District, formerly part of Juazon Statutory District as breeding confusion over having Plandiaboe and Tuba Towns as part of Kru speaking Tarjuowon District from Grebo speaking Sarbo district.

- **Rule of Law and Security:** The citizens said: *“Criminals in communities enjoy justice and peace more than those victimized by criminals”*. During the various dialogue sessions, participants claimed crime victims are being compelled by the police to feed the alleged “criminal” while they are detained and the subsequent release of “criminals” when victims fail to provide food for them. *“This action by the police is equal to giving heyday to criminals over their victims”*, a participant in Karweaken lamented. Other issues relating to rule of law and security are sassywood or trial by ordeal, with locals expressing that the abolition of this practice is an offense to tradition and culture, since they see it as the main source of justice in the community. People said that the border posts with the Ivory Coast are many and generally permeable. As a result, illicit drugs enter and have a negative effect on society, especially on the youth. Participants also indicated that human rights groups place more emphasis on the rights of children and neglect their other responsibilities.
- **Bad Governance and Corruption:** the locals talked about the misappropriation of funds and the sub-standard implementation of projects as instances of bad governance and corruption. The usage of computers, motorbikes and generators donated by the Ministry of Youth and Sports to the county youth for the personal use of local officials is considered unacceptable.
- **Ethnicity and Identity Discrimination:** *“The foundation and formation of River Gee County was rooted on ethnic and sectional lines, this has continued to permeate the way we do things as a people and we must put a stop to it”* a participant stated in a meeting. This is reported to take the form of employment preference for people from the same section or clan irrespective of merits and the directing of development initiatives to areas of powerful politicians.
- **Forestry Concession:** the exclusion of Jarkarken as beneficiary of the forestry concession by FDA on the grounds that it is outside the three kilometers buffer zone was reported as a source of resentment, with locals threatening not to allow the use of their town by any concession.

Recommendations

Unemployment and Access to Resources

- Participants called for the decentralization of development projects and the setting up of companies to create employment opportunities.

Land and Property disputes

- Set up land disputes resolution committees in communities, with strong capacities and mandates.

Rule of Law and Security

- Strengthening and training of the police.

Sassywood or Trial by Ordeal

- The lawmakers and the Minister of Internal Affairs should reconsider the abolition of Sassywood and should look at ways to refine the practice rather than completely abolish it.

Porous Borders

- The assignment of immigration personnel in the county to man the borders.

Human Rights Advocacy

- The conduct of joint human right training for major stakeholders of the community including parents and children.

Bad Governance and Corruption

- To hold a county conference to discuss these issues.

Ethnicity and Identity Discrimination

- Citizens called for the decentralization of development projects, based on the needs of the community.
- The merit system should be used in the recruitment of workforce in the county.

Forest Concession

- Residents of Jarkarken called on the Forestry Development Authority (FDA) to reconsider its decision to exclude their town from benefiting from the forest concession contract.





Grand Kru became a county in 1980 with Braclayville as its capital. It has a population of 57,650 inhabitants (LIGIS 2008) mainly comprised of Grebo and Kru ethnic groups. The county has six statutory districts, 18 administrative districts and is headed by a superintendent. The main source of livelihood for citizens of the county is subsistence farming, small scale illicit mining and petit trading.

The Liberia Democratic Institute (LDI) deployed a team of three researchers to implement the consultations in late July 2009. The field consultations included local community leaders, youth and women groups, elders, disabled and marketers as the key stakeholders. The team covered a total of 23 communities/settlements in three districts, and conducted 30 one-on-one interviews, 20 small group discussions, four town hall meetings and two focus group discussions. A total of 508 persons participated in these consultations.

Table 1: Districts, Settlements and Participants consulted in Grand Kru County

District	Settlement	# of Persons
Sasstown Statutory	Jekwikpo, Feedokree, Dayokpo, Nrokwia, Jarkarkpo, and Betu village	183
Barclayville/Picnices	Solokpo, Jlatekpo, Bilakpo, Jakapo, Kayken, Bishop quarter, Setor, Daryoken, Tompo and Tarweh village	201
Trehn Statutory	Behwan, Wateken, Gblebo, Kwaken, Pokloken, Giant Town, Tunbiaken and Garraway Down Beach	124
Total		508

Key Findings

Findings that emerged from the consultations point to deep rooted ethnic rivalry or sectional disputes, bad governance framework, struggle for power as well as prolonged neglect. These represent some specific key sources of tension in the county.

- **Ethnicity and Identity Discrimination:** participants agreed that sectionalism is the single most divisive factor. They named employment or appointment on sectional lines, marginalization and exclusion of the less privileged as the various forms of sectionalism. For example, a host of governmental offices are occupied by a single section of tribe hailing from the same quarter (Grebo) in Barclayville. As a result, they reported an intense power struggle and undermining of development efforts. The marginalization of the disabled has to do with their exclusion from government positions and from the overall development planning of the county, i.e. the CDA and PRS.
- **Bad Governance and Corruption:** lack of transparency and accountability, lack of community participation in decision-making and extortion by local government officials in the form of bribe for appointment were reported. For example, the citizens expressed lack of knowledge about the usage of the County Development Fund and the selection of communities and projects.

- **Land and Property Disputes:** according to the citizens, it comes in the forms of boundary disagreement among competing communities over farmland, the enactment of new administrative division by the national legislature without proper geographic demarcations, multiple land sales and encroachment. Boundary land disputes between Po-River and Piddy Towns; farm land dispute between Garraway and Neimen; and on the other hand Behwan and Garraway in Trehn District were highlighted. Similarly in Sasstown, families are at loggerhead over farmland ownership relating to Diyokpo and Nrokwia; and Wadebo and Forpo among others. The enactment of Trehn Statutory District is having Bahwan and Garraway Down Beach to fight over the status of the administrative seat of the district.
- **Rule of Law and Security:** Participants view the governance structure as weak, something which is manifest in the minimum presence of police, the function of the courts and other law enforcement officers in the county. Participants identified rape as the main form of gender violence and pointed to its non-documentation due to stigma and taboo that the community has in discussing sex openly.

Recommendations

Ethnicity and Identity Discrimination

- Create a platform to enable different sections to use dialogue and find means to build social cohesion, peace and promote development.
- Create community peace building committees led by consensual leadership that enjoys the trust and respectability of all parties. Incorporate diverse groups including respected traditional leaders and local authorities and supported by local and external NGOs for training and technical assistance.
- Include programmes for the disabled community in the county development agenda and the poverty reduction strategy.

Land and Property Disputes

- The institution of a land commission that will critically reform land policies and administration in the county.
- The government should appoint a county land surveyor whose responsibility will be to survey all disputed lands in the county.
- All disputing parties over land should give the county authorities the opportunity to resolve them through dialogue and or adjudication.
- The restoration of traditional capacities for mediation in the form of community land committees.

Bad governance and Corruption

- Encourage investors to commence logging, mining as a means of creating jobs.
- Increase the presence of law enforcement officers in the county to make the presence of government felt.

Rule of Law and Security

- Women strongly called for intensive awareness and education as means of fostering a change in attitudes and cultural practices that impede the growth and development of women.
- Improve the judicial system of the county by assigning more and qualified judicial personnel and build more infrastructure for this sector.



Sinoe is one of Liberia’s original counties and signatory to the Declaration of Independence on July 26, 1847. The county is predominately inhabited by the Kru and Sarpo and has a population of 101,068 inhabitants (LIGIS 2008).

A team of three researchers from the Liberia Democratic Institute was trained and deployed in Sinoe to undertake the consultations, which were carried out in 16 communities and settlements within the four districts which included 6 town hall meetings, six small group discussions, 55 one-on-one interviews and three focus group discussions. Participants included local leaders, youth and women, the physically challenged and religious leaders. A total of 634 residents participated in these consultations.

Table 1: Districts, Settlements and Participants consulted in Sinoe County

District	Settlement	# of Persons
Greenville	Sebbeh Town, Central Greenville, Po-river	185
Kpanyan	Sinoe Rubber Plantation, Kabada	160
Tarjuowon	Wiah Town, One Way, Nyenfueh Town, and Jacksonville	150
Juazon	Bilibokree Chebioh Town and Pyne Town in Juazon	139
Total		634

Key Findings

Findings that emerge during consultation in Sinoe County identified deep seated division along ethnic, social, political and economic lines which can be categorized as follow:

- **Land and Property Disputes:** disputes over land property in Sinoe reportedly take on the following dimensions: multiple sales, inter- and intra- county/community boundary disagreements, encroachment, trespassing and seizure of private/public farms or concession by citizens and migrants. For example, dispute is said to be between the Bannah, the Palama, the Tartuah, the Kabada, the Woodue and the Numonpou over boundaries. Information generated revealed that such disputes are breeding tension. The creation of new administrative districts is also a major source of land conflict in the county, for example the dispute over Plandiaboe and Tugbe Town has heightened animosity between the Sarpo of Juazon District on one side and the Kru of Tarjuowon District on the other.
- **Bad Governance and Corruption:** lack of transparency, accountability and mismanagement of the county resources by county officials was of concern to participants, and particularly to youth.

- **Unemployment and Access to Resources:** participants attributed the high level of unemployment to government’s “right sizing” policy, to the recruitment of NGO staff from outside of the county and to the illicit economic activities taking place in the county.
- **Ethnicity and Discrimination:** exclusion from decision-making process and lack of support from government and other aid agencies were reported in several settlements. For example, a reference was made to the judiciary branch of government where people from the disabled group applied to serve as a Jury at the court but were denied because they were visually impaired. Similarly, the Sarpo spoke of their marginalization by other surrounding tribes. For example, the Krus align them with the Krahn and hence Grand Gedians while the Krahn on the other side align them with the Krus and hence Sinoens. “Sarpo people feel lost as to where they really belong”, they said.

Recommendation

Land and Property Disputes

- The county legislative caucuses of Sinoe and River Cess as well as the Minister of Internal Affairs should intervene and mediate the unfolding land dispute between the two counties.
- *The government* of Liberia should empower the Liberia National Police (LNP) and should also work in collaboration with UNMIL and its international partners to evict occupants from the Sarpo National Park, who are destroying it.

Bad governance and Corruption

- The citizens, especially the youth, call for participatory decision-making process that involves all of the key stakeholders of the county, as it relates to the selection of development projects and the use of public funds including the County Development Fund.

Ethnicity and Identity Discrimination

- Local authorities, town chiefs and eminent citizens of the district should call upon the government to grant the Sarpo people a county status.
- Religious leaders recommended that the churches get involved in reconciling the disputing tribes since many of them belong to the different denominations across the county.

Unemployment and Access to Resources

- The government, NGOs and other concessioners should be encouraged to give first preference to Sinoens.





The County of Maryland joined the Republic of Liberia in 1857, ten years after Liberia’s independence, with Harper as its administrative seat. The county has a total population of 134,279 inhabitants (LIGIS2008). The Grebos and Krus are the predominant African tribes that inhabited the county in the early 1800s.

In June 2009, the Liberia Democratic Institute (LDI) undertook the field research of P4DP. A team of four researchers conducted a total of 20 individual interviews, 16 group consultations, ten town hall meetings and three focus group discussions. Participants in these sessions across Maryland included local leaders, youth and women, the physically challenged and religious leaders. A total of 421 inhabitants participated in these consultations.

Table 1: Districts, Settlements and Participants consulted in Maryland County

District	Settlement	# of Persons
Harper	Rock Town, Big Town, Hoffman Station, Central Harper, Sadeken	160
Pleebo / Sodoken	Pleebo, Wochoken	171
Karluway	Karloken, Wateken, Fish Town	90
Total		421

Key Findings

Generally, the citizens identified prolonged divisions along social, political, economic and religious lines, which manifest themselves in several forms at the individual and community levels including:

- **Land and Property Disputes:** the manifestations of disputes over land property in Maryland County have several dimensions. During the various consultations, the citizens pointed to commotion over existing boundaries between individuals, communities and districts as it relates to house spots, farmlands, and multiple sales of land as well as encroachment on private properties. There is also deep animosity and resentment of the locals toward the Cavella Rubber Corporation (CRC) for taking over their land leaving them with no room for living.
- **Rule of Law and Security:** people reported the rendering of justice in favor of those with the highest bounty, the lack of sufficient capacity to prosecute cases, the under remuneration of judicial personnel leading to corruption, the acceptance of bribes by the police to release the indicted without trial and the increase and repeated burglary of shops and other business centers by harden criminals. Another dimension of rule of law and security is the issue of killing for ritualistic purpose. According to the locals, ritual murder (which they referred to as “Gboyoy”) is the brutal extraction or cutting off of various body parts such as the tongues, eyes, nose, hands and other private parts, while the victim is still alive and the subsequent killing and

draining of the blood. In the case of a pregnant woman, they described it as removal of the fetus while the mother was alive. This incidence exploded in violent conflict as recently as December 2009 over the murder of a pregnant woman near Harper. In many of these instances, according to the locals, there are no arrests or trial of alleged culprits who are usually the “Big Shots”.

- **Gender-Based Violence:** was also highlighted with rape as the main form of gender-based violence in the county and the absence of the necessary institution to prosecute those responsible and care for victims.
- **Bad Governance and Corruption:** reports on lack of transparency and accountability relative to the management of public funds and materials were common. They pointed to the lack of information on a development rally for the construction of a market hall in Karloken, the imprisonment of six youth leaders and intimidation of citizens by local district officials of Karluway, and exclusion of youth and women from decision-making.
- **Unemployment and Lack of Access to Resources:** gross unemployment in Maryland County was reported especially among the youth, linking this problem to crimes such as burglary and stealing and the potential for exploiting the unemployed, especially the youth, for selfish reasons. According to them, *“an idle mind is the devil’s workshop”*.
- **Ethnicity and Identity Discrimination:** Ethnic discrimination was described by participants as xenophobic. It is exhibited by the Nyanbo ethnic segment of the Grebo tribe that is the indigenous of Pleebo/Sodeken district. It relates to the hatred and opposition of the Nyanbos to the employment of other Liberians who are not original Marylanders by the Cavella Rubber Corporation and others.

Recommendations

Land and Property Disputes

- The Liberian Ministry of Internal Affairs should carry out updated surveys of all disputed land across the county.
- Institute a land commission that will critically reform land and administration policies in the county.
- The restoration of traditional capacities for mediation in the form of community land committees.

Rule of Law and Security

- The strengthening of the judicial system and the pro-active involvement of the police in dealing with the incidence of killings for ritual purposes in the county.
- Prosecution of rapists.

Bad governance

- Increase and strengthen the monitoring mechanism of local official in the discharge of their duties and deal with dishonesty expeditiously according to the laws.

Unemployment and Access to Resources

- Establish vocational training institutions in populated centers of the county to prepare youth with skills for the job market.

Ethnicity and Identity Discrimination

- Give first preference to the indigenous Marylanders for employment at the Cavella Rubber Plantation and others in the county.

ENDNOTES AND EXAMPLES



Endnotes and Examples

¹ Dr. M.B. Akpan, 'Black imperialism: Americo-Liberians rule over African peoples of Liberia. 1841-1964' *The Canadian Journal of African Studies*, Volume v11, no2, 197, 3 pages: 217-236.

² Report of the Secretary General to the General Assembly on the Peacebuilding Fund (A/64/217-S/2009/419).

³ Alexandre Corriveau-Bourque. *Confusion and Palava: The Logic of Land Encroachment in Lofa County, Liberia – 2010*, NRC Report (www.nrc.no).

⁴ Krahn and Gio communities are confronted over land property issues in the Tappita district of Nimba County. In the Senjeh district of Bomi County, Gola and Mende communities are confronted around communal land ownership. At Yeabloe district in Grand Bassa County, Bassa and Kpelle dispute the property of over 400 acres of farmland. In Robertsport City, Cape Mount County, Fula and Fanti communities are involved in a dispute over house plots. Mandingo on one side and Mano and Gio in another one are confronted about urban plots of land in Ganta and other towns of Nimba County.

⁵ In the community of Beajah, Bomi County, residents from two different ethnic groups -Gola and Mende- are disputing over the boundaries of their respective tribal land reserves. In the community of Gbarma, Gbarpolu, there is a dispute about communal and private property claims between the community and one family in it, from the same ethnic group.

⁶ In Kakata, Margibi County, community members claim that a new clinic was built by public authorities in their private land. In Owensgrove, Grand Bassa, the community claims that public authorities have taken away from them 600 acres of traditional reserve land.

⁷ Alexandre Corriveau-Bourque. *Confusion and Palava: The Logic of Land Encroachment in Lofa County, Liberia – 2010*, NRC Report (www.nrc.no).

⁸ In Kpanyan district, Sinoe County, there is an inter-chiefdom land dispute involving the Palama, Tartuah, Kabada, Woodoue and Numonpou chiefdoms. An effort is being made by customary authorities to resolve this problem through traditional conflict resolution mechanisms.

⁹ Rock Town, a community in Harper District in Maryland, is involved in bitter land disputes with two neighbouring communities: Big Town in Harper district, and Wetchoken in Pleebo/Sodeken district. The people of Rock Town stated that the problem with Big Town dates back to the unilateral change of the boundary between both communities by a Superintendent in Big Town, from the Hoffman River -the ancestral boundary- to an artificial cornerstone that encroaches deep into their communal land. According to them, the dispute has already claimed two lives. They also claimed that the people of Wetchoken are encroaching over their land. They claim that this dispute is giving place to violence, and fear that as a result their fields and houses will be burned. During the consultations held in Big Town and Wetchoken, both communities expressed that they were the legitimate owners of the disputed land, and rejected the accusations waved by Rock Town.

¹⁰ Before the war, the community of Swamill was considered to be part of the Senjeh district in Bomi County. A rich area in minerals and forest, it is now being claimed by the authorities of Bomi and Gbarpolu Counties as falling under their respective jurisdictions. The people in the community expressed that because of this dispute, they have "no political identity", meaning that they do not know which of these is responsible for their community. The community of Cheesmanville indicated that they were unable to vote in the November 2009 senatorial by-election for Montserrado County because of the lack of clarity regarding the boundaries between Montserrado and Bomi counties.

¹¹ In the words of a participant from Karweaken in River Gee County: "My child, corruption been here since JJ Roberts' time. Da you able to eradicate it? I sorry for you."

¹² In Bomi County, a community referred to the alleged disappearance of funds approved for conditioning of roads by "yellow machines" without any work having been actually carried out.

¹³ In River Gee County, a community referred the case of a government services building that was left incomplete, without any explanation as to the use of the remaining funds.

¹⁴ A community in Bong County suggested that the amounts that had been originally approved for the construction of a Town Hall were for a bigger and better building than the one finally built.

¹⁵ Another community in Bong County reportedly found out that the CDF amounts approved for their community were higher than the ones reported to them by the local authorities.

¹⁶ In Gbarpolu County, a community referred that a Town Hall that was built with funds from an international NGO was reported as built with CDFs, with the amount approved to such effect by the government disappearing.

¹⁷ People from Owensgrove, Grand Bassa County, claimed that they were not receiving their “fair share” of CDFs, without any concrete reference as to what this share should have been or what happened to it.

¹⁸ In a town of Montserrado county, a community complained that the local city mayor secretly selected community leaders against the community’s interests because she has political support from a minister in government.

¹⁹ Women from Karnweaken, River Gee County, complained that the new market building in the town is too small because they were not invited to participate in any of the meetings where the relevant decisions were taken.

²⁰ In Zorzor district, Lofa County, the community reported the negative effects in their development of an alleged split between executive appointees on one side and the Lofa house caucus and the paramount chief on the other.

²¹ During a focus group meeting in Karweaken, River Gee County, participants referred that whenever a thief is caught, police authorities request the victims to feed the perpetrator during detention, setting the person free if the victim was unable or unwilling to provide the food. In Pleebo, Maryland, community members reported that the police demands money for fuel and logistics before they agree to conduct any investigation.

²² The Judicial Conference took place at the Chambers of the Supreme Court of Liberia in Monrovia, adopting a resolution with 18 points and commitments, central among which are the need to ensure a transparent application of rule of law, the need to review the jury system, and the territorial jurisdiction of courts based on population.

²³ Muslim communities in general complain about ethnic discrimination by local authorities: immigration officers in the border post between Maryland and Grand Kru counties that harass them and extract bribes from them; about goods being confiscated in the context of investigations in Grand Bassa that are never returned to their owners once the investigations finish.

²⁴ In Lofa County, the accidental death of a Lorma girl in the town of Konia gave place to rumours according to which she had been murdered by Muslims. This led to young Lorma from the community of Zorzor to attack the Imam and the local mosque. Upon learning about this attack, Moslems in Voinjama attacked Christian buildings, including two churches. Four people died and 18 more were wounded as a result of these events. Subsequent investigations revealed that this is the sixth violent flare-up of inter-ethnic tensions in the region since 2005.

²⁵ Communities and local authorities from and around the Sapu National Park in Sinoe County reported that foreigners from neighbouring countries roam the reserve and engage in illicit activities, from hunting of endangered species to mining.

²⁶ Communities in the south east region of the country regularly complain about cases of ritualistic murders.

²⁷ *“The police people are not enough in this area. We cannot see them to report cases. And the magistrate in Garraway is very old, over 85 years. This is frustrating since it makes our citizens to look at us local officials to be ineffective”.* Elijah Tyler, Superintendent, Trehn District, G. Kru Co.

²⁸ In Harper district, a protest march over a series of murders allegedly perpetrated for ritualistic reasons led to a violent confrontation with local authorities. Muslims in Voinjama, Lofa County went into a rampage burning several buildings and churches after learning of an attack against Muslims in the town of Konia. In Tappita, Nimba County, a mob attacked and burned the Police Station in order to set free a detainee they considered unfairly imprisoned.

²⁹ For example, the Mendes and Kissi and the Lormas, Kpelle, Gios, Minos, Krahn, Grebos are found on both sides of the border with Sierra Leone, Guinea and Cote d’Ivoire. With similar tradition and customs, they primarily identify with each other irrespectively of the international political boundary.

³⁰ In Lofa County, Lormas are considered as the “uncles” and Mandingos as “nephews”. For Lormas, this means a hierarchical relationship based upon their status as original inhabitants. They therefore resent claims for equality and participation in leadership position from the Mandingoes.

³¹ Within a single county, different groups presented themselves as victims of discrimination by another group: In Lofa County the Kpelle of Zorzor, the Mende of Foya, the Mandingo of Voinjama and the Kissi of Kolahun, all expressed that they were being marginalized by the majority ethnic group in the town or the district.

³² As stated in one of the sessions by the Inter-religious Council for Liberia: *“The October 24, 2004 fracas in Monrovia was a clear example of the use of religion or ethnicity as a mask for self interest. There was simple a quarrel over a piece of land between a Lorma and a Mandingo. And then it was alarmed by each side that Christians have attacked Muslims and vice versa. But the case has never been an ethnic Lorma or Mandingo confronting one another on the basis of tribe or a situation where Christians confront Muslims of because religions.”*

³³ Communities around Takeway in Grand Bassa, and in the Mamba Kaba district of Margibi, complained about coercion by religious customary authorities.

³⁴ In Lofa, customary authorities in several communities complained about “born again” Christians that exposed secret traditional practices to the uninitiated.

³⁵ In Nimba County, the research team reported that some communities close to the Gbi Forest complained about roaming witches that were spreading whooping cough in their communities. In Harper, Maryland County, several people were arrested in March 2010 after a pregnant woman was killed, the child extracted from her and the blood drained for ritualistic purposes.

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