



# Liberia

## ICAF Report

May 2010



Coordinator for  
Reconstruction &  
Stabilization



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

**Disclaimer:** This report has not been formally cleared by any of the agencies involved in the Interagency Conflict Assessment Team. The report may include views or statements of authors outside the government, and may have been written by an outside observer of the deliberations of the team. The authors accept full responsibility for any errors in their attempts to convey the views of the assessment team. Facts cited here have not been checked against other sources and the report itself is a summary of the team's discussion.

**Project facilitated and led by**

Office of Conflict Prevention  
Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization  
U.S. Department of State

Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation  
Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance  
U.S. Agency for International Development

**Report written by**

Agnieszka Paczynska  
Associate Professor  
Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution  
George Mason University

**With the participation of**

Embassy of the United States Monrovia, Liberia  
U.S. Agency for International Development Africa: Liberia  
Civilian Response Corps of the United States of America  
U.S. African Command  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
U.S. Department of Commerce  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
U.S. Department of Justice  
United Nations Mission in Liberia



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE





## Table of Contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Executive Summary                                      | 6  |
| Introduction   | 7  |
| Post-Conflict Context                                  | 11 |
| Core Grievances and Drivers of Conflict                | 13 |
| Land Control and Ownership                             | 13 |
| Unmet Expectations                                     | 16 |
| Lack of Opportunity                                    | 20 |
| Unequal/Unfair Access                                  | 21 |
| Core Resiliencies and Mitigating Factors               | 23 |
| Success to Build on                                    | 23 |
| Desire for Improvement                                 | 25 |
| Inter-Faith Dialogues                                  | 26 |
| Communities Able to Handle Disputes                    | 26 |
| War Fatigue  | 27 |
| Windows of Uncertainty                                 | 28 |
| Short-term   | 28 |
| Medium-term  | 29 |
| Long-term  | 29 |
| Conclusions  | 30 |
| Appendix A – Liberia ICAF Field Participants List      | 33 |
| Appendix B – Liberia ICAF DC Workshop Participant List | 35 |
| Appendix C – Systems Map (Liberian Society)            | 37 |
| Appendix D – Examples of Resilience                    | 39 |

## Executive Summary

Decades of political and economic exclusion, years of violence and insecurity, and a population of displaced and traumatized people are just some of the complex factors that contribute to the intricate political and social dynamics in Liberia.

**Drivers and Mitigating Factors:** A variety of deep-seated grievances arising from uncertainties relating to claims on and control of land, increasing dependence on international donors and, as a result, serious levels of unmet expectations with regard to the GOL and international donors, and perceptions of unfair and unequal access to assets and opportunities serve as fuel for conflict among numerous tribal groups and between “indigenous” Liberians and Americo-Liberians (descendants from 19<sup>th</sup> century settlers from the United States). A variety of opinion leaders, from the diaspora, some politicians, trade union heavy-weights, and tribal and religious leaders are able to mobilize their constituencies in support of instability and conflict around these core grievances.

At the same time, many Liberians express the perception that the country has genuinely made progress in important areas such as establishing inter-faith dialogues which are playing a key role in community reconciliation processes, in communities’ ability to handle some disputes on their own, and the desire for self- and community-improvement. Another success has been the establishment of radio stations which disseminate accurate and conflict-mitigating information. Key actors, such as religious leaders, political figures, radio station owners and operators, and eminent persons continue to mobilize their constituencies in ways that mitigate conflict and strengthen local capacity.

**Diagnostic:** Current levels of overt conflict in Liberia are relatively low, but the pathways for increasing levels of violence are in place, often used to stimulate minor or small-scale conflict. It is also the case that social networks and relationships supporting Liberian resilience already exist. Events scheduled to occur within two to three years (*e.g.* the Taylor verdict in The Hague, eviction from their homes of 25,000 people due to a concession agreement between the GOL and a private company, presidential and parliamentary elections, and the withdrawal of the UN mission) will open “windows of uncertainty.” Whether existing pathways for violence and instability or resilience and peace are used during these moments of uncertainty can be influenced by USG and other international donor engagement currently underway.

## **1. Introduction**

The Interagency Conflict Assessment Framework (ICAF) application began in a full-day workshop which was held on January 8, 2010 in Arlington, Virginia. About 30 representatives from across the interagency with expertise in Liberia participated in the opening phase of the ICAF application for Liberia. Embassy Monrovia's Political/Economic Counselor, Steven Koutsis, and Deputy USAID Mission Director, Carolyn Bryan, participated as did AFRICOM Desk Officer, Dorothy Perkins. Also participating were representatives from US Department of State, Justice, Energy, Health and Human Services, Treasury, Commerce, Agriculture and USAID. A representative from the United Nations Development Program, Liberia Desk Officers from USAID, State and the Office of the Secretary of Defense and academics with Liberia expertise from the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University, George Washington University, and the Woodrow Wilson Center. At the conclusion of the workshop, the participants agreed on a list of issues that needed to be further investigated. These "what we don't know" formed the basis for the in-country ICAF.

The second phase of the ICAF application took place in Liberia from March 7 to March 30, 2010 and included 20 participants from Embassy Monrovia as well as participants from the US Africa Command (AFRICOM) and the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). The four team leaders were from the US Department of State and USAID. Each of the four eight-person teams included conflict and technical experts; US Department of State (Embassy and DC); USAID (Liberia and DC); US DOD (AFRICOM and/or Embassy); UMMIL; and Liberian nationals. Each team included at least four people from Embassy Monrovia.

The teams visited four counties: Montserrado, Bong, Lofa, and Nimba. The four counties were chosen because the social, political and economic dynamics there were of particular concern to Embassy Monrovia as well as for logistical reasons. The teams conducted more than 180 interviews with more than 1,000 individuals. Those interviewed included tribal leaders, religious leaders, women leaders, farmers, students, teachers, health care workers, youth, market vendors, refugees, local NGOs, donors, union leaders, concessionary companies, UNMIL, county, district and town government officials, military and police officers, border guards, and national ministry officials.

The analytical foundation for the Liberia assessment is the Interagency Conflict Assessment Framework (ICAF), a method for diagnosing conflict dynamics developed by a U.S. interagency team in 2008 and adopted for U.S. Government use by the Reconstruction and Stabilization Policy Coordinating Committee in July 2008. The Liberia ICAF is the seventeenth application of the ICAF and the third full, in-country application. In the full, in-country application, teams deploy to various locations throughout the country, conducting interviews and focus groups, and making personal and group observations. The teams reconvene in the Embassy to analyze their primary as well as existing secondary source information.

The analysis is unquestionably richer as a result of the data collected in the field. The interviews in the four counties complemented the documentary record by providing important insights into the sentiments and expectations of Liberians from different economic, religious, and ethnic

backgrounds. These individual level perspectives also provided additional nuance to the valuable national level polling data conducted by a variety of organizations over the past few years.

The analytical power of the ICAF comes from using its concepts and their specified interrelationships as tools for seeking out and sorting data, identifying connections, and distilling patterns. The principal focus of the analysis is to identify those dynamics within a given society that (1) lead to instability and violent conflict (*the drivers of conflict*) and (2) seek to maintain stability and the status quo (*the mitigating factors*). The premise of the framework is that the stronger the drivers of conflict and the weaker the mitigating factors, the greater the risk that violent conflict will occur.

Both drivers of conflict and mitigating factors arise when *key actors* in society – individuals, but also organizational actors of all sorts – actively mobilize important attributes in that society. For drivers of conflict, key actors mobilize *core grievances*, such as a group’s ingrained perception that it has been excluded from political and economic life. For mitigating factors, key actors mobilize *resiliencies* that may be embedded in the traditions, historical experience, or institutions that make up that society such as a society’s common religious heritage. The ICAF goes on to identify a set of interrelated concepts that help tease out these grievances and resiliencies (*identities, institutional performance and societal patterns*) and the overarching social and environmental *context*. (Additional details on the ICAF may be found in Annex #).

The ICAF served as the hub of the data collection and analysis phases of the assessment. It was used to guide initial data collection efforts, identify information gaps to be addressed during the field work, sort the key facts extracted from documents, and elicit the attitudes, opinions and forecasts of those interviewed. The ICAF team then worked to identify drivers of conflict and mitigating factors. The results of the analysis are:

**Finding 1:** Levels of existing overt conflict are relatively low

In the seven years since the end of the civil war and the five years since the elections of President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, Liberia has not experienced large-scale violence and most Liberians do not anticipate a return to armed conflict. Clashes between social groups do occur, however, as was evidenced most recently during the February 26 incident in Voinjama, Lofa Country during which four persons died, scores were wounded, and a number of homes, business and health clinic among others were burned. While tensions resulting from conflicting claims over land were present in all four counties, most of the time they did not lead to direct violence between the parties. At the same time, in some counties, there were reports of ritualistic killings, crime was a concern, and the lack of effective investigations and prosecutions of perpetrators occasionally resulted in mob justice.

**Finding 2:** Pathways for increasing levels of violence are in place

Although existing levels of overt conflict are low, nonetheless a number of unaddressed grievances and key actors, such as politicians, tribal and religious leaders, and former commanders of armed groups, willing and able to mobilize social groups around these



grievances exist. Among the key inter-related grievances are conflicts over land, the unmet expectations of Liberians, the lack of opportunities and the unequal access to existing opportunities. The complex and largely unresolved issues of ownership and claims over land are in the views of most Liberians the primary source of social tensions in the country. The government has recently established the National Land Commission but it is too early to tell how effective the Commission will be in the long-term in resolving land issues and establishing effective dispute resolution mechanisms. Liberians are also deeply dissatisfied with the progress the country has made in the last seven years. In particular, Liberians are deeply concerned by the lack of formal justice systems' capacity to resolve legal disputes and to provide security and justice. Liberians are also frustrated by the lack of employment opportunities, especially for the young, lack of educational facilities and teachers, lack of health services and inadequate physical infrastructure for service delivery. At the same time, many Liberians feel that they are being unfairly denied access to various opportunities because of their tribal or religious affiliation, their socioeconomic position, and their lack of political connections among others. They see this unequal access operating in areas such as the formal justice system where the wealthy and connected are seen by many as having a greater ability to secure favorable rulings, in the realm of education beyond the primary school, and employment both locally and in the national government. Many see both the local and the national government as unresponsive to their needs and are concerned about what they see as pervasive corruption. Many are also frustrated by what they see as unfair access to plum political and economic posts of Liberians returning from the diaspora and believe that international donors have frequently contributed to the often disappointing process of post-conflict reconstruction.

**Finding 3:** Social networks and relationships supporting Liberian resiliencies exist

At the same time, social resiliencies exist and mitigate against conflict escalation. These social resiliencies can be found in the social networks, both personal and professional, that cut across tribal and religious divides. People from different social groups form friendships, intermarry, and come together to study, play sports and work in their communities. Motorcycle Unions, for instance, have multi-tribal membership and provide both an economic and social outlet for its members. Religious leaders as well as students with different religious affiliations have formed peacebuilding and dispute resolution organizations in order to provide a venue where dialogues between Christians and Muslims and among different Christian denominations can be held and address tensions among these communities. Likewise, many communities resolve, on their own, disputes that arise within families, between neighbors, or between neighboring villages although they also believe that violent crimes and many land disputes must be addressed by the formal justice system.

Many Liberians stated that they are committed to improving their own situation as well as the situation of their families and their communities, and they demonstrate this through securing an education for their children, reconstructing their towns and villages, and dedicating themselves to hard work. Additionally, Liberians are exhausted by fourteen years of war that resulted in so many deaths, displacement, and destruction. This war fatigue has sometimes translated into concrete efforts to ensure that conditions that could foster a return to conflict do not materialize.

Examples of social and institutional resilience were identified in each county and a description of them can be found in Appendix D.

**Finding 4:** Several conflict triggering events will occur over the next several years

Events creating uncertainty and having the potential to trigger conflict or violence are set to occur over the next several years. In the short-term, these events include: the verdict in the Charles Taylor trial in The Hague, the expansion of Sime Darby, a Malaysian international conglomerate which has signed a 63-year concession agreement which will be accompanied by the notification of eviction for 25,000 people, and decisions on key election-related legal issues, such as the controversial Threshold Bill and residency requirements for presidential candidates. In the medium-term, “windows of uncertainty” will be provided by the phased expansion of additional concession agreements with foreign companies which are likely to involve further evictions of those currently living on the specified lands; and the presidential and parliamentary elections scheduled for October 2011. In the longer-term, the events include the anticipated withdrawal of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and the decision about the implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) recommendations.

When these “windows of uncertainty” open, current events are likely to follow pre-existing pathways. Whether existing pathways for violence and instability or resilience and peace are used to express interpersonal and inter-group exchanges is being influenced by USG and other international donor engagement now. This influence is strongest and most effective when it creates more connections (in the desired direction) among more of the dynamics driving and mitigating conflict. The “systems map,” attached in Appendix C, is a graphical representation of the ICAF analysis and depicts some current international efforts as isolated interventions that may have unintended consequences. It also provides a basis for thinking differently about these dynamics.



## THE POST-CONFLICT CONTEXT

The two civil wars in Liberia, which lasted from 1989 to 2003, devastated the country's economy, reducing its GDP by 90 percent and pushing 75 percent of the population below the poverty line. Average incomes in 2003, were only a quarter of what they were in 1987. By most commonly cited estimates, 250,000 Liberians out of a population of 3.8 million were killed during the conflict; however, others suggest that as many as 400,000 may have perished. Additionally, two million Liberians became refugees or internally displaced. At the same time, large numbers of people fled the rural areas where fighting was most intense, leading to an uncontrolled and unplanned expansion of urban areas which in turn contributed to the deterioration of urban housing, sewage, water, and sanitation systems. Outside urban centers, forests were cut for fuel, leading to environmental degradation in some parts of the country. Infrastructure was almost completely destroyed, there was no provision of electricity or piped water, agricultural production, mining, and manufacturing essentially ceased and exports declined dramatically from \$486 million in 1978 to \$10 million in 2004. Foreign debt skyrocketed, reaching \$4.5 billion or 800% of GDP and 3,100% of exports.

The war also had a devastating impact on the country's educational system with 75% of the educational infrastructure damaged or destroyed, resulting in educational services essentially disappearing. At the same time, the public health care system also collapsed, leading to the

widespread existence of communicable diseases like malaria, acute respiratory infections, and measles. According to the World Bank, between 1997 and 2000, health expenditures averaged \$2 per capita annually. At the same time, most health care facilities were destroyed and healthcare professionals left the public health care sector. By some estimates, when the war ended, there were only 50 doctors left in the country, or 1 per 70,000 Liberians.

The civil war came to an end in 2003 with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Accra, Ghana. Charles Taylor resigned, went into exile in Nigeria, before being arrested in 2006 and brought to trial before the Special Court for Sierra Leone in The Hague. In the 2005, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, who had spent the previous decades working as an economist at the World Bank, was elected President. Liberia began the process of building democracy and reconstructing the country.

The new government thus had the daunting task of rebuilding a devastated country. In 2006 Liberia ranked 169<sup>th</sup> of 182 countries on the United Nations Human Development Index, and in the 2009 World Bank's Doing Business country ratings, Liberia placed a distant 159 out of 183 countries. Additionally, institutions of the state administration also needed to be rebuilt, a new political contract forged between the citizens and the state, and a process of peacebuilding and social reconciliation had to be launched. The long history of exclusion, marginalization, and lack of trust and faith of the public in the political system needed to be addressed and the shattered social fabric had to be repaired. The complexity of the challenge and the high expectations of the public concerning the pace of reconstruction were an additional challenge for the new government since it formed a "potentially explosive mix that could be exploited by forces interested in derailing the peace process." (von Kaitenborn-Stachau, 2008, p. 73)

Since the elections, the Johnson-Sirleaf government has launched an ambitious reform program aimed at reducing poverty and reconstructing the country's infrastructure as well as state and social institutions. The government has implemented a Security Sector Reform and has sought to tackle corruption. At the same time, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established at the end of the peace conference in Accra, Ghana. The TRC was charged with investigating the root causes of the conflict, with documenting human rights violations committed during the civil war, identifying victims and perpetrators of the conflict, and making recommendations to the government for prosecution, reparations, amnesty, reconciliation, and institutional reforms.

In late 2009, the TRC released its final report. The report identified significant violator groups, recommended their members for prosecution, and recommended various individuals who the TRC determined offered support to the warring factions be barred from holding public office for 30 years.

The government also has had some undeniable successes. The economic growth rate reached 9.5% in 2007 and despite the global financial crisis that erupted in 2008, maintained a growth rate of 7.1% in 2008 and 5% in 2009. Foreign investors have begun to trickle in and the lifting of international embargoes on timber and diamond exports imposed during the war have opened new sources of revenue for the government. The government also launched the Poverty

Reduction Strategy, a Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration program, and an ambitious Security Sector Reform.

As the February 17, 2010 Report of the Secretary General to the Security Council on the United Nation’s Mission to Liberia (UNMIL) noted, the country has been making progress toward achieving the four objectives of the poverty reduction strategy which focuses on security, economic recovery, the rule of law and infrastructure, and basic services, many challenges remain. Despite some progress, the capacity of national and local institutions across sectors remains limited. Public trust in key institutions remains low and there is continued lack of public confidence in the national security institutions and the criminal justice system in particular. Liberians are also concerned by the persisting conflicts over land, lack of employment opportunities, and health services as well as what many Liberians see as unfair and unequal access to opportunities.

These perceptions of the Liberian public can be grouped around four core grievances: issues of land control and ownership, unmet expectations, lack of opportunity and the lack of fair or equal opportunity. It is by tapping into these grievances that key actors seeking political power, influence or economic resources, can mobilize social groups, potentially intensifying social conflict.

## CORE GRIEVANCES AND CONFLICT DRIVERS

### Land Control and Ownership

Issues of land control and ownership loom large in post-conflict Liberia and most Liberians see access to land as the primary source of conflict, including violent conflict between social groups. A recent survey reveals that conflicts over land ownership and boundaries are seen by Liberians as by far the most important source of tensions between different groups in society (Afrobarometer Summary, 2008, p. 37)

*Over what sorts of problems do violent conflicts most often arise between different groups in this country?*

|  | Urban | Rural |
|--|-------|-------|
| Land ownership/distribution or boundaries                    | 65    | 60    |
| Ethnic/tribal differences                                    | 21    | 18    |
| Political, including political party or leadership disputes  | 8     | 8     |
| Traditional leadership disputes                              | 2     | 4     |
| Economic issues, e.g. competition for jobs, loans and debts  | 3     | 7     |
| Religion   | 1     | 1     |
| Inheritance or personal property disputes                    | 1     | 0     |
| Interpersonal or family matters, including personal behavior | 0     | 1     |
| Don't know   | 0     | 1     |

These patterns of social group needs and resentments, however, are not uniformly distributed across the country. In fact, there are important variations among Liberia's counties and between urban and rural areas. Thus, in River Gee County, 92% of the population identified land disputes as the primary sources of social conflict and over 70 percent of residents of Bomi, Grand Gedeh, Maryland, and Rivercess counties held similar views. In Bong, Grand Bassa, Grand Cape Mount, Lofa, and Sinoe counties, on the other hand, only about half the population viewed violent conflict between social groups resulting from land disputes. In these latter five counties, larger minorities (between 15 and 30 percent) saw ethnic and tribal differences as the main sources of social tensions in their communities. In some counties people report different frequencies of land conflicts with some counties' residents reporting much higher rates of conflict than others. Thus, while in River Gee County, only 29% said such conflicts occurred all the time or frequently, in Margibi 85% thought they occurred all the time or frequently, in Monteserrado 75% held this view, while in Grand Kru 62%. Thirty-Six percent of urban residents reported experiencing violent conflicts over land ownership and land distribution all the time while 22 % of rural residents had similar perceptions.

Conflicts over land access and land ownership were one of the underlying causes of the civil war. The population displacement that accompanied the civil war, the destruction of land deeds and records, as well as the general breakdown of the legal system meant that the issue of land became even more complex and pressing in the aftermath of the conflict.

During the war property abandoned by those fleeing the fighting was frequently appropriated by squatters. In some cases these squatters were combatants who took over lands they considered rightfully theirs and various armed faction commanders distributed land and property to their supporters and exploited natural resources as a way to finance the war effort. With the end of fighting and the signing of the peace agreement, the process of demobilization of ex-combatants and the return of internally displaced and refugees often set in motion clashes between social groups. Those returning to their homes and farms found others living on their property. These new occupants, many of whom had themselves been displaced during the war, were often unwilling to relinquish these properties, and in the absence of legal documents and an effective judicial system, those returning have found it difficult to successfully pursue their claims through the courts. Complicating matters further is the very complex system of land ownership that combines statutory and customary ownership with no clear mechanisms for handling these different types of disputes as well as how to resolve disputes between the different forms of ownership. Furthermore, conflicts over land involve not just agricultural areas but also urban properties and forest resources. They also involve local communities, local and national government, and increasingly investors seeking concessions to both plantation and forests areas.

In all four counties the teams visited, interviewees pointed to disputes over land as among the most serious problems their communities were facing. In all four counties, people expressed their frustration with the inability of the formal justice system to resolve land disputes effectively. Although, as will be discussed in the next section of the report on social resiliencies, communities were able to resolve some disputes over land on their own, respondents were unanimous in their assessment that most serious disputes over land needed to be adjudicated through the formal court system. In the absence of an effective formal justice system, when

unable to resolve issues on their own, communities have often relied on NGOs. In Bong County, for instance, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) has been the primary go-to organization for settling of land conflicts.

What has made the land issues more difficult to resolve and more politically charged in some areas of the country is that often those living on the land owned by returning displaced population are ex-combatants who view the land they now occupy as a rightful reward for the fighting they had done. Exacerbating these tensions further is that the ex-combatants and the returning displaced population belong to different tribal groups and, more important, supported rival armed factions during the war.

In Nimba County for instance, this tension between ex-combatants and returning displaced populations has resulted in clashes between the Gio and Mano tribal groups and the Mandingo. Here the squatting ex-combatants are drawn from the Gio and Mano, they are Christian, and they fought with Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPLF) during the civil war. The returning displaced population, on the other hand, is predominantly Mandingo Muslims who supported the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) armed faction during the conflict. Furthermore, as part of the DDR process, ex-combatants received money from the government to facilitate their reintegration into civilian life. These funds, as a recent report finds, "facilitated the creation of squatter communities and perpetuated the land disputes between returnees, ex-combatants, and their political patrons." (DIIS Working Paper, 2010, p. 8)

In other areas, today's land disputes reflect long-standing conflicts within communities. In particular, conflicts between the Mandingo and the Gio and Mano in Nimba County and Loma in Lofa County are as much about access and ownership of land as they are about access to political and economic resources. In both Nimba and Lofa Counties, the Mandingo are a minority and are poorly represented in the local government. In Nimba, many Mandingo believe that former supporters of Charles Taylor hold most of the political positions in the county government and are therefore seen by both Gio and Mano ex-combatants and returning Mandingos as patrons and protectors of the former. Thus, the Mandingo see few legal channels through which they can pursue their claims to land. As one respondent put it, "When we the Mandingo raise the issue of land, we are told we are causing trouble and violence." Similarly, in Lofa County, although the Mandingo are about 20 to 30 % of the population, they have only one representative in the local government, which is otherwise dominated by Loma. They, therefore, feel politically marginalized and less able to resolve land disputes in a satisfactory manner.

The relationship between land conflict and tribal and religious affiliation is complex. As many interviewees emphasized, conflicts over land should not be seen simply through a tribal lens. Many conflicts are among members of the same tribal group or religious community. By the same token, communities that are divided along tribal and religious lines can sometimes effectively resolve their land disputes. In other words, many conflicts over land which erupt between individuals and communities are not, at their core, about tribal or ethnic differences but rather concern differences about how land should be accessed and used. In those cases, however, while tribal and religious differences are not per se the source of land conflicts, the conflicts often manifest in tribal and religious terms and, in turn, fuel tribal and religious tensions.

Because access to land is so contested, because in rural areas there are few opportunities outside of agriculture for making a living and because of the long history of animosities between social groups, and of political marginalization and exclusion, key actors have been able to mobilize groups around the issue of access and control to land in pursuit of various political and economic objectives.

In 2006, for instance, in the northern Nimba County city of Ganta, former armed faction commanders mobilized thousands of Gio and Mano ex-combatants to defend the lands on which they squatted as rumors spread that the city was about to be attacked by Mandingos returning from refugee camps in Guinea seeking to reclaim their lands. Also in Nimba, during the 2005 electoral campaign, former combatants now running for political offices reminded voters of their role in armed groups and their track record of defending Nimba County against armed intrusion by LURD. Constant communication seems to flow between squatters in Nimba, some senators, members of the Land Dispute Committee and local representatives of ex-combatants – telling squatters when to attend meetings aimed at resolving disputes and whether or not to cooperate with the claimants of the disputed properties. As groups of Mandingo men put it, “Wartime leaders now national politicians enjoy local legitimacy in Ganta, which situates them in a powerful position to settle current claims and disputes over land. Threats of violence lurk under the surface of meetings and negotiations.”

In other words, access to land, land ownership, and boundary issues are core grievances. As such, politicians, tribal leaders, secret society leaders, religious leaders, businessmen and others are able to mobilize disaffected social groups with promises of favorable resolutions to land and boundary disputes. As key actors they encourage aggrieved groups to occupy land owned by others. Ex-combatants in the role of key actor may rely on groups’ residual fears of war and violence to mobilize them around grievances relating to land access, as a way to gain political power, economic resources and social status.

### **Unmet Expectations**

Despite progress that the country has made in the seven years since the civil war ended, Liberians remain deeply dissatisfied and disappointed with many aspects of political, economic, and social life. As in many other countries emerging from conflict, the public’s expectations about the “peace dividend” were high and many have remained unmet. These grievances can be grouped around several distinct issues. Among the most important of these are dissatisfaction with the state of the formal justice system and security, the slow pace of economic development and infrastructure reconstruction, the lack of responsiveness and accountability of local and national governments; the pervasive corruption, and the involvement of the international community in Liberia.

Liberians continue to be deeply dissatisfied with their formal judicial system. The most frequent critiques focus on issues of affordability, impartiality, accessibility and timeliness of case processing. Most Liberians see the formal judicial system as an institution that facilitates the perpetuation of the exclusionary politics of the past, were those socially powerful, with the resources to offer bribes, can “assert their will” (Isser, Lubkemann, N’Tow, 2009). In other words, seven years after the civil war has ended, most poor Liberians do not see the formal



justice system as a place where justice can be found. Many Liberians, especially those in rural areas, prefer instead to turn to the customary justice system to resolve many of their disputes. The customary justice system, however, as Liberians recognize, has its own limitations. While it is an effective mechanism for resolving various conflicts within a community, it is ill equipped to address disputes between members of two different communities or for particularly egregious offenses. In fact, a recent survey found that only three percent of cases are taken to the formal court, 38 % of cases are taken to the customary courts and 50% of cases are not taken to any forum for resolution (Center for the Study of American Economies, Oxford University survey).

Related to frustrations about the low capacity and high corruption within the formal justice system is the inability of the police to protect communities and to hold perpetrators accountable. Consequently, many Liberians do not feel secure in their communities. In many areas, the levels of crime are high and in rural communities in many express fears about ritualistic killings. Police are often seen as corrupt, demanding bribes for services. In many rural areas in Lofa, Nimba and Bong Counties it is less police corruption that is seen as a problem, although this too angers people. Rather, it is lack of police presence that is usually noted. In many rural communities police are rarely seen. Lacking transportation and communications equipment, police have difficulty reaching remote villages. As one respondent in Bong County put it, “If you call the police in the middle of the night they will say they have no guns, they have no cars. They cannot help.” In some areas, the lack of adequate jail facilities makes it difficult for the formal justice system to adequately handle criminal cases. As magistrates in Zorzor, Lofa County pointed out, there is no jail in town and the nearest prison is in the county seat in Voinjama six hours away. Therefore, even when people report crimes and police make arrests, the suspects are back on the street within hours since there is no place to hold them.

The lack of effective rule of law creates a sense of impunity and lack of accountability. The pervasive sense of insecurity in many communities is pushing people to take the law into their own hands. As a town chief in Lofa County pointed out, “The historical lack of justice creates a sense that groups have to create their own justice.” This sense of insecurity, in the view of many Liberians, also makes people and in particular young people more prone to believe exaggerated rumors traveling at lightning speed between villages. These rumors in turn, as was the case in Lofa Country in February 2010, can inflame tensions and lead to violence. In other words, the fear that lack of security creates and the resentments that accumulate when people feel victimized by the lack of accountability for crimes committed against them, makes people more vulnerable and more available for mobilization by key actors, whether tribal or religious leaders or former commanders of various armed factions.

Liberians are also disappointed with the performance of their government. In particular, in the outlying counties, there is a pervasive sense that the central government in Monrovia pays little attention to people’s concerns. The majority of Liberians the teams interviewed expressed frustration at the lack of responsiveness of their representatives and senators in the National Legislation. Most also noted that once the electoral campaign was over, representatives and senators rarely, if ever, visited their constituents. Likewise, although constituents tried to contact their representatives in Monrovia to draw their attention to particular concerns, these attempts almost never got a response. This dissatisfaction with government is reflected in surveys conducted in recent years. In a 2008 survey by Afrobarometer, for instance, although Liberians

expressed support for democratic institutions in principle, they were less satisfied with how democracy works in practice in their country, with 44% saying they were dissatisfied. Sixty-three percent believe that it is either “difficult” or “very difficult” for ordinary people to make their voices heard in the public arena (Afrobarometer Briefing Paper, no. 73, p. 5). Surveys also demonstrate the pervasive lack of trust in most formal institutions. Although 58% express trust in the President, trust levels in the law courts, the ruling party, the national legislature, the national electoral commission, local government officials, the political and the opposition parties, ranges between 27% and 45% (Afrobarometer Summary Results, Round 4, 2008). Poor governance sometimes also contributes to communal tensions. As people in one town in Lofa County noted, “Poor governance is increasing tribal identities in politics. People are voting based on their tribal interests and not based on national interest.”

Liberians also remain wary of competition between political parties which they worry may contribute to violent conflict. Many Liberians believe that the number of political parties should be reduced in order to promote collaboration between them. Many laid the blame for the slow pace of progress on the fact that too many parties are in the opposition and therefore have little incentive to work with the government on implementing the government’s agenda. In one recent survey, 73% of respondents thought that opposition parties rather than criticizing the government should cooperate with it and 53% believe that competition between political parties “always” or “often” leads to violent conflict, perhaps reflecting the “strong presence of former combatants in the opposition parties as a potential danger to the country’s democratic experiment.” (Afrobarometer Briefing Paper, no. 73, p. 5)

In many communities there is also dissatisfaction with the performance of local authorities. Some feel that local authorities are not distributing resources fairly within the community or that some of the development aid that is channeled to the counties is not used for the designated purposes. Often Liberians, including local government representatives, were frustrated by the lack of clear division of responsibilities between traditional and formal authorities and where the boundaries of responsibility lay. As a result of this lack of clarity, ordinary people are uncertain to whom they should turn for help with particular issues thereby adding to people’s sense of frustration with the current situation in the country.

Related to Liberian’s frustration with the lack of responsiveness of national and local authorities was their anger at what they see as the pervasive corruption and lack of accountability. Liberians are angry that development aid is siphoned off for private gain by government officials, bribes need to be paid to police to have them conduct an investigation, judges need to be paid off to win a favorable judgment, university professors need to be provided financial incentives in return for a good grade and so forth. At the same time, Liberians are appalled by the lack of holding those caught engaged in corrupt activities accountable for their actions. Many expressed frustration at the sight of high government officials not being punished for their actions but rather being transferred to another plum position within state administration. Surveys reflect this widespread dissatisfaction with the prevalence of corruption in the country. A 2008 survey found that 52% of Liberians believe that there is widespread corruption within the police, 41% said that it is widespread in the legislature, 37% in the judiciary, 36% in local government, and 32% believe most or all officials in the office of the presidency are corrupt” (Afrobarometer Briefing Paper,

no. 73, p. 8). At the same time, about half of Liberians thought that the government was doing a good job in fighting corruption (Search for Common Ground 2008).

Liberians are also dissatisfied with the pace of economic development since the end of the civil war. In most communities lack of employment opportunities was seen as a tremendous problem. People expected that once the conflict ended, they would be able to improve their own and their families material circumstances. Often these expectations have not been met. Furthermore, some people who are employed, such as teachers and police officers, complain that while they perform their duties they do not receive regular salaries from the government. For many the dearth of jobs also contributes to lack of security in the communities. High rates of unemployment among youth and among ex-combatants are viewed by many as the underlying cause of high crime rates in many communities. A frequently heard sentiment was that young people who have jobs do not have the time or the inclination to get into trouble. On the other hand, youth with little to do with their time drink too much, get into fights, and sometimes rob. Many Liberians expressed particular concern about unemployed ex-combatants who often stay with their former fighting units and are led by the war-time “generals.” As a recent report points out, “The rapid demobilization failed to break the strong links between former child soldiers and their commanders. The disappointment and frustration experienced by children and communities during the reintegration period led many to seek to re-establish links with their former commanders – not necessarily to become soldiers again, but rather to return to the last person who had provided them with food, shelter and protection” (Child Soldiers: Global Report 2008). The persistence of this command structure means that the “generals” can easily mobilize their followers. Some in Lofa pointed to this command structure as the reason why groups of young people could be so easily mobilized resulting in the violent clashes in Voinjama in February 2010.

The persistence of the war-time command structures was, for many Liberians, one of the indications of what they saw as a poorly executed DDR program. Often ex-combatants were given some money but little training or counseling when they were demobilized. Consequently, many were unable to successfully transition into civilian life, contributing to a sense of insecurity in many communities. Furthermore, many Liberians remain convinced that the former combatants did not give up their all arms and that there continue to be many weapons in the countryside. On the other hand, some Liberians felt that the DDR program gave resources to former fighters while neglecting those young people who did not participate in the war. This, they thought, potentially set up perverse incentives for young people who would see fighting as a way to gain resources from the government.

Along with the dearth of employment prospects in most communities, Liberians are dissatisfied with the pace of infrastructure reconstruction. The lack of good roads and bridges are seen as a particular problem. Getting around in the outlying counties is very difficult. During the rainy season many of the roads become virtually impassable. The poor road network means that farmers have a difficult time taking their products to market thereby retarding trade and reducing opportunities for economic development. The poor condition of the roads also means that the motorbike is often the only means of transportation available. However, as one farmer in Bong County pointed out, “How much produce can I take to the market on a motorbike?”

Although Liberians acknowledge that large amounts of foreign assistance have flowed to Liberia since the end of the war, many remain disappointed with what they perceive to be a lack of real improvement. They often blame this on the priorities established by donor governments, lack of consultation with communities about their development priorities, and they see the large flows of funds into the country as facilitating rather than dismantling the pervasive system of corruption. Some Liberians also see the international donor community as interfering too extensively in internal Liberian politics rather than allowing the Liberian people to chart their own political, social, and economic course. Although most Liberians view UNMIL favorably, some see UN forces as lacking a clear mission and vision. In Lofa County in particular, following the February 26<sup>th</sup> incident, many within the Loma community were disappointed and frustrated by what they saw as the lack of neutrality of the Pakistani and Jordanian UN troops and their perceived bias toward Muslim Mandingos.

Many people, and in particular traditional leaders, are also deeply concerned by the promotion of human rights by international donors and NGOs. In particular, many feel that the promotion of children's rights by these organizations is inappropriate in the Liberian context and is undermining the social fabric. Young people are not taught traditional ways anymore, they do not understand what their social obligations and responsibilities are, they question the authority of elders, and do not know traditional methods of interacting with other tribal groups and resolving disputes. Consequently, young people are more prone to act in ways that are inappropriate, are more susceptible to being mobilized, for instance, by former "generals," and more likely to engage in violence.

### **Lack of Opportunity**

Closely related to the deep sense of unmet expectations is the perception among Liberians that many people and communities lack basic necessities and opportunities for improving their lives. The most common frustrations are related to the lack of employment opportunities, the lack of education opportunities, inadequate health facilities, and poor infrastructure.

Only 15 percent of Liberians are employed in the formal sector, and this percentage has not changed significantly since the end of the war. In the context of grinding poverty, Liberians crave satisfaction of their most basic needs. People mostly want to ensure food for themselves and their families (90%), medical treatment (69%), shelter (58%), and security and protection (36%) (Afrobarometer Survey). The fact that seven years since the end of the conflict many find these basic necessities elusive is a source of frustration and disappointment with the pace of reconstruction.

In rural areas in particular, few employment opportunities are available. In Nimba County, for instance, young men are eagerly waiting for ArcelorMittal to reopen the iron ore mine since beyond this, there are no jobs available in the area. Investment has been slow in coming to these outlying counties in part because of poor infrastructure and access problems, in part because of cumbersome state bureaucracy making investing a challenge, and in part due to the recent global financial crisis. In fact, ArcelorMittal has reduced its anticipated employment rolls in light of the global economic contractions. Furthermore, the agricultural sector, where the majority of Liberians are employed, has been severely underfunded and few agricultural extension services

exist. Access to financing is also limited since most communities do not have banks and have no access to the banks in Monrovia. There are few microcredit institutions in place that would allow rural communities to diversify their economic base; a particular concern for women.

Access to health care remains an issue especially in outlying rural communities. Health facilities destroyed or damaged during the war have, in most cases, not been rebuilt. Because of poor roads and the long distances to existing health care centers, many communities have little or no ability to seek medical care. There is also a severe shortage of qualified health care workers, and there are almost no specialized medical services. One of the great tragic outcomes of the February 2010 violence in Voinjama was, as many people emphasized, that the only health clinic in the county that had vaccines for typhoid was burned down. Maternal mortality rates are among the highest in the world, and since 2000 the rate of maternal deaths has been on the rise. Contributing to health problems is that 34% of Liberians do not have access to safe drinking water and 89% do not have access to proper sanitation facilities. (Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2009)

In Bong, Nimba, and Lofa Counties there are few educational opportunities beyond the elementary level. There are few high schools and, in most cases, students who want to attend them are forced to leave their families and relocate on their own. In Lofa, despite government promises, there is no university and for most rural poor going to the University of Liberia in Monrovia is prohibitively expensive. There are also few vocational programs in these outlying counties except for teacher training institutions. However, as one young man in Lofa County pointed out, "Not everyone wants to be a teacher." Even elementary schools are viewed as inadequate. Although they are free, qualified teachers are in short supply and many teach as volunteers because the government is not paying their salaries on a consistent basis.

The anger and frustration at the lack of opportunities makes Liberians available for mobilization by key actors, such as politicians, tribal and religious leaders, union leaders, and ex-generals as these key actors seek political power and influence or economic resources.

### **Unequal/Unfair Access**

Liberia is a country with high levels of poverty and unequal distribution of income, wealth, and access to land. Although economic and political marginalization of large segments of the population has a long history, fourteen years of civil war exacerbated these problems. As a consequence of the years of violence, poverty levels have increased and, as discussed above, infrastructure of the country was largely destroyed and provision of social services and education practically stopped. The process of restoring these services and reconstructing infrastructure has been frustratingly slow in view of most Liberians. Political and economic marginalization is felt acutely in the rural areas of Liberia which, because of poor roads and lack of resources, have little access to the capital city of Monrovia.

The lack of opportunities, and in particular employment, education and health care, are a source of frustration in many communities. Adding to the sense of grievance is the perception that some individuals and social groups have access to opportunities that are denied others. In all four counties, but especially in Bong, Lofa, and Nimba, there is deep resentment and anger at the

privileged position of returning members of the diaspora who now hold many prominent positions in the government and receive significantly higher salaries than those who did not leave the country during the war. The diaspora is often perceived as not being fully Liberian, having lived abroad for many years. Furthermore, because returning members of the diaspora continue to have homes and families abroad and in particular in the United States, many see them as not fully committed to the country. They are frequently also perceived as draining the resources of Liberia since they send money and investments out of the country to support their American lifestyles rather than bringing them into the country. As a student at the University of Liberia in Montserrado County underscored, “The diaspora have no interest in this country, and they just send money back to the United States.”

For many Liberians who stayed during the war, the justification that the returning diaspora have skills necessary to run the country and to move the process of reconstruction forward rings hollow. Many Liberians argue that the talent and skills needed to rebuild the country and to run the state administration are locally available. However, because the indigenous groups lack political connections that the diaspora have, they are bypassed for good government positions. Furthermore, those who stayed in the country, as teachers in Bong County point out, are more familiar with local conditions and therefore are better qualified than those who are strangers to the county. Adding to the sense of injustice is that many do not see those returning diaspora as particularly well qualified. As a young man in Lofa County explained, “It often seems that being from the United States is a sufficient qualification.” In addition to their privileged access to jobs, many see negative side-effects of the diaspora’s presence in Liberia. As police officers in Bong noted, the diaspora are renting expensive home in Monrovia and driving up the costs of housing, negatively impacting their standard of living. International donors, many Liberians believe, inadvertently contribute to these resentments since they too bring people from outside the country who they believe have skills and capacity that are lacking locally. This reflects more assumptions about donors than the reality on the ground in the view of many Liberians.

It is not just diaspora groups that are seen to have an unfair advantage in access to political and economic resources. In many communities there are deeply held perceptions among minority groups that their access to resources and employment opportunities are limited vis-à-vis the dominant groups in the area. Those dominant groups, through their control of village, town, and county administrative positions, are able to steer jobs and economic development projects toward members of their own tribal groups. In Lofa County, for instance, many Mandingos expressed their resentment and frustration at being effectively shut out from the county’s administration. Although they account for 20% to 30% of the county’s population, they have only one representative in the county government. The lack of political power in turn, translates into more restricted access to economic resources. As one group of men pointed out, when outside NGOs come to Lofa County, it is the Loma community which mostly benefits. Mandingos in Nimba County expressed similar frustrations noting that Gio and Mano have been taking over Mandingo owned land but because these tribal groups control the county government, Mandingo pleas for justice have been ignored.

More broadly, many Liberians feel that access to jobs, to education, and to justice is better for those with political connections and financial resources. There is a widespread belief that you need to know someone to get a job whether with a Liberian employer, an international NGO, or

UNMIL. Pervasive nepotism is thus a source of deep resentment. Many Liberians believe that in the formal court system, justice can be purchased. As ex-combatants in Nimba County put it, “Court system does not work for people who cannot pay.” Likewise, police are seen as more responsive to those who can afford to pay them. Many country officials are perceived in a similar way and are not responsive to people’s requests for assistance unless they are compensated. In the words of young men in Bong County, when you take your problems to the authorities, “There is no redress but money is demanded. When you don’t have it your case is closed.” The sense of exclusion and marginalization is especially prominent among members of minority groups who not only lack the resources but cannot rely on personal networks to have their problems addressed. This is not just the case with tribal minority groups like the Mandingo. In Lofa County that sense of futility in seeking justice from local government was also expressed by devout Christians who were being attacked and whose churches were being vandalized by what they claimed were members of the secret Poro Society. Yet, because they believe that city government officials were member of the Poro society, they were unresponsive to their requests for an investigation into the violence and eventual prosecution.

For many, this marginalization and exclusion becomes a vicious circle. In order to gain a better education and improve one’s chances of a better job, a person needs money to pay for schools and universities. Most ordinary people, however, are unable to afford the cost of education in Monrovia. Access to that education is therefore seen by many as available only to the wealthy. As a result, there is a large education gap between the poor in the provinces and the wealthy, especially in Monrovia and, as a result, the uneven distribution of wealth only deepens over time.

Taken together this unequal and seen as unfair access to jobs, education, and justice are fueling resentment which is especially perceptible among the young. Many Liberians believe that this deep resentment among the young can be capitalized by local power-holders, politicians in Monrovia, religious leaders and, in 2011, by candidates running for the presidency. As one young man in Lofa County put it, “The resentment and frustration among the young run so deep, that Charles Taylor if acquitted in The Hague would have a good chance of winning the presidential elections.”

## **CORE SOCIAL RESILIENCIES AND MITIGATING FACTORS**

### **Successes to Build On**

Most Liberians are frustrated with the pace of post-conflict reconstruction and the continued marginalization and exclusion for those lacking resources and political connections. Nonetheless, many Liberians also pointed to some very real successes and achievements of the last seven years. These successes were seen as the beginnings of a new future and developments worth building on.

Among those successes is the ability of communities to rebuild their own villages, often with little or no government help. Most Liberians were displaced during the war and either temporarily moved to other parts of the country or became refugees. Over the last seven years, people have been returning to their original homes. Those returning have faced great challenges.

Most villages and towns in Nimba, Lofa, Montserrado, and Bong Counties were damaged or destroyed, infrastructure was shattered, and social services non-existent. People’s ability to take on the process of rebuilding, to mobilize resources, to plan activities, and to execute them is a source of pride. Some villages have formed neighborhood watch teams to conduct community policing and funded their own schools. This capacity to move forward despite hardships and actively participate in the process of reconstruction can be utilized more effectively than has been the case.

In many counties, the Motorcycle Unions have proven to be an effective institution for stabilizing communities. The Unions provide employment to ex-combatants thus facilitating their reintegration into civilian life and giving these men a stake in their communities. By providing employment to ex-combatants the Unions have also made the communities safer. As head of the Market Women’s Association in Bong County pointed out, “The Motorcycle Union has helped to reduce crime in the County by providing former fighters with an economic outlet.” As important, although they are still organized along the same combat bridge lines as during the civil war, the Unions are multi-tribal and non-denominational and therefore provide a forum for forging new relationships between groups that were previously in conflict with each other. These new relationships have translated into a new support network for these men. For instance, the Union members pull their money together so that they can send one of them to college.

Also growing has been the sense of common identity among Liberians. In many communities people expressed confidence in working with other tribes. Even in Lofa County where tribal and religious tensions run high following the February 2010 violence in Voinjama, the team found neighboring Loma and Mandingo villages who worked together and help one another as well as mixed Loma and Mandingo villages where the community strongly contended that the kind of conflict that erupted in Voinjama was unimaginable were they lived. Many also pointed out that despite the recent violence, there is a long history of Loma and Mandingo living together in harmony, inter-marrying and coming together to jointly mark life’s big transitions, such as marriages and funerals. In Bong, young people pointed to sports leagues as a place where members of different tribal groups come together to jointly play and form friendships. As important, most although not all, identified themselves as Liberian as well as members of their tribal group. Some claimed to feel primarily Liberian with their tribal identity being of secondary importance. This sense of a common Liberian identity, which was especially strong in Montserrado County, is also reflected in recent surveys.

*Suppose that you had to choose between being a Liberian or being of an ethnic group, which of the following statements best expresses your feelings? (Afrobarometer)*

|  | Urban | Rural |
|--|-------|-------|
| <b>I feel only respondent ethnic group</b>                 | 2     | 3     |
| <b>I feel more respondent ethnic group than Liberian</b>   | 5     | 10    |
| <b>I feel equally Liberian and respondent ethnic group</b> | 69    | 61    |
| <b>I feel more Liberian than respondent ethnic group</b>   | 10    | 6     |
| <b>I feel only Liberian</b>                                | 1     |       |



Another development that Liberians saw as successful are the radio stations run by UNMIL, private owners, and communities. They are often the only source of information in many villages and towns because of high illiteracy rates and the cost and lack of distribution of newspapers in outlying areas of the country due to the poor road network. Radio stations also serve as a vehicle for educating the public on civics and health issues among others and as a discussion forum for local issues. By providing information that counteracts the rumors that often spread rapidly thanks to the widespread availability of mobile phones, they provide stability to rural areas, towns and villages.

Because of the existing resentments and sense of insecurity, rumors can quickly run amok and deepen existing tensions within a community. This process was evident in February 2010 in Lofa County. There, the disappearance of a young Loma woman in the town of Konia, quickly led to rumors that Loma Christians were attacking Mandingo Muslims homes and mosques. These rumors spread like wildfire through the county, leading to eventual clashes between Loma and Mandingo in Voinjama in which four people lost their lives.<sup>1</sup> At the time of the clashes, the only community radio station in the county was not operating due to a mechanical problem with the transmitter. Many in Lofa felt that if the radio station had been operational, it would have allowed for the countering of rumors (in fact mosques were not attacked in Konia) and perhaps easing of tensions.

### **Desire for Improvement**

Closely related to the success of some communities in taking on the task of rebuilding their villages on their own, is a more general desire among many Liberians to improve both their own circumstance and that of their families and communities. Often working through traditional structures, religious institutions or NGOs, Liberians have been actively participating in improving their lives. As the village chief in one Lofa County village put it, “Our town was destroyed during the war but the community rebuilt it and we are planning for the future.” A similar sentiment was voiced in a Montserrado County hospital where nurses pointed with pride to the improvements in the professionalism of the staff and their greater ability to work effectively together and to serve the patients.

One of the areas where the desire for improvement is perhaps most visible is in Liberians attitude toward education. In many communities, although they are not receiving salaries from the government, teachers continue working as volunteers to ensure that children are given the opportunity to learn. Some communities are pulling their own resources together to rebuild and fund their own schools. Motorcycle Union members are jointly financing college education of one of their own. Many are willing to endure hardships in order to acquire an education. Many high schools students leave their families to move to another town and live on their own in order to continue their education. Others, especially those living in the rural areas, often walk for hours each day so that they can get to school. Many want to continue their education after high school, seeing a college degree as a way to improve their employment options. In Montserrado County,

---

<sup>1</sup> Who the parties to the conflict were is hotly contested in Lofa County. Some see it as a tribal conflict between Loma and Mandingo. Others view it as a clash between Christians and Muslims. Yet other believe that tribal and religious affiliation had little to do with the violence, and that it was perpetrated by young men affiliated with different war-time “generals” who were either looking for trouble or were settling old scores.

young girls from a small village emphasizes how important schooling was for them and how much they were willing to sacrifice to realize their dreams – two wanted to be doctors and two wanted to go into politics to work for their communities and country. As young men in Bong County put it, “We create our own opportunity.”

### **Inter-Faith Dialogues**

In many communities people have made a conscious effort to bridge divides between religious groups and to engage in a process of reconciliation and peacebuilding. These Liberians seek to deepen cooperation between members of different religions, enhance communication between them, and ensure that disputes that may arise between religious communities are resolved peacefully and constructively. Many different social actors are engaged in the promotion of inter-faith dialogues. University students and religious and political leaders initiate joint dialogues and discussions, celebrate festivals together, share meals, and engage in other social activities. Those engaged in these dialogues are consciously promoting cooperation between religious communities.

In Voinjama, Lofa County, for instance Christian pastors and Muslim clerics meet regularly to facilitate reconciliation and promote peacebuilding. They work closely on such issues as trauma healing and resolution of land disputes. Although these dialogues were suspended in the wake of the February 2010 clashes, both Muslim and Christian leaders expressed hope that the dialogues will restart in the future.

In Yekepa, Nimba Country religious leaders in the community have established a Justice and Peace Commission. This Commission provides a forum for dialogues between religious leaders, and it is the first place residents go to when disputes arise in the village. At the county level a Nimba County Christian and Muslim Association has been established, which like the Justice and Peace Commission at the local level, serves as a forum for dialogue and dispute resolution. The Association is very active and is well known and respected throughout the county.

In Bong County, the Muslim Student Association at Cuttington University formed an inter-faith student group to jointly work with communities in Lofa County to promote reconciliation and facilitate dispute resolution between people from different tribal and religious affiliations. In Bong, diverse Christian denominations have also come together to improve community relations.

### **Communities Able to Handle Some Disputes**

Liberians continue to be deeply dissatisfied with their formal judicial system. The most frequent criticisms focus on issues of affordability, accessibility, and timeliness of case processing. Most Liberians see the formal judicial system as an institution that facilitates the perpetuation of the exclusionary politics of the past, where those socially powerful, with the resources to offer bribes can “assert their will” (USIP 2009). Because most poor Liberians do not consider the formal justice system a place where justice can be found; many, especially those in rural areas, prefer instead to turn to the customary justice system to resolve their disputes.

This reliance on the customary justice system means that Liberians are often able to resolve many of their own disputes arising within their communities. In particular, disputes within families, between neighbors, as well as some disputes between neighboring communities are successfully handled outside of the formal justice system. Here communities rely on traditional mechanisms for dispute resolution and, in particular, the tribal, village and town chiefs. These leaders and the traditional justice system are where Liberians first turn to for help rather than to the local government or to the formal justice system.

Often various local associations play a role in resolving disputes within communities and provide a mechanism for establishing social relationships across tribal and religious divides. Within these associations, disputes are settled and communication and cooperation between social groups strengthened. Women's market associations often bring together traders from divergent communities to buy and sell commodities. For example, in Voinjama, Lofa County following the February 2010 clashes, it was market women who, after staying away for a few days, came back and reopened the market. As they pointed out, whether they are Loma, Mandingo, or Kpelle they had to come back to the market to trade because their families would have no income if they did not. In other words, economic necessity and trading relationships existing among women provide sufficient conditions for the women to interact with each other in the neutral public space of the market. This socially cross-cutting engagement offers women from different communities the opportunity to come together and intentionally or consequently re-establish social bonds after a conflict.

Other associations such as the Motorcycle Union or the Taxi Drivers Union as well as various youth organizations, because they often bring together people with different tribal and religious affiliations, also facilitate resolution of some disputes within communities and like the women's marketing associations provide a venue where cross-cutting social bonds are established.

However, Liberians are virtually unanimous in their assessment that while tribal and village and town chiefs are the first line of intervention in disputes within communities, these institutions are not able to handle all issues that arise within and between communities. They underscored that many disputes need to be referred to and handled by the formal justice system. In particular, Liberians in all four counties believe that violent crimes such as murder, rape, and robbery, as well large-scale land disputes need to be resolved by the formal justice system. Local communities do not have the capacity to address such issues effectively. However, a recent survey found, only 3 percent of cases are taken to the formal justice system (USIP 2009).

## **War Fatigue**

Finally, mitigating against conflict escalation is the sheer exhaustion of Liberians from fourteen years of war. As a community radio station manager in Nimba put it, "We refuse to allow any more war." This was a sentiment the teams heard frequently across the four counties. In light of the destruction, devastation, displacement, and trauma that Liberians experienced this is not surprising.

A recent survey provides a view of the personal impact of the conflict on Liberians. Fully 96% of respondents said they personally felt the impact of the civil war. Ninety percent reported they had to leave their homes, 86% lost contact with close family members, 83% said their homes were looted, 76% had their food taken away by armed groups, 74% had their property significantly damaged, 69% said they lost a family member in the conflict, 55% said they were humiliated during the war, 45% reported having been tortured and 51% indicated that someone close to them was a victim of sexual violence. Even six years after the fighting had ended, large numbers of minorities continued to fear displacement, destruction of property, loss of a loved one, victimization of sexual violence, and inability to provide support themselves and their families (Ipsos/ICRC 2009).

## WINDOWS OF UNCERTAINTY

Over the next several years, a number of key decisions and events will shape the social, political, and economic dynamics in Liberia. These windows of uncertainty are moments when events either threaten to rapidly and fundamentally change the balance of political or economic power or provide an opportunity to improve the existing situation.

### Short-term

**Charles Taylor Verdict in The Hague:** After the 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed in Accra, Ghana, Charles Taylor resigned the presidency and went into exile in Nigeria. He was arrested in 2006 and brought to trial before the Special Court for Sierra Leone in The Hague. Taylor was indicted by the Special Court for war crimes and crimes against humanity and accused of financing and supporting Foday Sankoh's Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in neighboring Sierra Leone. The trial, which is expected to conclude within the next few months, has received mixed reviews in Liberia and it is not clear how the public may react to a guilty or not guilty verdict. It is also not clear whether, in the case of a non-guilty verdict, Taylor would seek to re-enter Liberian political life.

**Sime Darby Expansion:** Sime Darby, a Malaysian international conglomerate which signed a 63-year concession agreement to 220,000 hectare (ha) to set up oil palm and rubber plantations will be giving eviction notices to 25,000 people who are currently squatting on the land. How this process is handled will affect how those being evicted respond but there is a clear potential for violence.

**Decisions on Key Election-Related Legal Issues:** There are a number of decisions on key election-related legal issues, such as the controversial Threshold Bill and residency requirements for presidential candidates. The Threshold Bill which would establish the basis for constituency demarcation needed to conduct the legislative elections has been a source of contentious debate between the Executive and Legislative branches of the Liberian government. President Johnson-Sirleaf has already vetoed two versions of the Bill, and Liberians are divided on whether the size of constituencies should be changed and if so, by how much. The other key legal issue involves the ten year residency requirement for presidential candidates which was temporarily suspended before the 2005 electoral contest. If this requirement is not changed, many politicians, including

President Johnson-Sirleaf and George Weah, would not be eligible to stand for office. How these legal issues are resolved will significantly affect who can run in elections and how campaigns will be conducted. It is not clear what the response of potential candidates in the presidential and legislative elections might be.

### **Medium-term (6-18 months)**

**Phased Expansion of Concessions:** There are a number of other concessions that the Liberian government is currently negotiating, including two large mining concessions, the ArcelorMittal and China Union, which could potentially start in 2011 and generate up to \$3.6 billion in new investments. The ArcelorMittal investment would include the rehabilitation of the Buchanan-Nimba Railroad and China Union, the Mount Coffee hydro-electric plant. There are also likely to be further concessions to set up rubber plantations and forestry concessions that would help revive the timber export sector. All these concessions would bring additional investment into the country and have the potential to generate significant levels of employment. On the other hand, they are likely to involve evictions of people who currently live, farm or otherwise utilize these lands. The recent forestry survey commissioned by the Liberian government may have underestimated the number of people who currently utilize the forest areas and thus hinder effective planning. Because so many land ownership and boundary issues remain unresolved, the expansion of concessions may intensify those conflicts.

**Presidential and Legislative Elections:** In October 2011, Liberia is scheduled to hold presidential and legislative elections. Elections are one the key windows that can either further strengthen the country new democratic institutions and overarching Liberian identity or increase instability because of the manner in which the electoral campaigns unfold, the process of elections themselves and, in particular, if they are or are perceived to be marred by irregularities, or in the post-election phase when electoral losers refuse to accept the results. The upcoming elections are likely to see a number of candidates, whom the TRC Report recommended be either prosecuted or banned from holding public office, running in both the legislative and presidential contests. It is still uncertain how this will affect the electoral process, the types of campaigns these candidates will mount, how and which social groups they will seek to mobilize, and what the public's response to such participation will be. Some Liberians are uncomfortable with President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf's decision to seek re-election in light of the TRC's recommendation that she be barred from running for public office for 30 years. Some are concerned about Senator Prince Johnson's plans for the elections and what his participation might mean for social stability. Finally, some thought that if Charles Taylor was acquitted in The Hague and sought to run again for the presidency this would make the electoral process and the post-election period even more unpredictable. Many Liberians are also clearly concerned about the potential for political instability or even violence, and most expressed hope that UNMIL troops would remain in the country for at least two years following the elections to ensure security.

### **Long-term (More than 18 months)**

**UNMIL withdrawal:** Many Liberians remain deeply concerned about the prospect of UNMIL leaving. UNMIL is widely seen as playing a key role in ensuring Liberia's stability and security.

Even in Lofa where following the February 2010 incidents many among the Loma were dissatisfied with the perceived lack of neutrality of the Pakistani and Jordanian troops, no one wanted to see UNMIL withdraw anytime soon. Almost unanimously, Liberians stated that UNMIL should remain in the country for at least two years following the 2011 elections to ensure that there is not a return to violence.

**Decision on TRC Recommendations Implementation:** Liberians remain deeply divided in their assessments of the TRC. Some argue that rather than focusing on laying blame and prosecuting people, Liberians need to forgive and move on. As many Liberians put it, “Let bygones be bygones.” Some believe that the establishment of the TRC was a mistake. Others, with equal passion, argue that those who are responsible for committing crimes during the civil war need to be held accountable. Supporters of the TRC believe that without truth and accountability, there will be a sense of impunity and therefore little change of social reconciliation. Both supporters and opponents of the TRC, however, are worried about the potential for renewed violence if the recommendations are implemented or alternatively, if they are not. Many Liberians, even those who supported the creation of the TRC, are convinced that the TRC did not really fulfill its mandate and that it has accomplished neither truth nor reconciliation. Many also remain dubious about whether the recommendations of the TRC will be implemented given the fact that many of those named in the final report play prominent roles in Liberia’s political scene. Assessments of what President Johnson-Sirleaf should do in the upcoming elections were also varied. Many continue to support her and want to see her run again. Others, however, believe that if she was named in the TRC report she should not be standing for another term.

## CONCLUSIONS

The dynamics discussed above will shape Liberia in the coming decade. How these dynamics play-out over time, *i.e.*, contributing to stability or instability, is malleable and can be influenced by the GOL, the USG, the UN, and other international actors. The greatest opportunities and dangers for influencing these dynamics arise when “windows of uncertainty” open. When these events occur, dynamics are likely to unfold along pre-existing pathways. Whether pathways for violence and instability or pathways for resilience and peace receive the bulk of social energy generated during these events is affected by a number of factors. Key among those factors are the strength and familiarity of existing relationships and their perceived effectiveness.

The USG and other international actors are deeply engaged in Liberia and, since the end of the civil war, have provided significant financial assistance to reconstruct the country. The USG alone in 2009 provided approximately \$200 million. In FY 2008, 34.6% of the funds were directed toward programs in areas of peace and security, 33.2% toward investing in people which include various health and education programs, 17.1% toward economic growth programs, 13.9% toward programs on governance and rule of law, and 1.2% toward humanitarian assistance. In other words, post-conflict reconstruction assistance funnels large amounts of funds to support diverse programs. The question is whether these programs effectively support pathways for resilience and peace or whether inadvertently they may be strengthening the pathways for instability.

For instance, the GOL's expected eviction of 25,000 squatters on land controlled by Sime Darby as part of its concession agreement could easily lead to growing social instability. If existing patterns of key actors mobilizing constituencies around grievances related to land are seized by politicians seeking to increase their own power, they may take the opportunity to rally squatters around core grievances linked to land control and encourage people to resist and protest. This could easily result in overt conflict and violence and further divide the people and the government and inflame disputes linked to rhetoric between sitting politicians and opposition candidates.

On the other hand, it is also possible that existing pathways for social resilience and stability could channel this potential social energy. If, for example, an extensive radio campaign, launched well in advance of the evictions, were in place disseminating information about available GOL assistance and providing families with information for accessing that assistance, bonds between the GOL and its population would be strengthened – in advance – and those relationships could be perceived as more readily available and more reliable. The GOL could also proceed by making known, months ahead of the evictions, that through government programs people could access services such as psychological counseling, relocation support linking families with other family members who could accommodate them short- or long-term, and conflict prevention training for displaced communities enabling them to mediate small disputes likely to emerge during the transition period. These types of activities already exist in Liberia and international actors make a “stability scenario” more likely if they assist the GOL linking existing Liberian resilience and conflict mitigating factors to each other and to pathways currently dominated by dynamics driving conflict and instability..

When resources are fed into any system, including the social system of a country, they are co-opted by the existing system. In the ICAF analysis sessions, several Embassy employees remarked on the apparent dependence of Liberians on foreign aid and assistance. This is as much related to the manner in which the assistance is fed into the social system as it is a commentary on the system itself. When substantial resources are fed into a system with the intention of changing the system, the resources are more likely to be co-opted by the system and – unintentionally – reinforce the existing negative patterns that the injection of resources was meant to destroy. This type of infusion of resources may also reinforce negative feedback loops within the system by deepening the system's dependency on outside resources. The best way to cause a system to break-out of unhealthy patterns and become a healthy system is to connect more of the system to itself. The systems map illustrates the components of Liberian society related to dynamics driving and mitigating instability and conflict and shows that necessary parts of the system may not be connected to one another.

The map also illustrates that some efforts of the USG and the international community may be inadvertently feeding the negative feedback loops in the system, because the system co-opts the inflowing resources in unhealthy ways. This unintentionally increases the possibility that during times of uncertainty, pathways likely to increase conflict and instability are more likely to be activated than those supporting stability and peace. When the system co-opts international resources in this way, it contributes to the deepening of resentments and core grievances and strengthens conflict drivers. For instance, international efforts intended to support the reconstruction processes may inadvertently be feeding peoples' resentment of both the

international community and the GOL by increasing people's already existing unmet expectations. This may happen when assistance is channeled not through GOL but implemented by the donors themselves or through NGOs. This inadvertently contributes to the perceptions among the Liberian public that its government is not doing enough to promote economic development and that it remains unresponsive to Liberians' needs.

Using internationally supplied resources to connect more of the Liberia social system to itself, as described in the Sime Darby example above, could reduce the unintended negative effects of the system's ability to co-opt externally supplied resources. Unless these connections are made and supported, continued contributions from the international community will continue to inadvertently contribute to the perception among the Liberian public that its government is not doing enough to promote fair and equal economic improvement in Liberia and that it remains unresponsive to Liberians' needs. The international community can support GOL's efforts to create more connections within the system to ensure that pathways that support social resiliencies and stability are reinforced.



## **Appendix A - Liberia ICAF Field Participant List**

### **Team Monrovia**

Team Leader: Bill McCulla (S/CRS)  
Monrovia/State: Steven Koutsis  
Robby Gonzales  
Monrovia/USAID: Justin Prudhomme  
DoD: LTC Clem Ketchum,  
Monrovia OSC  
UNMIL: Patrick Coker, Head of Field  
Office, Montserrado  
Jane Grausgruber, UNPOL  
LES: Finley Karngar, USAID  
Monrovia  
  
Drivers: Richard Nimley  
Gregory Vaye

### **Team Bong**

Team Leaders: Mark Hannafin (USAID)  
TDY: Stephen Andersson (DOJ)  
Monrovia/State: Mark Naylor  
Monrovia/USAID: Teddy Bryan  
DoD: LT James Darash, USMC  
UNMIL: Oretha Jewle, UNMIL Civil  
Affairs  
LES: Bill Massaquoi, USAID  
Monrovia  
RSO FSNI: Tristan Varfley  
  
Drivers: Henry Yillah  
Gabriel Hina  
Sando Dablah

### **Team Lofa**

Team Leader: Agnieszka Paczynska  
(S/CRS)  
Monrovia/State: Allison Henry-Plotts, INL  
Monrovia/USAID: Amanda Levinson  
DoD: Matt Patmon, Monrovia  
DAO  
UNMIL: Capt Ryan Leonard, USA,  
UN Observer  
LES: Daneil Bovel, Political  
RSO FSNI: Godwin Verdier  
  
Drivers: Eric Flahn  
James Jusu  
Prince Jacobs

### **Team Nimba**

Team Leader: Paul Turner (S/CRS)  
TDY: Derry Riedel, INL  
Monrovia/State: DCM Brooks Robinson  
Monrovia/USAID: Sean Hall  
DoD: Capt Matthew Sanderson  
UNMIL: Hanna Matti, JMAC  
LES: Jenkins Vangehn, Political  
Assistant  
RSO FSNI: Sam Fazzah  
  
Drivers: Matthew Glagbo  
Joseph Paye  
Cornelius Williams

### **During the Workshop also:**

Cynthia Irmer (S/CRS)



## **Appendix B - Liberia ICAF DC Workshop Participant List**

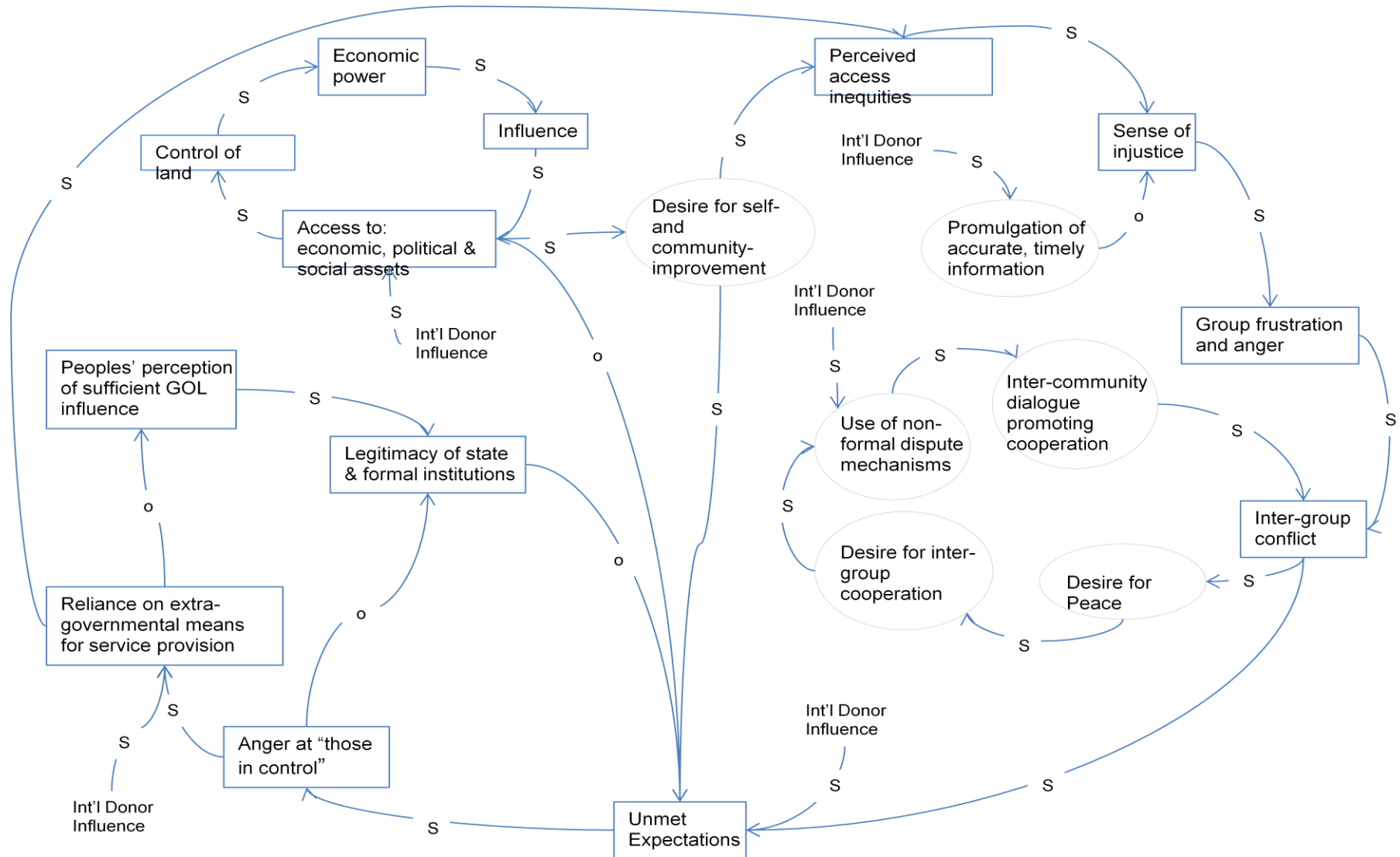
|                          |                  |
|--------------------------|------------------|
| Stephen Andersson        | DOJ              |
| Alexis Arief             | DOD/OSD Desk     |
| Teddy Bryan              | USAID/Liberia    |
| Carrie Sue Casey         | DOD/USD          |
| Robert Coburn            | DOJ/ICITAP       |
| Jim Conley               | USDA             |
| Marty Dale               | DOS/S/CRS        |
| John Dickerson           | Commerce         |
| Nole Garey               | DOS/AFW Desk     |
| Col. Howard Gray         | DOS/IO/PC        |
| April Haynes             | DOE              |
| Kevin Kratzer            | DOS/INR          |
| Steven Koutsis           | Embassy/Monrovia |
| Stephen Lubkeman         | GWU              |
| Shadrach Ludemann        | DOS/S/CRS        |
| Michael Lyman            | HHS              |
| Terrence Lyons           | GMU ICAR         |
| Steve McDonald           | Wilson Center    |
| Susan McCarty            | DOS/AF/RSA Desk  |
| William McCulla          | DOS/S/CRS        |
| Yolanda Miller-Grandviux | USAID            |
| Dorothy Perkins          | DOD/AFRICOM      |
| Julia Richards           | USAID/EGAT       |
| Derry Riedel             | DOS/INL          |
| Robin Ritterhoof         | Treasury         |
| Ellen Shaw               | DOS/OES          |
| April Well               | DOS/S/CRS        |
| Jeff Stansfield          | DOD/DIA          |
| Gregor Young             | Wilson Center    |



## APPENDIX C

When substantial resources are fed into a system with the intent of changing the system, it is more likely the system will co-opt the resources thus reinforcing existing negative patterns and self-reinforcing feedback loops they were meant to destroy. This also deepens the system's dependency on outside resources.

The best way to cause a system to break-out of unhealthy patterns and become a healthy system is to connect more of the system to itself. This systems map illustrates the components of Liberian society related to dynamics driving and mitigating instability/conflict and shows that necessary parts of the system may not be connected to one another.





## **APPENDIX D – EXAMPLES OF RESILIENCE**

### **1. Reinforcing/expanding on success**

\* In Bong County, the Motorcycle Union provides not just employment to former combatants but also because its membership is multi-tribal and non-denominational. Although they are still organized along the same combat brigade lines as during the war, they are developing economic state in their communities now. They also support one another for instance pulling their money together so that they can send a union member to college. (of course as with other resiliencies, the tight organization of these unions and their combat experience means that they could respond violently if their members were in some way threatened)

\* The other thing of course in all counties is what we have on one of the slides which are the radio stations which are providing information to the communities, dispelling rumors and thus reinforcing stability. As people in Lofa County told us, the fact that the community radio station in Zorzor which broadcasts to the whole county was not working at the time when rumors started about what was happening in Konia (a small town in Lofa; It was in Konia that a young girl disappeared and whose body was eventually found. There were demonstrations in Konia that pitted the Loma, Christian mother of the girl and her supporters against the Mandingo, Muslim imam and his supporters; rumors started that the mosque was being attack, burned, etc. It wasn't true but the rumor spread very quickly across the county). This many were convinced was the reason why the rumors spread and eventually led to the violent clashes in Voinjmama during which four people were killed. If the transmitter was working, they would have been able to counter the rumors with accurate information about what was going on.

### **2. Inter-faith Dialogue**

\* In Voinjama, Lofa County Christian pastors and Muslim clerics held regular dialogues (before the violent clashes in late February 2010) in order to facilitate the process of reconciliation and peacebuilding (peacebuilding was the terms that the Pentecostal pastor used in the interview I conducted with him).

\* In Yekepa, Nimba County there is a Justice and Peace Commission that allows all groups to work together. They solve their problems through dialogue between religious leaders. This is how they first try to solve their disputes. Only if they cannot resolve it at this level do they turn to the government for assistance. (this is cross-cutting with the other resilience of “communities handling some disputes”)

\* In Bong County, representatives of different Christian denominations are working together to bring the communities closer. The idea for working together emerged organically, without any outside pressure.

### **3. Communities able to handle many disputes**

\* Barzeilweih, a small village in Lofa county has a mixed population of Loma Christians and Mandingo Muslims. The men of the village say that the village chief is able to mediate a lot of disputes that arise in the community, for instance disputes between family members or between neighbors. Right now they also have a boundary dispute with a neighboring village but they don't feel that they need to seek outside intervention or go to court. The town chief and the clan chief have been able to deal with that dispute effectively. (however, they do believe that when faced with serious crimes or more difficult land disputes that the community would need to resort to the formal court system)

\* In Monserrato County towns, local traditional justice system remains the first line of intervention in disputes within communities. For instance in the Fendell community, people bring their disputes and grievances first to the town chief and elders and then to the commissioner. Many disputes are resolved this way. (but here too those interviewed said that there were limits to what local community could do and that there was a need for the formal justice system – I am including this comment because I think it's important to recognize that there are clear limits to what communities can do in terms of dispute resolution)

### **4. desire for improvement**

\* In a Bakedu, Lofa Country the town chief talks about how the town people, displaced during the war, came back to their town once violence stopped and rebuild the town on their own, without outside help. As a community, they plan together what they will be developing next and then they do it together so that life in their town improves. Right now they are finishing building a large mosque. All this is from their own resources since the government has not come into help. As the chief put it, "our town was destroyed during the war but the community rebuilt it and we are planning for the future."

\* In Bensonville, Monserrato county, female students express how important schooling is to them. Two want to be doctors, two want to go into politics and become a legislator and a senator. They live in a small community but walk to school even when it rains and even though it takes them a few hours a day to walk to school and back.

### **5. war fatigue**

\* In Nimba County a community radio station manager expressed a frequently heard sentiment, "we refuse to allow any more war."