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LIBERIA CONFLICT VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENT

FINAL REPORT (EXTERNAL)

MAY 2016

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AAAA	Addis Ababa Action Agenda
ADR	Alternative Dispute Resolution
AFL	Armed Forces of Liberia
AfT	Agenda for Transformation
BIN	Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization
CAF 2.0	Conflict Assessment Framework 2.0
CBO	Community Based Organization
CDC	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
CDCS	Country Development Cooperation Strategy
CFDC	Community Forest Development Committee
CSDLF	County Social Development Funds
CSC	County Service Center
CMM	USAID's Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation
CPA	Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement
CDC	Congress for Democratic Change
CBL	Central Bank of Liberia
CRC	Constitutional Review Commission
CRC	Covalla Rubber Company
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
DAC	Directly Affected Communities
DI	Democracy International
DEA	Drug Enforcement Agency
DO	Development Objective
DRG	Democracy, Human Rights and Governance
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EVD	Ebola Virus Disease
GII	Gender Inequality Index
GNI	Gross National Income

GOL	Government of Liberia
GVL	Golden Veroleum Liberia
HDI	Human Development Index
ICAF	Interagency Conflict Assessment Framework
ICG	International Crisis Group
IDPS	International Dialogue for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding
LACC	Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission
LNET	Liberian National Ebola Taskforce
LNP	Liberian National Police
LP	Liberty Party
LPRC	Liberia Petroleum Refining Company
LRA	Land Rights Act
MACS	Ministries, Agencies and Commissions
MOH	Ministry of Health
MOPP	Maryland Oil Palm Plantation
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NPFL	National Patriotic Force of Liberia
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
NSA	National Security Agency
ODA	Official Development Assistance
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
P4DP	Platform for Dialogue and Peace
PRS	Poverty Reduction Strategy
PSGs	Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-based Violence
SDI	Sustainable Development Institution
SDPL	Sime Darby Plantation Liberia
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USG	United States Government
WASSCE	West African Senior School Certificate Examination
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene
WGI	Worldwide Governance Indicators
WHO	World Health Organization

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In November 2015, USAID/Liberia commissioned a Conflict Vulnerability Assessment to understand the drivers of conflict in Liberia, assess the potential for future conflict, identify areas for programmatic engagement to mitigate conflict, and ensure that USAID programming does not exacerbate conflict dynamics in line with U.S. commitments under the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile and Conflict Affected States (FCAS) Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals (PSGs), and FOCUS and TRUST principles.¹ Through the New Deal, USAID together with other U.S. Government (USG) entities, host countries, and donor signatories have pledged to better align resources and programmatic thinking around an agreed set of principles and operational approaches that frame strategies for conflict-sensitive development and long-term host country resilience.

The assessment used the approach detailed in USAID's Conflict Assessment Framework (CAF 2.0) while also taking stock of New Deal PSGs around legitimate politics (PSG1); establishing and strengthening people's security (PSG2); addressing injustices and increasing people's access to justice (PSG3); generating employment and improving livelihoods to secure the economic foundations for development (PSG4); and managing revenues and building capacity for accountable and fair service delivery (PSG5); together with agreed principles for donor and partner engagement around achieving development goals. The desk study reviewed relevant literature in order to identify major conflict dynamics. This was followed by fieldwork conducted from February 24-March 5, 2016, by a team including representatives from USAID's Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation (CMM), USAID/Liberia, USAID/Senegal, and country experts and team members contracted by Democracy International (DI). The fieldwork included interviews and focus groups in Monrovia and 13 of the 15 counties: Montserrado, Margibi, Grand Bassa, Bomi, Grand Cape Mount, Nimba, Bong, Lofa, Sinoe, Grand Kru, Maryland, River Gee, and Grand Gedeh.²

Sub-teams working in the counties outside of Montserrado reported a low risk of a return to widespread conflict as overt conflict levels in these areas are currently low.³ Respondents in these counties did not identify specific key mobilizers (they broadly named political parties and politicians as potential key mobilizers). These sub-teams found a prevalent and profound commitment to maintaining peace among the population. That being said, governance capacity gaps may exacerbate social grievances, increasing the risk for sporadic, localized violence spreading to the national-scale.

¹ FOCUS: Fragility assessment; one vision, one plan; compact; TRUST: Transparency; risk-sharing; use and strengthen country systems; strengthen capacities; timely and predictable aid. A more detailed description of these principles may be found here: <http://www.g7plus.org/en/new-deal/document>.

² The March 2010 Interagency Conflict Assessment Framework (ICAF) conducted fieldwork in the four most populated counties of Montserrado, Bong, Nimba, and Lofa. The September 2011 ICAF Update conducted fieldwork in the four same counties.

³ CMM leads the CAF assessment process and provided oversight to the assessment team on application of the CAF methodology, which requires team members to integrate findings across different conceptual elements and from among regions assessed. These regional differences are captured in the overall assessment statements that follow.

A sub-team working in the most densely populated areas of Liberia (in the capital and surrounding areas) found a slightly higher, low to moderate risk of conflict resurgence. Although the compounded social grievances are presently constrained in the overall conflict dynamic due to the existence of a low appetite for renewed civil war and a lack of observed action by key actors to move toward national-level violence at this time, the heightened risk, compared to the majority of the counties, is explained in part by the fluidity of the situation on the ground in Monrovia, particularly in the approach to the 2017 national elections. Small-scale, local conflicts in Monrovia and the areas surrounding the capital include a number of minor incidents involving mob violence. Although we believe that the form of violence most likely to play out in the near term is also likely to be localized and mostly unplanned, the heightened levels of grievances and daily stress observed in these areas make the capital region particularly vulnerable to possible negative trends and trajectories over the longer term. These trends could move the overall conflict equation toward a higher risk of violence in the period leading up to elections in these areas.

This assessment did not identify specific key actors (individuals and/or organizations) with sufficient motivations to mobilize Liberians around known or latent grievances to drive violent conflict at the national-level. However, it is also important to note that not all opposition parties and influential actors could be interviewed within the three-week timeframe allotted for this assessment. Still, a key element in understanding why Liberians have not engaged in large-scale conflict and violence during the last 13 years, since signing the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2003, despite the existence of many social grievances, is that citizens value peace and stability and have a strong commitment to maintaining it. A few of the key actors who mobilized sectors to take part in violence during the civil war have attained new positions that encourage a degree of investment in some level of the status quo. Leaders of major opposition parties have acknowledged an improvement in the political space with the Sirleaf government. These important sources of resilience, along with others, will be explored in greater detail in the report as will key conflict dynamics, regional conflict dynamics, trends, triggers, and recommendations for fortifying Liberia's long-term peace and stability.

CORE FINDINGS

- I. Depending on the region, Liberia displays a low to moderately low risk of returning to full-scale war; overt conflict levels are sporadic and localized, and, so far, have been contained to relatively low levels of violence.
- II. Significant, pervasive, and enduring grievances remain. There is the potential for sporadic, localized conflicts to spark violence that could spread to a wider scale.
- III. The assessment team as well as the majority of people interviewed for this assessment could not identify specific key actors (individuals and/or organizations) with motivation to drive the country back to civil war. However, there is a risk of Liberians being mobilized around their numerous grievances in ways that could lead to a heightening of existing tensions (interviewers identified key actors in a broad sense—political parties and politicians—but these were not exhaustive).
- IV. Liberians and Liberian society are buoyed by a variety of resiliencies, but the most salient is Liberians' commitment to maintaining the peace in the country in order to continue with progress and development.
- V. Structural and operational capacity deficiencies at the national and regional levels stemming from continued challenges around political inclusivity, lack of transparency (resulting in low trust), and low human and resource capacity for service delivery, are a

pervasive grievance **across all sectors and all regions**. While strides have been made to address some of these concerns, ongoing deficits in these areas continue to undermine efforts to improve outcome quality across sectors.

- VI. The Government of Liberia (GOL) has made strides to begin to address the many political and sectoral grievances at the national level. These efforts have begun to build greater levels of social confidence in a positive way forward for Liberia and encourage a vision that is different from the patronage systems seen with prior warlords. This confidence and optimism is early and fragile. Pivotal decisions before the legislature to create new systems for inclusive participation in key sectors such as land, concessions, health, housing, and police could have a profound impact on how citizens evaluate and re-evaluate the root causes of their grievances.

GENERAL FINDINGS: NATIONAL RESILIENCIES

As previously stated, Liberians themselves feel they are responsible for maintaining the peace and stability in their country. That nearly every Liberian interviewed in all 13 counties expressed a great sense of pride in being committed to sustaining the peace in Liberia is a testament to this. Even though Liberians voiced numerous grievances to the assessment team, and there were mentions of some sporadic, localized conflicts involving violence and destruction of property as well as high incidences of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), many Liberians (especially outside of Monrovia) stated they actively engage in appropriate traditional and formal dispute resolution mechanisms. Interviewees saw some developmental progress and wanted it to continue, knowing this was only possible if peace and stability endured. They also expressed their sense of value and respect for the democratic principles, policies, and procedures currently shaping the country.

People Own the Peace: Liberians from the varied and divergent sectors of society interviewed for this assessment declared great pride in maintaining and sustaining the peace of the nation. Many are actively working for and contributing to the continuation of peace and stability in Liberia. Additionally, Liberians also express war fatigue, “knowing now what war means” and “not wanting to run anymore.”

Improved Citizens’ Perceptions on Economic Conditions and Governance Since the War: Most Liberians interviewed observed that the country’s economic and political conditions have improved since the war and believed some central government institutions have been strengthened and become more effective. An example often cited by interviewees was that government salaries are increasingly paid on time. These feelings emerged less strongly in Monrovia, where living conditions include large, informal settlements with little security, sanitation, or basic services. Many Liberians interviewed expressed support for democratic processes, including the ability to elect their leaders and hold multi-party elections. In the informal settlements of Monrovia, however, people felt excluded from positions of influence. This was found particularly among male and female youths with highest levels of exclusion noted among young women and girls.

Tangible Developmental Progress: Many Liberians interviewed acknowledged that during the past five years there have been observable and “small-small”⁴ improvements in the quality and coverage of public services, including paved roads, greater access to education and healthcare facilities, more trained and qualified teachers, healthcare workers and police,

⁴ In Liberian English, “small-small” signifies little by little or step by step.

improved sanitation, and (for some in the Southeast as well as Nimba and Bong counties) access to electricity.

Evidence of Effective Local Dispute Mechanisms: Liberians in a number of towns and villages visited by this assessment team understand, practice, and rely on both traditional dispute resolution mechanisms including resorting to their traditional leaders and Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) programs to resolve conflicts.

Freedom of Speech: Many Liberians interviewed for this assessment stated they are able to freely speak their minds. They also acknowledged that freedom of speech comes with responsibility. This observation is supported by results from the 2015 Afrobarometer survey in Liberia, which found that 82 percent of respondents believed they were either “somewhat” or “completely” free to say what they think. Only 15 percent of respondents stated they were “not at all” or “not very free” to say what they think.⁵ In Monrovia, where two high-profile deaths involving well-known whistleblowers and arrests for public commentary unfavorable to powerful political entities have occurred in recent months, many see the pendulum, which had moved strongly in favor of greater openness, beginning to swing back as the 2017 national elections approach.

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Community-Based Organizations (CBOs): Throughout the 13 counties visited, the assessment team found that CSOs and CBOs provide valued trainings in peacebuilding, conflict resolution and mediation, mediate land and family disputes, raise awareness of human rights, concession laws and governance proceedings, and advocate for numerous societal issues and concerns. One Liberian CSO member stated, “We, the civil society community, have learned how to engage with the government more productively. In the past, our engagement was accusatory making it impossible for leaders to respond.”⁶

Tradition of Community Lending: Village Savings Associations along with independent community members work together to raise funds, build projects, and solve problems in their villages and towns.

Reliance on the Police: Most Liberian citizens interviewed for this assessment viewed the police as a key law enforcement actor. However, there was a difference in opinions expressed in Monrovia versus the other 12 counties about police professionalism. In the 2015 Afrobarometer survey in Liberia, 77% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that the police always have the right to make people obey the law.⁷ This is the case even though 76% of respondents stated they strongly distrust the police and believe they are corrupt. This perception was supported by data from assessment interviews. Interviewees in Monrovia, however, expressed more strongly the perception of insecurity and fear in the police. In all other areas outside of Monrovia, citizens expressed more favorable opinions. Though there were some exceptions, many citizens interviewed in the counties felt safe in their communities.⁸

⁵ Afrobarometer Round 6, Survey in Liberia, 2015.

http://afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/publications/Summary%20of%20results/lib_r6_sor_en.pdf (Accessed on April 5, 2016).

⁶ Interview, Monrovia, February 2016.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ In one focus group with women and girls in the informal settlements of Monrovia, all participants commented that there was nowhere they felt safe, whether at home, school, in their neighborhoods, on the street, or at night.

Natural Beauty of Liberia: Liberians hold deep pride about both the abundant natural resources in the country and the natural beauty of the land. Yet, as we discuss below, access and control over natural resources are a source of grievance, particularly when decisions about natural resources are not transparent and inclusive.

Raised Awareness of Hygiene and Disease Prevention: Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) raised Liberians' understanding and practices of disease prevention. Many Liberians interviewed for the assessment feel they are now better equipped to manage health concerns compared to prior to the EVD crisis.

GENERAL FINDINGS: KEY CONFLICT DYNAMICS

The core finding from the 2016 Conflict Vulnerability Assessment is that Liberia continues to experience low levels of overt violence and conflict. Mob violence and a critical level of violence against women and girls are a daily reality, particularly, but not exclusive to, large urban areas. Sporadic, localized conflicts (sometimes involving violence and property destruction) occur, and there is the potential for these to spread to a larger-scale if high-level grievances remain unaddressed and unscrupulous key actors (mainly politicians and political parties) decide to negatively mobilize Liberians around real and perceived grievances. The pervasive influence of rumors in Liberian culture as a significant source of information and the availability of inexpensive SMS technology also has the potential to amplify localized incidents and spark fears in neighboring communities resulting in wider-scale violence.

The level of real and perceived grievances in Liberia is high.⁹ However, Liberians are motivated for maintaining peace, and many actors in Liberian society at the national, regional, and local levels are working actively to reduce tensions and resolve disputes for a more hopeful future. These efforts, many with support from the donor community, are critical, as is the need for Liberians to be able to perceive progress in addressing the numerous grievances found throughout society.

The most salient frustrations expressed by interviewees in all 13 counties include lack of faith that the GOL can play a central role in addressing Liberians' grievances, lack of employment opportunities and economic hardship, widespread incidents of SGBV, concern about the security sector's ability to adequately and appropriately perform their duties and responsibilities, limited access to the justice system, lingering tensions around land, the perceived mismanagement and perceptions of illegitimate governance around County and Social Development Funds (C/SDF), unmet basic human needs, lack of government capacity to provide basic services, and dissatisfaction with concessionaries¹⁰ resulting from some concession agreements made in a

⁹ Liberia remains a highly food insecure country with a "serious" state of hunger rating according to the 2015 Global Hunger Index ranking in the 20 least food secure countries in the world. Liberia ranks 177 out of 188 on the 2015 UNDP Human Development Index with an average literacy rate of just 43%, 65% of the population reported feeling unsafe, and 65% reported not trusting the government. Beyond high unemployment, 94% of those who are employed are working poor earning less than 2\$ per day. The country remains heavily dependent on food and fuel imports. According to FAO GIEWS 2012, an estimated two-thirds of the country's cereal consumption (around 530,000 tons) is covered by imports. Domestic prices of imported rice, the country's main staple, have continued to rise since the beginning of 2011. This rise in rice prices is due to a combination of factors including increased transportation costs, poor road conditions, and increased demand for food. In response to the continued rise in rice prices, the government has suspended its import tariff on rice to help maintain lower prices on the domestic market.

¹⁰Liberians interviewed for this assessment commonly used the term "concessionaries" to refer to companies that worked in extractive industries such as iron ore mining or those that manage

non-inclusive and non-transparent manner that do not have communities benefitting from the agreements nor witnessing national and/or local governing authorities addressing health, infrastructure, access to livelihoods, or environmental concerns on the part of affected communities.

In some counties outside of Monrovia, Liberians expressed elevated grievances when some developmental progress is experienced but the needs continue and people expect and desire improvements in their standards of living.

NATIONAL GRIEVANCES

Economic/Employment Hardship: Despite significant donor assistance and some economic growth over the last several years (with the exception of the years during EVD), the majority of Liberians continue to live with crippling levels of poverty and unemployment.

Rape and Other Forms of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV): SGBV including domestic violence is prevalent and widespread throughout the country. Women are particularly susceptible to traditional justice structures that include violence. Women feel specifically neglected in terms of access to justice for SGBV crimes, and women and girls experience higher levels of personal insecurity in their homes, schools, neighborhoods, and communities.¹¹

Security Sector: The lack of capacity and equipment are a hindrance to responsiveness, which perpetuates citizens' mistrust of the police. Crime, particularly related to drugs and the release of suspected criminals back into the community, creates perceived fear of reprisals, and unemployed/unskilled youth are seen as especially vulnerable to drug-related crimes. In Monrovia and the surrounding urban areas, concerns were expressed about the Liberian National Police (LNP) abuses of authority. Fears around the approaching UNMIL withdrawal included both that there would be less oversight of the LNP and that the LNP would not have the logistical capabilities of UNMIL. Issues regarding logistics are worrying given the key role the LNP will play during the potentially politically charged 2017 national elections.

Lack of Government Capacity and Accountability: Although Liberians have seen slow improvements in government services, the government remains unable to adequately respond to the needs and demands of its citizens, and citizens have few mechanisms to hold government officials accountable for their actions. Issues of government capacity, accountability, and perceived legitimacy create significant sources of grievances around the country and across all sectors. Key opposition leaders interviewed by the press have expressed concerns that accountability and legitimacy are key grievances among their constituents and have been at the core of several recent demonstrations.¹²

Access to Justice: Many Liberians interviewed for this assessment expressed the belief that there is no justice for the poor, because people are asked to pay justice officials to investigate and adjudicate cases. Further, an absence of court officials causes a delay in the adjudication of cases, which creates a perception that the justice system is ineffective. Large caseloads and poor

rubber and palm oil plantations. In following, this assessment report borrows the same term to refer to these types of companies in Liberia.

¹¹As heard in interviews with the Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Unit of the Ministry of Justice, SGBV in Monrovia includes an alarming degree of gang rape and brutal deaths from sexual assault of women, girls, and boys are reported as high as 4-5 per week.

¹²For an example, from 2013, please see: <http://theliberiandialogue.org/2013/10/06/extend-vocal-opposition-and-criticism-to-all-corrupt-and-ineffective-political-leaders-in-liberia-not-just-ellen/>

understanding of the legal process also perpetuate the perception that justice is not delivered. This results in people not wanting to go to court. This is particularly true in incidents of sexual assault where victims and their families may feel increased vulnerability after making reports of sexual violence. In some instances, poverty levels make some victims vulnerable to pressure from family members, who may accept payoffs from perpetrators to pressure victims to drop accusations. Many Liberians default to traditional structures, which they know and understand should not handle certain types of criminal cases.

Land: Land conflicts and land-related grievances are persistent. There are national-level disputes (resulting from concessionary agreements), county-level disputes over boundaries, family- and community-level disputes, inter-ethnic disputes, and cross-border disputes (Liberia vs. Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia vs. Guinea). Additionally, multiple sales of the same land, traditional/multigenerational ownership vs. formal deeds/property titles, lack of trained land surveyors (no surveyor school has existed in Liberia since the 1980s), and lack of awareness of property laws also contribute to both active land conflicts and latent land-related grievances. In Monrovia, grievances related to land are felt most strongly in the severe housing shortage. The National Housing Authority reported that an estimated 2 to 2.5 million people now live in a city designed to hold 500,000 to 700,000 people.¹³ Many live in 'zinc houses,' makeshift homes, in alleyways, and in dangerously congested informal settlements.

County and Social Development Funds (C/SDF): There are growing grievances around the management of both funds, politicization of projects, and lack of awareness and participation in discussions about the use of the funds.

Lack of Access to and/or Appropriate Education: Many Liberians feel access to education is out of reach. There is widespread concern over needing more trained teachers in general but the frustration is particularly noted in rural schools along with the lack of school supplies and materials (textbooks, labs, science equipment, computers, etc.). In some communities and counties, there are frustrations over a lack of access to universities, community colleges, and vocational education. This perception is consistent with the results of the 2015 Afrobarometer survey, where almost half of respondents (49%) said that if additional resources were available, the government should spend these on education.¹⁴

Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH): Many Liberians express grievances over the lack of access to safe drinking water, lack of planning around placement of and lack of access to hand pumps, too few hand pumps to sustain the community, and poor maintenance of hand pumps. Additionally, Liberians are frustrated with the lack of access to toilets and the lack of trash sites, dump sites, or appropriate burial grounds.

Lack of Roads including Feeder Roads to Create Farm to Market Connectivity: In areas with paved roads, Liberians acknowledge and are grateful for this infrastructure

¹³ The CIA World Factbook provides the following population estimates: Monrovia 1.264 million (2015 est.) and Liberia 4,195,666 (July 2015 est.) <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/li.html> (Accessed May 11, 2016).

¹⁴ The survey question stated: "If the government of this country could increase its spending, which of the following areas do you think should be the top priority for additional investment?" Afrobarometer, Round 6, Survey in Liberia, 2015. http://afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/publications/Summary%20of%20results/lib_r6_sor_en.pdf (Accessed on April 5, 2016).

development. However, they state a desire to see more paved roads creating a national road network that will contribute to both greater economic development and delivery of government services to the nation as a whole. In areas where paved roads are completely lacking (including most of the country outside the main corridors and a couple larger cities in the Southeast), Liberians are frustrated by this lack of progress.

Concessions: Upcountry, there are considerable grievances around concessionary agreements. There are grievances over the political legitimacy of these agreements given the failure of the central government to include affected communities and local authorities in decision-making when granting concessions. There is a perception that the central government is biased in favor of concessionaries. Other grievances include a lack of governmental accountability for ensuring appropriate conduct by the concessionaries, even on the relatively rare occasions when local communities are included in some aspects of concessionary agreement-making. Numerous other grievances shared by the directly-affected communities (DACs) of the concessionaries include frustrations concerning resettlement payments, lack of participation in negotiating concession agreements, lack of understanding about Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs, high expectations for social services by surrounding communities not directly working for the concession companies, and continued environmental degradation and pollution.

ASSESSMENT REPORT

SECTION I. INTRODUCTION

A. PURPOSE

In February and March 2016, DI worked with CMM and USAID/Liberia to conduct a comprehensive assessment of conflict vulnerability in Liberia. The purpose of the assessment was to:

- (1) Map key dynamics and risks for violent conflict in Liberia in order for the Mission to better understand conflict dynamics and probabilities.
- (2) Advise how conflict dynamics may impact USAID/Liberia's upcoming Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS) development and the Mission's ability to achieve key programmatic results.
- (3) Propose thematic recommendations and approaches to inform USAID programming based on the analysis and informed by coherent, evidence-driven theories of change with attention paid to the four Development Objectives (DOs) of (1) more effective, accountable, inclusive governance; (2) sustained, market driven economic growth to reduce poverty; (3) improved health status of Liberians; and (4) better educated Liberians.
- (4) The assessment will complete the three above listed purposes while also taking stock of New Deal Peacebuilding and Statebuilding goals around Legitimate Politics (PSG1) including fostering inclusive political settlements and conflict resolution; Establishing and Strengthening People's Security (PSG2); Justice (PSG3) address injustices and increase people's access to justice; Economic Foundations (PSG4) generate employment and improve livelihoods; and Revenues & Services (PSG5) manage revenue and build capacity for accountable and fair service delivery.

B. ORGANIZATION OF THIS REPORT

Section I describes the purpose, methodology, and context of this conflict vulnerability assessment in light of both previous conflict assessments and EVD. Section II discusses assessment findings on a national level and examines conflict dynamics in various regions as well as by sector. Section III elaborates on conflict trends and triggers investigated and identified during this assessment. Section IV summarizes recommendations based on the assessment findings.

C. METHODOLOGY

This assessment employed the CAF 2.0, beginning with a desk study that reviewed relevant literature to identify major conflict dynamics in Liberia. Based on that study, the conflict assessment team developed a field research plan and list of potential key informants and focus group participants. The list included government officials at national, regional, district and village levels, local CSOs and CBOs, religious leaders, members of the Inter-Religious Council, traditional and local leaders, journalists and community radio personalities, health practitioners, farmers, fishermen, teachers, students, motorcycle unions, traders, concessionaries, private sector, political parties, security personnel (Liberia National Police (LNP), Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization (BIN), National Security Agency (NSA), Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), and Customs), USAID implementing partners, UNMIL, and the Center for Disease Control (CDC). Attention was specifically paid to gender and age to ensure balance. Thus, women-only focus groups were conducted, as were youth and elder-only focus groups.

The conflict assessment team conducted 200 key informant interviews and focus groups with approximately 1,000 Liberians in Monrovia and various parts of Montserrado County as well as 12 other counties: Margibi, Grand Bassa, Sinoe, Grand Kru, Maryland, River Gee, Grand Gedeh, Nimba, Bong, Lofa, Bomi, and Grand Cape Mount. The two previous conflict assessments (March 2010 and September 2011) conducted fieldwork in Montserrado, Bong, Nimba, and Lofa counties.

The team consisted of 13 people: two from USAID/Liberia, one from USAID/Senegal, three Liberian country experts, three Liberian logisticians, two Liberian translators, one from USAID/CMM, and the team leader. For the field research in and around Monrovia as well as other parts of Montserrado County along with Margibi, Grand Bassa, Bomi, and Grand Cape Mount, the group subdivided into two teams. Team 1A was in Monrovia, around Montserrado, as well as Margibi and Grand Bassa, and Team 1B was in and around Monrovia and Montserrado as well as Bomi and Grand Cape Mount. Team 2 went to Nimba, Bong, and Lofa, and Team 3 visited Sinoe, Grand Kru, Maryland, River Gee, and Grand Gedeh. Upon returning to Monrovia, the full team engaged in a three-day exercise to synthesize the findings from the field research.

D. POLITICAL, SOCIAL, AND ECONOMIC CONTEXT

In 1822, the American Colonization Society began the settlement of freed slaves from the United States into what is today Liberia. In 1847, these freed American slaves, referred to as “Americo-Liberians,” founded the Republic of Liberia.

Americo-Liberians governed under one-party rule until 1980, when Samuel K. Doe, an Army Master Sergeant from the country’s Krahn indigenous ethnic group, overthrew the government, largely in response to the exclusion of indigenous groups from positions of political power.¹⁵ Doe’s governing style continued exclusionary politics and extractive economic systems, widening social cleavages between various indigenous groups. In 1989, Charles Taylor, a former government minister, invaded the country with his National Patriotic Force of Liberia (NPFL) through Nimba County from neighboring Cote d’Ivoire, hoping to topple the Doe government. A civil war followed and did not end until the 1996 Abuja Accords. The following year, Taylor was elected president. However, Taylor’s authoritarian style of leadership generated opposition, which manifested in the formation of numerous rebel groups. In 1999, the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), a dissident rebel group backed by Guinea, appeared in northern Liberia and sparked the start of the second civil war. LURD was joined by other groups including Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL), and by mid-2003 invaded Monrovia.¹⁶ On August 11, 2003, President Taylor resigned and went into exile in Nigeria. “This move paved the way for the deployment by ECOWAS of what became a 3,600-strong peacekeeping mission in Liberia (ECOMIL). On August 18, leaders from the Liberian Government, the rebels, political parties, and civil society signed a comprehensive peace agreement that laid the framework for constructing a 2-year National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL), headed by businessman Gyude Bryant.”¹⁷ By October of that year, the UN took over security in Liberia subsuming ECOMIL into the United Nations Mission in Liberia

¹⁵ Historical background follows from Amos Sawyer (1992) and Stephen Ellis (2006).

¹⁶ “Documenting the Resilience of Liberians in the Face of Threats to Peace and the 2014 Ebola Crisis.” Platform for Dialogue and Peace (P4DP). November 2015.

¹⁷ <http://www.state.gov/outofdate/bgn/liberia/124863.htm> (Accessed on February 10, 2016).

(UNMIL). UNMIL eventually grew to over 12,000 troops and 1,148 police officers and has provided continued support to the GOL since 2003.¹⁸

The civil wars from 1989 to 2003 devastated the Liberian people and dissolved social, political, and economic governance systems at all levels as government functions were disrupted and skilled individuals fled the country or were killed. Since resolution of the last civil war via the signing of the Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), Liberians have seen mixed development results in social, political, and economic sectors.

According to estimates from July 2015, the population of Liberia sits at a little over four million, in a country slightly larger than Tennessee. Ten major ethnic groups comprise Liberian society, with 16 total ethnic groups as documented by the 2008 census. Christianity, Islam, and indigenous religions are practiced. English is the official language with 20 ethnic group languages spoken. An estimate from 2015 found the median age in Liberia is 18 years with the majority of society (61%) between the ages of 0-24.¹⁹

Since 2003, the country has moved from a transitional government through two presidential elections (2005 and 2011) generally deemed free, fair, and credible without experiencing large scale or widespread election-related violence.²⁰ The election on October 11, 2011, was the first democratic election administered by Liberians instead of by the international community (UNMIL managed the 2005 elections).²¹ Two impending transitions have the potential to change the Liberian political context: (1) UNMIL, which has provided security sector support to the Government of Liberia since the conclusion of civil war in 2003, beginning its final phase of withdrawal in June 2016 and (2) the general elections slated for October 2017.

Liberia made only a limited recovery from the economic devastation of past civil wars, and the 2014-2015 Ebola crisis and its lingering, spillover effects further hampered growth.²² In 2005, average income in Liberia remained only one-quarter what it had been in 1987, and one-sixth of what it was in 1979.²³ The 2015 Human Development Index (HDI) score places Liberia 177 out of 188 countries with the Gross National Income (GNI) per capita at \$805 (2011 monetary levels), and over 70 percent of the Liberian population remains in poverty.²⁴ Liberia faces an uphill battle when it comes to addressing all the poverty indicators recorded by the HDI, as illustrated by data below from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).²⁵

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/li.html>

²⁰ https://www.ndi.org/files/2119_lr_finalreport_110105_0.pdf;
https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/peace_publications/election_reports/liberia2011-finalrpt.pdf

²¹ <http://www.cartercenter.org/news/features/p/elections/liberia/in-brief.html>

²² http://www.africaneconomicoutlook.org/fileadmin/uploads/aeo/2015/CN_data/CN_Long_EN/Liberia_GB_2015.pdf

²³ "Country Development Cooperation Strategy Liberia 2013-2017." United States Agency for International Development.

²⁴ <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/LBR> (Accessed January 21, 2016).

²⁵ Ibid.

MULTIDIMENSIONAL POVERTY INDEX (MPI), LIBERIA

United Nations Development Programme, 2015

Population in multidimensional poverty (%)	70.1
Population in multidimensional poverty, headcount (thousands)	3,010
Population in multidimensional poverty, intensity of deprivation (%)	50.8
Population in severe multidimensional poverty (%)	35.4
Population living below income poverty line, PPP \$1.25 a day (%)	83.8
Population near multidimensional poverty (%)	21.5
Working poor at PPP\$2 a day (% of total employment)	94

While Liberia has substantial renewable and non-renewable natural resources, which contribute to some economic growth, including iron ore, gold, diamonds, timber, rubber, palm oil, and cocoa as well as offshore oil reserves, all of these extractive commodities are deeply dependent on world markets and highly impacted by global economic shocks. Furthermore, land governance and concessions that fail to generate employment and improve livelihoods could contribute to fragility and increase conflict vulnerability that can become difficult to correct in the long term.²⁶

Recent economic growth in Liberia was interrupted by the EVD outbreak of 2014-2015. From 2006 to 2009, the economy grew by 9%, and in 2010 the economy grew by 4.5%. At this time, Liberia also agreed to more than \$16 billion dollars in foreign direct investment and concessions, which boosted growth. The country achieved high growth during 2010-2013 due to favorable world prices for its commodities. In 2013, economic growth continued at a rate of 8.1%. However, the Ebola crisis and falling commodity prices slowed growth in 2014 to an

²⁶ The extractive industries are also generating new sources of conflict between industry leaders and the communities. For example, in a story reported on Oct. 9, 2015, over 60 women stormed the Sime Darby Plantation in Gbarjike, Klay District, Bomi County in protest at the mysterious deaths of cattle in the plantation and neighboring villages. <http://allafrica.com/stories/201510123008.html> (Accessed February 9, 2016). Similarly, the literature also finds a strong correlation between economic downturns and the heightened risk of conflict in Liberia. The Evolution of Deadly Conflict in Liberia: From Paternalism to State Collapse. Jeremy I. Levitt. Durham, North Carolina: Carolina Academic Press, 2005.

estimated 1.8%.²⁷ Predictions are that household incomes will be slower to recover from the EVD epidemic.²⁸

E. NEW DEAL, TRUST, AND FOCUS PRINCIPLES

The New Deal articulates a paradigm shift in supporting transitions out of fragility and toward sustainable development in fragile and conflict-affected states (FCAS). The New Deal was motivated, in part, by the recognition that FCAS—home to roughly 1.5 billion people—have lagged significantly behind other low-income states in the achievement of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). At the same time, they receive more than 30% of global official development assistance (ODA) and nearly half of U.S. foreign assistance since 2009. As acknowledged at the Third International Conference on Financing for Development in Addis Ababa, countries in conflict and post-conflict situations—which are highly correlated with fragility—will require special attention to achieve sustainable development goals.²⁹ The New Deal provides a roadmap for the kind of attention that is needed.

Both the U.S. and Liberia are signatories to the three-pronged approach outlined by the New Deal. The **Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals** articulate the **what**: legitimate politics, security, justice, economic foundations (jobs), and revenues and services management. The PSGs have influenced, among others, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA) and 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including a commitment to promoting peaceful and inclusive societies everywhere and a pledge to work to increase access to financing for peacebuilding and development in the post-conflict context. The PSGs have also influenced and can be seen in the U.S. National Security Strategy as well as the 2015 Quadrennial Development and Diplomacy Review.

The New Deal also outlines the **who** through **FOCUS** principles.³⁰ International partners support national governments in developing country-led fragility assessments that, in turn, inform the development of a compact that outlines key priorities and articulates how to achieve progress. The objective is to achieve “one vision, one plan.” The New Deal also recognizes that a shift is needed in **how** international assistance is provided, elaborated in **TRUST** principles.³¹ Through better risk management, increased strengthening and use of country systems, and more

²⁷ “GDP growth forecasts for 2015 were reduced by over 50%. The already small export base shrunk due to EVD and falling global commodity prices. Global iron ore prices decreased 50% and rubber prices dropped by 30%” as stated in a recent study completed by USAID Liberia’s Building Markets project provides interesting insights into the impact of Ebola in the economy. “Liberian Businesses: the Engines of Economic Recovery and Growth: A Market Overview Report.” http://buildingmarkets.org/sites/default/files/pdm_reports/liberian_businesses_-_the_engines_of_economic_recovery_and_growth.pdf (Accessed February 9, 2016).

²⁸ http://www.africaneconomicoutlook.org/fileadmin/uploads/aeo/2015/CN_data/CN_Long_EN/Liberia_GB_2015.pdf (Accessed on January 21, 2016).

²⁹ Outcome document of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development: Addis Ababa Action Agenda. 15, July 2015. Paragraph 8.

³⁰ FOCUS: Fragility assessment; one vision, one plan; compact; use PSGs to monitor; support political dialogue and leadership. A more detailed description of this principle may be found here: <http://www.g7plus.org/en/new-deal/document>.

³¹ TRUST: Transparency; risk-sharing; use and strengthen country systems; strengthen capacities; timely and predictable aid. A more detailed description of these principles may be found here: <http://www.g7plus.org/en/new-deal/document>.

predictable and timely aid, donors have committed to help FCAS improve their ability to govern and to make development more responsive to the needs and concerns of citizens by strengthening national capacities and improving transparency and accountability. As the New Deal enters its fifth year, the Secretariat and membership of the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding has commissioned the Center on International Cooperation to comprehensively identify and analyze the impact that the New Deal has had, the challenges that lie ahead, and opportunities for overcoming them.³² This exercise, and the discussions that follow with USAID/Liberia, will continue to inform our conversations about innovative approaches for achieving development goals in the FCAS context.

SECTION II. FINDINGS

A. NATIONAL DYNAMICS

The national conflict dynamics in Liberia have not substantially changed since the March 2010 and September 2011 conflict assessments. Like these two assessments, the core findings of this 2016 Conflict Assessment is that Liberians do not face a high risk of widespread violent social conflict or a return to civil war. A number of factors have continued to exert a protective effect, mitigating risks of violent conflict even after the experience of EVD in 2014-15: the worst health epidemic in the country's history.

There are many social grievances including unyielding rates of poverty, unemployment, and critically low levels of infrastructure creating difficulties both in daily life and for private investors and small business owners. In addition, deficits in government capacity to deliver public services combined with the persistence of systemic corruption and lack of accountability undermine public confidence in the legitimacy of national governance, despite the progress that has been made. Despite these and other grievances, the widespread commitment to maintaining the peace, the absence of identified key actors with sufficient motivation to mobilize Liberians toward violent conflict around real or perceived grievances, gains made in governing entities and in terms of the available networks of social institutions and organizations, and hopes related to improved inclusivity in many aspects of national governance explain why Liberians remain dedicated to sustaining the peace and stability of the country.

Although there is risk of localized and sporadic conflict, mostly manifested in demonstrations or protests that morph into vandalism and/or property destruction, a possible rise in political murders, retaliatory killings related to vigilante justice, a spike in ritualistic killings possibly connected to the approaching elections, and extremely high rates of SGBV, the 2016 conflict assessment team heard a consistent message throughout its fieldwork: the resounding majority of Liberians are committed to maintaining the peace in their country—a powerful mitigating factor against widespread mobilization.

Liberians interviewed for the two previous assessments expressed numerous social grievances, but they did not identify key actors who had the resources or capacity to mobilize Liberians as drivers of conflict. Actors were only identified in broad terms such as political parties, politicians, and local leaders. In March 2010, interviewees identified religious leaders and former armed group commanders as potential drivers of conflict.³³

³² Further information on the New Deal can be found here: <http://www.pbsbdialogue.org>.

³³ Paczynska, Agnieszka, "Liberia Interagency Conflict Assessment Framework Report." May 28, 2010 and Afiya McLaughlin-Johnson. "Liberia ICAF Update Report." March 2012.

The most salient social grievances and active conflict drivers identified in the March 2010 ICAF were unequal and unfair access to resources, services, opportunities and institutions, unmet expectations, and land control and ownership. The September 2011 ICAF Update recorded the same core grievances, with the exception of land control and ownership.³⁴ This 2016 conflict assessment's findings highlight the same core grievances from 2010 and 2011 (including land control and ownership), but also surfaced previously unearthed grievances around SGBV, C/SDFs, and government handling of concessionaries.

In some areas of the country, this conflict assessment observed a nuanced understanding of the core grievances associated with rising development expectations: with progress comes the desire for not just continued development and progress but the expectation of greater development and progress. For example, Liberians with access to primary and secondary education but not access to higher education expressed grievances around not having a community college or university in their county. For some, post-secondary education is the new focus, and, for others, there is still a struggle to attain even a basic, elementary education. Corruption is also endemic throughout the school system with bribes and extortion of sex from students by teachers broadly acknowledged both in communities, in school administrations, and by government officials.

The same “elevated” level of grievance was heard from those Liberians, specifically in major towns in Bong, Nimba, and Lofa counties, who in 2016 have access to health clinics, roads, and electricity. Specifically, they wanted closer clinics, more healthcare workers, paved feeder roads, more road connectivity, and greater access to electricity. These types of grievances were heard when people had greater access to resources, services, opportunities, and/or institutions. This “development paradox” where positive development results generate new social grievances was a theme heard from interviewees during this assessment, though it must be noted that these interviewees were from the relatively small minority of Liberians who do have access to improved services and development infrastructure.

For the majority of Liberians, the quality and coverage of public services has not improved, and in some areas, the economic conditions have actually deteriorated. For example, according to the World Bank, agricultural products comprised approximately 30% of Liberia's exports in 1980, yet today the country is a net agriculture *importer* with many small farmers struggling to compete or have been pushed off of their lands in the years since. The lack of diversity in the economy is part of what has made the recent drop in commodity prices so devastating.³⁵ Similarly, in 2015, the UNDP found that 61% of Liberians report dissatisfaction with the quality of education and 71% of Liberians are dissatisfied with healthcare quality. These factors could create grievances that increase the potential for violent conflict.

As in the 2010 and 2011 conflict assessments, a pervasive grievance stemmed from perceptions of illegitimate and or uninclusive political and governing processes. Interviewees did not identify large-scale, national grievances, however they recognized that a series of major secondary and tertiary grievances were often seen to be the direct result of illegitimate and or incapable governing entities and processes. For conflict to move from the grievance stage to violence, the grievances must be attributed to a responsible entity and then mobilizing actors and conditions

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ <http://www.indexmundi.com/facts/liberia/agricultural-raw-materials-exports>

must be present to bring sufficient numbers or kinds of individuals to turn to violence, as a means of addressing those concerns.

Sporadic, localized conflicts involving violence and destruction of property has occurred and has the potential to continue. Interviewees often stated that a political party, politician, local leader(s), or group of people (as in mob violence) could potentially be a key mobilizer creating an active conflict situation. One such incident is the February 29 demonstration by University of Liberia students on behalf of civil society activist Vandalark Patricks in the Capitol Hill area of Monrovia. The demonstration started out peacefully but when the Police Support Unit (PSU) officers of the LNP, armed with batons and tear gas, stormed the area to disperse the students, the students reacted by throwing stones. The PSU officers engaged by also throwing stones and dispersing tear gas. No fatalities were reported in the incident even though people were injured, and there was some property destruction.³⁶ While a key actor or actors had to mobilize the group of students, no one self-identified or took responsibility for organizing the demonstration. Some students started throwing rocks and other students followed, but again the news did not report and no individual or group took responsibility for initiating these actions. This is an example of an active conflict, but without a self-identified key mobilizer. This type of mob violence without specific or with unidentified mobilizers may continue, especially as political parties and politicians move into the 2017 campaign and election season.

The assessment team did not find, at this time, the existence of key actors who are currently working to try to engage *significant* portions of the populations to act on their grievances in a violent and large-scale manner. This does not suggest that mobilizers could not arise in the future. Key sources did note, particularly in Monrovia, the large numbers of unemployed young men and the fact that many of the prior networks among wartime combatants (a means to mobilize) remain active. If the population does not continue to see inclusiveness in development gains, these networks *could* become active in the future. Fortunately, there is strong faith in the viability of peace as the path to progress, reducing the desire of the population to mobilize. Maintaining this faith in the years ahead will require ongoing evidence of progress on the ground.

Enduring resiliencies, identified in the 2010, 2011, and 2016 conflict assessments include an overwhelming desire to sustain the peace, determination to maintain progress, and yearning for continued improvement. The assessment team also observed a sense of both self- and community-reliance and strong social networks particularly in the counties.³⁷ Respondents also spoke with pride about relying on traditional leaders and structures to settle disputes, especially in rural areas.

During the past six years, one of the strongest resiliencies present in Liberia is Liberians' commitment to support peace in their country. In every interview and focus group in 2016, across all 13 counties visited, Liberians stated a strong sense of pride in maintaining the peace. The 2011 and 2016 assessments recorded additional resiliencies including pride in democratic values (conducting multi-party elections, freedom of speech and movement), a strong sense of

³⁶ "Liberia: Police, Protesters Clash On Capitol Hill." March 1, 2016. <http://allafrica.com/stories/201603021559.html> (Accessed May 11, 2016).

³⁷ Strong social networks, as a recorded resilience backed by literature, were not heard in Monrovia, specifically the informal settlements. Interviewees in these areas talked repeatedly about feeling "alone." Assessment participants described Monrovia as a place where everyone had to fend for themselves with no one to talk to about daily concerns or to go to for help because of the realization that everyone else was also struggling to survive.

respect for CSOs and CBOs, and pride of birth place³⁸ including the richness of natural resources and the beauty of the land.³⁹

The mitigating factors found by the assessment team in 2016 as compared to the previous two assessments in 2010 and 2011 illustrate different events in these time periods and differing levels of awareness, understanding, and growth. For example, in 2011, known mitigating factors involved “the president, most political parties, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and some motorcycle unions making public statements about their commitment to non-violence during the electoral process and most political parties signing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to abide by the National Elections Commission (NEC) guidelines with notable exceptions being the Congress for Democratic Change (CDC) and the Liberty Party (LP).”⁴⁰ The 2011 Liberia ICAF Update was conducted September 17 – October 5, 2011 with the national elections held on October 11, 2011.⁴¹ This explains interviewees identifying mitigating factors directly related to the national elections.

In 2016, numerous Liberian interviewees commented that CSOs and CBOs, along with traditional leaders, were actively engaged in implementing peacebuilding strategies and alternative dispute and conflict resolution techniques. Numerous participants expressed a desire to continue with trainings and workshops in peacebuilding and conflict resolution as they were witnessing positive results in their communities. While the 2011 ICAF Update did identify CSOs, CBOs, and traditional leaders engaging in dispute resolution, interviewees did not explicitly express interest in pursuing additional workshops and trainings in peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and mediation.

Additionally, interviewees in the 2016 assessment noted that strengthened central institutions appear to have a mitigating impact on the potential for grievances to be mobilized into destructive conflict. Our reviews of relevant policy documents from the current administration, observations of organizational changes in the central government (examples include the establishment by executive law of the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, the creation of the Governance Commission, and the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission or LACC) coupled with our interviews tracing thematic areas under these new entities revealed that important strides have been made to create a governing framework to enhance government inclusivity and political legitimacy—factors that are important for mitigating conflict. We found evidence that many citizens perceive some improvements related to governance since 2004, particularly with regards to political stability and absence of violence, but also with respect to a widening of the political space, and some improvements in service delivery—although regional and group variations in direct access vary.⁴² Importantly, Liberians interviewed also expressed an appreciation for having greater awareness and understanding of governance procedures and policies, and many expressed that they have higher levels of knowledge and participation in governance activities.

³⁸ Pride of birthplace, as a stated resilience, was repeatedly heard from Liberians living outside of Monrovia.

³⁹ Paczynska, Agnieszka, “Liberia Interagency Conflict Assessment Framework Report.” May 28, 2010 and Afiya McLaughlin-Johnson. “Liberia ICAF Update Report.” March 2012.

⁴⁰ McLaughlin-Johnson, Afiya. “Liberia ICAF Update Report.” March 2012.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² See World Bank Governance Indicators, <http://knoema.com/WBWI2014/worldwide-governance-indicators-2015?country=1001080-liberia>

ONGOING CHALLENGES / LIMITS TO DEVELOPING NATIONAL RESILIENCIES

At the same time, there are ongoing structural inadequacies that support poor governance and illegitimate actors. Almost all of the new structures and frameworks created by the GOL to increase participation, accountability, transparency, and service delivery suffer from capacity deficits in both the number of staff and the number of trained staff, as well as deficits in access to physical resources needed to carry out intended functions; for example, the police lacking vehicles and communication equipment. Further, the assessment team heard about persistent corruption including cronyism, nepotism, and the blatant capture of government resources for personal gain. Additionally, key acts and policy frameworks have been stalled in the legislature including the Local Government Act (decentralization), the Liberia National Police Act, and the Liberia Immigration Service Act.

B. THE DONOR COMMUNITY

International donors have played an overwhelmingly positive role in Liberia's recovery from civil war. Ongoing efforts are visible and the fruits of these efforts have been noted by the majority of Liberians interviewed in Montserrado, Margibi, and Grand Bassa counties. To help Liberia overcome the next hurdle of challenges, this assessment found areas where U.S. leadership among the donor community could build on efforts to date by turning next to finding new strategies to hasten efforts to reduce the present levels of state fragility, a persistent source of grievance among those interviewed (including those in government). Lack of coordination among donors around programs and resources leaves critical programming vulnerable to sudden funding shortfalls, as witnessed with front-loaded funding from across much of the donor community to engage on the Ebola crisis that resulted in simultaneous depletion of donor coffers. More importantly, due to a combination of concerns, including very real pressures for expedient programming output and the often (but not always) warranted concerns about corruption in local and national systems, donors too often work outside of and in parallel to host country efforts, rather than helping to build up nascent internal capacity in areas where efforts are delivering promising outcomes. Over the long term, this tendency to work around rather than with country systems, and in particular with revamped government structures that are striving to overcome prior failures, could have a negative effect on the long-term effectiveness of these institutions and unintentionally undermine their political legitimacy—one of the key factors leading to the earlier conflict.

Similarly, international programming that fails to align with existing GOL policy frameworks (many created with input from the donor community) can undermine efforts by Liberian governing entities to create more legitimate, accountable, and functioning capacities. An example is national de-concentration/decentralization efforts and governance commission plans and programming that strive to address long-standing problems (such as exclusionary and unaccountable governing practices). Gains from these efforts are real and are filtering down with demonstrable (and positive) impact across health, agriculture, and other sectors, but these are at risk of being lost without further financial support. As long as citizens continue to feel aggrieved by the central and/or regional governing authorities' lack of capacity to demonstrate inclusive awareness of and responsiveness to constituent needs in all areas (be it education, health, or economic development) and to follow through with its pledges and commitments, the Liberian people will continue to distrust and/or lose the faith that has been built in the early years after the war, on the promise of a new peacetime Liberia. Sectoral programming needs to understand these connections to reduce the risk of inadvertently aggravating or prolonging conflict.

When international actors (including those beyond USAID) fail to deliver services in partnership with existing country systems that approach helps (unintentionally) to promote the perception

among Liberians that progress can come only from the international community and feeds what many Liberians have identified as a culture of dependence—or the perception among many Liberians (and in particular the youth) that they themselves are not equipped to solve their own problems. This theme and the related theme around the lack of a spirit of entrepreneurship was heard resoundingly in interviews in Monrovia, Montserrado, Margibi and Grand Bassa counties and is an impediment to achieving the kind of investment needed from both government and civil society actors in the building of the Liberian economy, government, and health communities.

C. REGIONAL CONFLICT DYNAMICS

MONROVIA, OTHER PARTS OF MONTSERRADO, MARGIBI, AND GRAND BASSA COUNTIES

In Monrovia, other parts of Montserrado County, Margibi, and Grand Bassa counties, the assessment team heard interviewees discuss grievances not cited in other parts of the country. The lack of housing is a major source of grievance in Monrovia. Squatting is found all over Monrovia as the city now contains a population that far exceeds its original design. In the informal settlements of Monrovia, interviewees stated their primary grievance was evictions. Mayor Mary Broh attempted to force the dwellers to move without providing clear alternatives. This raised tensions, insecurities, and feelings of marginalization. Monrovia has nowhere else to go and no job prospects elsewhere, so the population is stretching the limits of the city. Similarly, in Margibi and Grand Bassa counties there was also a stated grievance against wealthy foreigners, Americo-Liberians, and returning Liberians as they were making formal purchases of land that others, with only informal claims and fewer resources, stood to lose.

There is an overall lack of security in the informal settlements, which is a haven for criminals. Violence against women, girls, and boys is especially high, and community members report prevalent feelings of isolation, disconnection, and forced self-reliance.⁴³ Despite the existence of some community-level governance structures, most interviewees reported being unaware of these structures or feeling that they cannot appeal to these structures for assistance. Distrust toward those in power was high in these areas.⁴⁴

In Monrovia, other parts of Montserrado, and in Margibi, interviewees expressed great concern over LNP abuses of authority, including expectation of receiving bribes, arbitrary arrests, and property confiscations. A common theme was over concern about actions from the government that might endow the police with greater authority. Here, interviewee's greatest fears around the approaching UNMIL drawdown stemmed first from the fear that the LNP would then have no oversight and second from tensions that were expected to increase around elections. Some of the outlying communities in these regions however (most notably Kakata) felt that police in their regions would be less reliant on bribes if they had better pay.

Concessions were also a major area of concern in Montserrado, Margibi, and Grand Bassa counties where community leaders and local leaders expressed distress at having to try to resolve problems that had been created at the national level. In many communities, the effects of concessions have been devastating for local agriculture, the environment, and community life. In some areas, resulting market distortions combined with the closure of more local industries had

⁴³ Interview with the Vice President of the Slum Dwellers Association of Liberia.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

particularly harsh implications for women and girls who suffered an increase in domestic violence as household resources grow increasingly scarce. Some turned to prostitution to meet basic necessities.

Bright Spots: De-concentration/Decentralization. Buchanan, Grand Bassa houses a pilot center for de-concentration. De-concentration is the first step of a national decentralization program designed to take services to the counties. The County Service Center (CSC) in Buchanan was launched on June 30, 2015. It links nine line ministries with three MACS (Ministries, Agencies, and Commissions) in a single building and under a central coordinator.⁴⁵ From July 2015 to January 2016, the Buchanan CSC had over 3,400 service center users. Services delivered include driver's licensing, vehicle registrations, and birth and marriage certificates—all services which inhabitants of Buchanan once had to make a day-long journey to Monrovia in order to obtain them. Therefore, the value of this kind of enhanced service delivery for everyday citizens in Buchanan is considerable. Moreover local service delivery offers tangible evidence that governance is improving. Decentralization is key to enhancing the perception and reality of legitimate politics and service delivery in the counties.

There were also positive findings related to CSC control processes. For example, our assessment of the accounting system at the Buchanan CSC was that it seemed to incorporate a degree of internal checks and required divisions of authority for tracking funds. The system is demand-driven and receipts for services are collected first by the Liberia Revenue Authority (LRA) to diminish opportunities for corruption.

Still, the future of decentralization is uncertain. National strategic frameworks call for the de-concentration phase (the roll out of community service centers) to be followed by a plan for fiscal decentralization that would empower CSCs to have real access to resources to fund service delivery. At the time of our assessment, however, all revenues generated by the CSCs continued to go not to building their own service capacity but instead to the central government coffers. Our understanding is that the fiscal decentralization plan that would allow the local treasury (already in Buchanan) to open formally is contingent on pending legislation.

BOMI AND GRAND CAPE MOUNT COUNTIES

As in many other areas of the country, Liberians interviewed in these counties identified limited access to basic educational, health, and other social services in rural areas as a grievance. Many communities reported significant gaps in access to basic health facilities, safe drinking water, toilet facilities and schools. The assessment team also heard concerns about the lack of transparency around land management and large scale investments, and tensions related to concessions and non-DACs feeling excluded from social benefits. These grievances were also heard in other Liberian counties and are further described in the following sections.

Interview and focus group respondents also expressed concerns about the lack of GMS coverage in remote areas and the lack of support for Ebola-affected communities burdened with orphans, widows, and high food prices. An Ebola-affected community in Grand Cape Mount reported facing significant challenges including hunger and caring for orphans, widows and Ebola survivors without any significant assistance. Focus group participants cited destroyed harvests

⁴⁵ The CSC for Margibi was opened in Kakata on April 21, and the opening of the CSCs in Gbarnga, Bong County and Sanniquellie, Nimba County are scheduled for April 25 and 26, respectively.

and over 60 deaths, 175 orphans, 37 widows, and 3 survivors from the Ebola crisis in that community.

NIMBA, BONG, AND LOFA COUNTIES

In Nimba, Bong, and Lofa counties, the assessment team listened to participants express grievances and active conflicts not heard as much or at all in other parts of Liberia. Ritualistic killings were mentioned in most interviews and focus groups in all three counties. “Ritual killings, in which body parts used in traditional indigenous rituals are removed from the victim, continue to occur. Little reliable information is readily available about traditional religions associated with ritual killings. The number of such killings is difficult to ascertain since police often describe deaths as accidents even when body parts were removed.”⁴⁶ Interviewees did not state who was committing the violence, but they did say the killings occur in both major towns and rural areas. Bodies of adults and children had been found missing various parts and limbs. Citizens noted that though the LNP will sometimes investigate these cases, they do not always have the logistical capacity and/or the interest to do so. Some assessment interviewees expressed fear that these types of killings will increase as elections draw closer, since there is a traditional belief that certain body parts (the heart in particular) provide power. Ritualistic killings were also recorded as a conflict dynamic in the same three counties during the March 2010 Liberia ICAF and the September 2011 Liberia ICAF Update.

Assessment interviews in Nimba and Lofa indicated that land conflicts with ethnic overtones persist in Nimba County (between Mandingos, Manos, and Gios) and in Lofa County (between Mandingos and Lomas). These dynamics were also observed in the March 2010 ICAF. In both counties, Mandingos are the minority and poorly represented in local government. Many Mandingos interviewed by the assessment team felt that this lack of representation results in land disputes being resolved in an unsatisfactory and discriminatory fashion that prioritizes Manos, Gios, and Lomas.

In March 2016, a group of Mandingo and Mano leaders held a town hall meeting in Ganta, Nimba to resolve land issues involving both groups. The meeting included representatives from the Mandingos and the Manos as well as the County Coordinator, Thomas Q. Suah. Following the meetings, the representatives agreed to withdraw their cases from the court and settle the disputes informally. “We need to forget our bitter past and work together for the promotion of peace and reconciliation, said Suah. We know that the 14-year senseless civil crisis in Liberia did not go well for our country and the people. At this point in the history of our nation, citizens must say no to issues that would threaten the peace and stability of post-war Liberia.”⁴⁷ Land conflicts with ethnic overtones are a serious issue in these three counties, but there are also individuals, CSOs, CBOs, and IOs working to peacefully mediate and resolve the disputes.

In Lofa, interviewees mentioned that tensions between traditionalists and Christians and Muslims continue to persist as a potential driver of conflict. The specific conflict mentioned by multiple assessment interviewees relates to the “bush devil,” a masked figure that functions as a high priestess to practitioners of the traditional, indigenous religion. When the bush devil is out it may kidnap any individuals it encounters. According to interviewees, the bush devil has, at

⁴⁶ International Religious Freedom Report 2004.”
<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper> (Accessed April 4, 2016).

⁴⁷ “Mandingo and Mano Vow to End Land Disputes through Dialogue.” March 31, 2016.
<http://www.bushchicken.com/mandingo-and-mano-vow-to-end-land-disputes-through-dialogue/> (Accessed April 4, 2016).

times, been out when Christians and Muslims are finished with their respective services or other events, forcing members of these communities to adjust their travel times and sometimes forcing them to remain at their places of worship until the bush devil retreats. However, interviewees noted that a schedule was created for all communities to set times for their respective practices to mitigate this conflict. Though interviewees noted some violations, most viewed the schedule as working and effective in decreasing related conflicts between different religious communities. This grievance was also noted in the September 2011 Liberia ICAF Update.

SINOE, GRAND KRU, MARYLAND, RIVER GEE, AND GRAND GEDEH COUNTIES

In Sinoe, Grand Kru, Maryland, River Gee, and Grand Gedeh counties, the assessment team heard a relatively unique set of grievances and conflict dynamics not necessarily expressed to team members conducting data collection in other parts of the country. A myriad of cross-border issues specific to the Southeast are actively generating conflict dynamics, including: illegal poaching of fish off the coast of Harper by foreigners, illegal hunting and farming in three Southeastern border counties, and smuggling of weapons and illicit drugs. While the serious border issues listed above will not be resolved quickly, both the GOL and the Ivorian government took steps in January 2016 to reaffirm past cross-border cooperation, in part with support from The Carter Center's USAID-funded Access to Justice Program (A2JP). Ivorian President Ouattara signed a joint communiqué with President Johnson Sirleaf calling for the revival of the Joint Commission for Bilateral Cooperation first established in 1976 between Liberia and Cote d'Ivoire. According to the communiqué, both governments were taking "immediate steps to resolve all land occupation-related issues along the border, increase the participation of chiefs and elders as well as youth and women in the cross-border peace-building and development initiatives" as well as develop "solutions for the reception and resettlement of refugees" from Cote D'Ivoire who first fled to Liberia during the Ivorian political crisis following the contested presidential elections of 2010.⁴⁸

The isolation of the Southeast from commerce and governance, especially during the Liberian rainy season from May to October, makes it difficult for communities, villages, and towns to achieve and secure developmental progress. Communities in the cities of Barclayville, Grand Kru and Greenville, Sinoe are virtually cut off from the outside world during the rainy season, which renders many roads virtually impassable and severely limits access to outside communities. This challenges central government service delivery including policing, justice, education, and health, and also underscores the need for de-concentration. The majority of Liberians live in rural areas where there may be limited access to roads, safe drinking water, schools, health clinics or hospitals, and electricity.⁴⁹ By some estimates, 27% of the total population cannot access all-season roads within 30 kilometers of their residences.⁵⁰ The assessment team found that a pervasive and specific manifestation of this issue in the Southeast is teachers' absenteeism due to

⁴⁸ "Liberia: Cote d'Ivoire to Reopen Border in March." January 29, 2016. <http://allafrica.com/stories/201602012430.html> (Accessed April 4, 2016).

⁴⁹ "Rural Population (% of total population)." The World Bank. <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.RUR.TOTL.ZS> (Accessed April 5, 2016).

⁵⁰ "Country Profile: Liberia, Main Economic Sectors and Multinational Companies." Stichting Onderzoek Multinationale Ondernemingen (SOMO) Centre for Research on Multinational Corporations. August 2015. (Accessed on April 2, 2016).

the need for teachers to travel to county capitals to receive their paychecks.⁵¹ This results in periodic disruptions of school activities, sometimes for an entire month. In a similar vein, the lack of banking facilities within River Gee and Grand Kru compels government employees and business people to travel several miles to places where banking facilities can be found, such as Pleebo, Maryland and Zwedru, Grand Gedeh. This presents a security risk for those individuals carrying large sums of money. With the news of the EcoBank closure in the Southeast, this situation is expected to worsen.

Another grievance heard from assessment interviewees in the Southeast was that science was not being taught in schools with the exception of Grand Gedeh County, which has a few science teachers.⁵² This has a direct, negative impact on students taking the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE). In 2015, the Liberian Ministry of Education (MOE) announced plans for decentralizing the education sector, partly in response to a report from the Southeast Women's Development Association (SEWODA) highlighting the "woeful lack of basic education facilities in southeastern Liberia."⁵³ However, it is not clear from assessment data collection whether any progress has been made in implementing this decentralization plan, and it may be too early to determine whether decentralization efforts, if any, will have any positive effect on the quality of education in the Southeast.

Finally, it is important to note that some women interviewed by the assessment team in the Southeast feel that the Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) program is a contributing factor to increased domestic violence. Financial power and control can be a flashpoint for domestic violence as well as an avenue of abuse. Many of the women interviewed requested that the program provide training and resources to improve understanding of the program for the entire family.

D. CONFLICT DYNAMICS BY SECTOR

GOVERNANCE

For any state, transitioning from conflict and establishing good governance and legitimate institutions is a gradual and complex process. The methodology for creating a steady state of lasting peace, stability, justice, and prosperity is not easily translatable from one country to the next. However, lessons learned can still be shared and legitimate institutions and good governance can be built in accordance with country-specific circumstances. Inclusive and accountable governance is not just an end in itself. In Liberia, it is the next frontier that must be addressed if lasting gains in health, education, economic growth, social reconciliation, and conflict mitigation are to be achieved.

The Government of Liberia has committed to working toward legitimate and inclusive politics as part of PSGI of the New Deal. This commitment appears to have begun to bear fruit. According

⁵¹ While the assessment team only heard specific mention of this issue in the Southeast, there have been news reports of similar problems with teacher absenteeism throughout the country. See "Liberia: Bomi Ntal Head Wants Teachers' Pay System Improved." February 27, 2015. <http://allafrica.com/stories/201503021093.html> (Accessed April 29, 2016).

⁵² While assessment team members did not hear this grievance expressed by interviewees in counties outside the Southeast, there have been news reports of a shortage of science teachers in other areas of Liberia. See <http://allafrica.com/stories/201602171342.html>.

⁵³ "Liberia: Updates On Education Reform Released." September 29, 2015. <http://allafrica.com/stories/201509290805.html> (Accessed April 4, 2016).

to indicators from the World Bank, Liberia has made improvements in most governance dimensions since 2004. Liberia's Voice and Accountability score for 2014 was the highest of the six indicators at a percentile rank of 38.9%⁵⁴, which is an increase from 2011. This score may reflect the resiliencies expressed by Liberians interviewed for this assessment related to increased freedom of speech as well as awareness-raising and advocacy-instilling CSOs and CBOs.

Government Effectiveness, however, a common source of grievance in this assessment, appears to have remained low and virtually unchanged. This problem emerges in every sector. In the area of concessions, the effects of community exclusion from an effective concession-making process are roundly visible. For examples, communities are cut off from access to their farm lands when concessions appear almost overnight and without warning, or when concessionaires resort to highly polluting practices and price-fixing to drive local small competitors into bankruptcy, often with devastating ripple effects throughout the adjacent communities.

Political Stability and Absence of Violence/Terrorism was the second highest score of all six indicators at a percentile rank of 24.8%, though the score has shown a downward slide since 2013. However, the 2014 score is higher than the percentage scores from 2004-2009. It was at its highest percentile rank (33.5%) in 2011. The highest percentage in 2011 may have resulted from the rather stable national elections in October 2011 with the low period from 2004-2009 resulting from uncertainties both before and the years following the 2005 national elections. The downward slide also likely reflects general awareness of increasing regional instabilities, particularly given the porousness of Liberian borders and the recent movement to create a Christian State (all potential triggers in this assessment).

The Government Effectiveness indicator percentile rank for 2014 was 7.7%, which is the lowest score of all six WGI. This score has been relatively the same since 2005 with 2012 reporting the highest (12.4%). Capacity building is one element that falls in this category of concerns, but it is only part of the problem. Though improvements have been made, legacies of corruption and embedded bad faith actors are real hindrances to G2G support, as well as poor internal controls and weak systems. This means that the next level of engagement will require even stronger and more probing partnerships between donors and the GOL to creatively target ways to enhance GOL effectiveness in areas that align with our (the GOL, the USG, and international partners) shared commitments to New Deal principles. This will require more emphasis on strategies that allow, for example, creative risk sharing as an element of G2G support and incremental 'show me first' approaches to giving that create a controlled environment for supporting the GOLs efforts to improve its effectiveness across all sectors.

Lack of Government Capacity and Accountability. A primary source of grievance in Liberia results from an ongoing lack of governmental institutional capacity and problems with accountability. Despite improvements in recent years, the assessment team found that lack of government accountability remains a key concern for many Liberian citizens and across all sectors. In the justice sector, for example, high profile cases that suggest elite immunity from prosecution continue to undermine public confidence and security. At lower levels, the common culprit is more often a lack of trained professionals and a lack of civic understanding of the legal process, which account for many of the problems in capacity and perceived accountability. Capacity deficits are widespread and found in every unit of government investigated, which

⁵⁴ The percentile rank refers to the percentage of countries that are below this score. In this case, 38.9% of all countries included in the worldwide survey scored below Liberia on this indicator; or alternatively, 61.1% of all countries scored higher than Liberia on voice and accountability.

translates to both a numerical and preparedness deficiency in staff. While improved, there are still institutional inadequacies that support bad governance and illegitimate actors. Specific weak spots along the process-chain in each sector need to be understood if programming is to be successful.

At the highest levels of government, nepotism continues to undermine public trust and confidence. One interviewee in Monrovia expressed concern about lack of accountability within the Armed Forces of Liberia, as evidenced by a recent inability to account for Ebola funds received (based on an audit). The interviewee noted that the Liberian mindset of impunity for those in power supports corruption, as individuals are expected to enrich themselves when they attain power, and there is a general tendency to disregard laws. The informant cited a specific manifestation of this tendency as the behavior of officials who constantly use sirens to avoid traffic rules.

Mismanagement of County and Social Development Funds. One key grievance expressed by Liberians across all 13 counties visited is the real and perceived mismanagement of C/SDFs.⁵⁵ Further, there are growing grievances around the politicization of projects and lack of public awareness and inclusive participation in discussions about the use of the funds. To note, County Development Funds (CDFs) are funds each county receives from the GOL (\$200k per county and are supposed to address county priorities). Social Development Funds (SDFs) are driven by concessions. Therefore, counties with greater concessions have greater SDFs. These funds are also hijacked by local, legislative caucuses like the CDFs. Many assessment participants acknowledged feeling frustrated about citizens' and communities' lack of involvement in the creation of projects and discussions about allocations of both funds. "The functioning of the C/SDFs is an issue that is under significant public criticism because communities have limited or no involvement in decision-making, and there are concerns about widespread corruption in the administration of the funds."⁵⁶ Some concessionaries have claimed to feel like "observers" in this GOL-led process, often blamed when promised projects are not realized despite no direct involvement in the process other than writing checks. However, on the community level, Liberian families, villages and counties are frequently deprived of direct benefits from the sale of their (former) lands. Greater transparency is needed at the highest level of decision-making to build confidence in the process.

Further, there is the perception that projects are politicized and all in charge use funds inappropriately.

A meeting held with CSOs on August 7-8, 2015 in Nimba and Bong Counties flagged the following C/SDFs challenges:

1. Undue interference of lawmakers in the administration of funds hampers the implementation of projects.
2. CSOs, especially in Bong County, are not involved during the process of assessing the needs of the county by its officials.

⁵⁵ "Liberia: Accusing Fingers at Bong Superintendent over U.S. \$25k Mismanagement." June 13, 2015. <http://allafrica.com/stories/201506151798.html> (Accessed on March 31, 2016). Bong County Superintendent, Selena Polson-Mappy, has been suspended pending an investigation into the mismanagement of \$25,000.00USD from the CSDF.

⁵⁶ "Liberia: Investigation Mission Reports on Liberia Social Development Funds." September 9, 2015. <http://allafrica.com/stories/201509101233.html> (Accessed on March 31, 2016).

3. County government officials often do not disseminate information on the progress of projects.
4. Accessing CSDF funding from the Ministry of Finance in Monrovia is a slow and bureaucratic process, which causes delays of payments to contractors for projects.

Prioritizing issues is difficult because there are so many needs including the lack of competent teachers and medical practitioners, poor roads, limited access to quality education, dearth of clean water and sanitation facilities, and a lack of administrative offices in districts, among others.⁵⁷ It is important to also emphasize that citizens could be mobilized to draw attention to this frustration via means of peaceful protest. Further, it is worthwhile to acknowledge that some of the grievances around C/SDFs could be mitigated or resolved by means of information dissemination in terms of project design and funds allocation, overall transparency in the process along with providing for inclusive citizenry participation in the C/SDF discussions. The grievance can also be reduced if county officials responsible for managing these funds are brought to account when they abuse their role, influence, and power.

HEALTH

Ebola Virus Disease. On Thursday, March 31, 2016, a 30 years old woman died of EVD at Redemption Hospital in the New Kru Town suburb of Monrovia. “She died on arrival and a swab was taken, analyzed in the lab and was confirmed, said Tolbert Nyenswah, head of Liberia’s Ebola response.”⁵⁸ The Liberian woman’s death came just one day after the World Health Organization’s Emergency Committee’s 9th meeting convened by the WHO Director-General under the International Health Regulations (2005) (IHR) “provided its view that Ebola transmission in West Africa no longer constitutes an extraordinary event, that the risk of international spread is now low, and that countries currently have the capacity to respond rapidly to new virus emergences.”⁵⁹

To review the history of EVD in Liberia, the first announcement of suspected EVD cases and deaths in Liberia came on March 27, 2014, from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) when the WHO reported eight suspected cases, including six deaths, in individuals with recent travel history to Guinea.⁶⁰ Liberia had the highest number of confirmed Ebola deaths at 4,809. “The WHO said that at the peak of transmission, during August and September 2014, Liberia was reporting between 300-400 new cases every week.”⁶¹ According to a 2014 report by the International Crisis Group (ICG), many hospitals closed and with only

⁵⁷ Ibid. The five challenges described during the CSOs meeting in Nimba and Bong Counties in August 2015 were generally the same grievances voiced by the Conflict Vulnerability Assessment participants in all 13 counties.

⁵⁸ “A New Case of Ebola has been Confirmed in Liberia.” April 1, 2016. <http://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2016-04-01/who-says-new-case-of-ebola-confirmed-in-liberia> (Accessed April 2, 2016).

⁵⁹ “Statement on the 9th Meeting of the IHR Emergency Committee regarding the Ebola Outbreak in West Africa.” March 29, 2016. <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/statements/2016/end-of-ebola-pheic/en/> (Accessed April 2, 2016).

⁶⁰ <http://www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/outbreaks/2014-west-africa/previous-updates.html>. (Accessed January 20, 2016).

⁶¹ “Ebola: Mapping the Outbreak.” January 14, 2016. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-28755033> (Accessed January 20, 2016).

45 doctors available for a population of a little more than 4 million, many illnesses including malaria and the common cold became fatal because there was no capacity or health infrastructure to accommodate EVD-related and non-EVD illnesses.⁶² According to the CDC, “the WHO first declared Liberia free of Ebola virus transmission on May 9, 2015. A new cluster of six Ebola cases was discovered in June 2015, but the country was declared free of transmission again on September 3, 2015. In November 2015, a second cluster of three cases was reported. On January 14, 2016, Liberia was for the third time declared EVD-free by the WHO.”⁶³

Even in the face of uncertainty brought by EVD, GOL seemed to manage the situation and Liberians demonstrated immense courage and resilience in the “face of what was perhaps the worst public health crisis of the decade.”⁶⁴ There was, however, heavy criticism of the GOL during the Ebola crisis causing a loss of some of the trust that the new government had begun to build among Liberians since the war. The international community played a major role during the crisis, and there was no widespread violence or instability resulting from the outbreak once the GOL ceased quarantining the West Point community in Monrovia.

The EVD crisis also brought to light some of the challenges of donor coordination and the tendency, when operating under a crisis response, for donors to provide interventions out of sync with the Liberian context. As one seasoned (US) health worker noted “the American and western obsession with technology often resulted in an embarrassing mismatch of technical solutions to human problems—high tech equipment was often provided that quickly became unserviceable, inoperable, and uninterpretable.” USG health teams (National Institutes of Health (NIH), CDC, and others) also had an intense focus on data collection that often added unnecessary burden to an already burdened population, usually without even providing a feedback loop to those from whom the information was collected about what the data meant. The next round of development planning in this area would benefit from more strategic, long-term planning that includes building local capacity and working with (in controlled ways) country systems, to help these to become more ready to sustain not only the next epidemic, but the most mundane treatment programs.

As a marker of resilience, the response by Liberians to EVD in terms of community action, in the face of real or perceived inaction and ineffectiveness by the GOL, demonstrated a sense of self-reliance along with strong social networks, resiliencies posited in all three conflict assessments (2010, 2011, and 2016). Although assessment interviewees did not directly state that their strong sense of self-reliance and durable community networks visible during the EVD crisis could or would transfer to other crisis situations, they did express that EVD raised their understanding and practices of disease prevention. Many Liberians stated they are now better equipped to manage health concerns than prior to EVD. Successful community initiatives to respond to, treat, and prevent the spread of EVD were spearheaded by local leaders and other highly motivated community members. Many of the practices and associations established during

⁶² “International Crisis Group, Statement of Ebola and Conflict in West Africa.” September 23, 2014. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/publication-type/media-releases/2014/africa/statement-on-ebola-and-conflict-in-west-africa.aspx> (Accessed January 20, 2016).

⁶³ <http://www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/outbreaks/2014-west-africa/case-counts.html> (Accessed January 20, 2016).

⁶⁴ S. Podder, “Bridging the ‘conceptual-contextual’ divide: security sector reform in Liberia and UNMIL transition.” *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 2014, Vol. 7, Num. 3, pp. 353-380.

the epidemic “appear to have been further developed or sustained in the wake of Ebola.”⁶⁵ It is conceivable that if Liberians were to experience another type of crisis or outbreak, be it health or political, they may reference or rely on the known and concrete practices, relationships, and networks established during EVD to help manage, mitigate, and, ultimately, resolve the situation.

EDUCATION

In 2016, the assessment team heard widespread grievances related to lack of educational opportunity. According to the UNDP’s 2015 Human Development Report, only 26.7 percent of the Liberian population aged 25 and above had at least some secondary education.⁶⁶ When interviewees had access to secondary schooling, their grievances related to lack of secondary education were elevated into desires for greater access to community colleges or universities. A number of Liberians interviewed for this assessment expressed that they did have access to schools with trained teachers and the opportunity to graduate and attend either a university or community college. Many interviewees including those in informal settlements and small rural communities expressed the desire for access to education or training that would lead to viable employment. The need for greater vocational education opportunities to facilitate job creation and independent employment was seen in epidemic proportions throughout the country. This is consistent with a 2015 Afrobarometer survey of Liberia, in which 50 percent of urban respondents and 48 percent of rural respondents expressed that education should be the government’s “top priority for additional investment.”⁶⁷

Public Security. The LNP and other security sector actors’ lack of both numerical capacity and logistics/equipment resources are a hindrance to their real and perceived ability to respond effectively to security problems. This lack of resources may also create incentives for corruption. In Grand Cape Mount, Margibi, and Grand Bassa the assessment team heard from officers that factors such as low salaries of less than US\$150/month, lack of rental allowances for officers, and an average monthly rent in the locality of about \$150/month combine to “make zero tolerance for corruption impossible.”

The lack of capacity and resources also fuels mistrust of the police by citizens. In the 2015 Afrobarometer survey in Liberia, 42 percent of respondents stated they trusted the police “not at all” and 34 percent trusted them “just a little.” Sixteen percent of respondents stated they trusted the police “somewhat,” 17 percent stated they trusted the police “a lot,” and one percent responded “don’t know/haven’t heard enough.”⁶⁸ These findings were confirmed most strongly in Monrovia and the surrounding areas of Montserrado where stories of police corruption, abuses, and impunity were widespread and many feared that problems would only

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Human Development Report 2015: Liberia. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/LBR>

⁶⁷ Afrobarometer Round 6, Survey in Liberia, 2015, http://afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/publications/Summary%20of%20results/lib_r6_sor_en.pdf

⁶⁸ Afrobarometer Round 6, Survey in Liberia, 2015, http://afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/publications/Summary%20of%20results/lib_r6_sor_en.pdf. The survey question was: “How much do you trust each of the following, or haven’t you heard enough about them to say: The police?” and the response options given were “not at all”, “just a little”, “somewhat”, “a lot”, and “don’t know/haven’t heard enough”. (Accessed April 5, 2016).

worsen with UNMIL's departure. One informant in Monrovia commented "the LNP themselves in Monrovia are often traumatized from the war, they have no idea of how to handle situations."

Lack of security sector capacity was a common grievance voiced in all 13 counties visited by the assessment team. Interviews with LNP officers and other security personnel including DEA, BIN, Customs, and NSA in Monrovia, county seats, major cities and towns, border areas, and villages highlighted the security sector's lack of personnel and equipment. In a number of instances, police stated that they lacked basic equipment and vehicles to do their jobs, and their salaries while regular were meager. These problems were worse in rural and border areas. The Liberia 2014 Human Rights Report supports these observations, noting that "regular LNP officers remain poorly equipped, ineffective, and slow to respond, although the foot patrol met with some success in curbing crime in some areas. Police have limited transportation, logistics, communication, and forensic capabilities, and they do not have the capacity to adequately investigate many crimes, including homicides."⁶⁹ Plainly stated, many Liberians, and security actors themselves, state that security sector officials lack the resources to appropriately fulfill their job responsibilities.

In the counties outside of Montserrado, many Liberians interviewed for this assessment acknowledged the predicament security officials face in terms of lack of resources, and in many cases were sympathetic to their plight. Interviewees observed that the lack of personnel, logistics, and equipment is a real hindrance to the government's ability to conduct criminal investigations, prosecute criminals, and provide adequate services to victims of crime.⁷⁰ Many assessment participants (largely those outside of Monrovia) said they resort to requesting police assistance even though they do not trust them. Interviewees also commented that the police are trying to do their jobs. However, the overarching perception is that police are inefficient, unprofessional, and unreliable. Perhaps this explains why citizens interviewed in the 2015 Afrobarometer survey identified security as the second area, following education, where they would want the government to invest additional resources should these resources become available.⁷¹ This commonly held grievance could be mitigated with attention to recruitment programs to increase the numbers of security personnel, increased budget allocations for equipment and logistics, and community policing efforts designed and implemented to build trust between the communities and the police. In one border county visited by the assessment team, officers recommended that recruiting from the region would increase the likelihood of new recruits remaining in assigned locales and improve security operations, as opposed to the current practice of training and recruiting officers in Monrovia and then assigning them to communities where they may not have strong ties. At the same time, there is a need for far greater oversight mechanisms. A widespread grievance in Monrovia was that the police acted with impunity. A number of informants felt strongly that police reforms were necessary and that only the army (and not the police) should be allowed to carry guns.

⁶⁹ "Liberia 2014 Human Rights Report." <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/236586.pdf> (Accessed April 1, 2016).

⁷⁰ "Liberia 2015 Crime and Safety Report." <http://www.osac.gov/pages/ContentReportDetails.aspx?cid=16960> (Accessed March 31, 2016).

⁷¹ The question was "If the government of this country could increase its spending, which of the following areas should be the second priority for additional investment." 25% identified security, the highest percentage followed by education and health. As mentioned before, the first priority was education.

In terms of drug-related abuses and crimes, Liberians in all 13 counties visited stated that unemployed and/or unskilled youth are especially vulnerable to drug-related issues. Many assessment respondents noted that they see an increase in drug use by the youth, particularly young men, and this has resulted in an increase in drug-related crimes. To note, the use of drugs and drug-related crimes was heard in Monrovia, the urban areas of counties, and border areas with Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Cote d'Ivoire. The 2015 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report states that Liberia is not a significant transit country for illegal drugs, but "the country's nascent law enforcement capacity, porous border controls, and proximity to major drug transit routes contribute to trafficking to and through Liberia."⁷² In a county bordering Sierra Leone, interviewees from the security service expressed that their lack of equipment/capacity enabled an increased inflow of drugs, and also observed that there was a limited DEA presence at the border despite increased drug trafficking activity in Sierra Leone flowing into Liberia. The report acknowledges that there is no reliable data on drug consumption or drug trends in the country at large, but consumption of marijuana is common. Participants in rural and remote communities and villages did not report witnessing drug use or drug-related crimes among the youth or adults. Strategies exist to prevent and mitigate drug use and crime among youth and adults alike. Again, information dissemination on the harmful effects of drugs, a national campaign to explain societal ramifications, and government investment to curtail drug use and crime is a possible tactic to reduce this potential conflict dynamic. According to this report, the Liberian Drug Enforcement Agency has begun to receive international donor assistance from the United States and the UN for the first time in recognition of its new leadership and growing effectiveness. Other donors have expressed interest in supporting this Agency, but none have yet provided assistance.⁷³ Drug use and drug-related crime is unlikely to result in destructive, national conflict. However, drugs destroy the relationships and networks of families and communities. To ignore or dismiss the concerns around drug use and drug-related crime provides for quiet acceptance, which can lead to an increase in both user rates and related crime.

UNMIL Withdrawal. Another commonly expressed grievance across the 13 counties visited reflects the security sector's real and perceived inability to maintain security, particularly in light of the UNMIL withdrawal. In September 2015, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 2239 setting June 30, 2016 as the date when Liberian authorities should take over security responsibilities from UNMIL. The resolution mandated the continued drawdown of UNMIL to a total of 1,240 military and 606 police personnel by this deadline. According to the March 2016 "Monthly Forecast" by the UN Security Council, "pending the impact of the security situation, the Council could decide on the withdrawal of UNMIL and a transition to another form of UN presence in the country."⁷⁴ The Security Council is scheduled to make a decision in December 2016 about the status of the withdrawal and if an extension will be granted. Furthermore, the withdrawal does not mean that UNMIL will completely cease to exist. A Nigerian battalion of 1,200 will be stationed in Monrovia, and 600 UN police will remain in the country. UNMIL will remain in its five locations throughout the country: Monrovia, Voinjama, Gbarnga, Harper, Zerdro, and Greenville. As well, whatever equipment UNMIL retains after the December

⁷² "2015 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR) Country Report: Liberia." <http://www.state.gov/j/inl/ris/nrcrpt/2015/vol1/238990.htm> (Accessed March 31, 2016).

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ "Liberia: March 2016 Monthly Forecast: Security Council Report." February 29, 2016. http://www.securitycouncil.org/monthly-forecast/2016-03/Liberia_15.php (Accessed April 1, 2016).

decision will be at the disposal of the GOL. This means that equipment will be available for logistical support to the GOL and could possibly be used for the 2017 elections.

What is important to emphasize is, at this point in time, UNMIL plays a largely symbolic role in maintaining security. Specifically, some Liberians expressed a desire for UNMIL not to withdraw even though UNMIL had not been operating in their town or county for some time. For example, UNMIL left Fofa City, Lofa over two years ago, and security has remained constant but some participants stated they did not want UNMIL to leave for fear of an increase in crime. The same was true for parts of Nimba County where UNMIL no longer has peacekeeping troops, but residents expressed a fear of increased crime if UNMIL left. It appears from interviews and focus group discussions that, for many Liberians, the presence of UNMIL provides both a psychological sense of reassurance and an international commitment to maintaining and sustaining the peace in Liberia. There is a misperception that the transition of UNMIL would mean the international community writ large would be departing. This sentiment was highlighted in the desk study as well from various reports, including the November 2015 Platform for Dialogue and Peace's "Documenting the Resilience of Liberians in the Face of Threats to Peace and the 2014 Ebola Crisis," the March 2010 Liberia ICAF, and the September 2011 Liberia ICAF Update. In those three reports, Liberians expressed concern over the withdrawal of UNMIL forces citing both the generally positive interactions and effective dispute resolutions mediated by UNMIL along with the worry over the LNP's capability to appropriately maintain security in local communities. As noted by the Platform for Dialogue and Peace (P4DP) in November 2015, "the true test of a nationally owned peace would be if the Liberians themselves preserve the peace for at least five years after UNMIL leaves."⁷⁵ Fears around an increase in crime upon UNMIL's departure could be mitigated in some communities, towns, and counties through information dissemination about UNMIL's present locations and reliable information on current security and crime levels.

Presently, UNMIL's role is handing over all security responsibilities to local authorities, and this has been ongoing. Despite the deadline, there are some doubts about Liberian authorities' ability to handle the transition. There are a number of security sector legislative reforms that have yet to pass including bills to bring needed reforms to the police, immigration services, and firearms and ammunition control. The economic slowdown and drop in global commodity prices impacted the ability of the GOL to secure adequate funding for transition activities. According to one of these documents, the GOL "initially estimated the costs of the transition at \$104 million. Later, the GOL reduced the estimated funding needs to \$38 million without revising any of the set criteria and planned activities. Out of this sum the government could only secure \$10 million."⁷⁶ A concrete concern expressed with the departure of UNMIL from Liberia regards logistics ahead of the 2017 national elections. During the 2005 and 2011 national elections, UNMIL assisted with transportation of ballot boxes and election-related materials to voting precincts and transported ballots and remaining election-related materials back for tabulation and deliberation processes. Logistical challenges remain in Liberia with everything from the lack of roads to lack of electricity that could impede a smooth and successful running of the 2017 elections. Some of these challenges will be resolved by continued infrastructure development with increased paved roads and road network connectivity and the possibility of electrifying the country with the Mein River Hydroelectric Project. However, the GOL, local stakeholders, and

⁷⁵ "Documenting the Resilience of Liberians in the Face of Threats to Peace and the 2014 Ebola Crisis." Platform for Dialogue and Peace (P4DP). November 2015.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

the international community will need to make timely and appropriate decisions on how best to handle and manage the very real logistical challenges that persist as they prepare for next years' elections.

Access to Justice. According to the Liberia 2014 Human Rights Report published by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor: "the most serious human rights abuses were those linked to a lack of justice, judicial inefficiency, corruption, lengthy pretrial detention, denial of due process, and harsh prison conditions."⁷⁷ Throughout the 13 counties visited by the assessment team, a core grievance and active conflict driver (in terms of mob violence) remains Liberians' real and perceived lack of access to justice. Across the country, Liberians described the same concerns when it came to accessing justice. Many Liberians feel that justice comes at a price, and that price does not allow for the poor to seek and obtain justice. A common theme repeated during interviews and focus groups was that in order to have justice, a person must pay for it. Poor people cannot pay for justice; therefore, poor people have no justice. Payment may begin with providing LNP officers money for transportation to the crime scene or payment to officers to deliver evidence to the police station. It is important to note that many assessment participants stated this happened, because the LNP lacks equipment and logistics needed to complete their investigations in a professional manner.

In addition to Liberians reporting having to pay the police to investigate, interviewees also expressed being asked to pay judicial officials including public defenders to adjudicate their cases. Further, absences by court officials cause a delay in the adjudication of cases, which creates a perception that the justice system is ineffective. The lack of judicial access also undermines the credibility of the LNP. Many Liberians interviewed observed arrested individuals being immediately released back into the community due to the LNP's lack of ability to press charges. Many Liberians associate the return of arrested individuals to the community as a problem with the LNP, not the judicial system. Additionally, large caseloads also perpetuate the perception that justice is not delivered. This in turn results in people not wanting to go to court, and they default to traditional structures. It was observed that for many Liberians interviewed for this assessment the traditional structures are useful and successful in handling certain types of cases. It was also reported by participants that Liberians are aware and understand which crimes should be handled by the formal justice system; for example, rape. However, the delay in adjudicating and administering justice means that some criminal cases get resolved with traditional leaders. This in turns generates tension and confusion among citizens, traditional leaders, and the formal judicial officials due to blurred demarcations of which legal system handles what types of cases.

An active, and often violent and destructive, conflict driver appears when citizens mobilize themselves around their lack of access to justice grievances and take "the law" into their own hands. Some Liberian assessment participants stated that if and when the police or courts do not provide justice, particularly as it relates to suspected criminals in their communities, villages, or towns, people mobilize to "arrest" the suspect and then dole out the punishment or "justice." These acts of mob violence often involve people beaten and injured, killed in some instances, and property destroyed. This type of violence is one of the few active conflict drivers that present the ability to spread across counties into national-scale violence.

⁷⁷ "Liberia 2014 Human Rights Report." <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/236586.pdf> (Accessed April 1, 2016).

ECONOMIC GROWTH

Macroeconomic Challenges. National policies that based the majority of Liberia's development strategy on poorly negotiated deals with numerous extractive industries that gave little to no protection to vulnerable local communities (many of which were already displaced by concessionary arrangements) put these communities in even more dire conditions when commodity prices dropped. This "one egg in your basket" development strategy also meant the drop in commodity prices resulted in significant adverse fiscal impacts across the Liberian economy. A high ranking official at the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning indicated to the assessment team that the country is facing a fiscal deficit over the next year or so of US\$150 million, due primarily to the downturn in the price of rubber and iron ore. The outlook is not bright as he expects private sector investments to decline in light of uncertainties due to the 2017 national elections and negative effects of the UNMIL drawdown on aggregate demand. Economic growth outlook for the near-term (next 1-3 years) remains dismal as the implementation of investments plans are delayed, rubber and iron ore prices remain weak and UNMIL withdrawal reduces aggregate demand. These factors will also exacerbate the problem of unemployment. The agricultural sector has been severely reduced as a consequence of government policies, so that today, Liberia produces only a fraction of its pre-war output. Though Liberia was once a net exporter of agricultural products, the country continues to be a net importer, not even managing to meet its own consumption needs. Data from the World Bank on Liberia's agricultural raw materials exports (% of merchandise exports) only exists from 1981-1985 with no other data recorded.⁷⁸ Moreover this single shot approach to economic growth has displaced once productive members of the community, who now lack the skills needed for work outside of the agricultural sector.

Unemployment. Unemployment was a widespread grievance reported by interviewees across the country. In Monrovia, youth in particular cited that even with education such as a high school diploma or college degree, job opportunities were lacking. Some expressed frustration about the lack of employment opportunities and unfair labor practices which involve employers offering mainly casual jobs or temporal employment to avoid providing benefits. Some also expressed dismay at the lack of transparency in the hiring processes, stating that often jobs are given to those with special relationships, not necessarily to those who are qualified.

In the informal settlements in Monrovia, children, and girls in particular, stressed the difficulty of staying in primary and secondary school. In one focus group, every participant described being obliged to drop out on numerous occasions throughout primary and secondary school in order to earn enough money herself to pay for school fees and to be better protected from school staff, who frequently attempt to extort sex when students cannot pay these fees. All participants stressed that education was the thing they wanted the most as it was seen as a way to free themselves from dependence, poverty, and abuse.

With recently depressed commodity prices, there is a concern within the government that the unemployment problem will continue to worsen, particularly in concession areas, as rubber plantations and iron ore mines reduce their activities. It was reported by a high-ranking government official from the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning that low prices on the world market for rubber are leading some rubber plantations in the southeast to shut down as they cannot find buyers.

Future development strategies must seek to find value chain solutions that broaden the employment base and diversify the Liberian economy while supporting the GOL priorities for

⁷⁸ <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/TX.VAL.AGRI.ZS.UN?page=4> (Accessed May 11, 2016).

enhanced attention to agriculture and other kinds of domestic industry, as stated in the Agenda for Transformation.

Land Conflicts. In 2016, land grievances and active land conflict were as visible and persistent in Liberia as they were during the March 2010 conflict assessment. A litany of disputes and deficiencies contribute to both latent and active land grievances, including county-level disputes over boundaries, family- and community-level disputes, inter-ethnic disputes, politicized disputes, cross-border disputes (Liberia vs. Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia vs. Guinea), multiple sales of the same land, lack of trained land surveyors, and insufficient awareness of property laws. In all 13 counties visited, numerous participants expressed knowing or being directly involved in some type of land dispute.

Land grievances and active land disputes often have historical underpinnings stemming from traditional, multigenerational, or ethnic understandings of who owns the land. This has created tension and confusion over ownership, boundaries, and formal property titles and deeds sometimes resulting in multiple sales of the same land. This in turn can create family, community, cross county, and cross-border land disputes. Internal (non-cross-border) land disputes appear localized and unlikely to spark national-level violence. However, if land disputes, particularly those with ethnic overtones or others that become politicized in the coming election cycle, persist it can lead to fractures in families, communities, villages, and towns. Land conflicts can have a lasting and widespread negative impact on community members and society as a whole.

The Land Rights Act (LRA) is intended in part to resolve land disputes of this nature, but it is not yet law.⁷⁹ It does, however, provide a useful method of categorization for understanding land dispute issues. The four land categories for land ownership in Liberia as outlined in the LRA are as follows: Public Land Ownership, Government Land Ownership, Customary Land Ownership, and Private Land Ownership.

1. **Public Land** is land acquired by the government through purchase, escheat, confiscation, gift, or otherwise, which is not presently used by government for its facilities and operations and is also neither Private Land nor Customary Land.
2. **Government Land** is land owned by government and used for its buildings, projects, or activities of the government, including but not limited to land on which are located: the offices of ministries, agencies, and parastatal bodies; military bases; roads; public schools and universities; public hospitals and clinics; public libraries and public museums; public utilities; and airports.
3. **Customary Land** is a portion of land owned by a community and used or managed in accordance with customary practices and norms, and which include, but is not limited to wetlands, communal forestlands, and fallow lands.
4. **Private Land** is owned or otherwise held by private persons under the provisions of this Bill and other applicable laws in Liberia.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ On April 12, 2016, the Liberian Senate voted unanimously to approve, with modifications, the Land Authority Act. It is now with the House of Representatives waiting approval. "Liberian Senate Passes Controversial Land Authority Act." April 13, 2016. <http://allafrica.com/stories/201604131280.html> (Accessed April 19, 2016).

⁸⁰ "Liberia: The Importance of the Proposed Land Rights Act to Liberia's Land Reform Agenda (part I)." November 27, 2015. <http://allafrica.com/stories/201511270949.html> (Accessed April 2, 2016).

Many interviewees noted, however, that some traditional leaders and traditional structures, along with CSOs, CBOs, and international organizations, have had success resolving land disputes. Participants generally acknowledged that traditional and alternative dispute resolution mechanisms were in place and successfully used to resolve conflicts. USAID, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and the Carter Center all implemented successful programs concerning land ownership, property rights, and dispute resolution. These programs addressed the complicated relationship between traditional land ownership systems and statutory laws. During the ICAF interviews in September 2011, many respondents praised the NRC's land dispute resolution program for fairly and effectively handling disputes over ownership. NRC left Liberia in 2015 after 12 years of work in the country.⁸¹ Their program success and subsequent departure makes it particularly crucial to monitor the conflict dynamics surrounding land issues. It will be critical to continue trainings for traditional leaders and others involved in land dispute resolution, to continue to work with the GOL to see that needed reforms are passed and implemented, and to continue providing support for implementing partners such that their programs may persist.

Concessionaries and Natural Resources. There are numerous grievances shared by the directly-affected communities (DACs) of the concessionaries, including frustrations concerning resettlement payments, lack of inclusive participation in negotiating concession agreements, lack of understanding about Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs, and continued environmental degradation and pollution. Additionally, the communities surrounding concession companies express grievances reflecting high expectations for social services provided to employees of the companies but not provided to neighboring communities.⁸² Grievances voiced by both the DACs and surrounding communities were heard around the ArcelorMittal iron ore mine in Yekepa, Nimba and railroad hubs in Green Hill, Bong and Buchanan, Grand Bassa. Similar grievances were expressed in DACs and surrounding communities of the Sime Darby Plantation Liberia (SDPL), in Bomi and Grand Cape Mount counties, in the five southeastern counties of Sinoe, Grand Kru, Maryland, River Cess, and River Gee where Golden Veroleum Liberia (GVL), Maryland Oil Palm Plantation (MOPP), and Cavalla Rubber Company (CRCo) are present, and also in palm oil and rubber plantation (particularly those operated by Firestone) regions of Margibi. Grievances associated with these companies revolve around forced displacement, environmental pollution, destruction of livelihood, and dissatisfaction with public services. If concessions aimed at mitigating these grievances fail to generate employment and improve livelihoods, these grievances may be worsened and gain greater potential to cause conflict as occurred on Oct. 9, 2015, when over 60 women stormed the Sime Darby Plantation in Gbarjike, Klay District, Bomi County in protest at the mysterious deaths of cattle in the plantation and neighboring villages.⁸³

⁸¹ "Leaving Liberia" <http://www.nrc.no/?aid=9147642#.VqOoFDZhrww> (Accessed January 22, 2016).

⁸² In one county, the assessment team heard about recent protests and complaints in a community classified as non-DAC, though located nearby a concession area, when a concession company violated a local content clause in the concession agreement by hiring busing services from outside the community, while there were businesses in the community that could provide the service. There seem to be continuing expressions of frustration from nearby communities who do not receive the types of services and support from concession companies as others who are considered affected by the company's operations.

While interviewees from the DACs and surrounding communities shared particularly egregious violations by many concessionaries regarding resettlement payments, lack of good faith negotiating, and environmental degradation with the assessment team, GVL stands out as especially notorious among these companies. The Guardian, Global Witness, The New York Times, and Al Jazeera America all published articles/reports about GVL's actions in 2014. During the height of the Ebola outbreak in 2014, the small town of Kabada, Sinoe "signed an agreement turning over large swaths of land to Golden Veroleum Liberia. The agreement was signed in September and a few months later larger tracts of land were cleared to make way for palm oil plantations. Kabada was among seven communities that signed agreements with GVL during the Ebola outbreak."⁸⁴ Prior to the 2014 agreements with the seven communities, GVL negotiated a 2010 concession agreement with Liberia's government. The GOL agreed to lease GVL about 220,000 hectares (543,400 acres) of land over a period of 65 years to develop its palm oil operations in Sinoe, Grand Kru, Maryland, River Cess, and River Gee counties. GVL began clearing the land in December 2010, then halted in response to community complaints. They began expansion again in 2013 in Sinoe and Grand Kru.⁸⁵ "In awarding the contract, mistakes were made,' says Walter Wisner, the current vice chair of the Land Commission. There were no consultations with local people. It was a tacit omission by the government that the customary people own the land."⁸⁶ This exemplifies the degree to which deficits in legitimate politics and decision-making (inclusive, transparent, and participatory governance) are undercurrents beneath the grievances observed in this assessment, down to and across sector-level dynamics.

All DACs of the concessionaries shared some universal frustrations regarding both the GOL and the concession companies. First, communities expressed wanting a voice in negotiating concession agreements. This grievance has been addressed by some concessionaries who held meetings with the communities, but the GOL needs to be actively inclusive of the DACs as a way to resolve this frustration. Many DACs expressed disappointment stemming from unmet expectations of services provided by concessionaires. This grievance can be mitigated, and potentially resolved, via information dissemination to spread awareness and understanding of CSR programs, the actual limited role of concessionaires, and the responsibility of the GOL in providing social services (not concessionaires). Grievances concerning environmental degradation, destruction, and pollution will be more challenging to mitigate and resolve until concession companies acknowledge and address these environmental problems for both the DACs and surrounding communities. If the concessionaries participate in environmentally sustainable practices, this can reduce the likelihood of future grievances heard from surrounding communities. This will require more than simple willingness to reform on the part of the concessionaires. It will require the GOL to hold these companies accountable for their industry practices and allow communities an inclusive voice and contributing role throughout the duration of the company's existence on the land and in the community. To reduce fragility and the likelihood of conflict, the USG should look for ways to tie future funding in these sectors to

⁸⁴ "Palm Oil Company is Accused of Exploiting Liberia's Ebola Crisis." August 1, 2015. http://www.newyorktimes.com/2015/08/02/world/Africa/palm-oil-company-is-accused-of-exploiting-liberia-ebola-crisis.html?_r=0 (Accessed April 2, 2016).

⁸⁵ "Palm Oil Firm Under Fire Over Land Deals Sealed During Ebola Crisis in Liberia." July 23, 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/jul/23/palm-oil-golden-veroleum-liberia-land-deals-ebola-crisis> (Accessed April 2, 2016).

⁸⁶ "Riot on the Plantation in Liberia, Palm Oil has Set Off a Dangerous Scramble for Land." October 4, 2015. <http://projects.aljazeera.com/2015/10/liberia-palm-oil/> (Accessed April 2, 2016).

the PSG principles as a means of encouraging greater alignment with these principles by the GOL at the sector level.

SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

The Carter Center’s Mental Health Program in Liberia states that approximately 50-70% of women and girls were sexually assaulted during the civil war.⁸⁷ A June 2014 report titled “The Fallout of Rape as a Weapon of War” by the UK-based think tank Overseas Development Institute (ODI) stated that sexual violence against women was at a high of 77% during wartime and “left many women with lasting physical, psychological, economic, and social problems including HIV infections, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and infertility.”⁸⁸ Sexual and gender based violence is prevalent and widespread across Liberia. Almost all assessment participants in the 13 counties visited stated an awareness of the crimes of rape and domestic violence occurring in communities, towns, and/or counties. “Rape remains one of the most frequently reported crimes in Liberia, according to Liberia’s Ministry of Gender and Development, and the incidence of sexual violence against women in Liberia is among the highest in the world.”⁸⁹

Some interviewees expressed feeling unsafe in their own homes, schools, and communities due to the pervasiveness of SGBV. “Anecdotal evidence suggests that sexual violence may have increased in Ebola-affected post-conflict settings such as Liberia and Sierra Leone, owing to the closure of social institutions, structures and schools, placing girls at a heightened risk. At the same time, access to sexual and reproductive health services has dramatically diminished.”⁹⁰ In some interviews and focus groups in Monrovia, girls and women reported experiencing very high levels of personal insecurity in their homes and schools, because SGBV perpetrators live with them or attend or are employed at their schools.

Many feel that the social breakdown that occurred after 14 years of civil war, including the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war, had a profoundly traumatic effect on Liberian society, “especially as this issue was not addressed during the peace process.”⁹¹ While there have been advances for women in post-conflict Liberia, including improved access to education, strengthened economic roles, and greater political participation, the status of women (particularly in the rural areas) has not vastly improved. Literacy rates for women remain low, their employment opportunities are limited to low-skill positions, they remain vulnerable to SGBV, and are subject to gendered traditional beliefs and customary practices.⁹² This is reflected

⁸⁷ “Development of Mental Health Services in Liberia.” The Carter Center. www.cartercenter.org (Accessed April 1, 2016).

⁸⁸ “The Fallout of Rape as a Weapon of War.” June 2014. <http://www.odi.org/publications/8464-rape-weapon-war-liberia> (Accessed April 1, 2016).

⁸⁹ “Tackling Liberia’s High Rape Rate.” July 18, 2014. <http://www.irinnews.org/report/100364/tackling-liberia's-high-rape-rat> (Accessed April 1, 2016).

⁹⁰ “Conflict-related Sexual Violence: Report of the Secretary-General.” March 23, 2015. http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2015_203.pdf (Accessed on April 1, 2016).

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² “The Fallout of Rape as a Weapon of War.” June 2014. <http://www.odi.org/publications/8464-rape-weapon-war-liberia> (Accessed April 1, 2016).

in Liberia's 2014 rank of 146 out of 155 countries on the United Nations Development Programme's Gender Inequality Index (GII).⁹³

The current administration has taken steps to address the violence and security issues caused by SGBV. In 2014, the Ministry of Gender and Development was transformed into the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection with increased emphasis on SGBV including an SGBV Unit. Similarly, a SGBV Unit under the Ministry of Justice now exists. The programs under this unit have provided an important community-level resource but have stopped receiving central government funding (according to informant interviews) due to budgetary shortfalls. The U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor's Liberia 2014 Human Rights Report notes that while rape is illegal, the government does not often enforce this law effectively. However, the government did establish the Women and Children Protection Section (WACPS) as part of the LNP. In 2014, they investigated "188 reported cases of rape, of which 43 were referred to a specialized sexual violence court (Court E), which by law has exclusive original jurisdiction over cases of sexual assault. Court E's effectiveness was limited by having only one of two authorized judges. A few of the 43 cases referred to Court E were forwarded to the criminal court (Court C) for further judicial review."⁹⁴ Domestic violence is technically prohibited by law. However, domestic violence, much like rape, remains an under-prosecuted crime. "According to the World Health Organization, 33% of married women reported experiencing domestic violence."⁹⁵ The GOL, media, and some CSOs and CBOs make efforts to draw attention to the issue and provide support programs for abused women and girls. However, the "maximum penalty for domestic violence is six month's imprisonment, and the government does not enforce the law effectively and generally treats cases, if reported, as either simple or aggravated assault."⁹⁶

SGBV is rampant in Liberia, and, while this likely will not result in a national conflict driver, it does undermine human and personal security for half of the population. It results in developmental challenges and perpetuates a national attitude of dismissiveness at best and acceptance at worst that these types of crimes will happen. It is important to note that boys and men can also be victims and survivors of SGBV. There is a still stigma associated with SGBV and some women and girls do not report because of the associated shame. The same is true for male victims and survivors. "The social stigma of rape, especially in the rural areas, contributed to the pervasiveness of out-of-court settlements and discouraged formal prosecution of cases."⁹⁷ The SGBV conflict dynamic involving crime, security, justice, and attitudes could be mitigated in a myriad of ways including continued country-wide sensitization to what constitutes SGBV and why it is harmful and hurtful, improved capacity for police and prosecutors, and development of national campaigns to create a new cultural paradigm on gender norms.

⁹³ Human Development Reports: Gender Inequality Index 2014." <http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/GII> (Accessed April 1, 2016). See Annex G for ranked categories of the Gender Inequality Index.

⁹⁴ "Liberia 2014 Human Rights Report." <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/236586.pdf> (Accessed April 1, 2016).

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

SECTION III. TRIGGERS AND TRENDS

A. TRIGGERS

The February desk study highlighted two major events in Liberia that may be triggers for conflict: June 30, 2016 UNMIL withdrawal and the October 2017 national elections. While these two events did surface during the assessment interviews and focus group discussions, participants did not identify any specific key actors (individuals or organizations) that were mobilizing Liberians at this time around any fears they hold about either or both events. The UNMIL withdrawal has been discussed at length in a previous section, but it is still important to list as potential trigger not for activating any known conflict drivers (not even crime) but because of the psychological security UNMIL's presence provides for many Liberians interviewed.

Assessment participants mentioned the national elections slated for October 2017. Many Liberians in the 13 counties visited discussed the possibility that political parties and politicians may try to manipulate people's frustrations or grievances, but assessment participants could not identify specific parties or politicians preparing to mobilize people and who could become key actors in driving violent conflict. Many of the candidates themselves have not yet been announced as primaries and conventions have yet to be held. Civic and voter education along with reliable and accurate information dissemination will be key to addressing and mitigating election-related fears, grievances, and conflict dynamics particularly as UNMIL withdraws and the elections near.

Other possible triggers include a proposal to make Liberia a "Christian Nation,"⁹⁸ failure to pass the Land Rights Act (LRA), further perceived clamp-downs on those who speak out against the government or government corruption, ongoing cross-border issues with Cote d'Ivoire, continued issues with concession companies, the DACs, and surrounding communities, and dislocation of people in urban illegal settlements.

In the fall of 2015, President Johnson Sirleaf stated she would not support any attempts to formalize and codify Liberia as a Christian nation. Although some assessment participants supported the proposed amendment due to concerns about Muslim-backed violence in the broader region, formalizing Liberia as a Christian nation does not seem likely considering the political obstacles of passing the proposal. The proposal itself, however, could trigger small-scale protests. An interviewee in Monrovia stated that some Christian elements, at the grassroots level, support or are taunting their Muslim neighbors about the proposal, while some Muslims are apprehensive about the proposal. On May 3, the Liberia Council of Churches publicly stated they did not support the proposed amendment to codify Liberia as a Christian nation.

Many Liberians interviewed for this assessment expressed that they would welcome passage of the LRA, but expressed concern regarding how the act would be implemented. Furthermore, if the LRA continues to be stalled in the legislature, citizens who feel the government is stalling efforts to clarify land law could initiate small-scale protests in Monrovia.⁹⁹ As highlighted in the regional conflict dynamic section, cross-border issues with Cote d'Ivoire have been ongoing.

⁹⁸ Liberian Constitutional Conference Approves 'Christian Nation' Recommendation. Voice of America: Africa. April 3, 2015. <http://www.voanews.com/content/liberian-constitutional-conference-approves-christian-nation-recommendation/2705243.html>.

⁹⁹ As noted in the land section of this report, the Senate voted unanimously to pass the LRA with modifications on April 12, 2016, and the LRA is now in the House of Representatives.

However, as of January 2016, with a signed communiqué between the two countries, there are renewed attempts to find cooperative and collaborative strategies to prevent future issues and resolve existing tensions and disputes. Lastly, if concession companies continue to violate DACs and surrounding communities' rights and if the GOL does not hold concessionaires accountable to their agreements or use C/SDF correctly and without malfeasance, protests could take place in affected communities. These protests have the potential to turn violent and cause death or injury as well as the destruction of property.

Finally, as detailed above, the housing shortage in Monrovia and additional planned community dislocations is also a major grievance and may represent another future trigger. Squatters and residents of informal settlements expressed insecurity and feelings of marginalization around evictions and the lack of economic opportunities outside the city.

B. TRENDS

During the assessment, participants described various trends in Liberia that could have negative social and economic consequences. World commodity prices for natural resources, including iron ore and rubber, have continued to drop. This directly affects Liberia's population and economy, as the majority of Liberians earn their living from agriculture and nearly 60% of the economy is based on industry and agriculture associated with these resources.¹⁰⁰ Some mining companies like ArcelorMittal have already cut jobs, and others may do so if commodity prices continue to decline. This affects workers, their dependents, and the surrounding communities. In a similar vein, the cost of living has been increasing as observed by Liberians interviewed during the assessment. This means obtaining or retaining a basic standard of living becomes even more difficult, and the majority of Liberians (slightly over 80%) already live on \$1.25 or less a day.¹⁰¹ Another worrying trend observed by assessment participants is the perception of an increasing rate of youth unemployment and under-employment.¹⁰² In all 13 counties visited, youth and adults alike discussed wanting to obtain employment to take care of themselves and their dependents, but jobs are scarce. In interviews and focus groups, youth expressed the reality that even though they graduate with a high school diploma or college degree, there are no jobs available.

The last two worrisome trends are increased youth drug use and teen pregnancy. In 2015, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Liberia representative reported that "teenage pregnancy has become prevalent in the country over the past few years, especially among school-age children."¹⁰³ Liberian focus group participants in Monrovia and the counties attributed the problem of teen pregnancies to various factors including drug use, erosion of morals by the drug and entertainment businesses, limited access to family planning drugs and services, and lack of opportunities to go to school. The 2013 Demographic and Health Survey in

¹⁰⁰ United Nations Data: Liberia.

<http://data.un.org/CountryProfile.aspx?crName=liberia#Economic>.

¹⁰¹ <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/LBR> (Accessed January 21, 2016).

¹⁰² This may only be a perception held by assessment respondents as data from the World Bank states unemployment, youth total (% of total labor force ages 15-24), is actually decreasing from 5.0% in 2011, 5.0% in 2012, 4.6% in 2013, and 4.6% in 2014. However, the World Bank does not report data for 2015. <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.1524.ZS> (Accessed May 10, 2016).

¹⁰³ "Liberia: UNFPA Alarms Over Teenage Pregnancy" AllAfrica. October 26, 2015. <http://allafrica.com/stories/201510271734.html> (Accessed April 18, 2016).

Liberia supports this last factor with its finding that “nearly half (49%) of adolescent women with no education have begun childbearing compared with 29% of women with secondary or higher education.”¹⁰⁴

SECTION IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the findings generated by this assessment, the recommendations below are based on USAID’s existing lines of effort in addressing grievances and conflict drivers and/or bolstering resiliencies and mitigating factors. The list is organized by USAID/Liberia’s four Development Objectives and alignment with relevant PSG principles:

- (1) More effective, accountable, inclusive government (PSG1);
- (2) Sustained, market-driven, economic growth and poverty reduction (PSG2);
- (3) Improved health status of Liberians (PSG4); and
- (4) Better-educated Liberians (PSG4).

Many recommendations advise continuing and/or expanding (when appropriate and if/when funding is available) USAID’s projects that already focus on elements or factors that could prevent or mitigate national conflict dynamics. Ongoing readjustment, continued analysis, thorough monitoring and evaluation, and an eye to conflict sensitivities and Do No Harm principles are necessary for projects to continue to achieve their desired results and sustain a stable and democratic Liberia. Similarly, while both countries have moved away from the idea of requiring a compact, New Deal principles, which have been accepted by the USG, the GOL, and numerous other donor and partnering entities operating in Liberia, could help to provide an organizing framework and language for emphasizing the importance of many of the conflict drivers identified in the 2016 CVA to programmatic concerns.

Do No Harm principles and the New Deal principles also both emphasize the importance of thinking about *how* interventions are made in terms of their impact on local institutions and capacities. These are referred to as Legitimization Effects, Substitution Effects, and Distribution Effects in the Do No Harm framework and as Legitimate Politics, Public Resource Management, and Use of Country Systems in New Deal parlance. The principles overlap. Both argue, for example, that aid programs that focus on building local capacity for service delivery (such as in health or education) will do more to reduce underlying sources of fragility and conflict over the long-term than those with more immediate/short term goals of service provision. These are systemic problems that must be addressed in Liberia if programs are to be implemented in a conflict sensitive manner.

Achieving this on a broader scale will require ongoing, concerted engagement with CSOs, the private sector, the GOL, and with implementing partners (such is the practice through procurement and CDCS processes) to continue to ensure the *right* goals are set. The most impactful goals will ask whether programs are reducing the underlying sources of fragility that drive sectoral level grievances or helping to sustain them. The New Deal provides an added tool or framework that can help missions to have this conversation and to align thinking on these goals with our partners. For the donor community this may also include leveraging capabilities to see that problems are addressed on a more systemic level. On the GOL side, this may mean

¹⁰⁴ “Liberia: 2013 Demographic and Health Survey, Key Findings.”
<http://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/SR214/SR214.pdf>.

using creative implementing agreements with the GOL to peg certain kinds of programs to indications of GOL progress in meeting some of its own obligations to reduce conflict and fragility using New Deal principles. For example, conflict sensitive programming can begin by asking what steps have been taken toward achieving greater political inclusivity on decisions that have led to some of the sector-level grievances that USG funding is being sought to address.

A. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CURRENT PROGRAMMING

MISSION-WIDE RECOMMENDATIONS

Develop USAID’s Gender Line of Effort: The Mission should consider mainstreaming a gender line of effort across all portfolios and establish a dedicated work-stream for gender. Gender-related inequalities exist throughout Liberia in all sectors, as evidenced by both statistical data and the qualitative research garnered via this assessment. Recommendations for illustrative activities include: (a) supporting the development of women’s associations, including capacity building and vocational training; (b) developing girls’ clubs or “safe spaces” for girls to learn about their rights and be informed of various gender-specific social services; and (c) developing programs that promote women’s empowerment while also involving men in a dialogue around changing gender norms. Efforts should focus on sensitizing the population to evolving gender roles, sexual and gender-based violence, and economic incentives for gender-inclusive activities. USAID should also consider developing programs or leveraging partners that work with the DOE and the DOL on creating education to employment opportunities and the LNP and Ministry of Justice SGBV crime units and courts, respectively, to support both skills training for LNP officers and judicial officials and psycho-social counseling for victims of gender-based violence.

DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVE I: MORE EFFECTIVE, ACCOUNTABLE, INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE

Strengthen USAID’s Civic Education Lines of Effort: Continue with both USAID programs, Liberia Elections and Political Transitions (LEPT) and Constitution Review Committee (CRC), which support civic education programs. Also consider the Liberia Accountability and Voice Initiative (LAVI) program as an appropriate platform to support this type of initiative. Leverage USAID’s sectoral programs to include civic education and coordinate with relevant GOL entities and Liberian civil society as well as with other international donors on civic education programs related to the political process including multi-party democracy and the rights and obligations of citizens. Consider developing or supporting existing efforts around town hall meetings for citizens to learn about civic responsibility. Strengthening Liberians civic understanding may help mitigate any grievances or conflict drivers that start to surface as the 2017 national elections draw closer.

Continue to Support Reliable Information Dissemination via Civil Society and Media: USAID’s Liberia Media Development (LMD) project to increase Liberians access to reliable and accurate information will be crucial as UNMIL withdraws and the 2017 elections approach. Further, LAVI may provide a suitable platform to support accurate electoral and UNMIL transition information. Information dissemination is also invaluable for raising people’s understanding of various government policies and procedures, service delivery, and concession agreements. Broader information networks could also help inform disenfranchised groups about available government services.

Continue with all of USAID’s Governance Lines of Effort: Continue with all ongoing and recently awarded governance projects including the Governance and Economic Management

Support Project (GEMS), Public Sector Modernization Project (PSMP), Liberia Integrated Public Financial Management Reform Project (IPFMRP), Liberia Decentralization Support Program (LDSP), Local Empowerment for Government Inclusion and Transparency (LEGIT), mSTAR, eGovernance, and Revenue Generation for Governance and Growth (RG3). Consider restarting or funding the next phase of recently completed projects such as the Liberia Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (LEITI). Governance projects seek to increase the capacity and accountability of GOL, which is critical for increasing the legitimacy of democracy in the country as well as citizens' confidence and trust in the GOL. Look for opportunities to integrate governance issues across sectoral programming in order to address the underlying causes of conflict and fragility in these areas.

Develop Stronger Ties to Access to Justice Programs: Continue implementing the Access to Justice Project (A2JP). Consider greater support to The Carter Center's Access to Justice Program given the weaknesses of the justice system, the level of frustration citizens expressed with lack of access to justice, and the potential this social grievance has as a driver of violent conflict. Promote programs to increase citizen's understanding of the role of the police and the courts in the justice system. Consider further development of programs to ease the tension between customary and formal judicial systems.

Leverage Existing Programs that Build Local Leaders' Land Dispute Resolution Knowledge and Strategies: Continue with support to the Land Governance Support Activity (LGSA) with the understanding that it is conditional upon passage of the Land Rights Act (LRA) and conduct a systems map on the problem to ensure that those who do not want the LRA also want the LGSA. Conditions related to the LRA should be tied to something important to those who are blocking the LRA. Consider working with partners to continue to build village leadership capacities and knowledge of land rights and land registration processes, as well as the capacity for the marginalized populations within villages to participate in the land use planning and registration process. Consider supporting partner's programs on alternative dispute resolution mechanisms as it relates to land and property claims. Building new and supporting existing land-focused programs will help reduce, mitigate, and prevent land-related conflict drivers as well as bolster the skills of traditional leaders, CSOs, and CBOs that were identified as actively resolving disputes and reducing tensions in numerous communities before they escalate and turn violent.

DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVE 2: SUSTAINED, MARKET-DRIVEN ECONOMIC GROWTH TO REDUCE POVERTY

Engage Concessionaries, Directly Affected and Surrounding Communities, and GOL to Foster Greater Understanding: Dialogues with all parties are of specific concern given high community expectations that corporations can replace government as the provider of basic services. Dialogues will first need to consider the fact that many concession agreements were made without input from communities. Programs should work with CSOs (such as SDI, Save My Future, and SIDA) to encourage the formation of legal systems that allow for greater inclusivity and transparency before land rights are given away. Increase participatory approaches (consider LAVI as they are currently engaged in this sector) to dialogue and consultation in communities, and identify how to help build capacity within communities to interface with private sector and the GOL and vice versa. Consider supporting measures to ensure government accountability for abuse of funds resulting from concessions. Consider developing programs to monitor private-sector compliance with concessionary obligations. This line of effort will directly affect communities who feel aggrieved by concession companies and will help to mitigate and help resolve active conflict dynamics.

Continue and Expand Existing Road Projects: Continue with both the Feeder Roads Maintenance Program (FRAMP) and Local Roads Construction IQC. Consider expanding the Rural Roads Rehabilitation programs set to conclude in 2016. Lack of roads and lack of access to roads is a major source of grievance shared by the overwhelming majority of Liberians. Furthermore, road development assists in addressing other social demands such as Liberians' ability to access schools, healthcare facilities, and markets.

Continue with Hydroelectric Plans and Renewable Energy Projects: Continue the Mein River Hydroelectric Project and continue to develop and support renewable energy projects if the following pilot projects are successful: Sorlumba Biomass Energy Project, Kwendin Biomass Energy Project, and Gbanway Solar Energy Project. Continue with the Beyond the Grid Program to develop institutional capacity of local energy cooperatives and Liberia Rural Renewable Energy Agency (RREA), as well as provide engineering services for Mein River Hydroelectric Project. Continue with LEC FARA project to deliver more power to neighborhoods in Monrovia. With only roughly 2% of the Liberian population connected to any sort of power grid, access to electricity is crucial in addressing numerous related social problems voiced by Liberians including crime, lack of safety and security, poverty, unemployment, and inadequate education and health services.

Strengthen USAID's Agriculture Lines of Effort: Support the new Feed the Future Liberia Agribusiness Development Activity (LADA) and consider other expansion programs after Food & Enterprise Development (FED) concludes on September 12, 2016. If successful, consider expansion of BHEARD (Borlaug Higher Education for Agricultural Research and Development). In a similar vein, consider development of a project to build the capacity of agricultural associations. Look for ways to pair education and local agriculture initiatives to rebuild communities around a more diverse set of agricultural outputs.

DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVE 3: IMPROVED HEALTH STATUS OF LIBERIANS

Continue with USAID's Health Lines of Effort: Continue support to the following projects: Partnership for Advancing Community-Based Services (PACS), Maternal and Child Survival Program (MCSP), Health Communication Capacity Collaborative (HC3), UNICEF Immunization, and Supply Chain Management System (SCMS), DELIVER, and Contraceptive Procurement. Liberians in all 13 counties visited expressed grievances around desiring more access to healthcare or lacking access to any healthcare. Continuing with all health lines of effort is critical in addressing health-related grievances shared by the majority of Liberians.

DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVE 4: BETTER-EDUCATED LIBERIANS

Continue with Higher Education Projects: Continue to support the Excellence in Higher Education for Liberian Development project. Many Liberian youth, in all 13 counties visited, shared grievances related to a lack of, or a lack of ability to access, higher education. Many youth interviewed for this assessment expressed the sentiment that higher education was out of reach for them even though they had graduated secondary school and desired to continue with higher education. Supporting continued development of Liberians' higher education goals will help build the human capacity of existing institutions and ensure a more qualified next generation. Work with local entities that are striving to find value-chain solutions to the education to employment problem such as BWI, the DOL, and in Buchanan, the CSC. Tie employment and education projects to planned resettlements of urban populations by strengthening partnerships with the National Housing Authority and the Ministry of Public Works.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE CDCS

MISSION-WIDE RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthen the Understanding between USAID Programming and New Deal: The New Deal principles, which reinforce the findings in this assessment, comprise an additional policy tool that can be used by the mission to leverage cooperation by key entities in order to attain a more systems-level set of solutions to the underlying causes of conflict and fragility. This language and these principles can be used to inform agreements across all sectors, as this assessment has found fragility to be a key factor in all areas.

Ensure USAID/Liberia staff is more comfortable with New Deal principles and language so that staff members are better equipped to use key language and concepts. Explore sector-specific ways to link programming to phased benchmarks that reflect GOL achievement of New Deal targets as a means of promoting long-term development gains and conflict mitigation. Evaluate programming with an eye to give credit when donor communities are in line with a unified vision around New Deal principles and development objectives.

GOVERNANCE

Support Local Systems for Service Delivery: Leverage the gains made by the GOL (many with the help of donor engagement) to create more inclusive and participatory frameworks and mechanisms for enhanced service delivery in all sectors. This assessment found many encouraging developments in the governance sector to suggest that Liberia is ready for donor engagement that puts greater emphasis on supporting long-term Liberian institutional arrangements in order to move the country closer to country based solutions and more sustainable (non-donor-dependent) service delivery. Supporting country systems is a central component of our commitments to Liberia under the New Deal. More importantly, strengthening these systems, particularly those reflected in the AFT, related policy documents and proposed legislation (which show great progress in terms of alignment to New Deal Principles) will work to enhance country resiliencies as communities see evidence of increasing transparency, accountability, and effectiveness in governing structures.

Land Governance: Effective governance and dispute resolution country systems are critical for mitigating conflict and creating an environment conducive to long-term peace. This notion has gained international recognition and support, and is reflected most prominently in Goal 16 of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, and in the New Deal for Engagement which captures international consensus around the need to build development efforts around activities that strengthen legitimate politics (as indicated in PSG I) and legitimate country systems (as indicated in the TRUST principles).

Land grievances and conflicts reach across sectors and are directly attributable to a legacy of poor governing structures and processes resulting in widespread exclusion of and lack of consideration of DACs. The findings in this assessment, as well as the commitments made by the GOL to the New Deal call for a role for civil society in holding governments more accountable and representative. In Liberia, the Sustainable Development Institute (SDI) has been working to create space for the participation of local communities in decision-making processes around natural resources and to strengthen the mechanisms that will ensure that communities receive a fair share of the benefits derived from natural resource exploitation. The CAF framework calls for actors to look for ways to build upon resiliencies. The GOL's proposed Lands Rights Act is consistent with New Deal commitments to increase participation, and to promoting legitimate mechanisms for conflict resolution (PSG I) and with FOCUS principles around country-led transitions that support inclusive and participatory political dialogue.

Our assessment found evidence that some of the dispute resolution mechanisms resulting from this process have had a positive effect at mitigating conflict over a number of land disputes in recent years.

The national reform law gives power to communities including rights to receive benefits and shares from forestry. Community Forest Development Committees (CFDCs), of which there are now 25 in 11 counties, have helped put community participation into practice by providing community structures to facilitate that participation. SDI provides support to the CFDCs to better structure their engagement in the reform process and with companies that are pushing for concessions on community lands, and by trying to link them with national level representatives and officials. While these efforts have been notable, there are enduring concerns. For example, in Sinoe, NGO sources indicated that government and company engagement with communities was still superficial. In the agriculture sector, more so than in forestry, community divisions over concessions are more frequent and can result in serious tensions. Some community members in Sinoe who objected to concessions reportedly had to flee from police and fellow community members when rioting erupted. Objectors can be branded as 'trouble makers' and have been ostracized from the group. In other instances, lands are cleared for concessions even after communities reject concessionary agreements.

In mining, though concessionary agreements require companies to make contributions to the SD fund, and SDI assessment found no trickle down of these funds to affected communities. Though concessionary arrangements are generally made at the national level, in some regions abuses occur at the county level, where contracts often land with relatives of those in the local governance structures (superintendents, senators), and oversight is lacking. The lack of transparency and need for further devolution of authority was discussed throughout the regions.

Improve Coordination with GOL and Other Development Partners: Look for new ways to align programming across partnerships (GOL and other donors) but also for ways to integrate systems mapping into sectoral interventions. Look for creative ways to link efforts to align USG and implementing partner programs with promising GOL initiatives and systems that adhere to agreed principles for effective development work in conflict affected areas (i.e. New Deal Principles). For example, the work of Governance Commission in educating all parties (including those living in informal settlements) about respecting the process)

Consider Building the Capacity of the Security Sector through Local Expansion: Work with GOL to build security sector locally through local government structures (increase number of officers). Recruiting and training locally will also add jobs and build rapport with the local community. Consider training of trainers component (human rights training, crowd management skills, understanding the law) so that security sector capacity will increase. Support the creation of GOL measures (possibly the Police Act) to increase accountability in the police force for instances of abuse, brutality, and extortion.

ECONOMIC GROWTH

Consider a Different Approach to Information Dissemination for Forest-based Communities: Continue with all USAID programs focused on sustainable forest-based enterprises; however, consider a different approach regarding sensitization of communities to knowledge-building about sustainability, deforestation, and biodiversity loss, as forest community members interviewed for this assessment expressed frustrations around restrictions on clearing trees for building their farms.

Establish a Framework to Conduct Continued Policy Analysis as it Supports Economic Development: Consider conducting systematic analysis to support high-level

economic decision-making with greater emphasis on job creation, economic diversity, and sustainability. This is an area where USAID's leadership in identifying options and working with other development partners could be helpful given the emerging fiscal challenges that pose a significant challenge for government operations in the near future.

Expand Livelihood Development and Diversify the Economy: Support job training and livelihood development for youth through processes that build on local, social, and natural capital based on market-driven analysis and in partnership with domestic actors. Consider strategies to promote economic development focused on diversifying the economy by creating incentives and policies to support investments in other sectors outside of the public sector and extractive industries, increase competitiveness by improving the business climate, while demonstrating alignment with core principles identified in this assessment to help ensure resilience (also important for a stable business climate) and support entrepreneurship.

EDUCATION

Expand Vocational Education and Training: Consider expanding vocational training opportunities for young people that are reflective of both the opportunities and needs in particular communities and the country as a whole to create a diverse workforce and economy. In all 13 counties visited during the assessment, both youth and adults voiced grievances about the lack of vocational training opportunities. Some Liberians expressed the importance of having vocational education as an alternative to universities and community colleges, which the majority of Liberians cannot afford or do not have the opportunity to attend. Expanding vocational education and training opportunities will also address issues of youth being chronically under-skilled and underemployed. Greater professional and vocational human capacities are needed in all areas. All sectors should work to increase sector-level human capacity.

Consider New Basic Education Projects: Consider renewal, expansion to new areas or new counties, or next phase funding for all basic education programs including the Liberia Teacher Training Program (LTTP II), Girls' Opportunities to Access Learning (GOAL) Plus, and Advancing Youth Program (AYP) set to conclude in October 2016. While the assessment team found that more Liberians are accessing basic education than in previous periods, the need for educational services remains in order to continue building a solid education foundation for future generations.

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ANNEX B: MAP OF ASSESSMENT FIELDWORK*



* Counties Visited: Bomi, Bong, Grand Bassa, Grand Cape Mount, Grand Gedeh, Grand Kru, Lofa, Margibi, Maryland, Montserrado, Nimba, River Gee, and Sinoe

* Counties not visited: Gbarpolu and River Cess

ANNEX C: INTERVIEW AND FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about your community. What is your community known for?
2. What are your concerns/issues (grievances)? How have they changed or not changed in the last five years?
- 2.5 Do you feel your concerns/issues are addressed in the decisions made in your community? How? Why do you feel that way?
3. When there are disagreements, what are they about? How are they resolved? Who is involved in the resolution? What is the outcome? How would you describe the relationship now of those involved in the disagreement?
4. When you have concerns or issues, whom do you talk to? Who do you rely on in times of need? Why do you rely on them? What do they do?
5. Are there things or issues that make you feel unsafe in your community? Why or why not?
6. What is working well in your community? How do you know? Who is involved? How do you participate in what is working well? What is working well in Liberia? How do you know? Who is involved? How do you participate in what is working well?
7. What makes you proud of your community? What makes you proud of Liberia? Why?
8. What are the three most important things you would like to see in your community in the next five years? What can you do to promote this? What else is needed to make these things happen in your community? What are the three most important things you would like to see in Liberia in the next five years? What can you do to promote this? What else is needed to make these things happen in Liberia?
9. Anything else to tell me that we have not already discussed?
10. Do you have any questions for us?

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