

Partnering for sustainable peace in Liberia

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Summary

Liberia is going through an important period in its transition, with elections in October 2017 and the final drawdown of the United Nations (UN) peacekeeping mission in March 2018. Despite having made significant strides towards sustainable peace, the country still has a number of urgent peacebuilding priorities that need to be addressed. This policy brief is based on field research carried out in November 2016. It makes targeted, practical recommendations to the UN Peacebuilding Commission on enhancing its support to Liberia, drawing on a wide range of partnerships with other internal and external peacebuilding actors.

LIBERIA IS AT a pivotal point in its transition to a peaceful democracy. In October 2017 the country will have its first 'open seat' elections. The incumbent, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, will step down and hand over power to the leader of one of the 22 political parties that are currently participating in the election. Moreover, despite security fears for the elections, the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) has downsized from over 15 000 military troops in 2007 to around 1 000 soldiers in 2016 (see Figure 1). It will continue to draw down in 2017 in recognition of Liberia's growing ownership of its own transition.

The country has made steady progress in transitioning from decades of civil conflict into a new democracy. It has instituted a number of legal reforms, national strategies and peacebuilding activities to address the root causes of violence. Liberia has been receiving support from the United Nations' (UN) Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) since 2010, but its institutions still need to be supported to consolidate their democracy gains. The 2015 review of the UN's peacebuilding architecture argued that, for the peacebuilding components of peace operation mandates to be more effective, there must be better coordination between the UN Security Council

(UNSC), the PBC and UN Country Teams. It also stated that the PBC could play an enhanced role in advising the UNSC on the diverse range of views from the full spectrum of international peace, security and development tools and actors, and in developing practical and context-specific solutions.¹ Finally, the PBC could be instrumental in bringing together various stakeholders, both from New York and from the field, to mobilise peacebuilding support to conflict-affected countries.

What does this mean in the case of Liberia?

Noting the numerous peacebuilding actors (including national, regional, subregional and international organisations) involved in Liberia's efforts to sustain peace, this policy brief makes practical recommendations on how the PBC, particularly its Liberia Configuration, can enhance its role in the country.

Liberia has instituted a number of legal reforms, national strategies and peacebuilding activities to address the root causes of violence

This paper is part of a broader project called 'Enhancing African responses to peacebuilding', made up of a consortium of three partner organisations – the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) and New York University's Center on International Cooperation (CIC). It is one of a series of products derived from research carried out from 2–10 November 2016 in Monrovia with 36 stakeholders from 22 institutions.²

It takes its point of departure from the Statement of Mutual Commitment (SMC) on peacebuilding in Liberia, signed in April 2016 by the government of Liberia and the PBC. This statement is particularly important, as it is the most comprehensive document confirming the Liberian government's peacebuilding priorities,³ namely security sector development, rule of law, national reconciliation and a peaceful and inclusive society.⁴ Cross-cutting issues such as decentralisation and empowering youth and women were also noted.

This paper first looks at those of Liberia's national frameworks relevant to peacebuilding. It then examines the engagements of multiple peacebuilding actors in Liberia, with a particular focus on the roles of African regional, subregional and bilateral organisations. It also unpacks principles as to why they may hold an advantage in certain peacebuilding activities. Finally, the paper explores how the PBC can develop context-specific solutions to Liberia's peacebuilding priority areas, making use of partnerships.

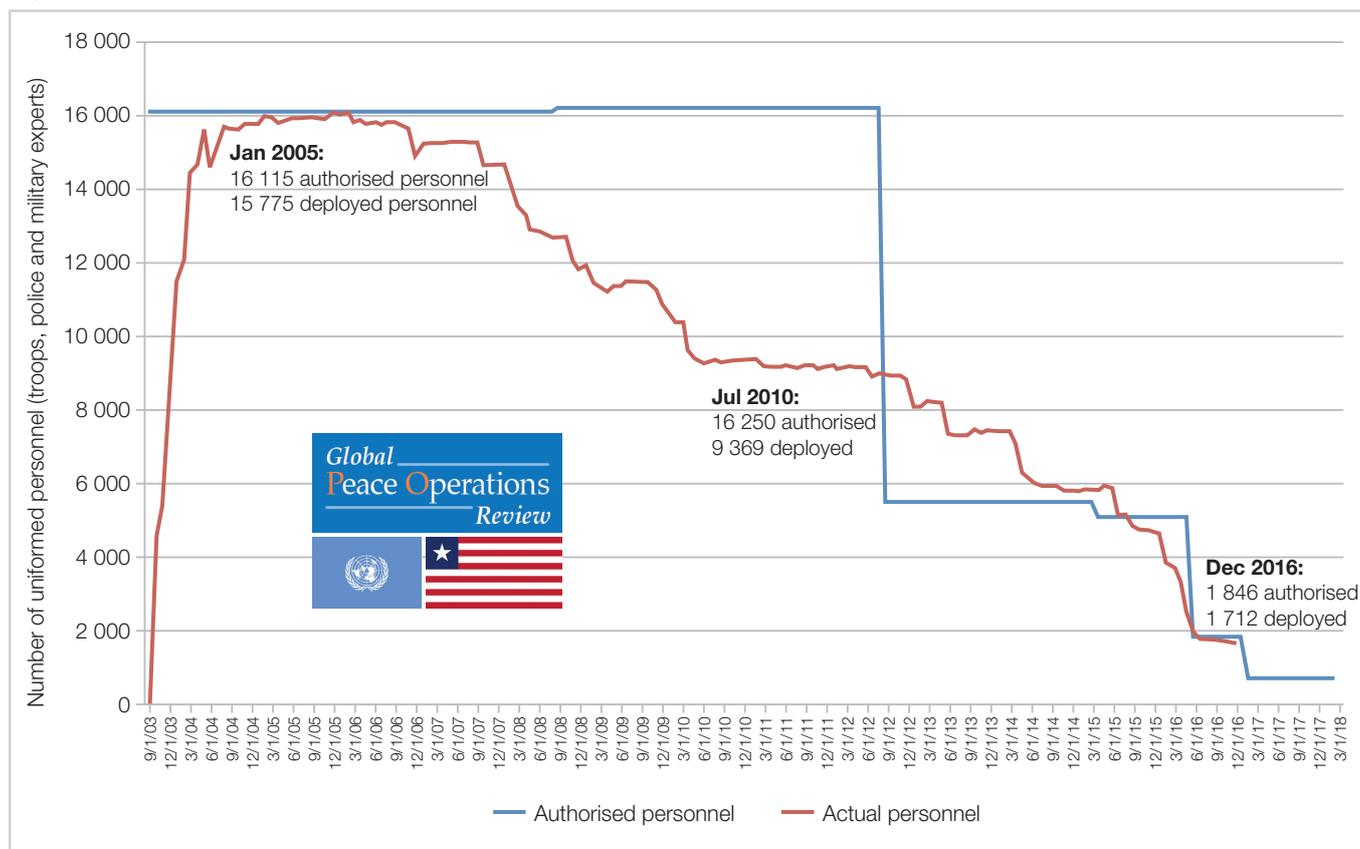
Background

Liberia's history is largely one of ethnic polarisation, exclusion and inequality. The settlement of freed slaves in the country in the early 1800s created tensions with 'indigenous' Liberians, as the freed slaves and their descendants held most of the country's wealth. These trends continued

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Figure 1: UNMIL uniformed personnel, 2003–present



Source: Global Peace Operations Review (www.peaceoperationsreview.org).

through decades of authoritarian rule, and rebellions and civil wars caused major disruptions in the country from the 1980s until a peace agreement was reached in August 2003.⁵ UNMIL was established in September 2003 to support the implementation of the peace agreement and take over from the regional peacekeeping force, the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), which had been the first to intervene.⁶

Liberia still faces myriads of challenges. The root causes of conflict relate to patronage and corrupt political systems, marginalisation and exclusion, ethnic/tribal divisions, human rights violations without redress, disputes over land, centralisation of power and economic disparities.⁷ It has weak human and institutional capacity, inequality and low levels of human development.⁸

The government has made an effort to address these issues, and has put in place a number of strategies that form the basis of national peacebuilding efforts.

Key national strategies

Liberia's initial post-conflict vision, *Liberia Rising 2030*, was that of an equitable, diverse and democratically stable country. It also emphasised the need for a competitive private sector economy with people-focused investment policies.⁹

The Agenda for Transformation (2012–2017) was derived from this vision, and was adopted as a five-year plan. It focuses on four pillars: peace, security, and the rule of law; economic transformation; human development; and governance and public institutions. There is also a cross-cutting pillar that takes into account additional issues such as youth empowerment and gender equality.

Another important document is the Liberian Strategic Roadmap for National Healing, Peacebuilding and Reconciliation (2012–2030).¹⁰ This roadmap is composed of 12 thematic components divided into three areas: accounting for the past, managing the present and planning for the future. It seeks to address some of the recommendations made in Liberia's controversial Truth

and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) report. As mentioned above, the SMC also details the commitments of the PBC and the Liberian government to address peacebuilding priorities.

While these documents form the basis of Liberia's national peacebuilding frameworks, research suggests more must be done to form a social compact between the government and civil society (particularly in the counties).¹¹ The 2015 Review of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture noted that for a country to obtain true ownership of its peacebuilding processes it must engage all spheres of society, a practice known as 'inclusive national ownership'.¹² One way of doing this is through national dialogues that give citizens a stronger voice in the future direction of Liberia.

External actors' engagement in Liberia

The primary national actor tasked with responding to Liberia's peacebuilding priorities is the Liberia Peacebuilding Office under the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which operates with support from the PBC and the Peacebuilding Fund. In addition, the Independent National Commission on Human Rights, which has been revitalised with the appointment of new commissioners, also works on peacebuilding initiatives, primarily relating to the strategic roadmap.¹³

Bilateral African actors claim to engage with one another much more than with traditional donors, primarily because they do not see themselves as such

As has been mentioned, the PBC is looking at ways to enhance context-specific and diverse perspectives on peacebuilding priorities across the world. This includes understanding what both donors and Southern development partners are engaged in. The PBC also wishes to be more active in setting up and drawing down UN missions.

As found in the research, the presence of UNMIL has dominated other UN engagements.¹⁴ A number of agencies operate in Liberia, including the UN Development Programme (UNDP), UN Women and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF). The UNDP has primarily worked on constitutional reform and access to justice, security development and elections. With the gradual departure of UNMIL, it will be important that the UN Country Team comes to the fore more than it does at present.¹⁵

A number of donors are present in Liberia. Sweden has been particularly active in supporting these processes as chair of the Liberia Configuration of the PBC. Others include the European Union (EU), Germany, the United Kingdom (UK) and, not surprisingly, the United States (US), given its history with Liberia.

As revealed in the research, these donors often do not engage with bilateral, subregional and regional actors.¹⁶ China and Turkey, for example, are also



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present yet operate unilaterally, with China often providing resources such as military equipment.¹⁷ In the SMC, the PBC is committed to generating sustained attention to and support for peacebuilding processes, assisting in generating the necessary resources and working with regional actors such as the African Union (AU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Mano River Union (MRU).

The AU, ECOWAS and the MRU are all regional and subregional intergovernmental organisations dealing with Liberia's peacebuilding priorities. While the AU is composed of continental countries and ECOWAS of West African countries, the MRU consists of the four countries sharing the Mano River Basin: Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia and Guinea.¹⁸

Representatives of the AU, ECOWAS and the MRU, as well as bilateral African actors such as Nigeria, claim to engage with one another much more than with traditional donors, primarily because they do not see themselves as such.¹⁹ In practice this means that while there are donor-coordinating groups across thematic areas, African actors that focus on capacity building do not see a role for themselves and do not attend meetings. This leads to a lack of both coordination and an overarching vision for activities between traditional donors and African actors, which in turn result in ad hoc and unsustainable efforts.

What can the AU, ECOWAS and the MRU contribute to Liberia?

The AU, ECOWAS and the MRU have all been present in Liberia for a considerable amount of time, and will continue to be there in the future. In an effort to find 'African solutions to African problems' they have all progressed in developing their institutional capacities to address conflicts.

The MRU is the least developed of all these organisations in terms of building peace and security, mainly because its contributions come from member states that have all gone through wars and are only now revitalising their economies. A history of mistrust between member states may also have contributed to teething problems but, as noted below, the organisation has gone to great lengths to address cross-border issues despite resource constraints.²⁰

The AU, on the other hand, has received more funding, which has allowed it to make significant headway in developing its Peace and Security Architecture. Its Peace and Security Council is supported by five pillars: the Panel of the Wise, the Continental Early Warning System, the African Standby Force and the Peace Fund. The AU has developed a post-conflict reconstruction and development (PCRD) framework and unit to address peacebuilding challenges and has a complementary structure – the African Governance Architecture – to address issues relating to democracy. While it is also increasingly acknowledging the importance of conflict prevention, in the past it often relied on peacekeeping interventions.²¹

The AU, ECOWAS and MRU can assist in a number of areas in which traditional donors struggle to gain a foothold

Similarly, ECOWAS has demonstrated its commitment to peace and security on the continent and has made greater strides than many other African subregional organisations.²² Its interventions have traditionally been focussed on peacekeeping, although it also has frameworks that acknowledge the importance of conflict prevention. Currently it is considering a PCRD framework to address challenges in the region.²³ ECOWAS has recently demonstrated its strength and commitment to democracy through its engagements after the 2016 Gambian elections, showing that it is willing to enforce a lawful transition of power.²⁴

These actors are particularly important in sustaining peace in Liberia and can assist in a number of areas in which traditional donors struggle to gain a foothold. The AU, ECOWAS and the MRU have in the past been criticised for a lack of funding and relying on traditional donors to supplement member state contributions. It is precisely a critical attitude that has often led these actors to distancing themselves from Northern donors. Moreover, these organisations have made great headway in becoming more self-reliant,²⁵ and their commitment to peace and security in Liberia is evidenced by their continued involvement despite the many challenges in member states.

The SMC acknowledges the need to engage with the AU, ECOWAS and the MRU in Liberia, but what is their precise comparative advantage? The first obvious advantage is that these organisations are all (either partially or fully) composed of neighbouring countries. They therefore have a long-term and sustained interest in Liberia, whose instability would have a negative impact on their own stability. The negative spill-over effects from Liberia were particularly evident during its Ebola crisis, and led to quick reactions from all three organisations.²⁶ Neighbouring countries often have similar cultural, social and political overlaps that are relevant in finding localised solutions. Furthermore, these countries have incentives to develop cross-border initiatives such as combatting drug trafficking. While in the past there have been allegations of neighbouring countries' assisting rebel groups in Liberia to further their own interests and therefore acting as sources of Liberia's instability, this is no longer the case, according to a number of stakeholders.²⁷

African actors that engage in Liberia bilaterally, such as Nigeria and South Africa, see themselves as development partners rather than financial donors

Many Southern countries have been eager to become less dependent on what is often seen as patronising, prescriptive and Westernised forms of assistance. Part of this view is derived from the fact that South–South cooperation (SSC) is often unconditional, unlike Northern donor assistance, and respects the principle of non-interference in sovereign countries.²⁸ Southern actors have argued that SSC differs from traditional donor assistance largely because SSC commonly refers to the exchange of resources, personnel, technology and knowledge between developing countries.²⁹ In other words, it is focused on solidarity, rather than the moral and historical responsibility Northern countries feel towards developing countries.³⁰ Moreover, as countries have similar developmental backgrounds they may be more aptly placed to share experiences. As such, African actors that engage in Liberia bilaterally, such as Nigeria and South Africa, see themselves as development partners³¹ rather than financial donors.³² SSC embraces the linking of peace, security and development, and activities by Southern partners range from infrastructure development by the Chinese to skills development offered by Indian institutions in conflict-affected countries.

Efforts to determine how SSC differs from North–South cooperation have suggested that there are several dimensions to SSC, including inclusive national ownership, horizontality, self-reliance and sustainability, accountability and transparency, and development efficiency.³³ These attributes, when utilised fully by African subregional and regional organisations, as well as by bilateral actors, demonstrate a comparative advantage for their engagement.

One major benefit of the approach of these African actors, as mentioned above, has been the focus on inclusive national ownership. As noted by the



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recent UN peacebuilding review,³⁴ 'national ownership is equated with acquiescing [in] the strategies and priorities of the national government', which leads to a lack of trust between the government and civil society. Underlying this is the implicit assumption that unless society owns national peacebuilding frameworks it will not act accordingly.

The AU, ECOWAS and the MRU have all demonstrated their emphasis on inclusive ownership. ECOWAS, for example, has been instrumental in setting up the National Centre for the Coordination of Early Response Mechanisms in Liberia, which feeds into its early warning mechanism at its headquarters in Abuja.³⁵ In this way, Liberia is primarily tasked with addressing its own conflict triggers. The centre will also position civil society alongside national government counterparts. Despite some problems in its set-up, primarily owing to Liberia's centralised system (see below) and inaccessible rural areas, ECOWAS has also shown an emphasis on developing country systems to enhance self-reliance and sustainability.

ECOWAS and the MRU have also emphasised the principle of horizontality in their actions. As neighbouring countries are directly affected by conflict, intergovernmental organisations focus on mutual benefit, shared decision-making and solidarity. ECOWAS, for example, has been working with the Liberian legislature to ensure it benefits from regional integration, and trade in particular, by ratifying the 30 ECOWAS protocols.³⁶

The MRU, on the other hand, has addressed issues of mutual benefit – cross-border trade and its links to peace and security issues – through its border units, where it has set up Joint Border Security and Confidence Building Units (JBSCBUs). These units are composed of representatives from health, police, the army, customs, civil society, youth, women and traditional chiefs.³⁷ The MRU has attempted to ensure ownership through multi-stakeholder partnerships and people-centred inclusivity in its JBSCBU units. Stakeholders noted that the missions have led to greater trust building and better information sharing.³⁸

Given the problems with access to justice, and the limited number of police in Liberia, these initiatives are laudable for making good use of communities to ensure a holistic approach to cross-border issues. Small

communities easily identify perpetrators, making detection easier, and joint initiatives are quick to build trust across borders among people with many commonalities.³⁹

Ownership is also demonstrated by the demand-driven nature of projects. African actors engaging in bilateral efforts in Liberia have focussed primarily on capacity building based upon requests from the government. Nigeria and Ghana have, for instance, been active in training the armed forces, and Nigeria has sent doctors and teachers to Liberia, as well as offered scholarships to Liberian students. Other countries, including South Africa, have agreed to train health lab technicians, upon the request of the Liberian government. There is also a greater focus on ensuring self-reliance and sustainability through this capacity building. For example, Nigeria sends officials to Liberia for a two-year period, rather than giving short training courses. Nevertheless, some stakeholders have noted that the lack of follow-up by the Liberian government means some activities might never transpire.⁴⁰ It is also important to remember that Liberia also suffers from a lack of infrastructure and that the necessarily facilities (such as labs and technical equipment) will need to accompany such training.

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The AU has also operated along SCC principles, taking a people-centred approach to its engagements. It has embarked on peace strengthening projects, including education, health and development cooperatives. To this end it has rehabilitated clinics and schools, and equipped a community-based college in one of the counties. It has also offered financing for development cooperatives to four counties.⁴¹ The AU has made an effort to empower communities as a means of preventing a relapse into violence and consolidating peace, although its focus on development rather than softer political issues is one that can be questioned. The AU already lacks financial resources and may be better off capitalising on its comparative advantages, such as political legitimacy on transitional justice issues. It is also trying to reinvigorate the African Solidarity Initiative (ASI), which aims to

mobilise 'in-kind' technical assistance from member states in support of PCRDR in Africa.⁴²

The research suggested that these organisations are more flexible regarding new activities, as they have fewer pre-determined objectives from headquarters. One criticism encountered during the field research was that traditional donors already have set priorities and funding frameworks, and like to work with the same partners.⁴³ African regional and subregional organisations are able to carry out more cost-effective activities due to their proximity (ECOWAS, for example, has a logistics depot for elections in Sierra Leone) and the difference in purchasing power parity.

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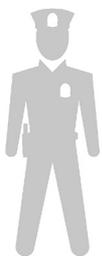
Yet given their limited accountability and transparency (such as the absence of any monitoring and evaluation [M&E] systems or joint monitoring), it is unclear how effective these organisations really are. In this regard, organisations must prioritise their own systems for measuring their effectiveness. The PBC could thus share experiences of developing M&E systems for peacebuilding, or consider joint indicators. Resource constraints also hamper the work of these organisations, and in other contexts they have shown an unwillingness to engage owing to member states' positions on sovereignty. Nevertheless, their utility in supporting Liberia's peace through their broad contributions is significant and greater strategic coordination with donors is imperative. How can this be achieved in reality, looking at the priority peacebuilding areas defined in the SMC and beyond?

Practical implementation of Liberia's peacebuilding priorities

Elections

As noted in the SMC, the 2017 elections are a priority focus area for Liberia's peacebuilding process. On 1 July 2016 UNMIL handed security responsibilities to the Liberian National Police (LNP),⁴⁴ although figures are still lower than what has been promised (5 101 rather than 8 000 personnel, and only 950 women).⁴⁵ A total of 1.9 million people are expected to vote during the elections with 22 political parties contesting the elections, which poses a challenge to security.⁴⁶

The government has taken a number of precautions to ensure the elections are successful. It has committed to preparing a realistic budget for elections, increasing the representation of women, implementing a broad campaign of civic education and voter education, ensuring dialogues between security forces and the population at community level, ensuring the proper training of security forces and establishing a code of conduct between presidential



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candidates. However, the institutional capacity of the National Elections Commission (NEC) is weak.

This research has found that more needs to be done. According to the stakeholders interviewed, elections are personality driven and the majority of the political leaders have not spent enough time reflecting on party manifestos or policy development.⁴⁷ There are also discussions on whether there should be a limit on the number of political parties allowed to run. However, while creating more stringent criteria for political parties may ensure that they are more committed, given Liberia's history of exclusion this may present further problems.⁴⁸

Furthermore, antagonism between politicians has led to violent clashes between supporters in Monrovia.⁴⁹ There are concerns that the elections may create safety and security issues, which will stretch the capacity of the police.⁵⁰ During the interviews, many of the participants agreed that the first round of elections will likely not yield a clear winner and that this will lead to a second round of elections. Previous elections in Liberia have proven that this can be problematic,⁵¹ even when allegations of fraud are unfounded.⁵² In the 2017 elections it is likely that political parties will again be forced to reach a compromise with one another, and this may have implications for developing an overarching vision for the country. The media can also increase antagonism among the supporters of candidates and requires training.⁵³

Although the elections are a priority for both the government of Liberia and external peacebuilding actors engaging in the country, there is no overarching strategy to ensure they run smoothly. Three main issues need to be addressed: the development of political parties' vision and strategy, voter education and the positive use of the media as a force for peace.

In addition, some actors are only now beginning to work out how they should support Liberia's elections, aside from election monitoring. The main supporting actor for the elections is the UNDP, which is strengthening the capacity of the NEC to ensure it conforms to international standards.⁵⁴ The UNDP and the NEC have jointly developed the National Civic and Voter Education Toolkit of Liberia to standardise and regulate voter education.⁵⁵ However, it must be rolled out at a much more rapid pace than at present. In addition, research showed that an election strategy must go beyond voter education to

address the capacity building of political parties. It is also important that citizens begin to question political parties on their ambitions for the future. Frank national dialogues throughout the counties are urgently needed in order for citizens to make informed decisions on voting, allowing them to hold the government accountable to its promises.

Security development

The government takes full responsibility for the security of the country, as it has committed to do in the SMC, as UNMIL prepares to leave. The country's security situation is relatively stable, but there are still some challenges. There are often public disturbances related to governance, corruption and concessions.⁵⁶ Mob violence in Liberia has increased over the last few years, with 35 incidents reported from November 2014 to December 2015, and 21 fatalities.⁵⁷ Moreover, the LNP's capacity to provide basic services to the people is hampered by resource constraints.⁵⁸

Although the elections are a priority there is no overarching strategy to ensure they run smoothly

Underlying tensions relating to rehabilitation further threaten security.⁵⁹ During the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) process, more than 100 000 people were demobilised. Yet only around 29 000 guns were recovered, and mostly in Monrovia, meaning that large amounts of weapons in Liberia are still thought to be unaccounted for.⁶⁰ Furthermore, as part of the DDR process, ex-combatants received an identity card for vocational training. Some of these were sold on, and in the absence of institutionalised psychosocial care many ex-combatants remain on the streets. The system of compensation was controversial⁶¹ and it is feared that unhappy ex-combatants and widows could cause conflict in the future. The government should be aware of this potential challenge and develop a strategy for addressing the issue – one that reintegrates these ex-combatants into communities.

In terms of security development the government has committed to provide adequate budgetary allocations to build the capacity of the various security agencies, the justice mechanism and courts. The draft budget

for 2016/17⁶² allocated about 16% (roughly US\$90 million) of the budget to security and rule of law. Previously, the budget did not allocate enough to these agencies, suggesting a lack of political will. Research revealed that high salaries for parliamentarians, legislators and other senior government officials have taken precedence, and economic strategies have not paid enough attention to poverty reduction.⁶³

Given these resource constraints and an apparent lack of political will, a much more effective way to enhance security is to focus on community-based systems

Largely driven by donors, Liberia began constructing justice and security hubs (one-stop shops for citizens to get basic services) in the counties. However, massive infrastructural issues led donors to change their focus from infrastructure to service delivery, much to the criticism of the local population, as there are now no resources to complete the remaining hubs.⁶⁴ In addition, training courses by the UK, the US and China have applied different policing models, which has led to confusion.⁶⁵

Given these resource constraints and an apparent lack of political will, a much more effective way to enhance security is to focus on community-based systems, as stressed in the SMC, that make use of civil society and traditional and religious leaders, and involve women and youth. There are already some models to base this on – as stated above, the MRU has been doing cross-border patrolling and should be supported in its efforts, and ECOWAS has an early warning system in place that is also based on community-led information. In addition, the government has committed to develop a strategic approach for regional security issues. In this regard the government should work closely with ECOWAS, which has been developing regional strategies for security, particularly through its Counter-Terrorism Strategy and Implementation Plan. Peacebuilding initiatives should be working towards strengthening and supporting existing approaches instead of duplicating interventions.

Rule of law

Liberia's criminal justice sector lacks capacity and resources. This is complicated by the fact that Liberia has a dual justice system, with both statutory and customary courts. There is a large backlog of cases in the former, as well as inefficiencies in laws and practices.⁶⁶ In addition, the Liberian public are not sufficiently aware of their rights and responsibilities. Many Liberians thus still turn to the traditional system owing to constraints related to affordability, accessibility and timeliness in the statutory system.⁶⁷ Moreover, the formal justice system is seen as favouring the wealthy, powerful or socially connected.⁶⁸

Given Liberia's enormous resource constraints, it would make sense for the government to better harmonise the system, using traditional systems of

> 100 000

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YET ONLY

29 000

GUNS WERE RECOVERED

justice for minor crimes. However, it is important that such systems conform to international human rights standards. The government commits to this in the SMC, but how this will be achieved is unclear. One potential area to explore is experience sharing with other African actors that have gone through similar processes, from more successful models such as Namibia to less positive ones such as South Sudan.

Reconciliation

The recent research found that the lack of reconciliation in Liberia is the elephant in the room. The TRC was established in 2005 as a result of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement negotiations. However, its report was launched in 2009 amid great controversy, as its recommendations⁶⁹ were criticised, particularly by those in power, for lacking evidence, not being impartial, and not respecting constitutionality through the presumption of innocence.⁷⁰

Although the TRC recommendations were ‘authoritative, binding and have the weight of law’,⁷¹ there has been no follow-up in terms of prosecutions. The report also made no provision for amnesty. A few cases have been instituted abroad, but none so far in Liberia. It has been noted that because some public figures remain in power despite the recommendations, ‘it could be argued that the report had the paradoxical effect of eroding public confidence in the justice system, and – by extension – faith in the state itself’.⁷²

The roadmap focuses on restorative justice, while stating that it does not preclude retributive justice or interfere with any future processes to establish special courts for redress.⁷³ Many projects have been slow to get off the ground, including the prominent ‘Palava Hut’ process mentioned in the TRC report (now part of a project on community-based truth-telling, atonement and psychosocial recovery). It is intended for lesser crimes – the Palava Hut could not pardon those responsible for gross human rights violations.⁷⁴ It is set to continue in 2017, led by the Liberian Independent Commission on Human Rights and the UNDP. Given the shortcomings of the statutory justice system, this community conflict resolution mechanism places an emphasis on traditional authorities, civil society, human rights organisations and religious institutions.

The Palava Hut is a worthy initiative and should be encouraged, but it does not deal with the larger issue at hand, namely accountability for gross human rights violations. It is worth pointing out that while there are many valuable initiatives in the roadmap, it glosses over the most serious issues that require attention – the gross human rights violations committed during the conflicts, including murders and rapes. How the issue of impunity is addressed in the future will largely be dependent on the will of political actors in leadership positions.

Research found reconciliation was also held back by a continued lack of coordination among the government, civil society and donors.⁷⁵ The strategic roadmap provides a framework, but some stakeholders suggested this had been reduced to a set of projects and neglected larger issues at hand, thus lacking a strategic perspective.⁷⁶ While the Liberian Peacebuilding Office has set up peace structures in the counties, there is little idea at present of how these will be sustained in the long term. Moreover, only a few have received county development funding, meaning there is a need to better integrate them into national level processes.⁷⁷ There are also useful civil society initiatives such as ‘peace huts’, but these operate somewhat independently of other processes.⁷⁸

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Civil society should be utilised to implement projects, but these should feed into an overarching strategy by the Liberian Peacebuilding Office. In this regard a revision of the National Roadmap for Reconciliation could be considered, in close consultation with the broader community. Furthermore, an inclusive national civil society platform that works on peace and security issues should be established, to ensure that government focus on reconciliation is sustained.

The AU PCR⁷⁹ unit could play a role in advancing transitional justice, as its framework has a transitional justice pillar. Transitional justice is particularly dependent on context, and in this way the AU could have a comparative advantage over traditional donors.

Another way of supporting reconciliation, as stated in the SMC, is to address the issue of land. Liberia was flooded with foreign investors before its civil wars, who carved out large areas of land for concessions through deals with the elites in Monrovia.⁸⁰ Efforts to open foreign direct investment to grow the economy have only deepened inequalities between the elites and local communities.⁸¹ In 2013 it was found that 53% of the country's total land had been given as concessions.⁸² Despite efforts to enhance transparency,⁸³ in practice it is alleged that these regulations are not enforced. The Liberia Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative in 2013 also found that between July 2009 and December 2011 only 10% of contracts were in compliance with applicable rules.⁸⁴

Efforts to open foreign direct investment to grow the economy have only deepened inequalities between the elites and local communities

Liberia has two legal systems for land ownership: customary and formal. The customary land system operates in rural areas and owners do not have title to properties. As such, the government is the 'official owner' of all public land – which has led to concessions taking over community lands.⁸⁵ Furthermore, there have been incidents of people crossing the border from Côte d'Ivoire to farm in Liberia, creating conflict with local communities.⁸⁶

In 2009 the Land Commission was established to deal with customary rights, and a Community Rights law was passed on ownership and forest resources.⁸⁷ By early 2017 a Land Bill should be in place, but this may also be a potential trigger point for conflict.⁸⁸ Once adopted, an implementation strategy will be necessary, and the public will have to be educated on their rights. Again, this is something other African countries have been through, and experiences can be shared in this regard.

Decentralisation

The issue of decentralisation as a cross-cutting issue is only briefly mentioned in the SMC, yet it is critical for addressing the root causes of conflict in Liberia. Stakeholders interviewed during the research stated that there is a centralisation of power (i.e., a separation between the decision-making processes led at the national level by elites, often with ties outside the country and no real vested interest in the future of Liberia, and the community-led traditional processes on the ground).⁸⁹ In August 2016 the UN Secretary-General Report for Liberia noted that '[t]he failure to robustly pursue reconciliation and delays in structural changes, such as land reform and decentralisation, raise a "red flag" about future prospects for peace and security'.⁹⁰

The decentralisation process has been partly hindered by the need for simultaneous constitutional reform. This has been a contentious process

53%

THE PERCENTAGE OF THE
COUNTRY'S TOTAL LAND
FOUND IN 2013 TO HAVE BEEN
GIVEN AS CONCESSIONS

as some proposals have been dangerous, such as a proposal on Liberia as a Christian state.⁹¹ Such reform, which would essentially move some of the powers of the central government to local governments, would also need to be supplemented by a local governance law, which has been drafted but not enacted.

Ultimately, the decentralisation process will need to move beyond the provision of basic services in some counties to ensuring inclusive national dialogues on local priorities that are specific to county needs. The focus should also be on how to bring the government closer to the people so that a social compact can be established. The experiences of other African countries such as South Africa can also serve as lessons learnt in this regard.

Women and youth

Women and youth are particularly vulnerable in Liberia. Women played a significant role in resolving the civil war by ensuring that warring factions were brought to the negotiating table. However, the post-conflict environment has not been conducive to women's empowerment or gender equality.

During the conflict sexual violence was used as a systematic weapon of war against women. Yet 13 years after the end of the conflict, rape and sexual violence against women remains a serious problem.⁹² The SMC recognises the need for a strategy to empower women in Liberia, but clear direction is lacking in this regard.

The government adopted a new law in 2006 that recognised rape (but not spousal rape) as a crime. The law imposes serious penalties on perpetrators, especially in cases of gang rape and where the victim is under 18. However, a number of challenges still exist in enforcing the law. Firstly, the enforcement of the law is ineffective, and cases are often settled out of court. Secondly, many rape cases go unreported, because of the shame surrounding sexual violence. And lastly, health facilities do not have the equipment, resources or expertise to deal with the cases.⁹³ Research showed that much more could be done to educate the population on these issues and to ensure that women's empowerment is mainstreamed throughout all aspects of society.⁹⁴ Moreover, considering that sexual and gender-based violence is so high, the LNP should be equipped to effectively investigate these cases and provide evidence

for prosecution. This would help ensure that survivors of sexual and gender-based violence can receive redress from the justice system.

The youth are also important for ensuring sustained peace in the country. The majority of youth are uneducated, teenage pregnancy is high and many suffer from trauma due to the civil war.⁹⁵ There have been a number of programmes to equip the youth with skills, but certification does not necessarily lead to employment.⁹⁶

One particular area in which the youth can be involved, as they mainly live in rural areas, is agriculture. However, owing to the perception among young people that farming is for old people only 4% of them are interested in agriculture.⁹⁷

The nexus between peace, security and development is increasingly accepted and should be considered

Vocational training is imperative, but many of the vocational schools were destroyed during the war and the trainers are often unqualified or lack the capacity to provide training.⁹⁸ Moreover, vocational training often does not translate into more employment opportunities, leading to a sense of helplessness among youths.⁹⁹ Vocational training with other African countries such as Nigeria and Ghana should be spotlighted, but there are also opportunities to explore partnerships with other Southern countries, such as India, that focus on these issues.¹⁰⁰

Additional issues

Economic revitalisation

The SMC does not mention economic development, but the research showed that it was one of the key areas that could be a driver for sustainable peace. Indeed, the nexus between peace, security and development is increasingly accepted and should be considered. Owing to the Ebola crisis¹⁰¹ and a sharp decline in commodity prices, Liberia's economy has been deteriorating. The drop in international commodity prices for Liberia's main exports – iron ore and rubber – slowed economic growth in 2015 by 0.4%.¹⁰² The growth rate for 2016 is expected to be close to 0%.¹⁰³

The focus is now on transitioning from resource extraction to improving productivity across the sectors mentioned above. Due to the decline in economic growth it is important to improve the business environment, productivity and value-add.¹⁰⁴ A major drive has been towards enhancing agriculture. However, the research found that there is still a lack of clarity on how agricultural initiatives are to be implemented, and how to get the youth involved and interested.¹⁰⁵ In order for agriculture to be successful, there must also be infrastructure to move goods to the capital and across borders, and to address electricity problems.¹⁰⁶

As many African countries have dealt with similar transitional issues, capacity building through regional and subregional organisations is key

Finally, agriculture will need to move beyond subsistence to commercial production, in a way that is inclusive and related to poverty reduction. To achieve this Liberia must begin to seriously address the long-term issue of educating its population and capacitating the workforce.

Liberia has been engaging with ECOWAS to ratify protocols relating to a number of issues, including trade and economic integration. As discussed earlier, these protocols must urgently be domesticated. In particular, the challenges and opportunities for trade across the borders of the MRU countries should also be emphasised.¹⁰⁷

Way forward

External actors supporting Liberia's peacebuilding process can better collaborate at a strategic level, to provide overarching assistance. This means understanding that Southern actors may not provide money but can play a role in enhancing context-specific and localised solutions. Given that many African countries have dealt with similar transitional issues, capacity building and experience sharing through regional and subregional organisations is key. This goes across sectors, as detailed below.

The elections in 2017 will be the primary focus for peacebuilding actors in Liberia. Building the capacity of the NEC is vital. It is imperative that donors, UNMIL and the UN Country Teams create an overarching strategy that harmonises support and identifies gaps, rather than simply implementing disparate projects in different areas. They must engage with Africa's regional, subregional and bilateral actors to ensure a holistic response. This activity should, ideally, be led by the Liberian government itself to ensure ownership, and could draw on already established national policies and frameworks. In this regard the PBC could play a role in guiding interventions and developing a common understanding of Liberia's political economy.

Political parties have limited capacity to develop comprehensive manifestos. Political parties will need to ensure that, moving forward, their policies are well



LIBERIA MUST BEGIN TO SERIOUSLY ADDRESS THE LONG-TERM ISSUE OF EDUCATING ITS POPULATION AND CAPACITATING THE WORKFORCE

defined and discussed so that the population is aware of what they are voting for. Another key requirement for the elections is enhanced rural voter education. Civil society should be further empowered to carry out comprehensive training in remote areas. This can feed into a national strategy overseen by the NEC. It is also imperative for the media to be utilised in a positive rather than a negative way, and this will also require training.

Partnerships with the AU, ECOWAS and the MRU could be maximised to ensure a coordinated and holistic strategy for elections. Political parties would also benefit from experience sharing with other African countries, such as Ghana, Nigeria and South Africa, and the NEC could benefit from lessons learned on voter education from fellow African countries in the lead-up to elections. The PBC can facilitate coordinated strategies that allow donors and the UN to work closely with ECOWAS, the AU and bilateral actors to facilitate such exchanges. Lessons learned on media engagement during elections could also be shared. Examples include Kenya (where the media was used positively to prevent election violence) and the DRC (where Search for Common Ground has been training the media).

Security will continue to be a challenge during elections. Access to justice through the statutory court system is an additional problem, as it still only benefits the rich. To redress this, more localised and context-specific solutions need to be developed. This will necessarily require a greater focus on the harmonisation of statutory and customary law, and the empowerment of community-based policing and justice models. The process of decentralisation also needs to be prioritised. The inclusion of citizens, and their ability to influence local politics, is critical to re-establish a social compact, establish future pro-poor policies and ensure that local government is held accountable. The PBC can help to emphasise such solutions, and draw on the experiences of African countries that have gone through similar processes.

Coordination and coherent efforts on reconciliation are needed and the Liberian government should consider a national peace policy. This is also being considered in other countries such as Nigeria and Ghana. In addition, national cohesion projects should be emphasised. A national civil society platform should be developed to implement projects, under a coordinated strategy led

by the Liberia Peacebuilding Office. A reconciliation strategy should also address underlying tensions over rehabilitation. The AU and ECOWAS can play a critical role in addressing issues of transitional justice, given their focus on these issues.

The focus on women and youth should be maintained. Civil society must be capacitated to provide training to communities on Liberia's new laws, including the rape law and the inheritance bill. It is also necessary to put strategies in place to enhance vocational training for youth. Civil society can give feedback to the Liberia Peacebuilding Office on the challenges that still prevent women and youth from being included in peacebuilding processes, when national-level initiatives are insufficient to translate into action on the ground.

A national civil society platform should be developed to implement projects under a coordinated strategy

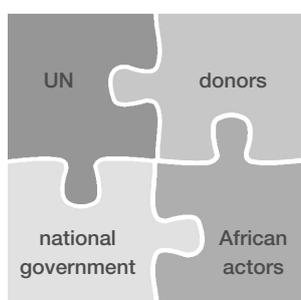
The importance of a healthy economy for peacebuilding should not be forgotten. Liberia has already ratified a number of ECOWAS protocols, and these need to be domesticated to facilitate issues such as cross-border trade. The MRU can also be supported in identifying gaps and opportunities for enhancing cross-border trade. Pressure should be put on the government to prioritise the Land Bill and review concession agreements for their legality. The PBC should consider linkages between peace, security and development as part of its strategy and support donors' efforts to diversify the economy. Once again, other African countries can be instrumental in experience sharing. In this regard, the MRU may be best placed to assist, particularly utilising the experience of Côte d'Ivoire. In addition, actors such as the African Development Bank should be engaged to support overarching initiatives.

Liberia has progressed in moving from decades of civil war to relative peace. However, the drawdown of the UN mission does not mean that the focus on peacebuilding in Liberia should be lost. Instead, the PBC can enhance its partnerships with African organisations to ensure that resources are amplified. This means exploring comparative advantages and capacity-building initiatives

that can be carried out by African bilateral actors and subregional and regional organisations.

Recommendations to the PBC Liberia Configuration

- Enhance communication and partnerships, including between UN Country Teams, UNMIL and the Liberia Peacebuilding Office, as well as between donors, African regional, subregional and regional organisations and Southern development partners, to provide a coordinated strategy for Liberia's peacebuilding priorities.
- Institute a stakeholder mapping process and support the development of a coordinated civil society platform in Liberia.
- Encourage inclusive national and county-level dialogues on peacebuilding priorities.
- Assist the Liberian government to develop a strategic and coordinated approach to prepare for the elections, in particular making use of civil society and the media in voter education, and to enhance the capacity of the NEC.
- Draw on African actors such as the AU and ECOWAS to support capacity building for political parties, including the development of their vision for the country.
- Emphasise community-based models for security and the empowerment of traditional courts to deal with minor crimes, building on existing models in Africa.
- Support coordinated reconciliation strategies (building on the national reconciliation roadmap but also identifying gaps such as rehabilitation and the prosecution of gross human rights violations) that empower civil society, and engage with actors such as the AU and ECOWAS to address issues of transitional justice, human rights and land.
- Support the process of decentralisation, beyond providing basic services to communities outside of the capital, so that it engages local citizens on local governance and area-specific needs.
- Support the development of strategies that empower women and youth through national, county-level and grassroots initiatives.
- Link peace and security with development initiatives – support poverty-reduction strategies linked to governance and the domestication of ECOWAS and AU protocols, particularly with regard to economic integration, and examine challenges and opportunities in implementation.
- Encourage experience sharing with other African countries through the AU (ASI), ECOWAS and the MRU, on issues of elections, security, access to justice, reconciliation and economic revitalisation, by identifying opportunities and assisting in generating financial support.
- Consider options for joint monitoring and evaluation of peacebuilding initiatives.



BETTER COMMUNICATION
AND PARTNERSHIPS
IS ESSENTIAL

Notes

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