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Conflict analysis of Liberia

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About this report

This rapid review provides a short synthesis of the literature on conflict and peace in Liberia. It aims to orient policymakers to the key debates and emerging issues. It was prepared for the European Commission's Instrument for Stability, © European Union 2014. The views expressed in this report are those of the author, and do not represent the opinions or views of the European Union, the GSDRC, or the partner agencies of the GSDRC.

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1. Overview

It is over ten years since Liberia's final peace agreement was signed in 2003, putting an end to 14 years of violent civil wars.¹ This research finds that current levels of overt conflict in Liberia are relatively low, and there has been no large-scale violence since the end of the second war. However, it also finds that many of the root causes and grievances that led to the wars have not been addressed.

This rapid literature review examines recent research on conflict and peace dynamics in Liberia, focusing on: (1) principal domestic actors; (2) principal domestic dynamics; (3) principal regional actors and dynamics; (4) national and international conflict responses; and (5) sources and capacities for peace. It focuses principally on the period after the 2003 peace agreement – and particularly on literature published within the last five years, unless the literature is particularly well-cited, or contains information not available elsewhere. It grounds the analysis with a brief overview of the historical context.

This review uncovered a **medium amount of literature** analysing conflict and peace actors and dynamics in Liberia. This ranges from a few macro-level conflict analysis papers (often produced or funded by international actors, NGOs, or think tanks) to a wealth of literature at the meso- and micro-levels of analysis that focus on particular conflict issues (e.g. conflict over land, or security sector reform). The latter papers are produced by the same types of actors, but also by academics. There is a limited amount of literature that directly identifies sources of or capacities for peace in Liberia.

The literature reviewed is **broadly consistent** in its selection of key conflict and peace actors and dynamics. However, there is varied emphasis on the dynamic considered most important. The literature is primarily qualitative single-country studies based on interviews or surveys.

The **key points** that emerge are as follows.

There are few examples of recent conflict events in Liberia, however there are many incidences of violence between citizens. Recent examples of overt conflict in Liberia are relatively few, and there has been no large-scale violence since the end of the civil war in 2003. Many Liberians think the country has made progress in regards to security. However, there are unmet expectations regarding progress on development indicators. Conflict analysis by the Interagency Conflict Assessment Framework (ICAF) concludes that the pathways for increasing levels of violence are in place, as many of the grievances and root causes of the wars have not been addressed. There are many incidences of violence between citizens, and criminality is also thought to be increasing.

A small number of individuals and groups dominate Liberian politics and economics. Power in Liberia revolves around political personalities and political groupings – principally the president and ruling political party, the government, individual politicians, and their businesses. Other internal actors include: security actors (state and informal), and civil society actors.

Unequal access to services, assets and justice are principal domestic conflict dynamics. These dynamics are rooted in the formation of the Liberian state, which was initiated in the early 1800s by a small group of freed

¹ Liberia's two civil wars ran from: 1989 to 1996; and from 1999 to 2003.

slaves, who arrived in Liberia from the US and from captured slave ships. The ‘Americo-Liberian’ elite still dominate political, economic, social and cultural life. Ordinary Liberians face high levels of poverty and inequality, and unequal access to services, assets and justice according to class, region, ‘youth’, ethnicity, and gender. Other domestic dynamics include: land control and ownership; natural resources; and justice. Two key triggers for potential conflict are the planned (but delayed) withdrawal of UN troops, and undemocratic, non-inclusive elections.

Liberia is vulnerable to cross-border conflict and spill-overs of violence, driven by the political alliances of elites.

Liberia and its west-African neighbours – Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Côte d’Ivoire – share common conflict dynamics. Since the end of the Liberian civil wars, levels of cross-border violence affecting Liberia have reduced significantly. Other regional conflict dynamics include: political alliances of elites across borders; remote borders where the state’s presence is limited; weak natural resource governance; and illicit trade in arms, drugs and minerals.

Liberia’s transition has been supported by national and international conflict responses, including: the 2003 Accra Comprehensive Peace Accord; national reconstruction and poverty reduction strategies; and peacekeeping and development programmes from the UN, the US and EU (among other multilateral and bilateral donors).

Social networks and community dispute settlement have been key sources for peace. Other sources and capacities for peace include: reconciliation activities, Liberian national identity, and interfaith dialogue.

2. Conflict and violence profile

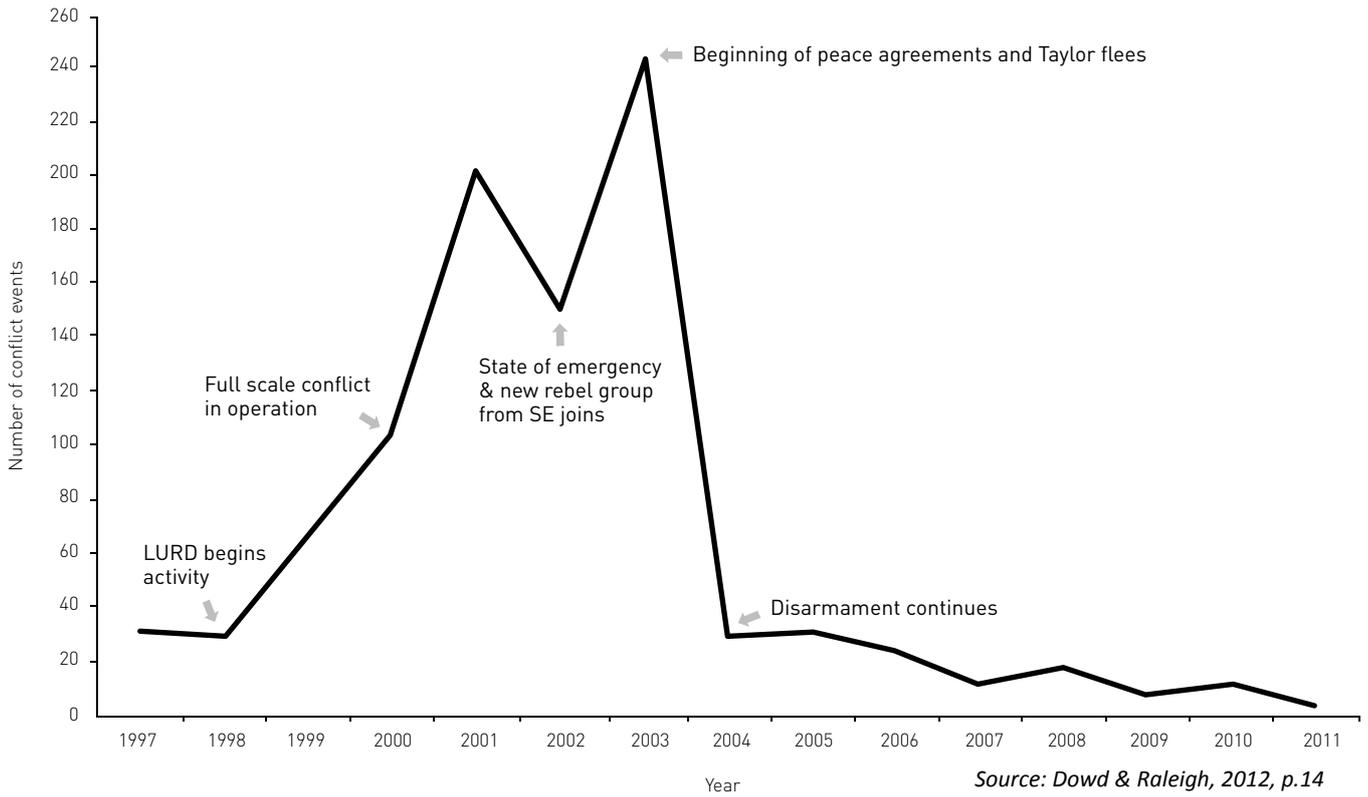
Current levels of overt conflict in Liberia are relatively low, and there has been no large-scale violence since the end of the civil war in 2003 (Paczynska, et al. 2010). An Interagency Conflict Assessment Framework (ICAF) update based on interviews with over 1,000 people across four Liberian counties in 2011 found that ‘there is an overall peaceful atmosphere in Liberia’. It noted that it is considered that there is no real risk of a return to the civil war (ibid). Liberia is now classified as ‘post-conflict’ (Drew & Ramsbotham, 2012).

Liberians widely recognise the improved security situation since 2003 (Paczynska, et al. 2010). However, overall, ICAF interviewees said that progress on development has not met expectations (ibid). The study concludes that the ‘pathways for increasing levels of violence are in place’ as many of the grievances and root causes of the wars have not been addressed (ibid, p.8). The legacy of the civil wars is still strong, and a more recent trend is an increasing regional division within Liberia (see Section 4.2) (Bøås & Utas, forthcoming).

There are many incidences of **civil violence** between individuals and social groups – and violence against civilians makes up around 30% of post-war conflict events. Criminality is also considered to be increasing, especially in cities undergoing rapid urbanisation (McLaughlin, 2012).

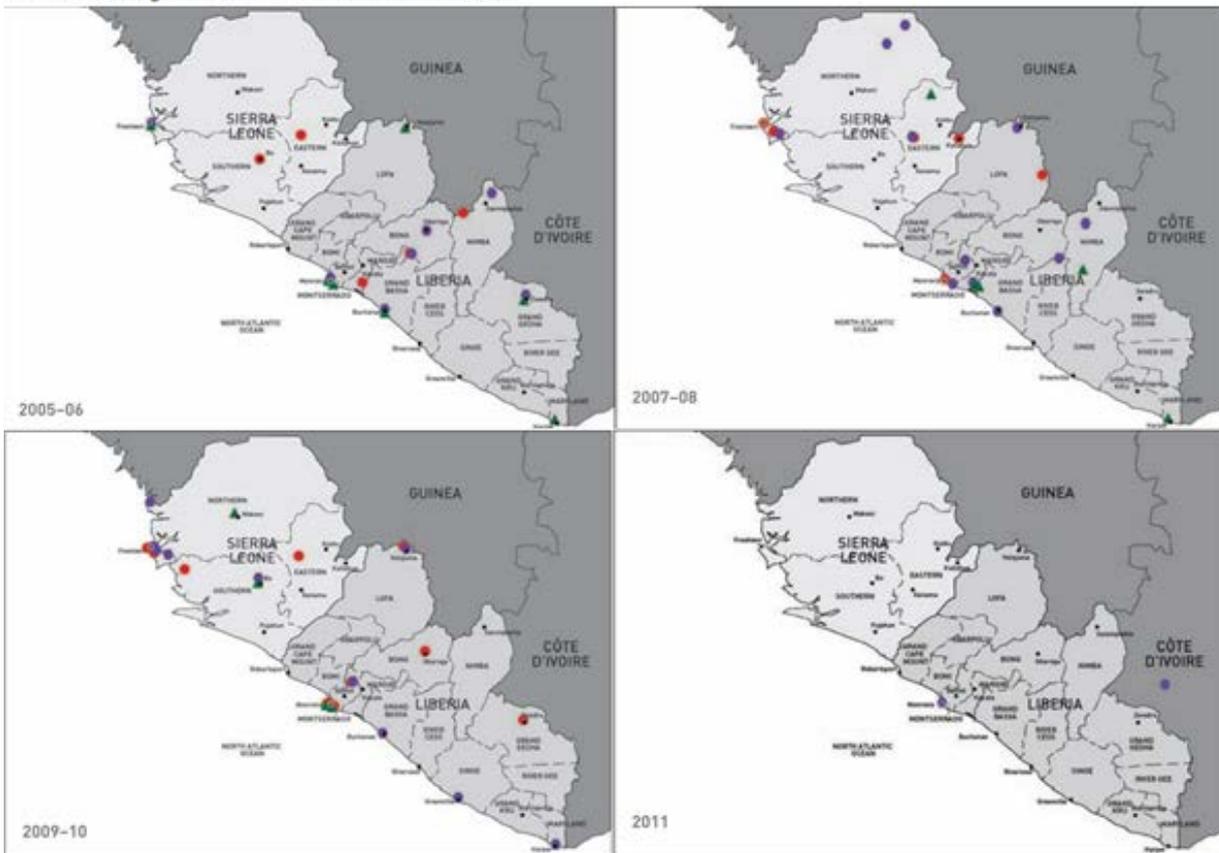
Graphic 1 shows a **timeline of conflict events** in Liberia from 1977 to 2011. It shows that there has been a dramatic reduction in the number of conflict events from 2003 onwards, following the signing of the peace agreement. This decrease slowed down from 2004 onwards, but has generally continued. Conflict has increased temporarily around key events – such as the 2005 establishment of Liberia’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), and the 2006 trial of former President Charles Taylor (Dowd & Raleigh, 2012, p.14). Graphic 2 maps the type of conflict events by geographic region (Dowd & Raleigh, 2012, p.18).

Graphic 1: Timeline of conflict events in Liberia (1977-2011)



Graphic 2: Conflict events across Liberia (2005-2011)

- Battle – Rebels overtake territory
- + Battle – Government regains territory
- Battle – No change of territory
- Violence against civilians
- ▲ Riots/Protests



Source: Adapted from Dowd & Raleigh, 2012, p.18

3. Principal domestic actors

A variety of state and non-state internal actors play roles in providing or threatening security in Liberia (Jörgel & Utas, 2007). Liberian politics, economics and society is dominated by **political personalities and political groupings** – principally the president and ruling political party, the government, individual politicians, and the businesses that revolve around these political actors.

Business people and political actors in Liberia are intimately linked. Many political actors are formally or informally also business people. Other important internal actors include: security actors (state and informal), and civil society actors.

3.1 Political personalities and parties

Political power in Liberia is **highly centralised** in the president and the executive – which have the power to overrule decisions taken in other parts of the government. The ruling party and the government are often considered synonymous. The government rules the wider country through informal patronage networks. This centralisation of power can limit democratic accountability, and is seen by some to be to the detriment to local governance structures, which wield much less power.

President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf²

President Sirleaf was first elected in 2005, and was then re-elected in 2011. Internationally, she is highly regarded for her role in the women's movement that advocated for an end to the conflict. In 2011 she was awarded the 2011 **Nobel Peace Prize**, jointly with fellow Liberian women's peace activist Leymah Gbowee. President Sirleaf is credited with steering Liberia through tough post-conflict years, and she has been successful at securing large amounts of international resources for Liberia.

Domestically, President Sirleaf is a popular leader, but is also facing **increased scrutiny** for a number of reasons.

- She is accused of not tackling pervasive nepotism and corruption in her party and government – as the traditional elites continue to visibly accumulate wealth. Following her re-election in 2011, she appointed three of her four sons to senior government positions.³
- As a member of the traditional elite, President Sirleaf's career is considered the result of her Liberian **patronage networks**, and of her previous successful international career. Many of the business community and 'strongmen' who supported the former President Taylor now support her (Utas, 2008).
- Her role during the civil wars is contested following Liberia's TRC recommendation that President Sirleaf (in addition to 48 other prominent figures)⁴ be barred from holding public office (elected or appointed) for 30 years due to her role financing Charles Taylor in the initial period of the first civil war (Bøås & Utas, forthcoming).

² See President Sirleaf's official biography at the Presidency website:

<http://www.emansion.gov.lr/2content.php?sub=121&related=19&third=121&pg=sp>

³ The posts are: head of the National Security Agency (Fumba Sirleaf); senior adviser and chairman of the state-owned National Oil Company of Liberia (NOCAL) (Robert Sirleaf); and Central Bank deputy governor (Charles Sirleaf). However, Charles Sirleaf was later suspended from his post for failing to declare his assets. See - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-19333908>

⁴ See page 361 for the full list of names - http://trcofliberia.org/resources/reports/final/volume-two_layout-1.pdf

- Many key political and military figures from the civil war not only have impunity for human rights violations, but also have positions of political and economic power, especially in the counties.
- Despite significant funding from international donors, Liberia's reconstruction has not met expectations.

Political parties

The ICAF update paper identifies political parties and politicians as key actors mobilising constituents around elections (McLaughlin, 2012). Liberian politics is **highly personalised** and centred on charismatic leaders. Parties tend to centre around people, and alliances change. While Liberia's political tensions and dynamics have changed significantly since the war ended, the same group of elites from the 'Americo-Liberian sphere' (i.e. not just Americo-Liberians) still dominate (Bøås & Utas, forthcoming; Adolfo, 2010).

Liberian politics operates as a **two-party system**, with President Sirleaf's ruling **Unity Party (UP)** on one side, and the main opposition party the **Coalition for Democratic Change (CDC)** on the other, led by opposition leader George Weah. The parties mainly differ according to their leadership, networks and regional representation. CDC is considered to represent more the poorer south-east region, while UP represents the wealthier north. The next national elections are expected in 2017.

Political membership in Liberia is low at 19% – with preference for membership of other types of groups (e.g. religious organisations) (Civicus, 2010). The broad population has lost confidence in politicians (ibid).

Other political figures

Former President Charles Taylor and his son Charles ('Chuckie') Taylor are both in jail for human rights violations. Despite this they are still believed to have 'considerable influence in the country' (UN Security Council, 2013).

A number of people and entities have been identified as posing a threat to peace and stability in Liberia and the sub-region. One list of people can be found in the recent UN Panel of Experts report – these people face varying degrees of travel and/or asset freezes.⁵ The report notes that this list has become politicised by the government (ibid). The TRC final report provides another list, including:

- **Cyril Allen.** Former Chairman of Charles Taylor's party (the National Patriotic Party), and considered to be second or third in Charles Taylor's hierarchy (Williams, 2002). He has publically vowed to build support to petition against Taylor's prison sentence, and has publically threatened to get ex-combatants to remove President Sirleaf from power.⁶ He is listed by the TRC (2011) as an individual for further investigation.
- **Benoni Urey.** Former Maritime Affairs Commissioner, a 'staunch ally' of and former financial adviser to Charles Taylor, a wealthy and prominent Liberian businessman. Urey has said he will contest the 2017 election as part of opposition party CDC. He is listed for: committing economic crimes; and as an individual for further investigation (TRC, 2011). The UN later removed his travel ban.⁷

⁵ A list of these people and entities, with descriptions of why they are suspected to pose a threat to the peace process in Liberia or undermine peace and stability in Liberia and the sub-region is provided on pages 23-31 -

http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2013/683

⁶ See - <http://allafrica.com/stories/201311182103.html>

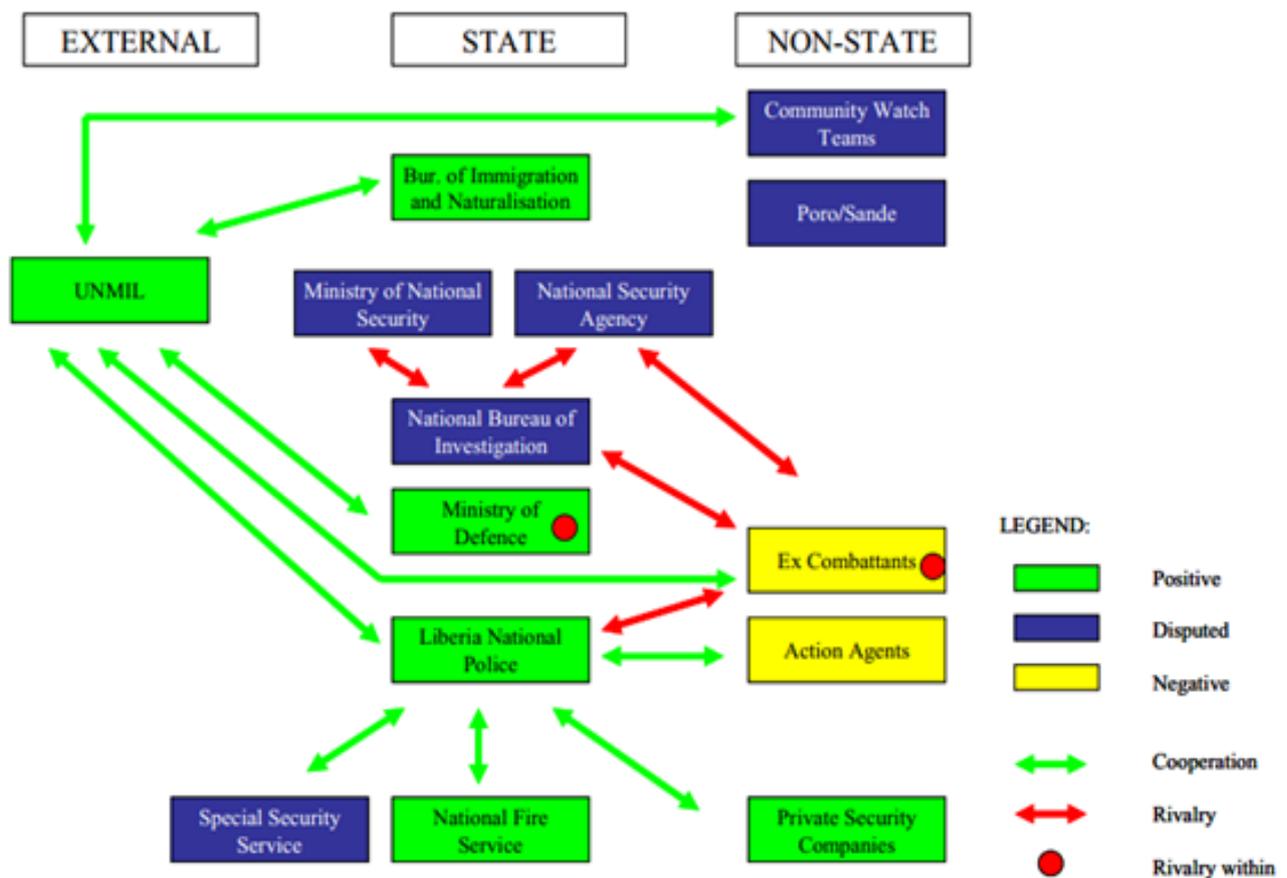
⁷ See - <http://allafrica.com/stories/201312271324.html>

- **Emmanuel Shaw II.** Former Liberian Finance Minister, one of Charles Taylor’s close confidants and financial advisers. He is listed for: committing economic crimes; and as an individual for further investigation (TRC, 2011).

3.2 Principal security actors

The Liberian state’s inability to provide security for its citizens has led to the growth of a variety of community security initiatives (Jörgel & Utas, 2007). Informal political contacts and networks are key elements that shape the structure of security institutions in Liberia (Jörgel & Utas 2007). On his blog, Utas argues that the ‘national security apparatus is still too linked to the political party. They typically see their role as protecting the government, those in power, rather than servicing the citizens’.⁸ Graphic 3 depicts the relationships between these state, non-state and external security actors.

Graphic 3: The level of interaction between various security actors in Liberia



Source: Judy Smith-Hohn in Jörgel and Utas (2007, p.44).

⁸ See - <http://matsutas.wordpress.com/2011/11/08/election-riots/>

State security actors

The Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) was completely recreated, re-recruited and trained by the US following the end of the war. The role of the AFL is yet to be established (Podder, 2014). It has only 2,000 troops. Podder (2014, p.363) explains that at present the AFL is 'confined to the barracks' as it does not yet have the trust of the public, political elite, or external donors.

The Liberian National Police (LNP) has also been reformed by UNMIL,⁹ though not as extensively as the AFL has been. The LNP programme started with rebuilding infrastructure and basic equipment, and then moved on to training and capacity-building (Podder, 2014). In 2011, an estimated 4,045 officers had been recruited, vetted, trained and deployed (ibid). The LNP was not able to control the violent protests during the 2011 elections, raising concerns about its effectiveness (ICG, 2012). It was also accused of being partial during the opposition CDC party's riots: it violently quashed the protestors.¹⁰

Informal security actors

The literature widely identifies the importance of informal actors in security provision. Informal actors include: community watch teams; local defence groups; vigilante groups; individual citizens; and businesses (e.g. rubber companies) (Podder, 2014). In a study of vigilante groups in Liberia, Kantor and Persson (2010, p.6) find that 'the real gatekeepers to Liberia's criminal justice system are the vigilante groups, not the formal security providers', as it is the informal groups that arrest and assess crimes within the local communities. This informal provision complicates the Western ideal-type view of state monopoly of violence, as the chains of command and control are outside formal accountability mechanisms, and often the groups see themselves as accountable to the community, rather than the state (Podder, 2014).

3.3 Ex-combatants and ex-commanders

The literature widely examines the risks posed by ex-combatants – with divergent perspectives on the possibility of remobilisation. There is little evidence of remobilisation of ex-combatants, except for in some remote border areas (see Section 5.2). A USIP report based on 1400 interviews with ex-combatants investigated what **motivations** could prompt ex-combatants to fight again (Hill, Taylor & Temin, 2008). It found that factors increasing the likelihood of a return to fighting include: poverty and hardship; unemployment; problems in gaining acceptance from the family and community; and tribal tensions (ibid). It also found that female ex-combatants may be more likely to fight again, in the face of poverty.

Despite demobilisation, disarmament and (limited) reintegration activities in Liberia, it is widely thought that the **networks between ex-combatants and ex-commanders** are still partly intact. However, these are maintained not with the aim of remobilisation, but of creating networks of labour.¹¹ At the 2011 elections, political parties used the networks to garner support. Businesses also use them to find workers ('labour brokers'). These networks are not considered risk factors as they would not mobilise on their own, but only under the leadership of politicians.

⁹ See section 6

¹⁰ See - <http://matsutas.wordpress.com/2011/11/08/election-riots/>

¹¹ For example, see - <http://matsutas.wordpress.com/2013/05/29/generals-for-good-do-good-generals-and-the-structural-endurance-of-wartime-networks/>

3.4 Civil society organisations

Civicus (2010, p.14) identifies three **categories** of Liberia's diverse **civil society organisations** (CSOs):

1. *Interest- and value-based groups* (e.g. marketing associations; driver unions; youth and student federations);
2. *Service- and humanity-oriented groups*, (e.g. orphanages; provincial Red Cross and Crescent; charities);
3. *Policy and advocacy groups* (e.g. research and academic think-tanks).

In terms of **impact**, CSOs are considered to have improved awareness of citizens' rights and of the responsibilities of public officials and the government (ibid). CSOs have 'shown strong progress' in civic engagement and influence on public policy (ibid, p.40). The women's movement and religious communities are identified as having had visible, positive impacts on the peace process (Dunn, 2011).

The Motorcycle Transport Union

The Motorcycle Transport Union (MTU) has risen to prominence in post-war Liberia, in tandem with the industry. Members generally pay a daily membership fee and receive services in return: parking, loans, insurance against accidents (including support for widows and families), and training on safety issues.

Evidence is mixed about whether the MTU incites violence, or builds bridges across groups. On the one hand, the Small Arms Survey notes that 'reports increasingly accuse MTU [Motorcycle Transport Union] members of being involved in violent incidences' (e.g. a 2009 violent five-day protest; a 2009 attack on a politician in a car) (Gilgen & Nowak, 2011, p.9). There is also a conflict between the two largest unions. Further, politicians used unions for propaganda reasons during the 2011 elections – fostering more tensions. On the other hand, the ICAF identifies MTU's positive impact in employing ex-combatants – reducing the risk of there being large numbers of unemployed, poor ex-combatants – and facilitating their reintegration into society (McLaughlin, 2012; Paczynska, et al. 2010).

4. Principal domestic conflict dynamics

4.1 Historical roots and causes of conflict

'The conflict in Liberia has its origin in the history and founding of the modern Liberian State' (TRC, 2009, p.17). The early 1800s saw a small group of freed slaves settle in Liberia, arriving from the US or captured slave ships. This minority elite group – the Americo-Liberians – founded the Liberian state in 1847 and developed a relatively stable oligarchy, dominating political, economic, social and cultural life (ibid). The indigenous inhabitants were 'largely antagonistic' to the formation of this Liberian state, and there was conflict over territory and trade routes during the 1800s (ibid).

The Americo-Liberian elite fostered ethnic affiliation as a means to access state power (Bøås & Utas, forthcoming). Following the 1980 military coup, Ethnicity became even more politicised, and polarising politico-ethno cleavages were consolidated (ibid). Liberia was 'characterised by elite politics, corruption, judicial limbo, political, military and economic violence, generational and other group clashes, and widespread poverty', even before the civil wars (Bøås & Utas, forthcoming, p.5).

The two civil wars in Liberia (spreading over 14 years from 1989 to 2003) led to the death of hundreds of thousands of Liberians, the displacement of millions, and widespread traumatisation. It devastated the economy and destroyed much national infrastructure and livelihoods. The civil wars could be conceptualised as a

‘nationalisation’ of local conflicts’, whereby a number of militias were created and fought against each other (Bøås & Utas, forthcoming).

Causes of the civil wars

Kieh’s book (2008, p.18-24) summarises the different schools of thought in the literature about the **causes of the first Liberian civil war**. These include the following theories: ethnic (the dominant view); elite pathology; institutional pathology; spiritual-religious anarchy; political culture; and crises of underdevelopment. Other causes identified are: the spillover effects from the army and the military junta; entrenched political issues and tensions; and economic profit. Most authors argue for a mix of causes (Dunn, 2011; Bøås & Utas, forthcoming).

In a journal article, Kieh (2009, p.7) argues that the second civil war was ‘inevitable’, and caused by the failure of the transitional processes enacted after the first civil war (such as disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) and broader security sector reform). Other proximate causes include the former President Taylor’s ethnic scapegoating, human rights abuses by the state, and the state’s failure to address social and economic problems (ibid).

4.2 Poverty, inequality and unequal access to assets, services and opportunities

High levels of poverty and inequality, and unequal access to assets and opportunities are often cited as the principal root cause of conflict in Liberia. Inequalities are prevalent across multiple dimensions, particularly: class; region; ‘youth’; and ethnic minorities. Liberians are angry and frustrated at the lack of and unequal access to opportunities, particularly employment; basic services (education, health, water); political power and processes; and land (Paczynska, et al. 2010).

In a 2012 Afrobarometer survey, based on 1200 interviews across Liberia, participants identified ‘the most important problems facing this country that government should address’ as: infrastructure/roads (20% of participants); unemployment (16%); education (15%); health (7%); and food shortage/famine (7%). However, McLaughlin notes the absence of mobilisation around these grievances, and that the majority of the Liberians interviewed for the ICAF update report would not support protests or violence methods (McLaughlin, 2012).

Poverty, income and wealth inequality

Liberia has historically had high levels of poverty and inequalities. It is one of the world’s poorest countries, with 64% of the population living on under US\$1 a day in 2008. Many ordinary Liberians have not seen any real economic improvements since the end of the war.¹²

Class inequality and elites

Liberian politics, economics and society has been dominated by a small, educated, wealthy, well-connected, and international elite (especially with links to the US). Originally this elite was formed predominantly of Americo-Liberians, but it now includes other ethnic-regional elites and instead could be called the ‘Americo-Liberian elite culture’. Aside from this however, little has changed since the end of the civil war – political and economic power is still exercised by an exclusive elite.

¹² See - <http://matsutas.wordpress.com/2011/11/08/election-riots/>

Unequal access and corruption. Nepotism and corruption are key sources of resentment, and many people do not trust local and national government, or the political system, to respond to citizens' needs (International Crisis Group (ICG), 2012; Eze & Saa, 2013). Elites are seen to have priority access to and control of: education opportunities (post-primary school), health, formal judicial matters (e.g. securing more favourable rulings) and policing, and employment opportunities.

Justice and impunity. During the civil war, violence was committed by all groups in Liberia, and the majority of Liberians believe they were victims of the war. This means that pursuing legal redress for human rights violations is a complicated effort – with high risks of destabilising peace. The recommendations of the TRC's final report attempted to address this difficult situation, but none have been implemented. Much of the literature suggests this is because many of those implicated hold positions in the government and parliament, or in businesses closely linked to these senior power brokers.

Regional (and ethnic) inequalities and divides

Historically, regional (and ethnic) divides have been important in Liberia since the formation of the state in 1847. Liberian counties were divided according to boundaries of ethnic groups. During the civil war, different groups fought with different militias. The Gio and Mano (especially in Nimba County) allied with Charles Taylor, and the Krahn and Mandingo formed their own militias (ibid).

In the **present day, ethnicity is less relevant than regional identity,** as an ethnic group in one part of the country often has very different interests and networks compared to the same group in another part of the country. Ethnic groups intermarry and coexist (McLaughlin, 2012). However, regional divisions are still prevalent and are becoming increasingly problematic. It is argued that the reintegration of the southeast of the country has been neglected by the government and the president, and people in this area feel marginalised (expert input). These divisions were visible during the 2011 elections (Bøås & Utas, forthcoming).

People are poorer in rural areas than in urban areas – with US\$1 a day poverty levels of 68%, and 55%, respectively (Government of Liberia, n.d., p.21). There is unequal access to resources between the capital region Greater Monrovia and the rest of the country (e.g. access to education) (Eze & Saa, 2013).

Infrastructure problems are consistently identified in the literature as being a key issue of dissatisfaction (Afrobarometer, 2012). The increasing trend of urbanisation is already putting basic services, infrastructure and jobs under stress (Republic of Liberia, n.d.). Rural areas can be disproportionately affected by impassable roads and insufficient infrastructure for health and education (McLaughlin, 2012).

Marginalised 'youth', young people and demographics

'**Youth**' in Liberia is often used as a socio-economic classification, rather than a demographic category, to mean people who are excluded from access to political, economic or societal power. Utas (2009) notes that tension between youth and elders was heightened prior to the war, but became even more visible and important during the war.

Young people are a majority – an estimated 60% of Liberia's population are under 35. Many young people are unemployed, or underemployed in the informal economy. The majority were born and grew up during the war, and many are ex-combatants (Eze & Saa, 2013).

High levels of **youth unemployment** (especially among ex-combatants) is consistently identified in the literature as a key potential conflict dynamic, and is viewed by many as the underlying cause of high crime rates (Paczynska, et al. 2010). In December 2012, youths violently protested (through roadblocks, attacking vehicles, and throwing

rocks) in Monrovia (Eze & Saa, 2013). However, **youth organisations** are also identified as a source of peace in Liberia – helping to bring together people from different tribal and religious affiliations (ibid).

Changing demographics are a key issue of concern. Liberia is currently undergoing a phase of rapid population growth. Government projections estimate that by 2038 the population is likely to have increased by between 53-90% (Republic of Liberia, n.d., p.18).

Ethnic minorities

Personal and informal networks are important to secure access to services and opportunities in Liberia. Dominant groups are seen as dominating access to local resources, to the detriment of minority groups. Minority ethnic and religious groups feel excluded from areas such as economic and employment opportunities, justice services, and education (Paczynska, et al. 2010). In some cases, minority groups have been attacked (ibid).

Gender

Women in Liberia have less access to education, less available capital to start businesses, and less access to land and properties than men (Eze & Saa, 2013).

Unequal access to economic opportunities and basic services

Limited employment opportunities – both formal and informal – are available in Liberia. Only 15% of people are employed in the formal sector (a figure that has largely not improved since the end of the war) (Paczynska, et al. 2010). Liberians also feel that **access to employment** is limited by class, ethnic or religious categories (ibid). Employment is harder to find in rural areas – this is another reason why access to land is so important to Liberians (see below). Some public sector employees complain that they do not get paid regular salaries (McLaughlin, 2012).

International engagement in Liberia has created its own economy – with many jobs linked to the peacebuilding efforts. There is particular resentment that many of these jobs have gone to diaspora elites returning to Liberia after the conflict (ibid). There are also suspicions that some aid funds have been diverted for other uses. Non-elite Liberians are increasingly resentful of the growing enrichment of the elites (ICG, 2012). Other causes of resentment are foreign nationals that have secured jobs in the mining sector, instead of Liberians (McLaughlin, 2012).

Access to education is limited, with few high schools and universities (especially in Bong, Lofa and Nimba Counties). Many children are not educated past primary school. It is common for high school students to live away from home to attend school. University tuition fees discourage some students from entering tertiary education (McLaughlin, 2012). The quality of education is low (especially at university level) – sometimes teachers do not have qualifications.

Access to health care is a particular concern for rural areas. Some facilities have not been rebuilt since the war ended (Paczynska, et al. 2010). The Ministry of Health has made slow progress in taking over the health services that NGOs were formerly providing in areas where NGOs left (McLaughlin, 2012).

4.3 Land control and ownership

Access, ownership, rights to, and use of land are widely considered to be structural causes of both past conflict and of current tensions in Liberia. In the past, key actors have mobilised groups around the issue of land (Paczynska et al., 2010). ICG (2009 in Vinck. et al., 2009) argues it is ‘the most explosive issue in Liberia today’. In all four counties the ICAF teams visited in 2009, interviewees said land disputes were the ‘most serious problems their communities were facing’, however this emphasis diminished by the time of the 2011 ICAF interviews (Paczynska et al., 2010, p.14; McLaughlin, 2012). The UN Security Council (2013, p.41) notes that progress, albeit slow, has been made in regards to land distribution, but warns that the ‘critical, societal fault line of land tenure must be addressed if Liberia is to finally overcome one of the principal, original causes of its civil conflict’.

Efforts to **resolve land disputes** are complicated by many factors. A central problem is the relationship between traditional land ownership systems and statutory laws. Formal records have limited value in rural areas where traditional law is strong. In urban areas, specific problems include: limited formal records of ownership (and the destruction of deeds during the war); incomplete land registry and ownership systems; disputes over ownership of land following movement of people during the wars; growing competition for land; and environmental degradation (Paczynska, et al. 2010). Conflicts occur in agricultural, urban and forested areas (ibid). They involve local communities, local and national government actors and, increasingly, business investors (ibid).

In some areas, **land disputes** are a result of **long-standing** conflicts within communities (e.g. between the Mandingo and the Gio and Mano in Nimba County) (Paczynska, et al. 2010). **New land disputes** have also emerged: during the civil war, land was often taken by squatters, or armed groups would reward their supporters with land (Paczynska, et al. 2010). Since the end of the war, many displaced people have returned to reclaim their land, and conflict has ensued (ibid). These tensions are often exacerbated by the fact that those that took the land often belong to different ethnic or regional groups, and may have been rivals during the war (ibid). In more unstable areas, such as the border with Guinea’s Forestière region, land disputes are potentially more dangerous (Adolfo, 2010).

4.4 Natural resources

Natural resources – diamonds, gold, timber, rubber and iron ore – are widely considered to have played a significant role in the wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone. They are Liberia’s biggest exports.¹³ The underlying weaknesses of natural resource management have not been effectively addressed. Therefore this is still considered a potential area of conflict.

While efforts have been made to regulate natural resource exploitation, a recent UN report finds that diamond trafficking continues ‘unabated’, and large-scale palm oil development continues to pose ‘significant challenges to peace and security’ in rural areas¹⁴ (UN Security Council, 2013, p.31). The illegal allocation of forest resources (via the misuse of private use permits) is also unresolved (ibid).¹⁵ Further, recent discoveries of oil are also potential sources of future conflict (expert input).

Le Billon (2012, p.34) suggests that there are three **types of conflict** over resources in Liberia:

- ‘Resource curse’ (resource mismanagement and weak governance);

¹³ Also including coffee and cocoa (OECD, 2012).

¹⁴ The report identifies that presently there is ‘continued conflict’ between local communities and large-scale concession holders (UN Security Council, 2013, p.31).

¹⁵ See - <http://www.globalwitness.org/campaigns/environment/forests/industrial-forest-use/liberia>

- 'Conflict resources' (which finance belligerents); and
- 'Resource conflicts' (fighting over resources).

Liberia is particularly **susceptible to these types of conflict** due to: the large size of its mining resources and projects; an entrenched culture of abuses; low capacity of bureaucracies and civil society to manage and monitor resource exploitation; elite involvement in the minerals industry; and limited political will to clamp down on illegal trafficking and contracting (Le Billon, 2012).

4.5 Justice

Liberians are deeply dissatisfied with the lack of progress made in rebuilding the formal judicial system, and there is a low level of trust in these institutions (Paczynska, et al. 2010). Common concerns include: affordability; accessibility; timeliness of case processing; and corruption (USIP, 2009).

Liberia has a long history of **customary justice systems**. Most Liberians – particularly non-elite, poorer, rural Liberians – use these to resolve disputes (Paczynska, et al. 2010). In fact, only an estimated 3% of cases are taken to the formal justice system (USIP 2009). The customary justice system is effective at resolving various disputes and conflicts at a community level, and often of a civil nature. However, it is often ill-equipped to resolve serious criminal disputes, or disputes between communities (ibid).

The weak, and often non-existent, formal judicial system has exacerbated tensions over **land disputes**, as people reclaiming land have found it difficult to take cases to court (Paczynska, et al. 2010). The complex system of land ownership is based on both formal and customary ownership – and there are no clear mechanisms for resolving the contradictions between these systems (ibid). An expert consulted for this paper commented that the formal justice system is seen by some to be a tool of the political and economic elite to control the population.

4.6 Triggers

The literature widely identifies two potential triggers for conflict. First, the planned (but continually delayed) **withdrawal of UN peacekeeping forces** is considered a concern. The Liberian state security institutions have limited law enforcement personnel, training, salaries, and logistical and administrative capacity (Eze & Saa, 2013).

Second, literature across countries now identifies **elections** as events that can foster violence and conflict. While the violence of the 2011 Liberian elections was not on a large scale, there were street clashes. The Liberian police were supported by UNMIL in controlling the violence.

The elections also prompted other issues to resurface. Bøås and Utas (forthcoming, p.3) argue that the 2011 elections highlighted that the 'cleavages that led to decades of war still run deep'. Meanwhile, the National Elections Commission (NEC) was accused of bias from some parties for failing to penalise the ruling Unity Party's use of state resources in its campaign (ICG, 2012).

5. Principal regional actors and dynamics

5.1 Neighbouring countries

Liberia and its west-African neighbours – Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Côte d'Ivoire – share common conflict dynamics: remote border areas where there state's presence is limited; weak natural resource governance; illicit trade in arms, drugs and minerals; and porous borders. The region is vulnerable to cross-border conflict spillovers and violence. Instability in neighbouring countries also has economic and institutional impacts (Dowd & Raleigh, 2012).

The Liberian state has limited capacity and will to exercise authority over its remote border areas (UN Security Council, 2013). These areas are home to many ex-combatants who are vulnerable to being recruited as mercenaries into regional militia groups (ibid).

5.2 Cross-border conflict dynamics

The civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone reduced stability in the surrounding region – especially in Cote d'Ivoire and Guinea (Jörgel & Utas, 2007). Since the end of the civil wars, levels of cross-border violence have reduced significantly, but regional mercenaries are implicated in violent incidents in neighbouring countries (Dowd & Raleigh, 2012; Eze & Saa, 2013).

At present, the political alliances of elites across the region are the most significant cross-border sub-regional conflict factor, rather than the movements of the border populations or ex-combatants (expert input). There is limited research in this area – an expert highlighted this as an important knowledge gap. Key questions are: who are the elites are that are collaborating in cross-border activities? What are their networks and power bases?

The Côte d'Ivoire-Liberia border

Côte d'Ivoire has also experienced civil wars in recent years – with the first running from 2002 to 2007, and the second from 2010 to 2011. Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire share ethnic groups, and these groups have sheltered each other during periods of conflict (e.g. ethnic relatives in Côte d'Ivoire have hosted Krahn and Gio Liberians) (Utas, 2004; Bøås & Utas, forthcoming). An estimated 65,000 Ivorian refugees live in Liberia's Grand Gedeh County, with the Krahn (ibid). There are also rumours of training camps in the county (ibid). Liberians are suspected of having been involved in conflict in Cote d'Ivoire following the 2010 elections (Eze & Saa, 2013).

Sierra Leone-Liberia border

In the Sierra Leone Civil War of 1991 to 2002, Charles Taylor and Liberian fighters were key conflict actors. Currently, the regional area of the Gola Forest has been identified by the UN Panel of Experts as an area at risk of conflict. Hundreds of former combatants (some armed) are alleged to live in the area, illegally mining gold, and smuggling drugs and weapons (UN Security Council, 2013). The governments of both Liberia and Sierra Leone are 'reluctant to take a proactive approach to the security of this forest region' (UN Security Council, 2013, p.19).

6. Conflict responses

This section maps some of the principal conflict responses carried out by national and international actors. It is not a conclusive list, but indicative of the types of initiatives found in the literature.

6.1 The 2003 Accra Comprehensive Peace Accord

In 2003, the Liberian government, rebels and political parties signed a peace agreement. This committed the signatories to: an immediate ceasefire; cantonment, disarmament, demobilisation, rehabilitation and reintegration; security sector reform; the release of prisoners and abductees; addressing human rights issues; security guarantees for humanitarian activities; addressing political issues; a post-conflict rehabilitation and reconstruction programme; implementation of the peace agreement; and the settlement of disputes (UN Security Council, 2003). Charles Taylor was forced to leave Liberia as part of the peace settlement, and was later brought to the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

6.2 Liberian government

'Liberia Rising 2030' is the country's long-term national development strategy, which will be implemented through a series of 'medium term expenditure frameworks'. It covers all themes and areas of government. The current framework, 'An Agenda for Transformation', runs from 2012 to 2017 (Republic of Liberia, n.d.). Previous strategies (after 2003) were: 'Lift Liberia: Poverty Reduction Strategy' (2008-2011); 'Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy of 2007'; and the '150-day Action Plan'.

President Sirleaf also launched the 'National Roadmap for Healing, Peacebuilding and Reconciliation' in 2012. This multi-dimensional process aims to overcome social, political, and religious divisions; transform relationships; heal wounds from the civil war; and address historical wrongs, including the structural root causes and potential areas of conflict (Sirleaf, 2014, p.2).

6.3 International actors

UN

The UN is present in Liberia through its peacekeeping mission (The UN Mission in Liberia, UNMIL), and its UN Country Team (UNCT) (which is made up of 16 UN agencies, funds, and programmes). UNMIL has widely been considered the foremost actor ensuring security from widespread conflict in Liberia since it started in 2003. Research by Jörgel and Utas (2007, p.41) found that Liberians perceive UNMIL to be the most important group for their personal safety. UNMIL is also considered a key actor able to resolve conflicts (McLaughlin, 2012). However, Liberians' concerns today are less about renewed war than about minor conflicts, on which UNMIL has been less able to act.

UNMIL started in 2003 with 15,000 military personnel and 1,100 police officers. In 2013 this had decreased to 7,500 uniformed personnel (such as troops and police), 400 international civilian personnel, 900 local staff and 200 volunteers.¹⁶ A gradual withdrawal of military troops is underway, and an increase in the number of police officers is planned to strengthen national capacity (e.g. the Liberian National Police) (OECD, 2012). The UN

¹⁶ Numbers have been rounded. See - <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/unmil/facts.shtml>

Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) has been engaged in Liberia since 2010, and has three focus areas: rule of law; security sector reform; and national reconciliation (ibid).

USA

Liberia and the USA have had historically close cultural, economic, and family ties due to the settling of the Americo-Liberians. The USA has political and moral reasons for actively supporting peace- and state-building activities in Liberia, and it is Liberia's biggest donor. USAID's new approach (2013-2017) to Liberia has changed from a primary strategic focus on post-conflict stabilisation and recovery to a focus on 'transformational' and sustainable long-term development (USAID, n.d.). The new approach will emphasise capacity building, and improving access to critical goods and services (ibid). Thematic objectives centre on: governance, growth to reduce poverty, health and education (ibid).

EU

The EU's strategy for the next budget period, 2014 to 2020, has yet to be published. From 2008 to 2013 the EU's conflict responses included: development support (mainly through its approach 'Linking Relief Rehabilitation and Development in a post-conflict'); natural resource management support (e.g. through the Kimberley Process); and conflict prevention (e.g. through supporting the TRC, and security sector reforms).¹⁷ In terms of funding, the EU is a smaller donor than the US or some EU member states.

7. Sources of and capacities for peace

This section looks at possible sources of and capacities for peace in Liberia, identifying where conflict has not spread, or where communities have managed to maintain peaceful relations. There is limited literature that directly identifies sources of and capacities for peace.

7.1 Social networks and relationships

A key source of resilience to conflict in Liberia is social networks and relationships that cut across the divisions and inequalities detailed in section 4.2 (Paczynska, et al. 2010; expert input). These networks may be formed through: marriage, friendships, education, work, culture, and entertainment, for example (ibid).

Social groups identified as being potential sources of peace include: the 'secret societies' (the Poro and Sande) in the north-west of the country; ex-combatants' networks; neighbourhood watch groups (as they bring communities together to carry out joint policing); and the Motorcycle Transport Union – which has multi-tribal membership (Paczynska, et al. 2010).

7.2 Community managed disputes

In post-war Liberia, the majority of disputes have been managed and resolved within local communities, by local actors. These disputes are often mediated by elders through **customary justice systems**. They have long provided the mechanism to resolve disputes within communities, families, between neighbours, and some disputes between communities (Paczynska, et al. 2010).

¹⁷ See - http://eeas.europa.eu/liberia/index_en.htm

Local associations also provide forums to resolve disputes within communities and across divides and inequalities (e.g. women's market associations, the Motorcycle Transport Union, youth organisations) (ibid).

7.3 Reconciliation activities

Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)

Established in 2006, the TRC's goal is to promote national peace, security, unity and reconciliation. It is also to foster truth, justice and reconciliation by identifying the root causes of the conflict, and determining those responsible for committing crimes. The TRC collected 17,416 narrative statements from individuals in Liberia about the nature and experience of violence from 1979 to 2003. The TRC released its final report in 2009 and made a series of recommendations – none of which have been implemented. Resistance to implementing the recommendations has come from the political and economic elites.

National 'Palava Hut' Programme

Launched in October 2013, the national 'Palava Hut' Programme is a traditional and cultural conflict resolution mechanism common in rural Liberia. It involves community-based truth-telling and psychosocial activities (Sirleaf, 2014). Palava Hut Talks will be conducted across the country, and aim to enable victims and perpetrators to tell their stories in a safe space, to promote national peace and reconciliation (Sirleaf, 2014).

7.4 Liberian national identity

The ICAF report identifies a growing sense of 'common identity among Liberians' (Paczynska, et al. 2010). Ethnic identity is of decreasing importance in Liberia, as groups increasingly work together. However, regional identity and regional divisions currently undermine the potential for a unifying national identity to be a source of peace. The TRC could be a potential forum to foster a sense of national identity.

7.5 Interfaith dialogues

There is less tension between religious groups now than there was at the end of the civil war (expert input). The inter-faith dialogues are thought to have played a role in this trend in the regions of the country where they were active.

Dunn (2011) suggests that Christian and Muslim leaders may have been the first mediators in the Liberian conflict in the early 1990s. These leaders went on to establish the Interfaith Mediation Committee, the principles of which were later used for the ECOWAS Peace Plan for Liberia. This effort eventually set the scene for the ECOMOG regional group to deploy a peace force (ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group, in Dunn, 2011).

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Key websites

- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia (TRC) – <http://trcofliberia.org/>
- Conciliation resources Liberia – <http://trcofliberia.org/>
- International Crisis Group – Liberia – <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/africa/west-africa/liberia.aspx>
- West Africa Network for Peace (WANEP) – <http://www.wanep.org/wanep/>
- Human Rights Watch – Liberia – <https://www.hrw.org/africa/liberia>
- Relief Web – Liberia – <http://reliefweb.int/country/lbr>
- Irin – Liberia – <http://www.irinnews.org/country/lr/liberia>
- UN Security Council Report – Liberia – <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/liberia/>
- UN Peacebuilding Fund – Liberia – <http://www.unpbf.org/countries/liberia/>
- European Union External Action – EU Relations with Liberia – http://eeas.europa.eu/liberia/index_en.htm

9. Appendix – full question

The output should be around 15 pages, with a maximum of 20 pages (if necessary, more information may be included in annexes). It should be based on a review of current literature relating to conflict dynamics in Liberia.

This literature review should identify and reference:

- Key structural tensions and proximate drivers underlying the current risk for violent conflict in Liberia. This should not ignore history, but should focus on the recent past and current events. Analysis should include:
 - Conflict over natural resources (principally forestry and land but also diamonds and the prospect of potential conflict over oil);
 - Conflict related to the conduct, reform and citizen's access to security and justice services, including transitional justice.
- Any sources of, or capacities for, peace. Identifying for example where communities have managed to maintain peaceful relations. Include any peace institutions - if they exist (e.g. religious organisations, CSOs, mixed marriages etc.)
- Principal conflict actors - their positions, interests and needs; their sources of power (popular, military, financial etc) and major alliances/tensions. Include external supporters of conflict parties.
- Regional dynamics and their (potential) impact on Liberia, such as the influx of returnees from neighbouring countries, positions (and how they are changing) of external actors with interests / influence in Liberia, etc.
- Conflict dynamics, including distribution / type of violence, factors producing escalation/de-escalation (triggers). Distribution of violence should include a (geographic / thematic) mapping of recent escalations into (localized) violence.
- Conflict responses - mapping the national and international responses to try to manage tensions and prevent violent conflict. Where available, indicate lessons learned and recommendations.