International Alert.

Insights: International Institutions, Aid Effectiveness and Peacebuilding in Liberia

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June 2011

Understanding conflict. Building peace.

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1. Executive Summary

This paper forms part of a series that assesses how international institutions (IIs), namely the UN and the World Bank, have sought to build peace in conflict-affected countries. It also aims to promote understanding of the constraints under which they operate and to suggest ways to work better within them.

Since Charles Taylor's departure in 2003, IIs have sought to provide stability through macro-economic reform, recovery aid and security provision. This approach is consistent with empirical evidence that both economic growth and peacekeeping promote stability.[1] Nevertheless, progress to date has only just begun to address the underlying vulnerabilities and tensions that threaten Liberia's stability and its public security and justice services remain ill-equipped to address or contain them.

While the IIs' focus on improved financial management and security sector reform has helped, it needs to be broadened if they are to support robust economic growth, state security capacity or state legitimacy in the near term. In the context of the planned drawdown of the UN's peacekeeping mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and limited state enforcement capacity, it is increasingly urgent that IIs build capacity in targeted preventive programming while also investing more in long-term efforts to strengthen state-society relations through a more collaborative approach to service delivery and governance.

This paper recommends that international institutions:

- **Build the evidence base for and support targeted preventive programming.** Given UNMIL's eventual drawdown, national capacities to identify, monitor and respond to "hot spots" and trends related to violence and conflict need to be strengthened. This is a prerequisite for more effective, targeted policing where forces are small, and for developing and measuring preventive programming. It should combine data from the state with civil society monitoring and be transparent.
- **Strengthen their own capacities for conflict-sensitive programming.** This requires both higher standards of conflict or political risk assessment in II proposal assessment and design, and greater use of community feedback mechanisms in project design, supervision, monitoring and evaluation.

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1   See P. Collier (2009). *Wars, Guns, and Votes: Democracy in Dangerous Places.* New York: HarperCollins; and OECD DAC Discussion Paper (2008). *Concepts and Dilemmas of State Building in Fragile Situations.* Paris: OECD.

- **Promote collaborative approaches to governance and service delivery.** IIs should foster collaborative approaches to priority setting, planning, implementation, supervision, monitoring and evaluation of public services at community, county and national levels. This requires increased support for decentralisation and service delivery with greater emphasis on strengthening local participation and accountability.
- **Prepare for long-term support for the peacebuilding and statebuilding process.** Addressing structural causes of conflict are political and long-term processes, in the best cases taking decades rather than a few years.[2] IIs must prepare for this, with long-term political accompaniment, technical assistance and aid linked to the government's 2030 national visioning exercise.
- **Extend the security guarantee.** Liberia has a small army of 2200 and police presence is only now beginning to extend into the country's interior. IIs should prepare for the UN to extend an over-the-horizon security guarantee even after UNMIL's transition into a political/police mission takes place.

2. Introduction

The study provides a snapshot of peacebuilding priorities and how II engagements address them. It draws on a longer study that examined how IIs have conceived, planned, implemented and coordinated their engagement in-country, and on International Alert's peacebuilding context analysis.

The methodology included desk research of primary and secondary sources and perceptions data from 41 interviews and two informal focus group meetings conducted from December 2010 to February 2011. These involved a broad range of in-country stakeholders, including government representatives, local civil society, international NGOs, media, the UN and its agencies and programmes, the World Bank and some bilateral donors.

The body of the report is divided into four sections. Section 3 notes the main peacebuilding priorities in Liberia. Section 4 provides an overview of international engagement in Liberia since 2003, tracing the priorities that have guided international interventions and how these have changed over time. Section 5 assesses whether and how:

- peacebuilding concerns have been integrated into recovery and peacebuilding planning and prioritisation processes;

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2   World Bank (2011). *World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security, and Development.* Washington, DC: The World Bank.

- aid coordination has contributed to conflict-sensitive collaboration;
- operational design and implementation has been conflict sensitive;
- interventions have been designed to directly address the drivers of conflict.

Section 6 draws conclusions on the strengths and weaknesses of IIs in addressing peacebuilding priorities.

3. Key Peacebuilding Priorities in Liberia

Liberia was devastated by civil war between 1989 and 2003. Causes included a century and a half of systematic exclusion of the "indigenous" majority, a decade of military-based rule, deeply entrenched corruption and rivalries with rulers of surrounding countries. The history of political exclusion, corruption and impunity and a generation of war has left the state centralised but weak, with limited presence outside the capital or coastal settlements. It has also left a legacy of deep state/society mistrust and political polarisation, making the state vulnerable to contestation and conflict, especially around elections. More specifically, International Alert identifies the following key peacebuilding priorities for Liberia's stability in the near and medium term:

Conflicts over land

- Complex land issues hinder development and trigger conflict. Legal property rights are rarely clear cut and it is common for land to be sold to more than one buyer. Conflicts related to county boundaries are also critical and have the potential to de-rail electoral processes and trigger inter-group conflict.

Management of natural resources

- Liberia's extractive sector is likely to be the engine of economic growth and employment. Although its post-war development has been constrained by conditionality and sanctions, it is now set to take off. If managed well, this should promote peace in the longer term, but it will likely increase the risk of corruption and local conflicts over access to land, water, forest, mineral and employment resources.

Access to Justice

- The formal and customary justice systems do not provide reliable justice and have created a system of impunity. Statutory courts and jails lack most financial and human resources; rural magisterial courts and justices of the peace are virtually moribund. Most Liberians see the formal courts as ineffective and corrupt. Customary courts under untrained chiefs provide

faster, cheaper justice focused on intra-communal reconciliation but are again seen as corrupted and only accountable to those with political and economic influence, and, furthermore, often disadvantage women and youth.

Security
- Liberia is not currently an especially violent country, although rates of interpersonal violence are rising, but this is overwhelmingly due to the deployment in strength of UNMIL peacekeepers, police and observers. Security sector reform has been comprehensive but national capacity remains limited by serious human and financial resource constraints. Police capacities outside Monrovia have actually declined in recent years. The small new army of 2200 will not be operational before 2012.

Youth and marginalisation
- Liberian youth make up the majority of the population (estimated at 55%) but given the legacy of the war, limited access to education and employment opportunities, a high proportion of youth remains marginalised and is considered a high risk for further violence. Horizontal economic marginalisation between groups is also seen as a risk factor for conflict.

Over-centralisation
- Liberia restored its national political institutions in late 2005 with the election of a president and bicameral legislature. However, parties are weak, with opposition particularly lacking any organising principle beyond rival personalities, and there has been no decentralisation of democracy either through the county/district/city administrations or via elections to chieftaincies, which indirectly administer the rural majority.

Divisions and reconciliation
- Years of war reinforced existing divisions between communities in Liberia, and created some new ones. Many of these have yet to be healed. The TRC process was never completed, and in some ways reinforced rather than healed divisions. There remains a need for a spirit and programmes of reconciliation.

There are invariably different interpretations of peacebuilding priorities, depending on political perspectives, organisational interests, mandates and capacities. Government and II plans are rarely informed by a shared analysis of the drivers of conflict. However, in Liberia a collective analysis of conflict drivers has been incorporated into national planning processes. For instance, the 2008 Government of Liberia (GoL) Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) identified six conflict drivers

or key risk factors: land conflicts; youth unemployment; political polarisation; poor state-citizen relations; mismanagement of natural resources; lack of access to justice. More recently, the GoL and the UN 2011 Liberia Peacebuilding Programme also identified rising levels of inter-personal violence, transnational trafficking, conflict in neighbouring countries (notably Côte d'Ivoire), elections in October 2011 and the anticipated UNMIL transition after 2012 as further potentially destabilising factors.

However, even if the analysis of conflict risk factors is broadly shared, this does not automatically translate into a common vision of how best to address them. The following section provides an overview of the II response to peacebuilding challenges in Liberia.

4. Engagement of International Institutions in Liberia: A Summary

In the early post-conflict period before the first elections, IIs pursued a stabilisation strategy that involved their substitution for and control over key state functions in parallel with the delivery of humanitarian and recovery aid. Peacebuilding at this early stage in effect involved state constraint with anti-corruption and macro-economic reform agendas, imposed by the international community. At the same time, the UN mission provided security, with donors and IIs providing aid to build popular confidence in the peace process through socio-economic recovery and visible infrastructure projects.

Since Ellen Johnson Sirleaf became president in 2006, the relationship between IIs and the GoL has been far more collaborative. IIs have nevertheless maintained their gradual approach to peacebuilding in which objectives in economic governance, security and socio-economic development were implemented simultaneously, while restrictions on the opening up of the extractive sector – the principal engine for economic growth – were maintained. International engagement in priority areas has, however, shifted towards institutional capacity building, with the World Bank leading on public administration and financial management, and the UN and US leading on the security sector and (less so) the justice sector.

Institution-building efforts have been combined with II support for an aid-driven socio-economic "recovery" agenda, delivered around the state but managed through some elaborate consent-based development planning processes in line with the 2008-2011 GoL PRS. Since sanctions and conditionality on extractive industries initially placed constraints on growth, this aid has been essential for

the delivery of peace dividends. International aid has been the main driver of economic growth and source of employment and Johnson Sirleaf's government has been highly effective at bringing it into Liberia.

5. Analysing International Institutions' Peacebuilding Responses

Some of the ways in which IIs have tried to tailor their engagements to addressing peacebuilding priorities include:

• Integrating peacebuilding priorities into strategic planning frameworks

This has been relatively successful in Liberia. A working group with representation from across government, the UN and civil society played a critical role in ensuring that analysis of conflict drivers was included in the 2008-2011 PRS. Although this probably helped increase international assistance for youth training and employment, other root cause factors such as conflict over land, political participation and state/society mistrust have received relatively little attention in II programming.

Liberia's engagement with the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) and Fund (PBF) offered further opportunities to focus international attention on conflict drivers. However, given the prospect of further UNMIL drawdown after 2012, attention has focused on addressing the security gap with the proposal to establish five regional justice and security hubs, each serving three counties. There are concerns about the potential of this initiative to deliver security on a sustainable basis given the already overstretched capacity of Liberian law enforcement. By comparison, planned interventions to address conflict drivers are relatively modest. They include compensation packages to resolve some flash-point county border disputes, a training and employment programme for 1000 at-risk young people and a dialogue platform programme to promote social cohesion in three counties.

In short, while acknowledging a broad range of conflict drivers in planning processes, the II strategic response has been to address these drivers indirectly through support for security and economic recovery. Even in the context of strong GoL-II relations, consent-based planning processes militate against II programming engagement on governance issues. Pressure for short-term peace dividends and results-based management practices also provides strong incentives for framing II programming in terms of tangible service delivery

outputs and for underestimating the importance of process, even if it has the potential to deliver political and social transformational impacts.

• Improving effectiveness through aid coordination and collaboration

The international response in Liberia is widely perceived to be relatively coherent. There has been a shared understanding of key priorities and a strong history of international unity in key negotiations. The PRS provided the framework for UN and World Bank planning and prioritising. Even so, despite adherence to common national planning frameworks, a relatively joined-up UN presence, and a plethora of interagency and aid coordination working groups, officials report that bureaucratic competition between agencies prevents greater interagency information exchange and the development of collaborative initiatives. For example, UNMIL's hot spot assessment reports are not shared beyond the mission. This impedes the ability of IIs (and other stakeholders) to develop more targeted preventive programming and to monitor impact.

UN-World Bank operational cooperation is also relatively rare due to a division of labour: the World Bank Country Assistance Strategy (CAS) does not address the priority issue of establishing peace and security. Nevertheless, there are some notable exceptions where operational collaboration has taken place, despite distinct mandates and working practices.

One example is the three-year UNMIL/UNDP/World Bank/Ministry of Public Works labour-intensive infrastructure programme that aimed to generate employment through road repair in high-risk areas near borders or plantations. Although the programme is now heralded as an example of good practice, it was initially met with internal resistance. This underscores the challenge of developing joined-up responses to violence risk reduction, especially when agencies do not formally share this objective.

• Integrating conflict sensitivity into operational and programming design

It is important that operational agencies working in fragile contexts develop interventions that are conflict sensitive, which are informed by local context dynamics and designed to not only mitigate potential risks and avoid doing harm, but also to contribute to long-term peacebuilding. However, in Liberia, UNMIL is the only international actor with sufficient ongoing monitoring and analysis resources to systematically incorporate local conflict data analysis into the design of its interventions. For example, drawing on its county hot spot

assessments it developed targeted interventions combining dialogue initiatives with programmes to advance community recovery in troubled areas. Its data and analysis also helped ensure that the GoL's repossession of plantations that had been occupied included a range of risk mitigation initiatives and that interagency emergency employment schemes targeted high-risk areas and included "do no harm" analysis.

Other international agencies have relatively fewer resources dedicated to ensuring that their programmes are conflict sensitive, or at least do no harm. The main way that political economy analysis is incorporated into programme design is through risk assessments and mitigation strategies. However, these are often not sufficient: they are rarely detailed enough to assess how the proposed intervention might affect local conflict dynamics. They are also typically limited to the proposal assessment phase, while conflict-sensitive implementation also requires ongoing monitoring and corrective action. This is, for example, a lesson that the World Bank has learned in connection with some of its forestry projects that resulted in conflict between local communities and commercial companies. To strengthen supervision and build in early warning and early response into project-monitoring processes, the Bank is pioneering the involvement of local communities in the production of External Implementation Status Reports in six pilot projects. Therefore, although international aid agencies have long embraced "do no harm" principles, these are only partially translated into programme practice in Liberia.

• Interventions that aim to directly address the drivers of conflict

Some II programming is targeted at addressing the principal risk factors for conflict in Liberia. For example, to improve political participation and address exclusion, IIs have supported the Governance Commission in developing plans for decentralisation while also working to build administrative capacity below the state level. To address conflicts over land, IIs have provided support to the Land Commission to promote long-term land reform and review alternative dispute resolution mechanisms for land conflicts. To support social cohesion and promote reconciliation, IIs have supported the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and, more recently, the Independent National Commission on Human Rights. In addition, to improve access to justice, IIs have recently begun to provide substantial support for the formal justice system. While important, these programmes have been pursued with only varying success.

In general, II engagement in tackling risk factors is most robust where the central government is the principal partner and has a clear vision of how IIs can

help. II support for governance reform and service delivery outside the security sector or at county level is far more limited. Although donors recognise that promoting inclusion and improving state-society relations are long-term and largely endogenous processes, they nevertheless fall short of their potential to promote local ownership and accountability mechanisms through their support for service delivery. In practice, pressure for quick results, combined with government resistance, has crowded out space for inclusive processes, often rendering local ownership and accountability or "consultation" superficial and largely symbolic. Rather than increasing government accountability to citizens, the principal path of government accountability for service delivery remains to the IIs. While this may be inevitable in the immediate post-conflict period, it is now time for IIs to promote more collaborative approaches to improve local service delivery, with greater emphasis on national reach, broad participation and local accountability.

6. Conclusions

Despite significant gains in economic recovery and stability, many of the underlying tensions and vulnerabilities that threaten Liberia's stability remain unaddressed. With the prospect of further UNMIL drawdown in 2012, international attention is currently focused on strengthening national enforcement capacities in the country's interior. However, this will be unlikely to contain violent challenges. In the medium to long term, the international community should also be prepared to offer external security guarantees, in line with suggestions for maintaining an over-the-horizon UN peacekeeping presence for West Africa.

Enforcement-only approaches are expensive and unlikely to be sufficient. They need to be complemented by preventive efforts and better-tailored aid to address risk factors and conflict drivers. This requires local data on violence trends. While UNMIL's hot-spot assessments have enabled targeted risk-mitigation programming in the past, it is now important that national monitoring mechanisms are strengthened in order to deliver more targeted II assistance to high-risk groups and geographical areas.

In addition to targeting high risk factors, IIs can do more to ensure that their programming is designed to deliver long-term transformational impacts related to social cohesion and governance. At a minimum, IIs can provide an example of responsive conflict-sensitive practice, investing more in local conflict analysis and encouraging more local engagement in monitoring and evaluation. The greater long-term challenge is for IIs to support more collaborative approaches to statebuilding,

and to promote effective and responsive relations between the state and people, e.g. through support for local service delivery which is deconcentrated and linked to local mechanisms for participation, accountability and dispute resolution.

Sources: List and Number of Interviews

Government of Liberia
Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs (2)
Ministry of Interior (2)
Land Commission (1)
Governance Commission (1)

International Institutions
World Bank (2)
UNMIL (8)
UNDP (4)
EU Delegation (3)

Bilaterals
DFID/UK FCO (1)
USAID/US Embassy (1)

Non Governmental Organisations
Action for Genuine Democratic Alternatives (1)
Carter Centre (2)
Catholic Justice and Peace Commission (1)
Center for Justice and Peace Studies (1)
Centre for Transparency and Accountability in Liberia (1)
Initiative for Positive Change (1)
International Youth Fellowship (1)
International Centre for Transitional Justice (1)
Interpeace (1)
Landmine Action (1)
National Democratic Institute (1)
New African Research Development Agency (1)
Open Society Institute for West Africa (1)
Search for Common Ground (1)