State of Peace, Reconciliation and Conflict in Liberia
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Executive Summary

INTRODUCTION
This report is an abridged version of an in-depth conflict analysis, carried out by Catholic Relief Services (CRS) for the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Liberia (CABICOL), in response to CABICOL members’ deep concern over the slow pace of post-war recovery in Liberia and the growing risk of renewed conflict. The brutal violence of 14 years civil war still casts a long shadow over the country.

To advance justice and positive peace, this study provides data, analysis and recommendations to assist the Catholic Church, its Justice and Peace Commissions, Caritas Internationalis and civil society organizations to better understand the conflict dynamics in Liberia. Furthermore, it provides a basis for developing and implementing actions that foster constructive community relations, inclusive development and sustainable peace.

The study was carried out in March 2016, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods to document opinions, perceptions and experience from over 1,500 respondents and nearly 50 key informants. Although other studies have assessed the conflict dynamics in Liberia, the “State of Peace, Reconciliation, and Conflict in Liberia” report extends and complements these efforts by focusing on pathways to overcome key challenges and to move towards positive peace. Its central aim is to further meaningful reconciliation and citizen engagement within, between and among Liberia’s diverse communities. The broad scope of the study also ensures that the views and sentiments of Liberians living in the remotest areas are heard and valued.

KEY TAKEAWAYS
The study offers a glimpse into the feelings, perceptions, thoughts and opinions of Liberians regarding the challenges, obstacles, opportunities and prospects for peace in the country. The specific findings and conclusions are presented in three essential areas: 1) Peace and conflict, 2) Democratic governance, and 3) Social cohesion. The key takeaways follow the central aim of the study and highlight key elements for furthering reconciliation and building positive peace.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS
• Liberians appreciate their Pax Liberia but fear that, given the current threats and trends, the peace is fragile and volatile.

• Liberians believe that curbing corruption in public services, resolving divisive land disputes, furthering employment of young people, and conducting free and fair general elections in 2017 are the necessary next steps for advancing positive peace.

• Liberians acknowledge that strengthening intercommunal relations and fostering meaningful reconciliation are crucial for the country to overcome the deep divisions from the enduring distrust, hurt and hatred sown by the civil war.
FRAGILE PEACE

Liberians perceive the current peace as primarily “negative”. Although the horrors of war and extreme violence are in the past, the positive attributes of peace—social harmony, mutually beneficial inter-ethnic coexistence, trust in institutions, and productive citizen–state relations—are still not present. Respondents were evenly split on whether Liberia is at risk of descending into large-scale violent conflict (50.6% for “high to very high risk” and 43.7% for “no to low risk”). Optimistic respondents and interviewees pinned their hopes on conflict fatigue and disillusionment with the uneven outcomes of the war. However, they highlighted that powerful risk factors for renewed violence still persist: systemic public sector corruption, disputes over land ownership and high rates of youth unemployment.

RECONCILIATION

The vast majority of Liberians believe that the main perpetrators of wartime violence escaped punishment and that the victims of violence were denied justice. More than 80% of respondents felt that people who suffered grave injury during the war did not receive justice through the national Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Half of respondents (49.7%) believed that post-war reconciliation failed to achieve its objectives. Key informants elaborated that the national peace and reconciliation processes had the weakest impacts at the grassroots level, where efforts were piecemeal and superficial.

KEY ACTORS AND FLASHPOINTS

Political leaders (71.8%) and unemployed youth (58.2%) topped the list of potential actors that can instigate violence. Nimba, Grand Gedeh, and Montserrado were cited as the main flashpoint counties, due to both historical and current factors. Inhabitants of River Cess (79.3%), Nimba (74.9%); Grand Kru (74.4%); and Grand Cape Mount (74.2%) assessed the risk as highest, while respondents in River Gee were the most optimistic. Also, the politically driven attempt to declare Liberia as a Christian state was seen as destabilizing, with potential to instigate violence.

SHORT-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

• Encourage free and fair general elections in 2017 by organizing and administering a nation-wide election observation mission; by carrying out parallel vote tabulation at district and national level; by developing and administering nation-wide civic and voter education campaigns; and by organizing political exchanges between communities and politicians.

• Foster meaningful and profound reconciliation across Liberia by creating safe spaces where healing and reconciliation can take place; by supporting the use of alternative healing and reconciliation approaches; and by creating opportunities to identify and employ suitable indigenous reconciliation mechanisms.
MEDIUM TO LONG-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

• Promote transparency, stewardship, and accountability in public resource management by supporting initiatives that increase transparency and accountability in public resource management; and by establishing and promoting social accountability, including the use of community accountability forums and tools.

• Promote transparent land management and property dispute resolution by supporting the development of comprehensive land title documentation processes; and by building community and local government capacity for land use negotiations.

• Create opportunities for Liberia’s youth to heal and advance their livelihoods by gaining further insights into the issues and challenges affecting young people; by offering opportunities for healing and social reintegration; and by providing capacity building to improve youth employability and job creation, i.e. livelihoods and small and medium enterprise (SME) support.

• Institutionalize a culture of a peace through education programs in schools and the community by developing peace and education activities focused on young people; and by institutionalizing peace education in schools.

• Promote community dispute resolution mechanisms by advocating for the establishment of chiefs’ courts as Community-based Alternative Dispute Resolution Mechanisms (CADRMs); by improving the capacity of chiefs to dispense justice; and by researching and integrating best practices from the traditional legal systems.

• Increase trust and cooperation between government and citizens by advocating for greater transparency in policy formulation and implementation; and by facilitating community encounters with decision-makers.

• Promote intercultural communication and exchanges by identifying and developing cultural connectors for peace; and by promoting cultural encounters and inter-county migration, especially among young people.
Liberia Today: Context and challenges

Since the end of the civil war, Liberians have successfully carried out two peaceful democratic elections, which restored a measure of confidence in the institutions of government and proved that differences can be resolved through peaceful political competition at the polls. If Liberia repeats this success in 2017, it will mark the first democratic transfer of power from an elected incumbent to an elected executive since 1944, as current President Johnson-Sirleaf steps down at the end of her constitutional mandate.

One of the main challenges is how to turn the negative peace into positive peace. The war trauma is still fresh, and the historical and systemic drivers that fueled the war are still present. Reconciliation did not reach deeply and widely enough to rebuild the torn relationships within and between ethno-regional groups. In the eyes of many Liberians, the elites manipulated the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to absolve themselves of wrongdoing and to gain political advantages.

Liberian social capital is fragile, divided horizontally by regional, ethnic, religious, urban vs. rural and young vs. old cleavages. Neighbors from different ethnicities who once lived peacefully are feuding over grievances, property titles and residency rights. Land ownership conflicts entangle local communities, international corporations, local and national officials, politicians and others in a bitter struggle to secure benefits through zero-sum competition.

Vertical social cohesion is also strained by crony capitalism, rent-seeking, and a weak civic society. The country remains impoverished and in desperate need of livelihoods, education and jobs, especially for young people. The fears are compounded by the uncertainty pending the upcoming drawdown of the peacekeeping forces of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), the main guarantor of state-wide security since the end of the war.

In sum, although Liberia has emerged from the dark days of civil war and taken significant steps toward democratic governance, positive peace has yet to take root throughout the country. National security remains fragile and under-resourced, and citizens live with the fear that violent conflict could reignite locally and spread.
Background and Methodology

This impetus for this study reflects the deep concern of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Liberia (CABICOL) that the country’s post-war recovery is far from complete. Church leadership believes that the impacts of 14 years of civil war—which ruptured the peaceful co-existence among ethnic communities, inflicted psychological trauma and stalled economic development—still cast a long shadow over Liberia. They contend that in order for justice and positive peace to be restored, there must be more honest and open discussion, listening, trust and unity between and among Liberians of all ethnicities, regions, ages, religions and economic status. To further this goal, the “State of Peace, Reconciliation, and Conflict in Liberia” report provides data, analysis and recommendations to assist the Catholic Church, its Justice and Peace Commissions, Caritas Internationalis and civil society organizations to better understand the conflict dynamics in Liberia. Furthermore, it provides a basis for developing and implementing actions that foster constructive community relations, inclusive development, and sustainable peace.

The study, conducted in March 2016 in each of Liberia’s 15 counties, applied both quantitative and qualitative methods. Hippolyt Pul, a former CRS Peace Advisor and presently an independent consultant, designed and led the research. Quantitatively, the methodology relied on random sampling of households and respondents with a probability proportional to size (PPS) process, selecting 50 electoral polling areas from the 1,780 listed the 2011 national electoral roll (the most up-to-date, comprehensive and in-depth record of proportional population distribution for Liberia). The survey instrument contained 65 questions and was administered by 25 surveyors. In total, 1,516 heads of households were interviewed, surpassing the minimum of 1,500 needed for a representative sample.

Qualitatively, the survey data was triangulated by conducting 47 key informant interviews in nine counties, to gather in-depth information on the attitudes, feelings, hopes and concerns of the average citizen. Interviews were carried out in the following counties: Bomi, Bong, Grand Gedeh, Grand Kru, Lofa, Maryland, Montserrado, Nimba and Sinoe. Interviewers posed guiding questions to elicit responses that illuminate the central research question: “How do Liberians perceive the status of peace, reconciliation and conflict in the country since the end of the civil war?” A survey-planning workshop generated the initial list of 64 potential key informants, which were subsequently vetted and contacted for interviews. Additional respondents were identified through a snowball sampling process based on recommendations by interviewed participants.
Findings and Analysis

The following section offers a glimpse into the feelings, perceptions, thoughts and opinions of Liberians regarding the challenges, obstacles, opportunities and prospects for peace in the country. It is organized into three sections: 1) Peace and conflict, 2) Democratic governance, and 3) Social cohesion.

The following general conclusions arise from the findings and analysis:

• Liberians appreciate their Pax Liberia but fear that, given the current threats and trends, the peace is fragile and volatile.

• Liberians believe that curbing corruption in public services, resolving divisive land disputes, furthering employment of young people, and conducting free and fair general elections in 2017 are the necessary next steps for advancing positive peace.

• Liberians acknowledge that strengthening intercommunal relations and fostering meaningful reconciliation are crucial for the country to overcome the deep divisions from the enduring distrust, hurt and hatred sown by the civil war.

PEACE AND CONFLICT

The current peace is greatly valued, but seen as “negative” and fragile: Liberians cherish the past 13 years of peace; however, they speak in terms of “silence of the guns” or “cessation of hostilities” rather than the positive elements of peace, such as ethnic integration, harmonious inter-communal relationships, civil conduct, mutual trust and civic pride. In surveys, two-thirds of respondents characterized Liberia as largely peaceful, but subsequent questions and key informant interviews revealed that peace is equated with the temporary absence of violence, with 66.3% describing the current peace as “negative”. In short, Liberians view the peace as tentative, fragile and volatile. This assessment is not surprising, because the fundamental problems that fueled the violent conflict are still there—corruption in public services, Americo-Liberian dominance over politics and the economy, marginalization of the indigenous populations, limited economic opportunity, and restricted participation in decision-making and access to influence for the average person.

More troubling perhaps is that the conflict opened new fault lines. Respondents identified corruption (85.9%), land disputes (83.7%), and high youth unemployment (79.8%) as the most potent conflict trigger factors. Alliances of convenience for profit, greed and survival during the civil war have made bitter rivals of formerly amicable ethnic groups. Once bridgeable differences over land and resources now constitute major barriers to dialog and civility, as families and communities engage in endless disputes over land boundaries and titles as well as agro-forestry and mining concessions. Trust and mutuality are hindered by weak institutions and lack of common norms and pathways for citizens and government to interact.
These social fissures are hardened by high rates of unemployment. Liberia’s youth have scant professional training or employable skills for the job market, but they do have extensive military experience and skills with weapons of war. This enormous need for sustainable livelihoods far outstrips the capacity of the economy and the state to provide jobs. The result is a pool of war-ready idle young people who can be rapidly mobilized. Furthermore, the state security apparatus is not adequately equipped or staffed to take over the provision of security services once UNMIL withdraws. Unmet economic expectations and mounting pressure to secure ethnic political bases will fuel neo-patrimonial behavior (e.g. nepotism, ethnic favoritism and exclusion), making it more difficult to foster dialogue, reconciliation and reestablishing the linkages between and among diverse groups and between citizens and the state. Liberians are tired of war, but this sentiment is not by itself a secure guarantor of peace.
Postwar reconciliation in Liberia is incomplete and shallow: Although Liberians acknowledge that gains have been made in reconciliation and healing, the vast majority remain convinced that the main perpetrators of violence escaped punishment, and that the victims of violence have largely been denied justice. Notably, more than 80% of respondents do not believe that people who suffered from the war received justice through Truth and Reconciliation Commission processes, and while half believe that post-war reconciliation failed to achieve its objectives. Respondents in Rivercess and Montserrado counties had a more pessimistic view, with 60% expressing scepticism regarding reconciliation. Key informants felt that national peace and reconciliation had the weakest impact on the grassroots level, where efforts were too piecemeal and shallow to obtain more than superficial buy-in from communities. A degree of healing can be attributed to the passage of time, which has cooled tensions and emotions.

They survey respondent and interviewee responses lead to a more cynical conclusion about the lack of reconciliation, with half of respondents stating that reconciliation has not happened. The truth and reconciliation process could have had a greater impact had it penetrated more deeply and widely into the social fabric and created more space for honest discussion on the grassroots level. The fact that it stopped short of reaching the most vulnerable levels of society raised the question of intentionality in the minds of many people who bore the brunt of the war. Was the intent to truly reconcile or was it meant to sweep unspeakable abuses under the rug and move on? Almost two-thirds (62.9%) of surveyed felt that the victims of civil war violence still do not feel safe. Liberians widely perceive (68.3%) that the organizers and perpetrators of the violence did not genuinely participate in truth telling and reconciliation. They feel that the guilty parties shirked their responsibility, denied wrongdoing, and did not show genuine remorse. Worse still, some of them secured positions of power as senators, representatives and government officials, and have even boasted about their wartime “accomplishments”.

Renewed violent conflict can be prevented, but the risk of recidivism is high: Respondents were fairly evenly split on whether Liberia could again descend into large-scale violent conflict (50.6% “high to very high risk” and 43.7% “zero to low risk”). Those who were more optimistic believed that Liberians were too tired and disillusioned with war to return to fighting. The others cited high levels of public corruption, contentious land disputes and high rates of youth unemployment as drivers for fresh outbreaks of violence. Also, attempts by some politicians to declare Liberia a Christian state were seen as a destabilizing force, with the potential to unleash violence. Political leaders (71.8%) and unemployed youth (58.2%) topped the list of potential conflict instigators. Owing to historical and current drivers, respondents identified Nimba (28%), Montserrado (21%), and Grand Gedeh (17%) counties as potential flashpoints where local conflict can erupt and spread. Feelings of insecurity and the fear of relapse into mass violence were most pronounced in River Cess (79.3%), Nimba (74.9%), Grand Kru (74.4%) and Grand Cape Mount (74.2%).
DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

Liberians enjoy access to basic democratic freedoms, but fear that unchecked abuses will jeopardize peace: Although there is broad consensus (78%) that citizens enjoy basic civil freedoms (speech, association and electoral franchise), respondents fear that these rights are fragile and easily abrogated. Many interviewees expressed misgivings about the lack of civility in the media, about inflammatory rhetoric in public spaces, and the perceived willingness of politicians to curtail freedoms based on such pretexts. Similarly, they believed that judicial corruption, overreach and disregard for laws were creating an atmosphere of permissiveness where public officials no longer felt bound by the constitution or obliged to listen to citizens. Many Liberians (50%) do not believe that state actors, the legal system and public institutions are making strong positive contributions to maintaining the peace.

Concerns linger over democratic participation, political inclusion and elections: Political exclusion along ethnic lines was a root cause of the civil war. Most respondents (72.7%) thought that it was possible for a member from any ethnic group to become President of Liberia. This is an important departure from the days when only Americo-Liberians could ascend to political power. Despite such perceptions, Liberians still feel that Americo-Liberians control the levers of power, and that political parties do not provide meaningful vehicles for public participation. Approximately half of all respondents cast their votes based on the ethnic origins and the personality of the candidate, most pronounced in Maryland (93%), River Gee (90%), Margibi (71%), and Grand Gedeh (60%). Sixty per cent of respondents believed that elections in Liberia were not transparent, free or fair. This sentiment was more pronounced in Nimba and River Gee (80%), Grand Gedeh (76%), and in River Cess (72.4%).

Liberians believe that the Government of Liberia (GoL) lacks sufficient capacity to safeguard peace: In light of the UNMIL drawdown, respondents doubted GoL’s ability to ensure peace and safety at the grassroots and to assume responsibility for national security. Only 22% of respondents thought that the government could guarantee the safety of all Liberians, with counties to the east and southwest expressing less

<table>
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<th>COUNTY</th>
<th>PERCEPTIONS ON LEVEL OF NEUTRALITY OF GOVERNMENT OF LIBERIA</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not Neutral (n=802)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bomi</td>
<td>74.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bong</td>
<td>51.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gbarpolou</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Bassa</td>
<td>62.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Cape Mount</td>
<td>83.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Gedeh</td>
<td>86.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Kru</td>
<td>45.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lofa</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margibi</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>81.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montserrat</td>
<td>62.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nimba</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>River Gee</td>
<td>80.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rivercess</td>
<td>37.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinoe</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>52.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
optimistic views, while counties closer to Monrovia were more optimistic. Key informant interview respondents corroborated this view, citing the inadequate staffing and resources of the police and armed forces. About half of all respondents thought that the GoL had failed to create opportunities for citizens to constructively engage with state institutions to build peace, and only 41.5% thought that the GoL had strengthened community capacity for peacebuilding. The conflict analysis found that NGOs and traditional leaders are compensating for the state’s weak presence and capacity at the community level and continue to play an important role in conflict mediation. However, traditional authority is greatly weakened due to its diminished respect after the war.

The state is not seen as a neutral arbiter in conflict resolution: More than half of respondents (52.9%) lacked confidence in the state acting as a neutral mediator and arbiter in conflicts. This sentiment was strongest in Grand Cape Mount (83.9%), Grand Gedeh (86.7%), Maryland (81.7%), and River Gee (80.0%), where the distribution of development services perpetuated a “we vs. them” mentality, with voters feeling punished because of their political allegiance. Partisan politics, nepotism, neo-patrimonialism and opacity in granting concessions were seen as the most contentious issues facing the country and a major threat to peace.

The private sector plays only a limited role in national politics and peacebuilding: Along with civil society and the state, the private sector potentially can be a force for peace and stability. However, two-thirds of respondents (65.9%) felt that in Liberia businesspeople exercised little influence in public affairs. Furthermore, 70.7% of respondents did not see a role for businesspeople in peacebuilding. This disconnect could be explained by the precarious position of Liberia’s main business groups: the Americo-Liberians, the expatriate Lebanese and Indian community, and the Mandingo business owners. Each group has tenuous constituencies in the country and can be sanctioned and potentially expelled at the whims of political leaders. Alternatively, business communities can voluntarily decide to expatriate their financial means if the situation is deemed too risky and volatile.
SOCIAL COHESION

Owing to weak social inclusion and equity, mutual trust remains fragile: Historically, social cohesion in Liberia has benefitted from interethnic marriages, Americo-Liberian and indigenous family arrangements, and religious tolerance. The civil war severely strained these bonds to the point of rupture. More than 80% of respondents said that they would not want a relative to marry into a different ethnic group. Similarly, 90% of respondents either would refuse or only reluctantly accept a job posting in another region or ethnic milieu. Key informant interviews revealed that the poor are often denied justice because they cannot afford to litigate their cases in formal courts. They also doubt that judges execute their duties competently, freely and fairly.

Gender inequity undermines women’s access to justice, economic opportunities, and reconciliation: It was widely commented that despite having more women in public offices in the postwar, Johnson-Sirleaf era, the lives of women in Liberia have not substantially improved, especially in rural areas. Women victims of violence, abuse and destruction of property during the war did not receive the same level of compensation as men. Moreover, women did not gain the same level of access to TRC processes as men, and therefore their issues received less attention. Although the vast majority of respondents (92.2%) felt that women were unjustly treated in TRC processes, a similarly high percentage (91.1%) did not see such inequity as a driver of violent conflict. Indeed, in the postwar era, women continue to suffer many forms of discrimination, and domestic violence against women is increasing. As male politicians gear up to “take back” the presidency from Liberia’s first female president, women face potential backlashes. It was widely commented that despite having more women in public offices in the postwar Johnson-Sirleaf era, the lives of women in Liberia have not improved substantially.

Religion can be a force for peace or for conflict: Religion exerts a powerful influence on Liberians, as witnessed by their belief in and worship of the supernatural. More than three-fourths of respondents (76.3%) see religion as important in their daily lives, and almost the same number (72.1%) felt that religious leaders can exert influence over their communities to promote peace. A similarly high percentage (73.7%) stated that interfaith collaboration represents a positive force for peace in the country. Interreligious tolerance was also lauded as a traditional value of Liberia’s confessional communities. Nonetheless, 65.5% of Christian respondents and 57.5% of Muslim respondents felt that religious intolerance was on the rise, and if left unchecked, could trigger violent conflict. Half of all respondents (48.8%) thought that religious identity was being used to discriminate in employment, business opportunities, or school admissions. By county, more than 60% of respondents in Grand Gedeh, Margibi, Maryland, River Cess, River Gee and Sinoe shared this view. Respondents also blamed politicians for instrumentalizing religion for political gains, citing the campaign to declare Liberia a Christian state as the biggest threat to interfaith peaceful coexistence.
Interviewees noted that post-war peace and reconciliation efforts were hampered by the government’s unwillingness to grant faith-based organizations more latitude to participate in these processes. Taxes imposed on religious institutions place a considerable strain on faith-based actors, and force in social welfare services amid dwindling external support sources.

Culture, tradition, and customs play ambivalent roles in promoting peace in Liberia: Cultural values, norms and traditions not only shape society but can also be powerful forces for peace or conflict. More than three-quarters of respondents asserted that Liberians of all ethnicities were accommodating and tolerant of strangers. They also believed that Liberians possess indigenous dispute resolution mechanisms (70.1%), and that all cultural groups follow Poro and Sande society practices to instill values and life skills in their youth (64.4%). However, 42.7% of respondents said that cultural associations and norms presently promote violence, and 51% felt that traditional leaders no longer promote inclusiveness. It is perhaps worrisome that persons younger than 54 years old largely find elders ineffective in influencing their communities. Their loss of status is directly related to the humiliation suffered at the hands of child soldiers. More than two-thirds of respondents (71.3%) doubted that traditional authorities would be able to re-exert their influence to prevent violent conflict. Although respondents found recent attempts to refurbish the image and authority of chiefs through the establishment of the National Traditional Council encouraging, they also feared that chiefs would not be independent enough to withstand politician efforts to co-opt them for political gains.

Persistent isolation impedes social cohesion: People from isolated and poorly connected areas expressed high reservations about marrying and comingling with persons from other regions and ethnic groups. Surprisingly, 18-35-year olds were the most reserved (23%) among all age groups about socializing with members of other ethnic groups. Owing to poor transport and communications infrastructure, limited opportunities for cross-county information exchange and encounters further entrench cultural isolationism. Other factors are also at play, but stereotyping and fear of the other can be reduced by facilitating cross-cultural exchanges and dialogue.
Recommendations

Although this study was commissioned primarily to assist the Catholic Church and its partners in their efforts to strengthen peace throughout the country, the recommendations are also aimed at Liberian civil society and international development partners. Depending on their capacities, experience and mission to engage in one or more peacebuilding subsectors, Liberian civil society organizations and NGOs as well as international NGOs are encouraged to join forces with the larger peacebuilding community to implement these recommendations. Due the civil society focus, the recommendations do not cover concerns regarding security provision by Liberian state bodies or international peacekeepers.

SHORT-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Encourage free and fair elections in 2017

The 2017 general elections will mark an important milestone in Liberia’s political development. Election observation by credible and independent third parties can play a crucial role in preventing ballot box irregularities and encourage acceptance of the outcomes. Based on experience elsewhere in Africa, it is recommended that Liberian civil society join ongoing efforts to recruit, train and deploy observers, and to publish the electoral results and observations in real time.

1.1 Organize and administer a nation-wide election observation mission:
Liberian civil society organizations including the Justice and Peace Commissions (JPC) of the Catholic Church should form a coalition to recruit, train and deploy election observers across the country. The Catholic Church should leverage its extensive network of parishes and associations, and also capitalize on good relations with civil society faith-based groups. The experience of sister churches on the continent can support this effort.

1.2 Conduct parallel vote tabulation at district and national levels:
Providing an alternative, verifiable source of electoral outcomes will improve confidence in and acceptance of the results, and greatly diminish the opportunity for violent mass-mobilization by dissatisfied parties. The JPC, together with the leadership of CABICOL and other faith-based (FBOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs), should secure the authorization to carry out parallel vote tabulations, in dialogue with the National Election Commission and political parties.

1.3 Develop and administer nation-wide civic and voter education campaigns:
To improve participation and voter engagement in the electoral process, to diffuse ethno-regional tensions as well as to dissuade politicians from using ethnicity, religion and other emotionally charged cleavages in their campaigns, it is strongly recommended that Liberian civil society develops and launches voter education campaigns. The Catholic Church can harness its extensive network of parishes...
and communication infrastructure, particularly Radio Veritas, to develop and disseminate these messages.

1.4 Organize exchanges between communities and politicians: The JPC should organize public debates, town hall discussions, radio call-ins, and other forms of exchanges between politicians and communities, preferably in collaboration with other FBOs and CSOs. These contacts enable candidates to present and explain their platforms, offer the electorate opportunities to voice their needs and opinions, and ultimately strengthen vertical social cohesion.

2. **Foster meaningful and profound reconciliation across Liberia**

The conflict analysis demonstrates that reconciliation within and between communities remains a distant prospect. It is recommended that the following actions be taken to broaden and deepen national reconciliation:

2.1 Create safe spaces for healing and reconciliation: Civil society can create safe and secure spaces for psycho-social counseling, emotional healing, victim-offender encounters and reconciliation dialogues. Trauma awareness and resilience therapy allow for collective recognition of mutual injury, expression and acceptance of remorse as well as healing and reconciliation.

2.2 Support multiple avenues to healing and reconciliation: Victims and offenders should be reached through multiple, inter-faith efforts by Catholic and Protestant Churches, by Muslim leaders, through African Indigenous Religious practices and non-faith-based community support. It is recommended that donors provide financial and material resources to support healing and reconciliation services.

2.3 Create opportunities to identify and employ suitable indigenous reconciliation mechanisms: Mainstream organizations should work with traditional leaders to research, identify and promote African Indigenous Religion (AIR) reconciliation mechanism and incorporate them into healing services. The survey emphasized the importance of AIR practices among Liberians, irrespective of their Christian or Islamic beliefs.

2.4 Support women-focused support and programming: Given the deeply rooted patterns of discrimination and gender inequity, CSOs should mainstream gender concerns into existing programming, and support women to vie for public positions and to seek equal access to justice, vocational training, livelihoods and property.

**MEDIUM TO LONG-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS: PEACE AND CONFLICT**

1. **Institutionalize a culture of a peace through education programs in schools and communities**

Respondents repeatedly mentioned that the war entrenched a culture of violence in Liberian society. They highlighted the need for re-establishing a culture of peace and “deprogramming” the wartime values and mindsets, especially among young people. To promote this transformation, it is recommended that CSOs:
1.1 Develop peace and education activities focused on young people: Various types of youth-centered activities such as sports, music, drama and youth clubs should be supported in communities across the country. Youth camps can be organized to rebuild community infrastructure, create opportunities to heal and to re-establish a sense of self-worth.

MEDIUM TO LONG-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS: DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

1. Promote transparency, stewardship and accountability in public resource management

The study highlights pervasive corruption as one of the primary barriers to peace and equitable development in Liberia. Respondents called upon the Church to advocate for vulnerable communities, which are neglected and marginalized. CSOs can:

1.1 Support initiatives that increase transparency and accountability in public resource management: CSOs should actively sponsor and champion activities that aim to increase transparency and accountability in the management and reporting of government revenues and other public resources. Several best practices such as Publish What You Pay (PWYP) and Publish What You Earn (PWYE) campaigns, government budget monitoring and expenditure tracking schemes as well as Catholic Church internal governance capacity building in Rwanda provide inspiration and guidance.

1.2 Establish and promote the use of community accountability forums: The JPC, through its network of organizations and civil society partners, and CSOs should consider developing and institutionalizing community social accountability tools, structures and forums at county, district and/or community level. These events bring elected and appointed government officials together with their constituents, to present ongoing projects, report on progress and discuss future policy directions and state–community collaboration pathways.

2. Promote transparent land management and property dispute resolution

The study identifies land tenure and property rights conflicts as key flashpoints for violent conflict, due to poor and inadequate documentation of title deeds as well as lack of transparency on land user rights. To address these shortcomings, it is recommended that CSOs:

2.1 Support the development of comprehensive land title documentation processes: Unambiguous land boundary demarcation and documentation procedures need to be developed, institutionalized and rolled out across the country. Using low-cost, handheld GPS devices and/or appropriate ArcGIS software mounted on Android devices, trained community members can easily demarcate their land boundaries to facilitate title documentations. CSOs should train and deploy community agents and engage with relevant agencies to decentralize the process and make it more affordable and accessible to rural populations.
2.2 Build community capacity for land use negotiations: Communities have limited capacities to effectively participate in negotiating land concessions and takeovers with multinationals, local businesses, and government agencies. CSOs should cooperate with legal professionals to provide pro bono trainings on land ownership laws, leasing and sale as well as negotiation skills to local land management committees. Potential partners include the Liberian National Bar Association, the Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia, Catholic Lawyers Association of Liberia and the Liberian Law Society.

3. Create opportunities for Liberia’s youth to advance their livelihoods

A key finding of this study is that many young people in Liberia suffer from high unemployment and low employability. This disadvantage, combined with unaddressed wartime trauma and extensive exposure to violence, presents Liberia with a huge reservoir of high-risk youth vulnerable to manipulation by conflict entrepreneurs. CSOs can:

3.1 Gain insights into the issues and challenges affecting young people: CSOs should conduct a youth-focused study to gather insights how to better provide young people with opportunities to heal and rebuild their lives, and rejoin Liberian society as productive citizens.

3.2 Provide capacity building and other opportunities to improve youth employability: Reintegrating young people requires retraining and equipping them with knowledge, skills and tools that correspond to job market needs and reflect their interests and capacities. Individualized and interest-based capacity building are much more effective than blanket vocational training. In the agriculture sector, vegetables, fruits, flowers and other high value crops with long value chains are a good entry points. CRS’ Savings and Internal Lending Communities (SILC) have proven successful in helping people of all ages learn to manage, save and invest money into small businesses.

4. Promote community dispute resolution mechanisms

According to the findings of the study, Liberia’s justice system does not reach all parts of the country; its resources are overstretched; and it is viewed as corrupt and inaccessible to the poor. Although the war weakened the authority of chiefs and traditional justice system institutions, these courts remain the first choice for redressing grievances and resolving conflicts in most communities. To sustain these initiatives and mainstream the judicial processes and outcomes of the traditional courts, it is essential to build up and institutionalize the traditional justice system. Accordingly, it is recommended that CSOs:

4.1 Advocate for the establishment of chiefs’ courts as Community-based Alternative Dispute Resolution Mechanisms (CADRMs): CRS Liberia and its partners should support legal and judicial reform efforts to integrate chiefs’ courts into the formal justice system as part of the ADR mechanism. Formal recognition and integration of the traditional systems into the national justice framework will enhance the image and capacities of these grassroots channels.
and ensure that chiefs’ decisions are legally binding and enforceable (and also subject to ratification and/or appeal in higher courts).

4.2 Improve the capacity of chiefs to dispense justice: Regardless of the outcomes of the legal reforms, chiefs will continue to fulfill the role of arbitrators in their respective communities. Enhancing capacities through trainings (in laws, procedures, mediation etc.) and equipment (transport and other material support) will improve their performance as well as the credibility and effectiveness of the traditional courts. Also, the chiefs’ legitimacy and authority in the community will be revitalized, thereby strengthening their valuable contribution to conflict prevention, which was greatly eroded during the civil wars.

4.3 Research and integrate best practices from traditional legal systems: Certain types of cases may be better handled through indigenous legal practices that promote restorative justice, in contrast to the retributive justice emphasized in the conventional court systems. However, while the principles and rationale of indigenous justice systems may cut across several ethnic groups, the specific practices and procedures can be quite different. To increase transparency, predictability and acceptance of these practices across different cultures, it is essential to identify, isolate and codify best practices to be integrated into community conflict resolution mechanisms.

MEDIUM TO LONG-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS: SOCIAL COHESION

1. Increase trust and cooperation between government and citizens

   The study reports high levels of civic distrust in some counties, due to perceived marginalization and favoritism in the allocation of development projects and resources. Victimization intensifies mistrust of government and weakens the social contract between citizens and the state. It is recommended that CSOs:

   1.1 Advocate for greater transparency in policy formulation and implementation: Often citizens do not engage with government representatives and other decision-makers because they lack information and skills how to present their concerns and suggestions. CSOs can enhance community participation in policy-making and local policy discussion through research and support by Justice and Peace Commissions and other organizations that can provide the needed data, policy options and advocacy training.

   1.2 Facilitate community encounters with decision-makers: To reduce distrust and perceptions of bias in the allocation of resources, it is recommended that CSOs organize town hall meetings, radio programs with phone-in and text-in audience feedback and questions, as well as other discussion forums that enhance citizen-state trust and vertical capital.

   1.3 Conduct social cohesion strengthening workshops: CRS has already developed social cohesion strengthening approaches and tools, in the Philippines,
the Central African Republic and elsewhere. These best practices can be readily applied in Liberia. CRS’ flagship social cohesion training guide, “The Ties that Bind: Building Social Cohesion in Divided Communities”, includes a training of trainers module and will be available from January 2017.

2. **Promote intercultural communication and exchanges**

2.1 Identify and develop cultural connectors for peace: Liberia’s 16 ethnic groups can be categorized into three linguistic groups with mutually intelligible dialects, shared histories and core values, and unifying rituals and practices that hold their societies together. CSOs should explore ways to leverage these connectors by identifying and strengthening cross-cutting cultural traits—especially values that emphasize diversity, tolerance, peaceful coexistence, and respect for authority.

2.2 Promote cultural encounters and inter-county migration, especially among young people: The study highlights respondents’ reluctance to move to other counties or engage with other ethnic communities in deeper, long-term interactions (like marriage of a relative). CSOs can work with state and non-state actors to create spaces for cultural encounters, especially among young people. Liberia’s National Youth Service Program, for example, could provide housing, basic equipment and community hosting for graduates of the country’s tertiary institutions who wish to take up youth service assignments in other counties.

3. **Support youth trauma healing and socialization**

3.1 Offer opportunities for healing and social reintegration: CSOs should develop special youth-focused trauma and psycho-social healing programs that offer young people opportunities to address trauma and encourage inner transformation.

3.2 Institutionalize peace education in schools: CSOs should consider developing and integrating peace education curricula into primary and secondary level education institutions. The revised learning plans would emphasize the positive aspects of Liberian heritage, counter inflammatory narratives and socialize youth on a path of coexistence and collaboration for the benefit of all in the country.