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Liberia: The Transition from Destruction to Post-War Reconstruction

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'Before we congratulate people on their freedom we should see what use they make of it' Edmund Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France 1790

Abstract

Liberia faced decades of dictatorship and bad governance which subsequently led to over 14 years of one of the bloodiest of wars in human history. Since 2003 the country has been grappling with its contentious past while trying to develop a road map for the future. Despite the fact that there are many gains made in the development and strengthening of state institutions, the challenges of poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and corruption are still weighing heavily on the bulk of the population of the country. The vulnerability that such conditions create especially for young people who constitute a significant percentage of the population is threatening the fragile peace that exists in the country. This article in its conclusion proffers recommendations on what could be done to help turn the situation in the country around for the better.

Key words: Liberia, war, transition and reconstruction

1. A chequered background

Liberia which means "land of the free" was founded in 1822 by free African-Americans and freed slaves from the United States. An initial group of 86 immigrants, who came to be called Americo-Liberians, established a settlement in Christopolis (now Monrovia, named after U.S. President James Monroe) on 6 February 1820 (Clapham 1976: 158). This new-found land of hope for freed slaves from America later became Africa's first in-dependent nation in 1847. The declaration of independence did not receive recognition by the nation's colonial power (the United States) until 1865, after frantic efforts were made by Great Britain and other European powers to convince the US to open diplomatic rela-tions with Liberia (U. S. Department of State 2010).

However, the freed slaves from America created a privileged oligarchy that dominated the socio-economic and political structures of the country. This small elite of Americo-Liberians ruled the state and discriminated against indigenous inhabitants for decades through the True Whig Party (TWP) and its influential patronage-system and extensive clientelistic networks. Economically, Liberia was always highly dependent on the export of natural/mineral resources (Clapham1976: 158). These minerals included timber, rubber and gold.

Since independence and on to the 1980s, presidency and all other positions in the newly independent state were exclusively and purposely meant for Americo–Liberians which made up only 5% out of a total of 2.5 million people then. The natives who made up the majority were considered inferior people of low caliber who could not fit in any position of trust. This semblance of selfishness and aggrandizement on the part of Americo-Liberians created suspicion and grief in the minds of natives who were marginalized. That notwithstanding, politically, the country was a one-party state ruled by the True Whig Party (TWP) headed by Joseph Jenkins Roberts, who was born and raised in America. He became Liberia's first president. The style of government and constitution was fashioned on that of the United States, and the Americo-Liberian elites monopolized political power and restricted the voting rights of the indigenous population. This position of inferiority coupled up with many other social problems left natives with no option other than finding ways to liberate themselves from psychological slavery, ostracisation and complete marginalization (Youboty 1993: 15)".

This resulted in the indigenes requesting for their lands occupied by the Americo-Liberians. However, a prominent and powerful chief Boatswain or Sao Bosuo took sides with the Americo-Liberians in their conflict with the natives. He had this to say to his people:

"*Having sold your country and accepted payment, you must take the consequences; let the Americans have their land immediately. Anyone who is not satisfied with my decision, let him tell me so. If it obliges me to come to court, I shall return and take off their heads from their shoulders as I did old King George on my first visit to the court to settle dispute* (Youboty 1993: 17)".

In the midst of this division between the Americo-Liberians and the natives, Liberia witnessed a military coup on the dawn of 12th April, 1980.The coup d' état was carried out by seventeen non-commissioned officers of the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) who deemed it prudent for the highest ranking officer among them, Master Sergeant Samnuel Kanyan Doe to assume the Liberian presidency. The coup changed the socio-economic and political landscape of Liberia forever.

In their brutal takeover, the officers assassinated President William Robert Tolbert in his bedroom and killed twenty-four members of his security staff. They also made a public show of stringing up and shooting, on a beach in the Liberian capital of Monrovia, thirteen prominent members of the Tolbert regime, including the president of the Senate, the

speaker of the House of Representatives, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and four cabinet members (Farrall, 2010: 4). The one hundred and thirty-three years of Americo-Liberian political domination came to an abrupt end and the People's Redemption Council (PRC) was formed (U.S Department of States 2010).

Feeling redeemed as the new regime's name implied, the natives took to the streets jubilating for the 'Moses' they believed God had sent them. Despite the murderous means by which Doe and his henchmen gained power, they attracted substantial popular support by positioning themselves as representatives of the long-oppressed indigenous Liberians. However, in the twinkle of an eye, Doe started crafting policies that oppressed not just Americo-Liberians, but also the majority of indigenous Liberians whom he claimed to be working for (Farrall, 2010: 4). He and his government continuously favored members of the Krahn ethnic group from which he came, giving them the best appointments in the government. Although the Krahn made up less than five percent of Liberia's total population, at one point during the Doe regime Krahn appointments made up one-third of all positions in central government, as well as several prominent posts in the military and security services (Farrall, 2010: 4). This raised ethnic tension and caused frequent hostilities between the politically and militarily dominant Krahns and other ethnic groups in the country (U. S. Department of State, 2010). After a decade in power a civil war started in Liberia that costed Samuel Doe his life.

2. The First Civil War

In late 1989 a group called the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), led by Charles Taylor, launched a rebellion against the Doe government from neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire, an incident that signaled the genesis of a brutal and bloody conflict. The rebel group was initially small with a total number of 186 members of mostly ill-trained and ill-equipped soldiers. Within a period of six months, this once small number increased to more than ten thousand, and had speedily captured a substantial amount of Liberian territory, including strategic locations such as the country's second largest city and port, Buchanan[1]. On 11 September 1990, ten years after Doe came to power, he met with his death. Doe had been invited to a meeting with Prince Johnson, another faction leader who had once been a close collaborator to Taylor in the NPFL, but had subsequently formed his own splinter group called the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia. Doe's murder was unwit-

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[1] Telephone interview with a former NPFL Commando on the 20th of August 2011, name withheld as requested.

tingly facilitated by the Economic Community of West African States Military Group (ECOMOG), which forced Doe's contingent to disarm upon entering the ECOMOG compound, whilst Johnson's contingent was not harassed to disarm. The subsequent torture and murder of Doe by Johnson and his henchmen were captured on a macabre video, copies of which can still be purchased on the streets of Monrovia (Farrall 2010: 4).

The following thirteen years (1990-1996) were characterized by bloody conflicts that gave the darker sides of history a different scope with several attempts to broker peace, followed by a return to conflict.

There were different paramilitary groups who were receiving orders from warlords and these groups constituted the majority of all conflicting parties. They fought against each other with different alliances for the purpose of power, resources and wealth accumulation (Körner 1996:25). Interestingly, the NPFL was the most powerful and influential rebellious group that later metamorphosed from a small raiding party to a powerful force with vast areas under its control. The faction recruited youths and children and prepared the latter in a special child-battalion of which were called "Small Boys Units". These units seemed to be more dangerous and notorious due to their fearlessness and robust guerilla war tactics. However, as the struggle continued, Taylor started experiencing a decline in his influence. This therefore forced many 'officers' to leave his faction and form theirs (Sesay and Ismail 2003: 146). One of the prominent and feared break-away factions was the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL) under the command of Prince Johnson. In as much as most of the factions had no focus, some of these factions were classified as self-interested and gain-seeking actors (Duyvesteyn 2005: 25).

That notwithstanding, the AFL with a total number of 6,000 soldiers due to poor discipline, lack of training and shortage in military equipment were unable to defeat Taylor's rebels (Duyvesteyn 2005: 29).

The major opposition to Taylor's faction was the United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy (ULIMO). This group was formed in 1991 with the main aim of disrupting and reversing the gains made by Taylor. However, in reality ULIMO aimed to seize the state apparatus and its sinecures for better participation in the war-economy and thus for the sake of profits and personal enrichment. By 1994, the organization broke apart along an ethnic fault-line into two competing factions with rather little influence (Muntschick 2008).

The events taking place in Liberia came under the scrutiny of the 13th summit of the Heads of States of ECOWAS countries which was held in Banjul, Gambia on 30 May

1990, under the chairmanship of Sir Dawda Jawara of Gambia. After much deliberation, member states decided to set up a five-member Standing Mediation Committee (SMC) with the task of achieving a peace settlement to the Liberian civil war (Ero 1995). On 6 July 1990 at a summit meeting in Banjul, Gambia, the five members of the SMC took an unprecedented step in deciding to send a multinational peacekeeping force into Monrovia. The mandate given by this five member committee was that of peace keeping, restoring law and order and ensuring that a cease-fire agreed to by the warring factions (including the NPFL) in Liberia was respected. On the 25th August 1990, 3,000 troops from ECOMOG landed in Monrovia (Ero 1995).

The intervention of ECOWAS and the creation of the ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) diminished the extent and urgency of Inter Faith Mediation Council (IFMC) involvement in the peace process. Like other civic groups, the committee was tempted to perceive regional intervention as an immediate panacea to the Liberian nightmare (Woods 1996). This as Woods asserted was ill-advised,[2] however, as the NPFL opposed the creation of ECOMOG, resolutely resisted its deployment, and refused to attend the national conference convened by ECOWAS to appoint the Interim Government of National Unity (IGNU) (Woods 1996). ECOMOG and NPFL locked horns on several fronts until 1997.

By 1997 ECOWAS came to realize that defeating Taylor militarily was impossible so they pushed for and sponsored a peace agreement (alongside the UN, AU and other actors) signed in Ghana that established an interim government (with Wilton Sankawulo as chairman later succeeded by Ruth Perry) and oversaw an electioneering process that took place in 1997. Taylor emerged the winner with a clear majority. This brought an end to the first Liberia war in 1997.

2.1. The Second Civil War

Many people and groups within the country remained deeply dissatisfied with the reign of Taylor. He was regarded as being very corrupt, ruling with iron fists and playing a leading role in helping to destabilize neighboring Sierra Leone while sponsoring frequent cross border attacks into Guinea. Widespread grievances threw Liberia into another civil conflict that started in 1999. Two prominent factions emerged, the Liberian United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL).

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[2] The NPFL were against regional interventional and fiercely resisted the landing of ECOMOG in Liberia. The war intensified following the deployment of ECOMOG in Liberia.

These groups and all the numerous small commandos, militias and warlords with micro combat-units were, however, said to be acting autonomously and engaged in war predominantly for profit, status and economic reasons than for political aims (Muntschick 2008).

The war lasted for three years and only came to an end when Taylor was convinced by other African leaders like Thabo Mbeki, Olusegun Obasanjo and Joaquim Chissano of Mozambique (then chairman of OAU) to go into exile in Nigeria. His deputy Moses Blah succeeded him but later handed power to an interim government. The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), first authorized by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) on September 19, 2003, was deployed to Liberia on October 1, 2003, two weeks before the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) took office on October 14[3] (CRS[4] 2010: 4). After normalizing the situation in the country elections were called up in 2005. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, an economist, won the presidential runoff vote, with 59.4% of votes cast and took office in January 2006, becoming the first elected female president of an African country (CRS 2010: i).

2.2. The Quest for Sustainable Peace

In an attempt to find a lasting solution to the conflicts in Liberia a multiplicity of peace agreements were pursued and signed with several actors playing different roles in the process. Fourteen peace agreements were reached at with almost all of them failing at different points in time. Below are some of the prominent accords signed: Yamoussoukro IV Accord (October 1991), (Cotonou) Agreement (July 1993), Akosombo Agreement (September 1994) Agreement on the clarification of the Akosombo Agreement (December 1994), Acceptance and Accession Agreement (December 1994), Abuja Agreement to Supplement the Cotonou and Akosombo Agreements as subsequently clarified by the Accra Agreement (August 1995), Supplement to the Abuja Accord (August 1996), Agreement on Ceasefire and Cessation of Hostilities between the government of the Republic of Liberia and Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (June 2003); and the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the government of Liberia and the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) and Political Parties (August 2003) which happened to be the last accord that finally sustained peace in Liberia

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[3] Initial strength of UNMIL's force was 14,875 military personnel and 1,240. They took over from the ECOWAS force ECOMIL which had most of its forces absorbed into the UN mission.
[4] CRS means Congressional Research Service of the United States of America. They prepare briefs for members and committees of Congress.

(ACPP)[5]. At this point Liberia started the transition from an unstable political system to a democratic one.

3. Post-war context in Liberia

The years of conflict led to the complete collapse or dysfunction of the state's institutions and economy of Liberia. During the war poverty levels reached 76.2 per cent and 52 per cent in absolute and extreme terms[6], respectively. In the 2010 Human Development Index of the United Nations, Liberia ranked 162 out of 169 countries rated (UNDP HDI 2011: 2). The blatant destruction caused during the war continues to weigh heavily on post-war Liberia.

3.1. Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration of Ex-Combatants (DDR) and Security Sector Reform (SSR) in Liberia.

After the peace process the leadership of the country with the support of the international community took the long and daunting task of raising the country from the ashes of war and anarchy. A critical phase in this process was the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration of Ex-combatants (DDR). This phase geared towards collecting weapons from the former combatants, demobilize their structures and assist them in their transformation process from fighters to normal civilians.

Approximately 103,000 ex-combatants went through DDR in Liberia (there were two programmes in Liberia, the first started in1996 and ended in 1999 and the second started in 2003). Ex-combatants went through vocational and technical trainings that were to assist them in their search for jobs and the transformation process into normal civilians. However, no comprehensive opportunity mapping exercises and labour market analyses were done to fully understand the needs of the combatants, existing markets and the needs of the local communities. Trainings were of the poorest quality, not long enough to provide real skills and they did not lead to jobs. Businesses were started without sufficient mentoring and support, the large majority disappeared within weeks after set-up. This led to flawed and frustrating processes that only made the lives of former combatants more difficult (Bangura and Specht 2011: 3). This created a level of dissatisfaction and disillusionment especially among some ex-combatants who felt that they were lied to. Edwin Sawyer, a former LURD rebel, stated that:

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[5] See: ACPP Annex 5. African Peace Accords
[6] Population living below 2$ and $1 a day, respectively.

'Ex-combatants are suffocated everyday by poverty and hardship. When we gave up our guns we thought that it would be for the betterment of our lives. Now we have no hope and can turn to no one.'

Similar sentiments were expressed by Amos Konneh[7] who was with MODEL for 18 months:

'I fought to liberate Liberia from the tyranny of Charles Taylor only to find myself gripped by hunger and starvation. I was given four months of computer training but I cannot properly use a computer as I have been unable to access one since the end of the training. At the same time no one wants to employ me because they say I do not have work experience or the required skills to be employed.'

Lawrence Santigie Sesay[8], a United Nations Reintegration officer, had this to say when interviewed on the current situation of ex-combatants in the country:

'While there are some ex-combatants who remain dissatisfied with the reintegration programmes there are many others who have been able to find their way in society. The programme proved quite useful in kick-starting the local economy and gave the ex-combatants the assistance they required. Quick impact projects (QIPs) were very meaningful in providing the socio-economic structures needed in local communities'.

This was rebuffed by an interviewee as an 'exaggeration beyond reasonability'[9]. However, it raises a very sensitive issue, that of the role of QIPs. QIPs are quick, focused and relatively simple to implement, producing rapid results and supporting area/community development.

Lessons learned, however, call for planning and implementing QIPs in an integrated manner rather than as several stand-alone projects (UNHCR 2004: V). In Liberia, QIPs included building local markets, roads, schools, community centers and clinics. This was mostly done by peace keepers with community projects developed that brought together ex-combatants and other community members to foster reconciliation.

While QIPs kick-started the local economies they were mostly small scale. Its end around 2006 left many people frustrated as there were no other available jobs they could easily move into. This is based on the fact that the absorption capacity of the private sector is

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[7]Telephone interview conducted on the 25th of August 2011.
[8]Telephone interview conducted on the 26th of May 2011.
[9]Telephone interview with Aminata Pierce a former NPFL fighter, conducted on the 27th of August 2011.

quite low and agriculture which is the biggest employer[10] is practiced at the subsistence level. It is not mechanized and there exists little potential for an immediate shift to mechanized farming. Thus agriculture is seen as boring and an ineffective means of economic transformation based on the prevailing circumstances. This is grounded on the fact that medium and long term strategies were not adequately planned and financed so they would immediately have short term strategies feed into them.

Subsequently, many former combatants started looking for new wars as a source of employment. The crisis in neighbouring Cote d'Ivoire served their timing and intentions right. Young Liberian combatants streamed into the gold and cocoa rich country and were readily welcomed by the various factions who were familiar with the terror tactics of the Liberian fighters[11].

In the area of Security Sector Reform (SSR) warring factions wanted to feature their generals in the reformed army, while civil society activists and political parties argued against the recruitment of "rebels" into the military. The outcome was an agreement that the new army would accommodate members of all warring factions in its ranks, including the moribund Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) and forces loyal to the government of Charles Taylor at the time of the signing of the peace agreement. The reform programme was on-going until 31 December 2009, when the United States[12] turned over the Armed Forces of Liberia's SSR programme to the democratic government of Liberia (ACCORD 2010: 54).

3.2. Constitutional and legal reforms

Since the end of the conflict Liberia has undertaken several initiatives and reform processes that are meant to stabilize the country and stimulate the post-war reconstruction phase. The 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) made provision for the setting up of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)[13]. It was given the mandate of investigating gross human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian laws as well as abuses that took place from the period of 1979 to 2003. It was also given the mandate of providing a forum through which impunity could be addressed (Liberia TRC: 2005).

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[10] Over 70% of Liberians are engaged in agriculture even though it is just at the subsistence level. See source at footnote 13.
[11] Based on a telephone interview conducted on the 27th of August 2011 with Manna Gbla formerly with LURD but moved over to La Cote d'Ivoire during the way there.
[12] The United States of America took over the training of the Armed Forces of Liberia as part of its support to the Security Scetor Reform Programme that was under taken after the war.
[13] It was established on the 12th of May 2005 by an act passed by the National Transitional Reconciliation Commission of Liberia.

The report of the findings were published on the 12th of June 2010 and it determined that "a criminal prosecution for violations, reparation and a "Palava Hut" forum is necessary and desirable to redress impunity, promote peace, justice, security, unity and genuine national reconciliation (Liberia TRC 2005).

Liberians saw the need for constitutional reform because the 1984 constitution, which came into force in January, 1986, had several flawed provisions: Article 27 (b) of the constitution limits Liberian citizenship to only negroes or people of negro descent. This constitution was a tool used to marginalized specific groups in the country and even provisions made that were seen as democratic were not instituted and this made life very unbearable for many (Jaye 2009).

The legal system as part of the transition process also received a controversial and serious attention during the negotiations and it was agreed that the judiciary was to be reformed through the appointment of temporary judges. The CPA stated that all members of the Supreme Court shall be deemed to have resigned with the signing of the accord. This was seen to be necessary since the serving judges had been appointed by Taylor and were not considered impartial. Thereafter, new judicial appointments were to be made from a shortlist provided by the National Bar Association (Jaye 2009).

3.3. Current challenges faced in Liberia

Post-war Liberia faces a multiplicity of challenges which include unemployment, illiteracy and corruption. These challenges are mentioned below with an insight on the negative impact they have on the growth and development of the country.

3.3.1 Employment

The most disturbing challenge and needed improvement that is required is thus in the area of unemployment especially for young people[14]. The unemployment level in Liberia before the war was very high and the dissatisfaction with this was said to be one of the key reasons for the willingness on the part of many (especially the youths) Liberians to volunteer into the NPFL at the start of the conflict. The war was seen as a source of hope, employment or to rid the country of those who were the cause for unemployment. A United Nations Office for West Africa study titled 'Youth Unemployment and Regional Insecurity in West Africa' highlighted that ´youth unemployment - and its corollary – has become

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[14] The youth population is very high and according to Adolfo (2010:29) it is about 70%.

a central political – security issue in West Africa, in addition to being a socio-economic one. Youth who are able-bodied but unskilled, jobless and alienated have been ready to take up arms in exchange for small amounts of money – together with the promise of recognition, loot and "wives" – and are more likely to be drawn into the influence of warring factions or criminal gangs to gain empowerment' (UNOWA 2005).

Post-war indicators show that unemployment has not been alleviated and that in some cases the situation is worse than it was before the war (Adolfo 2010: 29). Poverty has its consequences and they weigh heavily especially on the children within households. They get denied access to health, education and other facilities as their parents are rendered unable to provide these basic necessities to them. Thus, a huge chunk of Liberian youths were born in abject poverty with very little or in most cases no access to education and consequently little chance for employment.

As Ellen Johnson Sirleaf stated in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper for Liberia (2008: 7) '*In those county-level meetings (while developing the PRS[15]) across the country, Liberians spoke of building a country where a child can live in safety, go to a school with qualified teachers, get clean water and medicine, and study by electric light.'* This may not seem too much to ask for but facilities as minor as these have been denied the people of the West African country for decades.

To ameliorate the situation in the country the president based her government's programmes on four strategic pillars: Consolidating Peace and Security, Revitalising the Economy, Strengthening Governance and Rule of Law, and Rehabilitating Infrastructure and Delivery of Basic Services (PRS 2008: 43).

The government in cooperation with the Decent Job Agenda introduced the Liberia Emergency Employment Program (LEEP) and the Liberia Employment Action Program (LEAP) on July 15th 2006. These programs, while not exclusively targeting young people, are creating opportunities for them to access jobs (Bangura and Specht 2011: 4). However, initiatives undertaken only target few Liberians and do not have a long-term focus.

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[15] Emphasis is mine.

3.3.2 Illiteracy

Like unemployment the level of illiteracy is very high[16]. Illiteracy has a direct relationship with the unemployment level and subsequently poverty in some households. Employment or employability with no educational background is in most cases challenging. In both pre-war and post-war conditions the vulnerability level soared as there is a sense of desperation on the part of the people.

This problem is recognized by the government of Sirleaf as stated in a 2008 national report by the Ministry of Education:

'Government considers the provision of Basic Education (literacy) as its basic obligation under the overall umbrella that education is a fundamental human right. Illiteracy is equated to economic backwardness and this perpetuates ignorance, poverty and disease[17].'

In the same report the government highlighted some of the challenges faced in the basic education sector (especially the accelerated learning programme, ALP):

'……..need to work for parents at home, being self-supporting students, distance to school, migration, pregnancy, cultural ceremonies, poor teacher attendance, large class sizes, lack of school feeding programme and the heavy rainy season. Other challenges included the fact that 77.9% of the ALP teachers lacked teaching qualifications and had only completed high school (2008: 5).'

While government with the help of the international community has reconstructed or built many schools and education centres across the country with teachers encouraged to teach, it is easily noticeable that much more needs to be done. In developing basic education, adult education and accelerated learning programmes should be given the financial and technical support they require to help those left behind catch up with others or at least in the case of

older people have a fair level of education.

Another major challenge is the fact that in the education sector there is a high level investment in basic education but very little in higher education. One cannot say that the government is oblivious of the connection between higher education and economic devel-

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[16] See: http://www.inwent.org/ez/articles/176375/index.en.shtml (Accessed 27th August 2011)
[17] The report was delivered during the 6th international conference on adult education (Confintea VI): National Report on the Development and the State of the Art of Adult Learning and Education, 2008.

opment but it has not been seen making the right decisions in terms of support for higher education. Thus there is a good supply at the lower and middle levels of the workforce but limited supply at the higher technical levels. This leads to the outsourcing of professionals for jobs Liberians could be trained to do. The government has, however, committed itself to the challenge that by 2015 the illiteracy rate shall be reduced by a minimum of 50% of its value in 2008[18].

3.3.3 Migration

Due to the lack of social facilities and limited economic possibilities in the rural areas, Liberia is witnessing a high spate of rural-urban migration. Rural areas are faced with the massive exodus of young people who go to the cities in search of sources of livelihood. This hampers the potentials of agriculture and further entrenches poverty for those who are left behind. Farms are left unattended with the old resorting to backyard farming for sustenance.

When in cities the youth get faced with the reality of their limitations. The possibility of accessing employment with little or no academic background or skills training is almost non-existing. This leaves them in a difficult position as they remain jobless but determined not to return to their communities of origin. This then leads to a rise in criminal activities in major cities as youths resort to surviving by all means necessary.

The war and post-war eras have also led to the migration of Liberians to neighbouring countries and the West in search of peace and economic livelihoods. This has augmented the brain-drain as a host of engineers, teachers and medical doctors leave the country. Abu Sheriff, a Liberian working for the United Nations in Monrovia, had this to say on migration:

'The condition people were living under during and just after the war were abysmal and it is understandable that those who could afford to leave, left the country. However, this has created untold strain on the growth and development of the country. There is a lack of skilled and trained workers in the different sectors of the country and by the look of things most of those who left are not willing to return. The government and international agencies have to outsource experts to carry out researches and develop programmes. The fees for these experts are really high and they are paid from the aid given to the country.'

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[18] See: National Report on the Development and the State of the Art of Adult Learning and Education, 2008, pg. 4

The question here is: *'are there existing pull factors that would encourage those in the diaspora to return?* Joseph Kangawa[19] a civil society activist waved off the question:

'My friends and relatives in the US and UK are not willing to come back. Maybe some will come to visit but not to stay. What they make in a week from doing minimal jobs they cannot make in a month in Liberia. Let facts be put straight Liberia is not doing well economically, there are very limited job possibilities and workers are ill paid. Until this change, those in the diaspora will find it difficult to return and they should not be blamed, they are just humans.'

This view is shared by most of the Liberians interviewed in Europe. Samuel Sirleaf[20] living in Frankfurt, Germany, asserted that: *'There have to be changes, the changes have to be seen in the improvement in the standard of living of ordinary Liberians, until then we are here and no one should try to push us back to poverty and hopelessness.'*

The issue of rural–urban migration raised above became obvious especially during the war period when internally displaced persons sought shelter in major cities that were under the protection of West African Peace Keepers. However, urban migration has its own implications. Chief among them are over-population and health risks. The preliminary results of the 2008 national population and housing census in Liberia reveal that over one third of the 3.49 million inhabitants of the country live in Greater Monrovia, but many in Liberia believe the percentage may be closer to 40-50 percent (Kortu 2009: 1).

The overcrowding in major cities has led to the development of slums especially in Monrovia. The city lacks the absorption capacity and thus cannot cater for all those in it and on its periphery. The strain is visible especially on its water, health and sanitation facilities. Munah Tarpeh[21], a Netherlands trained public health official working in Monrovia in commenting on the health implications of over-crowding in Monrovia stated: *'There are communities in which several people live within a single room and the shags are so clustered that it becomes impossible for them to have proper ventilation. The toilet facilities are really bad and most of them use the streams and bushes in their environs as toilet. A high percentage of the cases we receive like dysentery, diarrhoea and cholera are congestion related cases. Because of the level of poverty and destitution these people cannot afford*

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[19] Telephone interview conducted on the 29th of August 2011.
[20] Interview conducted on the 29th of August 2011 in Frankfurt, Germany.
[21] Telephone interview conducted on the 20th of August 2011

to pay their medical bills. Some keep the patients within their households until their condition is so bad that they end up dying before they reach the hospital.'

The health implications faced are worsened by the food insecurity and malnutrition. According to the Greater Monrovia Food and Nutrition Survey (Republic of Liberia, 2007), 14 percent of households in Greater Monrovia are food insecure and 16 percent are vulnerable to food insecurity (Kortu 2009: 1).

3.3.4. Health and Sanitation

The health sector of Liberia was gravely affected by the war as most of its facilities were destroyed and the best of the staff leaving the country. The World Health Organisation (WHO) categorized the key health issues and difficulties faced in Liberia into three categories:

- rehabilitation/reconstruction of destroyed health infrastructures; acute shortage of human resources; high maternal mortality rate; food insecurity;

- high level of malnutrition; improving access to coverage, quality and operational standards of health care through the Basic Package for Health Services; low access to water, sanitation, education and electricity; revitalizing the system of procurement and management of essential drugs and medicines;

- implementation of the national health policy and plan; low capacity in health management: planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation; and weak coordination of health actions at different levels (2009: x).

Coupled with the technical challenges highlighted above, the sector is faced on a daily basis with the ever growing cases based on the relics of the war which include post-traumatic stress disorder, schizophrenia, Vesico-Vaginal Fistulae (VVF) and people with disability caused by land mines, amputations and torture. While the challenges are astronomical the fact that Liberia has only a handful of psychiatrists does not help at all. This is an area that could have been invested in to help handle the obvious effects of over a decade of conflict for both victims and perpetrators of violence. However, the government of Liberia is working closely with organisations like WHO and UNICEF to improve the health status of Liberia. In doing this, WHO guided by the government's and other agencies' policies has developed four areas of intervention:

- Emergency Preparedness and Humanitarian Response;

- Strengthening Performance of the Health System;

- Disease Prevention and Control;

- Improvement of Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (WHO 2009: 1).

However, health programmes have to be designed to meet the economic situation of the poor Liberians. The inability of many Liberians to access medical facilities also poses a significant challenge and results in untimely death in some cases. In local communities, health programmes are not designed to be community based[22] and this creates the feeling and tension of being left out by community members.

3.3.5. The Mining Sector

A major sector in the economy of Liberia is the mining sector. Due to the war the mining sector collapsed from a 12 per cent share of GDP in 1988 to 0.082 per cent in 2004 (GOL 2006: 11). However, it is once again picking up with a whole range of multi-national corporations investing in rubber, iron-ore, gold, timber and other resources. Lawrence Sesay expressed his hope in the sector: *'If the interest in the sector is maintained with the investors and the government having in mind the need to alleviate the poverty of the people of Liberia. I am optimistic that the sector will make a mighty difference. Liberia is a mineral-rich country that should have no business with poverty if politicians decide not to be greedy and spend the resources of the country on its people.'*

The shift from a resource-cursed nation to a resource-blessed one is the hope of many Liberians interviewed. In the past resources were used to finance wars not only in Liberia but also in neighbouring countries like Sierra Leone and Guinea.Like other sectors, the tertiary (service) sector dropped from 50.5 per cent of GDP to 17.4 per cent. Manufacturing stalled and exports were a mere 25 million USD, a sharp contrast from pre-conflict levels of 460 million USD (GOL 2006: 11). As the level of export decreases the level of import has increased significantly.

3.3.6. Lack of efficient coordination of aid

Liberia is faced with the challenge of duplication and a lack of coordination and collaboration among the different development actors. Sensing this as a major challenge the government of Liberia organised a constructive dialogue process focusing on the government's priorities and guiding principles for the mobilization, coordination and management of aid in Liberia. It was the first of its kind in the country and over 200 actors attended. The

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[22] A community-based programme is a programme in which the community plays a leading role in the design and implementation of the programme.

summit served as a timely opportunity to discuss approaches to changing the way aid is delivered and used in order to bring about more effective and sustainable results. [23] However, what such summits do not end up doing is creating an effective body that will help harmonize the activities of the actors to avoid duplication of efforts. This is due to lethargy and the unwillingness of those in charge to change the situation. Such a body should include civil society actors who will serve as 'watch-dogs'. At the end of the day such seminars end up not making any difference.

3.3.7. The Question of Corruption

Corruption and its underlying factors have proven to be quite a challenge to Liberia. As Timo Johnson[24] (2009) asserted: 'Corruption is the root-cause of our decadent socio-economic disparities as well as our calamitous/destructive social, ethnic and political problems; our antiquated and stale politics, our over-all under-development compared to other African countries'. Some of the reasons given for the conflict in Liberia according to the TRC report (2009) are based on corruption, bad governance and mal-administration. President Johnson-Sirleaf upon assuming office took considerable steps in fighting corruption. These steps include but are not limited to:

-Anti-Corruption Commission (LACC);

-General Auditing Commission (GAC);

-Code of Conduct-Declaration of Assets;

-Ongoing installation of automatic systems to reduce the chances of abuse and misuse

-Government has focused on building institutions. (Adolfo 2010: 23)

The successes of her actions have been widely applauded by many institutions including the International Finance Corporation (IFC). Liberia climbed 18 places in 2009 on the IFC's survey to 149, and jumped from 138 to 97 on TI's corruption meter. This has helped

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[23] The summit of the Government of Liberia, Development Partners and Civil Society took place from the 15th to the 16th of April 2010 in Monrovia. The theme of the summit was 'Maximizing High Quality Aid for Growth and Development'

[24] Johnson, T. (2009): 'Combating Corruption in Liberia: Talking the talk but not walking the walk' The Perspective, Atlanta, Georgia. See: http://www.theperspective.org/2009/0730200904.html (Accessed 4th December 2011)

to increase the number of businesses registered to reach nearly 7,500, an increase of 5.5% over the year 2009 (USDS 2010)[25].

Confusingly though and harshly contradicting the gains said to be made in the fight against corruption in Liberia, Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer 2010[26] listed Liberia as the most corrupt country in the world. This in fact also contradicts the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), where Liberia's global corruption ranking improved 10 basis point in 2010 to 87 from 97 in 2009[27].When asked to clarify their position, Chantal Uwimana, TI's Regional Director for Africa and the Middle East, said 'Liberia is one of those outlier countries where the analyses of international outside experts on the state of corruption in the country do not correlate with the findings of the actual experiences of the citizens who have to deal with corrupt practices at the basic level'[28]. This was a frustrating development for the government of Liberia as it is trying to build its international credibility as a source of change and hope for the Liberians[29].

When asked of her perception on the state of corruption in Liberia, Munah Tarpeh[30] expressed her frustration:

'Liberia is faced with corruption in all the different sectors of the country. We are aware that the government is working hard to reduce it but some of its officials are still widely known to be corrupt. As a government employee I see the level of corruption and know that the lives of Liberians could be much better if corruption is discouraged in our society. The anti-corruption commission should be much more active and try to go down into the middle levels of ministries and parastatals and not just concentrate on ministers.'

Unlike Munah who is aware of the strides of the government in mitigating corruption, many ordinary people are not aware. To them every government official is corrupt and the systemic perception of 'government and corruption' is still as it were for many decades. While not every government official may be corrupt the entire government has been judged and sentenced in the 'court of public opinion' as Mannah Kpakra[31] asserted:

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[25]See: http://www.state.gov/e/eeb/rls/othr/ics/2010/138100.htm (Accessed 27th August 2011)

[26] 89% of Liberian interviewees for the Barometer stated that they have paid bribe to access government services.

[27] See: http://www.liberianobserver.com/node/9969 (Accessed 28th August 2011)

[28] See: http://www.liberianobserver.com/node/9969 (Accessed 28th August 2011)

[29] Interview with Amos Konneh.

[30] Telephone interview conducted on the 20th of August 2011

[31]Telephone interview conducted on the 20th of August 2011

'Government officials are the cause of suffering in Liberia. The level of international support received by the government after the war could have helped to turn the economic situation of the country around with Liberians living a comfortable life. However, I am sure that some of the money given is safely resting in international accounts or used to pay the school fees and health insurance for the children of government officials living overseas. They do not care about us, we are used by them and even the little we deserve we do not get.'

This is one of the many harsh comments received during the research but the harsh sentence passed by some of the interviewees is based on their present socio-economic status. Despite knowledge gained from the activities carried out by government against corruption a clinical examination of the system and structures may tempt one to take the side of the ordinary masses. Liberia is a mineral rich country with a very small population[32]but remains one of the world's poorest. It is coming out of more than 12 years of conflict but much more could have been done given the fact that the war ended 8 years ago and the country got most of the support it needed to get back on her feet. As stated above, 8 years after the war Liberia still maintains its position at the bottom of the UNDP Human Development Index (UNDP HDI 2010) ranking 162 out of 169 countries.

Public perception though normally discarded provides an effective means of understanding the wishes, aspirations, fears and doubts of a people. Its importance was highlighted by UNDP's Rule of Law Officer, Cllr. James Nyenpan Verdier, Jr, during the launch of the results of a four month survey of public opinion on anti-corruption efforts in Liberia: '*though public opinion is not to be treated as hard facts, they provide a reasonable level of understanding of how ordinary people think and feel.*'[33]

When asked to comment on the way forward for Liberia a high profiled government official[34] stated:

'the fight against corruption is key to a positive way forward for the country. It is a fight that should be relentless, well planned and fully implemented. The people of Liberia deserve much more than they are getting. It is a shame that they are still affected by the things that they fought against.'

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[32]Less than 4million people
[33]See: http://www.liberiademocracywatch.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=109:ldw-ends-anti-corruption-assessment&catid=52:top-news&Itemid=165 (Accessed 28th August 2011)
[34]Identity not provided as requested by the interviewee. Interview conducted on the 21st of August 2011.

A similar call was made by the chairperson of the Anti-Corruption Commission of Liberia (LACC) Frances Johnson Morris on the 16th of August 2011: *"If we lose focus, the fight against corruption in the country will not be won. We need to take concrete steps in Liberia to show that we are serious about the fight against corruption"*[35]

3.3.8 Organised Crimes

Money laundering and drug trafficking are major growing sources of concern for the government of Liberia. Because of its porous borders and the ineffectiveness of its anti-money laundering strategies Liberia is used by individuals and syndicates to launder money. As frustration rises over this the chairperson of the LACC calls for cooperation amongst relevant actors in combatting money laundering: '*Money laundering and terrorist financing in Liberia can't be fought by a single institution. The LACC mandate requires that everyone in the country be involved in the fight against corruption.*[36]'

The World Bank, sensing the growing extent of organized crimes in West Africa, organised a workshop in Monrovia from the 19th to the 20th of May 2010 and advised all West African countries thus: '*It is no news that organized criminal activities are increasing in West Africa and it is crucial that all countries take appropriate steps, implement international standards, and increase capacity to fight money laundering and terrorist financing.*[37]'

Widespread bribery, corruption and ineffective monitoring and surveillance systems have also led to the West African country being used as one of the hubs for drug activities in the region. The increasing trafficking and use of drugs in the country poses a clear and present threat to the security and the existing fragile peace in Liberia. Drug trafficking and use has its related components which include arms trafficking, decline in morality, increase in criminal and gang activities and subsequently abuse of human rights and disrespect for the rule of law. Thus the need for the state to commit itself to dealing with this threat cannot be overemphasized. To mention just one pertinent incident, in 2008 barrels containing about 2.5 tonnes of cocaine were seized from a ship off the coast of Liberia (BBC WST: 2008).

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[35]See: http://www.wadr.org/en/site/news_en/1730/Money-laundering-in-Liberia-a-%E2%80%9Cgrand-corruption%E2%80%9D-says-anti-graft-boss.htm (Accessed 28th August 2011)
[36]Ibid
[37] UNDP: http://www.unliberia.org/press.asp?pr_detail=139 (Accessed 28th August 2011)

The challenge of drug trafficking is not limited to Liberia as other countries in the region are also used as transit points by South American drug lords. In 2007, 2.4 metric tonnes (mt) were seized in Senegal in June, almost 1.5 mt were seized in Mauritania between May and August, 0.6 mt in Guinea-Bissau in April, 0.5 mt in Cape Verde in March, 0.4 mt in Benin in August and 0.2 mt in Guinea. In 2006, two seizures in Western Africa, one made in Ghana (1.9 mt) and one Guinea-Bissau (0.6 mt), all accounted for 90% of all seizures reported so far on the continent (UNODC 2007: 5).

3.3.9. Other underlying sources of tension

Due to the resultant effects of unemployment, illiteracy, corruption etc. there is a serious focus on them as burning points by both the government and the international community. However, there are other sources of tension and conflict (apart from corruption and unemployment) which could also be linked to illiteracy and unemployment.

Liberia on the 23rd of August 2011 voted on four constitutional amendments, including a provision to change the election date to avoid the rainy season, as well as a stipulation to alter the residency requirement for presidential and vice presidential candidates (UPSL 2011: 1). However, Liberians seem caught up with the challenge of reaching a consensus on the validity of the referendum as the opposition leader George Opong Weah advised his supporters not to vote.[38] The decision not to vote influenced the outcome of the referendum as all the amendments sought did not get the required amount of votes that would have seen them through. The end result was that Liberia went to the polls in October 2011 with a run-off held on the 8th of November 2011. The situation in the country was tense as the main opposition party the Congress for Democratic Change (CDC) led by Winston Tubman pulled out of the second round of the election claiming that it not free and fair. However, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf (the current president) was declared winner of the run-off on the 15th of November 2011[39].

Not forgetful of the violent past of the country, the eyes of the world were turned on Liberia and closely followed the development of its electioneering process. International organisations like the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) provided Early Warning and Response Design Support (EWARDS) to the country and worked closely with all the

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[38] Interview with Nimenem Myers

[39] Carter Foundation (2011) : 'Carter Center Statement on Liberia's Tally Process and Post-Electoral Environment), Atlanta, USA, pg.1 See:
http://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/peace_publications/election_reports/liberia-post-electoral-112111.pdf (Accessed 8th December 2011)

relevant actors to ensure a peaceful process. The tensions that mounted during the election indicated clearly that the peace in Liberia is still fragile.

Another source of tension and divisions is in the area of access to and ownership of land; this is creating violent clashes that are increasingly taking on ethnic and religious tones. The Lofa and Nimba counties bordering Guinea and Cóte d'Ivoire respectively are the main sites of contention (Adolfo 2010: 25). Ethnic groups in this area regularly clash over the ownership of land sometimes leading to the deaths and injuries.

The crisis is of such urgent importance that the President set up a land commission in August 2009, which presented its report in June 2010. Prior to that, in 2006 an Ad-Hoc Presidential Commission on the County Inter Ethnic Land Dispute was set-up. The Commission's main task was to investigate the various land disputes deriving from continued ethnic tensions between Mano, Gios and Mandingos in Nimba county. Land disputes are ranked high as one of the issues threatening national peace and security in the country (Adolfo 2010, Rincon 2010: 18).

To foster the badly needed changes in the economy and the lives of Liberians the government has commenced the implementation process of a decentralization programme that will take the government to the people and ensure that the services provided in the major cities are made available and accessible in every part of the country[40]. It is working in tandem with UNDP and civil society organisations to educate its populace about the programme and why it should be supported.

4. Gender dynamics in pre-war, war and post-war Liberia

The pre and war era Liberia proved to be a very chauvinistic and patriarchal society where women did not enjoy the same rights as men. This was the case in all sectors in the country but was more obvious in the education and employment sectors. During the war period there were many cases of gender based violence with women used as weapons of war as reported in the TRC report (2009) of the country. In pre-and post-war Liberia domestic violence was the norm rather than the exception with women suffering horribly in the hands of family members that are supposed to protect them. There are cases of male preferences in the area of education with early marriage or working on the farm as the provisions for girls. This limited the employment and employability possibilities for many

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[40] Interview in Landgraaf conducted on 29th of June 2011 with Nimenem Myers a civil society activist based in Monrovia, Liberia.

women as they are illiterate and lack any form of technical training. The involvement of some women in the different fighting factions was based on their vulnerability as they did not reason well their decisions and were easily convinced by the factions to be part of them (Liberia TRC Report: 2009). Girls and women were made to serve in various roles within the different factions. Their roles ranged from being bush wives and sex slaves to gun totting and spying.

The gender roles changed in some communities during the war with some women becoming heads of households. This brief period of leadership enjoyed by women was quickly reversed with them returning to their traditional roles with the return of their husbands after the war. However, those who lost their husbands continued in their roles as heads of households. There were very limited legal provisions that protected the rights and welfare of women.

Despite this the women of Liberia contributed greatly to the search for peace in the country but like in most countries they were left out of the peace process. The election of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf has ignited the flame of 'womanhood' in the country as she is seen working towards bridging the existing gender gulf. The Nobel Peace Committee in 2011 awarded two Liberian women for the role they played in bringing peace to Liberia. These women are President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf and Leymah Gbowee a peace activist[41].

5. Conclusion

Liberia has faced a challenging past but it faces an equally challenging present and future. The civil war came to an end in 2004 but the pre-war conditions are still present and persisting. The government has made enormous strides in righting the wrongs that led the country through the abyss of chaos and destruction through the TRC and its report serves as a policy guide for the country. The reform process has broadly targeted the different sectors in the country bringing together the efforts of the government, international community and other stakeholders. At the same time the DDR programme was able to collect weapons from ex-combatants and assist them live a normal life. The recommendations of the TRC serve a guide for the development of policies and programmes that are meant to maintain the fragile peace in the country.

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[41] BBC WST: See: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-15214032 (Accessed on the 6th of December 2011)

Despite the achievements gained there are a plethora of challenges still faced. As could be seen above these challenges are mostly centered on unemployment, illiteracy, corruption, lack of opportunities and limited access and affordability in terms of social services. While the war can be said to be responsible for the present state of the economy it is obvious that corruption and maladministration on the part of government officials play a role in preserving the current status quo. The fight against corruption has to be augmented with the president and the anti-corruption agency making sure that there are no 'sacred cows'.

The rate of unemployment poses a significant threat to the peace and development of Liberia. To alleviate the unemployment challenge more investments and interventions that are pro-employment and growth have to be made. Strategies developed need to take into consideration the short, medium and long term effects and outcomes. Training programmes that are conducted to ensure the employability of especially young people have to be streamlined with the needs of the market. This could only be ensured through a market survey that will outline the jobs in demand. And it should be coupled up with an increased investment in ACLs and adult education programmes by the government and other stakeholders.

The Liberian government should work with the private sector thereby creating the possibility for the private sector to expand on their absorption capacity thus enabling them employ especially young people. However, to ensure this there should be initiatives that could help build on the current level of literacy and employability of people in the country. There is the need to expand on education to ensure that it is accessible and affordable in every corner of the country. This should be coupled with an improvement in the conditions of service of teachers and lecturers in order for them to be retained and also to discourage their migration to other parts of the world.

The higher education sector should also be given the attention and funding it needs. The introduction of courses that are development based can help improve the capacity of young people in institutions of higher learning thus creating the possibility for them to meaningfully contribute to the growth and development of their country. The higher education institutions should also be adequately funded and encouraged to be involved in research and training programmes geared towards national development. This would help build not only the human capital but also help produce answers to key challenges faced in the country.

There should be a shift from subsistence farming to cash crop production. Cash crop pro-duction will help give farmers the resources needed to take care of their families and at the same time have cash to invest in expanding their agricultural activities. A boom in ag-riculture will help mitigate rural-urban migration and at the same time attract Liberians in the diaspora to return home and those who are interested in agricultural activities invest in it.

The reform process on land should be given keen attention with laws formulated enforced. Land issues are sensitive as they can easily fuel ethnic tensions which have the capacity of polarizing the country. This is indeed crucial as the country will soon be going through another phase of presidential and parliamentary elections. Considering the susceptibility of young people due to poverty and illiteracy they can easily be lulled into taking the road to chaos and instability.

The election of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf to the presidency of the country has helped in giving women the necessary confidence required in helping them stand up and rightfully take their place in society. However, decades of structural marginalization and oppression has succeeded in widening the gulf between them and men. Such deep disparity cannot be rolled back overnight and needs the full attention of the government with gender main-streamed into all policies and programmes of the government. This should be fostered with a 'community- based bottom-up approach' with the development and enforcement of legislation that protects and promotes the rights and welfare of women and children.

The government should work closely with governments in the region and organisations such as the UN and European Union in developing strategies through which it could effec-tively combat the use of Liberia as a money laundering and drug hub. It will not be able to do so in isolation and must seek support and technical advice from foreign governments and other agencies with the necessary experience and expertise.

The economy of Liberia is still donor driven. To turn it around the human resources has to be capacitated and material resources constructively utilized. This should be coupled with a strong display of political will on the part of the leadership of the country. It should be inspirational and be able to develop a comprehensive national agenda that is imple-mentable, achievable and time bound. This will foster a change from poverty and misery to sustainable peace and economic security for the Liberian people.

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