Mapping opportunities for the consolidation of peace in Liberia

"Voices from the countryside"

National Conflict Map

SIERRA LEONE

GUINEA

COTE D'IVOIRE

Lofa

Gbarpolu

Grand Cape Mount

Bomi

Margibi

Montserrado

Bong

Nimba

Grand Bassa

Rivercess

Grand Gedeh

Sinoe

River Gee

Grand Kru

Maryland

ATLANTIC OCEAN

N

Legend
Conflict Risk Perception

Low
Moderate
Medium
High
Country Boundary
Ocean

0   15   30   60   90   120
Miles

Liberia Peace Building Office
Ministry of Internal Affairs

April 2017

"In the very first place, most of the conflicts that we have are on land issues... those are the big conflicts that if we do not arrest will be the next war. And when it starts, it will not end, because most of the time when you see people doing survey, you see other people taking cutlasses, and some people taking even guns and all."

FGD participant, Bong County

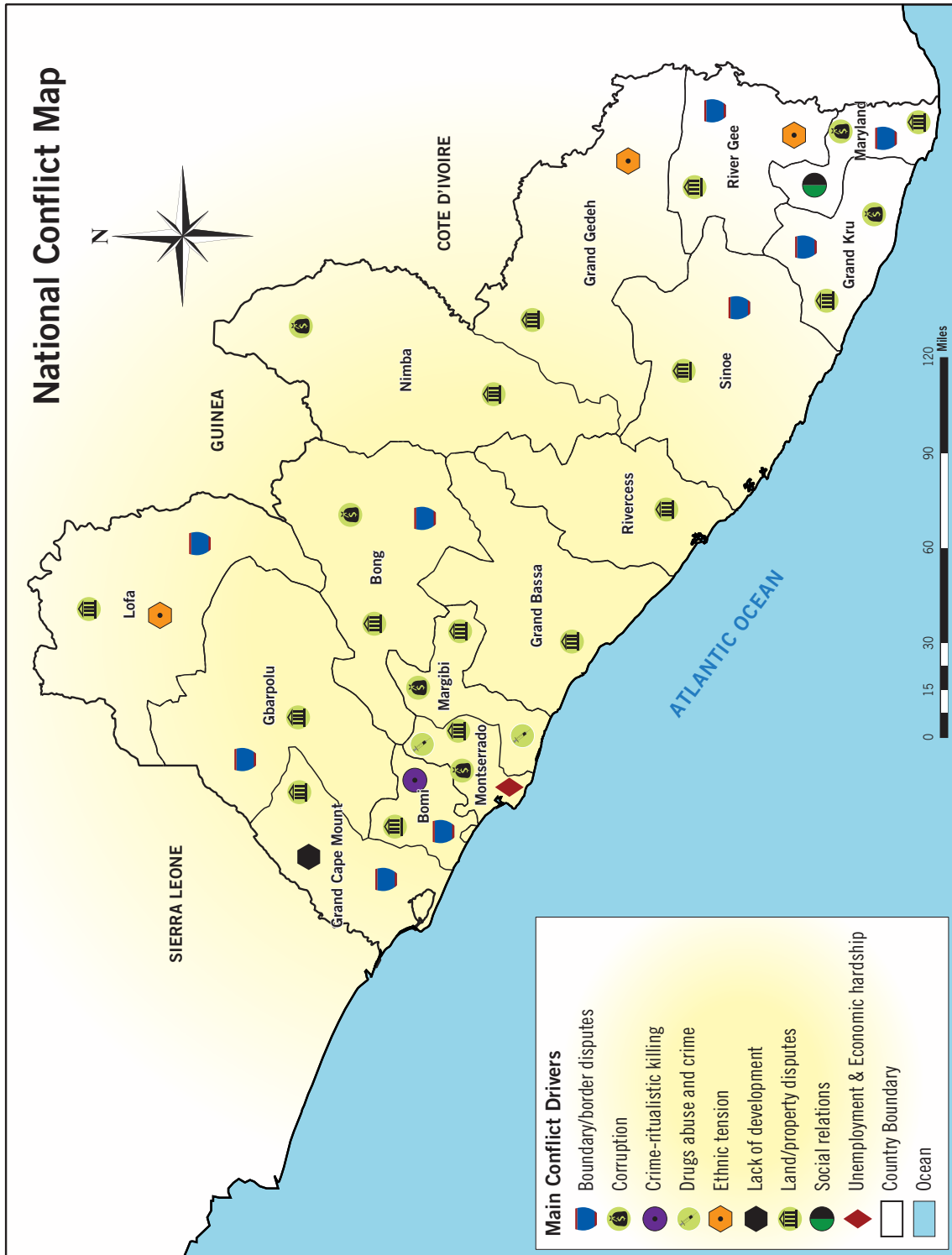# Mapping opportunities for the consolidation of peace in Liberia
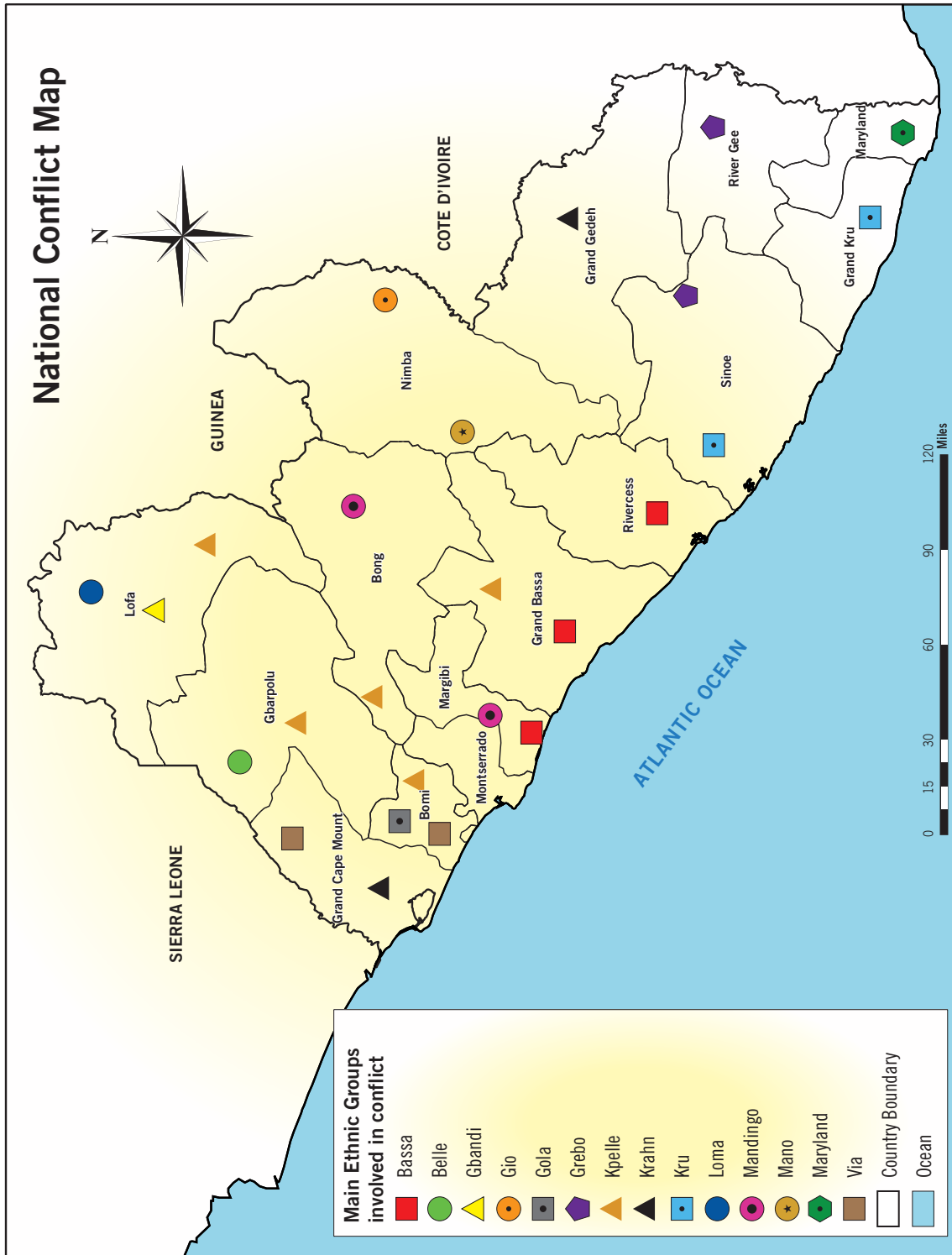
"Voices from the countryside"

by Edward Mulbah and John R Dennis

Liberia Peace Building Office
Ministry of Internal Affairs
April 2017

National Conflict Map

N

COTE D'IVOIRE

GUINEA

SIERRA LEONE

ATLANTIC OCEAN

Maryland

River Gee

Grand Gedeh

Grand Kru

Sinoe

Nimba

Rivercess

Lofa

Bong

Grand Bassa

Gbarpolu

Margibi

Montserrado

Bomi

Grand Cape Mount

Miles

120   90   60   30   15   0

Main Conflict Drivers

Boundary/border disputes

Corruption

Crime-ritualistic killing

Drugs abuse and crime

Ethnic tension

Lack of development

Land/property disputes

Social relations

Unemployment & Economic hardship

Country Boundary

Ocean

National Conflict Map

SIERRA LEONE

GUINEA

COTE D'IVOIRE

ATLANTIC OCEAN

Lofa

Gbarpolu

Grand Cape Mount

Bomi

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Margibi

Bong

Nimba

Grand Bassa

Rivercess

Sinoe

Grand Gedeh

River Gee

Grand Kru

Maryland

N

0   15   30   60   90   120
Miles

Main Ethnic Groups involved in conflict

Bassa	
Belle	
Gbandi	
Gio	
Gola	
Grebo	
Kpelle	
Krahn	
Kru	
Loma	
Mandingo	
Mano	
Maryland	
Via	
Country Boundary	
Ocean	

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Government of Liberia has placed a premium on peacebuilding and reconciliation, and it continues to support efforts to pursue this agenda – which has been supported by many partners, working collaboratively with the government.

The Liberia Peacebuilding Office (PBO) was established under this arrangement, with a mandate to coordinate the implementation of national peacebuilding and reconciliation strategies, policies and programmes. We acknowledge the government and its partners, such as the United Nations Mission in Liberia and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office (UNPBSO) and the African Centre for the Constructive Resolutions of Disputes (ACCORD), based in South Africa, supported the Peacebuilding Office to design this National Conflict Mapping Exercise (NCME). The PBO in collaboration with ACCORD was under the auspices of the African Peacebuilding Coordination Programme (APCP), which it implements with a grant from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland. The Liberia Institute for Statistics and Geo-Information Services (LISGIS) provided technical backstopping in the implementation of the study.

We express our deep gratitude and appreciation to the government and its partners for the unique opportunity to undertake this laudable initiative. We recognise the tireless and professional contributions of the six field teams, comprising enumerators, focus groups moderators, note-takers and transcribers. Most importantly, we appreciate local community members, who left their busy schedules to respond to the survey and to participate in various focus groups and key informant interviews.

CONTENTS

ACRONYMS

ACCORD	African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes
ADR	Alternative Dispute Resolution
AfT	Agenda for Transformation
CBO	Community-based organisation
CMF	Concession Management Framework
CNDRA	Center for National Documents and Records Agency
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
CPC	County Peace Committee
CSC	County Service Center
CSO	Civil society organisation
DEN-L	Development Education Network of Liberia
EA	Enumeration area
EU	European Union
EWER	Early warning and early response
FGD	Focus group discussion
GAC	General Auditing Commission
GDP	Gross domestic product
IAA	Internal Audit Agency
ICT	Information and communication technology
IEC	Information, education and communication
KII	Key informant interview
LACC	Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission
LISGIS	Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MIA	Ministry of Internal Affairs
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
MOU	Memorandum of understanding
MLME	Ministry of Lands, Mines and Energy
MPEA	Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs
NCME	National Conflict Mapping Exercise
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
PBO	Peace Building Office
PBRC	Peacebuilding Resource Center
PDA	Personal data assistant
PPCC	Public Procurement and Concession Commission
PPS	Population proportion to size
PRS	Poverty Reduction Strategy
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UN	United Nations
UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia
(UN) PBSO	(United Nations) Peace Building Support Office

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There is documented evidence which shows that most post-conflict countries are likely to relapse into violence after reaching peace agreements, and when United Nations (UN) peacekeepers exit the country. As Liberia continues on a path to peace and stability, 14 years after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2003, peacebuilding and reconciliation activities remain essential components of development goals and policies. Many studies have been carried out to support evidence-based decision-making in peacebuilding policy formulation and programme design. However, the majority of conflict literature and peacebuilding strategies in Liberia share a common critique – various conflict issues are discussed generally, efforts designed to help address and mitigate them are rarely informed by rigorous analyses, and the scope of these studies is usually limited in geography and extent of consultation with stakeholders.

The NCME was conducted to identify and analyse Liberian conflict issues and potential conflict drivers systematically. The study focused on five thematic areas: (1) conflict issues in Liberia; (2) assessment of the level of effectiveness of peacebuilding processes and frameworks; (3) proposals for peace and reconciliation; (4) external conflict factors; and (5) local and national unity. Utilising a mixed method approach, the study combined a quantitative survey and participatory focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs), along with a secondary data review. Study participants were drawn from all 15 political subdivisions, with more than 3 700 ordinary citizens surveyed. However, because the study was designed to explore the subject matter from the perspectives of the grassroots population, national-level perspective is sparse. Nonetheless, because the methodology ensured data triangulation, objectivity and validity were assured.

The NCME asserts that conflict factors are ubiquitous in Liberia. Citizens are generally aware of this situation, as more than one third (36.3%) of respondents acknowledged. Eight counties reported the highest risk perception of existing and looming conflicts: Maryland (68.5%), Bong (61.8%), Grand Kru (54.5%), Grand Bassa (48.8%), Lofa (47.8%), Sinoe (41.0%), River Gee (40.3%) and Rivercess (37.1%). It is worth noting that the majority of these counties are situated in the south-eastern region. Three key conflict drivers were identified to present the most eminent threat to national peace and stability: land/property disputes, corruption and border/boundary disputes. Land/property disputes is the most predominant conflict driver reported in all 15 counties. Together, these three drivers constitute a "*dangerous triplet*" that requires bold, concerted national efforts to combat with urgency and decisiveness. Other conflict drivers identified include inter-ethnic and intercommunal tensions; religious tensions; unemployment and poverty, especially among the youth; voice and accountability regarding governance decision-making and the management of resources; identify conflicts; etc.

Across the country, the main conflict actors include: tribes (51.8%), villages (32.1%) and political groups (23.4%). Conflicts tend to be driven more by citizens' grievances about patterns of social injustices, perpetuated as disadvantage (43.9%) and marginalisation (25.2%).

The most influential peacebuilding actors are traditional elders (26.0%), followed by local government officials (11.4%), including the Land Commission (7.9%), and the role of national government (10.3%) in resolving conflicts was duly recognised. Notwithstanding the gains made by these peacebuilding actors, it was found that there are substantial unresolved conflicts (32.5%) in the country. This result epitomises the level of unmet demands that exist for peacebuilding initiatives in Liberia. Conflicts have disrupted pre-existing intercommunal harmony and social cohesion, leaving behind fractious communities burdened with problems of greater division (34.1%) and social tension (25.3%) among various groups, such as tribes, as well as between the youths and elders.

To address the plethora of conflicts that has engulfed Liberia, the government and its partners have devised many policies and strategies. The four frameworks that citizens are most aware of are: (1) the Decentralisation Policy (57.6%); (2) the judicial system (56.4%); (3) the Land Reform Agenda (49.6%); and (4) the Reconciliation Roadmap (41.5%). The Decentralisation Policy is the only framework that the majority of citizens have heard about in all counties, followed by the Land Reform Agenda. Nearly nine in 10 respondents (85.5%) reported that these frameworks have been instrumental in helping to resolve and prevent conflicts in their counties, especially in Bomi (85.5%), Bong (82.4%), Cape Mount (79.7%) and Nimba (79.7%). However, it is surprising why respondents in Montserrado reported limited knowledge about the existing peacebuilding frameworks.

Citizens distinguished County Service Centers (CSCs) (71.7%) and the palava/peace hut (50.7%) as the most effective peacebuilding initiatives. Women's peace huts (41.1%), county peace committees (37.1%) and elders and chiefs (32.8%) were also recognised as effective initiatives. Nationwide, there was divided opinion about the impact of the Concession Management Framework (CMF). Nearly half of respondents believed the CMF brings enormous changes such as job creation (44.3%), local development (37.9%), food security (36.6%) and capacity-building (37.4%). However, the other half complained that some companies have become the source of contention in communities, owing to their failure to honour agreed corporate social responsibilities for job creation and development projects such as the construction of roads, schools and clinics, thereby causing conflict with the locals.

Citizens admitted that a lot could be done to promote peace and reconciliation, including reconciliation dialogue (85.9%), development projects (73.8%), etc. For these initiatives to succeed, elders (80.4%), religious leaders (79.9%), and youth groups (78.8%) should be involved to support government. Emphasis must be placed on messages of forgiveness (30.9%), the decentralisation of government services (22.2%) and benefit from the equitable distribution of natural resources (16.2%).There is a call for the government to establish a national identification card (57%) system and to identify a common language (30.3%) for the country. These initiatives will greatly contribute to the development of a set of values to promote national unity.

Despite the array of conflict factors plaguing the nation, the findings reflected a pattern of apparent homogeneity, whereby the major conflict drivers in one county are central to other counties. However, this interlinking characteristic revealed the highly dynamic nature of the conflict phenomenon in Liberia. Understanding this paradox of dynamic homogeneity of Liberia's conflict paradigm is at the heart of successful peacebuilding and reconciliation.

In view of these findings, the following actionable recommendations are proffered to help the government and its partners to formulate effective policies and programmes, as well as to align peacebuilding and reconciliation strategies properly to achieve desired results:

Policy

1. It is recommended that the government, through the National Bureau of Concessions, establishes a robust monitoring and evaluation mechanism to track the compliance of all concession companies on matters relating to corporate social responsibilities.

2. The government, especially the legislature, is called upon not to include "Preposition 24" (to Christianise Liberia) in the pending referendum.

Programmes

3. The government – through the Land Commission; Ministry of Lands, Mines and Energy (MLME) and the Center for National Documents and Records Agency (CNDRA) – should provide affordable surveying and deeds processing services across the country to deal with widespread land/property disputes.

4. It is recommended that the government expedites the construction of CSCs in the remaining counties, and also increases or diversifies the range of services they can provide.

5. The government must continue to create an enabling environment, attractive for business investment and, ultimately, job creation for local populations, utilising a tripartite strategy: technical and vocational capacity-building for marketable skills; entrepreneurship skills for engagement in small businesses; and the creation of wage-earning income-generation activities.

6. It is recommended that the government carefully examines the feasibility of issuing a national citizens' identification card, and the legislation of a common language, to help address the national identity conflict that seems to deflate citizens' sense of nationalism.

7. It is recommended that the government invests more in programmes that promote social cohesion and inter-ethnic harmony, such as sports and recreation activities – for example, the National County Meet and other district level tournaments.

Research

8. The PBO is urged to assess the land/property disputes and border/boundary disputes further, to develop geospatial conflict portals that provide online maps of the conflicts in Liberia.

9. It is recommended that the government, through the PBO, engages pertinent gender stakeholders to research the possibility of harnessing the experience and expertise of women in national peacebuilding, particularly for land/property and border/boundary conflicts.

1.   INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

For the past half a century, a high percentage of post-conflict states relapsed into violence after a peace agreement was reached, and after UN peacekeeping missions transitioned out of a country (ACCORD, 2009). This trend has been particularly prevalent in the African context, partly because of trans-border militarisation, shifting alliances and unorganised heterogeneous militias that create complex post-conflict power-sharing dynamics. In addition, some African countries have experienced a "youth bulge", amidst limited educational and livelihood opportunities. This is coupled with the problems of small arms and light weapons proliferation. Among other things, the promotion of social cohesion in post-conflict situations most times gets undermined by a lack of programming in key priorities such as infrastructure, health, education and other basic services. This is why the UN Peacebuilding Architecture was set up in 2005 – comprising the Peacebuilding Commission, the Peacebuilding Support Office and the Peacebuilding Fund – to support sustainable post-conflict peacebuilding initiatives.

Although Liberia has continued on the path to peace and stability for 13 years since the signing of the CPA in 2003, peacebuilding and reconciliation activities remain essential complements to development goals, policies and long-term stability. The government has developed relevant policy documents – including the National Vision (Liberia Rising 2030), the National Reconciliation Roadmap and the Liberian Medium Term Economic Growth and Development Strategy (the Agenda for Transformation) – to promote and consolidate peace and reconciliation. These documents have been built on previous policy-related frameworks, including the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS), the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) report and the National Security Strategy, as well as the UN Common Country Assessment. Despite these endeavours, conflict issues remain ubiquitous, requiring the steadfast support of the national government and its partners, as well as the participation of ordinary citizens, to engender durable peace and stability.

1.1   Lapses in peacebuilding strategies

In 2009, the Government of Liberia established the PBO to coordinate key peacebuilding initiatives in the country.[a] The PBO interacts with numerous stakeholders with common interests relating to peacebuilding in Liberia. Being a critical government functionary, the PBO has adopted an evidence-based approach to policy formulation and programming to invigorate Liberia's peacebuilding landscape. Accordingly, it has utilised research to inform its work and policy processes for building sustainable peace in Liberia.

These efforts by the government and its partners in mapping and analysing conflict factors aimed at applying mitigating mechanisms are aligned with Liberia's Vision 2030. They are also intrinsically linked to the overall goal of Liberia's Agenda for Transformation (AfT). Under Pillar One of the AfT (Peace, Justice, Security and Rule of Law), the government aims to ensure long-term peace and stability. It hopes to achieve this by managing tensions in society to reduce the risk of future conflict, increasing social cohesion, and ensuring that the principles of human rights are upheld (MPEA, 2012:41).

To contribute to this national goal, as well as to contribute meaningfully to the contemporary peacebuilding discourse in Liberia, the PBO continues to use evidence to support its policies and programmes. The PBO inaugurated the conflict early warning and early response (EWER) mechanism between 2008 and 2011, as a consequence of research evidence. The EWER mechanism has collaborated with the three justice and security regional hubs, providing capacity-building support to civil society

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a   Since early 2016, the PBO no longer serves as the secretariat of the Peace Building Fund.

organisations (CSOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs) to address conflicts at a community level. Another key peacebuilding project the PBO has supported through its evidenced-based research is the Palava Hut Programme, and it also continues to carry out regular justice and security perception surveys.

Most of the conflict literature and peacebuilding strategies in Liberia share a common critique – various conflict issues are discussed generally, and efforts designed to help address and mitigate them are rarely informed by rigorous analyses to ensure a corresponding tailoring of interventions. Consequently, some priorities and interventions have not yielded the desired outcomes, as conflicts abound. Since 2006, there has not been any empirical study or a national public opinion poll undertaken to track progress in reconciliation across a range of multidimensional indicators – including political culture and relations, human security, dialogue, historical confrontation and social relations. There are no empirical data that explain to what extent peacebuilding and reconciliation interventions have impacted Liberia.

Furthermore, there has not been a thorough conflict-mapping exercise in Liberia since the European Union (EU)-funded TRC Conflict Mapping Exercise, done in 2007–2008. In 2010, the Human Rights Center at the University of California also undertook a conflict-mapping exercise in Liberia, but it was limited in scope. In 2008, the PBO and the Peacebuilding Resource Center (PBRC) undertook another conflict-mapping exercise in five counties around issues of land and concessions, border security, access to justice, and gender. Despite the relevance of these mappings, they have not been comprehensive, neither have they led to deeper analysis of various conflicts to inform programming and interventions adequately.

Therefore, the NCME seeks to draw from previous studies to provide a comprehensive resource for informing national policy and programming on peacebuilding and conflict resolution.

1.2   Research aim

To date, most – if not all – of the peacebuilding-related documents developed, as well as the reconciliation roadmap, were heavily dependent on desk reviews and, in some cases, limited consultations with stakeholders. Existing knowledge about most of the conflict issues/areas is broad, with limited county specificity. This can lead to inappropriate data analysis that has the propensity to misinform peacebuilding programmes, and therefore adversely affect the resolution of conflicts.

To overcome these deficits in peacebuilding literature and strategies, the PBO undertook this nationwide conflict-mapping exercise, which allows for a systematic process in which Liberian conflict issues and potential conflict drivers are identified across the country. The study focused on five thematic areas: (1) conflict issues in Liberia; (2) assessment of the level of effectiveness of peacebuilding processes and frameworks; (3) proposals for peace and reconciliation; (4) external conflict factors; and (5) local and national unity. These thematic issues were determined through multi-stakeholder consultations, including the August 2015 workshop on coordination and coherence that was held in Monrovia. These issues have been analysed critically to help both implementers and actors of conflicts to comprehend important root causes and contributing factors. The research findings make possible a range of actionable recommendations to engender conflict reduction, management or resolution.

1.3   Research objectives

The research addressed seven specific objectives:

1.   to identify existing and looming conflicts with the potential to undermine national peace and stability;

2.   to assess the nature, type and dynamics of county-specific conflict drivers, and outline any possible ways to address them;

3.   to explore the underlying root causes of civil war that are not yet addressed;

4.   to identify key and emerging conflict issues or factors, and discuss the extent to which some previous factors are being addressed or not – including the extent to which previous interventions worked in addressing these factors;

5.   to recognise various peace structures and actors, as well as the interventions they have undertaken to promote peacebuilding;

6.   to provide guidance to inform the alignment of government strategies for peacebuilding and reconciliation programmes; and

7.   to recommend strategies to strengthen peacebuilding policy development, encourage national dialogue and broaden the discourse on peacebuilding and reconciliation.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1   Design and sampling

A random stratified cluster sampling method was used for the research, to ensure the findings were representative of the population at the county level. A sample size of 3500 was considered sufficient to provide statistically representative results and to allow for meaningful comparisons. Using the population proportion to size (PPS) technique in relation to the 2008 Population and Housing Census, a total of 141 enumeration areas (EAs) were randomly selected, reflecting the population size of each county. The survey sample was complemented with 30 FGDs and 30 KIIs – two each in each county. Also, a desk review was carried out on available peacebuilding literature.

Indicators for the research were based on documentations from the PBO 2014 desk review, the EWER County Peace Committees (CPCs) and the frameworks on Decentralisation and Governance, Peacebuilding and Reconciliation, among others. As much as possible, questions were simplified in Liberian English and outlined in a logical sequence. Except for a single question involving a Likert scale, interviewers did not read response options to respondents, to avoid any bias.

2.2   Data collection

A team of 36 research assistants, divided into six sub-teams, was drawn from universities in Monrovia, and the existing pool of interviewers and field office staff of the LISGIS. They attended three comprehensive trainings in Gbarnga, Bong County, and Monrovia, Montserrado County. The three trainings focused on understanding the objectives and contents of the mapping exercise, the methodology, the questionnaire, the use of the personal data assistant (PDA) and applying practical interview techniques. The trainings included mock interviews and field testing of the questionnaire with randomly selected individuals at non-sampled sites in the vicinity of the training venues.

Field data collection lasted from 7 June to 12 July 2016. The six teams were deployed simultaneously, with each team responsible for at least two counties. Letters of introduction were dispatched by the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) to all county superintendents, notifying them about the conflict mapping and requesting their cooperation in informing the local authorities in the respective counties about the content and timing of the research. PDAs were used to conduct the survey, while semi-structured questionnaires were used for FGDs and KIIs. With the consent of participants, FGDs and KIIs were audio recorded.

2.3   Ethical considerations

The purpose of the mapping exercise was clearly explained to all participants, in accordance with good research practice. Informed consent was obtained from each selected household respondent before starting the interview, ensuring adherence to the key principles of privacy and anonymity. As the study did not involve any invasive procedures, it posed no risks to participants. All information of a personal nature collected from participants is being kept by the PBO for programming purposes only, in adherence to the principles of data safety and confidentiality. Interviewees fully understood that their participation was completely voluntary, and they did not stand to gain personally or lose anything on account of their participation. The teams worked in collaboration with local authorities and community leaders, and remained respectful to existing local traditions. In fact, the team composition ensured collective knowledge and familiarity with the local languages and customs.

2.4   Data quality assurance and analysis

The PBO and LISGIS worked along with team leaders in the field, overseeing the overall quality assurance process. After each day of fieldwork, team leaders held debriefing sessions with their respective teams to discuss work progress, resolve any issues and plan the next day's work. There were two field coordinators: one from the PBO and one from LISGIS. They provided overall supervision and quality control during the data collection. The coordinators visited the teams in the field, observed and commented on errors, and discussed progress with the teams.

Upon completion of the fieldwork, a total of 10 transcribers were hired to transcribe audio files from the FGDs and KIIs. Transcripts were validated against the respective audio files by the PBO and LISGIS to ensure that transcripts were representative of audio file contents. Transcripts were manually analysed using the five-step approach: data organisation, idea organisation, building overarching themes, ensuring reliability and validity, and finding plausible explanations to findings.

Quantitative data were analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software; the needed frequency and contingency tables were generated and exported to Microsoft Excel, where interpretation and visualisation were done.

The study design explored the subject matter mainly from a grassroots perspective. At the same time, an appropriate national-level perspective was solicited through high-level consultations with key stakeholders, as well as through the holding of a national validation workshop involving relevant peacebuilding actors, including the government, civil society, development community, etc. This exploration of multiple data sources ensured data triangulation, thereby assuring the objectivity and validity of the findings.

2.5   Challenges

The field teams encountered two main challenges, neither of which affected data quality. First, some rural EAs were situated in difficult terrains that were inaccessible by road, requiring team members to trek long distances through thickets of forests. This situation was exacerbated by heavy rains that flooded some villages. Secondly, there was poor accessibility to the mobile phone network making it difficult to submit data from the PDAs via the internet. The teams were very resourceful and overcame the challenges, successfully completing the field data collection.

3. KEY FINDINGS AND REFLECTIONS

The quantitative survey for the NCME covered a total of 3 500 respondents, and formed the backbone for the analysis undertaken in the study. The quantitative survey was supported by the extensive qualitative data gathered from the 30 FGDs and 30 KIIs conducted with ordinary citizens and local leaders in the 15 counties.

This section presents the response rate and the profile of a typical NCME survey respondent and, most importantly, an overall discussion of the key findings.

3.1   Response rate

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by county

Distribution of respondents by county		
County	Number of respondents	Percentage of total sample
Bomi	83	2.4
Bong	327	9.3
Grand Bassa	221	6.3
Grand Cape Mount	125	3.6
Grand Gedeh	135	3.9
Grand Kru	55	1.6
Lofa	272	7.8
Margibi	209	6
Maryland	130	3.7
Montserrado	1180	33.7
Nimba	447	12.8
Rivercess	70	2
Sinoe	100	2.9
River Gee	62	1.8
Gbarpolu	84	2.4
Total	**3 500**	**100**

As shown in Table 1 above, the survey achieved a 100% response rate – meaning all the target respondents, as per the distribution in each county, were reached by the enumerators. In adherence to the PPS sampling methodology employed in the study, about half of the sample (46.5%) was drawn from Montserrado and Nimba, the two most populous counties as per the 2008 census.
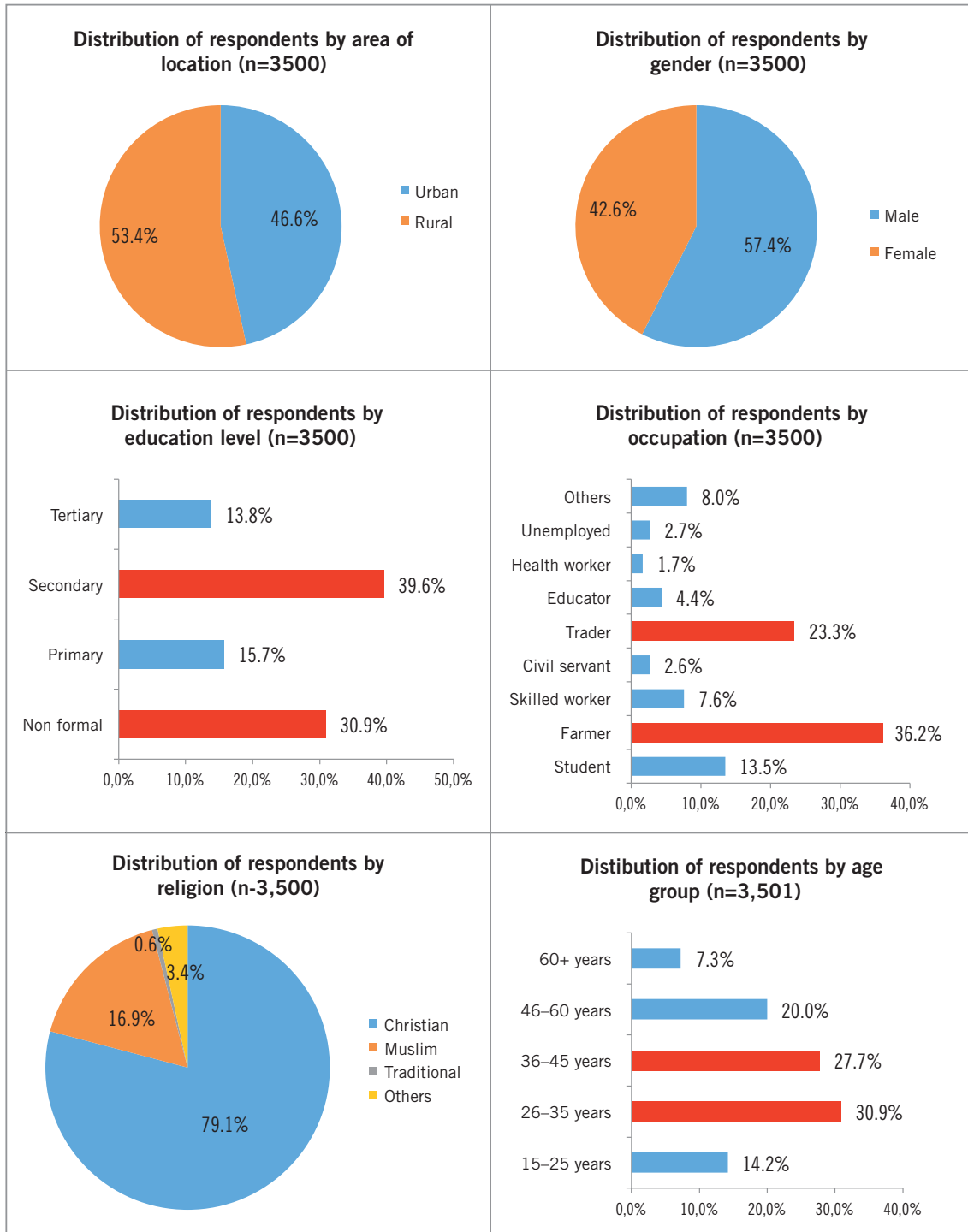
3.2   Respondents' characteristics

Distribution of respondents by area of location (n=3500)

- Urban 46.6%
- Rural 53.4%

Distribution of respondents by gender (n=3500)

- Male 57.4%
- Female 42.6%

Distribution of respondents by education level (n=3500)

- Tertiary 13.8%
- Secondary 39.6%
- Primary 15.7%
- Non formal 30.9%

Distribution of respondents by occupation (n=3500)

- Others 8.0%
- Unemployed 2.7%
- Health worker 1.7%
- Educator 4.4%
- Trader 23.3%
- Civil servant 2.6%
- Skilled worker 7.6%
- Farmer 36.2%
- Student 13.5%

Distribution of respondents by religion (n-3,500)

- Christian 79.1%
- Muslim 16.9%
- Traditional 0.6%
- Others 3.4%

Distibution of respondents by age group (n=3,501)

- 60+ years 7.3%
- 46–60 years 20.0%
- 36–45 years 27.7%
- 26–35 years 30.9%
- 15–25 years 14.2%

Figure 1: Profile of typical respondents

As depicted in Figure 1, the typical respondent in the survey was a young (27.7%) male (57.4%) who resided in a rural community (53.4%). Overall, because the majority of respondents had either attained secondary education (39.6%) or had no formal education (30.9%), they were more likely to engage in farming (36.2%) and informal trading (23.3%) to support their livelihoods. Generally, the study respondents professed strong elements of faith; nearly all of them (96.6%) held a religious belief, with about eight in 10 (79.1%) being Christians.

3.3   Conflict issues in Liberia

Liberia, like many post-conflict countries, is grappling with existing and looming conflicts which, if not properly mitigated, have the tendency to undermine the peace and stability of the nation. Stakeholders in peacebuilding have undertaken various conflict-mapping exercises with the aim of contextualising the root causes of conflicts, thereby mitigating them and averting a full-blown national crisis. Findings from most of these conflict-mapping exercises have been crucial in identifying a spectrum of conflict-prone factors. The contentious factors are land disputes, youth agitation (mainly about unemployment), the mismanagement of natural resources, strained state-citizen relationships, weak justice and security systems, lack of a shared national vision, and poverty and food insecurity (UN PBSO, 2013:2).

3.3.1   Perceptions about existing and looming conflict factors

To assess prevailing perceptions about existing conflict drivers, respondents were asked: *"Is there anything/palava*[b] *that could spoil the peace and stability in the district or county or between this district/ county and others?"* Figure 2 reveals that more than one third (36.3%) of respondents acknowledged the existence of conflict drivers or factors that have the propensity to undermine peace and stability in their county/district.
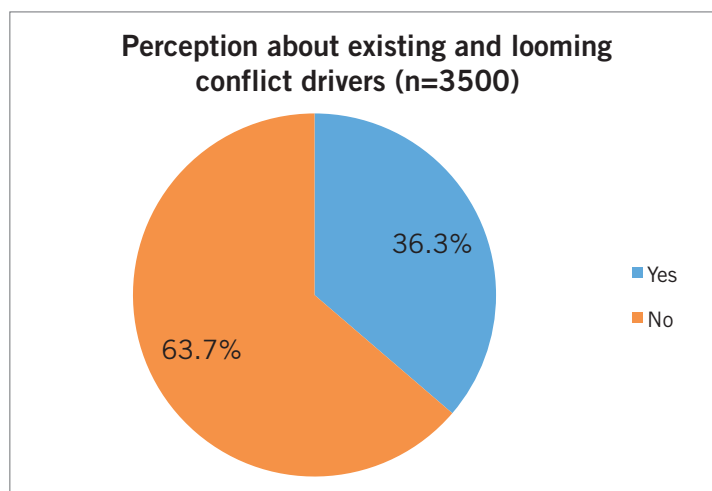

Figure 1: Profile of typical respondents

Respondents' area of residence – rural (50.1%) or urban (49.9%) – did not seem to have an influence on this perception. Similarly, educational level – non-formal (24.3%), secondary (43.3%) and tertiary (19.8%) – demonstrated no fixed trend in this regard. However, gender and age seem to associate clearly with the perceptions of respondents. Male respondents were nearly two times more likely (62.9%) than female respondents (37.1%) to recognise the existence of said conflict drivers. Also, young adults 36–45 years (30.4%) and older youth 26–35 years (29.4%) had a higher level of perception about existing and looming conflict issues. Nonetheless, this perception plummeted among senior citizens, 60+ years old (6.5%).

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b   Local vocabulary for "conflict".

Table 2: Distribution of conflict perception by county

Distribution of conflict perception by county		
County	Number of respondents	Percentage of "yes" within county
Bomi	83	13.3
Bong	327	61.8
Grand Bassa	221	48.4
Grand Cape Mount	125	12.8
Grand Gedeh	135	26.7
Grand Kru	55	54.5
Lofa	272	47.8
Margibi	209	10.0
Maryland	130	68.5
Montserrado	1180	34.9
Nimba	447	22.1
Rivercess	70	37.1
Sinoe	100	41.0
River Gee	62	40.3
Gbarpolu	84	28.6
Average		**36.3**

More than one third (36.3%) of respondents said that they were aware of existing and looming conflict drivers that could derail peace and stability in their counties or districts. As shown in Table 2 above, eight counties are considered to have high "conflict potential" in the country. In each of these counties, the share of respondents who reported knowledge of existing and looming conflict drivers was above the 36.3% national threshold.

The counties with the highest reported perception about conflict vulnerability, where more than half of respondents acknowledged perceived or real conflicts, are Maryland (68.5%), Bong (61.8%) and Grand Kru (54.5%). Overall, the data portray a unique trend – the majority of counties with high conflict risks (five of the eight) are located in the south-eastern region of the country: Maryland, Grand Kru, Sinoe, River Gee and Rivercess.

3.3.2 Nature, root causes and dynamics of conflict

At a national level, all respondents who acknowledged the existence of conflict were asked further: *"What is the conflict about?"* For this question, respondents had the option to list as many conflict drivers as applicable. As revealed in Figure 3, there are three high-risk conflict factors in Liberia: land/property disputes (57.8%), corruption[c] (40.0%) and border/boundary disputes (22.8%). Ethnic tensions (18.2%), social relations (13.6%) and religious disputes (10.8%) present moderate risks to the
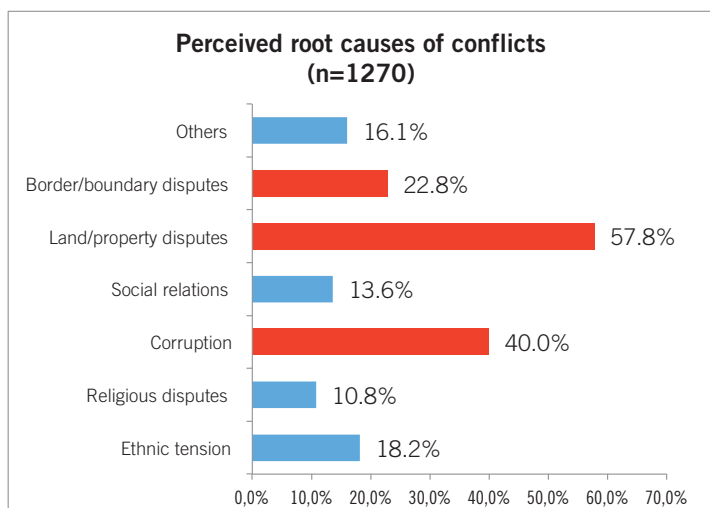
Figure 1: Profile of typical respondents

peace and stability of the country. Further analysis of conflict factors grouped under "others" revealed that issues of drugs, crime and unemployment – especially among the youth – presented additional conflict dynamics that cannot be ignored. Concerns about corruption encapsulate grievances people have about the mismanagement of public funds and natural resources, reflected by the inequitable distribution of the benefits of said resources. Furthermore, the citizens are frustrated with the governance system, because of feelings that decision-making processes are not inclusive enough.

Recent developments regarding "Proposition 24" from the constitutional review recommendations (calling for Liberia to be declared a Christian state) have agitated tremendous religious tensions, seemingly threatening volatile consequences across the county. But only one in 10 respondents (10.1%) regarded religious disputes as a threat to peace and stability. Although the quantitative evidence in this study does not corroborate the prevailing

> *"The other issue that would propagate conflict and destabilise peace in our community and county is inter-religious problem. Our laws provide that there should be religious tolerance so that everyone can practise their own religion. But we think that this going to cause us some contentions whether Liberian should be a secular state or a Christian state, and if the referendum passes, then we have to be careful of how we preserve our fragile democracy."*
>
> **Local government official, Maryland County**

apprehensions, anecdotes from the qualitative data establish that a cross-section of citizens had anxiety about this proposal, thereby making a strong case against it. This is important, keeping in mind that because of the very high religious inclination of the population (96.6%), contentious religious disagreements may generate high sensitivity and quickly escalate into widespread violence.

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c   Corruption perception encompasses a spectrum of grievances citizens harbour about political governance and leadership, as reflected by a lack of accountability and transparency, misuse of public and corporate resources, etc.

Table 3: Main conflict drivers identified in each county

Main conflict drivers identified in each county	
County	Order of specific conflict drivers
Bomi	1. Border/boundary disputes 2. Land/property disputes 3. Crime (ritualistic killing)
Bong	1. Land/property 2. Corruption 3. Border/boundary disputes
Grand Bassa	1. Land/property disputes 2. Drug abuse and crime
Grand Cape Mount	1. Border/boundary disputes 2. Land/property disputes 3. Lack of development
Grand Gedeh	1. Land/property disputes 2. Ethnic tension
Grand Kru	1. Land/property disputes 2. Corruption 3. Border/boundary disputes
Lofa	1. Land/property disputes 2. Ethnic tension 3. Border/boundary disputes
Margibi	1. Land/property disputes 2. Corruption 3. Drug abuse and crime
Maryland	1. Land/property disputes 2. Corruption 3. Border/boundary disputes 4. Social relations
Montserrado	1. Corruption 2. Land/property disputes 3. Unemployment and economic hardship 4. Drug abuse and crime
Nimba	1. Corruption 2. Land/property disputes
Rivercess	1. Land/property disputes
Sinoe	1. Land/property disputes 2. Ethnic tension 3. Border/boundary disputes
River Gee	1. Land/property disputes 2. Border/boundary disputes 3. Ethnic tension
Gbarpolu	1. Border/boundary disputes 2. Land/property disputes

Despite a complex history of crises, Table 3 attests that conflict drivers in Liberia reflect a pattern of apparent homogeneity, whereby three major drivers are central to most counties, with alternating degrees of individual risk intensity. The three most predominant conflict drivers are land/property disputes, corruption allegations and border/boundary disputes.

However, the single most commonly cited conflict driver in all counties is land/property disputes, especially those relating to land use, tenure and inheritance. Many of these disputes are the consequences of wartime displacement and resettlement patterns, coupled with persistent ambiguities between customary and formal property

> *"In the very first place, most of the conflicts that we have are on land issues... those are the big conflicts that if we do not arrest will be the next war. And when it starts, it will not end because most of the time when you see people doing surveys, you see other people taking cutlasses, some people taking guns and all."*
>
> **Male FGD participant, Bong County**

rights. The long civil war brought a complete breakdown in the structures that are responsible for dealing with problems in Liberian society. Therefore, land disputes today are the result of what accumulated during the war, when there was no institution to deal decisively with the situation of land ownership. This situation has often resulted in the inability of county land surveyors to assist landowners or buyers to demarcate boundaries accurately. Some land administrators and surveyors, particularly those in urban and populated communities, have engaged in fraudulent practice in procedures relating to land surveys, deeds and land sales (Blair et al., 2011). Another source of land/property disputes concerns ailing relationships between the original ethnic groups in the community and other "settler" tribes, after many generations. There are growing tensions between their descendants, as the indigenous or predominant tribes discriminate the other tribes as strangers. In this regard, land/property disputes may be the symptoms of underlying factors such as protracted ethnic feuds that have remained unresolved for generations.

These land/property disputes have sometimes escalated into confrontation between local communities and companies, with residents claiming that their lands have been grabbed by the companies. Cases of this nature were reported in Sinoe (Golden Veroleum), Maryland (Maryland Oil Palm Plantation), Lofa (Liberia Cocoa Corporation), etc. These situations have sometimes degenerated into violent confrontations, with enraged citizens rampaging company facilities, leaving in their wake damage worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. Aspects of these land/property disputes are intercommunal controversies about access and control over the economic benefits of mineral resources (diamond and gold), lumber and food security (hunting and farming). Whether the conflicts involve ordinary citizens or communities and multilaterals, there is high risk potential associated with land/property disputes across the entire country. Although land/property disputes were reported in all counties as the chief conflict driver, Grand Kru (80.6%) and Bong (80.4%) account for the highest reports.

Border/boundary disputes are as prevalent, except that they have a different distribution pattern. These types of conflicts are more common in regions where a "new county" was created in the past two decades. Sometimes, the conflicts involve two clans or communities – but, more often, they involve the "new county" and its neighbours. For example, there is a border/boundary dispute between the Bopolu and Belleh districts in Gbarpolu County, while that county has ongoing border/boundary disputes with Bomi and Bong. Similarly, while the people of Tuobo and Nyenebo districts in River Gee are in a boundary standoff, the county has been at loggerheads with Grand Gedeh and Maryland in separate border/boundary disputes. Maryland, too, is entrenched with Grand Kru in a border/boundary dispute.

Gbarpolu (70.8%) and Bong (57.4%) have the highest reports of border/boundary disputes. The Government of Liberia, with the support of partners such as the Carter Center, Development Education Network of Liberia (DEN-L), etc., has since intervened in the Grand Gedeh–River Gee and Lofa (Quado-gboni) conflicts. However, although some of these communities are now tranquil, some parties hold objections that the conflicts have not been fully resolved, as tensions still linger among the conflict actors.

A common factor that triggers intercommunal or intra-ethnic conflicts within a county is encroachment of the traditional land boundaries that demarcate neighbouring chiefdoms. Another factor that has added an administrative dimension to some of the border/boundary disputes is the 2011 electoral boundary demarcation, which conjoined some towns without strong traditional or political relationships or affiliations. This is creating tensions

> *"We are suffering, and people tampering with the state money and you can't prosecute them. Corruption is one of the serious breeding grounds for violence in this country because one John Brown just came from America - see the house he is building. You've been here struggling, went to school and earned a degree and you can't get a job. Somebody just recommend someone from America you fly in, you bring them in the country and they are making so much money and they do not respect people... that is totally wrong."*
>
> **Senior citizen, Grand Bassa**

as the minority or annexed groups feel marginalised, trading claims that because the legislator is not their own, their best interest is not advocated and hence, their communities do not enjoy a fair share of the benefits of local development initiatives. These differences are manifested through unending leadership struggles, non-cooperation with local authorities, and threats of shift in allegiance to other neighbouring constituencies.

Liberia's history of centralised governance and self-seeking behaviour of leaders embodies a convolution of democratic mishaps that have tainted the image of the government, thereby embittering the population. Public opinions are largely distasteful towards how the government manages resources, coupled with the extravagant lifestyles and selfish tendencies of political leaders and public officials. This phenomenon is enveloped in one word – corruption. The findings suggest that corruption is rife in Liberia, with two in five respondents (40.0%) identifying this menace as the number two conflict driver in the country.

The corruption umbrella covers all tenets of bad governance and social injustice that favour leaders and elites, giving them inequitable access to resources and opportunities that common citizens cannot enjoy. Rural communities had complaints of marginalisation and discrimination because of inadequate access to basic social services, especially good roads, quality healthcare and improved education facilities. Citizens harbour grievances regarding their limited participation in government decision-making processes; they are demanding greater voice and participation in local government decisions about natural resource management. There are calls for more accountability and transparency in the dealings of the government. The highest claims of corruption were reported in Bong (65.7%) and Montserrado (59.4%).

In addition, there are concerns about the weakness of the justice system – its failure to expeditiously dispose of cases; perpetuation of a culture of impunity for those who come into conflict with the law; and ineffectiveness in dealing with the growing crimes of sexual and gender-based violence – particularly rape, drug and substance abuse, and ritualistic killings.

Between 2014 and 2015, Liberia's economy further deteriorated, and gross domestic product (GDP) growth halved from 0.7% to 0.3%. The country is yet to recover from the twin shocks of the Ebola crisis and the sharp decline in commodity prices, which led to business closures, and consequent job losses and reduced revenues. The government is struggling to deal with

> *"A hungry man – you will get nothing good from a hungry man; he will not listen to you. The man is strong as a young man: he went to bed hungry; his children going to bed hungry; his wife going to bed hungry. So, what do you think tomorrow? When there's riot, people that go there go because they are going to get the opportunity to get something to go back home."*
>
> **FGD participant, Nimba County**

the harsh economic aftermath of these tragedies, which continue to challenge national recovery efforts and plans to diversify the economy to mitigate the impact of any future shocks (World Bank, 2016).

Although no accurate quantitative evidence was established in the study, anecdotes support the findings of Walker et al. (2009:6), which state that the economic factors associated with poverty, youth dependency and rising food prices drive fragility. The pinch of rising economic hardship is felt across all corners of the country, driving citizens to the edge as they scramble to address everyday livelihood challenges: putting food on the table, paying children's school fees, the cost of healthcare for the family, house rent, electricity and other energy expenses, transportation fares, etc. Because the economy has shrunk, the labour market offers very limited job opportunities. Unfortunately, the typical Liberian youth has low educational attainment and limited marketable skills, making it difficult to take advantage of the few available jobs. It is therefore not surprising, as evidenced by the study that nearly one in every four respondents (23.3%) engaged in informal trade as their primary source of livelihood. Furthermore, with the Liberian dollar currently faltering on the exchange market, the purchasing power of the ordinary person is further weakened, making it more difficult to "make ends meet".

Due to the growing economic hardship, punctuated by widespread poverty, youth unemployment and idleness, people are becoming more disillusioned and blaming the government and local leaders of failing to bring relief. If the current trends continue unabated, they may ferment a climate so charged that a single trigger could ignite violent conflicts, with impoverished citizens taking advantage of the chaos to pillage businesses and private properties.

Although the relationships among the conflict factors reflect a degree of homogeneity, their interlinking characteristics reveal a highly dynamic nature of the conflict phenomenon in Liberia. The individual county conflict paradigm is not isolated; rather, they share central conflict elements that may readily cross-pollinate with other counties and escalate into major crisis. Such reaction could be triggered by a decisive incident, such as an unfavourable public policy or violent tribal feud. In the Peacebuilding Priority Plan, it is reported that among the most frequently cited sources of instability in Liberia is collective violence, fuelled by political or intertribal tensions. For example, mob violence is one of the highest-risk threats to peace in the short term, stressing that relatively minor disputes can easily escalate into major destabilising incidents, especially during periods of highly charged electoral contexts (UN PBSO, 2013:2). Conversely, this dynamic nature could also present an entry point of opportunity to formulate national policies or programmes that may be applicable across the entire country. The likelihood of succeeding with such interventions is high, because of the possibility of harnessing common resources and sharing familiar lessons.

Ethnic tensions exist in various communities, with continuing power struggles between rival tribal groups. Often, the struggle for domination is between the predominant ethnic group and other minority groups that are challenging the status quo, advocating for voice and recognition in political decision-making, and wanting to control resources and opportunities in local economies. The majority groups,

which usually control the sphere of power and influence, resort to systems of marginalisation and social injustices to perpetuate themselves in power. The predominant group face growing resentment from minority groups, which are demanding greater involvement in governance, respect for fundamental rights, and a fair share of the benefits of resources. The highest reports of ethnic tension were recorded in Sinoe (64.7%) and Lofa (30.1%). The highest report of social tension (intergenerational conflicts between the youth and elders) was in Maryland (34.8%).

Another conflict factor that is recognised as gaining momentum is the stifling relationship between state security forces, especially the police, and citizens. Particular references were made to violent confrontations between the police and commercial motorbike riders ("pen-pen boys"), all of whom are young men. Most of these altercations are instigated by disagreements over the application of traffic laws. Pen-pen boys are notorious for their reckless disregard of traffic rules and regulations, which often leads to fatal road traffic accidents. During such incidents, they quickly forge solidarity with their colleagues, whether they were in the wrong or not, and engage in mob violence to burn vehicles involved in such accidents. The police, on the other hand, have been accused of using excessive force in effecting applicable laws; and they are also infamous for the unnecessary harassment of bike riders. These interactions have kindled violent conflicts, with devastating consequences – loss of lives and destruction of private and public property, including police stations.

3.3.3   Key conflict actors

The nature and characteristics of conflict drivers seem to have a clear parallel with the identified conflict actors. Because the main conflict drivers centre on issues of land/property and border/boundary, it is not surprising that tribes[d] (51.8%) and villages[e] (32.1%) are the key conflict actors. Similarly, the identification of political groups (23.4%) seems to explain the reported perceptions people have about corruption.

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d   Relations among different tribal groups.

e   Relations among different villages from the same tribal groups (e.g. two rival clans within the same ethnic group).

Table 4: Distribution of conflict actors

Distribution of conflict actors	
County	Main conflict actors within county
Bomi	1. Tribes 2. Subtribe 3. Village
Bong	1. Tribe 2. Village 3. Political groups
Grand Bassa	1. Tribe 2. Village 3. Concession and community
Grand Cape Mount	1. Village 2. Tribe 3. Subtribe
Grand Gedeh	1. Tribes 2. Village
Grand Kru	1. Tribe 2. Village 3. Political groups
Lofa	1. Tribes 2. Subtribe 3. Village
Margibi	1. Tribe 2. Village 3. Land dealers and buyers
Maryland	1. Tribe 2. Villages 3. Social groups 4. Political groups
Montserrado	1. Political groups 2. Tribes
Nimba	1. Village 2. Tribe
Rivercess	1. Tribe 2. Village
Sinoe	1. Tribe 2. Subtribe
River Gee	1. Tribe 2. Village
Gbarpolu	1. Tribe 2. Village

In Liberia, the intertribal dimension of conflict is present in all counties, because tribes and subtribes are recognised as key actors. This scenario describes the conflict between two or more ethnic groups or tribes. However, there is a different interplay of conflict actors, involving interactions among members of the same tribal groups but hailing from different villages.

Tribal conflict actors were recognised in all counties. However, they were most commonly reported in Lofa (90.2%) and River Gee (81.7%). The most common report of subtribes was flagged again in Lofa (45.1%), and in Sinoe (43.1%). The intervillage dimension of conflict actors was identified in all but one county, Montserrado. Overall, the predominant conflict of village actors was acknowledged in Rivercess (62.5%) and Bong (59.3%).

> *"If nothing is done and it comes to the national elections, there will be major problem in this county. Blood will share because all the minds of the young people in this county are divided: one person is behind this other person, another person behind this other group. So if you want to disgrace my leader, I will rise up and want to disgrace your leader. In that way there will be major, major issues, even people might die.*
>
> **Eminent citizen, Grand Bassa**

The proliferation of political parties and interest groups further complicates the conflict setting in Liberia. It is common for politicians and influential leaders to mobilise rival groups for purposes of promoting personal political agendas, mainly towards the acquisition of state power. As a result, it is much easier to divide citizens along political lines by exploiting grievances about social injustices and economic hardship. These political patrons use personal resources to fuel agitation by providing financial and moral support to rival groups, deepening animosity and social tension. Political groups were reported as the major conflict actors in Montserrado (38.9%) and Bong (37.3%).

Overall, these groups pose serious threats to peace and stability in the country. The manipulations result in confrontations among supporters of contending legislative or presidential aspirants. Sometimes, the rival groups are mobilised to take sides in standoffs among leaders, such as superintendents, and the legislative caucuses. Apart from ideological differences, supporters pledge their loyalty to their patrons because of the financial and other benefits they derive from the relationship. Therefore, if one group feels their so-called political leader or "godfather" has been maligned by an opposition group, they quickly mobilise and trade verbal or physical counterattacks against other leaders or groups whom they believe are culpable. This situation calls for particular attention as the nation prepares for the extremely sensitive 2017 general elections, in the wake of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) drawdown.

3.3.4   Conflict motives

Motives for conflicts tend to be driven more by citizens' grievances about patterns of social injustices which may be perpetuated by being disadvantage (43.9%) and marginalisation (25.2%). Accusation of disadvantage was the leading complaint reported in all counties. In Grand Gedeh and Sinoe, concerns about ethnicity were highlighted. In Montserrado, misuse of political office was the notable concern for citizens. Dissatisfaction about the poor management of resources was another reported interest of citizens.
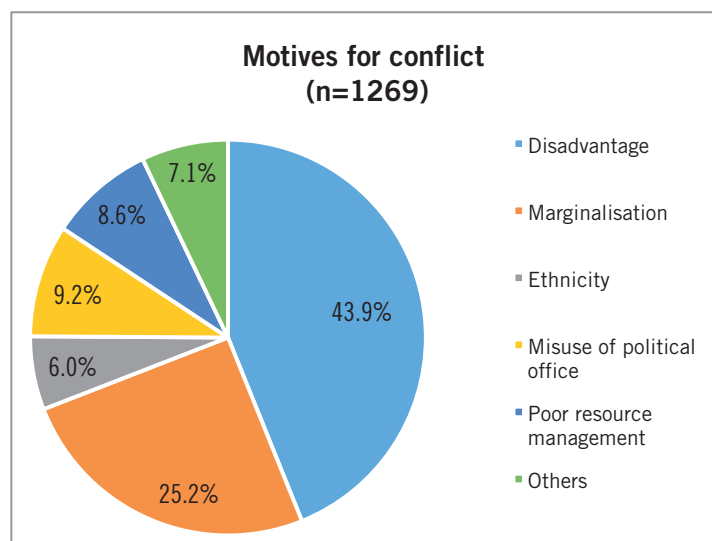

Figure 4: Motives for conflict

As per the origin of reported conflicts, the findings suggest that these conflicts generally have provincial dimensions, with the majority beginning at the county level (36.3%), followed by the district (22.9%) and town (19.6%) levels.

3.3.5   Conflict eras in Liberia

Liberian scholars offer a range of explanations – including ethnic divisions, predatory elites who abused power, a corrupt political system and economic disparities – for the years of conflict. In a nutshell, most historical accounts agree that the war resulted from the economic and political exclusion policies implemented by the Americo-Liberians, since their arrival in the region in 1822. This political strategy eventually turned the ethnic groups against each other, while the would-be political leaders were

Figure 5: Distribution of conflicts by date

exploiting the issue to their selfish advantage (Vinck et al., 2011). Also, the TRC found that underlying those immediate causes, the seeds of conflict were sown by the historical decision to establish Liberia as a state divided between natives and settlers, and the use of force to sustain the settlers' hegemony. Between 1979 and 2003, Liberia suffered coups, state breakdown, deadly internal armed conflict and international neglect (EU, 2008:25).
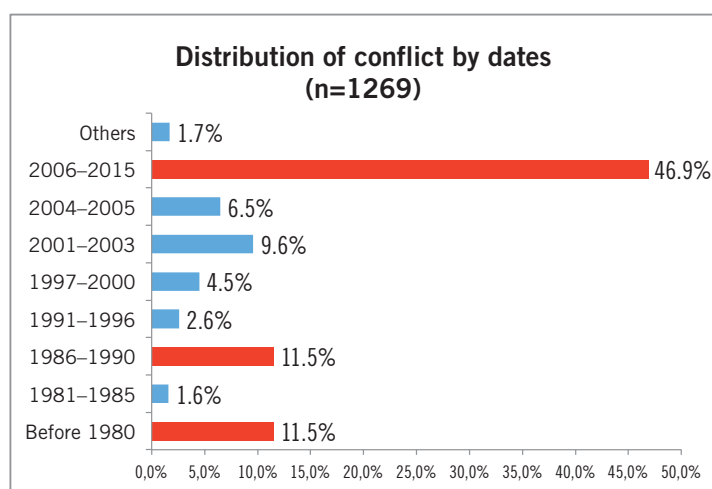
Generally, respondents believed that conflicts in Liberia peaked in three major eras. As shown in Figure 5, 46.9% reported that the conflicts in their counties began in the past decade (2006–2015); whereas 11.5% of the respondents respectively reported that the conflict began 1986 – 1990 and before 1980.

It is likely that recall bias may explain why the majority of respondents reported that most of the conflicts started in the past decade. This stems from the fact that roughly half of the respondents were youth (45.1%) between the ages of 15 and 35 years. As such, it is plausible that their memory of the historicity of conflicts in their counties/districts is founded on relatively recent incidents of the past decade.

3.3.6   Available peacebuilding structures

Figure 6 shows that four major structures have been instrumental in the resolution of conflicts in Liberia. The most influential peacebuilding actors are traditional elders (26.0%) and local government actors (11.4%), including the Land Commission (7.9%). The role of national government (10.3%) in resolving conflicts was duly recognised by the citizens. Notwithstanding the gains made by these peacebuilding structures, the findings reveal that there are substantial unresolved conflicts (32.5%) in the country.
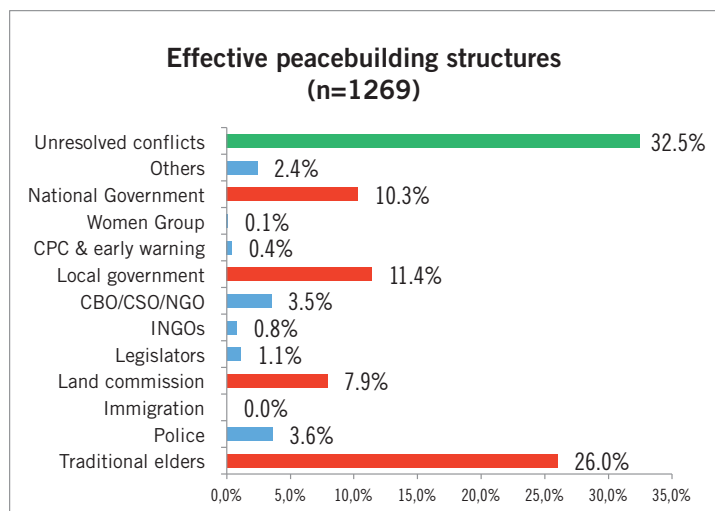

Figure 6: Effective peacebuilding structures

This result epitomises the level of unmet demands that exist for peacebuilding initiatives in the country – hence, the need for more effective interventions cannot be overemphasised.

Table 5: Distribution of unresolved conflicts

Distribution of unresolved conflicts	
County	Share of unresolved conflicts
Bomi	63.6%
Bong	16.3%
Grand Bassa	15.9%
Grand Cape Mount	37.5%
Grand Gedeh	11.1%
Grand Kru	10.0%
Lofa	32.3%
Margibi	14.3%
Maryland	6.7%
Montserrado	44.2%
Nimba	41.4%
Rivercess	38.5%
River Gee[f]	-
Sinoe	48.8%
Gbarpolu	20.8%

Table 5 reflects the dispersed nature of unresolved conflicts in Liberia. This situation was reported mainly in seven counties, with the most acute occurrences reported in Bomi (63.6%), Sinoe (48.8%), Montserrado (44.2%) and Nimba (41.4%). The finding raises questions about the effectiveness of

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f   The data for River Gee is an outlier; hence, it has been excluded from the analysis.

various peacebuilding interventions undertaken in the country. It was, however, outside the scope of this study to explore the reasons why these conflicts have remained unresolved. Therefore, the finding evokes a call to action for an independent evaluation of priority peacebuilding interventions to assess objectively the level of impact they make. While peacebuilding actors

> *"There has been a heated conflict on land issue. Peacebuilding efforts were made, but it is not resolved. The outer part looks [green] like water melon, but the inner part looks red. When you look at Maryland and River Gee Counties, there are outstanding conflicts that have not been totally resolved yet. There are still hurts, and their wounds need to be healed.*
>
> **Local government official, Maryland**

may have undertaken these interventions with the best interests of the country at heart, it is imperative that the interventions are independently evaluated to determine the level of effectiveness in achieving desired outcomes, as well as to document and share lessons to improve policy and future programmes.

3.3.7   Main effects of conflicts

According to the findings, social relations among community members were generally cordial before the onset of reported conflict situations. More than eight in every 10 respondents (84.0%) asserted that there were good relationships among residents in their county before the onset of the identified conflicts. As Figure 7 depicts, this intracommunal harmony and social cohesion has since been disrupted by different conflicts, leaving behind fractious communities burdened with problems of greater division
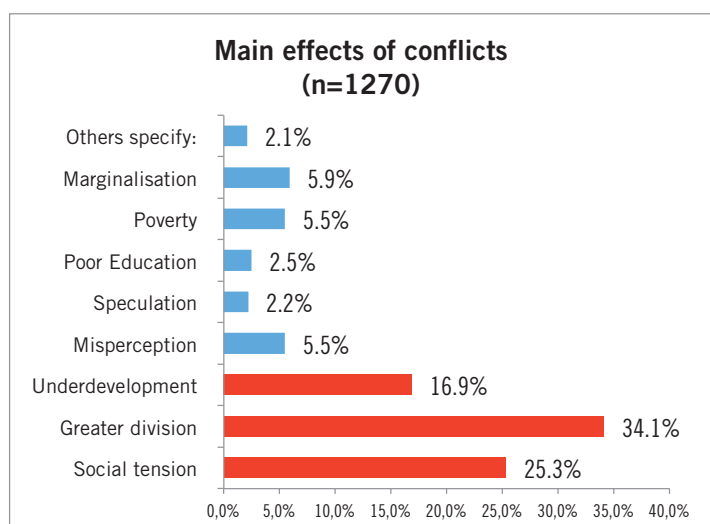

Figure 7: Main effects of conflicts

(34.1%) and social tension (25.3%) among various groups, such as tribes, and particularly among youth and elders. Furthermore, because of these conflicts, the communities have suffered underdevelopment (16.9%), proven by poor infrastructure and little or no access to basic social services.

Greater division among citizens is the most common problem, reported as a widespread concern in all counties. Social tension was reported as an issue of concern in all counties, except in Sinoe and Rivercess. Bong is the only county that reported the highest disquiet about marginalisation (12.3%). Concerns about poverty were underscored in Cape Mount (25%), Rivercess (12.5%) and Montserrado (12.3%). While these findings record above-average measures, anecdotes from the FGDs and KIIs affirmed the pervasive nature of unemployment, poverty and overall economic hardship, as earlier discussed.

3.3.8   Conflict mobilisers

Liberia's civil war pitted members of the country's 16 tribes against one another in paroxysms of ethnic and political violence. As such, intertribal biases are rampant, especially against ethnic minorities, stereotypically suggesting that some tribes are especially prone to violence. Accordingly, these levels of bias are equal across members of minority and majority tribes. One of the most typical targets of these stereotypes is said to be the Mandingo ethnic group – an unsurprising finding, given some Liberians' perceptions of Mandingoes as outsiders or foreigners (Blair et al., 2011).

Respondents were asked: *"What is the main ethnic group engaged in the conflict?"* Essentially, the findings suggest that conflicts in Liberia are largely localised, involving the predominant ethnic group and minority ethnic groups in the locality. Nonetheless, as shown in Table 6 below, the cumulative data identify seven ethnic groups to be the key actors in conflicts in the country.

Table 6: Ethnic groups commonly engaged in conflicts

Ethnic groups commonly engaged in conflicts	
Tribe	Level of conflict participation
Bassa	10%
Belle	1%
Dei	0.20%
Gbandi	1.40%
Gio	4.40%
Gola	0.30%
Grebo	9.20%
Kissi	0.60%
Kpelle	17%
Krahn	3.30%
Kru	6.40%
Lorma	5.10%
Mandingo	5%
Mano	1.60%
Mende	0.10%
Vai	1.10%

The findings establish that the Kpelles (17%), Bassas (10%) and Grebos (9.2%) are the most commonly identified ethnic groups involved in the reported conflicts. However, one third (33.3%) of respondents reported "Don't know". The localised nature of various conflicts supports the finding that conflicts mainly involve the predominant ethnic group in a county, struggling with main minority groups. Examples of this conflict configuration were reported among the Kpelles and Mandingos in Bong, Lormas and Mandingos in Lofa, Manos and Mandingos in Nimba, Bassa and Kpelles in Bassa, and Grebos and Krus in Maryland. Sometimes, the conflict involves the main tribe and subtribes, such as reported among the Grebos from Tuobo and Nyenebo in River Gee, who are embroiled in fierce border/boundary conflicts in the county. The majority of respondents (91.2%) reported that the main ethnic groups were not supported by a second group, essentially refuting theories about existing web of complex ethnic linkages that serve as vehicle for conflict.

Table 7: Distribution of conflict mobilisers

Distribution of conflict mobilisers	
Ethnic group	Locations of conflict involvement
Bassa	Rivercess
	Grand Bassa
	Margibi
Belle	Gbarpolu
Dei	-
Gbandi	Lofa
Gio	Nimba
Gola	Bomi
Grebo	River Gee
	Maryland
	Sinoe
Kissi	-
Kpelle	Bong
	Gbarpolu
	Bomi
	Bassa
	Lofa
Krahn	Grand Gedeh
	Cape Mount
Kru	Grand Kru
	Sinoe
Lorma	Lofa
Mandingo	Lofa
	Bong
Mano	Nimba
Mende	-
Vai	Grand Cape Mount
	Bomi

However, further analysis of the data reveals an interesting trend. There are three ethnic groups that are reported to be the key conflict actors in multiple geographical locations. They are the Kpelles (in five counties), the Grebos (in three counties) and the Bassas (in three counties). This trend is demonstrated in Table 7 above.

This finding provides additional enlightenment about the dynamics of the ethnic element of conflicts in the country. Ethnic groups exert influence on conflicts mainly in counties that border their original homeland. For example, the Grebos influence conflicts in Sinoe and River Gee, both of which border Maryland. Furthermore, this trend could be an indication that the ethnic groups under discussion are demographically sparse owing to factors such as inter-marriage and trans-boundary socio-economic activities. On the basis of the observation about influences in bordering counties, it is unclear why the Krahns are reported as conflict actors in Grand Cape Mount.

The findings also establish that other ethnic groups are identified as secondary conflict actors. However, evidence shows that while these secondary ethnic groups will at times support one group or the other, this support is not always guaranteed. Thus, there is no conclusive evidence to back claims of underlying ethnic support networks in various conflicts. Ethnic groups may be acting alone, without deliberate efforts to forge alliances against one group or the other.

For example, the Kissi ethnic group is a secondary actor to conflicts in Margibi, Lofa and Bomi, while the Krahns are associated with conflicts in Sinoe, Montserrado and Nimba. The involvements of the Mandingos and Kpelles are documented in Nimba and Margibi. Montserrado is a tragic convergence of multiple ethnic groups overlapping in different conflicts. Notable among these ethnic groups are the Vai, Krahn, Gio, Bassa, Lorma, Mandingo, Kpelle and Gola. These dynamics create a volatile conflict atmosphere in the country, because a conflict between two ethnic groups in one county could likely ferment reprisal attacks in other counties, where the kinsmen of the minority ethnic group may have demographic advantage.

In short, intracommunal social cohesion built on unity and trust is still deficient, to some extent. For instance, some communities remain split and perceptions of entitlement and legitimacy are often unreasonable. Reform and conflict resolution mechanisms at local and national levels often do not adequately address Liberia's multifaceted conflict paradigm, which manifests as inter-ethnic, interreligious and intergenerational tensions. The combination of these variables can quickly kindle a fracas about grievances – such as dissatisfaction over natural resource management – into violent conflicts. These remain critical challenges to peace and reconciliation (MIA, 2013:10).

3.4   Peacebuilding interventions in Liberia

In May 2005, the TRC was established with the mandate to promote national peace, security, unity and reconciliation by investigating more than 20 years of national civil conflict. In addition, several other Liberian government commissions – including the Disarmament, Demobilisation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration Commission; the Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission; the National Elections Commission; the Law Reform Commission and the Independent National Commission on Human Rights – are supporting peacebuilding activities in Liberia. The National Traditional Council, the Inter-Religious Council of Liberia and the Governance Commission are active players in the peacebuilding architecture of the country. The UN, non-governmental organisation (NGO) and donor community, as well as civil society, are also making laudable contributions to enhancing lasting peace and stability.

Also, in July 2013, the Government of Liberia, working with its partners, developed the National Reconciliation Roadmap for Liberia, which contains various structures and actors supporting peacebuilding in Liberia. The roadmap is aligned with Liberia's Vision 2030 and other ongoing peacebuilding and state-building processes (MIA, 2013:2).

3.4.1   Awareness about peacebuilding frameworks

In efforts towards addressing the plethora of conflicts that have engulfed Liberia over the recent past decades, the government and its partners have devised many policies and strategies. Stakeholders have undertaken different public awareness and sensitisation activities, utilising different information, education and communication (IEC) activities to popularise these intervention frameworks.
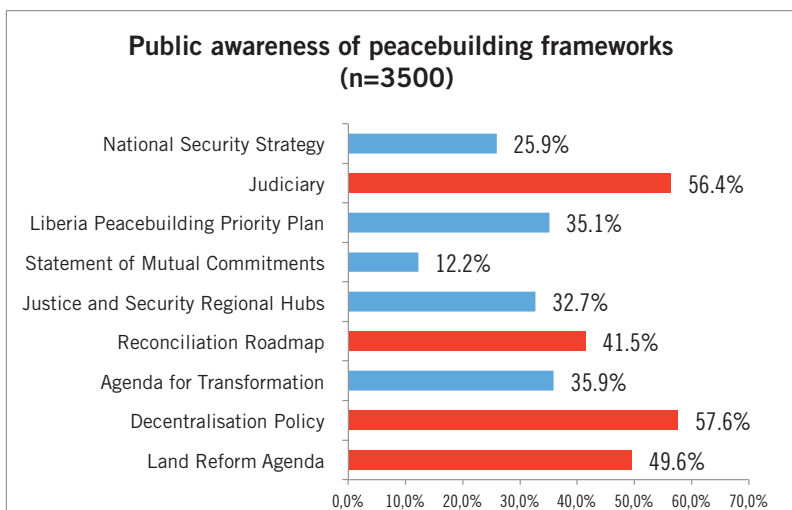

Figure 8: Public awareness of peacebuilding frameworks

As shown in the Figure 8, the general public is largely informed about the various peacebuilding intervention frameworks, with varying degrees of awareness. The four frameworks that citizens are most aware of are the Decentralisation Policy (57.6%), the judicial system (56.4%), the Land Reform Agenda (49.6%) and the Reconciliation Roadmap (41.5%). The Decentralisation Policy is the only framework that the majority of citizens have heard about in all counties, followed by the judiciary. Of all the frameworks, the Statement of Mutual Commitments is the least known by the public. In fact, it is the only framework that has below-average recognition in all counties. There is also public awareness about the justice and security hubs, the forest management framework, etc.

3.4.2   Level of success of peacebuilding frameworks

On the whole, respondents believed that these frameworks have been successful. Nearly nine in 10 respondents (85.5%) reported that these frameworks have been instrumental in helping to resolve and prevent conflicts in their counties.

Table 8: Perceptions about level of success of peacebuilding frameworks

Perceptions about level of success of peacebuilding frameworks	
County	Perception rating
Bomi	85.5
Bong	82.4
Grand Bassa	47.9
Grand Cape Mount	86.2
Grand Gedeh	40
Grand Kru	64.3
Lofa	49.8
Margibi	63.5
Maryland	69.2
Montserrado	39.3
Nimba	79.7
Rivercess	24.7
Sinoe	33.1
River Gee	24.8
Gbarpolu	54.8

In Cape Mount (86.2%), Bomi (85.5%), Bong (82.4%) and Nimba (79.7%), respondents were most enthusiastic about the achievements of the various peacebuilding frameworks. Logistical challenges and poor road infrastructure may explain why the majority of the hard-to-reach counties, such as those in the south-east, reported low awareness about these peacebuilding interventions. This finding may also provide hints as to why the region records the highest level of conflicts. However, it is surprising why respondents in Montserrado also reported limited knowledge about the existing peacebuilding frameworks. This finding brings to the fore the underserved need for peacebuilding information – a common problem in many parts of the country, even in Montserrado.

A respondent's level of education seems to be a factor, because it was observed that the degree of conviction about the extent to which these factors are successful increased with respondents' level of education. Among respondents with no formal education, less than half (41.6%) agreed that these frameworks have been successful, compared to about six in every 10 respondents (63.9%) with secondary education who shared similar views. For people with university education, more than two thirds (68.7%) agreed that implementation of these frameworks was yielding the required results. In a nutshell, the more educated people are, the better informed they are about peacebuilding interventions. Therefore, this finding challenges stakeholders to prioritise the use of IEC strategies that are suitable for Liberia's vast non-literate population.

Although not mentioned by respondents as one of the well-known frameworks, it is unclear why respondents believed that the National Security Strategy has been the most effective peacebuilding framework (67.7%). Perhaps these reports speak to the effectiveness of security forces in intervening to quell violent conflicts and civil disturbances, such as unauthorised demonstrations. Other frameworks identified as being effective in resolving and preventing conflicts were the judiciary (67.3%), the Decentralisation Policy (67.3%) and the Land Reform Agenda (60.2%). The County Development Fund (56.5%) and the Reconciliation Roadmap (50.4%) were also credited with noteworthy success in peacebuilding.

3.4.3   Peacebuilding mechanisms

In Liberia, peacebuilding actors have employed different approaches to operationalise the adopted frameworks. Figure 9 demonstrates that citizens identify the CSCs (71.7%) and *palava*/peace hut (50.7%) as the most productive initiatives for peacebuilding. The role of the women's peace hut (41.1%) and CPC (37.1%) are acknowledged, as well as the contributions of elders and chiefs (32.8%).

Figure 9: Peacebuilding mechanisms

The CSCs – the key strategy for bringing services closer to the people – have gained due recognition. Currently, four CSCs are operating – in Bassa, Margibi, Bong and Nimba – making it possible for citizens to process birth certificates, marriage certificates, business registrations, etc. in these counties. Construction of more of these facilities is underway in other counties. Even in counties where the facilities have not yet been built (Cape Mount, Lofa, etc.), news of their promising benefits are received in thankful anticipation by citizens. This reaction may be linked to initial findings supporting arguments that the lack of or limited access to basic social services or development has some conflict implications.
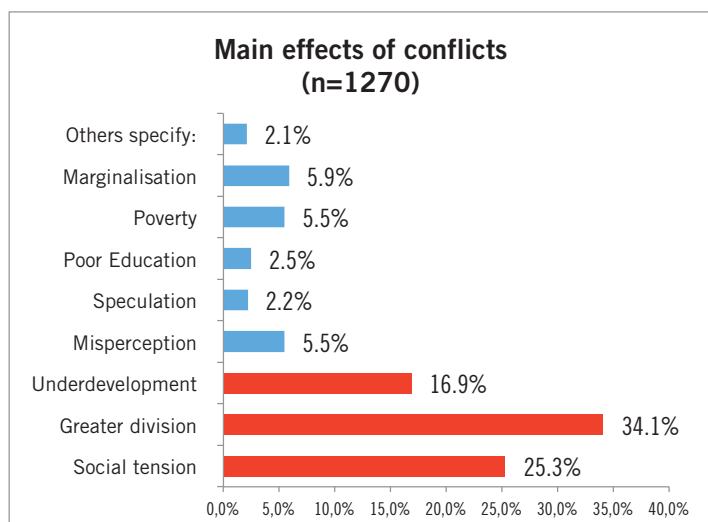
3.4.4   Concession management framework

Nationwide, opinion differed about the impact of the CMF. While nearly half of respondents (44.8%) asserted that the framework has no benefits, the other half were, however, convinced that the benefits are enormous. As shown in Figure 10, these benefits include job creation (44.3%), local development (37.9%), food security (36.6%) and capacity-building (37.4%).
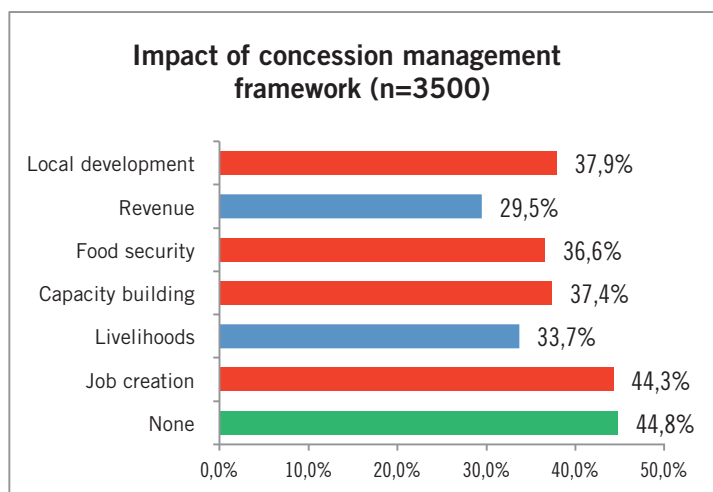

Figure 10: Impact of concession management framework

Furthermore, respondents reported that the CMF has made remarkable contribution to peacebuilding and conflict aversion. First, they argue that the framework has engendered conflict resolution (49.0%), peaceful co-existence (45.1%) and improved living conditions of the people (41.2%). Other identified benefits include enhanced local administration (35.2%) and improved access to services (34.6%).

As earlier noted, citizens were largely "of two minds" regarding the extent of effectiveness of the CMF. There were six counties in which respondents were unsure of the benefits of the framework: Montserrado, Grand Gedeh, Rivercess, Sinoe, River Gee and Gbarpolu. The least recognition of the benefits of the CMF was reported in River Gee (1.7%) and Grand Gedeh (7.4%). In fact, there were reports that the CMF has

> *"The bridge is damaged; they are not even able to help us mend that bridge. It is part of the agreement we have with them to repair damaged roads and bridges, but they are not doing anything regarding the MOU. So, in fact, maybe in time to come, it may result in us creating blockade for them. And we will not allow them to go in the forest to exploit our minerals while they are not doing the things they are supposed to do for us.*
>
> **FGD participant, Gbarpolu**

seemingly increased the suffering of the local populations, especially where arable farmlands have been used, and employees suffer delays in receiving compensations for their labour.

A major source of contention between concessions and local communities is the failure of the companies to honour agreed corporate social responsibilities for job creation and development projects such as constructing roads, schools and clinics. In some communities, these disagreements have resulted in violent conflicts, with citizens vandalising company property. Without the appropriate involvement of local leaders in decision-making about concession agreements, the education of local communities and rigorous monitoring by government, these conflicts will continue to hurt the economy, undermining efforts to foster development in the country.

Despite the multiplicity of interventions, conflict factors remain rampant in Liberia, with increasing threats to national peace and security. The persistence of economic hardship, food insecurity, inadequate service delivery capacity, a weak justice system, weak integration of ex-combatants, a low level of literacy, drug and alcohol abuse, corruption and faltering social cohesion reveal fault lines in the peacebuilding fabric of the country, thereby exposing the fragility of the peace and stability of the nation (Walker et al., 2009:6).

The government has taken concrete measures to resolve conflicts. For example, in land disputes in Nimba, the government facilitated peaceful settlement of the conflict by compensating those deemed to have been victimised in the conflicts. Yet, there are grumbles about this process. Furthermore, similar quandaries continue in other places, particularly in Bong and Lofa. The situation superimposes a volatile context of intercommunal divisions – which, if escalated to violence, would assume an "ethnic" dimension, spread quickly to neighbouring counties, have repercussions in Monrovia and risk cross-border militia activity (EU, 2008:3).

Lessons are drawn from the conflict involving the Lormas and Mandingos in Konia Town, Lofa County, between the traditional leaders of the Lorma ethnic group and religious leaders of the Mandingos. National security forces had to be dispatched hurriedly to defuse the resulting tension, which almost engulfed the entire county.

3.5   Peace and reconciliation

Respondents were asked: *"What sort of intervention would be helpful in promoting peace and reconciliation?"* Figure 11 shows five priority interventions that citizens felt would contribute immensely to peace and reconciliation. The number one intervention is reconciliation dialogue (85.9%), followed by development projects (73.8%) and other interventions

Figure 11: Proposed peacebuilding interventions (n=3500)

facilitated by the PBO (72.3%). Respondents also thought that sports and recreation (69.0%) and CSO/NGO interventions (67.1%) would play pivotal roles in promoting peace and reconciliation.

Across Liberia, citizens proffered multiple interventions that would help to promote peace and reconciliation. Reconciliation dialogue is the only intervention deemed to be critical for promoting peace and reconciliation in all counties. In Cape Mount and Nimba, citizens believed virtually every well-intentioned endeavour would contribute to peace and reconciliation, because they regarded all the proposed interventions as necessary. On the contrary, residents in Lofa, Rivercess and Sinoe offered limited suggestions about the types of intervention that would promote peace and reconciliation in their county.

For these interventions to succeed, citizens are calling on the government and partners to undertake vigorous IEC campaigns to create awareness and sensitise local communities about the development initiatives. They think radio platforms provide a good medium for the dissemination of information to wide audiences. Furthermore, they are demanding that these initiatives should not only stop in the provincial capitals; services should reach people in other parts of the counties, especially outside the capitals. Citizens are requesting inclusive participation of all genders, ages and associations: women and youths, community and religious leaders and CSOs. They are calling on the government, through the relevant agencies such as MIA, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and commissions, to continue to play a leading role, with support for local and international NGOs.

3.6   Peacebuilding actors

As shown in Figure 12, findings suggest that the actors that are most likely to succeed in peacebuilding and reconciliation are elders (80.4%), religious leaders (79.9%) and youth groups (78.8%). With the presence of elders and religious leaders, it is more likely that contending parties will adhere to their counsel.

It is no surprise that youth groups (78.8%) were recommended. They constitute a strong demographic
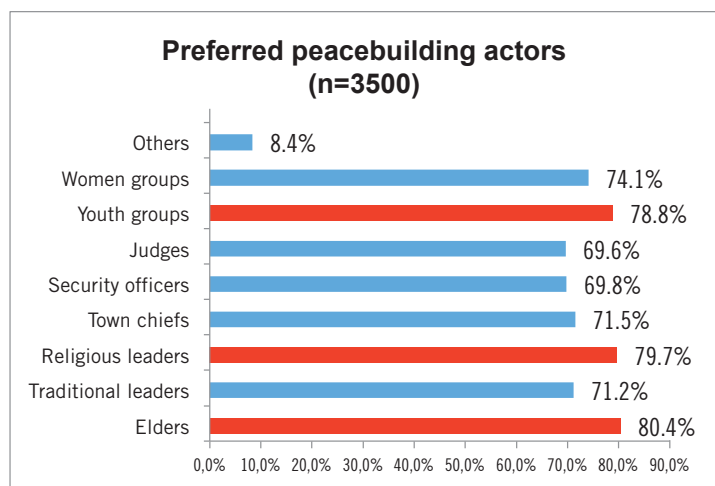

Figure 12: Preferred peacebuilding actors (n=3500)

constituent, and their voice and participation in peacebuilding and reconciliation is essential to the attainment of lasting peace and stability in the country. The same can be said about women's groups (74.1%), as they have a proven track record of effective peacebuilding. Obviously, the involvement of women and youth will leverage huge demographic dividends for strategic reasons. Liberia has a largely youthful population, and more than half of the population are women. For these reasons, the engagement of women and youth in peacebuilding would send a strong message that they are primary stakeholders, and that their contribution is essential to national peacebuilding. Women would easily reach out to all sides in conflict, while messages from youths may more readily resonate with their constituency, including the *pen-pen* boys.

3.7   External conflict factors

In Liberia, some people believed that there have been outside interferences, which have caused divisions. Respondents were assessed (on a Likert scale) to gauge the extent to which they affirmed or rebutted this claim. Figure 13 demonstrates that while a majority of respondents (35.4%) agreed with this notion, there were no strong sentiments against this argument. Across all counties, respondents believed
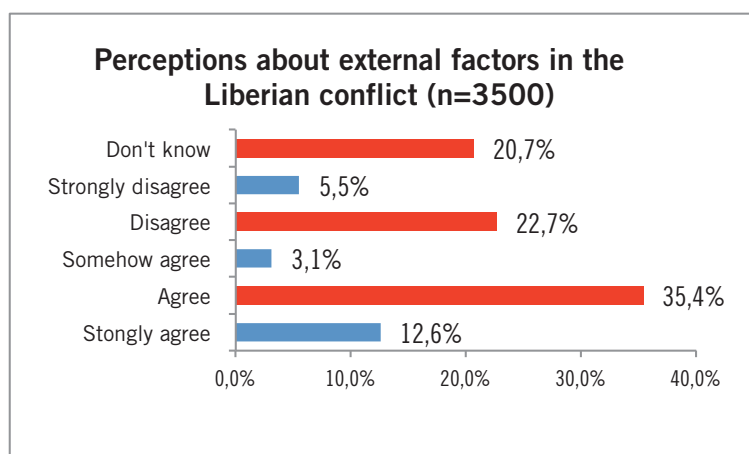

Figure 13: Perceptions about external factors in the Liberian conflict

that indeed there have been outsiders who have contributed to the 14-year civil war. Conversely, in 12 of the counties, citizens equally disagreed with this claim.

According to Figure 14, there are three main ways in which outsiders contributed to the Liberian civil war. At the top of the list is logistical support, especially the provision of arms and ammunitions. More than four out of every 10 respondents (43.2%) identified this support level. This is followed by the provision of territorial access (21.2%) in the form of corridors to bring in fighting forces, or havens for recruitment and training bases.
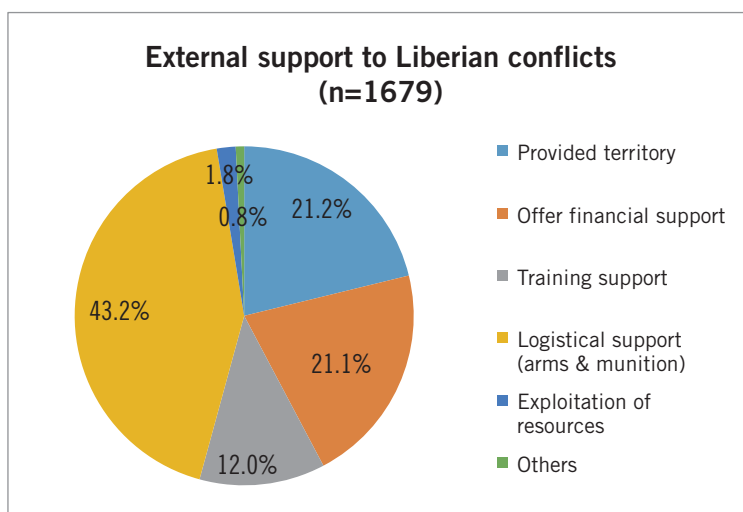

Figure 14: External support to the Liberian conflict

Respondents also reported that outsiders played a crucial role in offering financial support to rival warring factions.

3.8   Curbing outside influences

Respondents admitted that different strategies could be put in place to stop outsiders from contributing to the conflict in Liberia, with three main interventions put forward. First, it is essential to increase border security (16.9%), and then support cross-border peace and security initiatives (11.5). Finally, residents of local communities – mainly youths, elders and women (8.2%) – should be included in cross-border meetings on peace and security. However, more than half of respondents (52%) did not have any proposals in this direction. This may be indicative of the fact that local communities need immense technical guidance and support to design and implement appropriate cross-border peace and security endeavours. These response characteristics are evenly distributed across all counties, reflecting the widespread nature of the need for technical assistance.

In addition to external influences, there was also shared experience and common knowledge among respondents that some "big hands" – such as powerful political figures, local leaders, businesspeople, etc. – have played leading roles in dividing the people and fermenting violence. They believe that

> *"The people don't have us at heart. Election coming again, they will say your come vote for us. When they come they fool our people, and give them one, one bag of rice, land they give them few 'lappas', our people will start jumping from here and there, and they will not vote wisely."*
>
> **FGD participant, Lofa**

steps could be taken to stop these "big hands", who have bad intentions, from carrying the country back to violent conflict. These include an improved educational system (89.6%), the promotion of statebuilding (84.2%) and the effective implementation of national policies and processes (73.1%).

Curbing outside influences and strengthening internal cohesion requires multifaceted interventions to enforce justice and security interventions; economically empower citizens, especially the youth; promote inclusive dialogue for all stakeholders to be involved in decision-making about governance; and undertake massive public education to sensitise the population. Furthermore, Liberia needs to comply with international treaties and protocols, and respect territorial boundaries with neighbouring countries. If not, the "big hands" will continue to fool people with money and continue to incite divisions among the people.

3.9   Promoting inter-ethnic cohesion

According to the study findings, there are abundant opportunities for reducing division among ethnic groups. Respondents were confident that virtually all available resources and strategies would make meaningful contributions in this regard. As shown in Figure 15, the most important actions for inter-ethnic harmony are reconciliation programmes (78.3%), inclusive dialogue (72.5%), civic education in schools (71.8%) and sports

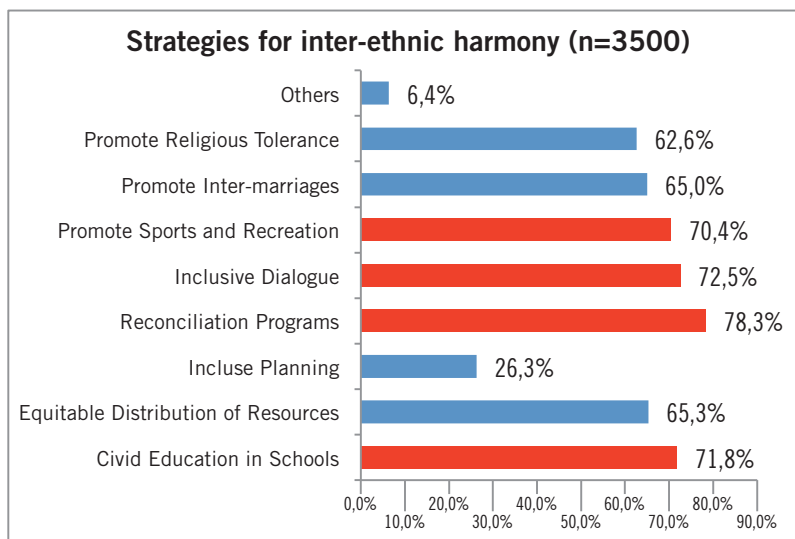**Strategies for inter-ethnic harmony (n=3500)**

Category	Value
Others	6,4%
Promote Religious Tolerance	62,6%
Promote Inter-marriages	65,0%
Promote Sports and Recreation	70,4%
Inclusive Dialogue	72,5%
Reconciliation Programs	78,3%
Incluse Planning	26,3%
Equitable Distribution of Resources	65,3%
Civid Education in Schools	71,8%

Figure 15: Strategies for inter-ethnic harmony

and recreation (70.5%). There is strong optimism across the country that once the appropriate interventions have been inaugurated, inter-ethnic harmony can become a reality once again. Nevertheless, the level of enthusiasm or prospects reported in Sinoe, Rivercess, Grand Kru and Montserrado was not as bright, as respondents in these counties were less hopeful of restoring inter-ethnic harmony.

3.10   Promoting national unity

3.10.1 Unity at county level

Respondents were asked: *"What is the best way to promote national unity in this county?"* To this question, each respondent was restricted to select only one option. As can be seen in Figure 16, four main strategies were proposed: elimination of tribalism (22.5%), forgiveness (20.6%), decentralisation of governance (14.8%) and
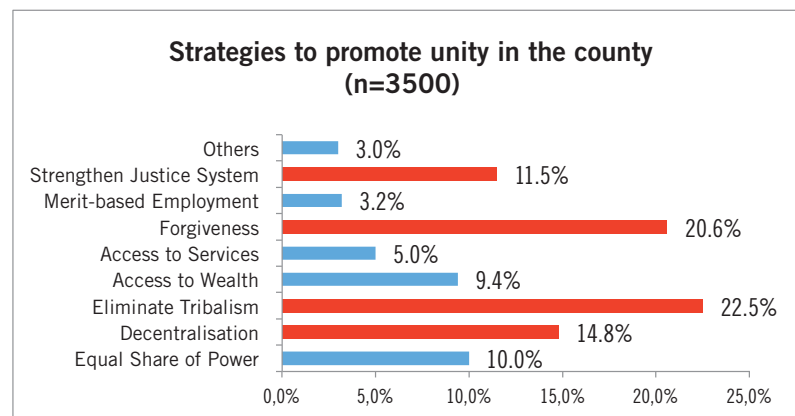
Strategies to promote unity in the county (n=3500)

Category	Value
Others	3.0%
Strengthen Justice System	11.5%
Merit-based Employment	3.2%
Forgiveness	20.6%
Access to Services	5.0%
Access to Wealth	9.4%
Eliminate Tribalism	22.5%
Decentralisation	14.8%
Equal Share of Power	10.0%

Figure 16: Strategies to promote unity in the county

strengthening of the justice systems (11.5%). Furthermore, citizens want government to bring more development projects to local communities, as well as institute programmes that support love and togetherness among the citizens. These programmes must include everyone: men; women; youth and special needs populations, such as persons living with disability. It was also reported that citizens want greater involvement in making decisions about the management of natural resources in their communities.

It is interesting to recognise that the proposed strategies embody a wholesome framework that addresses the past, present and future of the nation. There was a need for forgiveness for mishaps and atrocities committed in the past. Now, it is important that appropriate steps are taken to inoculate the menace of tribalism and sectionalism, and institute measures for inclusive participation in governance and the political processes of nationbuilding. The justice system must be reformed to deter crime, and also to ensure that the culture of impunity is vanquished. Montserrado and Nimba were the only counties where strengthening of the justice system was reported as a top-priority intervention for promoting unity.

3.10.2 Unity at national level

When asked about the best way to promote national unity in the country, three suggestions stood up: forgiveness (30.9%), decentralisation (22.2%) and the equitable distribution of natural resources (16.2%), as shown in Figure 17.

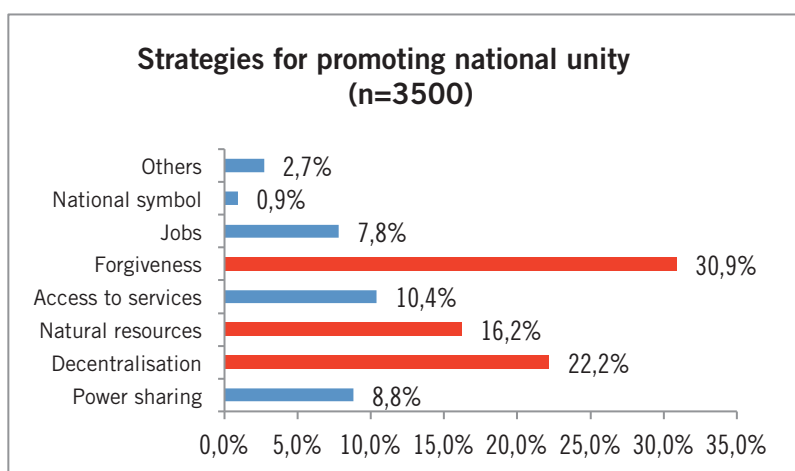Citizens also emphasised the need for the government to ensure the equitable distribution of the (benefits of) country resources, and increased access of basic social services such as education, health, etc. to the common people. The creation of job opportunities is critical to promote peace and unity in the country. It is also important to promote religious tolerance across all sectors of the country. These interventions should be supported by inclusive participatory processes that bring all stakeholders together to deliver the national peacebuilding agenda. There are also calls for the government to institute a single currency regime to enable economic relief for common citizens, and efforts should be made to use sports and recreation activities to promote peace and reconciliation.

Strategies for promoting national unity (n=3500)

- Others — 2,7%
- National symbol — 0,9%
- Jobs — 7,8%
- Forgiveness — 30,9%
- Access to services — 10,4%
- Natural resources — 16,2%
- Decentralisation — 22,2%
- Power sharing — 8,8%

Figure 17: Strategies for promoting national unity

Roughly nine out of every 10 respondents (90.9%) believed that it was possible to create a set of values about national unity that could unify all Liberians. This declaration was held strongest by respondents in Bomi, Bong, Cape Mount, Grand Gedeh, Margibi, Maryland and Nimba.

Respondents were certain that the two most important elements to be included in this set of values were a national identification card (57%) and a common language (30.3%). Respondents from all counties expressed a very strong sentiment about these elements. It is very important that the government should play a leading role, through the relevant sector ministries (MIA, MoJ, etc.) to set up a national history committee to write an acceptable set of values. They could also organise national reconciliation tournaments.

To make this initiative successful, respondents proposed a centrally appointed committee (53.6%), which should work with committees in the counties (31.4%). Respondents in Nimba (93.2%) and River Gee (81.1%) were largely unable to make up their minds about how this should work, as they failed to state their preferred approach.

3.11   Liberia's history and its role in conflict

When asked: *"Is the history of Liberia in any way a root cause of the 14 years of civil war?"* it was found that Liberians generally did not agree (73.9%) with this assertion. The majority of those who believed this claim were from Maryland (53.1%), Grand Kru (39.3%), Montserrado (33.8%), Bong (32.4%), Lofa (26.2%) and Nimba (23.9%).

Generally, this finding does not corroborate the accounts of Liberian scholars, most of whom agree that the war resulted from the economic and political exclusion policies implemented by the Americo-Liberians, since their arrival in the region in 1822. Neither does it agree with the findings of the TRC – that seeds of conflict were sown by the historical decision to establish Liberia as a state divided between natives and settlers, and the use of force to sustain the settlers' hegemony. It is, therefore, unclear why the NCME sharply disagrees with the previous findings. Perhaps this question is too complex to be elaborated fully with a simple "yes" or "no" response.

In spite of this, respondents believed that there was a lot that national government could do to foster a positive mindset about the country's history to enhance national unity. The most important proposition was for the government to work towards strengthening relations between the state and its citizens (26.6%) – engaging local communities in decision-making, increasing access to basic services, and providing appropriate civic education in schools.
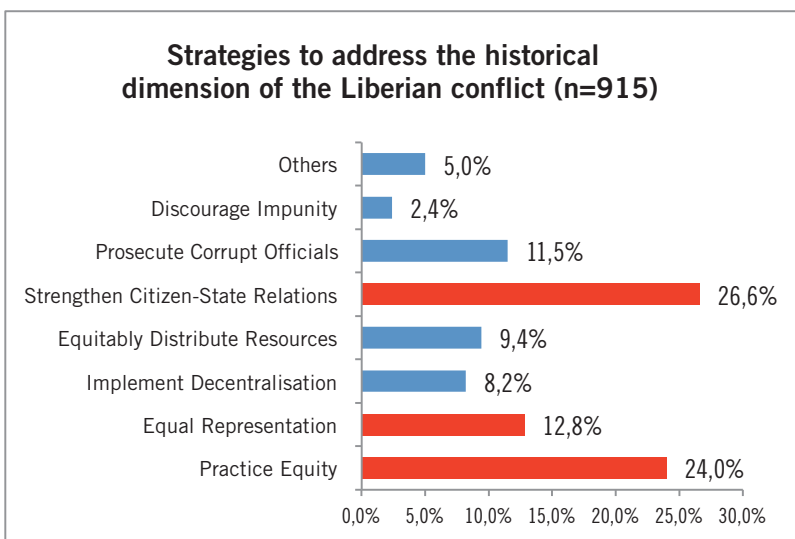
Strategies to address the historical dimension of the Liberian conflict (n=915)

Category	Value
Others	5,0%
Discourage Impunity	2,4%
Prosecute Corrupt Officials	11,5%
Strengthen Citizen-State Relations	26,6%
Equitably Distribute Resources	9,4%
Implement Decentralisation	8,2%
Equal Representation	12,8%
Practice Equity	24,0%

Figure 18: Strategies to address the historical dimension of the Liberian conflict

As shown in Figure 18, the government needs to practise equity among all groups (24.0%), and ensure equal representation of citizens (12.8%) in government and decision-making processes. Furthermore, nearly four in every five respondents (79.1%) reported that the country's ethnic diversity was adequately reflected in the government. The majority of respondents from Grand Gedeh and Gbarpolu did not share this opinion (59.2%), and are therefore requesting the government to pay attention to this matter, as well as to demonstrate respect for all ethnic groups (36.3%). In Grand Bassa (17.9%) and Montserrado (21.1%), there is a call for the prosecution of corrupt officials. Meanwhile, in Lofa (35.6%) and Maryland (14.5%), citizens are calling for equitable distribution (of the benefits) of natural resources to help change the psyche of ordinary Liberians about the country.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings from the study determine that Liberia is rife with existing and looming conflicts, which have the potential to undermine national peace and stability. This assertion is reflected by the voices of ordinary citizens, community and local leaders from the countryside. The findings of this study essentially resonate with previous conflict-mapping exercises, and reveal that there are three critical conflict drivers that present the most eminent threat to the sustainability of the nation's fragile democracy: land/property disputes, corruption and border/boundary disputes. Together, these three drivers constitute a "dangerous triplet" that requires bold, concerted national efforts to combat with urgency and decisiveness.

With the unflinching support of its partners, both at home and abroad, the Government of Liberia has made laudable gains in its national peacebuilding endeavours, both in policy and in the implementation of programmes. Notwithstanding these efforts, conflicts abound – citizens report many unresolved conflicts, as well as emerging controversies that have high conflict potential. Some of these grievances include rising unemployment and economic hardships; discontent about natural resource management practices; limited access to good roads and quality social services, such as healthcare and education; inadequate voice and involvement in local governance and decision-making processes; strained state-citizen relationships; religious and ethnic tensions; etc.

Despite the plethora of conflict factors plaguing the nation, analyses of conflict drivers in Liberia reflect a pattern of apparent homogeneity, whereby the major drivers are central to most counties, with alternating degrees of risk intensity. However, these interlinking characteristics reveal a highly dynamic nature of the conflict phenomenon in Liberia. Understanding this paradox of dynamic homogeneity of Liberia's conflict paradigm is at the heart of successful peacebuilding programmes and reconciliation efforts.

The conflict paradigm in each county is not isolated. Rather, it shares the vital elements of drivers and actors with other counties, and together they could be catalysed into spontaneous crises with catastrophic consequences. On the other hand, owing to its rather dynamic nature, this conflict construct presents an entry point of opportunity to formulate national policies or programmes that may be relevant and applicable across the entire country. As a result, once an intervention succeeds in one conflict situation, the likelihood of it succeeding in other similar conflicts is high, because of the possibility of harnessing common resources and sharing familiar lessons, with appropriate tailoring for each context.

In view of these findings, the following actionable recommendations are proffered to help the government and its partners, as well as other stakeholders, to formulate effective policies and programmes and to align peacebuilding and reconciliation strategies properly to achieve desired results.

Policy

1. The government is called upon to expedite the Decentralisation Programme by strengthening local governance structures and increasing access to basic social services. Within just one year of inauguration, the CSCs have gained the explicit appreciation of Liberians, especially those in the rural areas. There is an urgent need to construct such centres in all counties, and at the same time increase or diversity the range of services they can provide.

2. To be more effective in its decentralisation drive, it is recommended that the PBO must prioritise policies to ensure the total participation of local structures (CBOs, traditional and religious leaders) at all levels of planning and implementation of peacebuilding strategies.

3. It is recommended that the government, under the National Bureau of Concessions, strengthens the M&E mechanism to track the performance of all concession companies, as it relates

to the fulfilment of corporate social responsibilities and the terms of agreed memoranda of understanding they have with local communities. Under this framework, the National Bureau of Concessions would collaborate with relevant sector agencies and stakeholders – such as workers' unions and community leaders – to encourage dialogue to promote alternative dispute resolution. The PBO would support the National Bureau of Concessions to set up local conflict EWER mechanisms to detect and address any concession-related conflicts, before they flare into violence outburst.

4.   The executive and the legislature must work together to expedite the passage of the Land Authority Bill and the Land Rights Bill. These policy instruments need to be supported with vigorous social mobilisation and community sensitisation throughout the country, so that the populace is well informed about the process of land acquisition and its attending legal, political and conflict ramifications. This involves the translation of these policies into local languages and the use of different media (print and electronic) to disseminate information. The MIA has a big responsibility to lead these interventions, with the support of civil society and the NGO community.

5.   It is recommended that the government, especially the legislature, is called upon not to include "Preposition 24" (to Christianise Liberia) in the pending referendum. Although not generally recognised as a significant conflict factor, religious tensions have inherent potential to trigger conflicts, because of the strong religious inclination of the Liberian population. There is growing anxiety among citizens that if the government legislates any one religion as a state religion, it would increase religious tension and inevitably lead to conflict. Moreover, there is a real need for the Interfaith Mediation Committee to continue to co-host and work towards promoting religious harmony and tolerance in the country.

6.   It is recommended that the government and its partners increase their support to community peacebuilding activities that will address grassroots initiative for the long-term sustainability of peacebuilding and conflict prevention in Liberia. This will also encourage community ownership and the adoption of home-grown solutions.

Programmes

7.   It is recommended that the government, through the Land Commission, MLME and CNDRA, takes decisive action to deal with pending land/property and border/boundary disputes. First, a comprehensive border/boundary harmonisation programme needs to be undertaken in all affected areas, encouraging dialogue among rival groups, utilising local expertise and respecting traditional landmarks. Such endeavours maybe more successful when affected communities are facilitated to discover mutual, local solutions instead of relying heavily on imported or "scientific" solutions manufactured by "experts". Accordingly, international partners are encouraged to provide adequate logistical and technical support to the MLME. They are also called upon to provide support to the CNRDA to undertake extensive affordable surveying archiving services across the country. Emphasis should be placed on prosecuting unscrupulous surveyors, land administrators and other public service personnel engaged in fraudulent practices, such as the double sale of land and deeds falsification.

8.   Through relevant agencies and institutions such as the MIA, MLME, Land Authority, civil society and the NGO community, the government needs to intervene and establish the definitive demarcations of new counties. This intervention requires the meaningful participation of local authorities and traditional leaders, together with the general citizenry (especially the youth) of the affected counties.

9.   The government must continue to create an enabling environment, attractive for business investment and, ultimately, job creation for local populations. This requires balancing the

interests of both the investors and the host communities. Targeted efforts must be directed at job employment and other livelihood opportunities for youth. A tripartite approach to this problem may be more effective: technical vocational capacity-building for marketable skills; entrepreneurship skills and tools for small business start-ups; and the creation of wage-earning income-generation activities. It is important that vocational and technical education facilities are decentralised, availing opportunities to youth in all counties. Currently, there is a major economic policy shift towards agriculture to diversify the economy. Accordingly, the existing youth labour force could be leveraged for that purpose. However, engaging young people in agricultural productivity, without the corresponding markets to translate their efforts into money, will severely frustrate them.

10. It is recommended that the Ministry of Youth and Sports revitalises the National Youth Service Programme, allowing more positive interactions for social and professional exchanges among young people. These efforts need to be buttressed with the establishment of sports and recreation centres for youth and children across the country.

11. The government is called upon to strengthen policy and empower existing transparency and anti-corruption institutions – including the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission (LACC), General Auditing Commission (GAC), Public Procurement and Concession Commission (PPCC) and Internal Audit Agency (IAA) – with powers to pursue and prosecute, enforce recommendations of audit reports, and prosecute perpetrators in violation of procurement rules and regulations, for instance. Since corruption is recognised as the number two conflict driver in Liberia, it ought to remain a top priority for government interventions, both in terms of policy and programmes. As such, the Government of Liberia needs to make appropriate investments in programmes that will strengthen capacities of these institutions with needed skills and tools in order to discharge their duties and responsibilities effectively. Nonetheless, the government needs to consider establishing a special court on corruption, as well as revising the code of conduct for public officials, and fast-tracking the passage of the Whistle Blower Act. The need for decentralising the fight against corruption cannot be overlooked – the government needs to establish anti-corruption desks in various ministries, agencies and commissions. Equally so, civil society and the NGO communities need to play prominent roles in the national fight against corruption.

12. It is recommended that the government undertakes a nationwide programme to address issues that border on identify conflict, and which are negatively impacting the state-citizen relationship and overall nation building. Citizens overwhelmingly agree that there is the need to develop a set of national values that would force a sense of identity and promote national unity. Two suggestions stand out: (1) the issuing of a national citizens' identification card; and (2) legislation of a common language that would be taught in schools and used for everyday transactions by everyone. Thus, it is strongly recommended that the government legislates and domesticates the ECOWAS Citizens Bio-metric National Identification Card system, which is being used in other member states (such as Mali and Senegal).

13. The government must continue to support programmes that promote social cohesion and inter-ethnic harmony. Sports and recreation activities have been identified as an important vehicle for driving this agenda. Therefore, it is recommended that more investment be made into decentralised sporting activities, especially the National County Meet. Because such events are purposefully organised for peacebuilding and reconciliation, care should be taken in their organisation and execution to prevent the possibility of such events becoming the source of conflict and violence.

14. The PBO is called upon to ensure that its funded activities are focused on programmes for community sensitisation and dialogue, especially for the Alternative Dispute Resolution

(ADR) system to resolve existing known conflicts. Such interventions should facilitate the Land Coordination Centers, which have been tested and found to be effective land ADR mechanisms in communities.

15. The government, through the PBO, should also strengthen the organisational capacity of existing CBOs, especially the CPCs. Such initiatives should provide institutional strengthening in resource mobilisation, leadership skills, communication and the M&E of their own performances.

Research

16. It is recommended that the PBO further assesses land/property disputes and border/boundary disputes, to document all reported conflicts adequately. Such a study should leverage existing technology in geo-information services to develop interactive, electronic geospatial conflict portals, with maps of conflict zones in Liberia. The database can be periodically updated, and should be hosted on the relevant government information and communication technology (ICT) platforms, from which it can be accessed by relevant peacebuilding stakeholders as well as the general public.

17. It is recommended that the government, through the PBO, undertakes a study to determine how to harness the experience and expertise of women in national peacebuilding, particularly around border/boundary conflicts. The NCME did not explore the gender dimension of conflict in Liberia to unpack the gender differential effects of conflicts, or to understand the special needs of men and women in peacebuilding and reconciliation. This perspective would not only enrich the peacebuilding discourse, but might also uncover alternative pathways for more effective peacebuilding policies and programmes. Already, elders and traditional leaders (most of whom are men) have been identified as valuable peacebuilding actors, yet the invaluable role of women in peacebuilding in Liberia is well documented.

18. It is recommended that an independent evaluation be commissioned by the UN Peace Building Support Office (PBSO) for priority peacebuilding interventions in the country. Liberia has many unresolved conflicts, yet various interventions have been carried out to address these conflicts. Such an independent evaluation will objectively assess the level of impact these interventions have made. This is a sure way to determine levels of effectiveness, as well as to learn and share valuable lessons about what works or does not work. In addition, this will help to establish an evidence-based baseline to inform future improvements in policy and programmes.

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