



# **THE CHALLENGE OF ECONOMIC REFORM IN POST-CONFLICT LIBERIA: THE INSIDER'S PERSPECTIVE**

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

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BMZ/KFW	Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung/Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development/Credit Institution for Reconstruction)
CESD	Community Empowerment and Skills Development
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
CSA	Civil Service Agency
DAI	Development Alternative Inc.
DDRR	Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
EC	European Commission
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organization
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEMAP	Governance and Economic Management Assistance Programme
GNI	Gross National Income
GoL	Government of Liberia
ICGL	International Contact Group on Liberia
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IOM	International Organization for Migrations
IRC	International Rescue Committee
ISP	Institutional Support Programme
LCIP	Liberia Community Infrastructure Project
LECBS	Liberia Emergency Capacity Building Support
LIPA	Liberian Institute for Public Administration
LOIC	Liberia Opportunities and Industrialization Center
LURD	Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy
MLME	Ministry of Lands, Mines, and Energy
MODEL	Movement for Democracy in Liberia
NCDDRR	National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration
NGOs	Non-governmental Organizations

NTGL	National Transitional Government of Liberia
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
SES	Senior Executive Service
TOKTEN	Transfer of Knowledge Through Expatriate Nationals
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDDRRC	United Nations Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration Center
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDPKO	United Nations Department for Peacekeeping Operations
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCHR	United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WB	World Bank
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

## **INTRODUCTION**

In Liberia, as in all post-conflict countries, the challenge of economic recovery is immense. In April 2007, I conducted a set of structured interviews in the Liberian capital of Monrovia with Government officials and representatives from the international development community.<sup>1</sup> The objective was to understand how people leading the recovery effort perceived the challenges of economic reform.

Detailed accounts of what is required to lift a country out of post-conflict crisis are often provided by ‘outsiders’ in academia or international institutions. These experts may have deep knowledge of the countries under study. But many lack a full grasp of the complexities of the social and political landscape. And experience has shown that outsiders are unlikely to have the same sense of engagement and urgency as people in the trenches.

The major concerns of Liberia’s reform and recovery leadership can be summarized in four broad themes:

1. How to reconstruct a competent civil service, and ultimately a public sector, that is capable of managing the recovery and development process;
2. How to assert the Government’s priorities while exercising effective ownership of the recovery and development process;
3. How to create employment to address the needs of large youth populations while at the same time finding ways to discourage former combatants from returning to violence;
4. How to balance the need to address urgent problems in the short term with the development of broad policy strategies.

## **BACKGROUND**

In the period since the military coup in 1980 – except for three years of relative tranquility between 1998 and 2001 – Liberia has experienced intense conflict and, correspondingly, sustained political, social and economic disruption.

The conflict dynamics are extremely complicated, with old tensions overlaid with newer ones that have emerged over 20 years of conflict. Some of the most important sources of tension lie in inequalities in governance and access to opportunities.

Since the creation of the Liberian state, tensions have existed between the settlers and the indigenous population.<sup>2</sup> These tensions have been exacerbated by a national constitution whose provisions favored the settlers. Power was concentrated in Monrovia, a situation characterized by a ‘winner-takes-all’ attitude by political leaders and gross misappropriations of revenues from natural resources. Equity deficits had become institutionalized, with the

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<sup>1</sup> The list of Senior Officials interviewed is provided in Annex. The meetings were conducted on the understanding that the statements could not be attributed directly.

<sup>2</sup> The Americo-Liberian settlers declared the independence of the Republic of Liberia on July 26, 1847, after the American Colonization Society, or ‘Society for the Colonization of Free People of Color of America’ established Liberia as a place to send freed African-American slaves in the 1820s.

majority of Liberians having very limited land and property rights - and with services concentrated in Monrovia.

After almost 20 years of fighting, a ceasefire was finally agreed to in June 2003 followed two months later by a peace agreement signed on August 18, in Accra, Ghana.<sup>3</sup> By that time, the economy was in tatters. Over the conflict years, real per capita Gross Domestic Product declined from almost US\$1,000 in 1980 to below US\$100 in 1995. Since 2001, it has been hovering just below US\$200 (GoL/UN/WB/IMF, 2007, World Development Indicators, 2004).<sup>4</sup> Widespread insecurity and asset destruction had created a highly disabling environment for legitimate productive activity. Parallel illicit economies had emerged that served to boost the fortunes of the warlords and provide livelihoods through booty and rent for their constituents. Liberia's roads, sewage systems, ports and social infrastructure deteriorated as opposing combatants employed a deliberate strategy of destruction.

With the destruction of legitimate economic activity, parallel illicit economies emerged<sup>5</sup> and served to boost the fortunes of the warlords and provide livelihoods for their constituents. One study charged that in 2000 Charles Taylor profited from approximately US\$100 million in timber fraud (Global Witness/International Transport Workers Federation, 2001).<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, at the end of the conflict in 2003, the road network had not been maintained for three decades, the Monrovia sewage plant had been out of operation for more than ten years, and the railway and port infrastructure that once facilitated the vibrant exports of iron ore and timber had simply collapsed (NTGL/UN/WB, 2004, p. 63).

Social cohesion and trust, the core of society's social capital, were also severely eroded. With close to one million people having left their homes, communities were fragmented. Networks of social and economic exchange, developed over several decades, were destroyed. The rules of the game necessary for the effective functioning of state institutions had been mostly absent in the years leading up to the conflict, and this situation only worsened. Civil servants were not paid, and provision of basic services and public goods all but ceased.

In 2003 only 10% of the population was estimated to have access to healthcare. Indeed, little of the health infrastructure that existed before the war was functioning, as 242 out of 293 public health facilities had been looted or forced to close because of lack of staff and supplies (NTGL/UN/WB, 2004, p. 51). A similar picture could be painted for education. The Liberia Rapid Assessment of Learning Spaces 2003/04 found that learning spaces in 31% of the 3,840 educational facilities assessed were completely or mostly destroyed, while another 27% of the learning spaces were partly destroyed (NTGL/UN/WB, 2005, p. 54).

## **MAJOR CONCERNS OF LIBERIA'S REFORM AND RECOVERY LEADERSHIP**

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<sup>3</sup> The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed by the Government of Liberia (GoL), the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL), and the political parties. The full text is available online at [http://www.usip.org/library/liberia/liberia\\_08182003\\_toc.html](http://www.usip.org/library/liberia/liberia_08182003_toc.html).

<sup>4</sup> All GDP figures are in constant 1995 \$US.

<sup>5</sup> An interesting exception is the telecommunications sector - the privately managed and financed mobile phone services (which started in 1997) followed, against all odds, the explosive growth path observed in the region. There are now 50,000 mobile phone customers in Liberia, i.e., five times the number of conventional phone subscribers in 1990 (NTGL/UN/WB, 2004, p. 63).

<sup>6</sup> To arrive at their estimate, Global Witness took the difference between total trade revenue (US\$ 106 million) and declared revenue by the Central Bank of Liberia (US\$ 6.7 million).

## 1- Capacity for Managing Development

The challenge of building a functioning and capable civil service in Liberia is immense. As a consequence of years of neglect to the education system, and the ‘brain drain’, there is a severe shortage of skilled and semi-skilled workers in Liberia. In-country authorities assert that between 80 per cent and 90 per cent of skilled Liberians emigrated during the conflict years, and the majority have not returned.

At the same time there is a vast pool of under-skilled, unskilled and unemployed people.<sup>7</sup> The state management structure in Liberia has been likened to a ‘ledge’, with a thin layer of people with strong academic credentials at the top of the Government. These people usually have work experience overseas with international institutions, academia or private sector. Below them, however, there is an almost total absence of relevant skills, capabilities and competence.

The government, desperately trying to organize itself, has designed new ministries and is now trying to fill key posts with qualified staff. A number of programmes have been launched in support of this strategy. Some focus on increasing the pool of skilled labour in Liberia while others are more specifically targeted to the civil service.

To increase the pool of skilled people in Liberia in general, the government is launching a number of initiatives. One example is the ‘one-stop shop’ aimed primarily at making entry into Liberia easier for potential investors and returning nationals. The idea was to reduce transaction costs for potential investors by having in one place all relevant information such as taxes, visas, legal rights and obligations. Other initiatives are under way to increase accessibility to funds for small and medium-sized business enterprises, and to offer tax breaks and concessions in coordination with the National Port Authority. Several government officials saw this as an effective strategy during the recovery phase, arguing that the Diaspora Liberians are more likely to be longer-term investors.

The Director General of the Civil Service Agency (CSA) sees the country as facing a “*huge challenge to service delivery due to the levels of illiteracy, resource constraints and capacity gaps even at the trainer level*” (Source: interview).

Since January 2006, the government, with some support from development partners, has launched several programmes aimed more directly at fostering national talent by attracting back skilled Diaspora Liberians while offering training and re-training for senior and middle level management positions. A larger and more comprehensive 10-year National Capacity Development Strategy is also being drafted, with an articulated national capacity assessment and capacity development action plan expected to be completed by the end of the year (GoL/UN/WB/IMF, 2007, p.68).

Most notable among the capacity-building efforts encouraging the return of qualified Liberians are the projects known as the Transfer of Knowledge Through Expatriate Nationals (TOKTEN) and the Liberia Emergency Capacity Building Support (LECBS). TOKTEN is a

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<sup>7</sup> Figures cited in the interim PRSP (GoL/UN/WB/IMF, 2007) and statistics provided by the Research Department of the Central Bank of Liberia and line Ministries put the unemployment rate at 85%, but this figure seems unnaturally high, even taking into account the role of remittances from the Diaspora.

UNDP-sponsored programme aimed at bringing expatriate nationals back to the country for short periods, usually less than one year. These expatriates provide specialized skills to fill critical capacity gaps. The LECBS was designed to jump-start the institutional recovery process by bringing back highly qualified Liberians to assume leadership of key agencies. Indeed, several of the Ministers were initially paid from the repatriation fund set up for this initiative (GoL/UN/WB/IMF, 2007, p.15, UNDP Country Office [Website](#)).

A Senior Executive Service (SES) programme will also be in place before the end of 2007, as terms of references for the first wave of candidates have been finalized and recruitment will soon commence to fill 20 positions in 17 designated ministries and agencies. The government's current plans are to recruit 100 Liberian professionals for the most senior-level positions, both nationally and from the Diaspora (CSA, 2006, UNDP Country Office [Website](#), UNDP Communications Office, 2006).

The programme's three main objectives are, first, to strengthen the executive management of Government institutions through the recruitment of top professionals able to spearhead and manage change in the public sector; second, to reform the administrative systems and procedures for effective human resource management with emphasis on merit, performance, service culture and result orientations, and, third, to advance the overall reform and development agenda of the Government by strategically placing SES personnel in key ministries, departments and agencies. The programme will also offer training and counseling, job-search support and exit pay for staff whose positions have changed or become redundant. Positions will be performance-based, compensating high performers and encouraging low performers to find more suitable positions (in light of Liberia's conflict situation, termination will be considered a last resort). The estimated cost is \$9.7 million over the course of the programme's three-year term, although more than \$5 million has already been mobilized for the first three years (GoL, 2007, UNDP Country Office [Website](#)).

In addition to programmes targeting people who are already skilled, the government has launched initiatives to reinforce and build new skills. For example, according to the CSA, the Liberian Institute for Public Administration (LIPA) provides on-the-job training (funded by African Capacity Building Fund), and the CSA has installed an Information Technology laboratory that offers six weeks of intensive on-site, computer-based training programmes for government staff.

Impressive steps have been taken to address the capacity-building challenges, but many remain. Not least among these is the challenge of financing. In the early stages of recovery the government still relies heavily on external aid. Net ODA equaled to 30 per cent of GNI in 2003, and then rose to 54 per cent in 2004 and 2005 (OECD statistics available [online](#)). When it comes to financing government posts, many development partners are hesitant. In many cases, they face blanket policies that restrict their ability to finance government posts directly, either for political reasons or for expressed concerns about sustainability.

In Liberia's case, sustainability concerns are only a legitimate reason for the SES programme. Since the TOTKEN and the LECBS are stop-gap measures and therefore not expected to last far into the future, sustainability is less of an issue as the posts are due to be phased out.

A second challenge concerns the roll-out of the SES, since, in the short term at least, it could build tensions through the creation of large salary discrepancies. It is therefore very important for the government to take steps not only to ensure transparency and equal opportunity in the recruitment process, but to press for an expeditious completion of civil-service reform, specifically pay reform and the introduction of a living wage.

## **2- CAPACITY FOR OWNERSHIP**

Closely linked to the issue of development-management capacity is the question of how to build capacity for ownership. At the civil-service level, the focus can be on the technical and managerial skills to deliver goods and services on a day-to-day basis. At the higher level, those in power should be able to drive the direction of the recovery and push forward what they see as appropriate policy choices. This is not a challenge unique to Liberia; it is often encountered in countries that rely extensively on development aid, and where the international community takes an active, even activist, role in national policy and planning processes.

As many African officials recognize when a relatively capacity constrained government sits around the table with international partners who also control the purse strings, it is the internationals who have effective control of the development agenda. This control sometimes extends to the larger political agenda.

Since the signing of the CPA, international presence in Liberia has been very strong. In 2003, the International Contact Group on Liberia<sup>8</sup> (ICGL) was formed, co-chaired by the *Chargé d’Affaires* of the European Commission in Liberia and the Ambassador of Nigeria, to support the Peace process. It now includes representatives of United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), the African Union, ECOWAS, Ghana, Germany, the UK, Sweden, and the World Bank. To support the recovery planning efforts during the transitional government, a host of development agencies and NGOs began establishing or re-establishing their presence in Liberia. The UN was represented by 13 agencies: FAO, UNDP, UNEP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UN-HABITAT, UNHCHR, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNIFEM, UNOPS, WFP and WHO. The World Bank, IMF and IOM were also very active. Among the bilateral partners present in Liberia were China, Denmark, Germany, Ghana, Ireland, Japan, Nigeria, Norway, South Africa, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States (GoL/UN/WB/IMF, 2007).

There is a general feeling in government that certain systems or programmes that have been implanted do not have full national ownership. In some cases, this is because partners develop parallel programmes over which the Government has only limited information or capacity to provide oversight. In others, the Government may feel that these partners tend to reflect the preferences of the international community more than those of national decision makers.

The Governance and Economic Management Assistance Programme<sup>9</sup> is perhaps the most explicit example of a programme designed to meet partner rather than Government

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<sup>8</sup> Information available online at <http://www.europa-eu-un.org>.

<sup>9</sup> Detailed information is available online on the GEMAP’s Website at <http://www.gemapliberia.org>, including the GEMAP Agreement Document (NTGL, 2005). GEMAP’s overall aim is the implementation of good governance systems in the Government of Liberia’s operations and transactions through the execution of its six

preferences, and it sits at the heart of the Government's economic management. It was designed during the transition period and is still being implemented today. The emergence of parallel programmes - either between government and development partners or between different development partners - also presents a challenge to ownership in light of the fact that national authorities lack the capacity to provide oversight.<sup>10</sup>

GEMAP was initially designed and introduced as a temporary measure to address the chronic problem of poor fiscal management and economic governance, both of which proved to be the hallmark of the transitional government. It was designed to install checks and balances in the financial processes of government by filling capacity gaps in key auditing and accounting functions with experts who are given co-signature authority (NTGL, 2005).

In its first year, the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) requested an audit of the preceding Taylor regime. That regime was known for its pervasive and deep-corruption. For example, one study alleged that in 2000, President Charles Taylor profited from approximately US\$100 million in timber fraud (Global Witness/International Transport Workers Federation, 2001). The NTGL hoped to use the results of their requested audit to promote reforms in economic governance (IMF, 2004).

The European Commission (EC) offered to assist with the audit under the Institutional Support Programme (ISP).<sup>11</sup> However, given the poor availability of data, it quickly became apparent that an historic audit would not be feasible, so the EC decided to reorient the audit from the Taylor administration to that of the NTGL.<sup>12</sup> Without a formal agreement with the NTGL to carry out this audit, the EC commissioned the firm Ernst & Young to undertake an in-depth systems and financial audit of the Central Bank, as well as five other state-owned enterprises (NTGL, 2005, Jahr, 2006, Central Bank of Liberia, 2007, IMF, 2007).

This change in direction coincided with a shift in perceptions within the international community concerning the NTGL's true commitment to reform. Initially the environment for reform looked optimistic. In March 2004 the International Monetary Fund's Executive Board agreed to a resumption of technical assistance in view of what it said was "*Liberia's recent*

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presiding principles: 1. Financial Management and Accountability; 2. Improving Budgeting and Expenditure Management; 3. Improving Procurement Practices and Granting of Concessions; 4. Establishing Effective Processes to Control Corruption; 5. Supporting Key Institutions; 6. Capacity Building. With these six interlocking components, GEMAP expects to revitalize Liberia's economy by reestablishing its economic framework, streamlining its financial institutions and promoting transparency and accountability to revenue generating agencies and institutions within the Government. GEMAP implements its six components by placing international experts with co-signing authority in key Governmental institutions. These include: Ministry of Finance, Central Bank of Liberia; Bureau of Budget; Ministry of Lands; Mines, and Energy, National Port Authority; Roberts International Airport; Liberia Petroleum Refining Corporation; Forestry Development Agency (FDA); Bureau of Maritime Affairs, Bureau of Customs and Excise.

<sup>10</sup> A good example is the profusion of donor-funded DDRR programmes (Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration), a point detailed in section 3-.

<sup>11</sup> The ISP is a joint venture between the EC and Liberia to implement reforms in governance and financial management. Under the ISP the EC agreed to undertake organizational and financial audits of the Liberia Petroleum Refining Company, the Forestry Development Agency, the National Port Authority, the Roberts International Airport and the Bureau of Maritime Affairs, and, at the request of the NTGL, the Central Bank of Liberia as well (Institutional Support Programme, The European Commission's Delegation to Liberia).

<sup>12</sup> Our interviews revealed significant disagreement between government and development partners as to whether or not this decision was taken by the EC alone or together with the NTGL.

*record of cooperation and sound policies and its limited technical capacities and overwhelming reconstruction need” (IMF, 2004, p. 48).*

However, by the end of 2004, doubts were being raised by the international community as to whether the transitional Government was genuinely committed to making reforms and fighting corruption. The warning signs included poor choices in public finance management that delayed implementation of reforms; evidence of widespread corruption reported by the Liberian media, and mutual accusations among factions within the NTGL that state finances were being siphoned off for personal gain (UNDPKO/World Bank, 2006, p. 6).

With government agencies unilaterally entering into contracts and concessions (World Bank/UNDP, 2006), the Contracts and Monopolies Commission found itself totally bypassed in fulfilling its mandate to oversee the awarding of contracts.

The UN Panel of Experts on Liberia also reported in 2004 that sanctions were being disregarded: Individuals listed on the travel ban were making foreign trips on a regular basis; illicit diamond mining and trading persisted and posed a serious threat to the credibility of the Kimberley Process, and logging and pit-sawing continued under the control of previous warring factions in the ruling NTGL (United Nations Security Council, 2004).

In December 2004, the International Crisis Group called for a radical international approach to interventions in Liberia, going as far as to propose an international entity to take responsibility for national revenue collection.<sup>13</sup> (UNDPKO/World Bank, 2006). EC audits had revealed such gross NTGL mismanagement that the EC did not immediately release them for fear of the reaction they might provoke. Discussions were held among the EC, the World Bank, the US, and the IMF and later ECOWAS -- and it was finally concluded that a robust plan was needed to prevent further mismanagement of revenues.

The first key step in the actual design of GEMAP took place when international partners and the NTGL met for the annual review of the implementation of the recovery plan the Results Focused Transitional Framework (RFTF), in Copenhagen on 9-10 May 2004. Speaker after speaker expressed concern about the extent of corruption and its impact on recovery, pushing the NTGL to accept the need for a stronger international presence in Liberia’s financial management.

An action plan for economic governance was then elaborated based on a preliminary plan drafted by the US, with the IMF with the World Bank further developing its technical aspects and the EC drafting a political framework. The draft plan raised concerns among the NTGL and the sub-region due to its perceived possible infringement on sovereignty. ECOWAS, in its role as arbiter of the CPA, initially expressed concerns that such a plan would deflect attention from the CPA timetable, potentially undermining it.

ECOWAS acknowledged the severity of corruption but favored not addressing it until after the elections. However, agreement for an action plan was finally secured after significant

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<sup>13</sup> The Group proposed to “*convene a working group to prepare the political, technical and administrative modalities of a mechanism to assume responsibility for revenue collection for a projected fifteen to 25-year period, including an oversight board with mixed international and Liberian composition but controlled by the former and supported by a team of experts (forensic accountants) and international customs officers*”. (International Crisis Group, 2004).

lobbying by New York, Washington, Niamey, Abuja, Brussels and other capitals. The then-UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan also intervened, discussing the matter personally with ECOWAS and with other African leaders.

With the international community in agreement, donors increased pressure on the NTGL to accept the plan threatening the suspension of aid. The EC for instance, sent a letter stating that continued development funds were contingent on the implementation of GEMAP, while the US threatened to withhold support for security sector reform. This, coupled with the potential link between Security Council sanctions and the implementation of GEMAP, helped expedite its signing (UNDPKO/World Bank, 2006).<sup>14</sup> The final version of GEMAP was presented as a joint solution agreed between the NTGL and the UN, EU, ECOWAS, AU, US, IMF, and the World Bank (UNDPKO/World Bank, 2006).

NTGL opposition to a robust anti-corruption strategy was predictable for two key reasons. First, GEMAP threatened to interrupt lucrative personal revenue streams for individuals and threatened many of them with public embarrassment if not judicial investigation.

Approaching their final months in power, with no chance of participating in the subsequent government<sup>15</sup>, there was little incentive for senior NTGL leadership to take a different stance. At a very basic level, NTGL assent was always going to be reluctant (UNDPKO/World Bank, 2006).

Second, the impetus, or the green light for the international community to start work designing GEMAP, was the result of the EC audits which were themselves highly antagonistic. The fact that these audits were conducted by internationals on a sovereign state and were never explicitly commissioned by the national Government is an important point underlying the legitimacy of the whole process.

Although designed as a mechanism to be introduced during the transition period, the drawn out negotiations meant that GEMAP was not signed until September 2005, the month before Liberia's presidential elections. The new government found itself accepting responsibility for its implementation. Indeed, speaking to the U.S. Congress in early 2006, the President of Liberia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, showed support for GEMAP saying that in the first few weeks of being in office the government had "*accelerated implementation of the Governance Economic Management Plan - the GEMAP*".<sup>16</sup>

A year after coming to power, the new Government and international partners remain in agreement that cash/economic management needs to be rigorously handled, but there are growing differences over the method for doing so. Some aspects of the programme go against how Liberia sees itself and its notions of national identity and sovereignty with regards to the placement of foreign nationals in strategic Government institutions and entities.

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<sup>14</sup> Early drafts of GEMAP had called for Security Council endorsement but this met heavy resistance from the NTGL who argued that this did not allow for a clear exit strategy (UNDPKO, 2006).

<sup>15</sup> Included in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was the provision that the heads of each of the National Transitional Legislative Assembly, Executive, and Judiciary of the NTGL were prohibited from standing for election in 2005 (Articles 24-6c, 25-4, 27-4).

<sup>16</sup> The full text of the speech is available online at [http://www.embassyofliberia.org/news/item\\_congressspeech.html](http://www.embassyofliberia.org/news/item_congressspeech.html)

While placing economic governance in the hands of ostensibly objective outsiders was possibly justifiable under an un-elected NTGL, it is questionable in the face of a government that has come to power through elections judged as free and fair both nationally and internationally.

The GEMAP was designed as a partnership between government and development partners.<sup>17</sup> However, there have been recent calls for greater mutual accountability and equality within the programme. Among GEMAP's Technical Team, its operational management body, there is feeling of a "them/us" divide, with experts not seeing themselves as part of a team within their respective institutions. Members of the team have also often questioned the authority of the national institutions over the experts they host.

GEMAP experts are expected to report through their respective Ministry/Agency management, to the Technical Team and Steering Committee. A comprehensive report is expected monthly and is to be signed by management. However, many experts have failed to comply with this established chain of command and reporting. As tensions have escalated, some institutions have questioned the experts assigned and requested that they step aside.

Some experts continually report on problems, leaving many in government with the impression that they are not fulfilling their assigned task of efficient problem-solving efficiently. That has prompted the Government to call for partners to reveal clearer information on the performance and deliverables of the experts. Under their recommended system of mutual accountability, the Government has expressed the view that partners should openly report on performance and spending, as contrary behaviour creates the impression that they are not subject to accountability and transparency mechanisms.

One of the key suggestions that has already emerged for the future is the need to 'Liberianize' GEMAP. Of the 15 to 20 experts assigned to various ministries and agencies, only two are of Liberian descent (UNDP Country Office). There has been no systematic mechanism to capture the Liberians in the Diaspora, but the need to push for their representation as experts is evident. The Terms of Reference used to advertise for the GEMAP positions do not encourage Liberians to apply, with the condition of previous experience in the entity disqualifying numerous potential candidates.

For longer term sustainability of good economic governance, and the eventual phase-out of GEMAP, the programme needs to be integrated into wider civil service reform efforts. It was recognized in the design of GEMAP that the provision of international experts could never be regarded as a long-term sustainable solution to the capacity problem but nevertheless, provisions for technical assistance to build capacities of national staff were vague (GoL, 2005, p.15). Only recently has there been increased focus on this aspect, perhaps driven by the need to make the GEMAP approach more palatable to the new government.

### **3- CHALLENGE OF REINTEGRATION AND EMPLOYMENT GENERATION:**

The need to address the underlying dynamics of the violence has been clearly recognized as critical to the sustainability of peace and recovery. This was best evidenced by the CPA's call

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<sup>17</sup> GEMAP partners include: European Union (EU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union (AU), the United States (US), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank (GoL, 2005).

for the establishment of an interdisciplinary and interdepartmental National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (NCDDRR) to coordinate DDRR activities (CPA, 2003, Article VI). Subsequently, Security Council resolution 1509 established UNMIL in 2003 under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, and included implementation of a DDRR programme in its mandate (Source: UNDDRRC [webpage](#)).<sup>18</sup>

The so-called 'DDRR programme' (DDRRP) conceived against this background by the government and international partners has since then been an umbrella for various projects supported by multiple donors and implemented under several modalities (UNDP, 2006, 2007, DRC, 2007, Technical Working Group on DDRRP Beneficiaries, 2007). The DDRRP has been funded through three main sources: the UNMIL, the UNDP-managed multi-donor Trust Fund, and 'parallel programmes' financed by donors outside the Trust Fund.

The UNMIL covered most of the military-related activities associated with disarmament and demobilization of eligible ex-combatants (UNDDRRC)<sup>19</sup>, including the construction of DD camps and payment of transitional safety-net allowance for the demobilized beneficiaries (UNDP, 2007). An estimated 101,495 eligible ex-combatants were disarmed and demobilized between December 2003 and October 2004. While this was an important step in providing short-term stability, sustainable peace requires that legitimate livelihood opportunities be made available. To reduce the incentive to pick weapons back up, ex-combatants need to feel that they have other non-violent means of survival.

Following the DD phase and assuming a 2% 'spontaneous' reintegration ratio, some 99,000 ex-combatants having acquired civilian status became eligible for reintegration assistance under the programme, (UNDP CO, 2007). Options available to participants under either funding source included vocational skills training (offered in carpentry, masonry, tailoring, auto mechanics and agriculture, for instance), apprenticeships, formal education, financial and start-up support for agriculture and alternative livelihoods, as well as subsistence allowances, counseling and, in the case of parallel programs, temporary employment opportunities (UNDDRRC, UNDP, 2007, interviews, 2007). The UNDP-managed DDRR Trust Fund committed to assist close to 63,000 of the eligible caseload for a total estimated cost of over \$70m, with the remaining 36,000 beneficiaries meant to be covered by 'parallel programmes'.<sup>20</sup>

These 'parallel programmes' consisted of those projects and activities financed outside the Trust Fund but supportive of the mandate of the DDRR programme. These were financed by bi- and multilateral agencies such as the EC, USAID, DFID, BMZ/KFW, which made contributions to the Trust Fund but at the same time opted to support projects implemented by sub-contracted NGOs other entities, using various approaches, including training and cash-for-work programmes (UNDP, 2007).

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<sup>18</sup> The NCDDRR comprised representatives of relevant authorities of NTGL, the previous government forces, LURD, MODEL, ECOWAS, the UN, the African Union and the ICGL. 48 former 'generals', 16 from each faction, assisted the NCDDRR to facilitate the DDRR process, and to motivate combatants to participate. In order to facilitate the implementation of the DDRR programme, the NCDDRR, UNMIL, and UNDP formed the Joint Implementation Unit (JIU), a working mechanism for carrying out the planning as well as the day-to-day operations of the programme (Source: UNDDRRC [webpage](#))

<sup>19</sup> Detailed account of the eligibility criteria is available on the UNDDRRC [webpage](#).

<sup>20</sup> Figures from the DDRR Trust Fund Programme 2004-2007 are that the total programme cost \$70.2m, of which \$14.2m was spent on Disarmament and Demobilization, \$4.8 on the National Commission for DDRR and the Joint Implementation Unit, \$5.6m on management fees, \$3.1 on other logistics and operational expenditure and the majority, \$43.6m for Rehabilitation and Reintegration (UNDP DEX Programme for DDRR, August 2007).

For instance, the EC supported two vocational training projects implemented by two local NGOs, the Community Empowerment and Skills Development (CESD) and the Liberia Opportunities and Industrialization Center (LOIC).<sup>21</sup> Between October 2004 and October 2005, both organizations vocationally train approximately around 2,600 ex-combatants in different trade areas across the country, despite facing significant implementation difficulties (UNDP, 2006) whose policy implications are further discussed below.

Other parallel programmes have relied on labour intensive employment schemes, typically community-based, that aimed to provide short-term employment to war-affected populations while contributing to the reconstruction of local economic and social infrastructures (Technical Working Group on DDRRP Beneficiaries, 2007). Ex-combatants are included as members of the participating communities, but are not specifically targeted. An example is the EC/Danish Refugee Council Peace and Stabilization Project, which targeted *“both ex-combatants and non-combatants (IDPs, Returnees, and resident population) to alleviate immediate frustration and ‘keep people busy’ and away from desperation and criminal behavior”*. In order to do so, the project offered *“temporary employment in a cash-for-work set-up paying one USD per day’s work”*, for a total cash influx of more than \$500,000 (DRC, 2007, p. 3). Another example is the USAID-funded Liberia Community Infrastructure Project (LCIP) implemented by Development Alternative Inc (DAI) targeting an estimated 30,000 individuals, of which 18,000 were ex-combatants and 12,000 war-affected civilians. The assistance consists of short-term employment and public works programmes, reconstruction and rehabilitation of local infrastructures, as well as agricultural and vocational training. The project is in its 2<sup>nd</sup> phase (LCIP II), and the estimated cost of the 1<sup>st</sup> phase was \$30-40 m (UNDP, 2007, DAI [webpage](#)). Additional parallel initiatives have included<sup>22</sup> other USAID-sponsored projects (with Save the Children, World Vision, IRC) as well as a large €11 m KFW-financed Rural Recovery Project implemented by German Agro Action and a DFID-funded and UNICEF-implemented project (UNDP, 2007).

The coexistence of these various initiatives and projects funded through the DDRR Trust Fund and parallel programs has raised critical challenges and questions, not least in terms of coordination, consistency and efficiency.

A first technical challenge has been to monitor and address the discrepancies and gaps in the coverage of targeted ex-combatants between the two main funding sources. To that end, a Technical Working Group comprising the NCDDRR, the EC, UNICEF, USAID, UNDP/JIU and UNMIL was set up (TWG, 2007). The group was *“charged with verifying the data of participants in parallel programmes to be provided to JIU by USAID, UNICEF and EC to determine whether there were in fact persons who had not benefited [from any programme]”*. (p.1). This was attempted by means of *“match[ing] their names and PIN numbers against the demobilization database”*, so as to *“verify the status of actual participants who have benefited from past DDR[R]P activities in one way or another or are currently enrolled in ongoing projects, so that they can be excluded from further participation”*. The exercise concluded to the existence of an outstanding caseload of some 9,000 ex-combatants that are yet to benefit from RR activities (UNDP, 2007). It also highlighted specific problems, including double or multiple registrations, underlying that *“the quality of the data on*

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<sup>21</sup> The EC signed a Contribution Agreement with UNDP on 10 September 2004 for the coordination and supervision of two projects to be implemented by both NGOs, which had been identified by the EC. Separate Memorandums of Understanding and Grant Contracts were signed between the local partners and the EC on September and October 2004. UNDP had the responsibility to supervise through the Joint Implementation Unit the execution of the two reintegration projects (UNDP, 2006)

<sup>22</sup> The list is not meant to be exhaustive.

*participants submitted by some parallel programmes made it very difficult to match these with the data in the demobilization data base*”, primarily because of “*inconsistent and incomplete information*”, “*low quality reporting*” and the absence of adequate PIN number registration by some of the parallel programs (TWG, 2007, p. 3).

These conclusions pointed to coordination challenges posed by the existence of various programmes and funding sources, which were further substantiated by anecdotal evidence and other evaluations. The Final Report of the supervision of the projects implemented by CESD and LOIC on EC funding also stressed that “*ex-combatants ha[d] shared names with more than one institution with the hope that they could benefit from both institutions*”. In particular, there was evidence of “*CESD students found registered with (...) the parallel programmes of DAI/USAID*” (UNDP, 2006, p.4). Maybe even more critically, it was found that ex-combatants participating in vocational training programmes chose to drop out, attracted by employment schemes being implemented by USAID-LICP offering \$2 per day in the same areas (pp 3 and 4).

In addition, the Report concluded that some disruptions and constraints faced by both CESD and LOIC projects were “*inherent to the administrative arrangements of this parallel EC Reintegration programme*”, adding that “*the EC’s decision to separately target ex-combatants through direct funding of pre-selected partners instead of its usual contribution to the Trust Fund created additional layers of administration and management and affected the implementation at the ground level*” (p. 7). A key conclusion was that “*there are obvious and significant issues of inconsistency in the overall implementation of the DDDR Programme given the various parallel Reintegration Programmes*”, which led to the recommendation that “*projects be implemented under one administrative layer and greater programme policy consistency (...) ensured*” (p. 7).

At a broader level, the overriding challenge with the overall DDDR process has been moving ex-combatants from reintegration programmes onto self-sustaining livelihood paths. The challenge has been compounded by the fact that expectations were high, with former combatants feeling a sense of entitlement to a sustainable livelihood once they had completed the programmes. Some programmes, most notably the cash-for-work schemes, are now coming to an end and have been criticized for being too short term in their outlook and not equipping participants with the appropriate skills to integrate into the jobs market once the programme ends.

Even those programmes that were more forward looking, providing skills training or start up capital for example, are unable to guarantee a livelihood at the end of the programme. While people can be trained in carpentry, mechanics or small business management, their chance of sustainable employment is heavily contingent of the state of the market, and therefore the health of the local economy.

The government is understandably concerned that those ex-combatants that today are without employment may pose a risk to the fragile peace. Some of these combatants come from cash-for work programmes that have phased out, others have been through skills training but have not secured employment and others are in a group termed the “residual caseload” that have yet to go through any programme.

The overreaching need for sustainable job creation for recovery has been recognized and partly addressed by the government and development partners. The Ministry of Labour, in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Works and with support from UNMIL, the World Bank, UNDP, UNHCR, WFP and ILO, has introduced two initiatives: the Liberia

Employment Emergency Programme (LEEP) for the short term and the Liberia Employment Action Programme (LEAP) operating in the medium term; together termed LEEP/LEAP (ILO, UNHCR, 2007). The LEEP/LEAP is a six component<sup>23</sup> strategy that “*aims to provide a vision for immediate employment creation, while at the same time putting the foundation for longer term sustainable employment*” (ILO, 2007). The LEEP/LEAP is also meant to act as “*the point of connection that helps ensure a presence of the social partners in the Government’s work on developing a full PRSP by July 2008*” (ILO, 2007).

As it appears, many efforts have been made to try and address the challenges of reintegration and employment generation in Liberia. In hindsight, however, there is a feeling that the vast sum of resources that were spent on reintegration programmes should have been at least partly redirected to wider community recovery programmes. With a stronger local community, ex-combatants may have found it easier to find a market for their skills once passing out of the reintegration programmes. There is a need also to change the expectations concerning the role of a DDR process and its expected outcomes. Most importantly, ex-combatants must be kept off the streets until the economy is strong enough to absorb them and other members of society in gainful employment. Strategically therefore, it may be more appropriate to provide cash-for-work programmes that last longer, or do not come to an abrupt halt before there are sufficient opportunities outside of the programme. This would suggest that DDR requires a significantly longer period of engagement from the donors than it currently has.

However, adopting this approach would not be straightforward since questions of equity are likely to arise. Other members of the community may resent the fact, for example, that ex-combatants even several years after laying down their weapons, are prioritized in access to cash-for-work programmes. For some this may be perceived as rewards being given to those that fought. Therefore, it seems that there are two main areas where more attention is needed.

First, financing of reintegration programmes needs to increase so that programmes can be widened to allow all vulnerable groups, and not just ex-combatants, to have access to cash-for-work or vocational training. Second, more attention needs to be placed on reinvigorating the local economy, since as soon as the economy is stronger, reintegration programmes can wind down sooner.

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<sup>23</sup> The 6 key – gender sensitive – initiatives are: public works investments; skills training, enterprise development, production of statistics and labour market information, the promotion of social dialogue and strengthening of the labour administration, and the revival of agriculture.

#### **4- SECURING SPACE FROM FIRE FIGHTING**

While issues of capacity and employment are very clearly at the top of the Government's agenda, it was also apparent from the interviews that underlying all of these issues is a common continuing tension. On the one hand the Government and its partners are struggling to do the best that they can now with the limited financial resources available and on the other hand, they are wanting to take time to assess and plan in order to do things in the most optimal fashion.

The pressure to deliver a peace dividend in the form of goods and services, and a cleaned-up institutional apparatus is immense. After two years of relative peace under the transitional Government, the population has high expectations and is looking for the new Government to provide more than a just peace. Under constant pressure to deliver, the Government is not finding the time that it would like ensure a more thought out or strategic approach to recovery. Instead they feel very much that they are constantly "fighting fires." As such, while in most countries interventions often start with a policy statement, this has not recently been the case in Liberia because of the rate of deterioration and the urgent need to get things moving again.

Immediately upon coming into office, the government developed a '150-Day Action Plan' (GoL, 2007).<sup>24</sup> This included actions and activities to be completed in first six months, and also some longer term activities that were to be initiated. The plan was developed around four pillars: Enhancing Peace and Security, Revitalizing Economy, Rebuilding Infrastructure and Providing Basic Services, Strengthening Governance and Rule of Law. An analysis of the types of actions implemented reveals that they fell into either the 'cleaning up' category or were focused on the delivery of a peace dividend. For example:

##### **'Cleaning up':**

- Establish fully functioning cash management committee
- Dismiss all NTGL political appointees from MoF
- Complete vetting of MoF staff on payroll against census
- Cancel all forest sector concessions
- Reactivate money management committee
- Clarify customs and excise duty/tariff rates and consistently charge legal rates
- Patch and repair major roads
- Review all contracts entered into by the NTGL
- Nullification of all concessions granted by NTGL with a view to re-awarding through transparent competition
- Empowered Bureau of Inspection Valuation Assessment and Control to execute pre-shipment/ destination inspections

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<sup>24</sup> Available at <http://allafrica.com/peaceafrica/resources/view/00010785.pdf>

### **Peace Dividend:**

- Food for work initiative aimed at community development
- Electricity to Monrovia
- Rebuilding and repair of schools
- Publication in press of Ministers' declared assets
- Inaugurated Truth and Reconciliation Commission
- Rebuilt bridges and roads
- Completed recruitment and training of 300 police
- Rehabilitated prisons

During the first 150 days, and indeed up until today, the Government has simply had neither the time nor the human capacity to dedicate what it believes would be sufficient attention to developing its own recovery framework. Indeed, during an interview, one senior government official used the expression that “*programmes are running ahead of policy*” to describe the scenario since the elections. There are barely enough resources to deal with the priority issues of the day – the delivery of goods and the essential cleaning up. To reallocate time, personnel and money, could, in the Government’s view, be misinterpreted as a withdrawal of attention from the meeting the population’s needs -- and could in the worst case scenario, jeopardize stability.

It is also important to note that in a perfect world, the Government would need dedicate significant time to debate and negotiate in order to arrive at important policy decisions. In both the House of Representatives and the Senate, the Liberian President’s Unity Party has only 13 per cent of the seats, and therefore a consensus must be built around policies before they can be moved forward.

The consequence of limited resources is that whatever policy dialogue and strategic planning that does in fact take place is often led by external partners. In Liberia this has been through processes such as the Post-Conflict Needs Assessment (PCNA) during the transition period, and with the new government the staff monitored programme with the IMF, the MDG costing exercises and the Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy drafting process.<sup>25</sup> That these processes are led by externals, is not to say that they are wrong, or not in tune with the country’s needs – but just that, the directions in which the country moves are not always those that are crafted by the Government, and therefore they do not feel as nationally owned as would be optimal.

From the laundry list of possible recovery or development interventions needed in Liberia, tough decisions need to be made with limited resources. Prioritization should be the primary responsibility of Government, however the general feeling is that these decisions are being made more by development partners than by the national policy makers themselves.

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<sup>25</sup> The MDG costing is yet to be published (as of October 2007), the PCNA is available on the UNDG website at [http://www.undg.org/archive\\_docs/8886-Liberia\\_PCNA\\_Case\\_Study.doc](http://www.undg.org/archive_docs/8886-Liberia_PCNA_Case_Study.doc), while the iPRSP can be found at [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPRS1/Resources/LIBERIA-IPRSP\(Jan16-2006\).pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPRS1/Resources/LIBERIA-IPRSP(Jan16-2006).pdf)

In terms of capacity and employment – if the Government had more ownership of the recovery process, or was able to assert its priorities more effectively -- then we could expect some changes to the way programmes are implemented: For example:

- Capacity Building: Would expect the programmes to not face the funding challenges, and would expect the GEMAP programme to already be better integrated into wider reforms – with a greater emphasis on transferring knowledge to national counterparts
- Employment: Would expect to see more programmes targeting employment today. There were some quite heated debates between donors and Government as the DDRR process came to an end in 2006/7 – concerning the treatment of those combatants not yet in sustainable employment.

In the case of Liberia , it specially interesting that despite the numerous assessments and strategic planning exercises that have been conducted since the CPA in 2003, the national authorities still feel very strongly that not enough time has been dedicated to policy debate and design. This suggests that the processes such as the post-conflict needs assessment, the MDG needs assessment and the iPRSP, while in-depth and rigorous, may have been too heavily driven by international partners.

All processes included the formation of sector working groups, and national consultations with Government and civil society, and in the case of the iPRSP cross-sectional national consultations were even held at the county and regional level. However, for some reason these efforts did not get deep enough into the institutional decision making apparatus. Capacity can again be attributed as part of the reason. Despite efforts to consult nationally there is a feeling that given time pressures and a lack of overall capacity, vision of the iPRSP was somewhat centralized in the Ministry of Planning. Staff capacity shortages in the Ministry also meant that external assistance was provided to help consolidate inputs from stakeholders and to draft the report.

The processes are all however important steps on funding partners' radars – for example an iPRSP is a necessary first step in the process of developing a PRSP, a precondition for and securing HIPC financing, and likewise the MDGs are strategically sensible goals for any Government wanting to mobilize external funds. While these tools are supposed to be the place for Government to lay out its plans for development, it would appear that in Liberia they have indeed laid out plans for development, but these are not necessarily the Government's plans.

## SUMMING UP

What I heard from ‘the trenches’ was, almost as would be expected in any post-conflict country – that there is an urgent capacity deficit in government that needs to be addressed and that employment opportunities are perhaps the single most important factor for sustaining the fragile peace.

Development partners and the government have indeed been working closely together to build a functioning civil service and to put ex-combatants through reintegration programmes. While challenges remain in these areas for example with determining what to do with the un-reintegrated or unemployed ex-combatants, or with funding civil service posts, on the whole partnership is good.

Less encouraging were the perceptions around ownership, and suggestions that the Government is not yet in the driver’s seat. Perhaps the two biggest indications are that first, GEMAP exists as it was initially intended. It exists in the form in which it was designed during the transition period, by development partners, when it was thrust on the NTGL after significant international pressure. The result today is that there are tensions between the international experts and their Government agencies, and external experts, through their counter-signatory authority, maintain veto power over the elected Government.

Second, despite the numerous policy planning exercises that have taken place from the PCNA, to the MDG assessment to the iPRSP, national leaders still feel that *“programmes have been running ahead of policy.”*

For example, for some reason the consultations that took place under the RSP were not considered by Government leaders to have been a sufficient forum to count as a national policy dialogue exercise. Liberians still feel that they need a forum in which to lay out what Liberians want for Liberia. If the UN and international partners are serious about capacity building and supporting Liberia’s recovery, then they need to be serious about building not only the technocratic capacity to deliver and manage, but also the capacity to own and therefore in supporting national dialogue of a form designed by national partners.

History has shown that recovery and development require sustainable reforms, and that these are dependent on national ownership of the policies that drive the reform. If this capacity for ownership is not fostered in Liberia, the impressive reforms that are taking place today will rest on thin foundations indeed.

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**ANNEX: LIST OF SENIOR OFFICIALS INTERVIEWED**

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Mr. Olubanke King-Akerele	Minister of Commerce and Industry
Dr. C. William Allen	Director General, Civil Service Agency
Dr. Toga G. McIntosh	Minister of Planning and Economic Affairs
Dr. Femi Badejo	Senior Political Affairs Officer, UNMIL
Mr. Michael Tharkur	IMF Resident Representative
Erin McCandless	Peace-building and conflict resolution, UNMIL
Dr. Laurence Clarke	Economic Advisor to the President Liberia Reconstruction and Development Committee
Comfort Ero	Office of the SRSG
Reverend Jervis Witherspoon	Executive Director, National Commission on Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (NCDDRR)

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