



Development
Progress

Case Study Report
Security



**PROGRESS IN
SMALL STEPS**
Security against
the odds in
Liberia

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Cover image: Graduates of the police academy in Liberia. Under President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, the country has set quotas for recruiting more women into both its police force and army.
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Contents

Acknowledgements	5
Abbreviations	5
Abstract	6
1. Introduction	7
1.1 Politics, development and conflict in Liberia	8
1.2 About this case study report	9
2. What progress has been achieved?	12
2.1 Decreased armed conflict and political violence	12
2.2 People feel safer and more secure despite continued crime and violence	14
2.3 Generally improving perceptions of the police	17
3. What are the factors driving change?	20
3.1 A plurality of actors providing security at the local level	20
3.2 The role of UNMIL	24
3.3 Relatively stable political settlement	25
3.4 Security sector reform	29
3.5 The role of donor financing	31
4. What are the challenges?	35
4.1 Addressing potential conflict triggers	35
4.2 The gap in financing for security issues due to UNMIL drawdown	38
4.3 Implementing security sector reform	39
5. What lessons can we learn?	43
References	46

List of tables, figures and boxes

Tables

Table 1: Fear of crime at home	17
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Figures

Figure 1: Number of conflict events reported in Liberia, 1997-2013	13
Figure 2: Liberia: security against the odds	15
Figure 3: Change in overall personal safety	16
Figure 4: Change in level of violent crime	16
Figure 5: Trust in the police in urban and rural areas	19
Figure 6: Reliability of the police	19
Figure 7: Sources of security in Liberia	21
Figure 8: Best place to solve different types of disputes by category (%)	23
Figure 9: Total ODA to Liberia	32
Figure 10: Composition of total ODA to Liberia by sector	32
Figure 11: Regional comparison of multidimensional poverty	36
Figure 12: Government of Liberia: spending on security sector	38

Boxes

Box 1: Inequalities in security perceptions, experiences and provision	18
Box 2: An absence of security provision	21
Box 3: Different disputes, different security actors	23
Box 4: Background to UNMIL	24
Box 5: Challenges in obtaining data on SSR financing	33
Box 6: Challenges facing the JSJP as a mechanism for funding SSR	39
Box 7: Addressing widespread sexual and gender-based violence	42

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Abbreviations

ACLED	Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project	ODA	official development assistance
AFL	Armed Forces of Liberia	PBF	Peacebuilding Fund
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement	PER	public expenditure review
DDRR	disarmament, demobilisation, reintegration and rehabilitation	PPP	purchasing power parity
ERU	Emergency Response Unit	PRS	Poverty Reduction Strategy
FY	financial year	PSU	Police Support Unit
GEMAP	Governance and Economic Management Assistance Plan	SALW	small arms and light weapons
GDP	gross domestic product	SCSL	Special Court of Sierra Leone
GNI	gross national income	SGBV	sexual and gender-based violence
GoL	Government of Liberia	SJR	security and justice reform
HIPC	Heavily Indebted Poor Countries	SSR	security sector reform
IIAG	Ibrahim Index of African Governance	TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
JSJP	Joint Security and Justice Programme	UNDP	UN Development Programme
JSTF	Justice and Security Trust Fund	UNMIL	UN Mission in Liberia
LDHS	Demographic and Health Survey	UNPOL	UN Police
LNP	Liberia National Police	UNSCR	UN Security Council resolution
NGO	non-governmental organisation	WHO	World Health Organization
NTGL	National Transitional Government of Liberia	WIPNET	Women in Peacebuilding Network

Abstract

Since the end of several years of armed conflict and extreme insecurity in 2003, Liberia has experienced an end to large-scale organised violence, and seen improvements in the experiences and perceptions of a wide range of other forms of violence. Perceptions of the police generally appear to have improved, and the Liberian population increasingly sees police officers as a source of protection rather than insecurity, despite some ongoing allegations of excessive force and corruption.

This case study analyses the extent of progress in achieving security in Liberia, focusing specifically on changes in personal safety. Five key factors are identified as having played a central role in driving the changes witnessed in Liberia: the coexistence of a plurality of actors providing security at the local level; the role of the UN peacekeeping mission in Liberia; a relatively stable political settlement; security sector reform; and considerable donor funding and technical support.

Despite the improvements, Liberia continues to face overwhelming challenges. Violence and crime remain genuine threats in the daily life of many Liberians, and sexual violence in particular remains widespread.

Many potential conflict triggers still exist, ranging from unequal socioeconomic development, limitations in the disarmament, demobilisation, reintegration and rehabilitation process, conflict over land rights and resource management, and limited progress on issues of political corruption and reconciliation. There are also concerns around the Government of Liberia's ability to finance security provision following the eventual drawdown of the peacekeeping mission, as well as the impact and sustainability of the security sector reform process. It is vital that the Government of Liberia and its international partners fully address these challenges as the window of opportunity to consolidate the progress in security may be closing, increasing the risks of a potential resumption of mass violence and insecurity.

Nevertheless, Liberia's story may be of relevance to other countries negotiating their own post-conflict transitions. Lessons can be drawn from Liberia's experience in building post-conflict personal security, particularly in terms of the role the international community can play in relation to peacekeeping, financing progress in security, and supporting security and justice reform in the aftermath of violent conflict.



UN peacekeepers near Bomi Blue Lake, Liberia. Photo: © jbdodane.com.

1. Introduction

Personal security is an essential part of wellbeing and development. Better security enables people to invest in their futures and engage in livelihood activities, and helps governments and other agencies to deliver public services. International efforts to put security issues on the development agenda have resulted in increased donor funding and commitment to peacekeeping efforts, as well as for conflict prevention strategies including security and justice reform (SJR) in post-conflict states (World Bank, 2011; Sedra, 2010). However, what security is, who it is for and who should provide it remain contested questions, and even where there is progress on these issues in fragile and conflict-affected states, it is often fraught with challenges relating to equity and sustainability.

In this case study report, we present an analysis of Liberia's progress in security since 2003, after 14 years of civil conflict. We focus on improvements in personal security, understood as *personal safety from physical threat and fear of physical threat*.¹ Our findings suggest a mixed and complex picture. On the one hand, Liberia has avoided a return to civil war, and instances of state-led, collective and political violence have declined. Given the nature and scale of the violence experienced during Liberia's previous conflicts, this is remarkable and is an essential precursor to improvements in personal security. Successive elections in 2005 and 2011 and the gradual drawdown of the UN peacekeeping mission have taken place without any major outbreaks of collective violence, and this has fuelled international expectations that Liberia is increasingly stable and able to take on responsibility for providing security to its citizens (Conciliation Resources, 2012).

On the other hand, despite some important improvements, violence and crime remain genuine threats in the daily life of many Liberians. For example, crime rates, particularly in Monrovia, are high, and sexual violence remains widespread. Despite this, most people's perceptions of the police have improved, but concerns remain about widespread allegations of corruption and low capacity to respond to security incidents. This mixed picture also appears to shape people's perceptions of security. While some studies point to improved perceptions

of individual and community safety and security (Vinck et al., 2011; Small Arms Survey, 2011a; Blair et al., 2011), our interviews highlight that there appears to be increasing fear about the future of peace in Liberia and growing disillusionment with the post-conflict development process.

Discussing 'progress' in post-conflict settings can be uncomfortable, and the very label of 'progress' may misrepresent the reality of many post-conflict countries where people face continued political, social and economic inequalities and ongoing violence (Valters et al., 2014). However, highlighting and explaining these gains alongside the continuing challenges can in fact be vital to learning lessons for the future. Liberia's story may be of relevance to other countries facing multiple and competing challenges in post-conflict scenarios. We hope that lessons can be drawn from Liberia's experience in building post-conflict personal security, particularly in terms of the role the international community can play in relation to peacekeeping, financing progress in security and supporting SJR in the aftermath of violent conflict.

This case study is guided by three key questions:

- What progress has Liberia achieved in personal security?
- What factors are driving these changes?
- What challenges remain to improve personal security?

As we shall show, the progress achieved to date is the result of a diverse range of factors: the coexistence of various formal and informal actors able to provide security and resolve disputes at the individual and community levels; a strong and symbolic UN peacekeeping force; relative political stability; the strong and sustained financial support of the international community; and, to a lesser extent, ongoing reform of the security sector. However, major challenges remain that threaten the future of personal security in Liberia. These are related to the unaddressed drivers of conflict, challenges facing the Government of Liberia (GoL) in its efforts to maintain security, and flaws and limitations in the SJR process. Importantly, it appears that while there is currently a window of opportunity that could be seized to consolidate improvements in security,

'There is improvement in personal security... if you understand where we came from before 2003... there is remarkable improvement. We are good at forgetting where we used to be, expectations are so high, but there is progress' – Head of NGO, based in Monrovia

1 This takes its inspiration from human security, and is citizen-centred, but is narrowed from a fuller definition, which would incorporate health, education or political voice (Valters et al., 2014). This is not to deny the importance of the broad range of threats that people can face, or to downplay the clear links personal security has with other dimensions of wellbeing. However, for our purposes, a narrower definition of security is necessary in order to trace progress in a complex setting.

this window may be beginning to close. Furthermore, addressing the many ongoing challenges will be essential if a reversal of the gains and a potential resumption of mass violence and insecurity are to be avoided.

1.1 Politics, development and conflict in Liberia

Liberia grew out of a settler colony established by freed slaves returned to Africa from the United States of America. With support of the American Colonization Society, the settlers (also referred to as Americo-Liberians), who represented a minority of the population, declared the country a sovereign state on 26 July 1847.² Studies on the early formation of Liberia illustrate the control the elite had over the economy and the socio-political marginalisation of the other 16 ‘indigenous’ ethnic groups.³ The roots of Liberia’s conflict can be traced back to this widespread political, social and economic exclusion instituted at the founding of the state (Ellis, 1999; Utas, 2003; Moran, 2006; Sawyer, 2005). While Liberia was nominally free from colonial domination, it ‘was markedly colonial in its social presumptions, and in the dynamic of its political life’ (Brown, 1982: 480). This led to the development of a dual administration system in Liberia, with customary rules governing the majority living in the ‘hinterland’ and state rules governing the urban areas (Jaye, 2009). This played an important role in shaping security and justice in the country, and continues to do so today. Between 1980 and 2003, successive leaders kept power, decision-making and resources highly centralised and distributed them on the basis of patronage networks (Rocha Menocal and Sigrist, 2011; Sawyer, 2005).

The trajectory of Liberia’s economic development was also exclusionary, despite the potential of the country’s vast natural resource wealth. Historically, the Liberian economy has been divided into two, with a traditional agrarian economy managed by urban-based elites, and an enclave economy driven by raw-material-led export growth that brought little benefit to the average Liberian. The 1926 agreement with Firestone Tire and Rubber Company to develop the world’s largest rubber plantation granted concessions for natural resource extraction and management to foreign investors that were equivalent to the ‘colonisation’ of the Liberian state’s own ungoverned hinterland (Rocha Menocal and Sigrist, 2011). Wealth from these resources primarily flowed into the hands of the few privileged Americo-Liberians and foreign investors, with minimal benefits to the majority of the population. There was also little state investment in the physical

and social infrastructure of roads, agriculture, health or education, particularly in rural areas that were not seen as being of strategic value to the elite. This effectively prevented equitable growth and development in large parts of the country, and contributed to growing dissatisfaction among the population (GoL, 2009).

During the 1970s, popular uprisings against the Americo-Liberian establishment began to take place. In the early to mid 1970s, for example, university students from both indigenous heritage and Americo-Liberian backgrounds led protest marches, street demonstrations and political rallies campaigning for social justice.⁴ While there was some open space for political activism during this time, state security forces also began to be used as an instrument of repression and fear. This eventually turned into a culture of political violence that was continued and deepened by various warring parties during Liberia’s two civil wars (1989-1996 and 1999-2003).

The exact path to the outbreak of war is complex and beyond the scope of this study (see Sawyer, 2005). However, one of the clearest visible beginnings of violence came in 1979, when riots following an increase in rice prices were brutally repressed by the Tolbert government. In 1980, exactly one year after the Rice Riots, President Tolbert was killed in a violent coup d’état led by army Master Sergeant Samuel Doe. As an indigenous Liberian, Doe’s rise to the presidency was initially celebrated, but this was short-lived as his unwillingness to instigate real reform and his exploitation of ethnicity-driven politics became apparent. Widespread ethnic-based killings, especially of the political opposition, and a growing climate of fear and dissatisfaction sowed the seeds for the eventual outbreak of fighting in 1989.

Charles Taylor, who served briefly as Director General for the General Services Agency under Doe’s administration, had fled the country on charges of embezzlement in 1983. However, drawing on ethnic grievances and with some initial support he returned and invaded Liberia from the Côte d’Ivoire in December 1989, marking the start of Liberia’s first civil war. Following the brutal execution of President Doe in September 1990 and several subsequent failed peace agreements, the number of warring factions mushroomed and contributed to increased violence in the early 1990s. In 1996, the Abuja Peace Accords led to the purportedly democratic election of Charles Taylor as president in 1997. However, in reality, he assumed power amid a climate of violence and repression of the civilian population (Ellis, 1999: 109).

Under Taylor, power became even more heavily centralised and the spoils of war were distributed amongst a close inner circle (Sawyer, 2005). The pattern of political

2 The Americo-Liberian elite never exceeded 5% of the population.

3 These groups are: Bassa, Belle, Dey, Gbandi, Gio, Gola, Grebo, Kissi, Kpelle, Krahn, Kru, Lorma, Mandingo, Mando, Mende and Vai.

4 For example, the *Revelation Magazine* was edited and published by students from an Americo-Liberian background.

assassinations and violence that emerged after Taylor's election also triggered a new wave of exiles. As rebel groups gained control of a large part of the country outside Monrovia, a particularly brutal phase of the second civil war began. During this time, the population suffered untold abuses and violence and the state actors who were meant to provide security were in fact often a source of the insecurity. One of the tactics of the warring parties was to force combatants, often child soldiers, to attack their own families and communities as a way of breaking down trust among the population. During this time, personal security was non-existent for the vast majority of Liberians.

The Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) estimated that 250,000 people were killed by the conflicts, and one million were displaced out of a total population of approximately three million (GoL, 2009). The TRC further determined that all parties to the conflict committed extreme acts of violence against civilians, including torture, rape and indiscriminate beating, killing and abduction. A survey conducted by the International Committee of the Red Cross in 2009 reveals that during the civil wars in Liberia, the vast majority of respondents were forced to leave their home (90%), lost contact with a close relative (86%), had their home looted (83%), or lost a family member (69%). Liberians further reported that they were humiliated (55%), tortured (45%), had somebody close to them fall victim to sexual violence (51%), and were physically wounded by the fighting (40%) (ICRC, 2009: 10). Another study carried out in 2010 revealed that nearly four out of five people (78%) consider themselves to have been a victim of the civil wars (Vinck et al., 2011).

This widespread violence and insecurity destroyed infrastructure and institutions, displaced and damaged the social fabric of communities, eroded individual and household assets, disrupted service delivery and led to a breakdown of trust within and between communities. The fighting also wrought havoc with Liberia's development prospects. For example, iron ore production ceased, public provision of electricity, water and sewerage facilities was severely reduced, and what road networks existed fell into disrepair. A former middle-income country, Liberia saw its gross domestic product (GDP) fall by over 90% between 1987 and 1995, one of the largest economic collapses in the world since World War II (Radelet, 2007: 1). Crucially, the years of violent conflict brought a high degree of insecurity at the individual, community and national levels that impacted negatively on all aspects of the population's lives and made the need for peace and stability in the country particularly urgent.

International pressure, Taylor's indictment by the Special Court of Sierra Leone for his involvement in supporting conflict there, and the fact that two key rebel groups were advancing rapidly on Monrovia, all resulted in Taylor accepting an offer of asylum from Nigeria in August 2003.⁵ This led to the official end of the conflict, marked by the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) on 18 August 2003 and the formation of the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL).⁶ The CPA contained provisions for the NTGL as an interim power-sharing agreement until the holding of democratic elections, which the international community and some Liberians wanted to take place as quickly as possible to solidify Liberia's path to democracy (Freedom House, 2012). The NTGL led the first efforts to address institutional reform and oversaw the unfolding of the TRC process. Another key development following the signing of the CPA was the establishment of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) by UN Security Council Resolution 1509 in September 2003. UNMIL had the mandate to monitor the ceasefire agreement and support implementation of the CPA, including contributing to security sector reform in the country. The peacekeeping mission was initially authorised for 15,000 military personnel and 1,115 civilian and police officers. The signing of the CPA and subsequent deployment of UNMIL marks the beginning of Liberia's improvements in personal security, which we explore in this report.

1.2 About this case study report

The research team comprised international and Liberia-based researchers who analysed available primary and secondary data and literature, and conducted fieldwork in Monrovia during March and April 2014. The team conducted 32 semi-structured informant interviews with: independent experts and academics specialising in security in Liberia, donors active in the sector, and representatives of local and international NGOs, as well as police and GoL representatives in Monrovia. Interviews were also held with government and donor representatives involved in financing security reforms. Due to time limitations, fieldwork and interviews were conducted only in Monrovia. Given the important differences in provision and perceptions of security within and outside Monrovia, however, our research draws on testimonies from our Monrovia-based respondents, as well as available data and literature based on research outside the capital. In order to capture a more complete and nuanced picture of how

5 The Special Court of Sierra Leone (SCSL) was established in 2002 to investigate those who bore the greatest responsibility for the violence experienced during that country's own civil war. Charles Taylor was formally indicted by the SCSL in April 2003 for his role in supporting the Revolutionary United Front forces.

6 For the full text, see: Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the Government of Liberia and the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) and Political Parties, Accra, Ghana, August 18, 2003, http://www.usip.org/library/pa/liberia/liberia_08182003_toc.html.

Liberians have experienced personal security between 2003 and the present, we consider both incidences of various forms of crime and violence and perceptions around violence, insecurity and security institutions. Wherever possible, the data obtained from existing surveys, opinion polls and global indices are triangulated with interviews and evidence from the literature to provide a robust picture of Liberia's progress to date.

It is, however, important to highlight the difficulties in obtaining reliable and up-to-date data on personal security in Liberia. In many cases, data were collected a number of years ago, and therefore may not reflect important developments (and setbacks) relating to personal security that have occurred since then. Our interview data compensate in part for this; however, the limitations of the available data must be acknowledged at the outset. Assessing progress in personal security in Liberia is difficult due to a lack of countrywide and longitudinal data. Even the most basic demographic data are hard to find, and the census carried out in 2008 was the first such undertaking in over 20 years. Limited data exist on the levels, patterns and drivers of conflict in Liberia, as well as on Liberians' perceptions of the security sector, particularly in areas outside the capital with limited UN or police presence (Blair et al., 2011: 1).

These data-collection challenges are not unique to Liberia, as personal security and incidence of violence are difficult to quantify and measure, and national statistics departments in fragile and conflict-affected regions seldom collect routine data and often have limited capacity. This means that most indicators on personal safety and security lack a reliable baseline. Where data are available, the story behind the numbers is as important as the data. For instance, an increase in reported crimes may reflect growing willingness to report crime or greater accessibility of the police, rather than an increase in crime itself. This means it is also important to consider perceptions of changing patterns of violence and security.

The remainder of this report is organised into four sections. The following section describes the progress that Liberia has achieved in personal security since 2003, focusing on changes in the incidence of violence and the perceptions of security and safety among the population. Section 3 analyses the key factors that have influenced and driven Liberia's progress in these areas. Section 4 explores the challenges that remain, and addresses the many caveats and limitations on the progress described in Section 3. Finally, Section 5 provides some conclusions and sets out policy lessons that can be drawn from this case study.



At B'hai Jozon, on the eastern Liberian border with Côte d'Ivoire. Photo: © Travis Lupick.

2. What progress has been achieved?

In the 11 years since the end of the civil war in 2003, Liberia has witnessed some key improvements in personal security. Most notably, with the signing of the CPA, armed-conflict-related and political violence declined significantly. Despite some exceptions during the 2005 and 2011 elections, the relative absence of armed and political violence throughout the country over the past decade has dramatically improved the personal security of Liberians. Given the nature and scale of Liberia's conflict – and the persistence of many of the drivers of that conflict – this is the most important dimension of this progress story. In terms of other forms of conflict, crime and violence, the picture is rather mixed, with insecurity remaining a concern in many urban areas, particularly Monrovia. The threat of armed robbery and assault persists, and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) continues to be widespread with limited access to justice for victims. However, despite the various other forms of collective and interpersonal violence that persist, there is some indication that they are decreasing and most of the population appears to feel increasingly safe and secure. Perceptions of security institutions and the relationship between the police and citizens do appear to be improving and may continue to do so over time, yet the police are still perceived by many as unwilling or unable to fulfil their role effectively in providing public security. While Liberians' perceptions of their own safety and security appear to have improved since the end of the war, this also goes hand in hand with rising, but largely unmet, expectations and concerns for the future.

In order to unpack the progress achieved in Liberia since 2003, we therefore focus on the following dimensions of personal security:

- decreased armed conflict and political violence
- perception of increased safety and security despite continued crime and violence
- gradually improving public opinion of the police.

2.1 Decreased armed conflict and political violence

The signing of the CPA brought an immediate reduction in the level of armed-conflict-related violence, clearly having a positive impact on the personal security of Liberians, particularly in areas that were badly affected by war-related fighting. According to the Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG), Liberia was considerably safer and more secure in 2012 than in 2003, with notable reductions in cross-border tensions and domestic armed conflict. Liberia has converged with the African average on this category, and is the country showing the most progress since 2003. In particular, Liberia has demonstrated the single largest improvement in safety and the rule of law and the second-largest improvement in national security in sub-Saharan Africa over the period measured.⁷ Similarly, the Fragile States Index finds that there has been some improvement in safety and security in Liberia between 2006 and 2014, with Liberia moving from being one of the top 10 most fragile countries in 2005 to its current position of 24th out of 178 countries (Fragile States Index, 2014).⁸ While regional and global indices can only provide a broad overview, which may mask significant ongoing challenges, these results do illustrate the security gains brought about by the end of large-scale violence in Liberia in 2003.

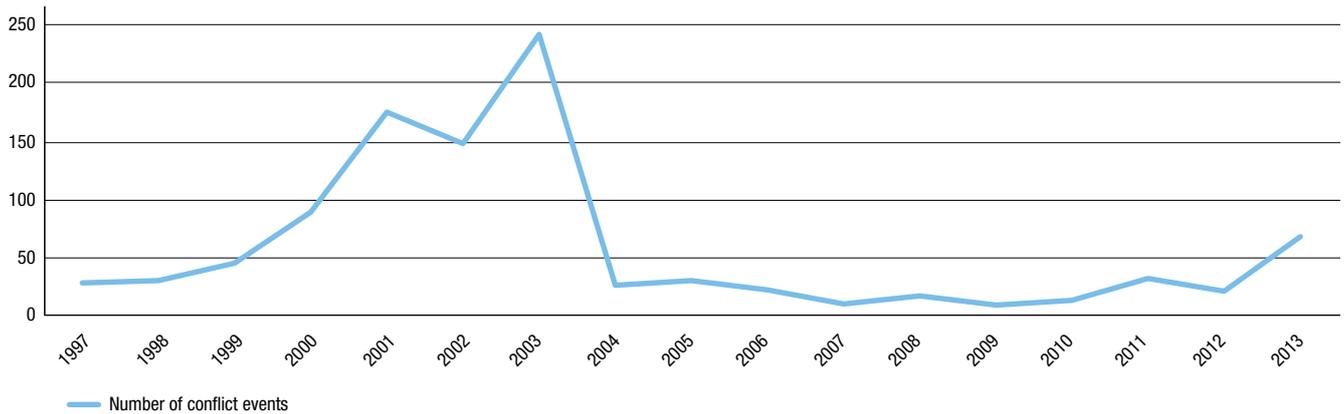
Since UNMIL's deployment in 2003, the peacekeeping mission's situation reports provide a valuable source of data on conflict and violence in Liberia. These show that large-scale riots, bombings and other politically motivated violence, formerly commonplace, have now become almost non-existent. Until 2004 there were also frequent ceasefire violations in the form of illegal checkpoints, but these no longer happen, other than as part of unofficial police actions (Small Arms Survey, 2011a). The state itself is now very rarely implicated in acts of violence against civilians on a large scale, such as extra-judicial killings. Although there

'We've come a long way since the civil war. Security has improved; people were being arrested off the street and being pushed into cars during the civil crisis and even during the reign of President Taylor. There has been much improvement in freedom of speech, citizens can express and freely speak on air. During the days, it is safe; you're free to walk around' – Civil society leader, Monrovia

7 Methodology, data and country analysis based on the Ibrahim Index of African Governance can be accessed at <http://www.moibrahimfoundation.org>.

8 Methodology, data and country analysis based on the Fragile States Index can be accessed at <http://ffp.statesindex.org>.

Figure 1: Number of conflict events reported in Liberia, 1997-2013



Source: ACLED data.

were reports of some incidents of unrest instigated by ex-combatants, who were disgruntled due to the slow progress made with respect to reintegration and rehabilitation benefits following the signing of the CPA, these declined over subsequent years (UNSC, 2007a, 2007b).

The decreasing level of conflict-related and political violence is also supported by the data collected by the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), providing information on reported conflict events between January 1997 and 2011 in 50 countries, including Liberia.⁹ Conciliation Resources (2012: 13) highlight that 'there was a dramatic drop in the recorded incidence of conflict events between 2003 and 2004'. The ACLED data show a continued lower level of conflict events between 2003 and 2010, but a rise in 2010, and a particularly sharp increase between 2012 and 2013 (Figure 1). Our focus group discussion with civil society members in Monrovia confirmed this latter increase in conflict events, which may be linked to isolated incidents witnessed at the time of the 2011 elections and the growing discontent among the population about the slow pace of development and governance reforms.

The majority of events recorded most recently have been protests and/or demonstrations by various groups relating to issues as diverse as corruption, poor working conditions and a perceived failure to deal with specific crimes or abuses. UNMIL reports also note that public expressions of dissatisfaction with national authorities by different sectors have recently been a dominant feature of the political environment (UNSC, 2014a). For example, a demonstration on 26 March 2013 occurred when approximately 1,000 Muslims protested against a

petition to make Liberia 'a Christian nation', and on 26 April 2012, approximately 1,000 students demonstrated at the campus of the University of Liberia over alleged corruption in the university's administration.¹⁰ However, the fact that both these incidents – and many others – have remained relatively peaceful could in itself be viewed as an important step towards peace and improved security, in terms of freedom of people to protest without fear of the state responding with violence. This does not suggest that all demonstrations are without violence, however. For example, on 22 March 2011 the police brutally dispersed a youth demonstration, leading to the establishment of a Presidential Committee to investigate the matter. Furthermore, perhaps the most serious security incident in recent years occurred on 3 July 2014, when around 500 people protested against ArcelorMittal iron ore company in Nimba County. The demonstration escalated into a clash between protesters and security forces and resulted in the arrest of 57 people (UNSC, 2014b).

Elections can be a useful barometer of progress in the security situation in a country, given the risk of political mobilisation leading to potentially violent consequences. Overall, the two recent post-conflict elections in Liberia have been relatively peaceful, despite some minor incidents such as a violent clash in Monrovia in November 2011 between security forces and supporters of the Congress for Democratic Change that resulted in one death (US State Department, 2012a). In Liberia, most political parties have employed former commanders as election campaigners and mobilisers, as well as for providing security to party members (Utas, 2011). The continued existence of these networks and the willingness of politicians to draw on

9 The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) collects information on all reported political violence events in over 50 developing countries. The data are derived from reports from developing countries and local media, humanitarian agencies and research publications. A politically violent event is a single altercation where often force is used by one or more groups for a political end, although some instances – including protests and non-violent activity – are included to capture the potential precursors or critical junctures of a conflict. See www.acleddata.com.

10 A range of other, smaller demonstrations are often held, including by motorcyclists, teachers, students and former Armed Forces of Liberia soldiers seeking payment of benefits. See UNSC (2013).

them may hold the potential for a resurgence of violence, but this has not happened.

Ultimately, given the legacy of violence associated with both state and non-state actors during the war, the end of violence directly related to the armed conflict and the limited extent of political violence over the past decade have been critical factors in terms of improving the day-to-day experiences of Liberians. These improvements have taken place despite the population's growing dissatisfaction with the political environment, the large number of ex-combatants with dormant but functioning command structures and networks and the continued high prevalence of small arms and light weapons (SALW). These factors could provide fertile ground for a resurgence of conflict; yet, as a conflict assessment carried out by the US government in 2011 found, 'Although there are several grievances held by many different identity groups throughout Liberia, there is a low level of conflict currently in Liberia. The majority of Liberians interviewed stated that they would like to remain at peace and are not interested in inciting or participating in violence' (US State Department, 2012a: 1).

2.2 People feel safer and more secure despite continued crime and violence

Despite the end of the armed conflict and the decrease in political violence highlighted above, it is clear that other forms of crime, violence and insecurity remain in differing degrees throughout Liberia. Assessing progress in these areas is particularly challenging given the lack of accurate and representative data on incidence and prevalence. We have therefore relied on the macro-level trends evidence in various global and regional indices (as above), and on a range of research studies and surveys carried out mainly between 2009 and 2011.

The chart within Figure 2 ('The Progress Made on Security') depicts the general sense of safety of people throughout Liberia. From the data that exist, it seems that, despite ongoing concerns about crime, there have been some positive improvements in overall personal security at various times. A number of key informants interviewed by the Small Arms Survey confirmed that there had been a relative decline in violent incidents, which is in line with the fact that most respondents also reported that neighbourhood security was better or much better

compared with the previous year (Small Arms Survey, 2011a: 6). According to another countrywide survey, 59% of respondents reported an improvement in overall security over the one-year period prior to the survey in 2010, and another 37% said the safety situation had stayed the same, while only 4% reported that the situation had worsened (Vinck et al., 2011). Although data from the Liberia National Police (LNP) covering 2012-2013 reveal a 20.2% increase in crimes reported, this does not necessarily mean that there is more crime; it could also be due to improved ability and willingness to report.¹¹

Liberia's relative improvements against the IIAG's measures of personal safety have been the largest of any country in sub-Saharan Africa since 2000 (Figure 3, overleaf).¹² Liberia's progress on personal safety has not been without setbacks, however, as it experienced a decline in its score between 2010 and 2012, which also aligns with the rise in incidents in the ACLED data highlighted above. This appears to coincide with growing discontent about the slow pace of post-war improvements in security and development outcomes. In terms of the IIAG's measure of violent crime, Liberia also improved during the period 2007-2012, and since 2006 has demonstrated a significantly better performance than other African fragile states (Figure 4, overleaf).

Distinguishing between the different types of crime and violence that Liberians experience is essential in understanding how the security context has changed since the end of the war. A report on violence based on data collected in 2010 (Small Arms Survey, 2011b) highlights that the security concerns most frequently identified by Liberians are crime and street violence (20.2%), followed by concerns about violence against women (16.9%), land disputes (14.9%), attacks on households (14.5%), armed groups (10.1%) and violence against children (9.2%). Together, these issues constitute the bulk of safety concerns, or 85.8% of the sample. Data from the LNP show that the most common crimes reported during 2012-2013 were: 2,383 incidents of property theft (34%), 1,258 incidents of simple assault (18%) and 559 incidents of aggravated assault (7.9%).¹³ While this police data tells us little about political or state-related violence (since it seems unlikely citizens would report these to the police), overall it appears relatively clear that the nature of crime and violence has changed during the post-conflict transition.

11 Data obtained from source at the Liberia National Police, Monrovia, June 2014.

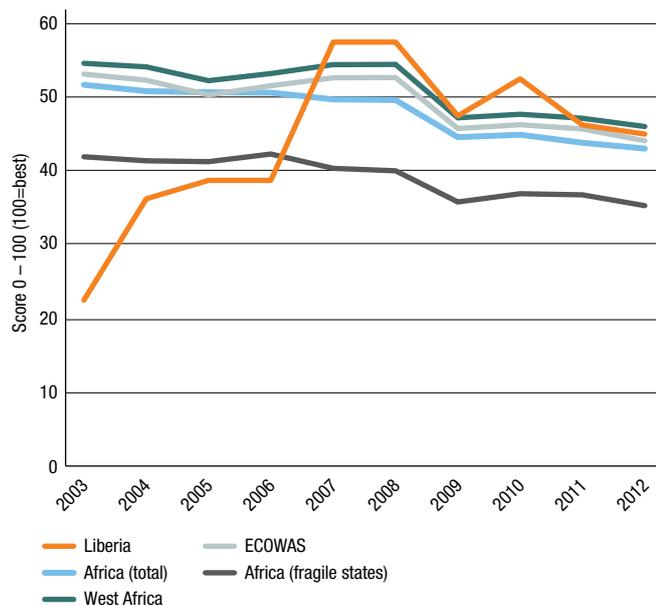
12 The measure of personal safety is derived from the following indicators: domestic political persecution, social unrest, safety of the person, reliability of police service, violent crime and human trafficking. The group of African fragile states is taken from the OECD, which has identified 47 states (24 within Africa) based on the World Bank-African Development Bank-Asian Development Bank harmonised list of fragile and post-conflict countries for 2012 and the 2011 Failed States Index (OECD, 2012: 17). The IIAG does not include South Sudan or Sudan due to lack of data, and so these have been excluded from this calculation.

13 Data obtained from source at the Liberia National Police, Monrovia, May 2014.

Figure 2: Liberia: security against the odds



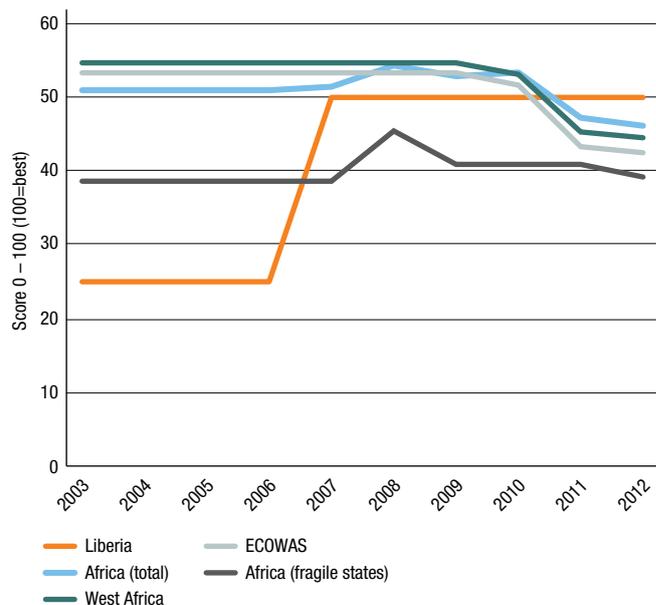
Figure 3: Change in overall personal safety



Source: authors' own. Data obtained from Ibrahim Index of African Governance.

Blair et al. (2011) provide one of the few in-depth studies on violence and conflict at the community level in Liberia. Based on data collected in early 2009 and late 2010, the findings of this study provide a useful illustrative snapshot of the levels of crime and violence across three rural counties: Lofa, Nimba and Grand Gedeh. It shows that not only was there a low level of crime and violence but, comparing early 2009 with early 2010, almost all measures of conflict appeared to be decreasing over time, in some cases dramatically. Reports of simple assault, aggravated assault and rape were all down by several percentage points, and while petty disputes and non-violent crime are endemic in rural Liberia, incidents of interpersonal and collective violence (assaults, mob violence, ritual killings) in these counties at the time of the study were rare. Furthermore, interpersonal violence was also found to be uncommon, particularly relating to armed violence, with only 4% of respondents in Grand Gedeh, 4% in Lofa and 5% in Nimba reporting having experienced violence involving a weapon in the past year. As already mentioned, the absence of the use of SALW is surprising in a country where the ratio of guns collected to combatants 'disarmed' was 1:5, implying a large number of SALW are still in circulation.¹⁴ This study provides important insights into the changing patterns of crime and

Figure 4: Change in level of violent crime



Source: authors' own. Data obtained from Ibrahim Index of African Governance.

violence in rural Liberia, albeit across only three specific locations, since the end of the war.

In research conducted in several urban areas in Liberia (including Monrovia) between late 2005 and mid-2006 (Basedau et al., 2007), survey respondents generally felt positive about their safety and security, with more than 60% of respondents rating the situation as 'okay' or 'very safe'. Just over a third felt differently; and 10.5% still thought the country was not safe at all. In the counties, four out of five respondents said that their community or neighbourhood was 'safe' or 'very safe'. However, in another survey on violence in Monrovia, more than half of the respondents described the safety in their immediate surroundings in either neutral or negative terms, probably indicating the greater prevalence of crime (and fear of crime) in urban settings (AOAV, 2011). When comparing the results from the 2008 and 2012 Afrobarometer surveys, it is possible to see a consistent decrease in fear of crime in the home over time for both rural and urban populations, as well as for both men and women (Table 1).

A more recent study, albeit limited to the south-east region (Grand Gedeh, Grand Kru, Maryland, River Gee and Sinoe), highlighted remarkable figures on safety. When asked 'How safe do you feel in your community?' a majority (68%) of respondents in the five counties

¹⁴ There is a range of scenarios that may explain where the weapons are or why the ratio was so high; for example: the weapons went across to neighbouring countries; the weapons remain but are under tight political control; it was a successful DDR process (although this seems unlikely); or a high number of combatants may have been demobilised who weren't truly combatants (this is likely to some extent due to the benefits associated with DDR processes). Fuerth (2011) highlights that overall the weapons most commonly used to inflict harm in Monrovia are bladed weapons, agricultural tools and homemade weapons. Information on the ratio of weapons collected to disarmed combatants was obtained from an interview with a UNMIL staff member, March 2014.

Table 1: Fear of crime at home*

	2008				2012			
	Urban	Rural	Men	Women	Urban	Rural	Men	Women
Never	42	65	55	54	53	74	63	66
Just once or twice	25	15	20	19	13	11	12	12
Several times	17	11	12	15	16	6	12	10
Many times	9	6	7	7	7	4	6	6
Always	7	3	5	5	10	5	7	7
Don't know	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Source: Afrobarometer Round 4 and Round 5

* 'Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family feared crime in your own home?' (percentage of respondents)

indicated they felt safe, while on average 18% considered their communities to be very safe. Only 6% of respondents reported that they did not feel safe and 1% felt not safe at all (Ministry of Internal Affairs, 2013). The differences in responses and limited geographic and chronological scope across these various surveys illustrate the difficulties in obtaining a consistent or definitive picture of security perceptions in Liberia as a whole, and point to the need to recognise that there are important inequalities in security perceptions, experiences and provision (Box 1, overleaf).

Relative progress can also be demonstrated by the weight Liberians attach to security concerns. The Small Arms Survey (2011a) reveals that more than four in five responses indicate broader socioeconomic or development-related concerns as the most pressing problems in the country, with security ranking as a lower priority than healthcare, education, transportation, sanitation, housing and electricity. Rounds 4 (2008) and 5 (2012) of the Afrobarometer survey also found that few people identified crime and security as the most important problems facing Liberia, with education, infrastructure and unemployment ranking much higher. Similar responses can be found in the *Talking Peace* report, which shows that many Liberians now prioritise improved social services over their immediate physical needs (Vinck et al., 2011: 27). In other post-conflict countries, such as neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire, security is a much higher priority, ranking second in the government-controlled southern region and fifth in the rebel-controlled northern region (Small Arms Survey, 2011a). While this is not to suggest that security is not still seen as a priority in Liberia – indeed perhaps it just points to how overwhelming underdevelopment is – it does indicate a lower level of emphasis on security than might be expected in a post-conflict or fragile country.

In terms of looking ahead, various perception surveys indicate a general positive feeling about Liberia's security

prospects for the future. In the *Talking Peace* survey (Vinck et al., 2011), 78% of respondents believed that safety would continue to improve in the foreseeable future, while 20% stated it would stay the same. Yet our qualitative interviews indicated a mix of more cautious and pessimistic attitudes towards the future as well, particularly in relation to the transition and UNMIL's departure, which is discussed in more detail in Section 4. Recent research by the Kofi Annan Institute for Conflict Transformation, which predominantly interviewed university students, indicated a great deal of scepticism about the ability of the police to maintain the peace after UNMIL's departure (KAICT, 2014). As one civil society member argued, 'with respect to departure of UNMIL ... we are still not to certain what will happen, it hasn't been tested. People are sceptical that the police can uphold rule of law.'¹⁵

2.3 Generally improving perceptions of the police

An increased feeling of safety also appears to be linked to improving confidence and trust in security actors. Historically, the police have often been responsible for murder and rape, not least through Charles Taylor's infamous 'Anti-Terrorist' Unit (Friedman and MacAulay, 2011: 2). From 1997 to 1999, the Taylor regime committed 357 politically related murders; and during the same period, 26 persons, mainly prominent civil society members, were arbitrarily arrested and detained (US State Department, 1999). Police often shot and killed suspects in custody and were responsible for other extra-judicial killings.

Now, most reports available indicate that, throughout the country, the Liberian police are rarely seen as perpetrators of mass violence, and that despite their history of violence and ongoing (and in some cases growing) concerns about corruption it appears there is a desire for

15 Interview with representative of an international NGO, Monrovia, 3 March 2014.

Box 1: Inequalities in security perceptions, experiences and provision

Progress in personal security can involve trade-offs, and even positive trends can be characterised by unequal distribution, with discrimination and marginalisation of poor people, women, slum-dwellers and minorities (Luckham, 2009: 3). Liberia is no exception in this respect, as geographic and gender-based differences in personal security remain. For example, in the Talking Peace report (Vinck et al., 2011), respondents were most pessimistic about both past and future improvement in the south-eastern part of the country that suffered repression and marginalisation, and was worst affected by the armed conflict. Development activities and infrastructure investments have also historically tended to prioritise other more accessible areas, which has provoked a sense of neglect and isolation among Liberians living in this part of the country. The numbers of police in this area also fell by one-third between 2007 and 2010, which LNP commanders argue is due to difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff due to poor pay, deployment to remote locations, competition from private security contractors, the lure of better training and opportunities in Monrovia, and hostility from local communities.

Research by Search for Common Ground (SFCG and SIPRI, 2011) also highlighted disparities in the perceptions of the LNP in Bong and Lofa counties, both of which revealed markedly more pessimism than those in other parts of the country. Reflecting the higher crime rates in Monrovia and other key centres, people in urban areas report higher levels of fear of crime in their own homes and in their neighbourhoods than those living in rural areas (Afrobarometer, 2008, 2012). The data collected by the Liberian Armed Violence Observatory (LAVO)* on armed violence in Liberia between May 2011 and April 2012 also reflects these fears, indicating that the overwhelming majority (63.7%) of incidents of armed violence occur in Monrovia (LAVO, 2012).

One of the most ongoing, pervasive and troubling manifestations of inequality in security provision relates to the widespread incidence of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) against women and girls.** It is widely acknowledged that SGBV was a significant issue during the two civil wars. In a 2005 study of four Liberian counties, the World Health Organization (WHO) found that among 1,216 female respondents, more than 80% had experienced sexual or physical violence during the war (Omanyondo, 2005). The Norwegian Refugee Council highlights that while SGBV is no longer perpetrated by rebels or paramilitaries, this form of violence remains brutal and widespread, and is often perpetrated by intimate partners. Data from the 2007 Liberia Demographic and Health Survey (LDHS) found that 44% of women aged 15-49 have experienced physical violence by a husband or intimate partner. This is not unique to Liberia, and there is an extensive body of evidence documenting the high levels of SGBV that persist in post-conflict and fragile contexts. Women (and men) often normalise the high levels of insecurity they live with. Overall, this exceedingly high prevalence of gender-based violence severely limits the extent of Liberia's progress and contributes to an underlying culture of violence that permeates all spheres of life. Despite efforts to address this, some of which are discussed in Section 4, SGBV must be recognised as a key factor preventing women and girls from achieving a real degree of personal security.

* LAVO is an independent institutional function that regularly gathers, analyses and reports on nationwide armed violence data in Liberia.

** While men and boys are also affected by SGBV, the victims of this form of violence in Liberia are overwhelmingly women and girls of all ages, particularly below 18 years of age.

the police to play a role in security provision (HRW, 2013; Reeve and Speare, 2012). As one donor representative pointed out, 'there is less fear to be had of security forces due to new mechanisms of accountability – previously citizens had more to fear from armed forces than others – they were a tool for warlords to wield power.'¹⁶

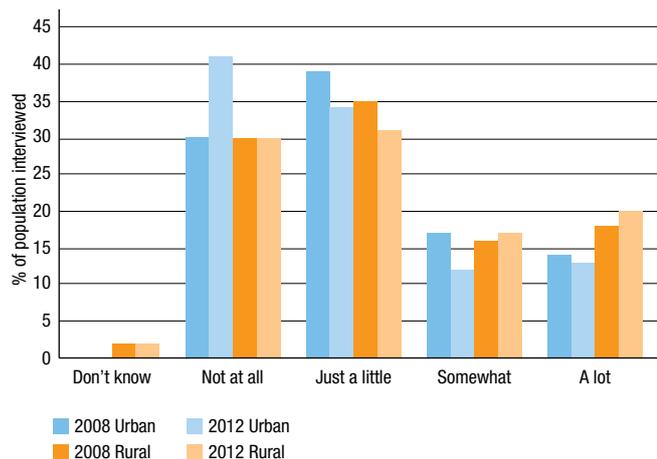
During a study conducted in urban areas in late 2005 (Mehler, 2012), a surprisingly positive picture resulted from a poll on security providers. Responding to open questions, 18.4% cited the police as the most important group for their personal safety. When asked more specifically whether they felt protected or threatened by the police, only 0.7% of respondents saw the police as a big threat to their personal security. As Mehler (2009: 62) points out, however, there is some degree of wishful thinking in this appraisal, given the low police-to-civilian

ratio in Liberia and the history of police violence. The findings from Round 4 (2008) and Round 5 (2012) of the Afrobarometer survey indicate that there was a slight decrease in trust of the police between 2008 and 2012 (Figure 5), particularly in rural areas.

It is not possible to determine the reasons behind this decrease from the data without further research; however, it could be due to the reported increase in crime rates in Monrovia, as well as the perceived failure of SJR to result in improved police performance. Interestingly, when asked why many people do not report crimes such as thefts or attacks to the police when they occur, nobody gave lack of trust or fear of the police as their response (Afrobarometer, 2012). The main reasons cited were 'no police station in the area', that police would have demanded a bribe or that the crime was reported to another authority. Similarly, an

¹⁶ Telephone interview with donor SSR expert, 26 February 2014.

Figure 5: Trust in the police in urban and rural areas



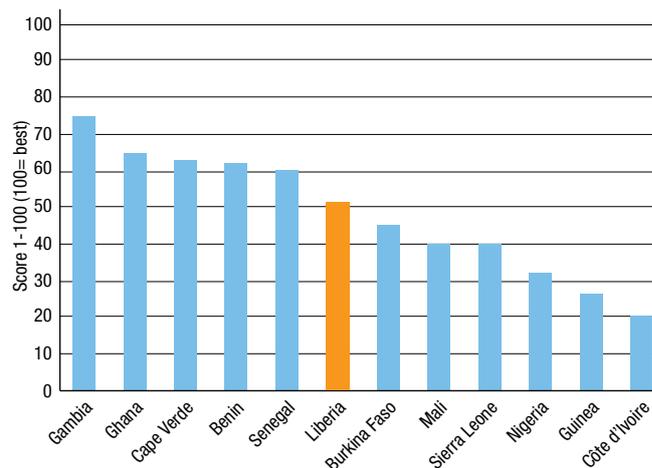
Source: data from Afrobarometer, Round 4 and 5, Liberia.

overwhelming 76% of the urban population reported that they would first go to the police for assistance if they were the victim of a crime. While the number is significantly smaller in rural areas (33%), with 53% preferring to go to customary leaders or courts, this still indicates a certain degree of preference for the police as a key security provider.

Another study on Monrovia in 2010 indicated that of the nearly 95% of residents who would seek help if they experienced a crime or violent encounter, 92% would seek police assistance (Fuerth, 2011). In fact, a significant majority expressed a preference for pursuing security and justice via the LNP rather than through local community mechanisms. This apparent desire or willingness to seek police assistance reflects the changing nature of the relationship between the LNP and the Liberian people since the end of the conflict and the fact that police officers are now no longer seen as perpetrators of mass violence, a finding supported by several interviewees during the course of this research.

Liberia ranks in the top third of countries in Africa (that were measured in this index) in terms of police reliability (13th out of 38 countries). Liberia performs significantly better than its neighbour, Sierra Leone, on this indicator (Figure 6) (IIAG, 2013).

Figure 6: Reliability of the police



Source: data from IIAG (2013).

The police have been subject to huge international investment as part of the security-sector reform (SSR) process, which has sought to reform the LNP to be more responsive to the Liberian people and their security needs (see Section 3.5 for more on this). Despite the challenges associated with this process, it does appear that the police are increasingly viewed as a legitimate source of security in some areas of Liberia, although customary and non-state actors still play an important role, particularly in rural areas (see Section 3.1). Based on data collected four years ago, Blair et al. (2011) highlight an important paradox where even though they found that corruption and crime were particularly common in areas of police presence, there was a preference for the police over all other providers of security. Fuerth (2011) also found that ‘despite strong buy-in and support for the function, residents provided numerous grievances based on their experience with, or observations of, police response’. These findings suggest that perceptions of corruption may not have a strong effect on rural Liberians’ preferences for providers of security, and that the desire for the police to fulfil a security function remains strong.

3. What are the factors driving change?

‘The way politics works in Liberia might not be the way that the West would want the state to be run, but it is what is creating stability in this context’ – Academic expert

This section presents an analysis of the factors that have contributed to the improvements in personal security in Liberia over the past decade. Ultimately, we make the case that, while personal security is experienced locally through a plurality of structures and forms of provision, overall the progress on personal security in Liberia has been heavily dependent upon national, regional and international political dynamics. Post-conflict transitions are multifaceted and rarely linear (Carayannis et al., 2014: 10; Dudouet, 2006: 12), and in a post-conflict environment such as Liberia, different overlapping factors have a major influence on the nature, equity and sustainability of personal security. Our analysis of existing evidence and additional findings obtained through fieldwork suggest that the following factors have driven the changes that can be seen in Liberia:

- A plurality of formal and informal actors at the local level provides day-to-day personal security for many Liberians. These include customary mechanisms that have survived the war, as well as the LNP, whose role has increased throughout the country.
- UNMIL has been effective in deterring renewed armed conflict and has played an important role in maintaining overall stability in the eyes of the Liberian population.
- Relative political stability, linked to the successive elections of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and her negotiation of a durable political settlement, has reduced the incentives for and threats of violent conflict.
- Liberia’s SSR process has resulted in greater prioritisation of security at the policy level, and growing professionalisation and effectiveness of the LNP in particular.
- A crosscutting factor across all of these drivers of progress has been the financial support of the international community, contributing to the re-establishment of security throughout the country and enabling the GoL to pursue a reform agenda in which peace and security has been a key pillar.

3.1 A plurality of actors providing security at the local level

Understanding how security is provided in Liberia, and by whom, is important not only for analysing the security context accurately, but also in terms of assessing the role these different actors then play, if any, in driving security progress. While much attention is placed on formal security institutions and actors, such as the police, they alone do not have the most impact on the day-to-day life of many Liberians. This section provides an overview of the plurality of security providers and how they contribute to conflict resolution at the community level. These actors at the local level influence the progress identified in Section 2 in different ways, but have been particularly important in preventing the escalation of conflict locally and reducing crime and interpersonal violence within and between communities, thereby contributing concretely to greater safety and security for many Liberians.

3.1.1 Providing security to individuals and communities

It is increasingly recognised that, particularly in developing-country contexts, security is provided by a plurality of actors, many of them operating in the informal sphere. Jörgel and Utas (2007) show how in West Africa, life and social relations are shaped by informal networks made up by a multitude of actors, such as politicians, military, businesspeople, NGOs, national and international organisations, secret societies, religious leaders, warlords, trade unions, and more. It is at the intersection of these informal networks and the formal sector, made up of police, army and other state actors, that the security landscape takes shape. In the ‘fuzzy reality’ of Liberia’s security architecture these formal and informal elements coexist, overlap and intertwine (Jaye, 2009; Jörgel and Utas, 2007; Kraushaar and Lambach, 2009).

In Liberia, the list of relevant local-level security actors is long and includes the police and government officials, customary leaders, community security groups, vigilantes, women’s groups, business protection groups and secret societies, among others (Reeve and Speare, 2012: 42). Despite greater prevalence in rural areas, the prominence of informal actors, and particularly customary institutions, holds for both the rural and urban areas, and they can play a key role in personal security (Jaye, 2009). Despite the often state-centric focus of security reforms in post-conflict contexts, the reality is that for most people, the state

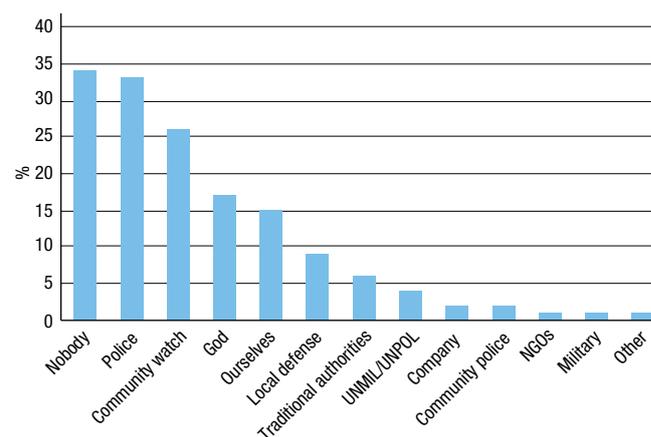
cannot be relied on to be the provider of security at the community or local level (Albrecht and Kyed, 2011: 3). As one prominent civil society activist and academic pointed out, ‘the people are their own protectors ... the role of elders, youth groups, women’s groups, traditional institutions ... all put together, these are making things happen in communities like that. Almost everything is being done by the communities themselves.’¹⁷

Figure 7 contains data from a countrywide survey in 2010 on who or what Liberians believe provides security in their communities. The diversity of responses provides a useful illustration of the plurality of actors engaged in the country’s security landscape, whilst highlighting that the most popular answer was that nobody provides security (Box 2). Although a third of Liberians believe that the police are the main source of security, 67% of the population believes that other informal actors take on this role. According to Afrobarometer, 84% of the population believes that the central government has responsibility for maintaining law and order, in contrast to only 3% who see a role for customary leaders. However, when it comes to resolving local disputes, only 23% believe this is central government’s job, while almost a third (29%) would turn to customary leaders. This highlights the different layers of security provision in Liberia, and that particularly for day-to-day disputes and conflicts, most Liberians are more likely to come into contact with and depend on the security provided by informal actors, or perhaps no one at all.

3.1.2 The Liberian National Police

Despite the troubled history of the police in Liberia, there is still a strong desire among the population that they perform a role in day-to-day life. As the SSR process unfolds, and the police force increases in size, trains and increases logistical capacity, it will take on an increasingly

Figure 7: Sources of security in Liberia



Source: Vinck et al. (2011: 55).

Note: Figures such as this can mask considerable regional variations in how security is provided. The full data, which include a breakdown by region, can be accessed at: <http://www.peacebuildingdata.org/liberia/map>.

critical role in protecting safety and security of the Liberian people. Although members of the LNP are the main actors responsible for upholding law and order throughout the country, they are not yet present in equal numbers across the country. This is despite a significant increase in GoL spending on the LNP since FY2005/06, including an almost doubling of funds between FY2009/10 and FY2012/13 from about US\$8.5 million to US\$16.4 million.¹⁸

There are now more than 4,000 police officers, compared with the 1,474 police officers registered by UNMIL in March 2004 (UNSC, 2004: 8). Nevertheless, some argue that the number of police officers throughout the country is half that needed to maintain public security

Box 2: An absence of security provision

Historically, the state security sector in Liberia has been primarily concerned with regime security, with power and decision-making concentrated in the Executive (Ebo, 2005). This resulted in a highly urban-centred state security apparatus, which is only now gradually beginning to change as the SSR process unfolds. Human and other essential resources are still largely concentrated in Monrovia and Liberia’s coastal counties, and the ratio of police to citizens outside these areas is extremely low (Reeve and Speare, 2012). Given this reality, while the finding by Vinck et al. (2011) that 34% of the study sample indicated that nobody provides security in their area is striking, it is perhaps not that surprising. This highlights why improvements in security cannot necessarily be attributed to the existence or behaviour of security actors themselves, whether they are ‘formal’ or ‘informal’. For Liberians who believe that nothing or no one protects their personal security, any improvements are more likely to be linked to the absence of conflict-related and political violence – which as we shall show is tied to broader national and regional dynamics – rather than any given security actor.

17 Interview with Liberian civil society representative, London, 25 March 2014.

18 Based on information obtained from the Ministry of Finance, June 2014. GoL funding for the LNP has been complemented by donor funds, mainly from the US and UNMIL and primarily in kind, to cover training and equipment. No consistent data are, however, available on donor funding for the LNP for past years.

effectively (Caparini, 2014: 15). As a result, the police force remains a more relevant security provider for some, whereas for others it is non-existent or can be a source of further insecurity due to corruption or lack of professionalisation (also see Sections 2.3, 3.4, 4.2 and 4.3 on the role of and challenges associated with the LNP).

3.1.3 Community-based groups

In a perception survey carried out by the GoL in 2013, community watch teams (27%) and traditional authorities (10%) were mentioned as the primary security providers, especially in Sinoe and Grand Kru counties, which are particularly remote. When these figures are combined (37%), these local and customary security mechanisms were considered to be equally as important as the police (GoL, 2013: 14). Community-based groups, such as ‘motorcycle gangs’ frequently made up of ex-combatants, have played a role in security provision in Liberia, particularly in the years immediately following the end of the war. Kantor and Persson’s (2010) report on vigilantism in Liberia shows how, after the war, groups of citizens (usually young men) organised themselves, for instance by forming ‘neighbourhood/community watch groups’ or ‘vigilantes’, sometimes with the agreement of local authorities.

These groups often patrol the streets at night, looking out for people they suspect of causing trouble and filling what was essentially a security vacuum where the police were unable or unwilling to respond.¹⁹ Their *raison d’être* was simple and consistent: ‘the state has failed us; therefore, we’ve taken on the task of defending our community ourselves’ (Kantor and Persson, 2012). Of course, these groups may also be responsible for various acts of mob violence or quick punishments without trial in communities, and risk being unaccountable to the people that they are protecting. Yet it must be remembered that even though the state is expanding its presence, the ratio of police to citizens will remain grossly disproportionate for some time, and in this space the alternative community-based approaches to security will continue to play some role.

3.1.4 Justice and conflict resolution at the local level

While mechanisms such as the police or community watch groups deal with the more obvious examples of insecurity, local forms of justice and dispute resolution are often the first stop before violence escalates (Herbert, 2014: 16). This is particularly the case for rural Liberians, for whom informal mechanisms are often faster, more affordable and accessible, and more relevant to the social and cultural

context (Caparini, 2014: 18-19). The core of the customary justice system is a hierarchy that begins with senior members of a household or family, extends through quarter chiefs, town chiefs, clan chiefs and paramount chiefs, and then to the district commissioner and finally the county superintendent.²⁰ As highlighted by Isser et al. (2009: 25), these ‘customary institutions and practices of justice have clearly survived Liberia’s devastating civil war and remain active in virtually all of Liberia’s rural communities’. Importantly, Isser et al. (2009) also note that individuals may move between the formal and customary systems, jumping from one to the other, creating a particularly fluid security and justice landscape.

Given the perceptions around police corruption and the lack of a functioning judiciary, many rural Liberians may also have more confidence that their needs will be met by going to their chief or other local leaders.²¹ Such forms of dispute resolution can play a key role in stemming violence at the local level given their high level of acceptance among Liberian communities. In discussing the role that local actors play in deterring crime and violence, one Liberian academic stated that, ‘It’s a hard reality that the further you go away from Monrovia, the lesser the presence of police you see. But strangely, there is less crime in those areas... [one explanation is that] the tendency or the incidence of violence is still in these areas, but there are what you call “local regulatory measures”, based on customs and traditions.’²²

3.1.5 Grassroots organisations

In addition to dispute resolution, initiatives to build the capacity of Liberians to support peace in their communities have also contributed to personal security in the country. These include projects implemented by local and grassroots organisations, such as women’s groups and youth groups, either working alone or in collaboration with other formal and informal security actors. Blaney et al. (2010: 5) argue that there was an active effort by leaders during the immediate post-CPA phase to support and foster networks for peace that reflected the desires of a war-weary population and helped them to ‘absorb failures and shocks [of the post-conflict peacebuilding process], hedging the risk of a relapse into war’.

Women’s groups, in particular, played a key role in bringing the armed conflict to an end, and many of these groups have continued to play an important role nationally, as well as in their communities, in the aftermath of the war. For example, the Women in Peacebuilding

19 See ‘Vigilante gangs patrol streets as police force rebuilds’, *IRIN News*, 18 October 2005 at <http://www.irinnews.org/report/56749/liberia-vigilante-gangs-patrol-streets-as-police-force-rebuilds>.

20 ‘Secret societies’, also known as Poro and Sandee, also play a major role in resolving disputes within Liberia, and may even be the first line of recourse in some cases. Where prevalent, Poro and Sandee often have a powerful influence on how certain areas are governed, although it is difficult for outsiders to gain a full understanding of how these societies operate and provide security to their members.

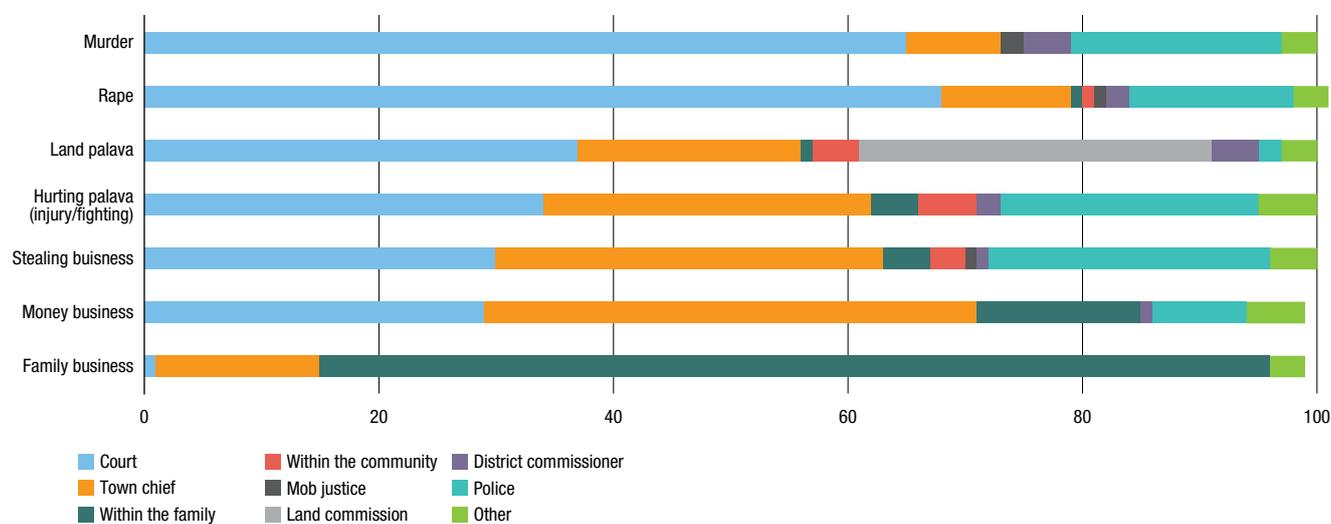
21 See Isser et al. (2009: 57) for the ‘complex reality’ of Liberia’s dispute resolution system.

22 Interview with Liberian academic, Monrovia, 5 March 2014.

Box 3: Different disputes, different security actors

It is important to note that not everyone turns to the same actors for the same types of problems, as illustrated in Figure 8. What is particularly notable from these data is that, in the case of ‘family business’, which includes domestic violence and other issues, nobody would turn to the police, overwhelmingly preferring to resolve such issues within the family. This has consequences for the protection of women and girls, whose rights can be violated by customary actors. This is particularly the case in relation to rape and domestic violence, where crimes are often settled informally between the involved families, resulting in outcomes that fail to protect the victim and, in some rape and sexual violence cases, can expose the victim to further abuse, e.g. by requiring her to marry the perpetrator. Both town chiefs and formal courts appear to play a major role across most types of disputes, but those who went to customary leaders and elders were happier with the outcome or resolution (90%) than those who went to the formal courts (71%).

Figure 8: Best place to solve different types of disputes by category (%)



Source: Ministry of Internal Affairs (2013: 23-24).

Note: This figure presents the average across five counties: Grand Gedeh, Grand Kru, Maryland, River Gee and Simoe.

Network (WIPNET) has established ‘peace huts’ in several communities around Liberia to provide a safe space for women to come together to discuss how to build peace in their communities, as well as provide a venue where any security concerns or disputes can be mediated and resolved. The huts, based on the customary concept of ‘palava huts’, have been particularly important in addressing problems such as domestic violence and play a role not only in supporting community-level security but also in activities such as income-generation or literacy training (UN Women, 2011: 80; Blaney et al., 2010).

Furthermore, there is a range of initiatives supported by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), such as the Carter Center’s Access to Justice Program, which supports the use of customary leaders in dispute resolution and is training community justice advisers to work alongside

formal authorities in targeted counties (Flomoku and Reeves, 2012). Under this programme, supported by USAID and Sida, building on customary mechanisms gives local people access to justice that is consistent with national legal principles in contexts where the formal justice system is not yet working or accepted. A number of local NGOs, funded in part by the UN Peacebuilding Fund (PBF), are working to track local-level violence as part of an early warning system to prevent potential escalation of conflict. This provides real-time tracking of incidence and has the potential to contribute to state and other authorities’ ability to predict and mitigate instances of violence and insecurity.

We have attempted to demonstrate the complexity of the security landscape, and that different actors exist both to protect people at the local level and to resolve disputes before

escalation into violent conflict. While the exact nature of and relationship between these actors needs more research, their existence forms the starting point for provision of personal security. It is clear that it is through these different security actors that Liberians have been able to secure some progress in their personal security from the low starting point in 2003. However, the improvements in security witnessed in Liberia have also been heavily dependent on the drivers operating at the national, regional and international levels, and these will now be considered in turn.

3.2 The role of UNMIL

The UN peacekeeping mission has played an important role in the progress on personal security in Liberia. While UNMIL did not arrive in Liberia until two months after the end of fighting on 1 October 2003, after which no subsequent major battle events were recorded, it is still widely credited with both contributing to the end of the armed conflict in Liberia and sustaining and consolidating relative peace over the past decade (Mehler, 2012; Smith-Höhn, 2007; KAICT, 2014; Mvukiyehe and Samii, 2010). Its presence has deterred future violence, and had a more direct impact on security by intervening at key moments, such as during the elections of 2005 and 2011. This role in providing back-up and capacity to the LNP has been particularly important given the resource and logistical constraints facing the police, and its inability to respond to security threats adequately and independently. The very presence of UNMIL also appears to have played an important role in improving perceptions around safety and security, suggesting that it has also played a symbolic role in Liberia's post-conflict recovery.

According to Mehler, the physical presence of UNMIL is the strongest reason violence has ended, rather than any 'changes in the military and political set up' (Mehler, 2012: 63-64). This view is supported by a study of the perceptions of urban Liberians early in the process in 2005, which showed that more than 75% of respondents believed UNMIL to be the main actor guaranteeing security, and that 'UNMIL is here to bring peace' (Smith-Höhn, 2007: 92). A public opinion survey carried out at the request of the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) in 2006 further found that 94% of respondents believed the security situation had improved under UNMIL and that they 'commended UNMIL for bringing peace and making them feel safer' (Krasno, 2006: 7). Equally, in a quantitative evaluation of UNMIL carried out in 2010, 97% of respondents believed UNMIL helped end the war, 93% reported being safer than before UNMIL's arrival six years earlier, and 65% considered UNMIL the primary security provider against threats specifically from armed groups (Mvukiyehe and Samii, 2010: 12). Another, more recent poll carried out with students at the University of Liberia found that 'people's feelings towards security and safety were very much dependent on the presence of UNMIL' (KAICT, 2014: 3).

While these overwhelmingly positive reflections highlight the role of UNMIL in bringing peace, evidence suggests that the peacekeeping troops have rarely played a role in mitigating local conflicts. An evaluation of the peacekeeping mission found 'little evidence to suggest that UNMIL had direct local impacts on conflict de-escalation and security at the local level' (Mvukiyehe and Samii, 2010: 2). The survey also mentions UNMIL as a protector against the threat from armed groups, which, while critical

Box 4: Background to UNMIL

Following the establishment of UNMIL by UN Security Council resolution (UNSCR) 1509, 15,000 military personnel were deployed, alongside 250 military observers, 160 staff officers and 1,115 police officers in 2003. UNMIL's mandate, initially for a duration of 12 months, has been extended repeatedly. Between 2007 and 2010, UNMIL went from full strength to 7,952 troops, and UNSCR 2066 outlined plans to reduce the troop level to 3,750 by July 2015, whilst at the same time boosting the mission with three additional Formed Police Units (FPUs) (Caparini, 2014: 11-12). On 30 June 2013, the first phase of drawdown was completed, with 2,026 military personnel departing the mission. In February 2014, the mission began the second phase of its military drawdown, but it is expected to remain in Liberia, albeit with a reduced presence, until 2017. As of 2 February 2014, UNMIL had a total of 5,869 military personnel, 1,612 police (including 1,265 personnel across 10 FPU), and 1,518 civilian personnel (UNSC, 2014a: 15-16). UNMIL has already begun to hand over some security responsibilities to GoL, and as of June 2014 has withdrawn from seven of the 15 counties.

UNMIL's original mandate, as laid out in UNSCR 1509, included a range of activities, from monitoring the ceasefire to developing and implementing an action plan for disarmament, demobilisation, rehabilitation and reintegration (DDRR), facilitating humanitarian assistance, and protecting human rights. Most relevant to this case study, UNSCR 1509 also mandated UNMIL to take on specific activities in support of SSR. These included assisting the NTGL with monitoring and restructuring the LNP, assisting with the training of civilian police, and supporting with the formation and training of a new national army (UNSC, 2003). Over time, UNMIL's mandate has evolved to reflect the changing needs of the peacebuilding process. In UNSCR 2066 (2012), its role in supporting the GoL with SSR, and in particular supporting the GoL's efforts toward a successful transition of complete security responsibility to the LNP, has been reconfirmed (UNSC, 2012a).

particularly in the immediate aftermath of the war, is rarely the main day-to-day security concern of Liberians, as reflected in Section 2. Data from the study by Vinck et al. (2011) support the notion that UNMIL's role and influence over personal security may have been more at the symbolic level, showing that less than 5% of the population view UNMIL as a source of security. It seems that a majority of the population, including ex-combatants, accords UNMIL a high degree of legitimacy as a provider of security (Mvukiyeye and Samii, 2010: 11). However, this is mainly through the perception that UNMIL is a deterrent to a return to violent conflict and armed groups, rather than as a local-level security provider for Liberia's citizens.

Despite its lack of involvement in most local conflicts, UNMIL has played a role in certain key moments that have had the potential to challenge the peace, particularly in the early stages of its mission, as noted in various reports to the UN Security Council.²³ In particular, UNMIL is widely credited with having been a key stabilising factor during the elections of 2005 and 2011.²⁴ In its report on the 2011 elections, the Carter Center highlights UNMIL's important role during this time as a reason for extending the mission's mandate (Carter Center, 2011: 57). More generally, UNMIL has demonstrated itself as capable of responding to incidents where local-level conflicts escalate beyond a certain level, and change from localised, community-level concerns into broader threats to peace and stability. For example, the UN Security Council's February 2014 report on Liberia determined that, in relation to recent and increasing incidents of mob violence, 'The police, with limited presence and mobility, were on some occasions overwhelmed by large crowds and required intervention by UNMIL to restore order and protect civilians' (UNSC, 2014a: 4). This highlights the important role that the peacekeeping mission continues to play in backstopping the LNP. From our research it appears that, without the additional security and deterrent impact of UNMIL, and until the LNP (and specifically the Police Support Units and Emergency Response Units) increases capacity, there could be more scope for community-level disputes to get out of hand, which would then in turn have an adverse impact on personal security.

UNMIL, largely but not exclusively through the UN Police (UNPOL) officers, has also contributed to improved personal security in the country by supporting reforms of the LNP, as well as providing extra capacity and oversight to the police force. In its original mandate outlined in UNSCR 1509, UNMIL was given a role in monitoring and restructuring the LNP and providing training to LNP officers (UNSC, 2003). UNMIL has also provided more

practical support, such as maintaining roads to ensure that security personnel have access to communities (UNSC, 2012b: 12). In addition to UNPOL, the Formed Police Units of UNMIL have also been effective in building confidence among the population through community outreach efforts (Caparini, 2014: 14). According to one study, 'focus group participants noted that UNPOL were crucial to keeping the peace in those situations in which guns or other arms are used. Without UNPOL officers, the LNP outside of Monrovia do not have the capacity to respond to armed violence. Community members are acutely aware of this reality, and view the UN [as] the only thing protecting them from armed violence' (SFCG and SIPRI, 2011: 15). Additionally, given the weakness of oversight and accountability structures within Liberia's security institutions, UNMIL's presence at LNP stations has been important for encouraging police officers to behave more ethically and professionally (SFCG and SIPRI, 2011: 22). Communities where UNPOL was present reported more positive views than those that did not have a UN presence.

UNMIL appears to have had a strong influence over Liberians' perceptions of safety and security. After so many years of violence and repression at the hands of the security services and the turmoil of the war years, many of our interviewees highlighted that the presence of peacekeepers throughout the country has provided some reassurance to the population that the security situation will not spiral out of control.²⁵ The concerns that interviewees expressed about the future of security in Liberia can also be seen as linked to the ongoing drawdown of peacekeeping troops and UNMIL's eventual departure. In 2012, a report to the Security Council on the situation in Liberia found that, 'While no imminent military threat of an internal or external nature was identified, it was the common view that latent security threats within the country, as well as potential risks within the sub-region, could undermine the stability of Liberia if not for the deterrent and confidence-building effect provided by the Mission's presence' (UNSC, 2012b: 5).

3.3 Relatively stable political settlement

Here we focus on the successive governments of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and analyse how and why a relatively stable political settlement has been achieved. The election of Johnson Sirleaf in 2006 and 2011, following relatively legitimate political processes and in a much-improved electoral environment, were important steps forward in consolidating democratic institutions in Liberia. Recent research by the Crisis States Research Centre (Putzel and Di John, 2012: iii) makes clear 'the central role played

23 See various progress reports of the UN Secretary-General on UNMIL at <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/unmil/reports.shtml>.

24 For example, on 7 November 2011, UNMIL forces had to intervene to stem violence following a clash between Congress for Democratic Change supporters and the Liberian security services (UNSC, 2012b: 2).

25 This was confirmed during a telephone interview with a donor representative as well as in the focus group discussion involving numerous civil society representatives, Monrovia, March 2014.

by elite bargains embedded in wider political settlements in determining trajectories of violence and change in developing countries'. Understanding the nature and trajectory of the elite bargain that has been struck in Liberia is crucial to understanding how political stability has been achieved – and political stability is essential for ensuring peace in Liberia.

This bargain and the wider political settlement has depended upon the following national factors: the ability of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to negotiate informal and formal networks of power; ongoing practices of personalised politics and corruption; a deliberate avoidance of the TRC recommendations, mixed with a crucial liberal reform agenda; and the promise of the economic dividends of peace. Yet, it has also been dependent upon the ongoing support for the political settlement by the international community, as well as relative stability in the Mano River region. In some respects, this political stability has contributed to improvements in personal security since 2003, mainly by minimising the risk of a return to armed violence, but also by contributing to people's sense of a safer and more secure future. It is crucial to note, however, that some of the strategies outlined below risk continuing patterns of exclusion and personalised rule that were some of the grievances behind the civil war in the first place. We reflect in more detail on the challenges this presents in Section 4.

3.3.1 Formal and informal networks

Understanding the formal and informal networks and relationships at both the national and international levels that have supported this settlement is central to understanding this progress story. The underlying problems relating to the division of power across the elites and between Monrovia and the rural areas were not resolved with the signing of the CPA; therefore, maintaining political stability required careful navigation of these (formal and informal) interests and grievances. As Jörgel and Utas (2007: 7) highlight, the patronage networks led by 'big men' in both Monrovia and rural areas are 'at the heart of how the [Liberian] state functions'. Utas has written extensively on this subject, and characterises politics in Liberia as about controlling people rather than territory through the use of vertical and horizontal networks. These 'big men' networks exist in all communities and at all levels, and often draw in businessmen, politicians, customary leaders and others, including criminals or those operating in shadow zones

(Utas, 2008). While they can present a security threat, and therefore engaging them and providing incentives for them to cooperate with the government is key, these networks can also be 'security stabilisers' (Jörgel and Utas, 2007: 14).

Johnson Sirleaf has demonstrated exceptional skill in negotiating the competing demands and interests of power-holders across the formal and informal political landscape of Liberia whilst maintaining the country's fragile peace. As one academic pointed out, 'the combination of the informal and formal is crucial to stability – Ellen would not still be in power if she couldn't work through these informal networks'.²⁶ As Utas (2008) notes, 'The correct logic from a foreign relations or international donor perspective would therefore be not to suppress the networks, as they will just hide and metamorphose and turn more anti-system or anti-state, but to deal with them. And in this sense Johnson Sirleaf is a master.' Negotiating a balance of power with different powerful individuals and groups and thereby preventing any one actor from having cause to mobilise the population around any one of the many ongoing grievances has also helped to avoid a renewed outbreak of unrest or violence (US State Department, 2012b: 7). For example, as one academic noted (telephone interview, February 2014), the state has regained:

'the grip of the counties, not by formal state power but by informal power... The government has the right to select city mayors and they are UP followers and quite often these are linked to former combatants. She [Johnson Sirleaf] has struck deals with former NPFL and Taylor generals, she has kept control over plantations and more in this informal way.'

3.3.2 Liberal reform agenda

When Johnson Sirleaf came into power, she was met with huge domestic and international expectations that she would accelerate peace and development in Liberia (Ejigu, 2006: 1). Her administration's governance agenda, reflected in the country's first Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (2008), prioritised peace and security, revitalising the economy, strengthening governance and rule of law, and rehabilitating infrastructure and delivering basic services (IMF, 2008: 19). Since Johnson Sirleaf's election in 2005, there has been greater commitment to transparency, improved human rights, reduced political persecution and greater freedom of speech (ICG, 2011: 16). These are important signals to both Liberia's citizens and the international community that there has been a

'The combination of the informal and formal is crucial to stability – Ellen would not still be in power if she couldn't work through these informal networks' – Academic expert

26 Telephone interview with academic expert on Liberia, February 2014.

major change in how the state interacts with society. Most importantly, one of the most direct effects that Johnson Sirleaf's two terms have had on personal security is that there is now an increasing dissociation between executive power and regularly perpetrated violence.²⁷

3.3.3 Personalised politics, corruption and the TRC

Johnson Sirleaf has kept her friends, family and trusted individuals close, for example through having appointed three of her sons to top government posts, although one was temporarily suspended as deputy governor of the central bank for failing to declare his assets.²⁸ This is not a process where all warring elites have remained at the table, despite their role in the CPA process. The President's first government was relatively inclusive, with recruitment into the political elite dependent upon qualification, trust and political expediency (Gerdes, 2011: 46). However, it is clear that although Charles Taylor was removed as 'head of a political network and possible rival of President Johnson Sirleaf... his senior associates have been integrated into the government patronage network, albeit on subaltern levels' (Gerdes, 2011: 48). This appears to mix a pragmatic approach, to get things done, with a perceived need to keep powerful people happy. A more benign example is the concerted effort made to convince talented members of the diaspora to return and take up leading positions in the civil service (Friedman, 2012).

This approach has fed into how corruption is dealt with in Liberia. Although Johnson Sirleaf has instituted some high-profile reforms, such as suspending 46 officials within 14 days of her new presidential term in 2012 for not declaring assets, they do not appear to be applied across the board (BTI, 2014: 11). As the International Crisis Group (ICG, 2011: 19) argues, it seems that, 'possibly as a way to keep peace in what is still a tense country, the President appears to have adopted a slap-on-the-wrist approach [to corruption], especially in cases involving allies'. There are many government initiatives on corruption, but few of them can claim notable victories.²⁹ Examples of apparent scandals matched with failed prosecutions are numerous: for example, Harry Greaves, 'a confidant of the President and former head of the Liberian

Petroleum Refinery Corporation, was sacked for allegedly taking a bribe but never tried. It is unclear what became of the findings of a committee constituted to investigate the case' (ICG, 2011: 18).

Notably, the GoL has also failed to implement any of the TRC recommendations, particularly one that calls for 49 people, including President Johnson Sirleaf, to be barred for 30 years from holding public office (ICG, 2011: 21).³⁰ Reflecting the feeling among some Liberians, Leymah Gbowee, Johnson Sirleaf's Nobel co-Laureate, resigned from her position as head of the TRC, accusing Johnson Sirleaf of failing to fight corruption and nepotism, charges that the President has denied.³¹ This is a thorny issue: while there appears to be considerable civil society support for the TRC and its recommendations, what would the consequences have been of preventing much of the political elite from holding public office? One possibility is that it could have represented a major and important shift in Liberian politics to a younger generation, not associated with the war. But another is that it would have been hugely destabilising, and potentially led to power grabs by disgruntled actors.

3.3.4 Promise of economic growth

Johnson Sirleaf has made economic growth a key pillar and commitment of her presidency. This reflects the belief that equitable growth to benefit all Liberians would, in part, tackle some of the grievances associated with the past conflict, thereby mitigating the likelihood of future conflict. There have been some notable changes in macroeconomic policy that have allowed Liberia to begin balancing its budgets, largely through the implementation of the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Program (GEMAP), which was also developed as an anti-corruption measure.³² In 2008, through the completion of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative, Liberia successfully received US\$4.9 billion of cumulative debt relief, thereby opening access to renewed engagement by international partners and considerable amounts of development assistance from, particularly, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the African Development Bank. There has been a recovery in economic

27 Telephone interview with donor government SSR expert, February 2014.

28 See 'Liberia's Johnson Sirleaf defiant over nepotism and corruption claims', *The Guardian*, 1 November 2012 at <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2012/nov/01/liberia-johnson-sirleaf-nepotism-corruption>.

29 Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) (2008), the Whistleblower Act (2010), the Freedom of Information Act (2010), the General Auditing Commission (GAC) (2005), the Public Financial Management Act (2009) and the Public Procurement and Concession Commission (2005).

30 For more on this see Gordon, G., 'In Liberia, Sirleaf's past sullies her clean image,' *Time*, 3 July 2009, at www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1908635,00.html.

31 'Liberia's Johnson Sirleaf defiant over nepotism and corruption claims', *The Guardian*, 1 November 2012 at <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2012/nov/01/liberia-johnson-sirleaf-nepotism-corruption>.

32 GEMAP was a UN Security Council-backed technical assistance framework for providing economic governance support. It was a partnership between the government and donors, created in September 2005, seeking to promote accountability, responsibility and transparency in fiscal management. The programme was intended to address concerns of donors about the mismanagement of public resources during Liberia's post-conflict transition.

activity, with growth rates averaging over 11% annually between 2005 and 2012 and a rate of economic growth of 11.3% in 2013.³³ Per capita GNI (PPP) increased from US\$310 to US\$790 during the same period.

Revenue has also increased steadily in Liberia due to improved tax policy and administration and increased economic activities, permitting the tax base to broaden and resulting in an increase in government revenue, including grants, from 12% of GDP in FY2005/06 to 28% of GDP in FY2011/12 (World Bank, 2103a). The economy is also being boosted by foreign investors who are now returning to the exploit the country's natural resources, such as agriculture, forestry and mining (World Bank, 2013a). While revenues from Liberia's iron-ore exports were first realised in 2011 and are currently estimated at less than US\$40 million per year, the IMF currently estimates that that mining concessions may generate as much as US\$74 million in FY2016/17 (IMF, 2014). Hence, Liberia's economic growth since the end of the civil war could, in theory, create a foundation for peace and security, but this link depends upon citizens getting visible benefits from economic growth, which would signal a break from the past and strengthen citizens' confidence in the government.

However, in reality, while the national-level macroeconomic picture looks positive, and is often presented as such by the impressive GDP growth rates, the promise of equitable economic development does not appear to be being upheld (also see Section 4.1). Liberia remains among the poorest countries in the world, and the 2008 National Population and Household Census (NPHC) estimated that 64% of the Liberian population live on less than US\$1 a day, with regional variations from 68% in rural areas to 55% in urban areas.³⁴ Even within urban environments, including Monrovia, infrastructure and social services remain uneven: publicly supplied electricity reaches less than 2% of the population, and less than 10% of the total road network is paved (AfDB/OECD/UNDP, 2014). Therefore, while we argue that the *promise* of economic growth is an important stabilising factor in Liberia's peace, this promise is beginning to fade, and, importantly, the lack of trickle-down benefits of economic growth is creating resentment among the population.

One interpretation of this situation is that the inequitable economic growth and development is in fact linked to the political settlement mentioned above. The networks led by 'big men' in both Monrovia and rural

areas have been the main ones benefiting from the recent economic growth and stability. There are also personal incentives for state actors to keep the peace. As one civil society member put it:

*'To stay in power as a politician you have to promote the stability of the state; if there is not stability, there is no guarantee you can make what you're making. Every politician in power has a stake because of economic dividend.'*³⁵

From a pragmatic and short-term security perspective, this approach could be useful in terms of containing potential spoilers to the peace. However, it also points to continuities with the past. While such an approach can bring short-term stability and an increase in personal security, at least for now, greater political change and more equitable growth will most likely be required to sustain Liberia's progress in future. We explore this in more depth in Section 4.

3.3.5 International support

A further factor supporting President Johnson Sirleaf's efforts to maintain political stability is the widely held perception among Western donors that she is an effective and strong leader committed to reform. Considerable international political capital has come from her being the first democratically elected female African president, and her contributions to Liberia's post-conflict recovery were recognised with the Nobel Peace Prize in October 2011. Prior to being elected to the presidency, Johnson Sirleaf studied economics and public policy at Harvard University, held a position in the Tolbert government as Minister of Finance for Liberia, and subsequently worked for a range of international organisations (Johnson Sirleaf, 2010). These connections, particularly through her previous employment at the World Bank and UNDP, have been a key point of leverage in order to access international funding and investment. This, combined with the history of US and other countries' involvement in Liberia, have contributed to an improved image of Liberia, international investment and increased donor funding.

3.3.6 The role of regional stability

Finally, the stability of the political settlement in Liberia has been, in part, dependent on tentative regional stability forged in the Mano River³⁶ region over the past decade. Historically, regional instability has played a major role

33 Figures taken from World Bank World Development Indicators. See <http://data.worldbank.org/data-catalog/world-development-indicators>.

34 Liberia conducted censuses in 1962, 1974 and 1984. However, statistics from these surveys are either extremely scarce or completely lost since the civil wars. Following the end of the wars, the Liberia Demographic and Health Survey (LDHS) was carried out in 2007, followed by the National Population and Housing Census (NPHC) in 2008. Because there are no complete population registers and surveys have not been conducted on a regular basis, the resulting demographic statistics must be interpreted with a degree of caution. It is expected that the results from a recent NPHC will be released later in 2015, making more systematic comparisons of developments over time possible for the first time since before the civil wars.

35 Interview with representative of an international NGO, Monrovia, March 2014.

36 The Mano River region includes the countries of Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire, which are all members of the Mano River Union, an economic association first established in 1973.

in the development and pattern of conflicts in Liberia, as well as neighbouring Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea. As Jörgel and Utas (2007: 6) put it, 'though the area today enjoys peace in formal terms, life for many citizens of Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea is one of immense and at times violent struggle in poverty for a decent livelihood'. Liberia's border zones are porous and ethnic groups straddle the different countries, which can have positive effects in terms of strong social relations and trade, or more negative effects in terms of regional conflict and illicit trade in arms and drugs. Despite recent violence along the border with Côte d'Ivoire and concerns about ongoing political change in Guinea, the Mano River region currently appears to be relatively stable.

This perceived improvement is in part due to a greater acknowledgement of the interconnectedness of violence across this region, leading to increased regional cooperation, particularly focused on border regions. Groupings such as the Mano River Union, as well as more local-level region-wide initiatives, have played a role in sustaining that regional security. For example, on 25 October 2013, the Heads of State and Government of the Mano River Union and ECOWAS adopted a comprehensive cross-border security strategy (UNSC, 2014a: 5) and ECOWAS also has adopted various declarations on issues such as counter-terrorism and maritime security (Uzoehina, 2014). However, most importantly from Liberia's perspective, there are few regional actors currently interested in initiating violence in Liberia, which is significant progress from previous years when many of the actors involved in the conflicts used neighbouring countries to channel funds, arms and soldiers.

3.4 Security sector reform

The international community has increasingly viewed SSR as a way of encouraging more democratic practices and a more efficient and professional approach to security in fragile and conflict-affected states (OECD DAC, 2007: 21-22). In many countries, such as Liberia, there is often a strong focus on police reform, typically involving technical interventions and focusing on organisational structures, training (often gender- and human rights-focused) and the implementation of community policing (Valters et al., 2014: 7). SSR now more commonly focuses, at least in theory, on human rather than regime security. Problematically, as noted by Sedra (2010, 17), while the 'international community of practice has achieved high marks in developing and institutionalising the SSR concept, it has received a failing grade on implementation'. Success stories in SSR practice are few and far between, and the case of Liberia does little to remedy this fact.

Police reform in these contexts is notoriously difficult, since the police forces are often militarised in terms of their training, equipment, roles, institutional capacities and mindset, which requires the institution itself to be

demilitarised first (Valters et al., 2014). The need for police forces to be effective in multiple areas, such as crime prevention through building trust with communities and in reacting to and controlling riots or violent demonstrations, requires a wide range of skills and capabilities. This requires time, patience, resources and strategies appropriate to the context from both national actors and donor agencies. One of the biggest potential barriers to progressive change is the lack of political will, particularly at the executive level, to reorient the police towards protecting its citizens rather than the regime itself. While this remains a problem in Liberia, there is little doubt that Johnson Sirleaf's two terms have been marked by increasing dissociation between executive power and regularly perpetrated violence by state security forces (see Section 3.3). This transformation has been critical to the processes undertaken under the heading of SSR we describe below.

It seems fairly clear that the reformulation and initial retraining of the army and police forces has been part of the process of ending the practice of using the security sector as a tool for repressing the population and is creating the basis for a more accountable and democratic security apparatus. Yet SSR in general was rarely cited by our interviewees as one of the factors, in their opinion, that has contributed to the changed levels or experiences of violence by the majority of the population. The failure to attribute progress to SSR may be partly because, as we argued in Section 3.1, the LNP is often not present at community level and a range of other actors are the main providers of security and conflict prevention, rendering much of the reforms that have been instituted invisible at the community level. Concerns about corruption and limited professionalism of the police can also result in an overwhelmingly negative perception of the police, and therefore of SSR, despite the albeit limited training and efforts to build capacity that have taken place. There is also likely to be a considerable time lag between instituting reforms and their potential effects having a discernible impact on the population, given the militarised institutional structures and practices pervasive in Liberia. The overall picture emerging from this research appears to be that the ongoing reforms of the security sector, particularly of the LNP, will take more time to trickle down to the level of day-to-day security of the average Liberian. Crucially, this will also require a reorientation of the nature and scale of reforms, to ensure that they are fully relevant and responsive to the daily security reality of all Liberians (see Section 4.3). What we detail below, therefore, is our analysis of factors important in the limited progress that has been made.

The Liberian government has indicated its commitment to a more professionalised and effective security sector that upholds human rights and the rule of law in key policy frameworks, such as the Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRSs), Lift Liberia (PRS I) and the Agenda for Transformation (PRS II). While these represent rhetorical

commitment only and do not necessarily reflect the reality of the SSR process, such documents do provide insights into what the official roles of the different institutions and actors are meant to be and what priorities have been arrived at through consultative processes (SFCG and SIPRI, 2011). There is an extensive literature around the SSR process in Liberia, in terms of assessing both progress made and remaining challenges, but it is beyond the scope of this paper to present and analyse this in detail.³⁷ This section will therefore focus specifically on the two aspects of SSR that appear to have had the most impact on the personal security of Liberians. These are the reform of the LNP and the reforms initiated under the Joint Security and Justice Programme since 2011.³⁸

3.4.1 Reform of the police

The LNP is one of the most important actors in relation to personal security given that it has responsibility for the maintenance of law and order in Liberia. The reform of the LNP has been principally led by UNMIL, and in particular UNPOL as part of the mission, as specified in the CPA, UNSCR 1509 and the subsequent extensions of UNMIL's mandates. The US provided advisers to the LNP and also helped to establish and provide training to the Emergency Response Units (ERUs), designed to help with civil disorder and armed violence, and the Police Support Units (PSUs), which deal with crowd control. While all LNP officers were required to reapply for their jobs, the vetting process was not as comprehensive as that for the AFL and so there have been issues with officers who had committed human rights abuses during the conflict retaining their jobs (Salahub and Bowah, 2011: 16-17; Downie, 2013: 4; ICG, 2009). Following the vetting, there were only 756 individuals remaining out of the 3,000 who had registered to join the new police (Caparini, 2014: 12).

Although it is fraught with challenges, such as a lack of capacity and accusations of corruption (HRW, 2013), it does appear that the LNP is slowly increasing in its professionalism and effectiveness over time. Research under Harvard's *Innovations for Successful Societies* programme goes so far as to argue that the LNP is 'one of the successes in post-war Liberia and an uncommon example of successful postwar police reform' (Friedman and MacAulay, 2011). Perhaps in part reflecting these changes, much of the population either identifies or desires

the police to be the main provider of personal security, as indicated in Section 2.3. However, 'preferences and heightened expectations for the LNP coexist with pervasive perceptions of corruption and ineptitude' (Blair et al., 2011: 16). According to one academic Liberia expert, 'the police are the weak link in the security sector. It is undisciplined... there are lots of concerns as it hasn't been properly vetted'.³⁹ Furthermore, it is not clear what will happen once UNMIL has departed from Liberia: 'without the presence of UNMIL ongoing [police] reform will be faced with huge challenges regarding coordination, command and supervision' (SFCG and SIPRI, 2011: 9). There are therefore contradictions and tensions around the impact of LNP reforms and performance that are difficult to resolve without more focused research on this issue.

The international community has been heavily invested in training and capacity-building of the LNP. According to one UN official, 'for good or ill, the LNP is largely a UN creation'.⁴⁰ There has been progress in terms of: increased numbers of female police officers; development of mechanisms for investigating allegations of misconduct (although not so much for external as opposed to internal complaints); successfully dealing with challenges such as the 2011 elections and insecurity along the border with Côte d'Ivoire; and some initial steps toward changing the reputation for abuse and corruption (Downie, 2013: 5). There has also been significant investment into building the capacity of the LNP to strengthen responses to gender-based violence through the creation of women and child protection units and codes of conduct for LNP officers.

However, there are many challenges associated with police reform, particularly concerning police behaviour and the lack of capacity and infrastructure for police work. For example, benchmarks set for the LNP in key documents are quite high and potentially unrealistic given the current capacity of the Liberian government. With the graduation of new recruits in May 2014, the strength of the police stands at 4,846, of whom 18 per cent are female. Only 23 per cent of police personnel are based outside of Monrovia (UNSC, 2014b). However, this still falls short of the goal of the LNP to reach the recommended strength of 8,000 personnel, based on a UN guideline of one police officer for every 450 citizens (Caparini, 2014: 15). Training is also currently behind schedule due to lack of funds and capacity.

37 See, for example, Malan (2008), ICG (2009) and Griffiths (2011).

38 While the reform of the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) has also been an important element of SSR and the broader post-conflict transition, it has not had as direct an impact on personal security as LNP reform, and for that reason is not considered in detail here. In some contexts, such as Sierra Leone, the post-conflict armed forces incorporated and retrained members of all fighting factions. In Liberia, however, the decision was made to completely disband the armed forces and begin the vetting and recruitment process anew. The intended target for the army was set at 2,000 troops, and the training of the new force was carried out by an American private security contractor, DynCorp. The AFL remained out of operation until mid-2012, but is generally considered to now be well trained and ready to take on responsibility for Liberia's external security, which may also mean that it will play a larger role in contributing to personal security as well in the years ahead. As of 5 February 2014, the AFL numbered 1,900 soldiers, with plans for a further 300 by 2015 (UNSC, 2014a: 11).

39 Interview with Liberia expert, Monrovia, 5 March 2014.

40 Interview with UN official, Monrovia, 6 March 2014.

3.4.2 Decentralising security provision: regional peace and security hubs

The Joint Security and Justice Programme (JSJP) initiated in December 2011 was intended to be a three-year programme but has subsequently been extended.⁴¹ As the overarching framework for improving the capacity and effectiveness of national justice and security structures and systems, it is particularly relevant for ongoing progress on personal security. While its impact and contribution to security progress may be difficult to identify given that it is a recent initiative, as the key financing and strategic planning framework for security reform, the success of the JSJP will be important over the coming years and it will be an important mechanism for consolidating security in the country.

The development of five regional peace and security hubs forms the backbone of the JSJP, and these are intended to form a mechanism to address the over-centralisation of security in Monrovia. The objective of the hubs is to provide a decentralised and holistic approach to justice and security, building institutional capacity, and also supporting positive relationships between the hubs and the communities they are intended to serve (Keane, 2012). Not only are the hubs intended to bring the LNP to areas outside Monrovia, but they will also bring the different security-sector institutions together under one roof, such as PSUs, Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization officials, prosecutors and corrections officers. According to Nikolaisen (2013: 55), ‘the Regional Security and Justice Hub model is essentially about integrating the rural population in the formal security sector’. The first of the hubs was opened in Gbargna in February 2013 covering Bong, Nimba and Lofa counties, and the development of a further two is underway. The selection of Gbargna as the site for the first hub was a strategic decision, given the proximity to the border region, the region’s historic insecurity and the recent security challenges experienced there (Sherif and Maina, 2013: 3).

In theory, the hubs could be an innovative way to provide security to the population throughout the country as well as supporting increased personal security by addressing some of the issues highlighted in Section 2, such as lack of presence of police and other security officials and inaccessibility of formal security institutions. However, the capacity of the first hub to respond to and meet the needs of the population appears to be quite limited at this initial stage, and awareness of the hubs and the services they provide is extremely low, perhaps reflecting the predominance of informal security institutions in rural areas, as discussed in Section 2 (Nikolaisen, 2013; Sherif

and Maina, 2013). Furthermore, the ability, or indeed even the intent, of the hubs to bridge the formal and informal security and justice systems is questionable, despite the fact that this is crucial to strengthening personal security in the country. One UN official we interviewed suggested to us that the hubs were little more than a useful forward operating base for ERUs stationed there, indicating a more reactive than transformative security agenda.⁴²

Several interviewees and literature sources draw attention to the fact that, while the hubs have potential, it is not clear that they should be the priority investment in SSR in Liberia, and that more research is needed to understand their impact and sustainability: ‘The hubs haven’t really been thought through properly, but the government wasn’t going to look a gift horse in the mouth’.⁴³ A local NGO representative highlighted that, while the hubs can be useful for ensuring an immediate response through the ERUs, longer-term processes of conflict transformation are needed, and these should be prioritised over spending millions of dollars on major infrastructure projects like the hubs.⁴⁴ Funding for the subsequent peace and security hubs is conditional on completing the first hubs with a GoL contribution. Given that establishing the first hub resulted in significant overspending, this could potentially affect the roll-out of the remaining ones. For now, it seems that while the hubs appear to be a step in the right direction – towards decentralisation of security responsibilities – they are yet to be joined up with a better understanding of what will work for the local population, and what is logistically feasible given the immense challenges in providing security throughout the country.

Overall, while there is still clearly much scope and need for continued reform, and concerns about the LNP are undoubtedly justified, the LNP is an important dimension of personal security in Liberia. As SSR continues and the LNP continues to build up its size, geographical coverage and capacity, there is potential for it to play an increasing role in contributing to decreased violence and increased perceptions of safety and security. As our interviews and the literature demonstrate, however, this end goal is still beyond reach and it is not at all clear at this stage that the regional hubs hold the answers for improved personal security for rural Liberians.

3.5 The role of donor financing

The international community has provided the financial and technical capacity without which the Liberian

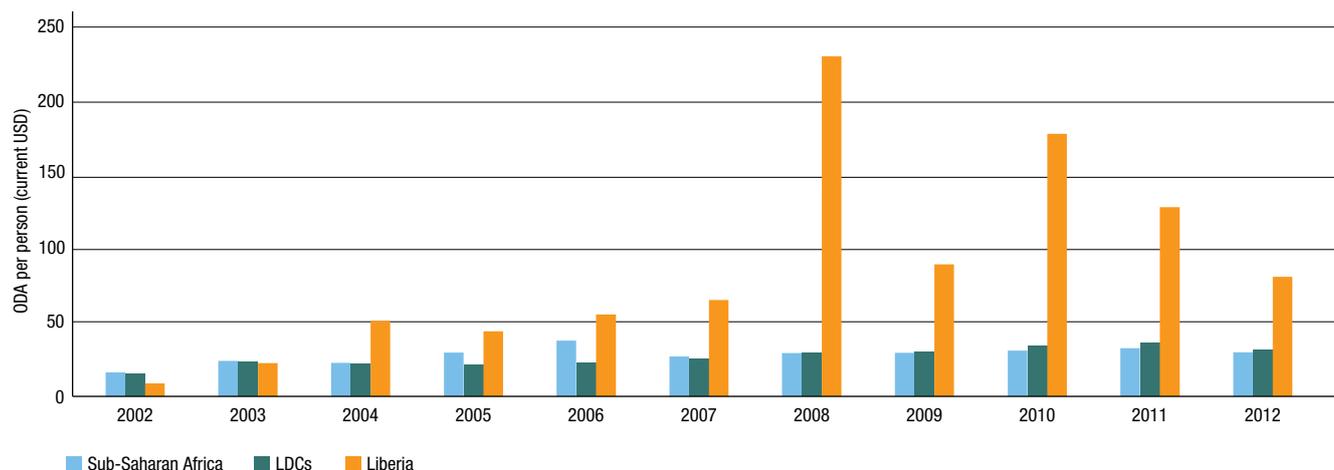
41 The programme has until now been funded through multiple sources including the UN Peacebuilding Fund (PBF), the Justice and Security Trust Fund (JSTF), UN Development Programme (UNDP) core funding, UNMIL, the World Bank, bilateral donors and the GoL.

42 Interview with UN official, Monrovia, 6 March 2014.

43 Interview with UN official, Monrovia, 6 March 2014.

44 Interview with local NGO representative, Monrovia, 7 March 2014.

Figure 9: Total ODA to Liberia

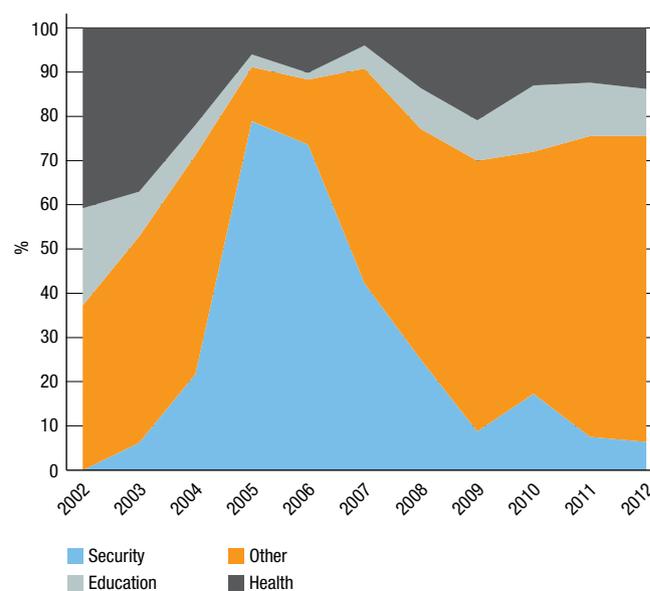


Source: OECD DAC (2014).

government would not have been able to implement security-related reforms, as well as the political capital that has enabled, at least in part, Johnson Sirleaf’s government to maintain the current political and economic stability. In this way, it has played an enabling role, giving momentum and support to several of the factors already mentioned in this section. The large role played by donor financing of security and justice reforms in the country reflects a growing trend of the international community becoming increasingly involved in these sectors over the past decade, in part connected to the fragile states agenda, and is not unique to Liberia (Pachon, 2012: 2). In Liberia, the context is now changing, with a decrease in donor funding, particularly linked to the drawdown of UNMIL, and a shortfall emerging where increases in the GoL’s spending on SSR is failing to meet the needs of security provision in post-conflict Liberia.

Historically the scale of overall donor finance for development has dwarfed Liberia’s financial contributions since the end of the civil war, with off-budget grants (excluding UNMIL) alone being as large as domestic revenue flows. From 2004 to 2007, it is estimated that more than US\$1.2 billion in donor financing was poured into Liberia to support the implementation of the interim PRS (IDPS, 2010: 7). Indeed, Liberia has been truly ‘donor saturated’, with donors having a direct political, military and economic role in the post-conflict transition. This is not merely an issue in the security sector: in 2007 Liberia was ranked as the most aid-dependent country in the world. Although it has now moved into 4th place, this demonstrates the country’s continued reliance on donor financing (OECD DAC, 2014: 30) (Figure 9). Data from 2011 show that Liberia just made it into the top 20 fragile state recipients of official development assistance (ODA), but ranks top for ODA per capita (US\$73) among countries with available data, more than double the level in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which is the next-highest at US\$38 per capita (OECD, 2014:

Figure 10: Composition of total ODA to Liberia by sector



Source: OECD DAC (2014).

90). According to Nikolaisen (2013: 51), ‘the Liberian [SSR] process is highly internationalised, and heavily dependent on external donors’.

As Figure 10 illustrates, there has been a sharp fall in the share of ODA spending on the security sector since FY2005/06 when there was a major investment by the international community in supporting stability in the run-up to and aftermath of the first post-conflict elections in 2005.

Donor financing and technical support to the security sector have focused predominantly on the police and army as the two core state security actors, and have been led in large part by the UN and the US (Luckham and Kirk, 2012). However, according to estimates in the

2013 public expenditure review (PER) for the security sector, donor contributions to the security sector are now declining, estimated to have ranged from US\$32 million in FY2008/09 to US\$23 million in FY2010/11 (excluding UNMIL spending). While the GoL's own contributions have increased to compensate for this shortfall, from US\$37 million to US\$56 million, during the same period, it is clear that a funding shortfall remains.⁴⁵ Separately, while the average annual cost of UNMIL's operations is estimated to have exceeded half a billion US dollars since FY2004/05 (World Bank, 2013b), it has steadily declined from a high of US\$723 million in 2004/05 to an allocation of US\$476 million in 2013/14. For obvious reasons, the increasing GoL budget allocations to the security sector have not been large enough to compensate for the massive decline in UNMIL funding in recent years.

The large amounts of donor finance to support economic and security sector reform have also enabled the international community to exert a degree of political influence over the country's post-conflict recovery. Through training, mentoring and high-level political discussions, the international community has been able to have considerable input into the development of policies and strategies for security reform. The US government's contracting of a private military company, DynCorp, to lead on army reform is just one example. This, however, has not always been seen in a positive light. For example, some opposition politicians were critical of the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to President Johnson Sirleaf a mere four days before the presidential elections in November 2011, which they saw as a thinly veiled attempt to influence the electoral outcome (UNSC, 2012b: 2).

Indeed, the large role played by the international community in bringing financial and technical capacity to the SSR process brings with it many tensions. For example, Jaye (2009) argues that, while international support has been critical to delivering key security-related reforms in Liberia, it has also resulted in top-down decision-making that has largely avoided local consultation. This has contributed to a situation in Liberia where there is a tension between strong donor activism and weak local ownership (Podder, 2014: 374), with questions around whether the reforms now being implemented, such as the regional hubs, are in fact appropriate and sustainable.

As Section 3 has attempted to show, the cessation of violence and the existence of a functioning government,

Box 5: Challenges in obtaining data on SSR financing

It is important to note that, as pointed out by Pachon (2012), the persistent lack of reliable data is one of the main challenges for conducting comparisons and extracting lessons learned from SSR around the world. The available budget data in many countries, including Liberia, is insufficient for drawing conclusions regarding the overall model of reform expenditure as it does not capture donor assistance to projects and programmes not classified as ODA or projects that are off-budget. In Liberia, donor contributions to SSR are many times larger than the GoL's own contributions, although there is not yet a consistent dataset capturing all of these resource flows. In particular, the UN and US have been very poor at reporting their contributions as the GoL is attempting to establish an aid management platform in the Ministry of Finance. Another issue regarding the difficulty of capturing SSR spending relates to whether it does or does not classify as actual ODA as per OECD's definition. Data that do exist on SSR spending and assistance are often contradictory, with different organisations reporting different amounts, making rigorous analysis of financing flows difficult.

albeit with limitations and problems, have allowed the Liberian population to achieve a basic level of security, which has in turn permitted an initial return to normal life following the end of the conflict in 2003. In Liberia, many interviewees spoke of a 'window of opportunity' following the conflict. We argue that this window of opportunity has been enabled largely by a plurality of actors at the community level, alongside increased political stability and UNMIL's presence in the country. We have identified SSR as a somewhat weaker driver of change: while it has brought essential attention to the challenges in the sector, it has been beset by tensions and problems. The international community's financial contribution has been an underlying driver of progress, partly enabling the deployment of UNMIL, the relatively stable political settlement and an expensive SSR process. However, many challenges remain. In part, these challenges are linked to tensions in the drivers of change we have identified, as well as unresolved conflict triggers in the country. It is to those issues we now turn.

45 Data obtained from the Ministry of Finance, April 2014. It is important to note that large amounts of donor finance for SSR also often occur off-budget, which makes it difficult to identify accurate spending levels and can reduce government control over the funds (Byrd, 2010: 307).



United Nations peacekeepers have helped to maintain security in Liberia. Photo: © UN / Marie Frechon.

4. What are the challenges?

‘There has been a lot of progress [in security] but there is still a lot more to be done ... the root causes [of conflict] are there: land, political marginalisation, ethnicity. They all remain and need to be addressed’ – Member of local early warning conflict network

Progress on security in Liberia must be nuanced with the main challenges and caveats that risk reversing some of the gains highlighted in Section 2. This section focuses particularly on issues that threaten the sustainability of security progress, such as the many potential conflict triggers, the financing gap in the wake of UNMIL’s ongoing drawdown and decreasing international support, and some of the conceptual and practical challenges linked to the SSR process, including developing a strong response to SGBV.

4.1 Addressing potential conflict triggers

While systems of exclusion and violence that exist during peacetime can be exaggerated by conflict, violence can also be entrenched during peacetime if the underlying causes of violence remain unaddressed (Keen, 2008: 16). The ‘root causes’ of the conflicts in Liberia are multiple and contested (GoL, 2009), and we do not seek to resolve any of those debates here. However, we highlight those issues that are particularly pertinent as Liberia seeks to maintain its relative stability and improve personal security. These issues include the socioeconomic marginalisation of many Liberians, the risks associated with a flawed DDRR process, conflicts over land and resource management, ongoing corruption and elitism in the political sphere, and a failure to fully implement the recommendations made by the TRC.

4.1.1 Unequal socioeconomic development

The socioeconomic marginalisation of the population that pre-dates the conflicts, particularly in rural areas and in the south-east of the country, remains to be addressed. Even now, over 11 years after the end of the conflict, Liberia ranks 175th out of 186 countries in the Human Development Index (UNDP, 2014). While Liberia seems to be making progress in areas of financial management and macroeconomic recovery, much of the population is still waiting to see concrete improvements in standard and quality of life. If a significant proportion of Liberians continue to receive little or no benefit from the

economic dividends of peace through jobs, infrastructure development or improvements in basic services, then the incentives to maintain the system may be outweighed by the possible gains of a return to violence. Indeed, while greater security and stability is critical for development by enabling service delivery and investments in the future, the equitable distribution of socioeconomic benefits is also vital for continued peace and security in Liberia. As highlighted by Gray-Johnson (2009: 18):

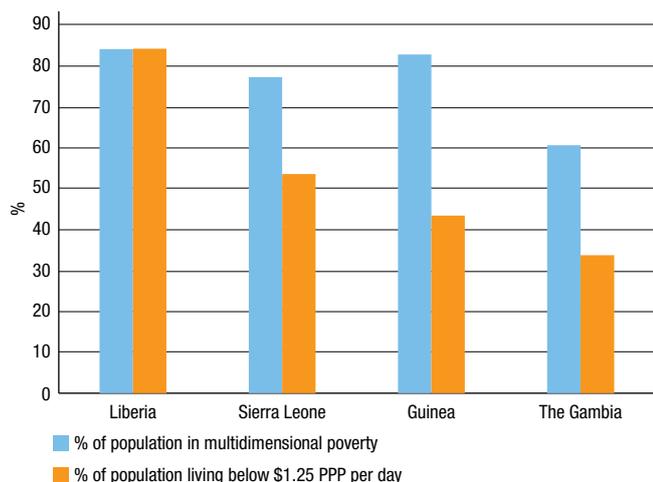
‘Given that the majority of Liberians seem to be weary of war, it is unlikely that former combatants will remobilize for war or that elites will urge violence to attain their goals. Nevertheless, this does not suggest that there is not the potential for violence. The capacity to remobilize for war remains, while the conditions that perpetuate inequality, exclusion and domination still exist and undermine Liberia’s prospects for real equitable development to benefit all Liberians.’

The Liberian economy remains segmented, with two-thirds of the population limited to subsistence farming and hunting, and gaining little benefit from the private-sector investments or enclave sectors, contributing to economic marginalisation (IMF, 2010). The 2010 Liberia Labour Force Survey estimates that 68% of employed Liberians work in the informal sector and over half of the employed population is self-employed or provides non-wage labour within their households. In addition, more than half of those employed are uneducated (GoL, 2012). With a young, growing and largely unskilled and unemployed population, creating employment and income opportunities for all Liberians will be critical, not least because high levels of youth unemployment and underemployment can lead to social instability (de Mel et al., 2013: 1). Currently, there are real concerns that Liberia is experiencing a jobless growth, which in part drove the conflict-related grievances that led to violence in the 1990s, and thus risks repeating the mistakes of the past. Poverty and inequality also continue to be major challenges facing Liberia. As Figure 11 (overleaf) shows, Liberia ranks as the poorest country in the region, with 83.8% of the population in ‘multidimensional poverty’.

The importance of socioeconomic development for Liberia’s long-term security prospects cannot be over-emphasised. As one Liberian academic stated:

‘Let’s assume out of [a population of] 4 million, you have 2 million in Monrovia – you don’t have water, electricity, housing, jobs. You see, so to what extent are these things factored into the security thinking in the country? Because of what the President and

Figure 11: Regional comparison of multidimensional poverty



Source: GoL (2013: 32) (data from Human Development Index 2012).

*her team are thinking about now they won't think about those, but we need to look at 20 years down the line. [If we ignore these issues] it means we may have done nothing but create the basis for renewed fighting.*⁴⁶

The end of the armed conflict and organised violence has created a more stable context in which basic health, education and infrastructure services can be built up and delivered more effectively. The WHO reports that Liberia is one of six African countries to have achieved MDG 4 on child mortality, despite the continued wide disparities in health outcomes across the country (WHO, 2014). Greater efforts will be needed in the coming years to continue to extend infrastructure and increase the human, financial and logistical capacity of the health and education sectors, particularly in rural areas, if development is to benefit all Liberians. The Ebola epidemic that has affected thousands in Liberia has demonstrated the huge inadequacies of Liberia's healthcare system. This has led to rising tensions in several communities, highlighting the ongoing fragility of the country's institutions and the very real security risks that development-related challenges can present.

4.1.2 Limitations in the DDR process

The initial phase of DDR began in December 2003, but was beset by challenges. These were largely due to the unpreparedness of UNMIL, which had yet to reach full strength in the country, and the unexpectedly large numbers of ex-combatants seeking to go through the programme. The process was halted after violent protests in mid-December, just a few days after beginning, but eventually restarted in April 2004. By October 2004,

when the process was officially declared over, 100,000 ex-combatants had gone through disarmament and demobilisation (Nilsson, 2009: 32-33). Yet despite the large number of participants, the small number of weapons recovered through the process has led to concerns about remaining caches and the possibility that the fighting forces could be easily re-armed. The delays, funding shortfalls and poor planning also meant that the rehabilitation and reintegration components of DDR were particularly ineffective, and the training and skills that ex-combatants gained ended up being largely unsuited to the type of employment available (Nilsson, 2009: 34). Some researchers have argued that the wartime command-and-control structures have not been fully dismantled, and there remains the potential that these could be reinstated, particularly if popular grievances escalate (Utas, 2008). In this respect, one of the most remarkable aspects of the current stability in Liberia is that it exists in spite of this large number of uneducated and underemployed ex-combatants, continuing command structures and a large number of unaccounted-for weapons.

The limited job creation witnessed in Liberia can mean that former combatants rely on their old command structures to source work, which in itself keeps the conditions in place for a potential return to conflict. Given that the Liberian army was entirely disbanded after the conflict, there are now approximately 17,000 deactivated servicemen along with 103,019 demobilised ex-combatants and a further 9,000 who did not benefit from the DDR process, all of whom need to find some way of making a living (World Bank, 2013b). Indeed, endemic poverty and marginalisation were key in the high levels of 'youth' participation in the Liberian Civil Wars: on this basis, a priority for post-war stability has to be improved livelihood options and a strengthened national economy. As a survey of over 1,400 ex-combatants has found, unemployment, poverty and hardship are all closely linked to the potential for renewed fighting (USIP, 2008: 1; World Bank, 2014).

4.1.3 Conflict over land rights and resource management

Another area of potential conflict is centred around land, property and natural resource management. Unequal, exclusionary or discriminatory land acquisition, tenure and distribution was highlighted as one of the underlying causes of conflict in Liberia by the TRC (GoL, 2009). There are major challenges around land in Liberia, spanning from local boundary disputes to issues relating to large-scale displacement and return of communities, as well as increasing investment by external investors that puts pressure on Liberia's resources (IRIN, 2013).⁴⁷ This also relates to job creation, since Liberians, as demonstrated by many other examples worldwide, are more likely to

46 Interview with a Liberian expert, London, 25 March 2014.

47 See also the Norwegian Refugee Council's website for monitoring data on conflict over land rights. <http://www.nrcliberia.ushahidi.com>.

welcome foreign investment where it has tangible benefits for them and their families, otherwise it will be seen as part of an ongoing corrupt and elitist practice in the country. In one recent example, hundreds of residents of Liberia's Grand Cape Mount County attracted nationwide attention by claiming land had been seized from them and turned over to a Malaysian agro-industrial organisation, Sami Darby Plantation, with the President admitting that the community had not been consulted properly.⁴⁸ In an attempt to address these concerns and to show how the revenues from the extractive sectors benefit all Liberians through the national budget, Liberia has acceded to the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) since 2007. However, the recent events in the mining town of Zolowee, Nimba County, where riot police officers fired live bullets in the air to disburse people protesting about unpaid wages and crop compensation linked to ArcelorMittal's work, demonstrate the ongoing concerns and tensions linked to land disputes.⁴⁹

Smaller-scale property disputes are also endemic in Liberia, and the *Talking Peace* report (Vinck et al., 2011) showed that nationally in 2011, 16% of the population had reported a land dispute since the end of the war, with roughly 40% of land disputes remaining unresolved. A report by the Small Arms Survey (2011a) highlights that land conflicts are routinely identified as the reason behind reported killings. For example, in 2008, 15 people were killed in clashes on the border between Grand Bassa and Margibi counties because of tensions relating to refugees, population growth and ongoing land tenure disputes. As in this example, land conflicts have the potential to exacerbate inter-ethnic tensions. Although progress has been slow in dealing with land-rights issues in Liberia, a Land Commission was established in 2009 to propose, advocate and coordinate reforms of land policy, laws and programmes. As a result of the Commission's work, a Land Rights Policy was approved in May 2013, which will form the basis of a new land-rights law.

4.1.4 Corruption

As mentioned above, President Johnson Sirleaf has made several political bargains to maintain stability and control over the political landscape, and this has undoubtedly brought compromises in the fight against corruption. In particular, there is an overall lack of accountability and oversight in the way in which the government operates and makes policies, including in the security sector. A key

issue has been political appointments within the upper echelons of the police service, which have undermined serious attempts at reform (Downie, 2013: 6). These should be understood in the context of Liberian politics, described in Section 3.3, which has necessitated trade-offs and the perpetuation of a certain degree of cronyism. As one respondent stated, 'the difference that I see is: previously it was plundering, now it's about manipulating the system. People are trying to do corruption cleverly – in the past it was more about grabbing what you want'.⁵⁰ The 2017 elections will be a test for the durability of the current political settlement in sustaining peace. Whether violence breaks out, and the extent of such violence, will demonstrate whether the political trade-offs, which have had a role in perpetuating elite and patronage-driven politics in the name of ongoing stability, have been worthwhile or whether this has merely enabled the same politicians to maintain positions of political and economic power to secure their re-election.

4.1.5 Reconciliation

The TRC was established in 2005 and concluded its final report in June 2009; this was received with mixed reactions.⁵¹ The recommendations remain unimplemented and post-war reconciliation efforts have not been a priority of the government, with the resulting reconciliation process largely being stalled.⁵² Notably, and understandably, Johnson Sirleaf has failed to act on the recommendation to remove herself from public office for 30 years, and that political rivals such as Prince Johnson also not hold office. This can be seen as a pragmatic approach to maintain short-term political stability and ensure that the reconciliation process does not exclude those who could become spoilers and threaten the peace. Yet exactly that kind of partly political decision could increase the population's lack of faith in the state to offer genuine reconciliation.

However, as argued by the ICG (2011: 25), until a new group of political actors emerges, the needed reforms to the security sector, as well as political, economic and social transformation, will not occur, as the current elites who gained power and influence during and after the war are too vested in the status quo. Reconciliation is not just about locking up perpetrators, but a range of processes through different echelons of society – very few of which the state is pursuing. Because of this, a range of local practices have emerged – such as various communities engaging in their own processes of post-conflict

48 See, 'Land grab or development opportunity?', *IRIN News*, 17 February 2012 at <http://www.irinnews.org/report/94882/liberia-land-grab-or-development-opportunity>.

49 See, 'Liberia: clashes near in [sic] Arcelor Mittal's mine', *The New Republic*, 6 July 2014 at <http://allafrica.com/stories/201407060054.html>.

50 Interview with representative of an international NGO, Monrovia, 3 March 2014.

51 See 'Liberia: opinion divided on Truth and Reconciliation findings', *IRIN News*, 6 July 2009 at <http://www.irinnews.org/report/85158/liberia-opinion-divided-on-truth-and-reconciliation-findings>.

52 Interview with UN official, Monrovia, 6 March 2014.

memorialisation. One such example is in Samay, a small town in Bong County, in which the community has erected a concrete cross with the names of 37 lost community members inscribed on it, which is now used as a focal point when teaching children about the war. More efforts like this are needed to heal the wounds of war and to enable people to have greater trust in their leaders and lead more secure lives.

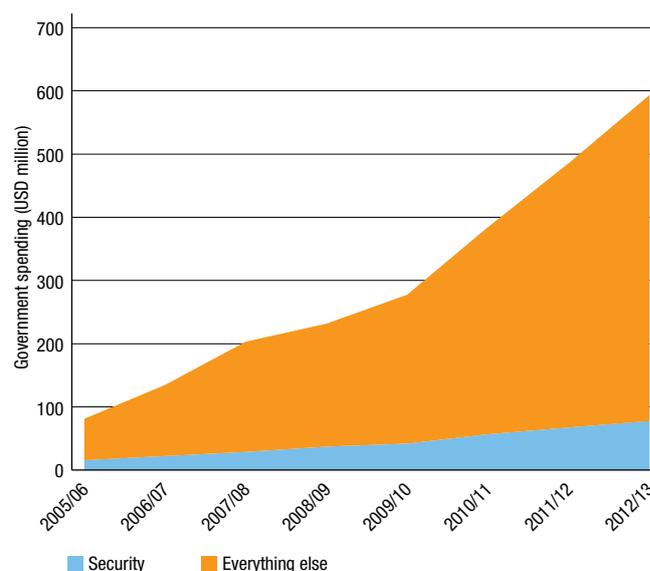
While the research carried out for this case study seems to confirm that Liberia is ‘stable but fragile’, important areas of dissatisfaction remain, some of which have spilled over into isolated incidents of violence. Moreover, if these areas of dissatisfaction remain unaddressed, this could contribute to a growing sense of grievance with the government and post-conflict process, threatening the peace and personal security of Liberians.

4.2 The gap in financing for security issues due to UNMIL drawdown

Despite efforts to support government ownership since the election of Johnson Sirleaf in 2005, SSR in Liberia has been driven by external actors (mainly the US and the UN), reflecting the nature of the peacebuilding process in the country more generally (SFCG and SIPRI, 2011: 9). As one UN official stated, ‘the power of UNMIL has declined as the government role has increased, but there is a dependency culture here which needs to be broken’.⁵³ As a result, there is concern among many about what will happen as the donor funds dry up and UNMIL fully draws down from its engagement in Liberia.

The financial and technical assistance from donors has acted as a double-edged sword. While it has been necessary for the improvements described throughout this case study, it has also created serious dependency issues that can be problematic in the long term (Podder, 2014: 353). Dependence on the international community also reflects a choice made by the government, ‘[which has] not made the police a top priority, preferring to accumulate political capital by providing health-care services and education and leaving security to the UN and international donors.’ (Downie, 2013: 6). Questions now remain about whether the GoL has the capacity and the trust of the population to take control of security provision throughout the country, as well as the ability to continue the reform process to strengthen personal security in a sustainable way without losing momentum in reforms in other important areas of social service provision. In particular, the UNMIL drawdown of personnel and equipment, which started in 2012 and will continue until 2017, will pose substantive challenges for the government on several fronts. For example, the ability of and speed at which national security agencies can assume the functions currently performed

Figure 12: Government of Liberia: spending on security sector



Source: based on data from the Ministry of Finance, April 2014.

by UN peacekeepers and police, in an environment of competing development needs with limited fiscal space, will be put to the test.

While GoL security sector budgets increased steadily between 2006 and 2012, the share of the security sector allocations as a percentage of the national budget remained fairly stable, at between 12% and 14% (Figure 12). However, in FY2013/14, the security sector allocation within the national budget decreased from US\$81.2 million to US\$77.4 million as compared with the previous year (UNSC, 2014a: 8), although this must be seen within an overall declining budget envelope. The PER (2013) ‘identifies a financing gap of US\$86 million between 2012 and 2019’ and calls on both the GoL and donor governments to contribute more to financing security activities (Downie, 2013: 8; World Bank, 2013b). If this gap is not addressed, which may be likely given the current budget constraints, this will affect priority issues such as having a larger and more mobile police force and the completion of the regional hubs.

A further challenge will be responding to the need to increase the pay of the police, which may be essential to tackling corruption and in turn increasing citizens’ confidence in state security services (HRW, 2013). A key finding of the PER is that the GoL has depended on donor financing for most of the capital spending in the security sector, only undertaking payments for ongoing costs such as fuel, uniforms and salaries, indicating the urgent need to development sustainable budgetary and resource flows critical to security (World Bank, 2013a).

53 Interview with UN official, Monrovia, 6 March 2014.

Box 6: Challenges facing the JSJP as a mechanism for funding SSR

The mid-term review of the JSJP found that, while considerable progress is being made to achieve the programme's aims, there are concerns around the lack of adequate funding and the poorly functioning governance and management structure (Swedish Development Advisers AB, 2013). Reflecting the previous limited attention given to strengthening security sector governance in Liberia, the JSJP was intended to address institutional management, but has been found to have failed to do so. The mid-term review, which highlights a number of problems and challenges, also suggests that the focus on the hubs themselves has been driven by the UN PBF and may in fact not have been entirely strategic in terms of advancing security and justice in Liberia. The hubs are being constructed at vast expense, but many observers are critical of their added value and whether they represent a strategic use of funds. UNDP's management of the UN PBF and JSTF resources has also come under fire, and the review alleges that this has damaged donor confidence and affected the viability of the programme. The allegations of corruption and inefficiency at UNDP were also substantiated during our interviews.* The issues raised relate to delays in implementing and reporting on elements of the JSJP, the quality of proposals and reports, delays in donor reporting, a lack of oversight of the use of donor resources and concerns about corruption within the LNP and judiciary (Nikolaisen, 2013: 54; Swedish Development Advisers AB, 2013). As a result, all donors except Sweden appear to have pulled out of the JSTF.

* Interview with UN official, Monrovia, 6 March 2014.

It is clear that budget allocations for security provision need to increase over time, although this will have an impact on the GoL's ability to spend on other important sectors. Byrd (2010: 302-303) points to some of the challenges in determining the proper balance of public spending on the security sector: where, on the one hand, the resources from a strong economy can be used to enhance security, but, on the other hand, overspending on the sector can lead to adverse development effects or higher levels of insecurity through a more militarised state. This means that the GoL must carefully make difficult trade-offs when deciding where to focus its limited resources and must ensure these are carefully aligned to the UNMIL transition, planning for which has come quite late. Many of the concerns expressed during interviews were linked to the role and reform of the police and the long-term sustainability of security progress. The majority of Liberians appear to attribute ongoing security to the UNMIL presence, as evidenced by the data reported in Section 2.2, and there is therefore a genuine fear about the ongoing drawdown and the possibility that it will destabilise the country. This also links to concerns regarding oversight of the police, given the important role that UNMIL, and particularly UNPOL officers, have played in this regard, and puts a spotlight on the fact that security sector governance has not been given adequate priority in the SSR process.

The GoL and UNMIL have agreed on a plan for the gradual handover of security tasks currently being

performed by UNMIL, including security functions to be transferred and the cost of filling the remaining capability gaps. Beyond the major capacity issues faced by the GoL, the financial constraints are likely to be truly damaging to sustaining what limited progress has been made in SSR, with serious concerns about the ability of the GoL to maintain the LNP at its current strength, let alone expand its numbers, as is expected and will be needed when UNMIL leaves. To increase this space for security sector spending, aside from relying on development partner support, additional domestic revenue from the extraction of natural resources (agriculture, forestry, mining and petroleum sectors) and increasing domestic tax revenue would need to be mobilised.

4.3 Implementing security sector reform

Most of the extensive literature on SSR in Liberia acknowledges that some improvements have been made (see Section 3.4), but that there are major gaps between policy documents and the possibilities for implementation. These problems in the SSR process are usefully summarised by Jaye (2009: 18):

'The provision of external support to Liberia's SSR process has produced mixed results. On one hand, it has collectively provided necessary advice and financial resources for the implementation of critical reforms, particularly of the AFL and LNP. Without the

'It doesn't matter to the ordinary citizens so much what a Liberian officer learns at police training academy. What matters is how a LNP officer acts with an ordinary citizen – that becomes the measurement of what the government is doing' – Liberian civil society activist

involvement and support of external actors – above all the US and UNMIL – the Government of Liberia would have found it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to carry out the SSR process. On the other hand, external support has also led to a decision-making process that is heavily top-down and, during the initial years, lacked consultation with local people. As a result aspects of the SSR process – much like the donor-driven structural adjustment policy of the 1980s – have not adequately reflected the security needs of Liberian society.’

4.3.1 Limited capacity, infrastructure and resources

Police still lack uniforms, cars and motorcycles, handcuffs, and computers to accurately record crime data (GoL, 2012). This, coupled with the difficulty in ensuring that the LNP has a presence throughout the whole country, means that the police are often unable to adequately protect the personal security of urban and rural Liberians. For example, as one experienced researcher on Liberia recounted, sometimes rural people do go to the police, but ‘there is maybe one person on duty and they don’t have a motorcycle ... but even if they did where would they put the perpetrator? On the back of the motorcycle?’⁵⁴ The lack of adequate resources to support the LNP is also linked to the problems with corruption within the police force. Demands for bribes are common when accessing police services (HRW, 2013) and this can act as a significant disincentive for the population to trust and go to the police. As one academic interviewee pointed out, ‘If you talk to police officers they will say this: it doesn’t matter how many workshops you send me to, I need to live, which means I need to take money. And the boss man then will ask for money from me too.’⁵⁵ Addressing this issue, and by extension the widespread corruption in the security services, should therefore be a more explicit element of the SSR process.

‘There is maybe one person on duty and they don’t have a motorcycle ... but even if they did where would they put the perpetrator? On the back of the motorcycle?’ – Liberia expert

4.3.2 Mismatch between technical responses and the reality of security perceptions and provision

This mismatch between the way that SSR has been designed and implemented and the reality of the Liberian context is partly because the SSR process has been

dominated by the US and the UN, rather than driven by the Liberian government or civil society. As a result, the targets and benchmarks, such as the eventual number of police and army officers, may not reflect what is possible and, in fact, needed given Liberia’s context and the needs and priorities of the local people. Instead, they reflect international ‘best practice’ for SSR, which more often than not reflects a desire to build Western institutions rather than drawing from local context and capacity. As Podder (2014: 368) has noted:

‘International policies flowing from a donor-driven SSR have attempted to duplicate international standards without addressing issues of sustainability and local spending capacity. This reinforces the tensions between international policies and local realities.’

This mismatch between donor funding allocations and local perceptions of what has contributed to security is also embodied by the excessive focus on formal structures at the expense of the important informal and community-based approaches that were highlighted in Section 3.1. Much of the focus of discussions around UNMIL’s drawdown have concentrated on the need for the GoL to increase numbers of police officers, in particular to fill the gap left by departing peacekeepers and UNPOL officers. However, it could be that this focus is misplaced and that even if the LNP achieves the desired capacity of 8,000 officers, this does not guarantee progress in personal security. Given the state’s lack of penetration outside Monrovia and other urban centres, it is not only a case of rebuilding the state services, but also of providing them for the first time in many areas that have historically remained untouched by formal security actors and institutions. As Bøås and Jennings (2005) have pointed out, trying to rebuild something that never existed is problematic, especially when the approach is not based on a comprehension of the context in which it is being implemented. An analysis by the OECD of more than 40 SSR programmes in Liberia found that ‘these programmes remain heavily focused on core SSR capacities, with less of a focus on building community security and resilience’ (Small Arms Survey, 2011b: 11). Yet it is these qualities that lay the groundwork for a durable peace. Stronger engagement with informal actors and more innovative security sector programmes that recognise the role of community-based approaches in the progress on personal security are needed. As one academic Liberia expert pointed out:

‘They [donors] don’t understand that the way order, peace, and security is maintained depends far less on the

54 Interview with Liberia expert, London, 25 March 2014.

55 Telephone interview with academic expert on Liberia, 26 February 2014.

state than they think. So by focusing on the state they don't get the outcomes they expect'.⁵⁶

This draws attention to the important role of non-state security actors contributing to security progress and the need for the international community to broaden the scope of reform programmes away from the dominant focus on formal, national-level structures, to take account of actors and institutions that exist in the informal sphere at the community level. As one participant in our focus group discussion stated:

'local structures can be very useful, but I don't think our security architecture has really been making use of those. To really sustain peace in Liberia we have to find a way of getting the chiefs and the local communities involved in the business of security. As we move toward a modern society, we have to bring the chiefs along. If we want to sustain peace then we need to concentrate on these structures.'⁵⁷

This is particularly important given the historical context of security provision in Liberia. As Podder (2014: 373) notes, 'exclusion of legitimate actors simply on account of their informal character can create low-capacity institutions that are ahistorical, unaccountable and lack public sanction'. However, while working with community-based informal structures is important, Reeve and Speare (2012: 42) also highlight the paradox that where some of these actors, such as chiefs and secret societies, contribute to social order and provide security to their communities, they can also be an obstacle to the state's ability to fulfil its civilian protection mandate and to uphold law and order and access to justice. Indeed, in the case of community-based providers of security, such as vigilante groups, there can be a fine line between them being a threat as opposed to a protector of a community (Kantor and Persson, 2010: 24). Their rules of engagement are likely to be informally held and possibly dangerous, with the risk of mob violence taking hold. Customary justice can also fail to uphold the security of women and girls, as perpetrators of domestic violence are rarely punished and deals are struck with the victim's family, rarely with the woman's security or welfare in mind.

While the community police forums were established as a way to bridge the gap between the LNP and communities, a survey carried out in Monrovia found that despite 102 forums existing in the city, they were rarely mentioned as an effective model of community-level security programming (AOAV, 2011: 38). There is therefore still significant scope for the formal and informal security sectors in Liberia to be better linked and coordinated.

Similar to the need for Liberia's political leaders to negotiate and manage the formal and informal political networks, there is also a need to engage with community-based security approaches, since they represent the reality of Liberia's complex post-conflict security context.

4.3.3 Overemphasis on the Liberian police and armed forces

Even within the realm of state security actors, SSR has overwhelmingly focused on the police and the army. While these two security actors are arguably the largest and most important in state security provision, this focus has come at the expense of a range of other important institutions, such as the border police and corrections officers, who are also key to the effective functioning of the security sector in Liberia. One reason for the oversight, beyond the obvious funding limitations, is that UNMIL did not have the capacity or knowledge to reform all arms of the security sector, such as the fire service or the drug enforcement agency, and so these agencies now need to catch up. The UN has now assigned mentors to these bodies in an attempt to support their reform.⁵⁸ The JSJP and the new regional justice and security hubs potentially offer a more joined-up way of supporting the various security agencies and institutions. However, the many challenges associated with them (as discussed above) may limit their impact in this regard.

4.3.4 Disconnect between the SSR process and justice sector reform

SSR and justice sector reform are closely inter-related, and although the donor community has attempted to support a coordinated approach, most recently through the JSJP and the JSTF, in reality justice reforms are lagging significantly behind. This not only has implications for access to justice, but also has a negative impact on Liberia's security transition (Podder, 2014: 365). It is all well and good to have a (somewhat) functioning police, but if there is not a reliable justice system to detain suspects and try and sentence them then people are unlikely to trust formal security services to resolve disputes. Effectively addressing and preventing SGBV in particular requires a well-coordinated security and justice response.

4.3.5 Lack of oversight and accountability of the security sector

There is a lack of oversight and accountability, tied up with the historical legacy of an overcentralised and patrimonial-based political system. Civil society organisations, such as the Liberia National Law Enforcement Association (LINLEA) and the SSR Working Group are beginning to play a watchdog role and are attempting to hold the

56 Interview with Liberia expert, London, 25 March 2014.

57 A focus group discussion was held with several local NGO representatives as part of this research in Monrovia, 8 March 2014.

58 Interview with official from the Ministry of Defence, Monrovia, 6 March 2014.

Box 7: Addressing widespread sexual and gender-based violence

Several interviewees noted that there has been progress in relation to changed attitudes and police responses to rape and other forms of SGBV.* There has been a strong recognition of this problem by the Liberian Executive, women's groups and donors, followed by a host of institutional commitments to gender initiatives. Reforms such as the adoption of a rape law, and structural reforms that have been put in place in the LNP, centred on the establishment of Women and Children Protection Units and the provision of gender training, have been important steps. Indeed, the police reforms in particular have made significant progress compared to similar attempts in other post-conflict countries (Salahub and Bowah, 2011: 35). However, they still face huge limitations, and much greater attention needs to be paid to changing attitudes and the culture around violence against women. Practically speaking, a major concern is that the GoL has not been contributing to the establishment and training of the women and children units, which does not bode well as donor funding will inevitably decline as Liberia moves away from conflict.

*This was a key issue mentioned in interviews with several donor and civil society representatives held in Monrovia in March 2014.

government to account, but there is a need for much more systematic engagement between the government and civil society organisations (SCFG, 2011: 18-19). The legislature and the judiciary also need to recover from years of marginalisation and manipulation so that they can fulfil their intended role.

Finally, there are many challenges associated with police reform more specifically, despite the important progress made on reforming the police force and improving its capacity. Despite some notable progress and the absence of wide-scale state violence against citizens, the list of legitimate problems against the police is a long one. According to a recent report by Human Rights Watch, the LNP is 'riddled with corruption and a lack of professionalism and accountability'; a survey carried out in 2012 found the police to be the most corrupt institution in the country – a country that already ranks as one of the most corrupt in the world according to Transparency International (HRW, 2013: 2).

Keeping in mind the challenges discussed in this section, the progress that we identify in this report, while real

and important, should not be mistaken as suggesting that Liberia has addressed all the security issues that currently face the country and its people. Indeed, a notable final challenge is posed by a number of upcoming events that could risk destabilising or reversing the fragile gains that have been made on personal security in Liberia. These flashpoints are in some respects linked to the failure to address the roots of conflict, but will also test the durability of some of the reforms that have been put in place. For example, the future presidential elections in 2017, in which Johnson Sirleaf cannot stand, have the potential to trigger violence. This particular moment is also closely tied to the UNMIL drawdown, with many fearing that without a UN presence the state security forces may not be able to deal effectively with any election-related violence. The Ebola crisis, which has resulted in a delay of the UNMIL drawdown, will also test the durability of Liberia's security progress as the health infrastructure is stretched to its limits and the government appears to be struggling to contain the threats that it poses – not only to individual lives but also to the country's fragile peace.

A survey carried out in 2012 found the police to be the most corrupt institution in the country – a country that already ranks as one of the most corrupt in the world according to Transparency International

5. What lessons can we learn?

‘Liberia is an inch above what we call “fragility”’ – Head of international NGO, based in Monrovia

In this report, we have presented an analysis of Liberia’s progress in personal security since 2003, after 14 years of civil conflict. Our findings suggest a mixed picture: on the one hand, Liberia has avoided a return to civil war, and instances of state-led, collective and political violence have steadily declined. This represents important progress. Yet, on the other hand, despite these improvements, violence and crime remain genuine threats in the daily life of many Liberians. Crime rates, particularly in Monrovia, are high, and sexual violence remains widespread. Despite this, most people’s perceptions of their own security and the role of the police have improved, but concerns relating to widespread allegations of corruption and low capacity to respond to security incidents remain. This mixed picture also appears to shape people’s perceptions of security. While many studies point to improved perceptions of individual and community safety and security, there appears to be increasing fear about the future of peace in Liberia and growing disillusionment with the post-conflict development process.

The drivers of change we have identified include a range of local responses to violence at the community level, UNMIL’s role in maintaining stability, and the relatively stable political settlement. To a lesser extent, we identify ongoing SSR and international technical and financial inputs as also playing important roles as underlying factors of change. The extent to which these drivers are interrelated – or indeed if they push in different directions – is difficult to ascertain. However, without the stabilising factor of UNMIL and a high level of international support, it appears unlikely that the political settlement would have held. The local responses to violence were often in place before the war and now have resurfaced to some extent. We note clear disjuncture between SSR approaches and these local responses, suggesting a potentially missed opportunity for cooperation – although this may be changing, based on findings of perception surveys linked to the roll-out of the justice and security hubs. Overall, we argue that without each of the three strongest drivers of change – local responses to address violence and resolve community-level disputes, UNMIL’s presence throughout the country, and a relatively stable political settlement – a return to conflict would have been a real possibility.

In our analysis of the progress made, we do not hold up Liberia as a success story to be emulated. This is not just because the progress made to date is limited in many respects, but also because the drivers of change we have identified may have prioritised an approach more focused on short-term stability than addressing long-standing drivers of conflict. The progress made has not been equitable, in terms of either personal security or broader political, social and economic issues, which brings into question the sustainability of Liberia’s post-conflict stability. As highlighted, one international NGO representative stated that ‘Liberia is an inch above what we call “fragility”’, implying that the transition to peace still needs to be fully consolidated.

However, highlighting and explaining the gains that have been made alongside the very real continuing challenges is vital to learning lessons for the future. Liberia’s story may be of relevance to other countries facing multiple and competing challenges in post-conflict scenarios, and understanding what is driving progress on security issues in this context is also important for development progress more broadly. We hope that lessons can be drawn from Liberia’s experience with post-conflict personal security, particularly in terms of what post-conflict political settlements look like, the role of peacekeeping and the sustainability issues it brings, the need to address long-standing grievances if progress in personal security is to be sustained, and how SSR approaches can be improved in the aftermath of violent conflict. In short, while focusing on aspects of progress can be useful, we need to remember to look also at long-term trajectories of change in order to learn lessons of the past on what drives conflict and violence. Below, we highlight five key lessons from this case study.

- **Political settlements in post-conflict countries will be unlikely to perform in a way that proponents of liberal democracy would wish.** What may often be required, as identified in the World Development Report (World Bank, 2011), are ‘inclusive-enough’ coalitions, alongside the creation of mechanisms that can signal reform commitment and galvanise support for change. This has played out in Liberia, where despite a clear shift in the make-up of the formal political elite since the end of transitional government in 2005, key actors have remained in power in order to keep the perceived required balance between inclusivity and transparency in governance with the broader stability of the political settlement. What we see in Liberia could be termed a form

of illiberal peacebuilding, combining security, reform and patronage (Smith, 2012). The critical question, however, is how this settlement transforms over the long term. In the short term, this securitised patronage model combined with some reforms has led to improvements, at least in relation to the state–society contract. Key moments in the future, for example the forthcoming elections and the UN drawdown, will be a test of the resilience of this non-violent political settlement, and of whether improvements in personal security continue despite the many challenges discussed above.

- **While peacekeeping missions can play a vital role in supporting stability, both symbolically and practically, there is a risk of encouraging dependency.** Liberia is an example where a peacekeeping intervention has been successful in supporting the post-conflict peace and growing security, but the current sustainability challenges in the wake of its departure draw attention to the need for more planning around how a country can transition to its own security leadership. UNMIL has been an important, largely symbolic, stabilising factor in the eyes of Liberians, representing the desire and commitment of the international community to maintain peace and security in the country. While UNMIL has rarely intervened in local conflicts, it has performed an important oversight and capacity-building role with the LNP. Yet, while there is much talk of shifting away from ‘recovery to development’, peacekeepers currently still remain in the country and it is impossible to determine the extent to which the progress in security is illusory. The Liberian government faces massive challenges in bridging the financing gap as it takes over leadership on security provision from the international community, as is often the case in conflict-affected countries, where there are competing pressures on limited government budgets. The dependency cannot merely be addressed by increasing the scale and capacity of state security actors to meet the levels of the departing peacekeepers, as frequently seems to be the assumption in policy documents from the Liberian government, and requires deeper and sustained engagement with the plurality of security actors that exist throughout the country.
- **Gains made with short-term focus on security may not be sustainable in the long run, particularly when they come at the cost of other development dividends.** What we know is that moving state and society away from war and armed conflict can take many years, if not generations (World Bank, 2011). But there is nothing inevitable about the shift away from violence. Some of the drivers we have identified, such as a relatively stable political settlement, the role of UNMIL, SSR and the role of international actors, pertain to improving security either through lessening the state’s role in violence or improving security provision. Yet, insecurity is not simply the by-product of a violent state or a lack of security provision, but is due to a multitude of underlying conflict factors. In Liberia, these include issues that have historically underpinned major grievances in the population, such as resource exploitation that fails to benefit the masses, disagreements over land, elite governance and corruption and youth unemployment. While not the main focus here, our interviews made clear that while Liberia’s approach thus far has resulted in a fragile stability, the ramifications and trade-offs of this approach may yet be felt over the longer term.
- **We need to think of SSR in a more modest and locally relevant way.** The approaches and achievements of donor-led SSR are often criticised in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, largely for being overambitious and failing to be context-sensitive. It should be noted that an overambitious approach will almost always result in perceived failure. In the case of Liberia, this can mean that minor gains in professionalism in a context where the police have historically been a militarised and violent force should be, but are not always, recognised and built upon. SSR is notoriously difficult, even in relatively benign environments. It requires a modest approach and a realistic measure of the progress that can be achieved. Thinking in a more locally relevant way is also central, as there is often local capacity to both respond to and measure violence in societies, which need to be the first (rather than last) step when considering interventions. The plurality of security providers in Liberia points to the need for a less state-centric lens for international interventions, and a more comprehensive engagement with what already exists.
- **Understanding experiences and perceptions of personal security is crucial to building strategies for sustainable peace.** Security is not merely an objective condition, it is subjectively experienced. As a result, measurements of security should ensure that they capture not only objective changes in levels of violence or protection against it, but also citizens’ perceptions of how safe they feel. This is particularly important given that the value of security is, in part, about its enabling potential – its potential to encourage people to invest in their futures by planting crops, rebuilding homes or sending their children to school. As decisions to invest in the future are made by individuals, their perceptions of the security of themselves, their families and communities are of vital importance. The value of perception data is even greater in data-poor post-conflict contexts. In Liberia, for instance, even the most basic demographic data are hard to find. The census carried out in 2008 was the first such undertaking in over 20 years and only limited data exist on the levels, patterns and drivers of conflict and violence in Liberia, particularly outside the capital. This is not to suggest that objective data sources are not also important – of course they are – but they provide only one part of the picture. More longitudinal studies of perceptions of security can thus help to provide a fuller understanding of peoples’ experiences of building a sustainable peace.



Local security at B'hai Jozon, on Liberia's eastern border with Côte d'Ivoire. The crossing has been closed in response to cross-border attacks related to the 2011 political crisis in Côte d'Ivoire. Photo: © Travis Lupick.

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Quote sources

- Section 2, Page 12: Interview with Liberian civil society representative, Monrovia, 3 March 2014.
- Section 3, Page 20: Telephone interview with academic expert on Liberia, February 2014.
- Section 4.3, Page 39: Interview with Liberian civil society activist, 3 March 2014.
- Section 4.3.1, Page 40: Interview with Liberia expert, London, 25 March 2014.



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