

**SUMMARY REPORT CONSULTATIVE DISCUSSIONS ON THE DEVELOPMENT
OF AN ACTION PLAN FOR A LIBERIAN POLITICAL TRANSITION**

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I BACKGROUND

The United States has been significantly involved in relief and reconstruction efforts in Liberia since the earliest days of this four year old conflict. USAID has been interested for some time in exploring in a comprehensive way the nature of a future political transition in Liberia and how it might affect U S Government support to Liberia over the next 18 months to two years. In this regard a participatory process was conceived as a means to formulate an "action plan" defining the USAID role. A three stage consultative process was planned which included the following elements:

1. A one day consultative meeting in Washington bringing together the major actors that have been involved in the process of relief and reconstruction in Liberia over the past four years, and individual consultations with key Liberians currently residing in the United States
2. A two day consultative workshop in Liberia bringing together key actors on the ground to discuss a similar set of issues to those undertaken during the U S -based consultations, and
3. A joint USAID-Liberian assessment, filling in critical information and analytic gaps identified in the two previous consultative meetings

Each of the first two stages are intended to inform the design of the joint assessment which is the principal means for the development of the action plan.

This report summarizes the one day consultative meeting held in Washington and the series of interviews conducted with resident Liberians. In addition to reviewing the results of these two stage one activities, this report provides a set of conclusions and recommendations concerning the conduct of stages two and three of the participatory process outlined above.

II WASHINGTON CONSULTATIVE MEETING

A Meeting Structure and Participants

The meeting took place for a full day on May 27, 1994 at the State Plaza Hotel in Washington D C. A total of 27 participants attended the meeting (see Annex 1 for participant list) representing a wide range of Liberians and Liberianists. Participants included all five members of the Project Liberia consortium and six well-known academics specializing in Liberian studies, there were a total of four Liberians in attendance. The meeting, hosted by USAID, was opened and chaired by the Chief of AFR/ONI/DG and facilitated by Associates in Rural Development (ARD).

The Agenda (see Annex 2) was broken down into four sessions corresponding to a series of issues/questions (see Annex 3) intended to address areas where additional information was sought to assist in informing the assessment design process. The structure of the meeting was designed to provide flexibility and elicit free and open discussion among participants. As it turned out, Session two was folded into the first session, and the content of Session three was significantly modified to focus more specifically on the requirements for undertaking the proposed Liberia assessment. Because of time considerations, session four "USAID's role in the transition process," was incorporated into session three. The meeting provided an opportunity for full group discussions as well as small working groups formed around specific topics identified by participants.

B. Summary of Meeting Findings and Conclusions

1 Session One Current Geo-Political Situation/Transition Scenarios

This session was designed to get a general idea of the current situation on the ground in Liberia and thus provide, *inter alia*, the basis for determining which of the three "transition scenarios" presented to participants best defined the current context. The following presents the principal findings¹ of this session. There was significant agreement among participants on most of the factual information related to current events.

Principal Findings

- As recently as the day of the consultative meeting fighting on the ground was confirmed to be taking place. This was seen as a continuation of a pattern which had been evolving since the signing of the Cotonou Accords and which had significantly intensified over the previous two months, and represented increased factionalization and militarization among a proliferating number of combatants.
- A major point brought up by the participants concerned the notion of whether the current factions actually "controlled" the areas identified with their military "presence." The feeling among participants was that presence did not necessarily indicate control, and that these areas would be more appropriately viewed as "no-mans' land" dominated by roving bands of "criminals" rather than organized military units.
- The Liberian National Transitional Government (LNTG) had finally filled the last of its ministerial posts (foreign minister) during the week of May 16. There was no indication, however, that the LNTG was going to be able to overcome the factionalization that is embodied in the current fighting and thus extend its control and consolidate its authority over areas outside of Monrovia—essentially the same situation as that under which IGNU operated.
- No consensus was reached on whether the 1986 constitution was in need of revision either prior to or following elections. What appears to be the case, however, is the principal parties on the ground have not made this an issue. Thus, with no demand for a "National Conference" or need for constitutional revisions, elections appeared to be the only way out of the current impasse.
- The group agreed that the principal cause of the current (and continued) conflict in Liberia was over control of land, resources, and ultimately the presidency (both of the LNTG and the new Liberia). The causes that led to and underlie the conflict, however, have historical antecedents based on both ethnic and socio-economic (class) cleavages. While bringing the current fighting to an end does not require directly dealing with the underlying causes that precipitated the conflict, they must be dealt with soon if reconciliation is to take place and stability restored.
- UNOMIL, including the expanded ECOMOG force, called for in the Cotonou Accords, is in place and essentially prepared to undertake its mandate to oversee the disarmament process and prepare for multi-party elections.

¹ Detailed notes of the entire meeting are attached as Annex 4.

- While the encampment and disarmament process started off favorably in the early part of this year, it has ground to a halt as a result of renewed fighting among the factions. There are estimates of between 200 and 2,000 combatants that have encamped and disarmed to date.
- Participants felt that there was adequate evidence to indicate that ECOMOG forces, i.e., the Nigerian contingent, in and around the Buchanan area had been actively supplying arms to one of the factions, i.e., the LPC, and had thus become a party to the conflict losing its mantle of neutrality.
- Serious human rights abuses which have marked the Liberian conflict from its earliest days, were still on-going, particularly in the new areas of fighting between the NPFL and the LPC in and around Buchanan.
- It was recognized that surrounding sub-regional politics as well as actions by other external actors, principally transnational corporations, have been a significant ingredient responsible for the instability and factionalization which characterizes the current Liberian context.
- A number of the participants felt there was far too much attention paid to the importance of external actors involved in trying to facilitate and resolve an end to the Liberian conflict. One participant believed that a "National Conference," along the lines held in several Francophone countries (although not sovereign) over the past five years would be the best way to increase the Liberian role in national reconciliation. Ultimately, there was no consensus on this particular issue.
- Most of the participants felt that the refugee populations in surrounding countries could play an important role in the resolution to the current crisis and in the overall transition. In some ways they were much more organized than the internally displaced, including the large refugee population in Monrovia. In fact, participants agreed that Monrovia was in many respects, a "microcosm" of the larger society, given the large population of internally displaced, and was therefore extremely important in the on-going process. The issue was how to increase their pressure and participation in the reconciliation process.
- Security considerations of each faction, principally of the Krahn, have been and continue to be a major impediment to decreasing armed conflict and restarting broad-based disarmament. Personal security has been equated with being able to protect oneself from one's enemies defined in this context as other tribal groups.
- Many participants felt that national elections should not be seen as the panacea for resolving the current crisis and that in fact the imperative of elections could be seen as a reason for the renewed military activities as each of the principal factions vied to control geography rather than develop party platforms as a means to determine election outcomes.

Principal Conclusions

- That disarmament is the principal and critical requirement for other elements of the transition process (e.g., repatriation and resettlement, elections, economic development) to succeed.

- That while the Council of State and LNTG are considered to be more broad-based than IGNU, and perhaps more legitimate in the eyes of Liberians, there is a lack of political will on the part of each of the principal factions to settle their differences within the framework of transitional agreements (the Cotonou Accords), or future governance rules based on constitutional law
- That with a quarter to a third of the population in the status of refugees (both in surrounding countries and the United States), and an equal number internally displaced, organizing and conducting elections that would be considered representative and fair is unlikely
- That there is little likelihood of national elections being held in early September 1994 as called for in the Cotonou Accords. Participants felt that given the current situation on the ground, elections were unlikely this year as well
- It was generally agreed upon that the current impasse in Liberia was not likely to be resolved by internal efforts alone, i.e., by the principal Liberian actors themselves. That the United States and United Nations, but especially the former, were the only credible parties that could deal with both the external factors (e.g., transnational corporations supplying weapons for resources) exacerbating the internal conflict and exert the kind of pressure necessary to make the factional leaders think twice about disregarding the conditions of agreements which they committed to

Although the participants did not directly address or specify the exact transition scenario which characterizes the current situation, session one discussions could leave little doubt that the best description of the present context corresponds to Scenario One "a constrained environment characterized by pronounced insecurity and fragmentation of the country which is apparently worsening "

2 Session Two Identifying Key Governance Elements for the Assessment

The purpose of this session (actually session three) was first to identify those elements that would be the focus of the Joint USAID-Liberian (democracy and governance) Assessment, choose five of the most important of these elements, and then break into small groups to examine in more detail the specific issues that the assessment team would target. In order to increase the usefulness of this exercise for the eventual assessment, each of the small groups were asked to specifically address two questions

- 1 What do we (USAID) need to know about this particular issue, and
- 2 Where or from whom can we find the information pertaining to the issue

Participants identified a total of nine different governance elements/issues of which five were finally chosen and addressed by working groups. The five topics chosen were

- ▶ **Cleavages** including religious, ethnic, and class, which are critical to improvements in the governance environment
- ▶ **Elections** What conditions need to exist on the ground before elections can be held? The importance of elections in promoting improved governance and creating the conditions for state legitimacy

- ▶ **Civil Society** the patterns of non-state associational life, issues of gender, and the role and capacity of indigenous NGOs in building a legitimate governance process
- ▶ **Sustainable Demilitarization** integration of economic, human rights and reconciliation, and demilitarization of society issues
- ▶ **Decentralization** Potential for sharing governance functions and the appropriate level of decision making, how to maximize participation in the new Liberia

Participants broke into five separate groups and spent about 90 minutes reviewing their respective issues and preparing for presentations to the larger group. The following presents a summarized version of each of the five group presentations in terms of the two questions noted above.

CLEAVAGES

The principal cleavages existing in Liberian society are ethnicity, religion and socio-economic status, i.e., class. While ethnicity (tribalism) has been viewed as the principle cleavage dividing Liberians, religious differences were seen to increase significantly at the end of the Doe regime with Muslims increasingly demanding rights in what had hitherto been considered a "christian country." A number of participants made the point that it was really socio-economic status or class, regardless of ethnic or religious affiliation, which had come to define the differences between the great majority of Liberians living in poverty and the very few who had gained extreme wealth through primarily illicit means. However defined, these are the fundamental problems which underlie Liberia's crisis and which must be dealt with for long-term reconciliation and stability.

What do we need to know?

- **Ethnicity** How do Liberians define ethnicity? How does ethnicity impact on the whole question of political realignment? How important is the relationship between ethnic identity and national identity, i.e., to what extent is it an impediment to forging a national identity and what can be done to mitigate its impact?
- **Religion** What is the exact relationship between religion and ethnicity? Does ethnicity and religious affiliation have a geographical expression or identity? Focus on the Mandingo and their relationship with both christian and animist groups. Will heightened awareness of religious diversity impact political development? Implications of a "christian nation" in an era of Muslim resurgence? The role of traditional religion in the Liberian context?
- **Class** People are still in trying to define class in the Liberian context. One set of divisions identifies a technocratic, urban, educated elite class versus a predominately rural, peasant and traditional underclass. Essentially a division between Monrovia (elite) on the one hand and rural Liberia (underclass) on the other. One argument goes that class actually cuts across ethnic and religious cleavages. What are the ethnic and class disparities which factional leaders have used to exploit cleavages and create the current problems?

Where do we find this information?

- Review existing literature on the subject Plenty exists already (e g , most recently Amos Sawyer, the works of Gus Liebenow)
- Talk to individuals, i e , academics, PVOs/NGOs, and other Liberianists in the U S , in particular, Warren Azevedo has done significant research on ethnicity and George Klay Kieh's work on class (continuation of Amos Sawyers work) and military - civil society relationships
- In Liberia the University of Liberia should be contacted, it is still functioning, a number of academics are still there and documentation exists Talk to a number of knowledgeable Liberians, including Elizabeth Mulbah of Christian Health Association of Liberia and Unicef, and Dr Guenigale of Phoebe Hospital
- Visit refugee camps in Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea and Sierra Leone

ELECTIONS

The current elections environment is marked by physical insecurity, significant numbers (one-quarter to one-third) of Liberians outside of the country (in the U S and refugee camps in surrounding countries) with an equal number in a status of internal displacement (primarily in Monrovia), and little or no preparations (administrative and logistical) for scheduled the elections mandated as part of the Cotonou Accords for September 7, 1994 Elections are to a large extent, seen as a winner-take-all event, with whoever gains the presidency viewed as controlling and using Liberia's resources for personal aggrandizement How to diffuse this view?

What do we need to know?

- What conditions need to prevail (what actions are required) for holding elections and for the acceptance of election results? What level of democratization does a country require as a precondition to the holding of elections?
- What is the legal terrain, including constitutional provisions and election laws that will affect the holding of elections? What is the political terrain including possible parties and candidates and their platforms?
- What are the administrative structures that currently exist for the holding of elections (e g , electoral commission)? What must be done to prepare for elections What are the local resources available and capable of being drawn upon to undertake administrative responsibilities?
- How can participation in the electoral process be increased? What measures can be taken (e g civic and voter education) to encourage people to take ownership of, participate in and confer legitimacy on the electoral process? How to decrease the almost exclusive focus on Taylor (NPFL) and Kromah (ULIMO) and increase the role of non-political groups including refugees
- What is the proper role of international support in the Liberian elections, including technical and financial assistance as well as promoting an enabling elections environment? What countries or organizations are currently committed to electoral support?

Where do we find this information?

- Review assessments of the electoral needs already undertaken by UNDP and IFES, review constitution and electoral code, and any documentation of the 1985 elections which still exists that throws light on structure and organization, assessment of results, etc
- Meet with Project Liberia members here and in Liberia (particularly IFES, Carter Center, and FOL), Elections Commission, principal political actors, heads of civic organizations and human rights groups in Liberia, and representatives of refugee communities in surrounding countries and the U S

SUSTAINABLE DEMOBILIZATION/SUSTAINABLE SOCIETY

This issue assumes that in order for a successful political transition to take place and be sustained that a range of other tangential non-political requirements must be addressed at the same time. These include human rights, increasing the level of personal security, economic and social development, the judicial system, and the relation of the military to civil society and a newly constituted government. The concept of sustainable demobilization is a precondition to the holding of elections and the transition to a democratic political system, sustainable society embodies the notion that without corresponding improvements in economic, social and physical security it will be difficult to sustain and consolidate a successful transition.

What do we need to know?

- What is the nature of the illicit profiteering of Liberian resources by the political/military factions, their linkages with external transnational corporations, and how to go about gaining control of this illicit sector and making it serve the legitimate needs of Liberian reconstruction and recovery?
- What are the educational and training infrastructural needs of the country? In terms of human capital what currently exists within the country, in refugee camps, and in the U S ?
- What is the country's capacity to undertake integrated community development or reconstruction efforts at the local level (e.g., needs, resource availabilities, state of local/traditional leadership and structure)?
- What systems are in place for weapons exchange (cash or in-kind)? What are the sources of current weapons flows and what can be done to stop them? How to instill a social vision among combatants that it is in their interests as members of a greater Liberia to give up their arms and fight for peace?
- What is the current status of human rights abuses? Who is primarily responsible? How feasible and useful would it be to set a commission of inquiry ("truth commission") to investigate (and sanction) those responsible for such abuses? To what extent is human rights education and training taking place? With whom? Who is undertaking it?

- What is the status of the legal/judicial system, including the courts (traditional and modern), the law profession and judges, criminal and civil codes, reviewing judicial standards, the utility of street law projects, legal training, etc?
- How effective is donor coordination? Who is doing what and how much are they contributing to the relief and reconstruction process? What are the intentions of individual donors over the short and medium term?
- What is the current nature of the security forces, both of the LNTG and of the principal combatants? What plans are there for downsizing, restructuring and integrating these forces?

Where do we find this information?

- Review literature of countries have gone/are going through similar situation (e g , Angola, Mozambique, Uganda) or undertaken by other organizations (e g , World Bank's demilitarization studies, UNDP) to find lessons learned that may be applicable to Liberia
- UNOMIL's data banks to find profiles on combatants, the NRC's data sources, U S NGOs (e g , Carter Center, NDI)
- Economic data related to issues of profiteering (William Reno in particular), UNDP and World Bank sources to gain an understanding of current economic conditions and needs, and talk to local people (Monrovia offers a microcosm of the larger society) and especially the growing 'no more stupid' understanding by low-ranking combatants that they are being used by their leaders as cannon-fodder while they (the leaders) are growing rich on profiteering
- Visit refugee camps in Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, and Sierra Leone

CIVIL SOCIETY

Liberia has been a country dominated by state institutions, especially the presidency since the arrival of "settlers" in the mid-1800s. There has been little role for non-state, civil society actors in the policy making process or in ensuring good governance, i e , the allocation and management of public resources, within state institutions. Liberian NGOs, and especially church organizations, have played a significant role in the areas of social and economic development prior to December 1990, and have increasingly become involved in civic action functions, (e g , human rights promotion, conflict resolution) during the past three years. The working group on civil society and the larger group in general, felt that a key to resolving the current conflict and promoting improved governance in a new Liberia would largely depend on increased participation of civic organizations at both the national and local levels.

What do we need to Know?

- The nature of civil society and the capacity of existing civic organizations in Liberia, including the church, political groups, NGOs, traditional organizations youth groups, journalists etc. Determine which of these groups have the greatest outreach to associations at the local level.

- What types of organizations exist in Monrovia, refugee camps, and in the country-side which are currently or could play an increased role in promoting reconciliation, the policy dialogue, increasing governmental accountability, etc?
- What is the structure of civil society groups in terms of how they go about making decisions and promoting participation among members or beneficiaries Are there formal as well as informal decision making processes?
- Analyze how these organizations make alliances or coalitions Are they based around primary affiliations, i.e., ethnicity, religion, class? Are there some organizations (women's groups) whose affiliation cuts across these cleavages? Look at the structure of both regional and local level coalitions
- What are the legal requirements under Liberian law to register as an NGO or association? Do these requirements inhibit associational life or promote it?
- How active are women in NGOs or civic organizations? Do they have leadership roles? Do they participate in decision making?

Where can we find this information?

- Undertake an inventory of Liberian NGO community Review information already collected by such Liberian Apex organizations as NARDA and Lush Conduct interviews with key Liberian activists in Monrovia, the refugee camps and in the country-side
- Interview key international NGOs working at both the national and local levels including the Carter Center, CRS, Africare, AICF, and international organizations such as Unicef, UNOMIL, etc

DECENTRALIZATION

To increase participation in both economic and political development, while simultaneously decreasing state domination of these processes, power in terms of decision making needs to be decentralized to the county and regional levels Liberia has had a history of traditional self-governance but extremely circumscribed to localized matters County level government has had experience in the planning and management of some public goods and services but most of these officials have been appointed rather than elected and thus not accountable to local populations The overall issue is how to increase participation of Liberia's citizens at all levels of governance

What do we need to know?

- What is the current legal context for decentralization? Does the constitution provide an enabling environment for local governance, participation in local and national decision making? Specifically, concerning sectors such as education and health, collection and utilizations of tax revenues at the local level?
- What is the perception of people living at the local level about their rights in the domain of self governance and participation in national governance matters? What do people feel about their

capacity for self-governance? In what areas are they already undertaking self-governance functions?

- What formal or traditional governance structures currently exist? Has the conflict led to the creation of other types of governance structures, particularly in the refugee camps, among the internally displaced in Monrovia, and created by the political/military factions to administer areas under their control?
- How have NGOs and international organizations promoted self-governance in their emergency relief and rehabilitation programs? How can these structures be expanded to take on other responsibilities in the transition process and in a democratic consolidation stage?

Where can we find this information?

- Review the 1985 constitution and other implementing laws (e.g., related to tax and revenue collection and utilizations)
- Review literature both in the U.S. and at the University of Liberia related to decentralization and local governance issues. Include a review of USAID and other donor studies on this issue
- Interview academics both in the U.S. and Liberia that have worked on decentralization issues
- Interview representatives of refugee organizations in surrounding countries and of groups of the internally displaced in Monrovia. Also, representatives of the principal military/political factions

3 Session Three USAID's Role in the Political Transition

The general feeling among participants was that the U.S. in general and USAID in particular was the key external player in bringing about a peaceful settlement and a successful democratic transition. This is consistent with the meeting's conclusion that internal players by themselves were incapable and/or unwilling to cease the recent upsurge in hostilities and in reaching consensus on a range of transition issues. While not explicitly stated during the formal sessions, there was considerable discussion concerning the interest of the U.S. in undertaking a more activist role in the political transition. The situation can perhaps be best summed up in the divergent views of the meeting participants and the perceived policy of U.S. decision makers: that without a significantly increased U.S. role, the situation in Liberia will not improve (the participant view) versus (the U.S. position) that until the concerned Liberian actors respect previously made agreements and demonstrate their seriousness for reconciliation and democracy, the U.S. will not consider an expanded role.

A number of participants did make the point that the undertaking by USAID of a workshop and assessment in Liberia, including the visibility of the team, the assessment team would be interpreted by Liberians as an indication of increased U.S. interest in Liberia.

III U S -BASED CONSULTATIONS WITH LIBERIANS

A. Purpose and Methodology

The purpose of conducting personal interviews is to obtain the views of Liberian citizens who are scholars, intellectuals, political activists, and practitioners in the United States who cannot attend the meeting in Washington. These interviews were conducted in Washington, Atlanta, Philadelphia and Chicago, cities where an appreciable number of Liberians can be identified. Telephone interviews were also conducted with Liberians in other cities. Some of the people interviewed supported the various factions in Liberia and gave different perspectives about the situation. The interviews were very informal and focused on the following issues: disarmament, resettlement, elections, civil society, ethnicity and decentralization. The names of those interviewed are not identified in order to protect their personal safety in case they return to Liberia.

B. Summary of Interview Findings

This summary is an attempt to highlight the main points of the interview discussions.

- *Disarmament* It was the consensus among the people interviewed that the breakdown of the disarmament process was the most serious challenge on the ground. The discussions pointed out the unevenness between the military and political processes. The political process is progressing—the Liberian National Transitional Government (LNTG) has replaced the Interim Government of National Unity (IGNU) and the cabinet is in place. The disarmament process was supposed to take place concurrently with the installation of the new interim government but continued fighting between and within the various factions has halted almost everything.

One participant suggested "there should be a comprehensive disarmament aid package for all factions, i.e., from military to civil society lifestyle. The international community should help with this transformation by developing programs such as vocational training, mentor, adoption, literacy and other rehabilitation programs." Other participants noted that disarmament can only be effective if people have incentives to disarm. Funding non-governmental organizations in Liberia to assist in developing these structures will quicken the pace of disarmament. "Centers and schools should be established to re-train some of these combatants. Most of them are kids and they need to see a future." In short, practical economic programs can be established and widely publicized that will lessen the insecurity felt by some of the soldiers, particularly the very young.

In general, there was a sense among those interviewed that a gun buy-back program from faction fighters should be encouraged in Liberia. One participant stated, "The international community should be much more generous in providing resources to help with disarmament. The lack of funds has been a major impediment in getting the people to disarm." Several participants expressed their ambivalence about the success of a gun buy-back program and suggested that it should be examined further based on other countries' experiences.

- *Resettlement* The issue of resettlement is totally linked with security in Liberia. There are more than 70,000 Liberians refugees in Sierra Leone, Guinea and Ivory Coast. A lot of people would like to return but there is nothing to come back to. Stability and the elements of an environment of normalcy needs to be created. Non-governmental organizations should be funded to organize workshops that provide refugees with information about the current situation and plans for rehabilitation. One participant

stated, "People need to be assured there is hope for them especially after losing everything because of the war They also need to be given confidence that the country could be salvaged The international community should establish structures such as training facilities and education that will attract these people " Local NGO's can help to identify leadership structures in all localities that will organize a delivery system for getting aid to the affected population

- *Elections* There was agreement that despite the Cotonou Accords directive, September elections are unreasonable due to the current situation Some participants think elections should be held this year because the international community might withdraw their help if something concrete does not occur One participant stated, "Although no election in Liberia at this moment can produce a democratic form because of disarmament and resettlement problems, we are hopeful that any new government can maintain an effective security system You need to set a date as a target although September is unrealistic If you do not have a date to work with, there will be significant problems Disarmament is the crux of the problem It has seriously affected the implementation of the Cotonou Accord "

In general, they criticized the demand for elections which they believe is a "Western" imposition "People pushing for elections are thinking that Monrovia is Liberia which is absurd All political parties are based in Monrovia and the debate is largely the competition for power based on guns rather than ideas There are no serious rural based parties and the elections will not be a reflection of the general Liberian state " Another participant noted, "We have a large number of refugees in neighboring countries Has any thought been given to absentee voting for those in refugee camps? The international community should help with disseminating information to these camps and run workshops on voter education, registration and training so the people can know who they are voting for "

- *Civil Society* They agreed there should be support for a redevelopment of institutions of civil society that went underground during the reign of Samuel Doe Participants suggested the international community can help to rebuild schools, religious groups, universities, trade unions, etc , that can act as watchdogs of any new government One participant stated, "Opposition politicians are not the best watchdogs civic organizations can be independent of politics--non-partisan they can be effective in watching both government and opposition and call attention to abuses " Another participant noted, "Local NGO s have not been given prominence they present the only opportunity and hope to restore civility and their programs such as voter education, training, etc , can weaken the warlords "

One common suggestion throughout the interviews is to identify Liberian citizens in the United States who want to return to play a role in reconstruction They believe these people can play a significant role in helping to integrate soldiers into society Young Liberians, especially those who are professionals have a role to play The international community must emphasize the neutrality of these Liberians before their return Just like the Somalians who went to help with language translation during that country's crises They were clearly portrayed as neutral, non partisan participants They should be sent to territories where they have influence or their own home counties The point here, according to participants is that Liberian civil society has not been involved in all these negotiations There has been too much focus on the warlords

- *Ethnicity* Ethnicity has not been a key issue among Liberians because it was suppressed by the Doe regime The ethnic factor has arisen again primarily because certain tribes were targeted during the war Faction leaders have been using the issue of ethnicity for their own gain As one participant stated "The war has made us realize we are all Liberians and are related somehow, either through marriage or the extended family system The displaced people within Liberia, and the refugees in the

neighboring countries for example live together **The war has brought the Liberian out of everyone "**

There is no dominant ethnic group in Liberia and no group can win an election based solely on ethnic loyalty Due to the nature of the war, it will be extremely difficult to rely on people voting strictly along ethnic lines because the issues that brought these groups together to fight the war are not durable To recognize the significance of managing ethnicity, participants suggested the international community organize a unity conference to encourage different factions to appreciate ethnicity as an integral part of civil society

On the question of national identity, several participants were discouraged because some elite groups are perpetrating the notion that certain ethnic groups will not assume the presidency This threatens the question of national identity Others felt the international community can play a significant role in helping to identify the local democratic structures and educate people on the issues especially in their indigenous languages through the media This, according to participants, is crucial in creating a national identity

- ***Decentralization*** There was agreement in all interviews that there is a need for decentralization "The history of the central government in Liberia has been disastrous The only way to have government give up some of its power is through decentralization " Although decentralization is necessary, the current system does not have to be changed People can run for office in local councils rather than assume positions through Presidential appointments One participant stated, "After you elect a President, a referendum will take care of the other amendments in the constitution and an independent judiciary should ensure it is not abused you cannot undo all the former problems at the once Focus should be on how to reinvigorate or establish a vibrant civil society "

Several participants suggested Liberia really needs a strong leader who can bring everyone together It was acknowledged that democracy and consensus building are ineffective in a war situation, but a strong leader committed to the Constitution and the proper management of the country's resources can help to rescue the country

C Summary of Interviewee Conclusions

One of the major conclusions to be drawn from these interviews is the overall agreement that the international community can play a much more significant role in helping to move the peace process in Liberia by doing the following

- ▶ **Pressure the faction leaders** There needs to be a concerted effort to paralyze the commercial operations of these leaders The international community should fully explore their business dealings and try to eliminate their operations until peace is restored Threatening to freeze their assets, and banning prominent people associated with their organizations from entering the United States is a good start Since the Cotonou Accords called for the dissolution of these factions, the international community should insist that they adhere to the agreement by publicly announcing their troops must disarm However one reason for these faction leaders' refusal to make such pronouncements is simply they might not be in control of as many people as they claim If they make such pronouncements and people refuse to give-up their arms, their political positions are weakened and even their personal safety may be in serious trouble

- ▶ **Provide more funds for disarmament** It was the consensus of the Liberians that a lack of support from the international community is directly responsible for the current arms proliferation

ECOMOG soldiers especially in the Buchanan area are allegedly selling their weapons to members of the Liberian Peace Council, because they are not receiving adequate funds especially from their individual countries. It will be extremely difficult to have elections if there is no peace and people are still armed. ECOMOG forces need additional resources, moral, technical and political support to disarm the faction fighters. This kind of support creates an atmosphere for stability.

► **Confidence Building Mechanisms** There was agreement that a majority of Liberians affected by the current political crisis do feel hopeful. Yet people think the international community can undertake confidence building measures such as supporting education, vocational training, retraining doctors and nurses who have been prevented from continuing their professional practices, civic organizations, rebuilding infrastructures, etc., so that people realize some sense of normalcy in the country. Furthermore, counselling programs, and psychologists can help tremendously to make young soldiers aware of the alternatives to fighting. Such news of successes will spread and people may start to believe things can improve.

► **Empowerment of local people** One significant concern expressed throughout the interviews was the lack of involvement of "Liberians" in the peace process and reconstruction programs. Too much focus has been on the warlords and the "Liberian people" have been isolated. AID should support rural development programs since most of its former concentrated in Monrovia, the capital city. Many indigenous NGO's especially in the rural areas need support to develop community self-help projects which will also encourage participation by many of the locals. AID should encourage and establish systems such as cooperatives to provide business loans to people who wants to locate in the rural areas. There is a prevalence of private initiatives such as petty trading in Liberia and these people need encouragement. In short, emphasis should be on small and subsistence enterprises.

► **Assist with information dissemination** Disseminating information to displaced people and refugees has been ineffective or non-existent. Liberians need to be aware of success stories regarding reconstruction and a working radio and television stations that will reach people in various parts of the country should be supported. A public relations strategy can play a key role in disarmament by explaining in the various dialects current plans and incentives for disarmament. AID should support such an effort especially engaging in the rebuilding of facilities and equipment necessary to reestablish television. The faction leaders are not likely to discourage the flow of information when it is positive. NGO's can use this medium to explain their reconstruction programs in their local dialects. It was the common view that if people are seen on television carrying out their day-to-day activities in addition to the news of fighting, it helps allay some of their insecurities and concerns. Most of these armed people in Liberia hang on to their guns because of insecurity and lack of alternatives. If they become aware of alternatives through radio and television, it will be an added impetus for them to surrender their weapons and get involved in these programs. Workshops that provide information to people about the various reconstruction plans and what they need to do to get involved should be supported. Thus media education (especially radio and television in local dialects) is one of the best hopes at the present time to influence people to disarm. A sound media campaign may have some very positive effects.

IV THE U S CONSULTATIVE STAGE CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

While the "on-the-ground" information generated during session one of the meeting was considered useful by many of the participants and served as the basis for later discussions, it is unlikely that it increased the general knowledge base of either USAID or the State Department given their presence in Liberia and other information sources. It was, however, relatively up-to-date and indicated the capacity of participants to keep themselves (and their organizations) informed about the current state-of-play. This same finding, i.e., that knowledge of the situation was current, was also noticeable in the individual interviews that were conducted with the larger Liberian community.

Where the meeting should prove its utility for USAID is (if and) when an actual assessment takes place. The governance elements identified and discussed in the small groups, as well as the data sources to be investigated should be extremely useful to the team as an initial point of departure for the proposed workshop and the later assessment.

While the participants felt that adequate information could be collected in both refugee camps and Monrovia (seen as a microcosm), the fact that fighting is still on-going, if not escalating, with serious human rights abuses increasingly cited, logic argues against conducting the Liberia-based component of the larger consultative process at this time. Not only would travel to other parts of the country be restricted, and thus important perspectives lost, holding a workshop and undertaking an assessment at this time would likely be sending the wrong message to Liberians about U.S. intentions in the future. If any action is to be undertaken at this time, it would be a very low-key fact-finding mission to begin laying the ground-work for a Liberia-based exercise. Otherwise, it should be left to USAID/Liberia in conjunction with the Embassy to determine the appropriateness and timing of these proposed activities.

The true importance of the U.S.-based portion of this larger exercise is in the fact that it has achieved its objective of being both participatory and consultative. As noted by the wide range of participants in attendance at the Washington meeting, and the number and diversity of Liberians interviewed overall, both interest and concern for the plight of Liberia was significant and the input by those participating in this stage should make a difference at some future point in time.

**SUMMARY REPORT CONSULTATIVE DISCUSSIONS ON THE DEVELOPMENT
OF AN ACTION PLAN FOR A LIBERIAN POLITICAL TRANSITION**

**WASHINGTON MEETING
PARTICIPANT LIST**

LIBERIA MEETING PARTICIPANT LIST

1	Jane Martin	African American Institute (AAI)
2	Richard Joseph	Carter Center of Emory University (CCEU)
3	Thomas Beyer	International Foundation for Electoral Systems
4	Christopher Formunyoh	National Democratic Institute (NDI)
5	Lyn Gray	Friends of Liberia (FOL)
6	D Elwood Dunn	University of the South/Liberian Studies Journal
7	George Klay Kieh	Morehouse College
8	Abraham James	University of Pennsylvania
9	William Seigman	Brooklyn Museum
10	Svend Holsoe	University of Delaware
11	Joyce Mendes-Coles	UNDP, Development Fund for Women
12	Paul McDermott	Carter Center Liberia Project Manager
13	William Reno	Hamilton College
14	Janette Carter	Catholic Relief Services
15	Janet Fleischman	Human Rights Watch/ Africa
16	William Jackson	State Department, Desk Officer
17	Minnie Wright	USAID AFR/CCWA Desk Officer
18	Richard Barton	USAID/Office of Transition Initiatives
19	Robert Shoemaker	USAID/Office of New Initiatives
20	Robert Charlick	ARD/Governance Advisor
21	Barry Hart	George Mason University
22	Alameda Harper	Africare

23	Roger Berre	Legislative Asst/Subcommittee on Africa
24	Gani Yoroms	Brown University
25	Leslie Fox	ARD/consultant
26	Sahr Kpundeh	ARD/consultant
27	Colin Scott	Save the Children/USA

**SUMMARY REPORT· CONSULTATIVE DISCUSSIONS ON THE DEVELOPMENT
OF AN ACTION PLAN FOR A LIBERIAN POLITICAL TRANSITION**

**WASHINGTON MEETING·
AGENDA**

Consultative Discussions on

POLITICAL RECONSTRUCTION IN LIBERIA

DATE May 27, 1994

PLACE State Plaza Hotel - The Ambassador Room
2117 E Street, N W
Washington D C

MEETING PURPOSE: The first stage in a participatory process that would result in the development of an "Action Plan" assessing the political situation and defining the role of USAID in Liberian political reconstruction. It is intended that the meeting be seen as an informal forum for discussion and that participants feel free to express themselves frankly and openly. In this regard, it is not anticipated that a final report of the proceedings will be prepared but rather that information generated will be directly incorporated into the design and implementation of an assessment to be carried out during the field based component of the exercise.

AGENDA

8 30	Continental Breakfast
9 00	Welcome and Introductions
9 15	Current Geo-political Situation in Liberia
10 15	Scenarios for a Transition to Democracy
11 00	Coffee Break
11 15	Identification of Issues to be Assessed in Developing a Program for Reconstructing a Liberian Governance Process
12 30	Lunch
13 30	Continuation of Governance Related Issues
14 30	USAID's Role in the Recovery Process
16 00	End of Meeting

**SUMMARY REPORT CONSULTATIVE DISCUSSIONS ON THE DEVELOPMENT
OF AN ACTION PLAN FOR A LIBERIAN POLITICAL TRANSITION**

**WASHINGTON MEETING
ISSUES/QUESTIONS**

ISSUES/QUESTIONS

The following issues and questions are illustrative and generally provided to initiate discussions on the four meeting objectives. It is intended that participants will contribute their own thoughts and come up with additional issues and questions.

1. The geo-political situation

- ▶ What is the current political situation on the ground, including
 - the principal political groups/actors involved,
 - the geographical space they control,
 - what alliances exist among the principal Liberian actors and between them and other groups (e.g., donors, ECOWAS members, transnational corporations, etc.),
 - the human rights situation,
 - current fighting and between whom,
 - current status of disarmament and demobilization and future outlook,
 - the current status of LNTG and future outlook,
 - the status of relief and resettlement efforts of the internally displaced and refugees in surrounding countries, and
 - the state of preparations for the scheduled September 1994 elections and the likelihood of their being held.

2. Assessing a set of scenarios for a democratic transition

- ▶ What strategy and interventions or actions should USAID/Liberia consider if
 - **Scenario One** the currently constrained environment characterized by pronounced insecurity and fragmentation of the country continues or worsens?
 - **Scenario Two** the climate of insecurity persists along with a slow pace in the demobilization and national reunification process, but there is limited progress towards community reintegration and the holding of democratic elections?
 - **Scenario Three** rapid disarmament and reintegration of ex-combatants occurs, resettlement of displaced persons commences, movement toward return of

refugees within one year takes place, and prospects are promising for elections before the end of 1994 in an improved security climate?

- ▶ Under which scenario noted above (or others which you define) do you see the Liberian situation at this point?

3. Elements in Reconstructing a Liberian Governance Process

- ▶ What is the prospect for a Liberian national identity emerging at this time and being embodied in a legitimate national government?
 - The issue of ethnicity
- ▶ What kind of governance structure should emerge to promote a national identity, economic and social development and governmental legitimacy?
 - What contribution can Liberian civil society make in terms of improved governance?
 - Is there a need for implementing an effective decentralization policy?
 - Does the constitutional framework exist to limit the state's exercise of power and promote good governance?
- ▶ What is the role of external actors in promoting national reconciliation, in contributing to the development of a national identity and in the creation of governance structures and framework necessary for a stable and sustainable democratic system?

4 What should USAID's role be in Liberia's political reconstruction process?

- ▶ Given the context defined by elements 1 - 3 above, what does this imply strategically and programmatically regarding the nature, scope and timing of USG support for national reconciliation and democratic transition in Liberia
- ▶ What is the appropriateness of holding a workshop in Liberia and undertaking an assessment of the political situation given the current situation as defined above