



# WOMEN IN TRANSITION

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF  
WOMEN'S CIVIC AND  
POLITICAL PARTICIPATION  
IN LIBERIA

**Women in Transition:  
A Critical Analysis of  
Women's Civic and Political  
Participation in Liberia**

by Bryan M. Sims



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ROYAL MINISTRY  
OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

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Production by Bronwen Müller, [bronwen@media17.co.za](mailto:bronwen@media17.co.za)

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# Executive Summary<sup>1</sup>

Throughout Liberian history, social capital has been limited to individuals within particular ethnic groups who strengthen themselves at the expense of excluded groups. Over time, this caused severe inequality, marginalisation and politicisation among ethnic groups and minorities. As a result, a breakdown of trust and bonds that engender social capital and cohesion took place, setting the conditions for a protracted and violent conflict.

Despite the suffering women were exposed to during the civil war, Liberia's conflict exposed women to new opportunities and formal roles that allowed them to participate in shaping the nation's future, roles that had previously been dominated by men. One Gender Ministry official concluded that the limitations placed on men during the conflict created the space for women to take on new roles that they are not willing to cede in today's post-conflict environment<sup>2</sup>. These include playing vital decision-making roles in Liberia's peace-making and peacebuilding processes. Women continue to rebuild and reclaim their social capital by participating in grassroots associations, non-governmental organisations, and schools as well as other political, economic and cultural structures throughout urban and rural areas. However, structural barriers, including a dual legal system, traditional views on marriage, the lack of ownership of land and property as well as poverty, limited education and institutionalised violence are responsible for obstructing greater participation by women and maintaining inequality between men and women.

Civil society in Liberia has undertaken a watchdog role and provides a link between government, policymakers and women. It assists in transforming policies into programmes and activities on the ground. However, many women's organisations continue to struggle with their capacity and ability to increase women's participation and increase equality among men and women.

The state's electoral system and political parties pose a significant challenge to women's participation. Women's representation suffered dramatically following the October 2011 elections in which more than one-third of women in the legislature lost their seats. Political parties continue to shirk voluntary quotas on their candidate lists and few have included women within their leadership structures. A draft Gender Equity Bill aims to increase the participation of women in both the executive and legislature; however, it lacks the mechanisms necessary to ensure its objectives.

Those crafting the draft should consider broadening the draft so that it can be used as a tool for politics, economics, culture, religion, society, family, education, health care, credit access, land rights, development initiatives, freedom from gender violence<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, the Women's Legislative Caucus of Liberia suffers from incapacity and partisanship.

Lastly, government's inability to strengthen local government has undermined its own goals and objectives regarding gender equity. A lack of decentralisation has undermined accountability and transparency at the grassroots level while denying women the opportunity to undertake less competitive positions within government at the local level.

## Research Question

This study will examine the ability of Liberian women to organise and participate in Liberia's socio-economic and political processes. It will look at the ability of Liberian women to rebuild their social capital, those resources or structures embedded in social relations that assist people in satisfying needs and can be mobilised for the purpose of collective action, through the use of civil society and political structures, specifically, the Women's Legislative Caucus of Liberia and the draft Gender Equality Act, the electoral framework and political parties, and governance.

## Background

Liberia is Africa's oldest republic, founded by freed American slaves in 1847. From its incorporation as a republic, the ruling class of elites, the Americo-Liberians, maintained a monopoly on the state and social mobility by ruling through patronage and by suppressing the indigenous population in all aspects of social, cultural, political and economic life until a coup d'état led by Sergeant Samuel Doe in 1980. Like the Americo-Liberian regime that preceded him, Doe largely concentrated power among his own ethnic group, the Krahn. In an attempt to overthrow the government, Charles Taylor and his National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) launched an invasion in 1989 resulting in a protracted and violent conflict that engulfed the small West African state of approximately three million for the majority of the next 14 years. The first women's organisation to gain

notoriety during the conflict was the Liberian Women's Initiative (LWI). LWI sought to influence the peace talks between representatives of Doe, Taylor and the Armed Forces of Liberia in June 1990. Although LWI did not officially participate in the negotiations that led to the first Abuja Peace Agreement, they were able to attend regional peace talks and have their concerns included in the agenda of the negotiations, and influence public support for them<sup>4</sup>.

In a fervid attempt to conclude the peace process of the first civil war, the second Abuja Peace Agreement of 1997 sought to swiftly hold elections in an environment that was permeated by fear, intimidation and violence. Taylor maintained his militia using his considerable access to resources and contraband (in both Liberia and Sierra Leone) and won the election in a landslide. In 1999 incursions launched by Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) initiated Liberia's second civil war.

As the war intensified, the Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET) led the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace Campaign to confront and engage LURD and MODEL rebels directly. The women also arranged meetings between Taylor and the leaders of LURD and MODEL, earning them a reputation as objective mediators<sup>5</sup>. As the informal negotiations became formal, the women involved used their extensive social networks to seek a permanent and peaceful solution. For example, the Liberian chapter of the Mano River Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET) was accredited as a participant to the formal negotiations that led to the Akosombo and Accra agreements in 2003. The mass organisation and participation of women in seeking a resolution to the conflict played a key role in facilitating the 2003 Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) that was signed by the warring factions, political parties, and civil society, establishing the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL). The NTGL's primary task was to prepare the country for presidential and parliamentary elections in October 2005.

As the country prepared for another election, WIPNET organised a campaign that motivated thousands of women to register to vote<sup>6</sup>. The international community, donors and emerging Liberian civil society organisations led by women collaborated to encourage more than 100 female candidates to seek office in the run-up to the 2005 elections, including two for the presidency and four for vice-presidency<sup>7</sup>. The contest culminated in the election of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the first female head of state in both Liberia and Africa with 59.4% of the vote. Her first admin-

istration oversaw an increase in schools and enrollment, improved access to health services and better roads and infrastructure. The President has also been widely credited as a key catalyst that brought recognition to, and raised the voices of, Liberian women; many of the women and men interviewed for this study agreed<sup>8</sup>. During her presidency, Liberia emerged as one of the few post-conflict states to implement an action plan that seeks to encourage gender equality among its citizens according to the dictum of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2009. The resolution called upon all principle actors involved in negotiating and implementing peace agreements to adopt a gender perspective that included the special needs of women and girls during repatriation and resettlement, rehabilitation, reintegration and post-conflict reconstruction<sup>9</sup>. In addition to the National Action Plan on Resolution 1325, government implemented a National Gender Policy and a Poverty Reduction Strategy that, while not specific to gender equality, mainstreamed gender throughout its four pillars in order to address the structural barriers that have marginalised Liberian women throughout its history.

Although there have now been two peaceful and free and fair elections, many of the actors involved in atrocities and mass theft during the country's conflict continue to hold positions throughout the government, thus allowing them to maintain linkages to the political economy and considerable influence within their constituencies vis-à-vis channels of patronage. As many of Liberia's political elites are benefiting from the current political system, many are reluctant to seek further reforms that are necessary to address Liberia's challenges.

While trust in the state and consensus around the country's democratic values is consolidating, decades of violent conflict have left most Liberian's embroiled in a constant struggle to obtain the most basic needs to survive. Moreover, insecurity, endemic corruption and poverty, lack of infrastructure, low levels of literacy and education and high unemployment threaten gender equality, and this inequality in turn threatens the country's stability.

President Johnson Sirleaf begins her second term with significant gaps remaining between the advances of urban and rural women, despite a great deal of attention from donors and government. A major challenge for government and donors is to get the urban and rural areas to advance together and, as one advocate said, avoid "two Liberia's moving forward"<sup>10</sup>.



# Women's Ability to Organise and Participate

## Social capital in Liberia

Gender shapes roles, relationships, responsibilities, expectations and access to resources that are vital to engendering and maintaining social capital<sup>11</sup>, those resources or structures embedded in social relations that assist people in satisfying needs and can be mobilised for the purpose of collective action. However, the intrusion of gender inequality throughout political, economic and social interactions lays the foundation for structural inequalities that ultimately hinder the consolidation of social capital throughout a society<sup>12</sup>. Women in particular are vulnerable as structural inequalities of authority and power create the conditions for women to be subjugated and marginalised, thereby decreasing the available resources needed for social capital.

Mobilising and investing in social capital can enhance desirable outcomes for individuals or communities<sup>13</sup>. As such, through the utilisation of social capital, women can build their own capacities and reduce gender inequality, often reinforced and maintained by an active civil society. In the case of Liberia, women's movements have been a notable feature of civic activism. Throughout Liberian history, social capital has been inclusionary, that is limited to individuals within particular ethnic groups in order to strengthen themselves at the expense of excluded groups. Over time, this caused severe inequality, marginalisation and politicisation among ethnic groups and minorities, leading to a breakdown of trust and bonds that engender social capital and cohesion. Differences between women, based on class, occupation, race, ethnicity, education and cultural background, were exploited as various groups sought to monopolise authority, power and privilege.

During the conflicts, some Liberian women maintained or amassed social capital in their roles as agents of both war and peace. Female combatants join new social units in order to be rewarded with social status and a means to earn a living or survive. Initially, when the NPFL launched its invasion, many Liberians, including the diaspora, welcomed it as a populist movement intent on removing a violent and despotic regime. In the beginning, women provided critical support to the NPFL, including access

to key political actors in Liberia and the region, courier services, intelligence and financing<sup>14</sup>. Women also held high ranking positions within the NPFL, most notably, Grace Minor and Victoria Reffel. Furthermore, the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL), a faction that broke ranks with NPFL and led by Prince Johnson, maintained a women's wing of combatants "with a fearsome reputation for efficiency and brutality<sup>15</sup>". According to Aning, women in the INPFL undertook various roles that included military duties, serving in the medical corps and working in the INPFL propaganda section as journalists<sup>16</sup>.

Social capital among women was undoubtedly reclaimed with the help of the mass peace movements instigated by women in earnest in the early 2000s. Women participate in grassroots associations, non-governmental organisations, and schools as well as other political, economic and cultural structures throughout urban and rural areas. But there is still a long road to be travelled. The most recent Rapid Social Assessments (RSAs) undertaken by the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme in 2004 and 2006 found that the notion of "community" within Liberia remains contested<sup>17</sup>. This discord reflects historical inequalities, perfidious inter-generational relationships and the breakdown of institutions<sup>18</sup>. For Liberian women, their ability to rebuild and sustain social capital is hindered by three issues: a dual legal system (statutory vs. customary), traditional views of marriage, and a lack of ownership of land and property.

The dual legal system, comprising of statutory and customary law, is a serious impediment to rebuilding Liberian women's social capital. The statutory system includes the Supreme Court, circuit courts, magistrates' courts, and justices of the peace courts. To expand access to statutory law to rural Liberians, justices of the peace were established in communities far from magistrates' courts. However, since government has little capacity to engage in oversight, justice of the peace courts have become a liability as many are unaccountable and unsupervised<sup>19</sup>. In rural areas in particular, these courts are often the only accessible formal institutions in which women can seek justice. Justices of the peace are primarily men, many of whom operate illegally by exceeding their mandates<sup>20</sup>. In particular, local courts and justices of the peace are more susceptible to corruption because of a lack of oversight. As such, corruption will reinforce existing explicit or implicit gender bias and discrimination. The impact on women and their rights can be substantial.

While there is a lack of clarity as to whether or not the Rules Regulating the Hinterland are still legally in force, these traditional Rules continue to

be used by government officials to govern outside the capital. Entrenched customary institutions offer an alternative to formal institutions, like justice of the peace courts. They are active within most rural communities. Even so, these institutions continue to reflect pre-war structures in which cases are referred up a hierarchy, beginning with senior members of a household, and extending through a succession of chiefs until a matter reaches the paramount chief, who represents the heads of clans and tribes<sup>21</sup>. If cases cannot be resolved under the paramount chief, the informal system's chain of referral continues first to the district commissioner and then to the county superintendent<sup>22</sup>. District commissioners and county superintendents, while being part of the formal governance structure, are generally unqualified to handle matters of jurisprudence. The majority of cases affecting women are adjudicated, interpreted and applied by men at the customary level<sup>23</sup>. As such, women are more at risk of being subjugated to rulings that are predicated on their perceived roles and not their rights.

According to a recent study by the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), "mounting social frustration [in Liberia] can be attributed to the vacuum created by the implementation of policies that restrict the scope of customary justice institutions but provide no genuinely viable alternatives<sup>24</sup>." While government has sought to strengthen the judiciary, it has only set aside approximately four percent of the national budget for the judiciary<sup>25</sup>. Inadequate funding of the judiciary has not allowed the state to expand its formal justice system to many rural areas. The formal judicial sector is unable to hire and train qualified personnel, enhance or build infrastructure, or develop adequate case-flow mechanisms that ensure due process. While unable to expand the judiciary into the rural areas, government has sought to restrict customary law, specifically in cases involving death, rape, serious incidents of violence and major theft. By restricting customary institutions without offering any credible alternatives, government has reinforced the perception that it has insufficient interest in the hinterland. These deficiencies have emphasised and legitimised customary law, specifically in the rural areas, as a viable alternative to formal institutions. It also reinforces the perception of two Liberia's moving forward.

The inability of women, both urban and rural, to access formal judicial institutions has encouraged many women not to seek due process within the formal system for crimes committed against them<sup>26</sup>. In an attempt to redress an epidemic of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), government created a special court, known as Court E, specifically dedicated to SGBV in February 2009. The Sexual Gender Based Crimes Unit was created

to prosecute cases and support victims and their families<sup>27</sup>. Unlike most courts, Court E possesses cameras that allow victims to testify without having to sit before the accused. However, the court is based in Monrovia and is inaccessible to many Liberians. It also faces a substantial backlog, creating a perception that women whose cases are administered by the formal courts risk an unfavourable outcome. The USIP study found further that a fair number of chiefs indicated that they continue to be solicited by their constituents to adjudicate rape and other SGBV cases<sup>28</sup>. The use of traditional courts leaves women susceptible to biased rulings, particularly in cases concerning marriage and ownership as traditional patriarchal views continue to prevail throughout rural areas. It is clear that traditional courts and customary law remain vital for the resolution of disputes and adjudication in Liberia, giving access to justice to those in rural areas. However, there is an inherent risk that the use of customary institutions to deal with rape and SGBV could reinforce gender inequality as many Liberian women could be denied their rights.

Until recently, the labour and reproductive capacities of women were subject to the control of men through various practices including levirate marriages in which the brother of a deceased man is obliged to marry his brother's widow<sup>29</sup>. Children were, and in some cases still are, considered to belong to the lineage of the husband, and, according to Fuest, a woman who intended to divorce or refused to submit to a levirate marriage would likely lose access to her children and any property accumulated during her marriage<sup>30</sup>. Furthermore, Richards et al describes marriage in many rural areas as "a thinly disguised system for [the] extraction of unpaid youth labour" as chiefs or male elders levy heavy fines on young men whom older men have lured into liaisons with their junior wives. Many young men unable to pay the fines have been forced to work them off with interest by labouring on older men's lands (International Crises Group, 2006: 20)<sup>31</sup>. Moreover, as chiefs and elders had, and in some areas continue to have, a monopoly on young women vis-à-vis political alliances, demanding bride wealth and other clientelistic tolls, many young men are unable to marry. Young Liberian men explicitly linked their involvement in the conflict to having few or no prospects of either being able to afford bride wealth or simply to have access to women<sup>32</sup>.

In 2003, a major piece of legislation, commonly known as the Inheritance Law, the Act to Govern the Devolution of Estates and Establish Rights of Inheritance for Spouses of Statutory Customary Marriages set out to radically alter gender relations, as well as relations between elders and youths, by recognising and legislating against the primary ways male

elders maintained control over the reproductive and labour capacities of women<sup>33</sup>. Specifically, the Act prohibits compulsory bride wealth transactions, forced labour of a wife, bans forced marriages and, finally, forbids a husband from aiding or engendering a situation in which his wife is forced to have sexual relations with another man for the purposes of collecting damages. Notwithstanding the corrective action this Act sought to address, the Rules Regulating the Hinterland (revised, 2000) continue to condone the idea of women as property by listing fines to be paid to husbands, including US\$100 for first wives and US\$10 for all subsequent wives<sup>34</sup>. The landmark Act is also encumbered by the government's lack of authority in the rural areas.

Inaccessibility to land and property can be traced to Liberia's two separate land tenure systems comprising of statutory and customary law. The statutory system, which requires a title deed, provides a legal basis for land and natural resources concessions, some of which overlap with customary lands. This can exclude those communities, often rural, from their land base as well as their food and livelihood sources<sup>35</sup>. All other land, largely within the interior, is considered public land and is divided among indigenous groups on a tribal basis. Customary land tenure is often based on verbal agreements and is not formally codified.

The clash between these two systems has exacerbated poverty among Liberian women. In Liberia, women comprise more than half of the labour force in the agriculture sector and two thirds of the trade and commerce labour force, providing marketing and trading services, and linking rural and urban markets through their informal networks<sup>36</sup>. Despite the contribution women make to these vital sectors of the economy, very few own land or have secure tenure to the land they work on, compared to men. The most recent data by the World Food Programme stated that 56% of female-headed households own land, compared to 68% of male-headed households, while almost double the number of men (33%) compared to women (16%) own land<sup>37</sup>. A 2007 study by the Ministry of Agriculture reported that community leaders' systematic preference for men in the process of granting land was due to a perception that "women are strangers to the community and tradition forbids them to inherit land"<sup>38</sup>. This perception is tied to the fact that women lose their informal right to land when they marry out of their community, a common practice in Liberia<sup>39</sup>. Furthermore, although the law allows women to inherit land and property, the lack of oversight by formal governance institutions allows traditional patriarchal institutions to deprive women from real access to land and property.

Lastly, the conflict resulted in illegal occupation of land and property under both statutory and customary ownership, and left documentation either missing or in disarray. The current systems face organised fraud involving government surveyors, probate court officers and managers of archives, among others; malfunctioning land administration agencies; a judiciary plagued by corruption and a lack of capacity; and the breakdown of land dispute resolution mechanisms<sup>40</sup>. These inefficiencies as well as a lack of coordination between the two systems are responsible for continuing legal disputes, social conflicts, unequal land access, and significant property registration constraints<sup>41</sup>.

Land ownership directly relates to fundamental aspects of political and economic power, as well as carrying other negative social implications. Ownership of land and property is key to an enabling environment in which women can create opportunities for themselves, their households and their communities. Ownership is critical to developing sustainable livelihoods, food security and poverty reduction as women would be able to better obtain access to credit, training, agricultural extension and information<sup>42</sup>.

Despite these impediments to women's social capital, there are positive signs that women are redefining social capital to attain greater gender equality by increasing their participation in political, economic, social and cultural spheres that were once inaccessible to them. For example, one member of an NGO in Zorzor noted that in 2011 a woman contested the paramount chieftaincy, the highest position in traditional governance, in her district for the very first time<sup>43</sup>. What must be recognised is that while women in Liberia largely transcended their differences to unite and seek a common goal during the conflicts, the unity that strengthened the peace-building movements largely dissipated after the end of the second conflict as women can now channel grievances using means other than associations or civic bodies and are able to pursue a variety of interests. Moreover, as women attempt to break into new roles, perceptions of women as leaders and decision-makers are gradually changing<sup>44</sup>.

That stated, the most visible social capital mechanism women use to alter gender perceptions and work toward achieving greater equality in Liberia is through local associations or non-governmental organisations.

## Is civil society a catalyst for gender equality?

During the conflict, women were forced to undertake new gender roles and new responsibilities as the scope of women's economic activity widened, and their political positions and the number of women's organisations increased. Many of the women's organisations that emerged from the conflict were inter-ethnic groups that sought to mend the deep suspicions and distrust engendered by the conflict<sup>45</sup>. Organisation and participation among women in Liberia has been widely discussed since the end of the civil war when women demanded a seat at the table for the peace talks that culminated in the 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement. However, a decade after the end of the conflict, Liberian women continue to struggle to attain real decision-making power.

Liberia's politics is shifting from domination by state elites to more popular forces, with civil society undertaking a significant role in the country's transition. Historically, civil society in Liberia has been weak. The first Liberian NGOs were formed in the 1970s, and many were co-opted into the Doe regime in the 1980s. Those that were not co-opted faced repression and harassment. It was not until the establishment of the first transitional government in 1994 that there was space for civil society to re-emerge. In particular, press freedoms created the space for a myriad print and broadcast media to develop and grow. However, peace was short lived. When it became clear that peace talks were going to be held again in 2003, Liberian civil society called for formal inclusion in the talks. The participation of NGOs in the Liberian peace negotiations remains one of the few examples of direct NGO involvement in top level, formal, political peace negotiations<sup>46</sup>. Their inclusion framed the negotiations as a successful case in which citizens integrated their needs, aspirations and concerns into a sustainable peace agreement. The participation of NGOs in the negotiating process helped to establish civil society as a sought after partner among donors and government in Liberia's post-conflict setting. It has become a vehicle for citizens, particularly women, to engage society and government.

Although civil society is building the capacity it needs to design and implement policies, its ability to act as a check on government's power within such a short period since its re-emergence is a real accomplishment. Also, by partnering with government on initiatives, civil society is generally providing a link between government, policymakers and women, assisting in transforming policies into programmes and activities that have

an impact on the ground<sup>47</sup>. Throughout Liberia's democratisation process, women's organisations have maintained prioritisation and interest among donors and government as they recognise that gender inequality lies at the core of Liberia's structural problems.

Participation among the women interviewed often takes place through joining civic-oriented organisations, primarily concerning agriculture and economic activities (including skills training), gender-based violence, health care, education, and political advocacy. While voting, as well as membership in political parties and seeking candidacy for political office, are ways in which women participate in the country's civic life, this was only acknowledged by a small number of women interviewed. Membership in rural organisations such as cooperatives, agricultural producers' organisations and farmers' associations, has proven to be an important vehicle for women to access productive resources, credit, information, training and other support services from government, the UN and donors. However, among the women surveyed, many of them heavily relied on support from the UN or donors, putting them at risk of being co-opted by donors and focusing on exogenous projects that do not address the real needs of their constituents.

Local women's organisations that did not receive assistance from international donors were established to address local needs. According to staff interviewed from an American-based NGO, there is discernable tension between the local and international NGOs as well as some larger Monrovia-based NGOs<sup>48</sup>. Many of these local groups complained that the international and Monrovia-based NGOs were either overtaking their programmes or instituting programmes and activities that did not address the needs of local women. Furthermore, many international donors, including the UN, have focused on skills training and other quick impact projects that aim to increase visibility. A few local organisations were highly critical of projects that are implemented by the UN and other donors, stating that they are unsustainable. They complained that these programmes and activities often failed because not only did they stifle, and in some cases eliminated, indigenous efforts evolving from peacebuilding and reconstruction processes, they, at times, clash with local culture and ultimately undermine efforts aimed at rebuilding Liberia<sup>49</sup>.

Yet efforts to organise women as a means to attract national attention to pertinent local issues, to improve their livelihoods, or to obtain other political, economic or social capital have, more often than not, been limited with most outcomes localised. Distance, a lack of roads, and expensive



and inadequate communication hampers deeper collaboration between women's organisations within districts. Many women must walk to meet with colleagues in other villages, which can take days. More often than not, many women are unable to leave employment, families, or their crops for such a long time.

Lastly, many Liberian women grapple with internal struggles that include fear or a lack of confidence. As one Liberian woman posited, building self-confidence and becoming more assertive and aggressive within a patriarchal society is a challenge for many<sup>50</sup>. Despite some redefinition and rebuilding of social capital through civil society, women continue to confront broader structural, cultural and legal barriers that undervalue their role in society and impede their ability to make decisions that shape policy and their own livelihoods.

## Broader structural barriers faced by women and women's organisations

The effects of almost a century and a half of exclusion and marginalisation of the majority of Liberians are still visible today; with women suffering disproportionately more than men. Various structural barriers to organisation and participation in civic life, including poverty, limited education, gender-based divisions of labour, cultural marginalisation (particularly among Mandingoes) and institutionalised gender-based violence have resulted in women's inability to gain the skills and qualifications that are critical for building the capacity and confidence needed to effectively organise, advocate for positive social change and access positions of real political power.

For example, education and literacy, low for the majority of Liberians, are worse among women. Fifty-six percent of women have never attended school, with the remote northwest region reaching as high as 70%<sup>51</sup>. Illiteracy among Liberian women is estimated to be 65%<sup>52</sup>. Not only is this a cause of cyclical poverty and poor family planning, it also directly challenges the ability of women to recognise and understand their rights and to empower themselves to take on political and economic roles within their families and communities. Additionally, it reinforces the perception that politics is for men only as women are less inclined to challenge the patriarchal hegemony.

Poor education has created challenges in conveying the roles of political

leadership, communicating and understanding policies and their effects on Liberians as well as failing to engender useful and effective engagement between Liberians and their government. During an interview, one UN official opined that trainings given to women's organisations were "not permeating the rest of society" as messages were not being disseminated<sup>53</sup>. The inability of women in the counties to transform personal needs into deliverables was a serious struggle as many of the women interviewed were unable to carry out basic advocacy; for example, forming complaints in writing to members of local government.

The World Bank posited that gender segregation in the labour market is a source of divergence between women's occupations and Liberia's drivers of economic growth<sup>54</sup>. Access to capital (this is not female specific) is often difficult to attain outside of the country's urban centres as resources do not favour rural development. Moreover, micro-lending institutions are under capitalised and maintain high interest rates<sup>55</sup>. In Liberia, women make up the majority of the informal sector which hinders their ability to seize opportunities to upgrade their skills and integration into national, regional and international markets. It also means many women are unable to access capital by formal means, and as a result, are unable to formalise their businesses and embark on a sustainable plan for economic independence and growth. Additionally, women face difficulties in achieving financial independence and access to economic resources compared to men because of cultural values and social norms that hinder equal participation<sup>56</sup>.

Together, these structural barriers have particular consequences for organisation and participation. First, they inhibit the development of sustainable advocacy networks that connect women from different communities with shared issues and interests. Compounded with a lack of infrastructure, particularly electricity and roads, rural women face acute challenges in staying connected with civil society coalitions that are generally based in Monrovia, as well as international NGOs, legislators, ministries and other political leaders. It often takes days to reach remote districts and villages. For those women who choose to undertake travel, it often comes at a substantial financial cost. Secondly, women are unable to finance formal and informal costs associated with maintaining long-term sustainable support for their organisations, gaining a party's nomination or standing as a candidate in an election<sup>57</sup>. And finally, while women are free to seek candidacy for political office, educational requirements, candidate registration processes and a patriarchal political system exclude the majority of women; undermining their efforts and ability to influence policy.

Many of the women interviewed in the rural counties acknowledged that traditional societies continue to shape political knowledge and discourse. Participation in traditional societies varies by area. Sande societies, secret traditional societies for women, remain influential with leaders exercising strong political and economic influence over members<sup>58</sup>. If a decision is made by the leadership within these societies, women are more likely to abide by it<sup>59</sup>. However, there are emerging signs of change. For example, in River Cess, a remote county in the southeast, all of the women interviewed agreed that traditional structures have changed and continue to adapt to women's demands for participation. According to one observer, she had no recollection of any women's organisations in River Cess prior to the war<sup>60</sup>. Members of numerous organisations agreed that there has been a proliferation of women's organisations, formal and informal, that have led to both an increase in decision-making roles and a changing perception of women's roles among men<sup>61</sup>.

# Ability to Pursue Positive Social Change

## Gender equality and policy

The women pursuing social change who were interviewed for this study cut across class, occupation, ethnicity, education level and cultural backgrounds. In both urban and rural areas, women face discrimination and threats to their security, albeit, access to education, health care employment and other services favour women in Liberia's urban areas. In an attempt to uplift women and reduce the divide between women in urban and rural areas, Government designed and implemented three critical policies: the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS), the National Action Plan for the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (LNAP), and the National Gender Policy (NGP). Together, and with the support of civil society, the private sector, and donors, these policies demonstrate a commitment to gender equality.

While the PRS is not specific to gender equality, it is viewed as a foundation for attaining equity by "promoting equitable access to resources, through the implementation of gender sensitive macro and micro policies<sup>62</sup>". The policy, set out in 2008, is an attempt by government to work

with development partners, civil society, and the private sector to address four key “pillars” that seek to set the conditions for inclusive and sustainable economic growth: peace and security, economic revitalization, governance and rule of law, and infrastructure and basic services.

According to the most recent assessment of the PRS, gender equality features in three aspects of the PRS<sup>63</sup>. First, every government agency has incorporated gender awareness modules into their training agendas. Security agencies in particular now include more women. Second, the assessment found that the availability of health care for pregnant women has increased while there has been a modest decline in maternal death rates. Finally, female enrolment rates in education have increased, however, enrolment rates remain below those of males (enrolment for both groups are low), yet gaps in literacy remain wide, with the literacy rate for women at 41% compared to 70% for men.

The LNAP was launched in March 2009 as the government’s ambitious response to United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325. LNAP seeks to promote human rights and security for women and girls; develop and institutionalise economic, social and security policies to facilitate participation at all levels of society; and to strengthen coordination and coherence of gender mainstreaming. A four year consultative process led to the implementation of the National Gender Policy in 2010. The NGP seeks to mainstream gender into institutional frameworks and guidelines; promote women’s rights vis-à-vis human rights; promote equal access to political and economic resources; and disseminate information about the NGP and other gender-related policies.

The Ministry of Gender and Development (MoGD) is the primary institution responsible for implementing NGP and LNAP. The MoGD’s mandate is to advise government on all matters affecting the development and welfare of women and children; coordinate gender mainstreaming efforts; integrate women as equal partners with men in the development of the country; and monitor and report back on the impact and progress of gender equality programmes<sup>64</sup>. The Ministry maintains a high-level of domestic and international political support as well as technical and financial funding. It was one of the first ministries to decentralise, establishing a presence in each of the 15 counties, assisting in the creation of greater awareness of gender equality among people in rural areas. The county offices play a key role in maintaining linkages with international donors, communicating local needs to Monrovia and, most importantly, adding women’s voices and concerns within county development meetings.

The MoGD has limited ability to assist in building the capacity of women's organisations as a means to enhance their ability to participate and improve the livelihoods of women in their areas. However, many of the women interviewed credited the Ministry for its role as a conduit between them and decision-makers in Monrovia, facilitating access to capital and inputs for agriculture, and seeking to incorporate the needs of women into County Development Agendas. This has largely created a positive perception of the Ministry. A recent study by Search for a Common Ground found that among Liberian men and women, 48.36% of the respondents perceived MoGD's efforts to promote gender equality within their communities as good, whereas slightly less than half, 41.45% did not perceive their work as good<sup>65</sup>. In the counties visited, the MoGD was visible, with the exception of River Cess.

A key weakness in the MoGD's decentralisation plan is inadequate funding to train staff, especially the Gender Coordinators who represent the Ministry in each county. Coordination and communication between county offices and Monrovia are hampered by a lack of computers and electricity. The effectiveness of the local MoGD offices also varies according to geographical location, county institutions and infrastructure, as well as the capacity and personal commitment of the Gender Coordinator. Some women's civic groups criticised the MoGD for poor communication and for only assisting more established organisations while largely ignoring smaller, and newer civic groups. Lastly, the MoGD does not engage with traditional societies for fear that incorporating these societies within their programmes because it would interfere with the hierarchy within the traditional structures, resulting in divisions and conflict, as well as possible reinforce practices that do not advance equality<sup>66</sup>.

## Women's Roles in the Country's Decision-making Processes

Gender equality is an essential tenet of any human rights and democratic framework. The development of any political agenda that does not include the perspectives, views and experiences of women who will be affected is not credible<sup>67</sup>. Attaining the goal of equal participation among women and men within decision making will provide a balance that more accurately reflects the composition of society and strengthen democracy<sup>68</sup>. While more women hold appointed political decision-making roles in Liberia today than at any other time in the country's history<sup>69</sup>, women

continue to be under represented in government. For example, as of 2010, women held 14 out of 94 seats in both houses of parliament. Women also held one-third of the country's 15 county superintendent positions, a quarter of cabinet posts and two of the five seats on the Supreme Court. While women are under represented in cabinet, the placement of women at the top of key ministries that are generally led by men is a positive step<sup>70</sup>. The placement of women in high and venerated positions has helped many women gain confidence and become more assertive, even aggressive according to the Angie Brooks International Centre<sup>71</sup>. Women have successfully worked together to bring attention to key issues affecting their constituencies and have passed legislation that addresses some of these issues. For example, the Women's Legislative Caucus of Liberia has played an instrumental role in passing key pieces of legislation concerning HIV and AIDS, medical and dental associations, pharmaceuticals and the children's law. However, personal and party agendas have created polarisation among the members of this small legislative group<sup>72</sup>.

To ensure women can make an impact in Liberia and that this impact is reflected across and deep within society, the platforms and mechanisms that are meant to create equality between men and women in Liberia must be strengthened and maintained by government and citizens. In Liberia, the mechanisms that could be used to entrench and broaden equality are the Women's Legislative Caucus of Liberia and the Gender Equality Act, the electoral framework and political parties, and governance reform.

## **The Women's Legislative Caucus of Liberia and the Gender Equality Act<sup>73</sup>**

The Women's Legislative Caucus of Liberia (WLCL) was established in 2003 with four women legislators. It grew to 14 in 2006. According to Senator Jah, the WLCL initially sought to build the capacity of women legislators as many of them lacked basic education and literacy. As the Caucus has grown and has sought to become more consolidated, it has identified four strategic issues that it believes are necessary for engendering greater gender equality in Liberia's political decision making processes: strengthening its own capacities; enhancing women's economic empowerment and participation in national and local leadership positions; facilitating advocacy and judicial processes for women and children's rights; and ensuring adoption of a budgeting process that is gender aware<sup>74</sup>.

The WLCL has begun to build a sense of unity and mutual understanding among the women who came from various counties and backgrounds so that women in the male-dominated legislature could prioritise issues that were vital to them, including greater equity in a male dominated branch of government. However, the polarisation and partisanship within the legislature is also reflected within the Caucus<sup>75</sup>, impeding the development of a coherent strategy to address gender inequalities. This is largely reflected in the WLCL's inability to rally around its signature piece of draft legislation, the Gender Equality Act, and usher it through the legislature. Finally, the capacity of the WLCL must be strengthened if it is to become an advocate for gender equality. Members must work to connect with their constituents and find ways to support and join efforts undertaken by the executive, vis-à-vis the MoGD in their counties and districts. The Caucus needs to seek and include men in their organisation if they are to tear down boundaries and engender mutual understanding and trust between men and women in the Legislature.

The Caucus' signature piece of legislation is the draft Gender Equity Act. Throughout Africa, gender equity bills are increasingly used as a tool to incorporate the perspectives, views and experiences of both men and women into decision making and policies. However, in the case of Liberia, the draft Act fills a gap as the Liberian Constitution fails to address gender equality in terms of women's political representation. The draft Act has two goals: increasing women's representation and the establishment of a gender equity fund that seeks to build the capacity of women for leadership positions. However, according to Hannah Britton, if this is the one and only gender equity bill Liberian women are going to get, those crafting the bill should consider broadening the draft so that it can be used as a tool for politics, economics, culture, religion, society, family, education, health care, credit access, land rights, development initiatives, freedom from gender violence<sup>76</sup>. If the drafters are sincerely focusing on legislating gender equity for the long term, then this draft Act has too narrow a focus<sup>77</sup>.

Despite its shortcomings, the draft bill is breaking new ground in Liberia by mandating gender quotas for election lists<sup>78</sup>. That said, women legislators interviewed for this study were divided on whether or not Liberia should introduce quotas. Those against quotas cited limitations of gender quotas and representation. Those supporting quotas emphasised the need to have women represented above all else in order to alter existing attitudes about women and leadership positions among Liberians. The debate between substantive representation – representation based on the interests

of women – versus demographic representation – the filling the seats with women, regardless of their political background or focus – divides women within the WLCL. Demographic representation has several useful elements, including the role model effect, in which girls do begin to perceive themselves as having a voice and possessing the ability to be a decision maker from having women in political office. But, there is also widespread criticism that alleges some political parties use quotas to place loyalists or rank and file members who vote as they are told, using women's representation as a strategic and legitimising tactic, but then refuse to allow women to have a real voice.

What the draft lacks is specifics as to how targets will be achieved and regulated. For example, does the 30% mean every third person on the list is a woman, or can parties clump women at the bottom of the list? What are the implications or enforcement measures for not having 30%? Will government reserve seats to ensure 30% if women fail to get elected? Can they reject the lists and send parties back to add more? Moreover, if the Act successfully increases women's numbers in parliament, it fails to address other ways women are marginalised in the legislature, including a lack of committee assignments and opportunities to enact legislation.

A key strength of the draft Act is that it targets cabinet positions as a way to engender leadership opportunities for women in the executive branch. Most gender equality bills focus on elected office only and many of the international protocols that address gender equity often overlook cabinet. Again, there are few specifics. For example, what does a minimum mean to them? Will the women be grouped into stereotypical gender positions, or can/will they be put in many roles?

The Gender Equity Fund included in the draft is an innovative concept in that it seeks to address limitations, including illiteracy and a lack of skill concerning public speaking, strategising and campaigning, held by many female legislators in Liberia. The fund is an incentive for political parties to have more women. However, the fund does not suggest punishments for parties that fail to meet the suggested targets as punishments are very hard to implement when parties don't meet gender targets. The fund could also enumerate other goals. For example, if this is meant to be a permanent fund, it could seek to receive a percentage of the national budget for a certain number of years, decreasing over time. It is also unclear as to who will govern the fund.

Lastly, misperceptions of gender equality and fears of ceding power among men in positions of power hinder progress on equality. As one



official stated, women fear losing power to men and men fear giving all of their rights to women<sup>79</sup>. A member of the WLCL blames a continued lack of knowledge and ignorance for Congress's inability to pass the Act. She blamed her male colleagues for their mischaracterisation of the Act as a piece of legislation that only seeks to promote more women in government at the expense of men. However, the WLCL has yet to devise a coherent strategy to educate all members of the legislature on the Act's aim to promote gender equality on all levels of governance throughout Liberia. Until this takes place, the draft Act is unlikely to be passed.

## Electoral framework and political parties

Electoral systems have a direct impact on gender equity and governance, and achieving reform in order to increase greater parity and representation among women and men is a long-term process. While some countries have various legally binding mechanisms enshrined in national constitutions or legislation to ensure women's representation within various levels of government, Liberia does not have legally binding quotas<sup>80</sup>. The electoral framework enshrined in the Constitution and the New Election Law of 1986 is based on a plurality/majoritarian system. The President is elected by absolute majority through a two-round system to serve a six year term. Fifteen Senators are elected by plurality vote in multi-member constituencies to serve nine year terms and 15 members are elected by plurality vote in multi-member constituencies to serve six year terms<sup>81</sup>. In the House of Representatives 64 members are elected by plurality vote in single-member constituencies to serve six year terms.

In regards to eligibility requirements within the Liberian Constitution, only age stipulations exist for those seeking the presidency and a seat within the legislature<sup>82</sup>. Two Supreme Court rulings in 2011 had a significant impact on the eligibility requirements set out within the Constitution. First, the Court struck down a controversial recommendation by the now defunct Truth and Reconciliation Commission in which individuals, including President Johnson Sirleaf should be banned from political office for a period of 30 years for their roles in Liberia's conflict. Second, Article 52(c) stipulates that any candidate for president and vice-president must reside in Liberia for a period of ten years. The Court ruled that while Article 52(c) arguably forbids those who have not lived in Liberia for ten years preceding their candidacy, the framers of the Constitution did not anticipate intervening security situations that led the Constitution to be

suspended twice. The eligibility requirements set out within Articles 30 and 52 of the Constitution, as well as the recent Supreme Court rulings, allow political parties to play a prominent role in the selection of candidates for political office.

The electoral system's inability to increase women's representation was made evident following a 36% reduction of seats held by women within the legislature in the October 2011 elections. One hundred and four female candidates sought the presidency and seats within the House of Representatives and the Senate in 2011, slightly fewer than the 113 female candidates nominated for the presidential and legislative elections in 2005. In 2011, three women (19%) ran for president, 90 women (11%) for district representative, and 11 women (11%) for a seat in the senate<sup>83</sup>. However, fewer women were elected to the House of Representatives and Senate, dealing a serious blow to gender equality in the Liberian legislature. Only eight women were elected to the House, compared with nine in 2005, while only one woman was elected to the Senate, compared with 5 in 2005<sup>84</sup>.

In the absence of an appropriate gender sensitive legal framework, the National Elections Commission (NEC) encouraged, and political parties adopted, arrangements similar to those in place for the 2005 elections. These included a 30% quota for female representation within internal party structures and candidate lists; parties agreed to support specific training programs for women in leadership and campaign management and they agreed to pay candidate registration fees for female candidates and aid in fundraising. However, unlike in 2005 under the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, political parties were not bound to uphold the arrangements that sought to include and strengthen women's participation in the legislature in 2011. As a result, most parties failed to uphold their commitments. As a result, many women seeking office, even those who were successful, struggled to engage the public and media, plan their campaigns, mobilise members of their communities, and understand political issues. While these struggles are not the fault of the political parties, each political party has a responsibility to assist in building up cadres of women capable of engendering gender equality within each party as a means to addressing larger equality issues in Liberian society.

Political parties in Liberia are the weakest link in the political system according to one international observer<sup>85</sup>. Parties are often personality driven and structures are highly fluid, contributing to a lack of efficient capacity. Political parties have also failed to address significant inequalities

among men and women within their ranks. Most parties have not taken any concrete steps to politically empower women<sup>86</sup> and cite gender bias on the part of the electorate as one of the main reasons they resist selecting female candidates. Of the three major political parties, only the Unity Party and the Congress for Democratic Change have included women within their leadership, while the Liberty Party does not. Finally, men are invariably favoured when it comes to the allocation of campaign resources as they are usually considered better candidates because of traditional gender role socialisation and the availability of resources<sup>87</sup>. With campaigns becoming increasingly expensive, particularly those for national legislature and executive positions, this clearly reduces women's chances of succeeding through the ballot box.

While it has only been six months since the election, the possible effects this could have on gender equality more broadly in Liberia could be significant. An immediate consequence of the election is that there is less diversity in government and women in Liberia now have less representation. Moreover, Karam posits that, generally, women in decision-making positions have brought concerns and issues, many that are erroneously perceived to be women specific, concerning reproductive health and choice, nutrition, equality in education and employment, child care and the environment<sup>88</sup>. The WLCL, as mentioned above, was instrumental in overseeing similar legislation passed in Liberia. As the Caucus has lost more than a third of its membership election, its capacity and ability to influence members or the legislature has seriously been undermined.

Research on the application of quotas has demonstrated that gender equity is more achievable in countries with a proportional representation (PR) electoral system rather than a plurality/majoritarian system<sup>89</sup>. Women competing in Liberia's plurality/ majoritarian system continue to face entrenched patriarchal perceptions and attitudes regarding women's political participation, competition against men who have greater wealth and social capital to support them, and discrimination by political parties. Notably, changing an electoral system to ensure gender equality is a more realistic goal to work towards than changing social and cultural perceptions of women.

Quotas are often cited as a mechanism that can increase the representation of women in political decision making by ensuring a specific number or percentage of women are included as members of a political decision making body; for example, cabinet, parliament, and county and local government. There are three major types of quotas: voluntary, legislated and

reserved. Voluntary quotas are utilised by political parties to guarantee the inclusion of women within party structures and on party lists. However, if parties fail to meet quotas, there are often no sanctions or punitive measures taken for non-compliance. Legislated quotas are enacted through constitutional or legislated means. A specific percentage of seats are reserved for women. This applies to all political parties participating in an election with sanction or punitive measures taken for non-compliance. Finally, reserved seats can be set aside a certain number of seats for women among representatives in a legislature, specified either in the constitution or by legislation, which can include either the election of women or their appointment<sup>90</sup>. As Liberians continue to debate quotas within the draft Gender Equity Act and the overall representation of women in all institutions, the type of quota system must be compatible with the plurality/majoritarian system. In most of these systems, political parties select one candidate per electoral district. Two possible solutions that legislators should consider, as an alternative to revising the Constitution, are reserving seats for women and introducing quotas at the aspirant stage of the nomination process. For example, in Uganda, 56 seats, one elected in each district by a special electorate, are reserved for women. Thirty percent of the seats, elected by a special procedure, are reserved for women in Rwanda. Tanzania reserves 20% of the seats for women, allocating those seats to the political parties in proportion to the number of parliamentary seats won in an election. Quotas should also be mandatory at the aspirant level, where women are chosen by a primary or by the political party, requiring a certain number or percentage of women or either sex be represented in the pool of candidates that are up for discussion.

The crucial determining factor in whether or not quotas increase participation of women depends on the sanctions levied for non-compliance. According to Dahlerup, an appropriate authority must be given to the implementation agency, such as the electoral management body, to reject candidate lists that do not comply with the requirements<sup>91</sup>. In the case of voluntary quotas, a high-level body within political parties should be tasked with ensuring compliance.

## Governance reform

Liberia lacks an inclusive and effective system of local governance that aims to build consensus and address the localised needs of Liberians. Since the restoration of democracy in 2003, the central government continues to

be responsible for the appointment of county officials. One of the central causes of inequality in Liberia is that women are excluded and marginalised from institutions of political governance and access to key economic resources<sup>92</sup>. Local government, including County Superintendents, District Superintendents, District Administrators and Paramount Chiefs are largely unrepresentative and unelected. Scheduled for 2013, Liberia has yet to hold local elections<sup>93</sup>. County Superintendents and District Commissioners are appointed by the President and charged with the responsibility of supervising the government's mandate. Control by the presidency over the process of selecting chiefs and local leaders and their manipulation by that office is a strategy of domination and predation inherent in the nature of autocratic rule in Liberia<sup>94</sup>.

An important focus of governance reform in the service of gender equity is strengthening local government by the decentralisation of powers, resources and responsibilities as a means to improve the quality and efficiency of service delivery, strengthen fiscal management and transparency, enhance private sector development and increase local participation in decision making<sup>95</sup>. With government closer to its citizens, citizens have a greater ability to scrutinise the actions of their local representatives and hold them accountable to local needs. According to the UN, women are expected to benefit from the accountability and service delivery improvements that local government should provide<sup>96</sup>. Because positions in local government are less competitive than those on the national level, local government can be a significant political apprenticeship arena for women. New forms of direct participation and planning, currently being utilised by the MoGD, can provide more opportunities for women in civil society to advance their agendas and meet their needs.

Although Article 56(b) of the Constitution stipulates that mayors and paramount, clan and town chiefs can be elected, a 2008 Supreme Court ruling allowed the president to appoint mayors in consultation with local leaders so long as the country could not afford to hold municipal elections. However, the Court also ruled that once it was financially able, the National Elections Commission would be required to hold elections for municipal positions. The President has sought to modify the way appointments are made by introducing a consultative process in which five candidates nominated for positions, two of which must be women, are sought from county representatives, including Gender Coordinators and civil society. However, the effectiveness of the nomination process has been mixed as the majority of county representatives are men<sup>97</sup>.

While women seeking these positions may be dissuaded by having to spend time away from home, or they lack access to a large disposable income, a reasonable level of education, experience of political competition, and social connections, these municipal positions pose less of a deterrence at the local level, creating the conditions for women to contest elections and seek public office<sup>98</sup>. Moreover, these appointments have had adverse consequences. The appointment process has created a culture that is permeated by a lack of accountability toward citizens among the appointees. And they have failed to deepen democracy and promote gender equality as they have perpetuated the primary causes of the conflict: marginalisation of the rural areas and poor economic development.

An issue that was common in all the counties and districts that were visited was women's lack of knowledge in regards to County Development Funds (CDF) and how these funds were spent. Government allocates USD\$250 000 to each county to support local development projects. As such, each of Liberia's counties devises County Development Agendas (CDAs) through adapting the priorities from the PRS to meet local circumstances and needs. Gender Coordinators in all of the counties prioritise their own objectives according to deliverables set out within the PRS and Millennium Development Goals<sup>99</sup>. While activities and outcomes vary by county, some Gender Coordinators have sought gender responsive budgeting within the CDAs, while others, like Grand Bassa, have partnered the UN to review their CDAs gender responsiveness. However, in all of the counties surveyed<sup>100</sup>, Gender Coordinators admitted that they were unaware of not only how CDFs were being used to address gender inequality, but how these funds were being spent at all.

A lack of accountability and transparency fostered by the nomination process has allowed political appointees and their benefactors to use CDFs to support the interests of particular political parties rather than to reduce poverty as intended. For example, in River Cess County, not one organisation could identify a single completed project implemented by the county's development funds. According to the Executive Director of an NGO in Cestos City in River Cess county, CDFs do not represent the interests and needs of women, while local government sought to use some women as 'puppets' in order to secure funds for pet projects<sup>101</sup>. Moreover, River Cess was unable to complete one single development project<sup>102</sup>, despite having been awarded US\$250 000.

If government is serious about reducing inequality between men and women, it must begin by giving them the decision-making abilities and power to control local resources and choose their representatives.

Government should not just be preparing for municipal elections in 2013, but should be aiming to make other public positions, like County Superintendents, elected positions. Moreover, devolving power to a more local level is the key to better public services which meet the needs of communities across Liberia.

## Conclusion

Today, rural and urban women continue to rebuild their social capital through civil society and the use of political structures; however, the gains Liberian women have made are threatened by political, economic, social and cultural barriers. Greater attention needs to be paid to reforms in the dual legal system, and land reform, while greater monitoring and scrutiny, as well as greater resources, should be applied to support legislation passed to protect women from violence and ensure that justice is attainable should they become victims.

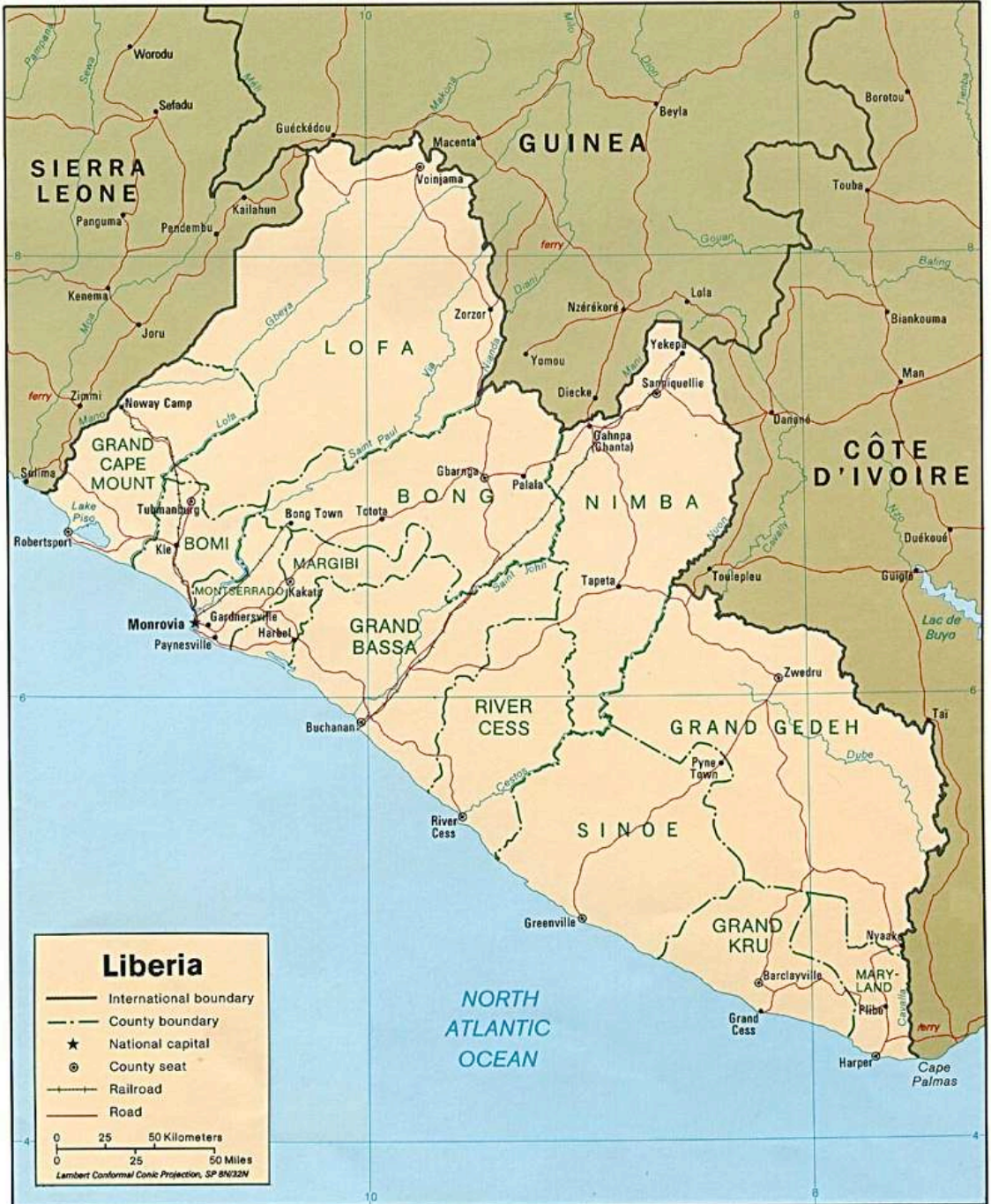
The majority of women interviewed for this study were confident that the gains that they have made since the conclusion of the conflict in 2003 are irreversible. In particular, civil society has served as a crucial conduit for women to attain the social capital necessary for them to seek greater equality. International donors, national polices and the MoGD have been essential in disseminating awareness and fostering greater understanding of rights among men and women in Liberia. However, the majority of civil society organisations in this study are hindered by structural barriers and a lack of enhanced skills that are necessary for them to play a greater role in furthering women's participation.

At the level of Liberia's institutions, significant challenges remain entrenched. First, as the most recent election demonstrated, women participating in elections are vulnerable. A mechanism is needed to increase women's participation. The draft Gender Equity Act addresses the inherent limitations held by many Liberian female legislators, but there remain too many ambiguities in how the legislation will be implemented. The electoral system must be amended in order to ensure greater participation of women. Within the current plurality/majoritarian paradigm, quotas should be introduced from the process of selection of candidates to run for office right through to seats in the legislature. Political parties must be held accountable for not including greater numbers of women on their candidate lists.

Finally, government must invest in decentralising governance to its citizens in order to engender sustainable democratic practices and values. Decentralisation would go a long way to creating more opportunities for women to participate in decision-making and would groom more women for higher-level decision-making roles, sustaining their participation and increasing the number of women in national leadership positions that are critical to Liberia's ability to become an inclusive, pluralistic and equitable democracy.



# Appendix I: Map of Liberia



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# Appendix II: Draft Gender Equality Act (as of 30 September 2011)

AN ACT TO PROVIDE FOR EQUITABLE PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION OF ALL PERSONS IN GOVERNANCE AND POLITICAL PROCESS

WHEREAS, the Constitution of Liberia, in an effort to strengthen national integration and unity in Liberia without preference for ethnicity, regional, or other differences including but not limited to sex, religion, creed, mandates the Legislature under Article 5(a) to enact laws for promoting national unification and encouragement of all citizens to participate in government;

WHEREAS, the Constitution also provides under Article 7, the management of the national economy and the natural resources of Liberia in such a manner as shall ensure the maximum feasible participation of Liberian citizens under conditions of equality as to advance the general welfare of the people and the economic development of Liberia;

REAFFIRMING the principle of promoting gender equality as enshrined in the Constitutive Act to the African Union as well as the New Partnership for Africa's Development, relevant Declarations, Resolutions and Decisions, which underlie the commitment of the African States to ensure the full participation of African women as equal partners in Africa's development;

REALISING THAT, Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the rights of women in Africa stipulates that State Parties shall take specific positive action to promote governance and equal participation of women in political life of their countries through affirmative action, enabling national legislation and other measures to ensure that: women participate without discrimination in all elections; be represented equally at all levels with men in all electoral processes; are equal partners with men at all levels of development programmes; and the increase and effective representation and participation of women at all levels if decision-making;

NOTING THAT, women's rights have been recognised and guaranteed in all international human rights instruments, notably the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Convention on Civil and Cultural Rights

[sic], the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and its Optional Protocol, the African Charter on the Rights of the Child, and all other international and regional conventions relating to the rights of women as being inalienable, interdependent and indivisible human rights;

FURTHER NOTING that the African Platform for Action, the Dakar Declaration of 1994 and the Beijing Platform for Action of 1995 call on all Member States of the United Nations, which have a solemn commitment to implement them, to take concrete steps to ensure women's equal access to, and full participation in, power structures and decision-making and increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership;

BEARING IN MIND related Resolutions, Declarations, Recommendations, Decisions, Conventions, other Regional and Sub-Regional instruments aimed at eliminating all forms of discrimination and at promoting equality between women and men;

COGNIZANT OF the need for increasing participative governance through enabling quota legislation and positive measures, as a means to secure 50% representation and participation of women in structure of governance at all levels, particularly in legislative elected seats and appointed posts as well as decision-making structures of registered political parties and electoral processes.

Now therefore:

It is enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the Republic of Liberia in Legislature assembled:

## SECTION 1: PRELIMINARY

1.1: That from and immediately upon the passage of this Act, there shall be provided an equitable participation and representation of all persons in the governance and political processes of the Republic of Liberia.

## SECTION 2: GENDER PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL PROCESS

2.1.: Accredited political parties putting forth candidates for senatorial and representative seats and all other elected positions shall not have less than 30% and nor more than 50% of gender participation.

### SECTION 3: ROLE OF THE NEC

3.1: That the National Election Commission shall formulate and enforce guidelines controlling the conduct of all elections for public offices, which guidelines shall not be inconsistent with the provisions of the Constitution and the Elections Laws of Liberia taking into account “not less than 30% female nomination for electoral districts and as close as equal senatorial nomination for each gender” on a party listing submitted to the NEC.

### SECTION 4: COMPOSITION OF APPOINTED POSITIONS

4.1: The President of the Republic of Liberia shall in the Constitution of his/her cabinet and other appointed positions ensure a minimum gender balance.

### SECTION 5: GENDER EQUITY FUND

5.1: A special Gender Equity Fund shall be established by the government of Liberia through budgetary appropriation for political parties meeting the minimum threshold of gender participation under this Act for training capacity building of females in political and national leadership.

### SECTION 6: DISBURSEMENT OF THE GENDER EQUITY FUND

6.1: The disbursement of the Gender Equity Fund shall be made to regulate political party(ies) meeting the threshold set under this Act for Gender Participation after the submission and publication of listing national officers, heads of national and subsidiary organs and verified by the NEC.

### SECTION 7: EFFECTIVE DATE

This Act shall take effect immediately upon the publication into hand-bill.

### ANY LAW TO THE CONTRARY NOTWITHSTANDING

# Appendix III: Country Brief



## SITO

States In Transition  
Observatory

[www.statesintransition.org](http://www.statesintransition.org)



## Country Brief | Liberia May 2011

*Liberia is Africa's oldest republic, founded by freed American slaves in 1847. From its incorporation as a republic, the ruling class of elites, the Americo-Liberians, maintained a monopoly of the state and social mobility by ruling through patronage and by suppressing the indigenous population in all aspects of social, cultural, political and economic life. Following a series of coup d'etats that saw the demise of Americo-Liberian rule in 1979, decades of oppression and military rule and two civil wars, in which some of the continent's most violent atrocities took place, Liberians elected Africa's first female head of state, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, in free and fair elections in 2005.*

*Johnson Sirleaf is widely credited as a pragmatic leader who has ushered in relative stability. The country is recovering; however, the slow pace of economic benefits reaching the masses, endemic corruption, regional criminal networks, and the renewal of armed conflict in Côte d'Ivoire pose significant risks to this fragile democracy.*

*Legislative and presidential elections scheduled for October 2011 will be the first to take place since the establishment of democracy; possibly yielding Liberia's first peaceful democratic transition of power.*

### Political Environment

Trust in the state and consensus around the country's democratic values is consolidating. However, following decades of violent conflict most Liberians remain embroiled in a constant struggle for survival and are not able to actively participate in the country's political life. Political parties are less likely to be issue and value based and often centre around the personalities of party leaders.

### Major Political Parties

The House of Representatives and Senate contain representatives from some twelve political parties as well as independents. The Unity Party (UP), despite holding the Presidency, does not hold a majority in the legislature. The Congress for Democratic Change (CDC) holds the most seats in the lower house while the Coalition for the Transformation of Liberia (COTOL) holds the most seats in the Senate. The executive branch, under Johnson Sirleaf (UP), continues to dominate both the legislature and judiciary. Liberia's political parties, many of which lack a clear ideology, are based on narrow interests or are personality-driven, hinder political compromise.

### Other Key Political Stakeholders

The United Nations has been involved in Liberia since 1997. The current UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) has had a significant peacekeeping presence since 2003 while the UN international police (UNPOL) is primarily responsible for maintaining law and order as the country struggles to train and equip its own police and military. The United States is Liberia's largest donor, contributing to democratisation programmes, security sector reform, education, reconstruction, and support for UNMIL.

## Democracy

### State Institutional Capacity

The capacity of state institutions, while having improved since 2003, remains weak and unable to meet the needs of Liberians.

Corruption is taken seriously, but remains an insidious problem that hinders the country's growth and the government's ability to effectively govern. High level civil servants accused of/found guilty of corruption have either been dismissed or prosecuted. However, the government's commitment to anti-corruption has been questioned following the acquittal of Charles Gyude Bryant, former National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) chairman, for corruption charges stemming from his tenure at the state oil refinery.

The judiciary is faced with significant inadequacies, including a lack of qualified personnel, insufficient funding and corruption. Meanwhile, the Governance Reform Commission, mandated to establish a national framework for legal and political reform, continues to seek greater decentralisation of power, regional participation and balancing national and regional interests. Once this process is complete, many Liberians, particularly those in the rural areas, would be able to elect representatives that are more accountable to rural needs, acquire greater access and control over local resources and act as a counterbalance toward political and economic policies mandated from Monrovia.

In 2010, the government established the Independent National Commission on Human Rights (INCHR), as mandated in the 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement. The INCHR is responsible for implementing the recommendations made in the 2009 Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) report. However, both the report and the government's response have come under scrutiny. The report's poor quality and lack of factual evidence about those recommended for prosecution and bans from public office, including President Johnson Sirleaf, have undermined its findings. The government has also been slow to act on the report's findings, signalling a potential lack of political will aimed at reform.

### Rights and Freedoms

A plethora of civil society organisations and interest groups have reorganised and continue to develop. While the press and media operate in freer conditions than under Charles Taylor and the NTGL, they are subject to harassment and arbitrary arrest and detention. Liberia passed a freedom of information bill in 2010, a significant improvement toward awarding those in the media adequate protection. However, the media lacks the resources needed to convey factual and impartial information to Liberians. As Liberia approaches a referendum and elections, the media struggles to cover candidates to the depth necessary, while remaining vulnerable to the ethical lapses that often occur in media environments where survival trumps professional journalistic practice.

Liberia's conflict engendered new opportunities for women to take on new and more formal roles that had been dominated by men. While women make-up approximately one-third of local government officials, senior and junior senator posts, as well as the presidency, women face significant hurdles, both public and private. Women legislators in the lower house continue to push for a "fairness bill" which would require 30 per cent of the candidates running for legislative seats to be women. Finally, while the Constitution prohibits discrimination based on ethnicity, sex, creed, place of origin, disability, and political opinion, it enshrines discrimination based on race; explicitly stating that only "Negros" or those of "Negro descent" are entitled to citizenship and land ownership.

## Economic Situation

Liberia's economy has historically been dominated by external powers and influences. The economy relies heavily on the extraction of natural resources, particularly rubber and timber. It is also very dependent on foreign aid. The IMF has been heavily involved in rebuilding the formal economy, however, most employment is found within the informal sector. Approximately 80 per cent of the population is unemployed, with 75 per cent living on less than a dollar a day.

## Opportunities and Threats

Liberia's problems, caused by decades of authoritarianism and violent conflict, have resulted in widespread unemployment, the destruction of the subsistence economy, and an increase in social tensions as former combatants attempt to reintegrate and ethnic and religious cleavages remain entrenched. Land disputes between returning land owners, IDPs and returning refugees have resulted in numerous reports of violence and death.

Parties with ties to former warlords have been largely marginalised by the ballot box. Yet, former warlords and spoilers are able to capitalise on pervasive poverty, poor education and the breakdown of social structures. Instability in neighbouring countries, particularly Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea, pervasive poverty in both urban and rural areas, the availability of arms and a significant number of former combatants that have not yet been reintegrated pose a serious risk to both Liberia and the region.

# Appendix IV: Editorials

## Elections Crucial for Liberia and Regional Security (October 2011)

Over the past six years Liberia has continued to take measures aimed at fostering political and economic equity, including small steps toward decentralising government; pluralistic, transparent, free and fair elections; and demonstrating greater respect for human rights, have – albeit slowly – put Liberia on a path of reconciliation and recovery. However, external and internal pressures, paramount distrust in politics and failed service delivery have prejudiced Liberia's second democratic elections. Yet, these elections will allow Liberians, many of whom have become politically aware and savvy throughout Liberia's brief commitment to democracy, to transform their discontent and disillusionment into tangible reward and punishment of politicians. If successful, the 2011 elections would not only allow Liberians to continue to face ongoing challenges, but further entrench democracy in Liberia and the region.

The Mano River Union states have experienced worrisome anti-democratic trends. Guinea continues to confront political and economic instability since a 2008 coup d'état while Côte d'Ivoire underwent renewed violent conflict over incumbent President Laurent Gbagbo's refusal to accept defeat following the 2010 election results. As a result, Liberia has seen an increase in armed groups transiting through its territory and attempting to profit from the instability in both of these countries. It also continues

to cope with increasing strains placed by refugees that continue to seek safety in rural counties that are severely under resourced and prone to communal tension.

The 2005 presidential and legislative elections were an historic milestone. Competitive, transparent, free and fair, they ushered in Liberia's first truly elected democratic leader. In the first round of elections, 74.9% of Liberians took part, while 61% participated in the presidential run-off that culminated in the election of the continent's first female head of state<sup>103</sup>. However, the euphoria felt by many Liberians following the conclusion of years of war and the prospect of participating in the country's new democratic paradigm has dangerously and rapidly eroded.

Voter apathy observed during the referendum, with a low voter turn-out of 34.2%, has been blamed on the disenchantment that many Liberians feel toward their politicians and toward a political process that, according to one government official and members of civil society, did not address their needs<sup>104</sup>. Liberians often complain that they rarely see their representatives in the counties. Furthermore, a recent survey concluded that 31% and 40% of Liberians perceived the President and those in her Office as well as members of the Legislature are involved in corruption, respectively<sup>105</sup>. While corruption is a threat to Liberia's nascent democracy, the widely held perception of corruption as embedded in the country's political culture undermines the efforts taken to strengthen good governance.

Throughout Liberia the message is the same: politicians have failed to meet people's needs and expectations. Liberia remains at the bottom of the Human Development Index, barely above where it was ranked in 1980, while adequate access to clean water, food, health care and education remain scarce for most. Six years after Liberia began its transition to democracy, the lack of confidence in public officials and institutions threatens to erode the gains that have been made.

The 2005 elections, a product of the 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, were largely guided and funded by the international community while this year's referendum and general election are being undertaken by the National Elections Commission (NEC). In 2005, the international community's role largely bestowed the legitimacy needed for Liberians to accept the results of the election. Since the first democratic elections, the NEC, with support from the international community, has taken steps to enhance its capacity to operate free, fair and transparent elections as well as alter the perception of elections throughout Liberia.



Yet, despite the undertakings made to strengthen the NEC and other institutions responsible for supporting the electoral process, deep-running suspicions of institutions continue to be held by many Liberians following decades of manipulation, election rigging, and election related violence. A product of past political realities in Liberia is that Liberians today continue to believe that electoral institutions and processes are designed to benefit the incumbent<sup>106</sup>. Unfortunately, these beliefs continue to be exploited for political and economic gain by some political figures and parties, further entrenching distrust in the country's institutions and leaders.

Serving as a litmus test for the 2011 presidential and legislative election, the politicisation of the 23 August referendum demonstrated how the slow and stubborn transformation of Liberia's political class, from one based on self-interests and patronage into one based on the interests and needs of constituents, inculcates Liberian's misperceptions of Liberia's electoral processes. Despite the benefits that the amendments could have offered, one Commissioner of the NEC believed that politicisation was a result of the referendum being held so close to the elections<sup>107</sup>. But a Senior Senator serving in the opposition stated very clearly that it was the ruling Unity Party's 'Vote Yes' position on all four amendments<sup>108</sup> that transformed the referendum into a political issue<sup>109</sup>.

The politicisation of the referendum generated confusion among Liberians that led them to become weary of going to the polls. Opposition candidates tried to persuade Liberians that the referendum was only intended to strengthen the ruling party's consolidation of power. Winston Tubman, a current presidential candidate for the Congress for Democratic Change, one of the few viable opposition parties, stated that "changes to the constitution cannot be done to favor those in power..."<sup>110</sup>.

The tones of the political campaigns that began on 5 July 2011 have been mixed. While no major incidents of disturbances or violence have been reported, some campaigns continue to invoke ethnic and communal tensions to garner support. In particular, candidates vying for seats in the House of Representatives are more likely to run these types of campaigns than those seeking higher office<sup>111</sup>. The Chairman of the NEC, James Fromayan, conceded that ethnicity is not likely to be ruled out of politics anytime soon<sup>112</sup>. UNMIL, the NEC and the Independent National Commission for Human Rights have urged candidates to take a conciliatory tone to engender reconciliation among Liberians<sup>113</sup>. Nonetheless, the divisive and acrimonious political culture of Liberia's politics seems unlikely to change anytime soon.

While greater political opportunities have opened for women, considerable obstacles continue to hinder women's participation. Women seeking candidacy today face difficulties acquiring the support of political parties<sup>114</sup>. Only three of the sixteen presidential candidates and 102 of the 909 candidates seeking seats in the legislature are women<sup>115</sup>. Many women in the legislature face re-election in October. If many fail to win re-election, this would pose a huge setback for women's participation in Liberia's governance structures at a time when women continue to strive for gender equality on all levels of society.

The 2011 election – the second since democracy was established – is crucial for Liberia's transition. Not only will it shape the composition of government – and therefore impact the government's ability to work together for all Liberians – but it will also shape the parameters of discourse, service delivery and reconciliation that will ultimately set the course for democratisation in Liberia and the region.

Liberians, particularly in the rural areas, need to see more tangible results from their political participation if democracy is to take root in a country that has been recovering from a past that was synonymous with child soldiers, rape and other atrocities. A second credible election will also usher in a period of greater political certainty. This is needed to stimulate economic growth and increase the foreign investment needed to rebuild the country's infrastructure and backstop vital health and education programmes, as well as other services.

Finally, a successful election will demonstrate to the rest of the region that a commitment to democracy will allow citizens to demand the accountability needed to engender a political culture that focuses on the challenges faced by citizens, not the needs of elites. With regional media attention squarely focused on Liberia, the stakes are high.

## **Inclusiveness Obligatory for Liberian Stability (February 2012)**

As President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf embarks on her second term, she must make it a priority to ensure greater inclusiveness within the political establishment. If the President fails to do so, Liberia's transition to democracy could falter and there is a high risk of renewed conflict.

The violence that erupted in Monrovia last November in the run-up to

the presidential run-off was not a surprise to many observers and political insiders. The crucial period between the election and the presidential run-off, where tensions were at their highest, saw negative political rhetoric and campaigning reaching new crescendos. Opposition candidates and parties portrayed the electoral process as flawed and unfair, despite contrary evidence and international approval of the first locally managed election. The uncertainty, fear and unsubstantiated accusations of political interference ultimately put the supporters of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's Unity Party (UP) and the main opposition party, the Congress for Democratic Change (CDC) under the stewardship of Winston Tubman and former footballer-cum-politician George Weah on a collision course.

The Liberian electorate has undergone a profound change since the 2005 internationally administrated elections. Liberians today have more expectations of their representatives and are more aware of the rights they now possess<sup>116</sup>. Expectations, however, have not been met as is evident from a recent survey revealing that 45% of the population is dissatisfied with the way democracy works in their country<sup>117</sup>.

As an interviewed UNMIL representative described the discontent, politicians are "accountable to the power brokers in Monrovia, not the people". As UNMIL seeks to reduce its presence and move from a peacekeeping to a peacebuilding mission, this past November offered a crude reminder to both Liberians and the international community that Liberia's peace – nine years on from the end of the conflict – remains a delicate balancing act between a success story and another tragedy on the continent.

During her first term, President Johnson Sirleaf spent her political capital resurrecting the country's international reputation. She and her government began to rebuild the institutions of the state, achieved Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative status – relieving Liberia of a US\$4.9 billion debt burden – attracted over US\$16 billion in direct foreign investment and introduced a poverty reduction strategy that has seen some successes in securing greater food security, clean water and investments in infrastructure needed for the economy and sustainable livelihoods.

However, the President failed to engage the spectrum of political parties as a way to engender mutual understanding and to reiterate her commitment to upholding the country's new democratic dispensation. Her inability to do so has created a space for spoilers and opportunists to create misperceptions and obstruct government's responsibilities and programmes and has allowed suspicions to flourish among the political personalities that shape Liberia's politics. As a result Liberians openly doubt the sincerity of her intentions and the depth of Liberian democracy.

While the tasks her administration had to confront in 2005 were enormous, the administration's inability, or unwillingness, to create an inclusive environment that sought the participation of all Liberians has hindered progress. Most Liberians still lack basic access to infrastructure, healthcare, education and employment opportunities six years after Johnson Sirleaf first came to power. As a result, many ordinary tasks, like service delivery, have become politicised. Moreover, vitriolic statements are becoming normal in an increasingly hostile political environment, with members from each of Liberia's political parties slinging accusations at the other. As such, and as came to pass in November, the environment became ripe for confrontation and violence.

While not the only party to engage in antidemocratic behaviour, the CDC's attacks on the National Elections Commission (NEC) and their refusal to partake in the presidential run-off highlighted the country's tenuous political stability. It also underscored the willingness of political parties to attack credible institutions and manipulate the anxieties of the electorate to win power and the benefits that accompany it.

In her second term, Johnson Sirleaf must work harder to engage opposition parties. Not only must she build mechanisms for communication and participation, but she must seek to entrench these mechanisms for a healthy and stable future. As she and her administration move to focus on domestic issues in this new term, she must build consensus while prioritizing reconciliation, engaging the country's youth (who form almost 60% of the population) and promoting participatory and accountable local governance structures. These are no easy tasks, and there are no simple solutions.

Liberia's ruling elite have yet to find a common language on reconciliation. The absence of initiatives on national reconciliation is having a profoundly negative impact on Liberian politics and within society. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), approved by an Act of Parliament and created by the President, released a report in 2009 generated little political goodwill as most of the country's elite had a direct or indirect role in the conflict<sup>118</sup>. The President, herself named as one of the 49 persons that should be barred from holding public office as a result of alleged roles played in the civil war, and following the release of the report, she has largely shunned the Commission and its recommendations despite a January 2011 ruling by the Supreme Court that determined disbarment is unconstitutional<sup>119</sup>.

The most urgent recommendations according to a Commissioner at the

Independent National Human Rights Commission (INHRC), the guarantor of the TRC's recommendations, are embarking on a programme of national reconciliation. This includes supporting the National Palava Hut forum so that Liberians in rural areas can begin to face and reckon with the injustices of the past in order to move forward. Reconciliation also entails identifying those entitled to reparations, rehabilitating victims, memorialisation of massacres and injustices, prosecution of perpetrators and debarment of those perpetrators from politics<sup>120</sup>. These tasks will require cross-community and cross-party cooperation. Those who attempt to politicise the process must be held accountable by their political party and should be publicly reprimanded by the INHRC.

Liberia's youth, many of whom are ex-combatants, remain unemployed, marginalised and dissatisfied with the pace of democratic progress. These youth are a key threat to security which stresses the need for a new approach to reintegration. Johnson Sirleaf acknowledged the need to address their grievances in her inaugural address. However, government and opposition parties must work together to absorb youth into the labour market and deepen democratic values and beliefs among this key constituency. One example would be to work with the Ministry of Youth and Sports to build the capacity of the National Youth Volunteer Service, a five year old initiative that trains youths in a variety of disciplines throughout the country. If more of Liberia's youth are not brought into the new dispensation, they will remain susceptible the kind of manipulation that led to one of the world's most violent conflicts.

The 30% quota for female candidates enacted during the 2005 elections was not implemented in 2011. This put female candidates at a significant disadvantage with the President acknowledging that there would likely be fewer women in the legislature as a result. The parties have a responsibility to ensure the gains women have made are protected and to continue with efforts to rectify gender imbalances.

Local governance must be strengthened and made more accountable so that Liberians outside of Monrovia are able to create functional relationships between themselves and government and so they can attain greater influence and more control over critical local resources. One UNMIL official posited that many of those in the government, including legislators and Ministries are against decentralisation because they will have to not only cede power<sup>121</sup>, but close channels of patronage. The centralisation of power in the capital and marginalisation of the rural populations was a key driver of the conflict. If government is to seek greater participation in

order to “ensure a more wholesome process of development and democratic governance”, as its National Policy on Decentralisation<sup>122</sup> states, then decentralisation must become a priority in the President’s second term.

Lastly, as the President moves forward with her ministerial nominations, she must be mindful of the ability of her nominees to perform their responsibilities, but she must also aim to be inclusive by incorporating qualified members of opposition parties, women, and trying to achieve a regional and ethnic balance. While this may not be customary in most electoral democracies, Liberia’s challenges require its leadership to take up unique measures that aim to include those who fared less favourably in elections.

Signs of greater political tolerance and inclusiveness have emerged since Johnson Sirleaf took office in January. The CDC, which increasingly looked as if they would boycott the inauguration, not only attended the event but welcomed her speech for pressing the need to focus on lifting up Liberians. Furthermore, the CDC acknowledged that they were holding talks with the UP that could lead to their members taking positions within the administration. This is a significant departure from the previous six years and one that could lead to a significant step toward democratic consolidation.

Liberia’s history was determined by the politics of exclusion and bigotry. If history is not to be repeated, not only the President and her administration, but all of Liberia’s political parties and policy makers must work together to write a future that aims to build a pluralistic democracy inclusive of all shades of politics.

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- 70 The ministries included the Ministry of Justice and Attorney-General, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the Ministry of Gender and Development, and the Ministry of Youth and Sport.
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- 79 Interview with government official, Nimba County, 18 June 2011.
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- 81 Two Senators are elected from each of Liberia's 15 counties. Senatorial candidates receiving the highest number of votes in each of the 15 counties are considered Senior Senators and have a term of office of nine years. Senatorial candidates with the next highest number of votes in each county are considered Junior Senators and have a term of office of six years.
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- 99 Interview with MoGD, Sanniquellie, 18 June 2011.
- 100 Excluding Bong County.
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This publication examines the ability of Liberian women to organise and take part in Liberia's socio-economic and political processes. It looks at women's ability to rebuild their social capital through the use of civil society and political structures, specifically, the Women's Legislative Caucus of Liberia and the draft Gender Equality Act, the electoral framework and political parties, and governance.

Among its conclusions are that greater attention needs to be paid to reforms in the dual legal system and land reform. Also, greater resources should be put into supporting legislation to protect women from violence and to ensure that justice is attainable should they become victims.

