CONFLICT ANALYSIS SUMMARY

LIBERIA

Peacebuilding, Education and Advocacy in Conflict-Affected Contexts Programme

This report summarizes findings from a conflict analysis undertaken as part of the UNICEF Peacebuilding, Education and Advocacy (PBEA) programme, funded by the Government of the Netherlands. The purpose of the report is to better understand the relationship between education, conflict and peacebuilding in Liberia, and to identify education and peacebuilding strategies informed by local attitudes, perceptions, needs and priorities.

The PBEA programme, 2012-2016, seeks to build peaceful societies by strengthening the role of education in peacebuilding and integrating peacebuilding within the education system.

Methodology

The conflict analysis was developed through a series of workshops with 1,006 people (including 384 children) in the counties of Maryland, Grand Gedeh, Nimba, Lofa, and Grand Cape Mount, as well as informal urban settlements in Monrovia. These consultations involved a range of stakeholders, including those that might be marginalized in education circles such as traditional leaders, out-of-school youth, people with disabilities, women and ex-combatants. Findings from the workshops were validated with stakeholders in Monrovia. While mainly consultative, the report also built on previous analyses of the Liberia context.

Context

The first civil war in Liberia began in 1989 and saw 150,000 people killed, most of them civilians, and almost a million people displaced, including over 850,000 refugees who fled to neighbouring countries. The war began with a series of skirmishes between the government and the opposition group, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia, led by Charles Taylor. The first war ended in 1997 with the election of Taylor as president during a UN-negotiated ceasefire. Systematic human rights abuses, the exclusion and harassment of political opponents, and the absence of national security system reform all precipitated the second civil war in 1999.

Taylor resigned in 2003 and the second UN intervention (UNMIL) oversaw a transitional government until the election of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in 2005. She was re-elected in 2011, although opposition groups boycotted the election. The government has significant progress to make in rebuilding the infrastructure and institutions of the country, and the risk of recurring conflict is still present. However, the country has remained stable and UNMIL transitioned the majority of the security management to the government in 2013.

Underlying causes and dynamics of conflict

The following conflict drivers were identified through prior analyses and a community based consultative process with key stakeholders.

SECURITY AND JUSTICE

- **Cross-border vulnerabilities:** The presence of armed groups on the border with Cote d'Ivoire, the proliferation of arms, and ethnic tensions that spill across borders fuels ongoing insecurity. An influx of migrants from neighbouring countries like Sierra Leone and from other counties within Liberia have also created tension.

- **Weak judicial system:** The judicial system is seen as inefficient, slow and corrupt. Long court processes defer people from bringing claims to court and result in perpetrators being set free. Bribery is widely prevalent and justice is perceived to be for those that can afford it. There is also a tension between the formal justice system and traditional dispute resolution mechanisms.

POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE

- **Weak governance:** Governance systems lack accountability and transparency, resulting in feelings of mistrust of government institutions and systems, particularly at the community level. Patronage and nepotism are seen as endemic. Corruption is widespread, such as the police, where bribes and demands for money are commonplace. . Women and youth are excluded from decision-making. Informal governance systems compete with formal systems for power. In the education sector, mistrust is present at the level of Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) and school management systems, where funds collected from parents are not accounted for transparently and those that cannot afford to pay are often excluded. This mistrust filters down to the student/teacher relationship.

- **Ethnic/religious tensions:** A root, underlying driver of conflict is the deep, historic fracture between Americo-Liberian and indigenous populations. There are also tensions between different ethnic and religious groups. These tensions are exacerbated by refugees such as the Krahn and Gio in Grand Gedeh and the Mandigo and Lorma in Lofa, as well as between Islamic, Christian and traditional communities. Distrust and misperceptions are also based on perceived participation in the war. Local and district peacebuilding efforts have yet to penetrate the community level. School systems have not yet realized their potential to bring communities together and open new opportunities for dialogue.

- **Inadequate access to quality education:** Lack of access to quality schools and vocational training opportunities fuels ongoing resentment. Communities expressed concern regarding primary school student teacher ratios, that the school calendar does not fit with agricultural demands, and the need for vocational, not just academic training. Consultations also noted the presence of bribery, sexual favours for grades, and lack of respect for teachers. Exclusion from education is a particular concern for children and youth with disabilities, largely due to misinformation and irrational fears amongst the population.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- **Poverty and unemployment:** Liberia's economy is dependent on primary resource extraction with low investment in skills, value-addition and local markets. Children and youth in particular are frustrated by their desire for more education, vocational skills training and job opportunities. Lack of future opportunities leaves young people vulnerable to violence, criminal activity, and militia recruitment.

SOCIAL ISSUES

- **Traditional versus modern systems:** There is a tension between traditional and modern (Western) practices and rights. Parents feel disrespected, through dress and behaviour, by children who do not acknowledge their culture and tradition. There is a feeling that NGOs have pushed human rights without teaching comparable responsibilities. At the same time, children and young people see parents, teachers, community members and government officials as poor role models. Parents do not know how to restore traditional respect through positive discipline as opposed to fear. The tension between traditional and modern systems is also reflected in institutions, such as the inclusion of traditional values in the formal education system.

- **Culture of violence:** Liberia has a deep history of exploitation and violence, where violence is used as an expression of power. Domestic violence against women and children is common. Parents use physical violence against children to maintain discipline. Rape and sexual harassment are major sources of violence against girls. Sexual harassment by teachers and boys, and sexual favours as a form of bribery, extend to the school system. Communities can resort to violence where the judicial system is weak and there is an absence of due legal process.

NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

- **Land and property disputes:** Land and property disputes are one of the most significant conflict drivers in Liberia. These disputes are an expression of underlying enthic and religious tensions. In urban areas, in particular, the source of dispute is construction on land that is subsequently claimed by a returnee. In other cases, the government demolishes structures to make way for infrastructure without providing adequate compensation. There is an absence of

effective, transparent property dispute mechanisms.

Key conflict dynamics at the subregional and community levels

Lofa

Lofa County, in northern Liberia, includes six of the nation's sixteen tribes. The county is bordered by Sierra Leone and Guinea. Lofa has dangerous levels of latent conflict, with low levels of shared interest between the Lorma and Mandingo ethnic groups and is highly vulenrable to conflict triggers. Additional conflict drivers include domestic violence, discrimination against those with disabilities, ex-combatants or single mothers, and low access to education in rural areas.   Despite the existence of County and District Peacebuilding Committees and the work of the Inter-Religious Council, these efforts have yet to penetrate at the community level.

Grand Gedeh

Grand Gedeh is located in South Eastern province and is noted for its rich natural resources in iron ore, gold, timber and farmland. Despite its resource wealth, the country is one of the most neglected in Liberia with inadequate provision of basic social services. Issus of land ownership, corruption, exclusion, discrimination, domestic violence, lack of basic social services, and the presence of armed groups and arms proliferation along the Cote d'Ivoire border are key conflict drivers.

Nimba

Land and property disputes are key conflict triggers in Nimba County, rooted in ethnic divisions and internal and cross-border migration. At the school level, there is strong separation and opposition between formal and Bondo schools. These divisions are compounded by lack of access to education and vocational training opportunities and poor teacher performance. There are limited community associations with the structure and credibility to resolve disputes, though where they exist they offer opportunities to enhance peacebuilding, dialogue and trust.

Maryland

Maryland is located in South Eastern Liberia. Once home to agricultural processing industries, the county's livelihoods are now based on subsistence farming and informal industries, leaving the population dependent on NGOs for social services. In addition to the overall conflict drivers identified in Liberia, residents of Maryland identified inequitable distribution of resources, lack of access to early childhood education, and unresolved conflict and guilt stemming from the war as important additional factors.

Grand Cape Mount

Grand Cape Mount is located in western Liberia. Porous borders with Sierra Leone has resulted in increased migration to the region and placed pressure on limited resources.   Mineral resource wealth is not benefitting communities. Community Social Development Funds and concession agreements entered into by the government and local authorities are seen to benefit only a few individuals. Additional conflict drivers identified include high unemployment and few skills training opportunities for youth, drug abuse linked with criminal activity, conscription of girls into Sande societies, and corruption in land administration. Despite these challenges a strong spirit of self-help predominates in the region.

Monrovia Informal Urban Settlements

The Monrovia consultation focused on issues affecting children and youth. In this environment, children are expected to earn money in the market or by other means in order to help with household and school expenses. Girls face sexual harassment in the home, from peers and on the streets. Rape and sexual harassment by teachers for grades is a pressing issue for girls and pregnancy undermines their educational prospects. Both boys and girls want to improve their education, but also to acquire practical income earning skills. Children have positive respect for one another but are often treated disrespectfully by educated elites.

The role of education in peacebuilding

Many linkages between conflict, education and peacebuilding were identified during the consultations. These linkages were validated during the Monrovia workshop and priorities for education and peacebuilding were identified including:

Respect – rights and responsibilities: Revise the curriculum to include civic education appropriate for each age group. Civic education should emphasize building peace through cultural values of inclusivity, respect for diversity, mutual respect between children and adults, positive parental discipline techniques, training on rights and responsibilities for both children and adults, and the re-establishment of family support systems. Institutionalize peacebuilding in national policy and ensure changes are effected at all levels in communities.

Identity, equity and inclusion: Teach the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in schools and communities. Provide education on infectious and non-infectious diseases to eliminate misperceptions of disabilities and reduce stigma. Evaluate local structures for equity and inclusiveness across clans. Provide social studies education to reduce misinformation about other clans and address ethnic tensions. Integrate land registration systems as a primary part of civic education. Enable national pride and patriotism. Include children and youth from all economic/employment sectors in informal and formal education.

Access to quality services and resources: Provide formal and informal/traditional education at complementary times. Offer incentives to girls to access education, make schools safe for girls, and provide programmes to young mothers. Implement child-friendly schooling. Enforce a code of conduct for teachers through regular inspections and punishments for sexual relationships with students. Deploy teachers according to need with appropriate and efficient payment and training. Engage traditional leaders to develop local ownership of quality education. Train local businesses on management and growth strategies to increase employment and training opportunities. Ensure provision of adequate facilities, especially toilets, and regular inspections of teachers and schools. Build more schools.

Trust, transparency and accountability: Ensure strong community-based monitoring of local education, including financial transparency. Allow local schools, when reasonable, to raise and manage resources locally to fund community-managed facilities until government systems are trusted by local stakeholders. Use low-tech communication such as radio, drama and town criers to increase transparency and accountability. Improve coordination and accountability between central and local offices in the recruitment and appointment of teachers in rural areas.

Empowerment and the power to act: Build on existing, trusted community organizations to develop locally-driven resources from young children in ECCD centres all the way up to employment-level training opportunities and enterprise start-ups. Focus on children under five years to improve ECCD infrastructure, materials, curricula, training and parental/communal supports. For youth, ensure vocational training is holistic to avoid oversaturation of the marketplace with a specific skill. Teach critical thinking and problem-solving and offer mentorships for self-empowerment. Develop national adult literacy institutions and universities across counties.

Peacebuilding entry points in education and learning

Recommendations for Transformative Education

Transformative Education is a key component of Liberia's Strategic Roadmap for National Healing, Peacebuilding & Reconciliation. The following recommendations, based on a life cycle approach, were identified to ensure education achieves its transformative potential.

Age Range	Curriculum Recommendations
<5 years	• Provide children with the basis for a non-violent culture and future positive adult values using a play-based, child-friendly curriculum focused on self-esteem, confidence, expression skills, and learning cultural values and traditions.
6-9 years	• Ensure education is child-friendly, inclusive, and instructive (not-recitation based). Promote civic education including concepts of identity, peace-building, social cohesion, respect for diversity, cultural and traditional values. Promote behavioural changes that reduce dependency attitudes and increase community empowerment.
10-14 years	• Begin basic vocational skills training within curriculum including traditional skills. • Teach interpersonal skills, moral values, appropriate dress and behaviour, leadership training, intergenerational relationships, cultural and civic education, which should include respect for the rule of law, cultural identity, tradition and custom, and participation in decision making without gender segregation. In addition, provide sex education and promote delayed marriage.
15 +	• Youth should be involved in Peace Hut discussions, national policy development, and interactive forums for civic engagement and education. Peace education, conflict resolution, gender equality, critical problem-solving, integrity, and youth leadership training including accountability and transparency should be taught. • Students should be provided with career counselling and fairs, guidance counselling, and education on family life and planned parenthood. Schools should be provided with technical equipment, trained teachers for science subjects and ICT, and trained vocational teachers in all Jr. and Sr. high schools. French language teaching should be provided.
Young Adults	• Curriculum priorities include: programme of internships and job placements that provide skills training; leadership development in peace advocacy at the community level; arts-based projects; regional identity; relevant skills for regional market, drawing on West African context (including French language skills). • Alternative hours with flexibility on hours per day and days per week/length of programme to allow family and income generation responsibilities are important.