

# MAPPING AND ASSESSING THE GENDER-RESPONSIVENESS OF PEACE INFRASTRUCTURES IN LIBERIA

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# **MAPPING AND ASSESSING THE GENDER-RESPONSIVENESS OF PEACE INFRASTRUCTURES IN LIBERIA**

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# ACRONYMS

<b>ADR</b>	<i>alternative dispute resolution</i>	<b>MIA</b>	<i>Ministry of Internal Affairs</i>
<b>CBMC</b>	<i>Community Based Mediation Committee</i>	<b>MIA-PBO</b>	<i>Ministry of Internal Affairs Peacebuilding Office</i>
<b>CBO</b>	<i>community-based organisation</i>	<b>MoF</b>	<i>Ministry of Finance</i>
<b>CPA</b>	<i>Comprehensive Peace Agreement</i>	<b>MPW</b>	<i>Ministry of Public Works</i>
<b>CPC</b>	<i>County Peace Committee</i>	<b>MSC</b>	<i>Most Significant Change</i>
<b>CSC</b>	<i>County Service Centre</i>	<b>NGO</b>	<i>non-government organisation</i>
<b>CSCO</b>	<i>County Security Council</i>	<b>NGP</b>	<i>National Gender Policy</i>
<b>CSO</b>	<i>civil society organisation</i>	<b>NPFL</b>	<i>National Patriotic Front of Liberia</i>
<b>DPC</b>	<i>District Peace Council</i>	<b>NPHWL</b>	<i>National Peace Huts Women of Liberia</i>
<b>DSC</b>	<i>District Security Council</i>	<b>PHACT</b>	<i>Peace Hut Alliance for Conflict Transformation</i>
<b>ECOWAS</b>	<i>Economic Community of West African States</i>	<b>PWD</b>	<i>persons with disabilities</i>
<b>EWER</b>	<i>Early Warning and Early Response</i>	<b>QDA</b>	<i>qualitative data analysis</i>
<b>FGD</b>	<i>focus group discussion</i>	<b>SGBV</b>	<i>sexual and gender-based violence</i>
<b>GBV</b>	<i>gender-based violence</i>	<b>SPSS</b>	<i>Statistical Package for the Social Sciences</i>
<b>GC</b>	<i>Governance Commission</i>	<b>SRNHPR</b>	<i>Strategic Roadmap for National Healing, Peacebuilding and Reconciliation</i>
<b>GoL</b>	<i>Government of Liberia</i>	<b>TRC</b>	<i>Truth and Reconciliation Commission</i>
<b>ICC</b>	<i>International Criminal Court</i>	<b>ULIMO</b>	<i>United Liberation Movement of Liberia</i>
<b>IDP</b>	<i>internally displaced person</i>	<b>UN</b>	<i>United Nations</i>
<b>IGNU</b>	<i>Interim Government of National Unity</i>	<b>UNCT</b>	<i>United Nations Country Team</i>
<b>INCHR</b>	<i>Independent National Commission for Human Rights</i>	<b>UNDP</b>	<i>United Nations Development Programme</i>
<b>JSC</b>	<i>Joint Security Committee</i>	<b>UNMIL</b>	<i>United Nations Mission in Liberia</i>
<b>KI</b>	<i>key informant</i>	<b>UN-OHCHR</b>	<i>United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights</i>
<b>KII</b>	<i>key informant interview</i>	<b>UN-PBF</b>	<i>United Nations Peacebuilding Fund</i>
<b>LCC</b>	<i>Land Coordination Centre</i>	<b>UN Women</b>	<i>United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment</i>
<b>LDRU</b>	<i>Land Dispute Resolution Unit</i>	<b>USAID</b>	<i>United States Agency for International Development</i>
<b>LISGIS</b>	<i>Liberia Institute for Statistics and Geo-Information</i>	<b>WIPNET</b>	<i>Women in Peacebuilding Network</i>
<b>LLA</b>	<i>Liberia Land Authority</i>	<b>WIPSEN</b>	<i>Women Peace and Security Network</i>
<b>LLC</b>	<i>Liberia Land Commission</i>		
<b>LMPTF</b>	<i>Liberian Multi-Partner Trust Fund</i>		
<b>M&amp;E</b>	<i>monitoring and evaluation</i>		
<b>MAC</b>	<i>ministries, agencies and commissions</i>		
<b>MDA</b>	<i>ministries, departments and agencies</i>		
<b>MFDP</b>	<i>Ministry of Finance and Development Planning</i>		
<b>MGCSP</b>	<i>Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection</i>		

# 1. INTRODUCTION

Liberia experienced two consecutive civil wars between 1989 and 2003, resulting in the death of an estimated 250,000 people, the decimation of the pre-war population of roughly 3 million people and the displacement of as many as 1.5 million people, including 700,000 refugees who fled to other countries<sup>1</sup>. With external support, the country was able to achieve peace in 2003. However, the context in which this peace was achieved was characterised by a high level of disintegration, trauma, poverty and mistrust among Liberians. Thus, the need for transitional justice mechanisms to address the ill effects of violence and the root causes, consequences and the historical legacies of the civil wars became critical.

An essential component of peacebuilding and the reconciliation process in Liberia has been the establishment of peace infrastructures at the national and local levels. Felix Irene Oseremen defines peace infrastructures as institutional structures or mechanisms that are created to:

**[M]ediate intrastate or intra-communal violence, and through harnessing local resources enable communities to resolve conflicts through a problem-solving approach. Infrastructures for peace have become even more imperative in contemporary times in view of the increasing need to transcend the small scale approach to peacebuilding, peace trainings and peace activities into a large scale, more**

**effective and long-term approach that involves a sustainable architecture for peace<sup>2</sup>.**

Peace infrastructures are usually designed to provide access, participation and essential security and justice related services, especially in societies that are transitioning from a violent past. They help to build a legacy of peace and stability whilst simultaneously addressing the wrongs of the past. Some of the structures and mechanisms established in post-war Liberia include the Palava Huts<sup>3</sup>, women-led Peace Huts, County Service Centres (CSCs), County Peace Committees (CPCs), District Peace Councils (DPCs) and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) Observatories<sup>4</sup>.

The Independent National Commission for Human Rights (INCHR) of Liberia is responsible for coordinating the work of the Palava Huts whilst the Peacebuilding Office situated in the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA), known as MIA-PBO, is responsible for the overall coordination of peace infrastructures. Development partners, including the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) in Liberia, have also played a major role in supporting the development and implementation of transitional justice and peacebuilding-related activities in the country. As part of a joint initiative funded by the Liberian Multi-Partner Trust Fund (LMPTF), UN Women, the United Nations (UN) Development Programme (UNDP) and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) are implementing a project which is geared

1 Foster, D, et al. 2009. pg. 247.

2 Oseremen, F.I. 2018. pg.1.

3 The Palava Huts referred to here are those that were based on the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report and not the traditional huts as described in section 4 of this report.

4 These are local structures established as part of the peace infrastructures in Liberia. The study focuses on them and their contributions to the search for sustainable peace and security in the country.

towards advancing reconciliation and promoting transitional justice processes through legislative reform and civic engagement.

In line with this, UN Women Liberia, in consultation with INCHR, commissioned this study to map the existing peace infrastructures in five counties (Bomi, Bong, Grand Bassa, Grand Gedeh and Lofa) and assess their gender-responsiveness<sup>5</sup>. In addition, the study assessed the links between the peace infrastructures and the existing coordination mechanisms and how they inform the implementation of the government's Strategic Roadmap for National Healing, Peacebuilding and Reconciliation (SRNHPR). The roadmap seeks to address some of the recommendations put forward by the Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC) in 2009 and as such seeks to promote complementarity of efforts, which is essential to achieving the objectives of the infrastructures. In addition, the study also critically assessed the enabling factors and challenges faced by the peace infrastructures in the counties studied.

The findings and conclusions of the report are very detailed, and the lessons learned and recommendations provided could be useful to policymakers, practitioners and academics working on transitional justice and peace infrastructures both in Liberia and further afield. The report is divided into six chapters. The first chapter introduces the report and the methodology adopted. The second chapter examines the root causes and the consequences of the Liberian civil wars and details the transition to peace. The third chapter analyses the approach by policymakers to transitional justice in Liberia. The fourth chapter presents and analyses all the peace infrastructures against the objectives of the study. The fifth and sixth chapters provide conclusions and recommendations.

## 1.1 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The overall objective of the study was to conduct a mapping exercise of existing peace infrastructures in the targeted five counties and research their gender responsiveness. The research also assessed the mechanisms of coordination and intersection between the Palava Huts and the Peace Huts and other decentralized peace infrastructures, which should inform the implementation of the recommendations put forward by the TRC.

The specific objectives of the study were to:

- Map the types, locations, composition, capacity, roles, functions and activities undertaken by peace infrastructures in the five counties studied
- Assess the existence, and the types and quality, of coordination mechanisms for peace infrastructures in Liberia
- Assess the gender responsiveness of peace infrastructures. This includes whether they were designed to be gender responsive; the types, level of participation and roles played by women and men; satisfaction with the services received by women and how the infrastructures could be strengthened to be much more gender responsive
- Assess the opportunities available and the challenges faced by the peace infrastructures in Liberia and the potential for their sustainability.

## 1.2 METHODOLOGY

Methodologically, this study adopted a small-scale ethnographic approach, rooted in the philosophical tradition of subjectivism, which assumes that knowledge is subjective. As such,

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5 The assessment of the gender responsiveness of peace infrastructures in this study goes beyond merely seeking an understanding of the inclusion and participation of males and females in the respective infrastructures. It largely focuses on assessing the processes and actions adopted and the activities undertaken by the peace infrastructures to overcome the historical biases entrenched by patriarchal and chauvinistic systems, structures, cultures and traditions that have for decades disadvantaged women and girls in order to ensure that the needs and aspirations of women are respected and met.

6 For clarity, the MSC is a tool that enables consultants and evaluators to have a deeper understanding of how people perceive change and how they present how they view change. As an assessment tool, it enables the consultant to have first-hand knowledge of the most important changes that respondents would like to see over a certain period. It is a very useful tool as it allows consultants and evaluators to determine the perception of different categories of people. The MSC uses stories that are collected partly on a one-on-one basis and, where possible, in FGDs where there are several participants. It is user-friendly and easy to work with.



desk research, formal interviews, semi-structured questionnaires, focus group discussions (FGDs) and the Most-Significant Change (MSC) tool<sup>6</sup> were used for the collection of data. The MSC tool was used specifically to collect data on the perceptions of respondents on the activities of the infrastructures, their contribution to peace and security in local communities, the changes they have promoted and the key contributions beneficiaries and observers would like to see the infrastructures make to peace and security over time.

The questionnaires, FGD and interview guides were adapted to the different categories (described below) of respondents who were engaged during the study. In addition a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis was done with staff and monitors of the INCHR, members of the respective peace infrastructures and community members participating in the process.

The tools mentioned above were used to collect data from relevant ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) of the Government of Liberia (GoL) and its development partners and members of the respective peace infrastructures and civil society organisations (CSOs). Additionally, community, traditional and religious leaders and other community members who have either participated in or are familiar with the activities of the peace infrastructures were also consulted during the study.

The study targeted five counties, namely Bong (Gbarnaga and Totota), Grand Gedeh (Zwedru), Grand Bassa (Buchanan), Bomi (Tubmanburg) and Lofa (Voinjama and Zorzor). These counties were targeted for several reasons, including that they are among those worst affected by the civil wars and they provide a good geographic and demographic sample (in terms of the composition of ethnic and religious groups). In addition, some of the key infrastructures, such as the Palava Huts, were implemented in only

two of the counties (Lofa and Grand Gedeh), while the Peace Huts were initiated in Bong County and the first CSC was established in Grand Bassa.

Purposive, random and snowballing sampling<sup>7</sup> techniques were used to select, categorise and collect data from respondents. A total of 250 respondents, 133 females and 117 males, took part in the survey. A total of 10 FGDs were organized, 2 in each county, with a total of 92 people (59 women and 33 males), consisting of members of peace infrastructures and local communities. Also, 24 interviews were conducted with relevant staff of the GoL, UN agencies and CSOs in Monrovia. Key informants were selected for their specialized knowledge and unique perspectives on the thematic areas covered by the study.

The researcher met with the Reference Group, which was established by UN Women and included key stakeholders from the GoL, UNDP, OHCHR, the Transitional Justice Working Group (TJWG)<sup>8</sup> and CSOs. The group played a vital role in providing feedback during and after the study.

The researcher was assisted by two researchers who were staff of the INCHR, along with human rights monitors of the INCHR, who supported the study in the field by mobilising interviewees and FGD participants in all the counties visited. Due to challenges in travelling to Grand Gedeh, data from that county was collected by INCHR monitors deployed there.

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7 Purposive sampling: A sampling method using the intentional selection of respondents based on their knowledge of the subject and/or their direct participation in the activities studied. Snowball sampling: A sampling method through which the initial respondents are used to identify more informants. Random sampling: A sampling method through which respondents are selected by chance.

8 The Transitional Justice Working Group was established during the implementation of the TRC process, with the aim of supporting the process. It consists of key civil society organisations and other stakeholders.

## 2. THE LIBERIAN CIVIL WARS

According to Christopher Clapham, Liberia, which means “land of the free”, was founded in 1822 by 86 freed slave immigrants, who became known as Americo-Liberians. On arrival in Liberia on 6 February 1820 they established a settlement named Christopolis (now Monrovia, named after United States President James Monroe<sup>9</sup>). With their growing influence and the need to expand their economic and political hold over the land discovered, they declared Liberia’s independence in 1847, thereby becoming Africa’s first independent nation.

The Americo-Liberians established a privileged oligarchy<sup>10</sup> under the True Whig Party (TWP) that exercised power and control over the natives for several decades. As such, the natives were marginalized and denied their rights and privileges as citizens, which consequently bred mistrust and grievances against the privileged oligarchy. Even though the country is rich in timber, gold and diamonds, the exploits from the nation’s wealth benefited only a select few, while the bulk of the population remained poor and illiterate<sup>11</sup>. Consequently, the natives grew frustrated with their inferior status, alongside many other social problems. They were left with no other option than to find ways to liberate themselves from psychological slavery, ostracization and complete marginalization<sup>12</sup>.

The Americo-Liberians were overthrown on 12 April 1980 in a popular coup staged by 17 enlisted men of the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) and led by Master Sergeant Samuel

Kanyon Doe, a non-commissioned officer. Doe immediately established a military government under the banner of the People’s Redemption Council (PRC) and for the first time native Liberians took control of the political affairs of the country. However, Doe was accused of being a high-handed and corrupt nepotist, perceptions that eventually contributed to the eruption of a violent civil war on 24 December 1989<sup>13</sup>, when the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) led by Charles Ghankay Taylor, a former civilian official of the PRC, attacked the country. Confronting a weak and ill-prepared AFL, the NPFL made quick gains in the war, as a ready-made army of young, illiterate and desperate youth joined the movement with the aim of removing the Doe regime. According to Joseph Isaac, “The war was marked by the use of child soldiers, who were made to carry out horrific atrocities against the civilian population, including amputation of limbs, mutilation and murders. In addition, the country’s infrastructure and buildings were looted and destroyed<sup>14</sup>.” The consequences that this widespread destruction and loss of human lives had on the region led to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) deploying a peacekeeping force, the ECOWAS Monitoring Group, in Liberia in August 1990.

Despite the presence of ECOWAS, the war continued until 1996, when a peace agreement was signed in Abuja, Nigeria after several previous accords had failed. The Inter-Faith Mediation Committee, which was formed in

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9 Clapham, Christopher. 1976. pg 158.

10 Ibid.

11 Bangura, I. 2011. pg.5.

12 Youboty, J. 1993. pg. 15.

13 Bangura, 2011, pg. 7.

14 Isaac, J.T. 2014. pg. 4.

1990 and renamed the Inter-Religious Council of Liberia<sup>15</sup> in 1995, played a leading role in engaging and encouraging the warring factions to seek peaceful solutions to the conflict. They collaborated with women's movements that had also succeeded in becoming key stakeholders in the search for sustainable peace in the country. Collectively the two actors became instrumental in encouraging the factions to negotiate and sign the agreement, which paved the way for elections in 1997, which Taylor won with over 70% of the votes cast.

A little over a year into Taylor's reign, the country relapsed into another civil war. The Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy, a movement consisting of former warring factions, with support from neighbouring Sierra Leone and Guinea, started attacking military positions in 1999 with the aim of removing Taylor from power. The conflict became much more protracted when another group of insurgents, the Movement for Democracy in Liberia, also launched an attack against the government, entering the eastern part of the country from neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire in early 2003<sup>16</sup>. After more than four years of intensive fighting, the embattled Taylor was persuaded to go into exile to avoid further loss of human lives. Following discussions for Taylor to step down, the Cable News Network (CNN) reported on 2 August 2003:

**Taylor told reporters he would hand over power to his successor at 11:59 a.m. on August 11 and that the new president would be sworn in at midday... Taylor spoke outside the executive mansion in the capital Monrovia on Saturday after a two-hour**

**session with West African diplomats, in which he agreed to step down following the arrival of peacekeepers. The delegation from ECOWAS told Taylor that a 2,500-strong, Nigerian-led peacekeeping force would begin to arrive in Liberia on Monday<sup>17</sup>.**

Taylor's deputy, Moses Blah, succeeded him and continued with the negotiations that eventually led to the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in Accra, Ghana on 18 August 2003. The agreement paved the way for the deployment of an International Stabilization Force, the implementation of a disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration programme, security sector reform, release of prisoners and abductees, the establishment of a TRC and transitional government and the organisation of national elections<sup>18</sup>.

The UN eventually deployed one of the largest missions in the world, then called the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) with initial troop strength of up to 15,000 and a significant civilian component and necessary support staff contingent<sup>19</sup>. With the existence of relative peace, elections were held in 2005, the outcome of which saw the transitional government headed by Charles Gyude Bryant handing over power to the winner Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf on 16 January 2006.

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15 The IRCL consists of leaders of the National Muslim Council of Liberia and the Liberian Council of Churches. It was established to promote inter-faith collaboration in the process of seeking peaceful solutions to the conflict in Liberia. Since 1995, it has succeeded in becoming one of the lead institutions that promote peace, especially at the national level. However, this study primarily focuses on peace infrastructures in the five counties studied and as such does not lay emphasis on the IRCL.

16 Gilgen, E. and Nowak, M. 2011. pg.1.

17 See: <http://edition.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/africa/08/02/liberia.ecowas/> (Accessed 30 October 2019).

18 See: [https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/file/resources/collections/peace\\_agreements/liberia\\_08182003.pdf](https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/file/resources/collections/peace_agreements/liberia_08182003.pdf) (Accessed on 29 October 2019).

19 See: <https://unmil.unmissions.org/background> (Accessed 30 October 2019).

# 3. TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE PROCESS IN LIBERIA

With peace secured in 2003 and the country succeeding to hold tightly contested elections without degenerating into violence, the stage was set for the government and its partners to build on the fragile peace that existed. Fundamentally, there was a need to address both the root causes and the consequences of the war. As such, the country needed a comprehensive transitional justice process that was to promote truth-seeking, justice for victims, reparations, reconciliation and national healing. Liberia was faced with a high level of disintegration as a result of two violent civil wars that had devastating consequences on its people.

The 2003 CPA adopted the use of restorative rather than retributive justice in the search for sustainable peace in Liberia. This may have stemmed out of the realisation that any suggestion of the use of retributive justice options would have derailed the peace process. Thus, the agreement mandated the establishment of a TRC, as stipulated in Section XIII:

**A Truth and Reconciliation Commission shall be established to provide a forum that will address issues of impunity, as well as an opportunity for both the victims and perpetrators of human rights violations to share their experiences, in order to get a clear picture of the past to facilitate genuine healing and reconciliation.**

**In the spirit of national reconciliation, the Commission shall deal with the root**

**causes of the crises in Liberia, including human rights violations<sup>20</sup>.**

The TRC was eventually established in 2005 through an act of parliament with the objective to promote national peace, security, unity and reconciliation through among others:

**Investigating gross human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law as well as abuses that occurred, including massacres, sexual violations, murder, extrajudicial killings and economic crimes, such as the exploitation of natural or public resources to perpetuate armed conflicts, during the period January 1979 to 14 October 2003; providing a forum that will address issues of impunity, as well as an opportunity for both victims and perpetrators of human rights violations to share their experiences in order to create a clear picture of the past to facilitate genuine healing and reconciliation; conducting a critical review of Liberia's historical past, with the view to establishing and giving recognition to historical truths in order to address falsehoods and misconceptions of the past relating to the nation's socioeconomic and political development; compiling a report that includes a comprehensive account of the activities of the commission, and its findings<sup>21</sup>.**

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20 Aning, K. and Jaye, T. 2011. pg.3.

21 Government of Liberia. 2005. pg.5.

With the adoption of the TRC Act in 2005 and the appointment of commissioners by President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, the commission started operations in early 2006. From the beginning, the TRC found itself contending with enormous challenges that significantly affected its outputs. Paul James-Allen et al. claimed:

**Staffing challenges plagued the TRC throughout its lifespan, and problematic internal dynamics between commissioners often impeded coherent policy and programme planning. In addition, the initial lack of a fully functional secretariat meant that the TRC's activities were often haphazard. One example was in November 2006, when early statement-taking efforts ended after only a few months of work with many statement-takers protesting outside the TRC offices for pay allegedly still owed to them<sup>22</sup>.**

In the end, the commission was able to reach a large number of Liberians and heard testimony from 607 witnesses, of whom 499 were conflict survivors<sup>23</sup>. In mid-2009, the commission completed its work and submitted, on 30 June, a comprehensive report to the government. The report immediately generated significant controversy as some of the recommendations called for specific individuals, including the then-president Johnson-Sirleaf, to be punished and banned from holding public office for 30 years as a result of the roles they played during the conflict<sup>24</sup>. It appears that the inclusion and targeting of actors who had succeeded in re-emerging as political elites in post-war Liberia immediately negated any chance of the report being acted upon. Consequently, the process lost its momentum and the report was abandoned by the government.

The focus then remained on the establishment

and use of peace infrastructures as mechanisms for the promotion of peace and reconciliation at the local level. The principal infrastructure recommended by the TRC is the Palava Hut, which is discussed below. However, several other infrastructures are contributing to peace, security and reconciliation in the country, which are also assessed in following sections.

By 2009, it became obvious that gender discrimination and inequality was a major challenge in post-war Liberia, as described by the then Minister of Gender and Development, Vabah K. Gayflor:

**Women in Liberia still face discrimination and marginalization in many ways. Women do not share equally in the fruits of production. Gender disparities and unacceptable inequalities persist at all levels. Deeply entrenched attitudes against women and girls perpetuate inequality and discrimination against women in public and private life, on a daily basis. It is important to note that equal opportunity for all people is essential to the construction of a just and democratic society<sup>25</sup>.**

In responding to this challenge, the government adopted a National Gender Policy (NGP) in 2009 with the objective of having it:

**[S]erve as a framework and guideline in mainstreaming gender and empowering women and vulnerable groups in the national development processes. Other objectives are to enhance women's and girls' empowerment for sustainable and equitable development; create and strengthen gender-responsive structures, processes and mechanisms for development, in which both**

22 James-Allen, P, Weah, A. and Goodfriend, L. 2011. pg. 7.

23 Ibid.

24 Aning, K. and Jaye, T. 2011. pg.3.

25 See the foreword provided by Vabah. K. Gayflor in the Liberia National Gender Policy, 2009.).

women and men participate equally,  
have access to and benefit from all the  
country's resources<sup>26</sup>.

It was expected that the policy would help shape the approach to gender-related issues, especially given the nature of the civil wars Liberia experienced. In spite of this policy and other development agendas of the government, such as the SRNHPR, the failure to have a credible transitional justice process more than 15 years after the civil war in Liberia, which would have helped to promote reconciliation and healing in the country, has had negative implications for victims and the country as a whole. As such, there is a growing demand for an Economic and War Crimes Court to address the atrocities of the past. Current president George Manneh Weah, who promised during his campaign to provide justice for victims, in a letter to the legislature dated 12 September 2019, wrote: "I... do hereby call on the national legislature to advise and provide guidance on all legislative and other necessary measures towards the implementation of the TRC [Truth and Reconciliation Commission] report, including the establishment of the Economic and War Crimes Court<sup>27</sup>."

Inasmuch as the court may generate controversies and tension if established, it is important for the country to confront and deal with its past. The court will contribute to the search for justice for victims, which is vital for their healing process. Additionally, the process will be of intrinsic significance to mitigating impunity and the recurrence of violence in the country. Most importantly, a vital component of any future transitional justice programme should be the strengthening of peace infrastructures, which are of vital importance to achieving reconciliation, healing and peace, as argued in the sections below.

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26 Government of Liberia. 2009. pg.7. Government of Liberia. 2009. pg.7.

27 See: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/09/17/liberia-president-backs-war-crimes-court>  
(Accessed 30 October 2019)

# 4. FINDINGS

This chapter presents findings collected in the five counties (Bomi, Bong, Grand Bassa, Grand Gedeh and Lofa) and the capital city Monrovia, using interviews, FGDs, semi-structured questionnaires and the MSC tool. The data is presented in five components:

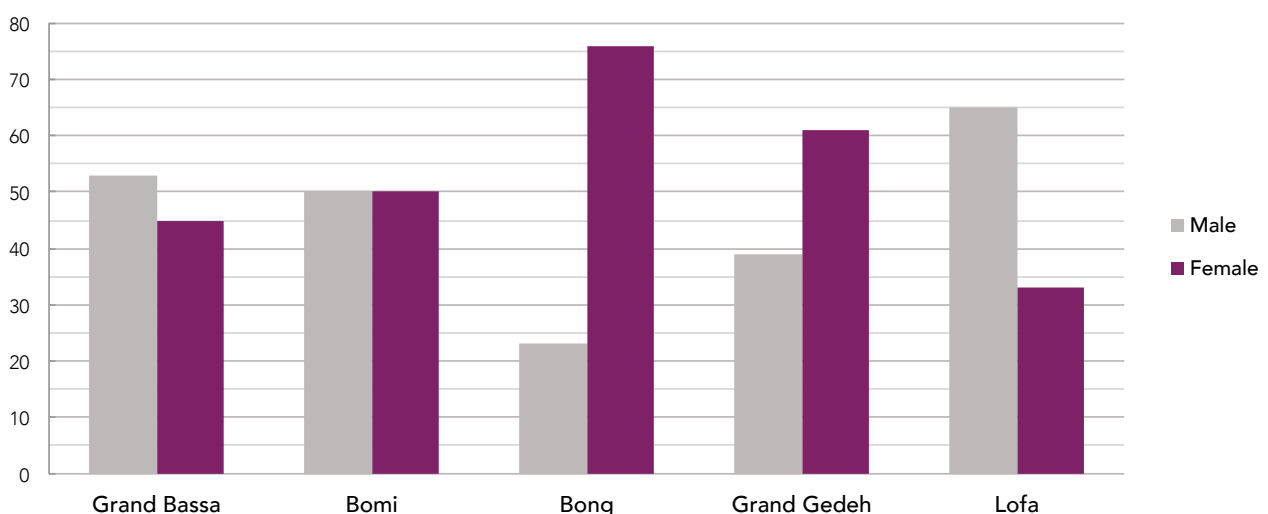
1. the demographics of the respondents,
2. the peace infrastructures in the counties studied (origin, composition, responsibilities, activities, challenges, etc.),
3. the gender responsiveness of the peace infrastructures,
4. the types and quality of the coordination mechanisms for peace infrastructures,
5. the enabling factors and challenges that peace infrastructures contend with, and
6. the potential for the sustainability of peace infrastructures.

## 4.1 DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE RESPONDENTS

The semi-structured questionnaire was administered to 250 people (133 females and 117 males), 50 in each county visited. Coupled with this, 92 people participated in FGDs (59 women and 33 males), with 21 key informants interviewed (12 females, 9 males) in Monrovia. The total number of females who participated in the study is 204, while the number of male participants is 159.

**Figure 1** illustrates the gender of respondents in each county.

**FIGURE 1: GENDER OF RESPONDENTS PER COUNTY**

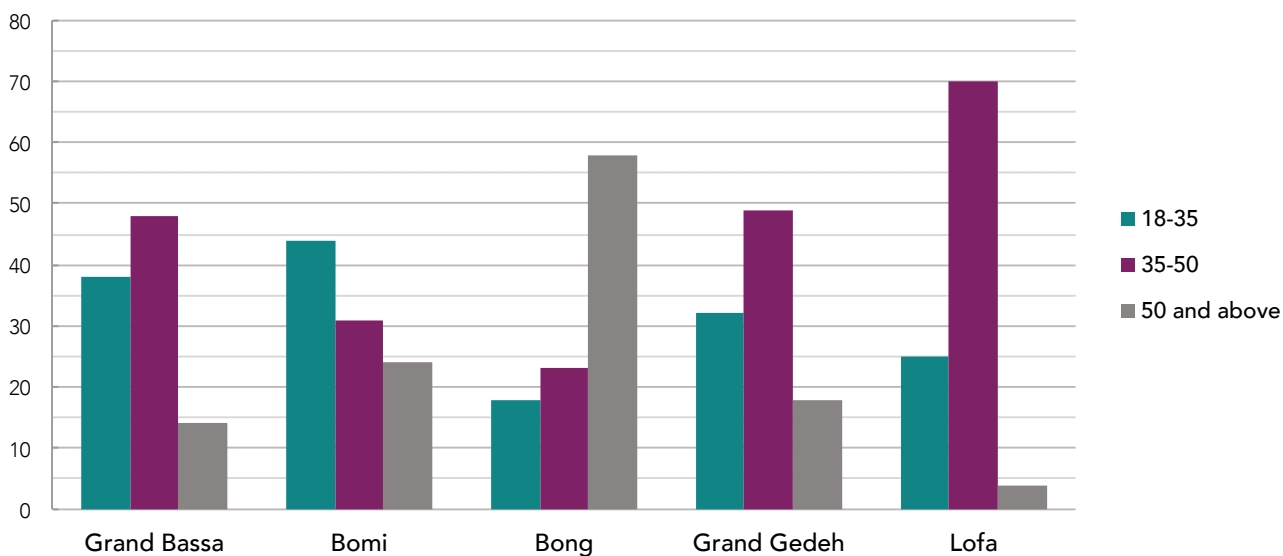


**Figure 2** illustrates the age of respondents on each country.

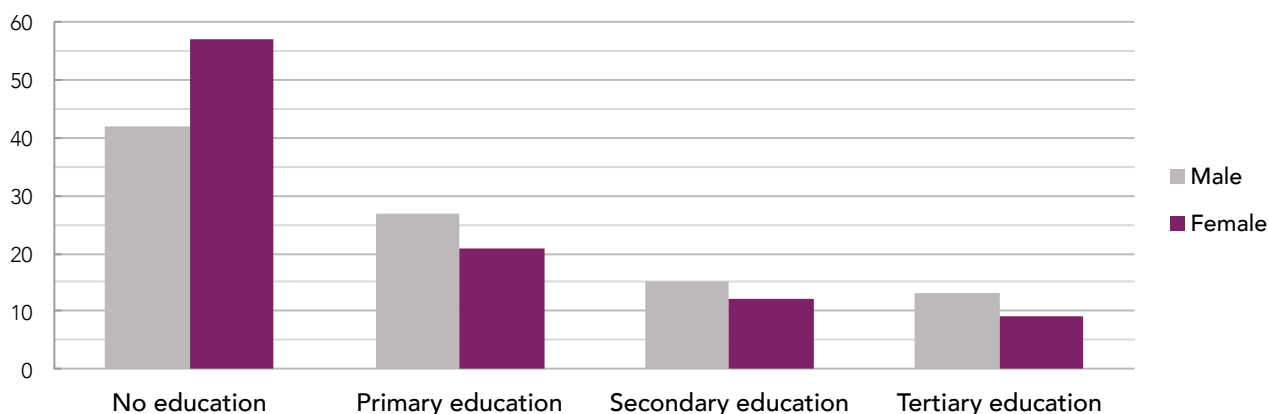
**As illustrated in the graph below**, 57% of female respondents had no formal education, 21% had primary level education, 13% attained

secondary school education and 9% had tertiary level education. Of male respondents, 43% had no formal education, 27% attained primary education, 16% attained secondary school education and 14% had tertiary level education.

**FIGURE 2: AGE OF RESPONDENTS**



**FIGURE 3: LEVEL OF EDUCATION OF RESPONDENTS**





**FIGURE 4: OCCUPATION OF RESPONDENTS**

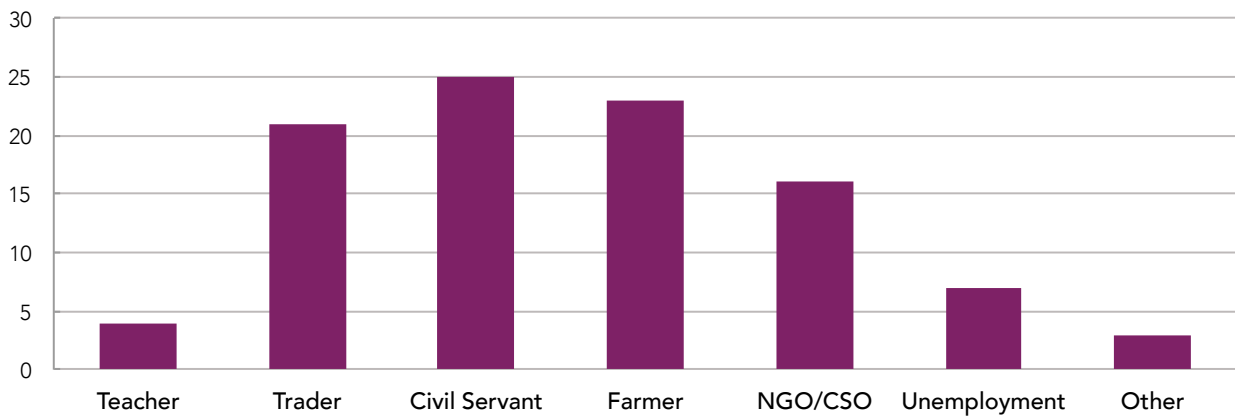
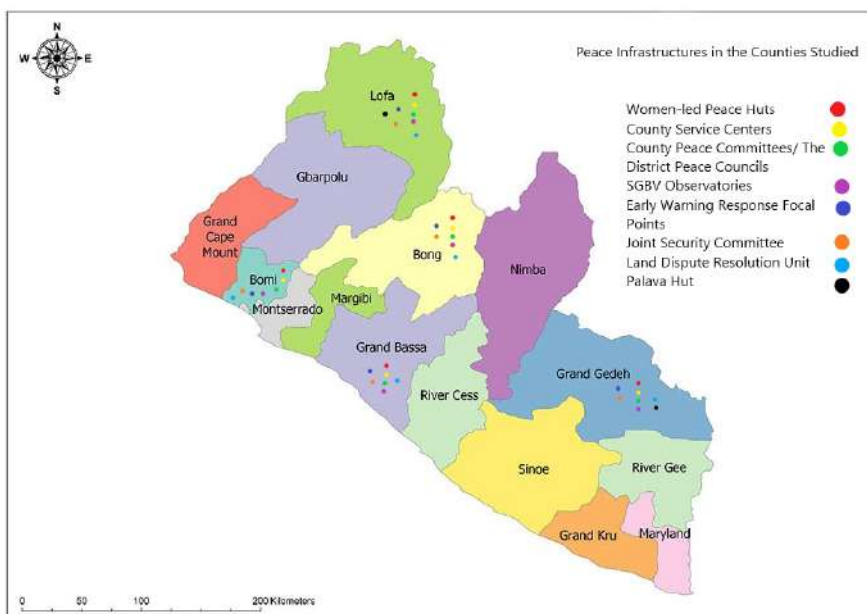


Figure 4 reveals that 25% of all respondents were civil servants, working mostly in CSCs, County Security Councils (CSCOs) and the Joint Security Committees (JSCs); 23% were farmers, 22% were traders, 17% were staff of non-government organisations (NGOs) and civil society organisations (CSOs), 4% were teachers, 2% indicated that they were involved in other trades such as carpentry and tailoring, and 7% indicated that they were unemployed. A significant percentage of female respondents were either farmers or traders, while many of those who worked in the formal sectors as teachers, civil servants and in NGOs/CSOs, were male respondents. This provides an indication of the gender disparity in the working world, with women still disadvantaged in the formal and informal employment sectors.

## 4.2 PEACE INFRASTRUCTURES IN LIBERIA

The study found that eight key peace infrastructures are present and functional in the five counties. These are the Palava Hut, women-led Peace Huts, CSCs, CPCs/ DPCs, SGBV Observatories, Early Warning and Response Focal Points, JSC and the Land Dispute Resolution Unit (LDRU), which is within the Liberia Land Authority (LLA). The map below illustrates the peace infrastructures in the respective counties, revealing that only Lofa and Grand Gedeh have all eight infrastructures, as they are the only counties where the Palava Huts project was implemented.



**FIGURE 5: PEACE INFRASTRUCTURES IN THE COUNTIES STUDIED**

The following section critically assesses the functions, composition, gender-responsiveness, monitoring mechanisms, enabling factors and challenges faced by the infrastructures, and the potential for their sustainability.

### 4.2.1. The Palava Huts

This section presents the origin, location, composition, responsibilities, activities, gender responsiveness and challenges faced by the Palava Huts.

#### 4.2.1.1 Origin and approach of the Palava Huts

In its 2009 report, the TRC established that even though the conflict in Liberia had its origins in the history of the country, its major root causes were “attributable to poverty, greed, corruption, limited access to education, economic, social, civil and political inequalities; identity conflict, and land tenure and distribution<sup>28</sup>.” One of the measures prescribed by the commission was the remodelling of the traditional conflict-resolution mechanism, which had been used in local communities in Liberia for decades to settle family and community-related disputes. This mechanism is referred to as the ‘Palava Huts’<sup>29</sup>, and the TRC mandated the INCHR to ensure the implementation of the remodelled process<sup>30</sup>.

The TRC essentially viewed the Palava Huts as a mechanism that could be used to heal the wrongs of the civil war outside of the official courts of Liberia. The intention was to mitigate any potential for bias or interference from state officials. It was believed that the Palava Huts would be much more accessible and trusted by both victims and perpetrators of violence at local and national levels<sup>31</sup>.

In endorsing the Palava Huts, President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf had this to say:

**We will create a space where the truth is sacred and renew our peacebuilding efforts to heal fractured communities. I am prepared to be the first to appear before it, to say what I have already said, to challenge untruths, to say what I have done and what I have not done and to demonstrate that no one is above this process of healing and truth-telling<sup>32</sup>.**

The non-judicial approach of the Palava Huts provided participants, especially perpetrators, with the confidence to openly speak about the atrocities that they committed. It focused on less serious offences committed during the war. This is reflective of the focus on healing and reconciliation, whilst simultaneously seeking to uphold the rights of victims and vulnerable groups<sup>33</sup>. According to the INCHR, the Palava Hut sought to:

**Promote community-based healing and reconciliation through the application of traditional justice and accountability mechanisms to facilitate public disclosure, acknowledgement and apology for human rights violations and other mass abuses committed during the civil war in local communities, and to build the foundation for social cohesion and national unity which would contribute to upholding basic human rights of men, women, children and people with disabilities<sup>34</sup>.”**

28 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia. 2009.

29 The Palava Hut has existed in Liberia for centuries as it is a traditional method of addressing communal disputes and meeting on general issues related to a community. The word “palava” is a derivative of “palaver”, a Portuguese word meaning “discussion” or “meeting”, thus leading to description of the Palava Hut as a place of meeting. As such, the Palava Hut was seen as a model that could be used to promote peace and reconciliation in local communities in post-war Liberia.

30 Independent National Commission for Human Rights. 2017. pg. 2.

31 Skaar, Elin. 2013.

32 See Kosmos Journal, Planting seeds of peace in Liberia, 2019, <https://www.kosmosjournal.org/article/planting-seeds-of-peace-in-liberia/> (Accessed 17 October 2019).

33 Pajibo, Ezekiel. 2008.

34 Independent National Commission for Human Rights. 2017.

With support from the GoL and the UN, the INCHR was to set up the Palava Huts modelled specifically on the recommendations of the TRC. It was to roll out the process through setting up District Palava Hut Committees, taking into consideration the following:

- Conducting nationwide awareness of the process, benefits, and safety of the Palava Huts system
- Conducting a comprehensive study across the four linguistic communities in Liberia to determine the forms and content of their respective Palava Huts system
- Undertaking a mapping exercise of the types of war-related violations that can be addressed through the huts
- Designing context-specific Palava Hut methodologies
- Supporting cleansing and atonement rites, including public apology, reparation and memorialisation agreed by communities and that adhere to human rights principles
- Conducting community Palava Hut discussions nationwide<sup>35</sup>.

Even though there was a clear understanding of what needed to be done, it appears that there was limited interest in rolling out the traditional transitional justice process. For instance, after the second civil war ended in 2003 it was only in 2009 that the TRC report was produced, and it was not until 2016 that plans were put in place to pilot the Palava Huts. Such delays have direct negative implications for the victims and the reconciliation process in a deeply traumatised and divided country.

#### **4.2.1.2 Locations and composition of the Palava Huts**

Two pilot locations for Palava Hut hearings/discussions were selected by stakeholders (CSOs, community, religious and traditional leaders, etc.) in Lofa and Grand Gedeh counties as part of a project titled the Community-Based

Truth Telling, Atonement and Psychosocial Recovery Project. The piloted project was supported by UNDP and the UN Peacebuilding Fund (UNPBF). A seven-member executive committee of four males and three females was established in the counties where the Palava Huts were piloted. The structure included the Chairperson (male), Co-chairperson (female), Secretary (a male or female youth leader) and four members, comprising two males and two females. They were selected from various organisations, including the Christian and Islamic communities and traditional authorities.

#### **4.2.1.3 Palava Huts' activities and challenges**

The pilot Palava Huts were implemented in Lofa and Grand Gedeh between 2016 and 2017. According to the INCHR report on the pilot Palava Hut hearings:

**The maiden round of the hearings was held in Toffoi's Town, Tchien District, Grand Gedeh County, 15-24 December 2016, while the second convened in Vezela, Voinjama District, Lofa County, 16-27 January 2017. A total of 269 war-related victim statements were recorded, with 108 from Voinjama District and 161 from Tchien District. The Palava Hut heard and resolved 86 cases in Voinjama District and 91 cases in Tchien District, totalling 177 resolved cases<sup>36</sup>. In disaggregating the cases by sex, the commission indicated that in total "the victims included 38 males and 139 females while the perpetrators were 176 males and 1 female<sup>37</sup>.**

The remaining 98 cases were not heard as funding ran out and no additional support was provided by the UNDP, which had supplied the initial funds.

35 Independent National Commission for Human Rights. 2013.

36 Independent National Commission for Human Rights. 2017.

37 Ibid.

Since 2017, the Palava Hut project has not been revived, which has led to a massive gap in the process of healing and reconciliation in Liberia. The traditional Palava Huts continue to function, but they deal with community-related cases and not ones related to the war. A member of the Palava Hut in Vezala, Lofa County, Florence Kullie, expressed her dissatisfaction and frustration:

**There is so much we were able to achieve within a very short period of time. People trusted the process, they wanted justice and they were eager to speak out and seek reconciliation. The pilot project raised hopes and people were travelling to Vezala to listen to the hearings, and also registered to participate, but it all ended in a short period of time. They say there is no money and that is not good for Liberia. What we need is a process that works and that our leaders could invest resources in. People still need justice and they need to have their stories told; they should not be denied that as it is part of their healing process<sup>38</sup>.**

Some interviewees indicated that the decision to stop the Palava Huts process may have been because the end process was tied to the provision of reparations for victims, which was not available.

In other countries across the world, the failure to experience an adequate healing and reconciliation process usually has the tendency of undermining the process of preventing the recurrence of violence, which is a core element of transitional justice. Peacebuilding expert Haroun Kamara, currently working in South Sudan, had this to say in relation to the challenges of the Palava Huts in Liberia:

**There is a growing concern, looking at the deterioration in peace and security**

**in the country, that the failure to address the root causes of the conflict and reconcile Liberians has led to the current situation that the country is finding itself in. People are hostile, they do not trust the government and are asking for a war and economic crimes court. This is as a result of the fact that the system has failed to provide the justice and healing that was required in immediate post-war Liberia. The grievances and frustrations are resurfacing. What is needed now is for relevant stakeholders to sit down and map out the methods that should be applied to address the historical legacies of the conflict and strengthen prevention mechanisms to mitigate any potential of relapsing into violence<sup>39</sup>.**

As indicated by respondents, the Palava Huts could be vital in helping to heal and reconcile victims and communities but the GoL and its development partners need to provide the financial and technical support required to enable it to effectively do so.

#### **4.2.1.4 Gender responsiveness of the Palava Huts**

A very good approach to gender responsiveness was used in the two pilot Palava Huts. The ability of the huts to create awareness and to encourage especially female victims, and those who perpetrated violence against them, to provide their testimonies — with the perpetrators asking for forgiveness — went a long way in providing both justice and healing for the victims. The process was designed to respond to female victims' quest for justice and healing, which is important for the closure they require and had a positive impact on those who went through the process, according to respondents. The latter add that replication of such an approach via a revival of the Palava Huts will go a long way in fostering justice for female victims of the war,

38 Interview conducted in Voinjama on 21 October 2019.

39 Interview conducted via Skype on 24 October 2019.

a demand which has remained unattended for more than a decade and a half.

In addition, four of the seven members of the Palava Hut in Lofa were said by respondents to be extremely vocal and respected women who were able to bring to the fore issues related to women, with a good number of cases heard that were related to female victims. The strength of the process went beyond mere inclusion of women to having women champion the causes of other women, spotlighting cases that had remained unaddressed for a very long period. Thus, females interviewed felt satisfied that even though the process was short, it opened their eyes to what could be done to address their demand for justice at the local level.

#### **4.2.1.5 Potential for sustainability**

The Palava Hut process has limited potential for sustainability. This became obvious in the manner with which it was abandoned when the initial funds ran out. The subsequent project, if implemented, should be carefully assessed at the design stage to ensure sustainability. Implementation of the Palava Huts could be designed to be sustainable as it is built on community structures and inexpensive to run. However, its success requires continuous, longer-term financial support from the government, as local community members would not have the resources to provide the logistics required to facilitate the process on a day to day basis. These logistics would include transportation and refreshment for those participating. In addition, victims would require reparations, otherwise the process could stall.

#### **4.2.2. The women-led Peace Huts**

This section presents the origin, location, composition, responsibilities, activities, gender responsiveness and challenges faced by the women-Led Peace Huts.

##### **4.2.2.1 The origin and approach of the Peace Huts**

The involvement of women in the search for sustainable peace in Liberia between 2001 and 2003 provided them, especially women working

at the grassroots level, with the awareness and confidence they required to further support the sustainability of peace in post-war Liberia. This was coupled with the need, as a result of the gaps in the transitional justice process, to provide platforms through which women could participate in reconciliation and peacebuilding efforts and at the same time protect and promote the rights and welfare of women and girls in local communities.

As part of the support to the peacebuilding process in post-war Liberia, the Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET) supported grassroots women to establish what became known as the women Peace Huts, which became a registered CBO in 2018. WIPNET was able to source 2000 US\$ from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Sweden, which was used to open five Peace Huts in Bong (Totota and Gbarnga), Bomi, Montserrado and Grand Bassa counties. WIPNET further supported the establishment of 11 Peace Huts in Bong County.

The Peace Huts were modelled on the Palava Hut structures. However, they were established to respond to the needs and aspirations of women and girls, as the Palava Huts were believed to be male-dominated and disadvantageous to women who were seeking security and justice in their communities. According to Annie Nushann, one of the leading founders of the Peace Huts:

**Years of neglect, marginalization and deprivation of women by men led to the need of women like me, who have been involved in peacebuilding and gender-focused advocacy, to establish the first Peace Hut in Bong County. At the end of the war, women were experiencing a lot of violence at the hands of men and there was no one to speak for them or protect them, and we wanted to put an end to that. We believed that if we had fought for peace to return to Liberia, it was our business to ensure that women and girls enjoy that peace<sup>40</sup>.**

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40 Interview conducted in Monrovia on 15 October 2019.

Annie further added:

**The choice of the word Palava Hut was not appealing to us as it signified conflict —technically the Palava Huts are called ‘conflict huts’ — and they were dominated by men. We the women wanted something that both symbolizes and stands fully for peace and nothing else, so we decided to develop a platform for peace and not for palava. We wanted the mentality and the approach to peace to change and we chose to call ours the Peace Hut<sup>41</sup>.**

To mitigate SGBV and domestic violence, women proactively identified and started dealing with related cases in Totota. With the support of the police and community leaders, women would summon men to the Peace Huts when a complaint was made against them and if they failed to report they would be arrested by the women. These women would then try to solve the reported cases, with the culprits warned or taken directly to the police<sup>42</sup>. Men who were caught or reported to be abusing the rights of women and girls were forced to appear before the hut’s executive and sworn to never commit such acts in the future. Major cases such as rape and murder were reported to the police, with the cases monitored by members of the hut when taken to court.

UN Women gained interest in the activities of the Peace Huts, and after a few years of providing financial and technical support it decided to have the activities of the huts expanded. In 2007 the agency established a hut in Totota, Bong County, and helped the women establish the National Peace Huts Women of Liberia (NPHWL).

In 2009, officials of UN Women visited the

Peace Hut in Totota, listened to the stories of the founders, observed how the hut worked and were satisfied with the model used by the women. This led to the agency facilitating a trip of one of the Peace Hut leaders to a UNPBF meeting in New York in 2009 to speak on the approach used, which provided other peacebuilders globally with the opportunity to understand the contributions made by local women to peacebuilding in Liberia.

In late 2009, UN Women supported the construction of the first Women Empowerment Centre in Totota, with the aim of providing women training in areas including business skills, the village savings and loans approach, advocacy, conflict management and resolution. This was done alongside the construction of a new Peace Hut for the women in Totota. Since 2007, 11 Peace Huts have been established in Bong County, with others created in every county in Liberia.

Each of the Peace Huts owned by the NPHWL has an executive comprising the following positions: Chairlady, Assistant Chairlady, Secretary, Treasurer and Chaplain. At the national level, there is the National Chairlady, the National Vice Chairlady, the Secretary, Treasurer and Chaplain. Peace Huts supported by WIPNET have a Coordinator, Deputy Coordinator, Secretary, Women Head and Animators, with the number of Animators varying from district to district.

#### ***4.2.2.2 Locations and composition of the Peace Huts***

Three institutions have Peace Huts in Liberia: the NPHWL, WIPNET and a local NGO, the Peace Hut Alliance for Conflict Transformation (PHACT). It is important to note that one of the founders of the Peace Huts, Annie Nushann, is working with all three organisations and the models used are the same. However, only the NPHWL receives support from UN Women.

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41 Ibid.

42 When interviewed, members of the huts denied abusing the right of male culprits they arrest and take to the police. However, the women need to be adequately trained on human rights and the rule of law to avoid them abusing the rights of community members in the process of seeking justice for female victims.

## NATIONAL PEACE HUTS WOMEN OF LIBERIA

The NPHWL was established in 2007 specifically to construct and use the Peace Hut model to protect and promote the rights and welfare of women in local communities in Liberia. It has been consistently supported by UN Women, which translated into construction of the huts listed below.

**TABLE 1: PEACE HUTS BUILT WITH SUPPORT FROM UN WOMEN**

NO.	COMMUNITY	COUNTY
1.	Totota	Bong
2.	Gbegbesta	Margibi
3.	Schiefflin	Margibi
4.	Weala	Margibi
5.	Tiama Town	Grand Gedeh
6.	Zai Town	Grand Gedeh
7.	Polar Gbarzon	Grand Gedeh
8.	Gbarma	Gbarpolu
9.	Belle Yalla	Gbarpolu
10.	Morlakwelleh	Gbarpolu
11.	Bopolu City	Gbarpolu
12.	Henry Town	Gbarpolu
13.	Cestos City	River Cess
14.	Borgeezy	River Cess
15.	Tarr Town	Grand Bassa
16.	Little Bassa	Grand Bassa
17.	Edina	Grand Bassa
18.	Dorobo-Gbarlaken	Maryland
19.	Barrenken	Maryland
20.	Bo Waterside	Cape Mount
21.	Malema	Bomi
22.	Yeala	Lofa
23.	Konia	Lofa
24.	Tiapa	Nimba
25.	Zontuo	Nimba
26.	Ganta Border	Nimba
27.	Tuzon	Sinoe
28.	Tuobo Wartiken	River Gee

## WIPNET PEACE HUTS

WIPNET is a programme of the West African Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP). WIPNET was established in 2001 with the aim of “building the capacity of women to enhance their roles in peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction in West Africa.” WIPNET was very instrumental in supporting the mobilization and participation of women in the search for peace in Liberia during the second civil war and has since continued to support grassroots mobilization for peacebuilding. WIPNET has established roughly 24 Peace Huts across Liberia, with 12 of them in Bong County, as indicated above. Table 2 provides details on the locations of the WIPNET huts.

**TABLE 2: PEACE HUTS ESTABLISHED BY WIPNET**

NO.	COMMUNITY	COUNTY
1.	Salayea	Lofa
2.	Zorzor	Lofa
3.	Quadagbone	Lofa
4.	Voinjama	Lofa
5.	Kolahun	Lofa
6.	Foya	Lofa
7.	Sanoyea	Bong
8.	Meleke	Bong
9.	Gahnmue	Bong
10.	Foequelleh	Bong
11.	Gbarnga	Bong
12.	Belefanai	Bong
13.	Gbalatuah	Bong
14.	Totota	Bong
15.	Waterside	Bong
16.	Tekeh	Bong
17.	Bong Mines	Bong
18.	Salala	Bong
19.	Buchanan	Grand Bassa
20.	Gboinyee Tarr, District 4	Grand Bassa
21.	Moncray Inn, District 3	Grand Bassa
22.	Cooper Town, Suehnmecca District	Bomi
23.	Tubmanburg, Senjeh District	Bomi
24.	Gbarma	Gbarpolu

## PHACT PEACE HUTS

PHACT is a local NGO that was established by grassroots Liberians, including Annie Nushann, to support the creation of platforms for peacebuilding. It has been able to establish four Peace Huts in the communities listed below.

**TABLE 3: PEACE HUTS ESTABLISHED BY PHACT**

NO.	COMMUNITY	COUNTY
1.	Voinjama	Lofa
2.	Ghanta	Nimba
3.	Wasu	Bong
4.	Maikibi	Kakata

## COMPOSITION OF THE PEACE HUTS

Generally Peace Huts have 50-200 members per district, who perform voluntary roles. Peace Huts focus on supporting and strengthening community dynamics and women's roles in fostering dialogue, mediation and justice-seeking. Women have been educated in numeracy and literacy at the Peace Huts and have expanded on this knowledge with further business development and management skills, which have allowed many of them to start their own businesses, thus empowering them economically<sup>43</sup>.

The bulk of the leadership and membership of the huts are women. A few men play clerical roles, especially in areas where there are no literate female members. For instance, in Totota the Secretary is a male and another male member is reported to be playing an active role in the hut, which puts its membership at 56 females and 2 males. Similarly, the Peace Hut in Gbarnga has a membership of over 150, with three of those being men, one of them the Secretary. Grand Bassa and Bomi have better rates of male membership. In Buchanan, Grand Bassa, 35 of 200 members are males, while in Tubmanburg, Bomi, 25 of 100 members are men. In other locations, such as Tiama Town,

Konabo District, Grand Gedeh, all the members (more than 150) are females.

However, despite the limited number of male members, all the women in all the communities visited indicated that the men in their communities are cooperative and support the activities of the huts when called upon to do so. Furthermore, all the women interviewed indicated that their husbands have never tried to stop their participation in the huts' activities. Members indicated that the Peace Huts were initially rejected by males in their communities, however this attitude changed over time due to the positive records of the huts and the awareness created by women in those communities<sup>44</sup>.

Notwithstanding, the limited amount of men in the Peace Huts indicates that they are virtually an all-women process, with men playing only roles that female members may not have the capacity to undertake. As such, a conscious effort needs to be made by the leadership of the Peace Huts to encourage more male involvement and participation in their activities. This challenge could be overcome through awareness-raising and sensitization in local communities.

It was observed that a significant number of leaders and members of the Peace Huts are elderly women, with a limited number of young women participating. The reason for this, proffered by Mary Varney, a member of the Peace Hut in Bomi, is:

**Elderly women are very much respected in Liberia and they have convening power. If they summon any community member to the Peace Hut, they are most likely to go there. Also, the work we do is voluntary as there is no pay and we sacrifice a lot of time helping women to be respected and treated fairly by men, which affects our livelihoods as we spend less time fending for our families. So, it is only**

43 UN Women, 2019.

44 Based on interviews conducted in October 2019.



**those who can volunteer that can join us, and mostly elderly women are the ones who volunteer<sup>45</sup>.**

However, the approach that has been used by the Peace Huts supported by WIPNET is to establish what they refer to as Youth WIPNET — female youth who work with the elderly women with the aim of taking over the leadership when the elderly women can no longer effectively carry out their responsibilities. Four Youth WIPNET groups have been established, in Bong, Montserrado, Grand Bassa and Margibi counties. Additionally, intergenerational dialogues were initiated for the Peace Huts, with ActionAid and Women Peace and Security Network Africa (WIPSEN-Africa) (at the time led by Leymah Gbowee<sup>46</sup>) partnering with the huts to strengthen the relationship between older and younger women. The Peace Hut in Totota benefitted from the initiative, which unfortunately was not replicated in other communities.

Very few people with disabilities (PwDs) participate in the activities of the Peace Huts, a result of the limited effort made to promote their participation in the huts' activities. This is a challenge that persists in all the huts visited in all the targeted counties. If PwDs are integrated into the activities of the huts, they could gain a voice and contribute to the protection and promotion of their rights.

#### **4.2.2.3 Peace Huts' capacity, activities and challenges<sup>47</sup>**

Interviews and FGDs revealed that women in the Peace Huts are fully knowledgeable about the factors behind the formation of the huts, what is expected of them and how they should go about achieving the objectives of the respective huts. Although the vast majority of the members are not educated (literate), they demonstrated that they have the knowledge and skills required

to carry out their daily activities. Ninety-two percent of all the women interviewed in the counties visited, who are members of the Peace Huts, confidently spoke of the objectives of the huts and the activities they undertake in their respective communities.

All the huts have a constitution with laws that guides its activities and, based on the constitution, members are expected to pay dues to fund activities. In addition, members are expected to pay 3,000 L\$ (roughly 20 US\$) every month to the national executive for the coordination and implementation of essential activities of the huts. This is because the huts receive no financial support from the GoL or other organisations to carry out activities. The bulk of the financial support received is directed towards building the huts and undertaking training in the empowerment centres, for huts that have them. The lack of support, particularly from the government, may be because no proactive measure has been taken to integrate the Peace Hut infrastructure into the government's system, even though it was registered as a CBO in 2018 and referred to in the second National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security.

The Peace Huts' financial challenges immensely limit their ability to be more effective. Despite this, they continue to contribute to peace and security for women in the communities in which they operate. Hawa Hundred, a member of the Peace Hut in Gbarnga, spoke about why the huts continue in spite of the difficulties:

**Peace Huts made me brave. I came to realise how much power women could have if they stand up for their rights and reject the violence and disrespect they are usually subjected to by men. Women can arrest men and even the police and courts tread carefully when they see us mobilizing to take on an issue. We have**

45 Interview conducted in Bomi on 28 October 2019.

46 Leymah Gbowee is a Liberian woman activist who was instrumental in mobilizing women to support the process of searching for peace during the Liberian Civil War. She won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011 alongside Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, former president of Liberia, and Tawakkol Karman, a peace activist in Yemen.

47 Kindly see Annex 1 for the locations of the Peace Huts in the counties studied.

never stopped since we started work in 2007. We have no money, no salary or logistical support but we are prepared not to stop as we are volunteering to not just keep the respect of the women of our generation but also the next generation. If we stop now as a result of financial challenges, then all will be lost. The government does not want to accept that we are doing its work and they should be supporting us, but we will continue doing what we do<sup>48</sup>.

The resilience of the women, alongside the opportunities provided by UN Women and WIPNET to showcase their model, has led to the Peace Hut gaining a positive global reputation. On 20 June 2019, the National Peace Hut Women of Liberia won the UN Population Award in New York for its activities in Liberia. Previously, in 2013, the head of the Peace Huts was invited to South Sudan by the UN Women Country Representative, Izeduwa Derex Briggs, to share her experiences with the women of South Sudan. In that same year, women from Mali and a delegation from Nepal came on a study visit and engaged with the huts.

In relation to the perception of the Peace Huts, direct beneficiaries, community leaders and members who are familiar with the huts' activities indicated that they are very effective and have become more active than the police in some communities<sup>49</sup>. Korpoh Deddeh, a beneficiary of the activities of the Peace Hut in Totota, had this to say:

**Women work more than the police in my community. They are very reliable and have succeeded to a large extent to stop abuses against women in my community. I am a direct beneficiary.**

I had several challenges in the past with men in my family but now no one worries me. I am happy and in peace. Women can deal with men more than the police and this was not the case before the Peace Hut came. Now we have a voice and respect in our homes; when threatened we have people we can run to and they respond with speed<sup>50</sup>.

Similar sentiments were expressed by Lawrence Santigie Sesay, a former UN Volunteer in Liberia:

**People need to understand how much work the Peace Huts have been doing in Liberia. With the limited presence of the government in some communities, women would have been subjected to the harshest treatment in post-war Liberia. The emergence of the Peace Huts has succeeded in overcoming that challenge to some extent. I have never seen women in any part of the world standing up bravely to fight against SGBV (sexual and gender-based violence) in their communities. I am deeply impressed with the work they do and it is a shame that the government has not come to understand the opportunity they are missing by not helping to strengthen the activities of the Peace Huts<sup>51</sup>.**

Both the government and other actors engaged during the study are confident that SGBV has declined in the areas in which the Peace Huts have been established. Although the original premise of the Peace Hut concept was peacebuilding<sup>52</sup>, it appears — as indicated by both state and

48 Interview conducted in Gbarnga on 24 September 2019.

49 Based on interviews conducted in Lofa and Bong counties.

50 Interview conducted on 23 October 2019.

51 Interview conducted via Skype on 23 October 2019.

52 For UN Women, support to the Peace Huts was a strategy to interlink all activities at the community level around it, including activities related to peace and security, economic empowerment, political participation and eliminating violence against women.

non-state actors, especially police officers and members of the CPCs and the DPCs engaged during the study — that the education received by women through the Peace Huts is contributing to raising awareness amongst women of their rights and how to defend them. The education of women on their rights, in turn, enhanced their ability to obtain justice. The Peace Huts acted as a vehicle for women’s empowerment, and many communities began to address issues affecting women more seriously than before. According to UN Women, “the combination of trainings, awareness-raising activities and adjudication of GBV (gender-based violence) cases all culminated in reduction of GBV incidents in Peace Hut communities<sup>53</sup>.”

The huts continue to contribute significantly to peace and security and the protection and promotion of the rights and welfare of women and girls in Liberia. Where they exist, they are amongst the first points of contact for women and girls in communities. Peace Huts could contribute much more if provided with financial and material support, alongside the demonstration of political will by the government. Such support would help them strengthen the activities of the already established huts and expand, especially into remote and isolated communities where violations and abuses of the rights of women and girls may be going unnoticed.

#### **4.2.2.4 Gender responsiveness of the Peace Huts**

The Peace Hut was modelled to support the involvement and contribution of women to peace and security in local communities and as a direct desire to have a women-led peace infrastructure based on the concept and model of the traditional Palava Huts. The model has produced significant positive results, with women who felt that the patriarchal systems, structures, cultures and traditions in their communities disadvantaged them, so that the rights of women and girls were violated and they were unable to seek redress. The huts have helped to respond to the demands of women and girls by giving them the protection that was denied them for decades. As such, they now have stronger voices in their communities

and are recognised as a force to be reckoned with. The Peace Huts adequately address the concerns and fears of women and girls and consistently engage them, along with security and justice officials, on safety and security issues. This has created positive shifts, as indicated by community members interviewed.

It is, however, important that more men are encouraged to be involved and participate in the activities of the huts. The more that men are seen advocating for the rights and protection of women and girls in local communities, the better it would be for both sexes.

#### **4.2.2.5 Potential for sustainability of the Peace Huts**

The Peace Huts has very good potential for sustainability compared to other peace infrastructures. It has succeeded in surviving to date with minimal support and has expanded into several communities in the country. Its strengths in relation to sustainability include that the huts are owned and led by community women, who provide services on a voluntary basis and see the huts as part of their contribution to protecting and promoting the rights and welfare of women and girls in their communities. Members put together contributions to implement activities and as such have not relied on external support for the day-to-day activities of the Peace Huts. Closely tied to this is the fact that the Empowerment Centres established by UN Women are contributing to the longer-term sustainability of the huts. The training on savings and loans and other economic activities and approaches would go a long way in the near future in strengthening the ability of women to take care of themselves and their families and at the same time contributes to the huts’ activities.

Inasmuch as the home-grown approach of the huts is good for sustainability, for this peace infrastructure to expand its activities or fully address the cases brought to it, it needs longer-term support from the government and its development partners. The integration by the government of the huts into the infrastructures that it supports would go a long way toward promoting longer-term sustainability.

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53 UN Women, 2019.

### 4.2.3. County Peace Committees and District Peace Councils

This section presents the origin, location, composition, responsibilities, activities, gender responsiveness and challenges faced by the CPCs and the DPCs.

#### 4.2.3.1 Origin and approach of the CPCs and DPCs

As a result of the numerous community-based conflicts in post-war Liberia, the MIA, with support from the MIA-PBO and the UNMIL, established the CPCs in 2010 with the mandate to help resolve conflicts at the local level through the use of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) mechanisms. CPCs handle non-criminal cases such as land disputes. They also help with withdrawal of minor cases from the police and courts (especially where such cases do not warrant the attention of the police or the courts and can be easily handled by the CPCs) and reconcile families and communities in conflict. Members of the CPCs are usually trained by the MIA on peacebuilding, early warning and response mechanisms, conflict management and resolution, trauma healing and the provision of psychosocial support.

The CPC in Lofa has an office of its own, unlike those in the other counties. The houses of members are usually used for meetings and other engagements. Coupled with this, no financial support is provided to CPCs by any institution so members make personal contributions to carry out their activities. This affects the amount of work they can do as they have too many cases in several communities to cover. According to the Chair of the CPC in Grand Bassa:

**People come to us with all sorts of cases and we work with the police and other community actors to solve them. However, we are faced with a lot of challenges as we are not paid and we are poor people who have to take care of our personal needs and at the**

same time try to help keep the peace in Grand Bassa. We have no resources to travel to communities where we are needed and while we do understand that our work is voluntary, at least the MIA and other institutions should be providing basic funds to help us do it. Transportation and communication support will go a long way in keeping the CPCs and DPCs alive<sup>54</sup>.

#### 4.2.3.2 Location and composition of the CPCs and DPCs

The County Peace Committees are located in the capital of the counties. In Bomi, it is in Tubmanburg, in Bong, Gbarnga; Grand Bassa, Buchanan; Grand Gedeh, Zwedru and Lofa, Voinjama. Every district in the five counties visited has a DPC.

The structure of the executive of the CPC is: Chairman, Co-Chair, Secretary, Women Leader, Youth Leader, Financial Secretary, Members (roughly three additional members).

While the CPC sits at the county level, DPCs were established to carry out the same duties at the district level. However, the composition of the DPC largely depends on the dynamics and challenges in the district. For districts with intermittent religion-based tensions, such as Lofa, the executive consists of: Muslim representative, Christian representative, Traditional leader, Women representative, Youth representative, Two ordinary members.

Council members are elected during general meetings and are usually traditional leaders, CSO members and other respected members of the community. The members in the different districts, in turn, elect those who sit in the CPCs. There is no constitution or bylaws guiding the activities of the CPCs and DPCs. As such, their activities are guided by consensus among members. Other influential and respected members in the districts are usually asked to

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53 Interview conducted in Grand Bassa on 25 October 2019.

support the councils to solve complex cases in their communities. They do not have to be members of the CPC or the DPC but should support the councils until the cases are resolved.

#### **4.2.3.3 Activities and challenges faced by CPCs and DPCs**

The activities implemented by the CPCs and DPCs are largely based on the provision of ADR-related services to community members. Those services have multiple aims, which include the desire to mitigate violent conflicts in the communities, prevent minor conflicts from reaching formal security and justice actors and to promote peace and reconciliation. Respondents are of the perception that the CPCs and DPCs are contributing significantly to the mitigation of conflict as the approach they use, ADR, is accessible and user-friendly. In addition, the blend of various actors, including religious and traditional leaders, helps to provide the confidence and trust in the process that is required. This is especially the case where there are regular religious and ethnic conflicts, such as in Bomi and Lofa.

However, in spite of the increasing demand for services from community members, the committees and councils do not have the logistical support they require to take on most of the cases that are reported in communities that are difficult to access or costly to travel to. CPC and DPC members indicated that they need motorbikes, fuel, telephone and airtime to communicate with community members and travel to villages and towns where their services are required. In the absence of such support, they largely focus on dealing with cases reported in the communities where they live. Thus, some people have to travel to access CPCs or DPCs or pay members' transportation costs to have them take on a case in a community outside of their own. These challenges limit the support that the committees and councils can provide to the increasing number of people who demand ADR services.

#### **4.2.3.4 Gender responsiveness of CPCs and DPCs**

Although women in the committees indicated that they are respected and provided with space to influence decisions, it was concluded that there are gender limitations for women. For instance, all the heads of the CPCs visited

were males, with women mostly in the roles of secretaries and in some cases, co-chairs. Additionally, there are more male than female members in most of the CPCs, which presents the impression of male domination. The exception is Grand Gedeh, where out of a membership of 25, 12 are females, a much more balanced gender representation than in other CPCs.

Male dominance in the CPCs could be attributed to the continued male hegemony in the counties, with women still being denied equal representation and voice in structures such as the CPC. In spite of this, it was concluded, based on engagements with community members, that both the CPC and the DPC address cases and concerns brought to them by women. They help them access justice in cases that they cannot handle and use ADR to solve those they can. When interviewed, most female respondents indicated that the processes used are fair, with conflicts usually resolved by the committees. It was deduced from the study that some members of, for instance, Peace Huts, are also members of committees and councils. This further strengthens the social capital that is essential for collective approaches to community conflicts.

#### **4.2.3.5 Potential for sustainability of the CPCs and DPCs**

The CPCs and the DPCs are contending with immense challenges that have direct implications for their sustainability. Factors such as the need for incentives, lack of logistical support required to travel to and address cases reported in remote and isolated communities, and the perception of lack of political will, among others, undermine the potential for sustainability. As such, even though the structures may continue to exist, they will be less effective and may not provide the services that are required in communities. Thus, based on the results of the survey, there is a need for the government and its development partners to provide much needed logistical support and basic incentives to render the infrastructures functional in the immediate, medium and long term.

### **4.2.4. County Service Centres**

This section presents the origin, location, composition, responsibilities, activities, gender

responsiveness and challenges faced by the CSCs.

#### 4.2.4.1 Origin and approach of the CSCs

One of the key peace infrastructures that currently exists in every county in Liberia is the CSC. It was established out of the GoL's need to respond to gaps identified in meeting the needs of people in the respective counties. It is part of the decentralization processes geared towards extending public services to other parts of the country. The GoL stated in its 2012 to 2015 Deconcentration Implementation Strategy:

**'Deconcentration' is the first phase of decentralization at which development programmes planned by central line ministries and agencies are implemented in the counties and districts by their designated personnel and staff, with the objective of improving service delivery at the local levels<sup>55</sup>.**

The CSC became the core approach developed by the government to 'deconcentrate' services in the country. When questioned on the reasons for establishing the CSCs, Jefferson Gbaryan, the CSC Coordinator in Bong County, who also doubles as the Chairman for the Association of County Services in Liberia, said:

**The CSCs are a direct response by the GoL to address the challenges of the centralization of services in Monrovia. The centralization of power and services in Monrovia was not only a lead contributor to the civil wars in Liberia but also continued to disadvantage people in the post-war phase. The government realized then that by doing nothing they were denying people not just their rights but also their dignity, and further increasing poverty in local**

**communities. As such, they launched the first CSC in Grand Bassa in 2015 and every county now has a CSC<sup>56</sup>.**

The first CSC was opened on 30 June 2015 in Grand Bassa and thereafter replicated in all the other counties. Administratively, the CSC is under the MIA and the Governance Commission, with a Coordinator who sits in one of the ministries, agencies and commissions (MACs) represented in the CSC.

#### 4.2.4.2 Location and composition of the CSCs

Every county has a CSC, which is located in the capital city. Officials recruited for deployment in the centres are provided with training to enable them to deliver the essential services. The MACs that are deployed to provide services in the CSCs are:

- MIA
- Ministry of Health and Social Welfare
- Ministry of Transport
- Ministry of Education
- Ministry of Public Works
- Ministry of Finance and Development Planning
- Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MGCSP)
- Ministry of Commerce and Industry
- Ministry of Labour
- Ministry of Lands, Mines and Energy
- Centre for National Documentation and Registration Authority
- LLA
- Business Opportunity Support Services
- Internal Auditing Agency
- Liberia Institute for Statistics and Geo-Information Services<sup>57</sup>.

55 GoL. 2012

56 Interview conducted in Gbarnga on 24 October 2019.

57 Some of the centres have all the MDAs, while some have a couple still not fully deployed in them. In spite of this, most of the MDAs are deployed in the CSCs.

The CSC is usually coordinated by an official of one of the lead MACs, with each institution having an office (referred to as a window) with about three staff.

#### 4.2.4.3 CSCs' activities and challenges

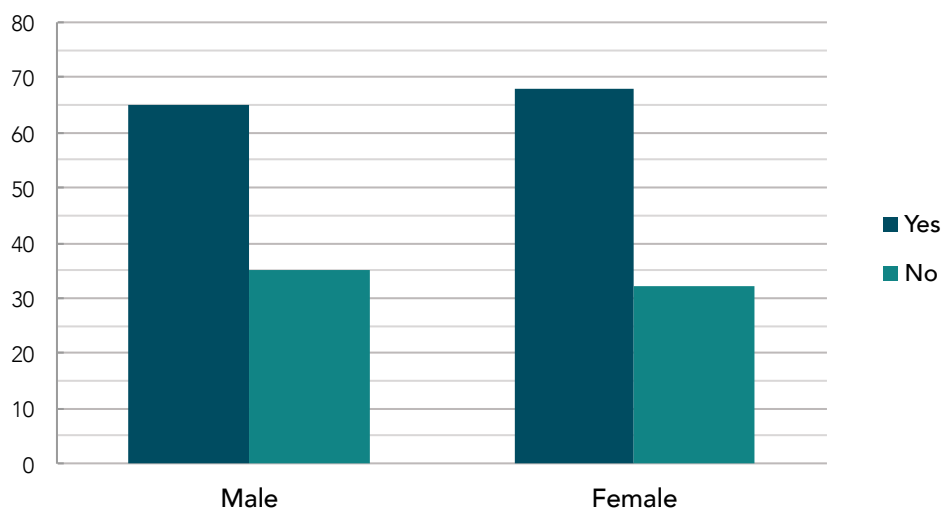
CSCs do radio outreach and periodically go to communities to educate local people about their services and activities. Each CSC 'window' includes a list of the services provided.

On arriving at a window, a person requesting a service is interviewed and given a form to provide his or her details. The service is then paid for before it is provided. Free services are those related to conflict resolution and mediation done by officials of the MGCSP. The mediated cases relate to domestic violence, child support and abandoning of family and conflict, amongst others. Through the CSCs, community members can get birth, death and marriage certificates, driving licenses, car insurance, land documents, etc.

The CSCs benefit both community members and the government. While community members have much-needed services closer to them, the government also increases its revenue base since more people can now access the services outside of Monrovia. However, it appears, based on interviews conducted, that the centres need to mount effective public education campaigns in towns, cities and villages to create awareness of their existence and the services they provide. Eighty-seven percent of women engaged in interviews and FGDs in Zorzor indicated that

they were not aware of or familiar with the existence of the CSCs. The argument for such a gap — provided by Jefferson Gbaryan, the Chairman for the Association of County Services in Liberia — is that the CSC in Lofa was opened in 2018 and has not had enough time to conduct community sensitization activities. However, the argument may not hold as the centre has been opened for over a year and the expectation of respondents is that CSCs should proactively engage and educate local community members of their existence and the services they provide. Seventy-four percent of the women engaged in interviews and FGDs in Totota, which is only a 45-minute drive from Gbarnga, also indicated that they were not aware of the existence of the CSC in Gbarnga, which is a clear indication that the CSCs need to upscale their activities. Some of the staff in the CSCs visited indicated that they do not have funds for community outreach and largely depend on educating community members of their services through local radio stations. This presents challenges as most community members may not have access to radio.

One approach suggested by some respondents to ensure effective service delivery at the local level is the use of intermittent mobile services. According to them, periodic mobile services could reduce the challenges related to community members travelling to the headquarter towns of counties to access services. This, for instance, could be done for less complex services such as the registration of births, deaths and marriages and the provision of the respective certificates.



**FIGURE 6:**  
SATISFACTION WITH SERVICES PROVIDED BY CSCS

When questioned on their satisfaction with services provided by the CSCs, 67% (as shown in **Figure 6**) of female and 65% of male respondents who have sought services from the centres indicated that they were not satisfied, as the services demanded were either not provided or the quality of the service was poor. Typical examples provided by respondents included the unavailability of electricity to print certificates or other documents requested. All of the CSCs complained of not having stable electricity as they depend on generators, with electricity rationed. In addition, respondents indicated that in most cases computers or printers in the CSC were either not available or were not working. If the computer or printers were working, the next complaint was usually that ink and stationery were not available. Some respondents indicated that they normally end up going to Monrovia to access the services they require. Women also complained that few women work in the windows which leave them unable to demand services that are gender sensitive. However, 35% of male respondents and 33% of female respondents who have sought services from the centres indicated that they were satisfied.

It was deduced from the study that staff deployed to the CSC windows feel demotivated, as they complained of poor salaries and conditions of service, a challenge that is worsened by the long delays in the payment of their salaries<sup>58</sup>. Furthermore, support staff such as messengers and security guards in most of the centres indicated that they have not been paid for almost 10 months, which also affects their ability to focus on their jobs. As indicated by respondents, this has implications for the centres and may even be a direct reason for the failure on the part of the staff to adequately sensitize communities of the work they do and how CSCs can be accessed. This undermines both the essence and the effectiveness of the centres, thereby limiting the difference they could make in the lives of local communities, especially in rural Liberia. It could also be a potential source

of corruption and fraud as the staff struggle to meet their daily needs.

#### **4.2.4.4 Gender responsiveness of the CSCs**

The CSCs are not as gender effective or responsive as they could be. As such, they need to take a broader look at how they should approach the question of gender responsiveness, especially as a result of the kinds of services that they provide. While there is equitable representation of women in CSCs, their inclusion and participation is more symbolic and not a good approach to gender responsiveness. For instance, the limited recruitment and deployment of women in the centres directly affects the willingness of women to seek services in the CSCs, as indicated by some respondents. Women feel more confident speaking with women on issues related to marriage, births and death certificates. Additionally, the huge disparity in the number of men and women in the centres points at the unequal employment opportunities provided to both sexes in the country. It should be noted that MGCSP staff are stationed in each of the CSCs, however they are limited and only address cases that are directly referred to them, rather than being proactive and providing technical support to other institutions represented in the centres. Such a gap limits the extent to which women can be provided with the essential services and advices that they require.

In relation to gender composition, out of roughly 40 staff representing the respective MACs, only 9 are females in Gbarnga; of the 52 staff in Grand Bassa, only 9 are females, and of 22 staff in Bomi, only 8 are females. This signals a huge disparity in opportunities provided to males and females in terms of their recruitment, training and deployment by MACs in the centres. A female staff member working in one of the CSCs visited stated:

**We deal with a good number of cases related to women, and the more**

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58 It is important to note that the challenge related to late salaries is not a systemic challenge as indicated by the respondents. They started facing the challenging a little over a year ago, with the growing economic crisis in the country. Nonetheless, it is affecting the activities and motivation of staff in some of the infrastructures engaged in the study.



women we have in the CSCs the more comfortable those who come for services would be. The majority of those who visit us are women and they usually go in search of women to speak to as some are less comfortable sharing their challenges with men. Government agencies should address these challenges to ensure that they become gender-responsive<sup>59</sup>.

The centres should be modelled to be gender-responsive through developing gender-friendly approaches to service delivery, such as having more women with the skills and techniques needed to provide gender-sensitive services. CSCs should also undertake regular assessments on the actual services required by women and their perception of the quality of services provided. Data from such surveys could be used to take corrective measures to better meet the needs of women.

#### 4.2.4.5 Potential for sustainability of the CSCs

The CSCs have very good potential for sustainability, which could be enhanced if the rights step are taken. This potential hinges largely on the fact that the CSCs are fully mainstreamed into the structures of the government and are funded by the government. This infrastructure is a vital component of the GoL's desire to decentralize services, with the aim of having individuals in local communities access essential services and, to that aim, hire and deploy people to provide services. What could be questioned, according to the results of the survey, is the manner in which the CSCs are administered and the likelihood that people may be starting to lose faith in them as they fail to deliver as expected. The challenges they face, such as infrequent electricity, lack of salary for staff and the consequent demotivation on the part of the staff, undermine the confidence and trust of the public in the CSCs. When people travel to Monrovia to access services, it defeats the purpose for which the CSCs were established.

## 4.2.5 The Land Dispute Resolution Unit

This section presents the origin, location, composition, responsibilities, activities, gender responsiveness and challenges contended with by the LDRU and its sub-components.

### 4.2.5.1 The origin and approach of the LDRU

Since the end of the first civil war in 1997, Liberia has been contending with challenges related to disputes in communities over access and ownership of land. These conflicts intensified after the second civil war ended in 2003 and since then several measures have been taken to peacefully resolve the land disputes through the use of ADR mechanisms. According to the Land Alternative Dispute Resolution Policy:

To address these and related challenges and ensure judicious, efficient and adequate resolution of all issues surrounding land, the government established the Liberia Land Commission (LC) in August 2009. In accordance with the commission's mandate – to propose, advocate and coordinate land policy, laws and programmes – the LC formulated a Land Rights Policy and drafted a Land Rights Act. In October 2016, the Government of Liberia established a successor organisation to the LC, the Liberia Land Authority (LLA). The latter, after consultation with a diverse group of stakeholders, updated the proposed Land Rights Act, which was submitted to the National Legislature for enactment into law. Additionally, the LC completed a final Land Administration Policy, and gathered evidence to inform the creation of an Urban Land Use Policy, and also drafted a Land ADR Policy<sup>60</sup>.

59 Interview conducted in October 2019, identity withheld as requested.

60 Liberia Land Authority. 2017. pg 8

In 2011, the Land Dispute Resolution Taskforce was established by the LC with the aim of promoting a collective approach to the use of ADR to resolve land conflicts in the country. This was followed by the establishment of the Land Coordination Centres (LCCs), established in 2011, and subsequently the Community Based Mediation Committees (CBMCs), which is a grassroots and inclusive approach that promotes community ownership of the process of resolving conflicts over access to and ownership of land. The LCCs and CBMCs work directly under the LDRU, which is within the LC in Monrovia.

#### **4.2.5.2 Location and composition of the LDRU and its sub-components**

As indicated above, the LDRU is within the LLA in Monrovia, LCCs can be found in the capital cities of the counties, while the CBMCs are in local communities. The LCCs consist of different institutions and actors working on, among others: 1. Creating and promoting linkages and coordinating activities of a network of traditional institutions, local CSOs/CBOs, international organisations and government/administrative structures that provide land dispute resolution services 2. Promoting more effective ways to assist disputants to achieve timely and efficient settlements of land disputes 3. Creating awareness, educating and counselling disputants on methods for mediation of land disputes and the range and potential sequencing of dispute resolution procedures available to them.

The CBMCs consist of community members who volunteer to be trained and to help resolve land disputes in their communities and neighbouring ones through the use of ADR. It is, however, unclear how many members are deployed in each community, as this largely depends on community members' willingness to volunteer.

#### **4.2.5.3 LDRU and its sub-components' activities and challenges**

The LDRU receives complaints and mediates cases with the aim of peacefully resolving them through its decentralized structures, the LCCs and the CBMCs, which use ADR to address disputes. The unit plays a principal role in working with local communities and the LCCs to identify community members who are interested in being trained and used as

Land ADR practitioners. Over 500 Land ADR practitioners were trained with the support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and other international partners, and are working across Liberia.

The guidelines and steps that were developed by the LC for ADR practitioners are:

- The practitioner must ensure that parties demonstrate a willingness to settle their land dispute through the assistance of a neutral third party
- The practitioner must ensure that sufficient information and clarifications are provided to the disputants about the process and that it is fully understood before it commences
- The practitioner must determine from the parties whether a case involving the disputed land is pending before a court or other regulatory agencies for adjudication. If the dispute is in court or pending before an agency for adjudication, practitioners must inform the parties that they will have to withdraw the dispute from the court or agency before they can sign a final mediated agreement
- The practitioner must investigate the land in dispute. The outcome of the ADR process will become ineffectual and unsuccessful if the land in question is part of a larger complex controversy that involves too many parties with competing claims
- The practitioner must ensure that the parties involved in the process are the actual parties to the land dispute and not proxies. Failing to determine the actual parties may render the entire agreement ineffectual
- The practitioner must first obtain written and signed consent from the parties to use the process
- The practitioner must assist the parties to negotiate and sign a final agreement
- The practitioner must ensure that the process and decisions are free from gender discrimination and bias.

The signing of a final agreement signifying that the case has been resolved and that all parties will comply with the provisions of the agreement usually symbolizes the end of the dispute.

However, there are times, as reported by some respondents, when some of the parties involved would claim that they are dissatisfied with the way the case was handled and demand that the case is re-mediated; usually they are asked to seek judicial means of resolving the case.

It is important to note that, inasmuch as customary structures (chiefs and other traditional leaders and community elders) are not listed as peace infrastructures in this study, they do play a meaningful role in resolving land disputes using ADR. Chiefs are an integral part to conflict resolution in local communities as cases are brought to them regularly by community members, with the chiefs subsequently bringing together community leaders as part of their daily responsibilities to address those cases. They also refer critical cases to the relevant security and justice actors. For peace infrastructures to succeed in achieving their objectives, they need the chiefs to provide the social capital that is essential in mobilizing community members and promoting a positive mindset and attitude towards peace. According to a 2018 study commissioned by USAID:

**Despite government efforts to provide dispute resolution services through ADR, most individual disputes are handled by local authorities and male traditional secret societies. When there is a dispute between individuals over land and property, the first point of contact is the elders within the community, and when elders are unable to settle such disputes they are referred to the town chief, and if the conflicting parties are not satisfied with the ruling from the town chief, then the cases are forwarded to the clan chief or district commissioner<sup>61</sup>.**

The quote above provides an indication of the centrality of traditional leaders to conflict resolution at the local level.

In spite of the gains made through the use of

ADR approaches, the processes are usually laced with challenges that sometimes centre on the clash between cultural and traditional approaches to land and its ownership and the changes promoted by laws and policies. According to the Land ADR Policy, common challenges related to the use of ADR include:

**[T]ensions between customary norms, practices and changing ways of life (such as more progressive and equitable treatment of women, youth and/or strangers), unequal status and bargaining power among disputants, dilemmas of reaching similar and equitable outcomes across cases, creating precedents for outcomes that can be applied when resolving future similar cases, limited capacities to use technology to inform dispute resolution outcomes, difficulty enforcing outcomes if disputants are pressured to participate or agreements are not voluntarily reached or accepted, and lack of criteria and procedures for when cases should be referred to a government statutory court for a judicial decision<sup>62</sup>.**

While the challenges listed above have to do with the process, ADR personnel are faced with significant logistical challenges, including lack of transportation or communication support when dealing with cases. As such, they are usually unable to travel to communities to deal with cases that require their urgent attention.

#### **4.2.5.4 Gender responsiveness of the LDRU and its sub-components**

Like most countries in West Africa, Liberia has strong patriarchal customs and traditions that have succeeded in disadvantaging women and girls for decades. According to USAID:

**Within customary communities, land passes through clan-based male**

61 USAID. 2018.

62 Liberia Land Authority. 2017. Pg.10.

lineages, and men largely control the decision-making, allocation, management, use and inheritance of land. Daughters generally do not inherit rights to customary lands on par with men, and wives' inheritance of land occupancy and use rights is often contingent on their willingness to remain a part of their deceased husband's family by marrying a brother or other relative<sup>63</sup>.

The Land ADR Policy, which was developed in 2013 to address land related challenges, promotes access, ownership and inheritance of land by women. The ADR mechanisms are designed to ensure that the process and decisions arrived at are free from gender discrimination and bias. Inasmuch as it was difficult during the study to ascertain how responsive the approaches used are, due to limited time in the field, it was reported by respondents that they provide a platform for women to report land disputes, with those cases addressed by the CBMCs and the LCCs.

Women interviewed indicated that there are visible changes in their communities as women are gaining more access to and ownership of land. They appeared to be much more aware of the steps to take when they are denied access to or the possibility of inheriting or owning land in their communities. These changes could be largely attributed to the activities of the LCCs and the CBMCs. However, it is evident that challenges continue to persist, especially in remote and isolated communities, and as such there has to be significant investments in the LCCs and the CBMCs, with the aim of keeping them functional and at the same time training and providing them with the knowledge and skills they required to be gender responsive.

#### **4.2.5.5 Potential for sustainability of the LDRU and its sub-components**

The structures established by the LC have good potential to be sustainable as they were developed through the use of an integrated

and inclusive approach, with key stakeholders involved in and seen working on ensuring that the structures continue to exist and thrive. Land disputes are common in Liberia and can easily deteriorate into violence, and as such there is keen interest among international and local actors in supporting the use of ADR mechanisms in communities.

Despite this, the government and its partners need to ensure that they invest in the LCCs and the CBMCs, which are the front-liners dealing with land disputes in communities. Failure to provide them with logistical support may hinder the progress that the LLA could make in those communities. Thus, the challenges facing these bodies should be carefully assessed and the right steps taken to fully address them so that they can continue providing essential services.

### **4.2.6 Early Warning and Response Focal Points**

This section presents the origin, location, composition, responsibilities, activities, gender responsiveness and challenges faced by the Early Warning and Response Focal Points/Volunteers.

#### **4.2.6.1 The origin and approach of the Early Warning and Response Focal Points**

To promote peacebuilding in local communities in Liberia, the MIA-PBO in 2011 established a Conflict Early Warning and Early Response (EWER) mechanism. It was based on the need for the government to proactively identify and address potential conflict triggers. This was to be done through having trained volunteers collect and transmit relevant information and data that would be collated and analysed, with the necessary steps taken by government authorities and other stakeholders to address the emerging or existing challenge. Thus, EWER volunteers were identified and two were trained and deployed in each district.

#### **4.2.6.2 Location and composition of the Early Warning and Response Focal Points**

The EWER mechanism was initially established at the county level in 2011 and subsequently

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63 USAID. 2018. Pg.1.

in every district. However, it was short lived as a result of lack of funds, and subsequently three counties (Bong, Maryland and Grand Gedeh) were chosen for the establishment of Early Warning Centres, with two volunteers trained and deployed in every district in those counties. According to the MIA-PBO<sup>64</sup>, 272 volunteers who are referred to as focal points were deployed in 136 districts in the country. There is no clear picture on the gender statistics of those who were deployed.

#### **4.2.6.3 Early Warning and Response Focal Points' activities and challenges**

The activities of the EWER Focal Points are focused on monitoring and reporting incidents of concern that may threaten peace and security in communities. The focal points work with the CPCs, CSC and the National Centre for the Coordination of Early Response Mechanism, sending information and data for them to act on. Potential conflict triggers identified are registered in the web-based platform LERN, with the actors responsible provided with the information they should act on. The National Centre for the Coordination of Early Response Mechanism is supported as part of the ECOWAS regional EWER initiatives and is situated in the ECOWAS office in Monrovia.

It was, however, observed that the focal points are little known and mostly inactive in local communities. Few were identified as part of either the CPCs or CSCs although they play dual or multiple roles in their communities. The principal reason provided for the focal points' lack of effectiveness was that they are not provided stipends or logistical support to carry out their daily activities. As such, they either do not send the required data, as they cannot travel to communities to ascertain the veracity of the information they receive, or they simply feel demotivated and focus on other activities that provide payment. The failure to address these logistical and financial challenges has resulted in the government lacking access to sensitive data that could help prevent the eruption of conflict and violence in some communities.

#### **4.2.6.4 Gender responsiveness of the Early Warning and Response Focal Points**

It was difficult to assess the gender responsiveness of the early warning and response structures as they are to a large extent not functional in the communities visited. However, it was observed that members of other peace infrastructures, such as the CPCs and the DPCs, also hold the title of Early Warning and Response Focal Points in their communities.

#### **4.2.6.5 Potential for sustainability of the Early Warning and Response Focal Points**

There is potential for the sustainability of the Early Warning and Response Focal Points as they are not expensive to keep and demand very little support to effectively perform their roles and responsibilities. For instance, there are only two focal points in each district and what they mostly require to undertake their activities is logistical support for transportation and communication, according to the survey. In addition, providing stipends would go a long way toward motivating them. The failure to provide both the stipend and the logistical support would gravely undermine the potential for sustainability.

### **4.2.7. SGBV Observatories**

This section presents the origin, location, composition, responsibilities, activities, gender responsiveness and challenges faced by SGBV Observatories.

#### **4.2.7.1 Origin and approach of the SGBV Observatories**

The civil war in Liberia was characterized by a high rate of SGBV, with women and girls used as weapons of war and subjected to rape and torture. Several respondents indicated that the approach to women and girls during the conflict was shaped by pre-war gender relations and interactions. Consequently, SGBV became a critical challenge in post-war Liberia.

In seeking to address the challenge, the government developed its first National Action

<sup>64</sup> See the Support to Early Warning and Early Response, County Peace Committees and District Level Political Reconciliation Dialogues and Civic Engagement Project Proposal, 2018.

Plan on GBV (2006-2010), which has been succeeded by two other plans. The Second National Action Plan on GBV (2011-2015) took the approach that prevention is the most plausible approach to overcoming challenges, especially in local communities. The GoL and the UN had earlier established the Joint Programme on the Prevention and Response to Sexual and Gender-Based Violence. Through this programme, several initiatives were implemented with the aim of achieving the objectives of the action plan. One of the initiatives was the GBV Observatory Network to support the process of rolling out the National SGBV Action Plan.

#### **4.2.7.2 Location and composition of the SGBV Observatories**

The MGCSP initially established six GBV Observatory Networks in Lofa, River Gee, Nimba, Grand Bassa, Gbarpolu and Bomi counties, but later expanded to Grand Cape Mount, Margibi, Bong and most recently, Grand Gedeh County. Each observatory network has between 10 and 12 members, who are part of different community initiatives, such as women and youth groups, CBOs, teachers and religious and traditional leaders.

#### **4.2.7.3 SGBV Observatories' activities and challenges**

The principal responsibility of the observatory is to monitor potential violence against women and refer cases that cannot be handled by the community leaders to the relevant service providers. Observatory members serve as grassroots sources of information for the prevention of GBV/rape. Once identified by members of the respective groups, the agreed representatives are trained by the MGCSP on GBV issues and the referral pathway<sup>65</sup>. They regularly introduce and re-enforce information on rape prevention, referrals and victims' confidentiality. They hold community discussions and provide awareness on GBV,

particularly rape, and report cases to the police. Communities where the observatories' network members operate have reported an increase in interaction of the community with service providers, and improved arrest of perpetrators<sup>66</sup>.

As indicated by Victoria Johnson, a trader in Buchanan who is familiar with the SGBV Observatory there:

**The observatory was established to help women fight for their rights. They had community meetings on many occasions with us a few years ago and told us what to do and where to go when our rights are violated. That knowledge has been helping us as we were less confident to approach the police to report SGBV cases. We also go to the women in the community and the people who taught us what to do accompany us to the police and the hospital. They are always with us and we do not feel ashamed anymore<sup>67</sup>.**

Members of the observatories are volunteers who report to the Gender Coordinators in the respective counties. The Gender Coordinator shares reports from the observatories to the SGBV Task Force in the counties, which follows up the reported cases and ensures that necessary actions are taken by the respective institutions. The SGBV Task Force is composed of all relevant actors who work on SGBV-related issues at county and district levels.

When UNMIN started winding down in Liberia, financial support to the prevention of SGBV decreased and the observatories ceased to function as it should. Thus, at the time when this study was conducted there was little that could be learnt of the activities of the observatories as they appeared to be dormant as a result of financial and logistical challenges.

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<sup>65</sup> The referral pathway has to do with the steps and the actors to contact when a victim of SGBV is seeking assistance.

<sup>66</sup> GoL and UNMIL. 2013. Pg. 20.

<sup>67</sup> Interview conducted on 27 October 2019.

#### **4.2.7.4 Gender responsiveness of the SGBV Observatories**

The observatories were designed to directly respond to the challenges related to SGBV and rape that women and girls in several communities in Liberia suffered from. The inability to access the referral pathway as a result of lack of knowledge or the unavailability of a support system rendered women and girls vulnerable and the subject of multiple abuse and violations. The observatories were instrumental in closing those existing gaps and provided services that created awareness and encouraged women to report abuses and violations and also seek justice for themselves, their families and community members.

Interviews and FGDs revealed that the SGBV Observatories have a good gender composition, with both community men and women belonging to them. A good number of women in the Peace Huts and other peace infrastructures in the communities visited indicated that they are either part of SGBV Observatories or are familiar with their activities. The observatories work with gender-related structures in the districts and counties, with those structures relying on the information provided to them to take appropriate actions. However, the lack of support to the observatories limits their effectiveness and productivity.

#### **4.2.7.5 Potential for sustainability of the SGBV Observatories**

The observatories have shown that they are unable to remain functional without the support of government. Although they are developed as community structures, with people volunteering for them, they require financial and logistical support to implement their activities. Some members argue that if they are providing their time, effort and energy, the government should at least provide the logistical support they need. It is important that the observatories begin to function as soon as possible as failure to keep them functional has negative effects for women and girls who are mostly affected by SGBV and rape.

### **4.2.8 County Security Councils and the Joint Security Committees**

This section presents the origin, location, composition, responsibilities, activities, gender

responsiveness and challenges faced by the County Security Councils (CSCOs) and the Joint Security Committees (JSCs).

#### **4.2.8.1 Origin and approach of the CSCOs and JSCs**

The County Security Council was established by the National Security Reform and Intelligence Act of 2011 with the aim to respond to existing and emerging conflicts at the county level. It deals directly with the DSCs, which are its sub-structures at the district level. Similarly, the Joint Security Committee, which was established by the same 2011 Act, is a security structure that functions at the county level and works closely with the CSCs. The CSCs, DSCs and the JSCs are decentralized security structures established to promote security and the rule of law at county and district levels.

The councils take strategic decisions related to security and liaise with their central offices in Monrovia. They apply a people-centred approach to security through working with civilian actors and agencies to strengthen peace and security.

#### **4.2.8.2 Location and composition of the CSCOs and the JSCs**

Both the CSCO and the JSC function at the county level and can be found in the capital city of all counties in Liberia. The DSCs are in every district in the country. The CSCOs consist of the Liberia National Police, the National Bureau of Immigration and Nationalisation, the Drug Enforcement Agency and Paramount Chiefs. Some members of the DSCs are usually incorporated into the CSCOs or can be called upon to provide briefings during meetings. The CSCO is chaired by the Superintendent in the county, who is the most senior political figure. The JSCs consist exclusively of security and justice institutions and provide technical advice on security issues in the county. They work with the CSCOs and are also chaired by the Superintendent.

#### **4.2.8.3 Activities and challenges of CSCOs and JSCs**

As indicated above, the CSCO, DSC and JSC are part of the decentralized national security structures. They are integral to the national security architecture as they perform key

functions, including maintaining law and order in counties and districts and identifying and responding to potential conflict triggers. As indicated by the MIA-PBO, the CSCO “meets regularly and is concerned with both responding to human security issues that emerge, such as conflicts between Liberians and immigrants, ethnic disputes, major land conflicts and political clashes”<sup>68</sup>.

It was concluded from interviews that the CSCs, DSCs and JSCs are very active and work with the other peace infrastructures to maintain peace and security at county and district levels. They work cooperatively so that CSOs and community actors provide sensitive information to them and they use that information to deal with potential security threats.

Inasmuch as the structures are proactive and working towards strengthening peace and security, members complained of receiving limited technical and financial support from the government, which directly affects their sensitive work. They reported that sometimes they were unable to follow up on intelligence provided to them because of the lack of financial and logistical support. Also, delays in receiving salaries and the poor conditions of service demotivate and demoralise them. There is an urgent need for the government to address the concerns and challenges that these structures deal with to enable them to deliver on their mandates.

#### **4.2.8.4 Gender responsiveness of the CSCOs and the JSCs**

The CSCOs and the JSCs are largely male dominated, as they consist of government officials and chiefs, in the case of the CSCOs. This illustrates the gender disparity in relation to employment in the sector. Nonetheless, the institutions represented in the committees, for instance the police, are the ones directly responsible for dealing with cases referred by other infrastructures. Essentially, while the structures claimed during interviews to be gender-responsive, women interviewed in

communities visited indicated that security and justice institutions are less responsive to their complaints and that they tend to be biased toward males. This is one reason behind women’s confidence and trust in the Peace Huts, where they believe other women would help them access justice or at least assist them to resolve disputes in their homes and communities.

Such claims indicate the need for the government and its development partners to support CSCOs and JSCs and to better understand the essence of gender responsiveness. This would strengthen the abilities of these infrastructures to adequately identify and deal with security and justice-related challenges that affect women and girls on a daily basis in their local communities.

#### **4.2.8.5 Potential for the sustainability of the CSCOs and the JSCs**

Of all the peace infrastructures, the CSCs and the JSCs have the highest potential for sustainability as they consist of members of key government institutions and are among the most vital institutions at the county and district levels. Members are on government salary and are mostly senior officials of their respective institutions. As such, even with the logistical challenges that they face, they will continue existing and functioning. However, they could perform better if they received the financial and technical support they need to carry out their daily responsibilities.

## **4.3 THE TYPES AND QUALITY OF COORDINATION MECHANISMS FOR PEACE INFRASTRUCTURES IN LIBERIA<sup>69</sup>**

The MIA-PBO and the Governance Commission are the key institutions responsible for the coordination of peace infrastructures in Liberia. Principally, the structure at the county level is that the Superintendent, who is under the MIA, is the head of administration, followed

68 GoL and UNMIL. 2013. Pg. 20.

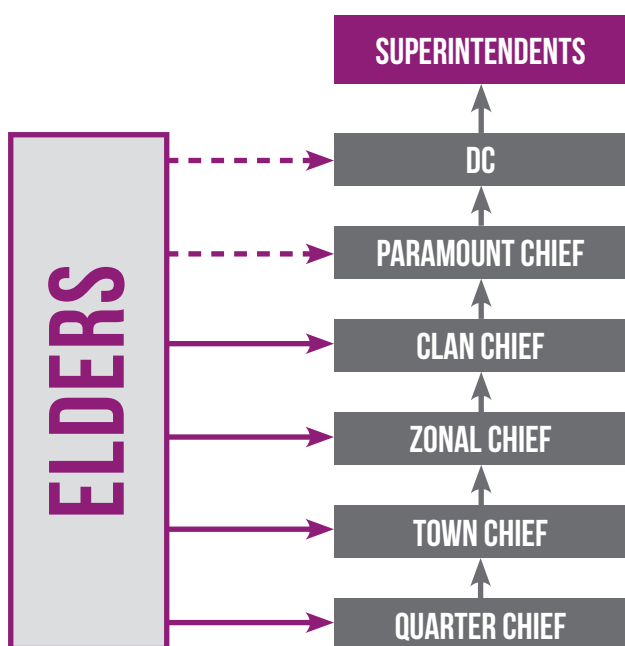
69 The source of the structure in this section is: USAID LPIS 11 Clan Study, at 88.



by Assistant Superintendents and then District Commissioners, who are the administrative heads in the districts. After District Commissioners come the Paramount Chiefs, Clan Chiefs, Town Chiefs and Quarter Chiefs.

All peace infrastructures that are government-owned work directly with the commissioners at the district level and the Superintendent at the county level, with the commissioners reporting to the Superintendent. So, the CSCs, JSCs and CSCOs work directly with the Superintendent, with the latter chairing both the CSCO and the JSC. As such, these bodies are all parts of meetings organized by the Superintendent or the commissioners, if at the district level. In addition to the point above, both the County Peace Committees (CPCs) and District Peace Councils (DPCs) meet with government officials and participate in, for instance, meetings of the JSCs.

**FIGURE 7: ADMINISTRATION OF PEACE INFRASTRUCTURES AT COUNTY LEVEL**



The SGBV Observatories provide reports on SGBV cases that are taken to the SGBV Task Force, which assesses the reports provided and takes the required actions. Subsequently, reports are sent to the MGCSP in Monrovia, where they are collated and assessed. This is where the County Gender Coordinators play a leading role in supporting the coordination of

all gender-related activities, and work with the different partners to ensure that there is synergy and harmonization of efforts. The MGCSP also operates windows in the CSCs where minor cases are addressed through ADR in a bid to minimize the number of cases going to the police and to promote peace within families and communities.

The women Peace Hut is less integrated into the coordination structures at the national, county and district levels. It operates largely in collaboration with the police and other stakeholders but seldom participates in meetings organized by the government. Thus, inasmuch as members of the Peace Huts also serve as members of SGBV Observatories and peace committees, those links are hardly drawn, and the connections are not studied by the government and other actors. As a result, there is a failure to build on those positive lines through establishing synergy and harmonising the efforts of the different structures. This leads to duplication of efforts, especially between the CPCs and DPCs and the Peace Huts.

Collaborations between the Peace Huts, peace committees, peace councils, SGBV Observatories and the Early Warning Focal Points would expand the reach of the respective actors and their ability to produce more robust and coordinated outputs than is now the case. What is apparent though is that the lack of harmonization, synergy and complementarity of efforts adversely limits the collective gains the infrastructures could make if such platforms were available.

The MIA-PBO and its development partners should fully integrate the Peace Huts into the structures contained in the national initiatives supported by the government and as such include it in its monitoring framework. In addition, the monitoring and coordination mechanisms should be fully developed, with dedicated staff stationed in the MIA to support such processes. This will require financial investments by the government to recruit, maintain and support the human and technical resources needed to foster collaboration, coordination and monitoring of activities. The process should include key stakeholders, such as the INCHR.

## 4.4 ENABLING FACTORS AND CHALLENGES FACED BY PEACE INFRASTRUCTURES IN LIBERIA

This section presents the factors that enhance the activities of the peace infrastructures and also further analyses the challenges presented above for each infrastructure, to create a clearer picture of the effects of those challenges and what could be done to address them.

Several factors support the establishment and functioning of peace infrastructures in Liberia. These range from the desire and willingness on the part of community members to support peace initiatives, fear of a recurrence of violence, the strong presence of social capital in local communities and the existence of traditional methods of reconciliation and healing that are adapted to the current context.

Principal among these factors is the fear of the recurrence of violence and the willingness on the part of community members to identify and deal with potential conflict triggers. This is reflected in the words of Mai Gueh, the Head of the Peace Hut in Buchanan, Grand Bassa:

**We know what we went through as a people. Images of the gruesome death and horror we experienced are still fresh in our minds. We can never sit back and allow Liberia to degenerate to that level again. The role we have to play as ordinary Liberians is to stand up for peace and challenge any individual or community that is threatening that peace. So, the little work we do every day across the country is meant to ensure that we do not go back to where we struggled to come out of<sup>70</sup>.**

The fear is not limited to the women interviewed but other key actors in local communities, who provide the social capital required to promote peace at the grassroots level. They include elderly

women, traditional and religious leaders and other respected members of local communities. They have the convening power to mobilize their community members and ensure that they participate in activities organized by the infrastructures. They also directly belong to or participate in the activities of the infrastructures, which provides the clout and respect that these structures need to function effectively in their communities.

The presence, availability and willingness of social actors to support peacebuilding in Liberia is supported by the existence of traditional approaches to reconciliation and healing. These include the Palava Huts which, for instance, inspired the establishment of the Peace Huts by local women. These approaches are organic as they are home grown and have the buy-in, ownership and leadership of community members, which is of intrinsic significance to the success of their activities.

The point above is supported by the fact that the bulk of the approaches used are grassroots and community-based, including the early warning and response approach, the SGBV Observatories, the CPCs and the DPCs. These grassroots approaches promote inclusivity and participation by community members. As such, even though members are unpaid and contend with significant challenges, they continue contributing. David Jackson, Co-Chair of the CPC in Grand Bassa, stated:

**The reason that keeps us going is the fact that the issues we deal with directly affect our family and community members. If we do not try to keep the peace, people will take justice into their hands and resort to violence. If we do not keep the peace, no one else will and we cannot afford to sit back and see our communities continue to be unsafe when our children and women live in them. So, what we do is about us and no one else and we take**

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70 Interview conducted in Grand Bassa on 26 October 2019.

it seriously and when people question why we do it without being paid, this is the answer<sup>71</sup>.

Although the initiatives undertaken are meaningful and provide tangible results, backed with the commitment on the part of local actors to support them, respondents indicated

that there are key challenges undermining the efficacy of the peace infrastructures. These challenges are presented in the table below, divided into challenges presented by government officials working in infrastructures established by the government and other structures and those presented by ordinary civilians who are members of peace infrastructures.

**TABLE 4: KEY CHALLENGES UNDERMINING THE EFFICACY OF PEACE INFRASTRUCTURES**

GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS	CIVILIAN MEMBERS OF PEACE INFRASTRUCTURES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unavailability of electricity in CSCs</li> <li>• Limited financial, logistical and technical support from the government</li> <li>• Poor salaries and conditions of service, coupled with delays in payment, which demotivates staff,</li> <li>• Inability to provide stipends and logistical support to peace infrastructures affects their relationship with government officials in the counties and districts</li> <li>• Increasing demand for ADR services, with limited ability on the part of the government to meet those demands.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of political will on the part of the government, especially in relation to the failure to continue the Palava Hut project and provide the infrastructures with the support they require to effectively function</li> <li>• Difficulties in undertaking and expanding services to areas that require similar services, especially as a result of financial and logistical challenges</li> <li>• Poor coordination of activities of peace infrastructures by the government, with the Peace Huts not integrated into the government's coordination efforts.</li> </ul>

As can be seen in Table 4, respondents perceive that there is limited political will and investment in the peacebuilding effort by the government, which is undermining the efficacy of the peace infrastructures. This perception is based on the fact that subsequent governments have failed to address both the root causes and the historical legacies of the civil wars. More than 16 years after the end of the conflict, Liberia still contends with pre-war and war-related challenges, such as poverty, unemployment, perception of corruption and the persistent marginalization of youth and women, which reflects negatively on the gains initially made when peacebuilding was supported by UNMIL.

The lack of funds to provide material support and incentives for the infrastructures affects

their ability to perform their daily activities. Institutions such as the CSC cannot undertake effective outreach activities as a result of lack of funds and do not have regular electricity, stationery supplies, laptops and internet, which they require to carry out their responsibilities. The county and district peace committees and councils lack the resources they need to reach out to communities and follow up cases that are brought to them, which in some instances gravely affects people's confidence and trust in them. Due to such challenges, it is particularly difficult for these structures to reach remote and isolated communities, which feel left behind by the system and where there may be abuses and violations of rights going unnoticed. In addition, even structures that are mainstreamed into government feel demoralised and ill-motivated

71 Interview conducted in Grand Bassa on 26 October 2019.

as staff go for months without being paid. Such structures include the CSCs.

The GoL and its development partners need to critically think as to how they want to approach and address the challenges facing the peace infrastructures. The continuous delay in doing so will succeed in gradually limiting their essence and contributions to peace in the country. Additionally, the delays in recommencing the Palava Hut initiative to address war-related issues continue to deny victims the justice that they deserve. This delay and the perception of unwillingness on the part of political elites to provide victims with justice have intensified the call by civil society for a war and financial crimes court in Liberia. However, even if such a court is eventually established, there will still be the need for the Palava Hut as it would reach the vast majority of victims, which the proposed court would be unable to reach. Therefore, it is vital that the GoL and its partners focus on establishing the Palava Huts and providing them with the required support to ensure that they meet their objectives.

# 5. SWOT ANALYSIS OF PEACE INFRASTRUCTURES IN LIBERIA

During the study, the team engaged all interviewees on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) of the peace infrastructures. It is important to note that the MSC tool was also used to collect data on the strengths and weaknesses of the infrastructures. The data collected were similar to those from the SWOT analysis and as such they were both analysed and incorporated into Table 5. This helped to strengthen the information provided. Where the factor listed is related exclusively to a specific infrastructure, that infrastructure is listed to ensure clarity.

**TABLE 5: SWOT ANALYSIS OF PEACE INFRASTRUCTURES IN LIBERIA**

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The use of grassroots/ community-based approaches to peacebuilding, with most of the peace infrastructures consisting of local actors, which promotes local buy-in, ownership and leadership of the structures. As such, there is strong social capital</li> <li>• Peace infrastructures are cost-effective</li> <li>• Peace infrastructures are accessible and trusted by community members</li> <li>• The use of ADR is contributing significantly to peace and security in local communities</li> <li>• More women participating in peacebuilding activities</li> <li>• Increased awareness of issues related to SGBV and human rights</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited financial and human resource capacity of peace infrastructures, which affects their ability to be much more effective</li> <li>• Weak coordination mechanisms, which results in duplication rather than complementarity of efforts</li> <li>• Some of the existing peace infrastructures targeted are not gender-sensitive, inclusive and responsive</li> <li>• Failure to mainstream the NGP into the activities of the infrastructures</li> <li>• Delay of payment of salaries of employees and support staff of MACs at CSCs is demotivating staff and affecting their outputs</li> <li>• Due to financial challenges and lack of incentives, the CSCs are not undertaking effective awareness-raising and sensitisation activities, a gap which is denying community members the knowledge and information they require to access the much-needed services</li> <li>• Perception of lack of political will and interest in the peace infrastructures</li> <li>• Lack of systematic monitoring, which leads to decision-making processes not adequately based on data and evidence</li> </ul>
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing demand for justice by victims as can be seen in the demand for an Economic and War Crimes Court</li> <li>• Willingness and commitment of development partners to support peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts</li> <li>• Increase in international pressure on the GoL to implement the TRC recommendations</li> <li>• Commitment at the national level, through the legislature, to implement the TRC recommendations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deterioration in the political and security situation in the country</li> <li>• Failure by the GoL to prioritise financial and technical support to peace infrastructures</li> <li>• Change in donor priorities, which may directly affect the peace infrastructures</li> <li>• The predominant representation of elderly women as opposed to younger women in the membership of the Peace Huts has the potential to create a human resource gap upon the retirement of the elderly members</li> </ul>

The SWOT analysis provides a good indication of the opportunities offered by peace infrastructures, such as willingness on the part of community members to own and lead the peacebuilding process and complement the activities of the state, especially where there are gaps. Some of the structures are organic as they are home-grown, cost-effective and accessible to Liberians.

The analysis also clearly presents the challenges facing the peace infrastructures, which appear to be systemic and do affect all of them. Factors such as limited financial and technical support undermine the ability of the infrastructures to effectively provide the essential services and support required at local levels. This has negative consequences, especially as the demand for security and justice is increasing, while the supply side is not as effective as it should be. The financial, technical and human resource gap will allow a significant number of abuses and violation of rights to go unnoticed and unaddressed in local communities. A critical factor indicated in the analysis is the perceived lack of political will on the part of the government to support the activities of the infrastructures. Unless this changes, the infrastructures will not be as effective as they should be, which would have a direct effect on peacebuilding in the country.

The changes in context, especially the growing demand for justice coupled with requests by civil society actors and the general public for an Economic and War Crimes Court to address abuses related to the civil war, presents a unique opportunity for Liberia to revisit its approach to transitional justice and peace infrastructures and determine how these could be strengthened to contribute to addressing past and present human rights abuses and violations. However, this will require significant political will and investment by the GoL and its development partners.

# 6. CONCLUSION

The two civil wars in Liberia left a significant part of the country destroyed, with communities deeply traumatised and inundated with challenges typical of post-conflict settings, such as poverty, mistrust, the persistence of impunity and the fear of a relapse into violence. The 2003 CPA adopted a restorative approach to justice. This led to the establishment of the TRC and the subsequent focus on peace infrastructures, such as the Palava Huts, as mechanisms to promote reconciliation and healing at the local level.

With the support of development partners, the peacebuilding process has enabled the establishment of several other infrastructures, such as the CSCs, CPCs, DSCs, EWER Focal Points, and SGBV Observatories. These infrastructures have been supporting the GoL to provide services that are essential to the maintenance of peace and stability in local communities. In addition, rural women established the Peace Huts to promote the involvement and participation of women in the peacebuilding process.

The process of mapping the infrastructures revealed that while the TRC-based Palava Huts were piloted only in Lofa and Grand Gedeh, Peace Huts exist in every county targeted in the study, including huts in several communities in the districts targeted, as could be seen in Annex 1. Infrastructures such as the CSCs, the CPCs, the CSCOs and the JSCs exist only at the county level, although they are responsible for the provision of specific services, as described in the sections above, in the districts and at other levels. The EWER Focal Points and SGBV Observatories operate largely in the districts and local community levels from where they are supposed to provide essential data to officials at the county level.

The study was able to ascertain the capacity of the peace infrastructures, the factors that enhance their work and the challenges they face. It found that the infrastructures are vital and contribute

significantly to peace and stability in their communities. They are the first points of contact for most community members, who are familiar with one or more of them. The infrastructures, in turn, fill the gaps in the security and justice system by using ADR mechanisms to address complaints and concerns that could escalate into violence if not addressed. In addition, the methods used by the infrastructures help to reduce the number of cases reported to the police and judiciary, which is helping to lessen the workload of those structures.

The MIA-PBO and the Governance Commission play leading roles in coordinating the activities of the peace infrastructures as they are embedded in the structures at county and district levels. For instance, structures such as the CSCs, CSCOs and peace committees participate in weekly and monthly meetings, where they provide reports on their activities. The SGBV Task Force also meets, with reports assessed and actions taken by the necessary actors. However, it was concluded that there is significant room for improvement as the coordination efforts are weak and do not promote complementarity of efforts. For example, the Peace Hut, a key infrastructure, operates largely in isolation, despite having wide national coverage and an approach that yields significant results.

To promote the effective coordination of activities, the infrastructures should be provided with the resources they require to undertake their activities, with coordination mechanisms tied to a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework that is rolled out and reported on, with corrective measures taken as and when necessary. This should be coupled with training on M&E for the respective actors in the infrastructures and government, who appear to have limited knowledge of M&E.

The survey found that most of the infrastructures have a fair representation of women. Additionally, the Palava Huts that were piloted were very much gender-responsive, as both

their composition and the issues they addressed focused largely on dealing with victims of SGBV. Women played active leadership roles, which succeeded in encouraging female victims to share their stories and reconcile with those who had hurt them. Such a model is exemplary and should be replicated when the substantive programme is initiated.

Traditional Palava Huts are male-dominated and deny women the voice and representation they require and so the pilot huts were tailored to meet the demands and aspirations of women in search of justice and reconciliation. While it is understandable that the Peace Huts is led by women, buy-in and participation of men will enhance its credibility and its willingness to adopt a gender-sensitive and responsive approach to what it does. Yet, the Peace Huts have already become formidable and strategic in their support to women and girls in their communities. They are contributing to the reduction in SGBV and rape cases as reported by interviewees, and men are becoming more aware of the need to respect the rights of women in their communities. Also, Peace Hut members work with other peace infrastructures to strengthen peace and security in the communities in which they operate.

Infrastructures such as the CSCs, the CSCO and the JSC include few women. These women, along with the men in the centres, appear to lack the skills and techniques essential in meeting the needs and demands of women who request their organisation's services. The availability of a gender unit within the CSC does not fill the gap, as the unit merely focuses on its own activities, while the other agencies are handicapped and do not get the training and support they require to provide essential services in a gender-friendly and responsive manner.

It was observed that the NGP is not mainstreamed in the activities of the peace infrastructures, which is one of the reasons for the gender-related challenges that they face. The policy needs to be mainstreamed into their activities. Also, all of the actors involved in the respective infrastructures require very specific training and mentoring in gender mainstreaming, sensitivity and responsiveness. Such training would provide them with the knowledge, skills and tools that they need to adopt gender-responsive

approaches to their work. Most of the staff lack those skills at the moment and as such, what is done is merely to integrate women in the infrastructures and believe that that solves the problem. The officials deployed by the MGCSP should also undergo training to better enable them to support the training, mentoring and monitoring of the infrastructures' activities to promote the delivery of gender-responsive services.

Although the infrastructures are built on solid community-based foundations, the financial and human resource challenges they face continue to undermine their potential sustainability and their ability to progressively contribute to peace and reconciliation. For instance, the failure to complete the pilot Palava Hut project has significant implications for the reconciliation and healing process of victims of the war since the project plays a significant role in ensuring that victims get the restitution they deserve and have closure to the hurt and injustice that they have been subjected to since the war ended. The call by Liberians for a war and economic crimes tribunal is based on the fear of the continuation of impunity and injustice in the hands of political elites. However, even if the court is established, it is still important that the Palava Hut and the Peace Huts are better resourced to deal with cases at the local level because courts like the one proposed usually have limited mandates and resources and focus on a small number of perpetrators. The bulk of the work on reconciliation will still be in the hands of traditional and local actors.

It has to be noted that Liberia has still not succeeded in overcoming the historical legacies of the conflict and there remains the need for efforts to be made to address the question of peace and reconciliation. If this is not done, the country will remain trapped in negative peace, which has the potential of ultimately leading to a relapse into violence.



# 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

This section provides recommendations that are based on the findings and conclusions of this study. The recommendations are targeted at the GoL, the peace infrastructures and international development partners. They are drafted to be very clear, direct and actionable. If they are implemented, they will contribute significantly to building on peace, security and stability in Liberia. At the same time, they will meet the needs and aspirations (through the use of a gender-responsive approach) of women and girls in the country.

## 7.1 GOVERNMENT OF LIBERIA:

- **MIA-PBO:** The MIA-PBO needs to go back to the drawing board to assess the challenges facing the peace infrastructures and engage the government on addressing those challenges. Principal challenges include the lack of financial, technical and material resources required for the peace infrastructures to efficiently and effectively function. The lack of such resources will undermine the objectives of the government in relation to peace, security and stability.
- **MIA-INCHR:** There is an urgent need for the government to recommence the implementation of the Palava Hut project as set out in the TRC recommendations. The failure to complete the pilot phase and to expand the initiative to other parts of the country has denied victims of the war the justice, restitution, closure and healing they deserve. Liberia has to deal with the legacies of its past, and restore the respect and dignity of victims. The downplaying of the Palava Hut so far is creating an impression of insensitivity and impunity on the part of political elites, thereby resulting in Liberians asking for retributive measures rather than supporting the restorative approach that was previously adopted.

- **INCHR:** It is important that the INCHR continues to oversee the implementation of the Palava Huts process. Identifying the membership and implementing activities within the huts should be done by a team of CSOs and community members chosen by team members. The INCHR should train members of the huts on the approach used and monitor their daily activities to ensure that they are on track and providing the required services.
- **INCHR:** If the GoL and its development partners succeed in resuming implementation of the Palava Huts, the approach used during the pilot phase should be maintained and improved upon. It is a very effective and gender-responsive model that has the potential of contributing to addressing the historical legacies of the conflict in Liberia. However, the government should ensure that the huts has the resources required to fully undertake activities that it commits itself to. Halting the process in the future because of lack of funds may further undermine the confidence and trust of victims in the GoL.
- **MGCSP:** An effective means of mainstreaming gender into the activities of the peace infrastructures is to mainstream the national gender policy into their operational frameworks. The MGCSP should work with other line ministries and agencies to provide the infrastructures with clear and well defined terms of references and standard operating procedures that promote gender mainstreaming and responsiveness. Members of the infrastructures should be provided with specifically designed and targeted training based on their actual needs. This should be coupled with the ministry engaging all relevant stakeholders to ensure that there are more women employed in, for instance, CSCs, and that the services they provide respond to the needs of women and girls.

- **Ministry of Finance and MIA-PBO:** The government should seek to provide incentives and basic support for infrastructures such as the CPCs, the DPCs, SGBV Observatories and the Palava Huts when they are eventually established. The failure to provide even minimal support places enormous pressure on them and affects their outputs. Inasmuch as the structures are largely grassroots, the government needs to provide them with support as they complement the activities of the state and fill the gaps where the state has limited presence. This support should be extended to the Peace Huts, which is an essential component of peace infrastructures in Liberia.
- **MIA-PBO:** The MIA-PBO should design and implement an M&E framework that will guide the activities of the infrastructures, with the data collected from them collated, analysed, managed and used to achieve the objectives of the government and its development partners. The availability of such a framework will go a long way to also getting key stakeholders to follow up on the progress and the challenges facing the peace infrastructures.
- **MoF-MIA-PBO:** A major challenge identified, especially with CSCs, is that late or inconsistent payments by government are demotivating staff. Coupled with this, the non-payment of support staff also undermines the effective functioning of this peace infrastructure. The government needs to urgently look into these challenges and address them to ensure that the CSCs do not fail to achieve their objectives.
- **MIA-PBO-INCHR:** A significant gap in the transitional justice and peacebuilding processes is the failure of the government to provide victims with reparations. These are vital to victims' rehabilitation and ability to live in decency and dignity. Through the MIA-PBO, the government and INCHR should set up a Victims' Reparation Fund, identify those eligible for that fund and provide them with specifically tailored support. It is still not late to do so and lessons could be learnt from countries such as Côte d'Ivoire, where such a fund was implemented.

## 7.2 PEACE INFRASTRUCTURES:

- **All Infrastructures:** The infrastructures, with the support of the MGCSP, should mainstream gender-effective and responsive approaches into their activities. This will require longer term training, mentoring and coaching support by the GoL and its development partners, which will position the infrastructures to better engage in the peacebuilding process and adequately utilise the knowledge, skills and tools acquired.
- **Women-led Peace Huts:** The leadership of the Peace Huts should adopt a more proactive approach in engaging the GoL and ensuring that they develop an effective working relationship with the government. Doing so will go a long way toward helping the huts secure much needed funds and technical support from the GoL.
- **CSCs:** To be more effective the CSCs need to expand their outreach activities. However, they require financial resources from the government to do so. The failure to undertake outreach activities has resulted in a good number of communities visited during this survey to be unaware of the CSCs' existence and the services they provide. This is inconsistent with the objectives of this peace infrastructure and denies the intended beneficiaries the knowledge they require to access CSC services. The use of radio stations to popularize the centres is insufficient as most communities do not have coverage and access to radios.
- **CSCs:** An effective approach that should be adopted by the CSC is the use of mobile services, as this would take services to communities' reducing people's costs of travelling to county headquarter towns for services. Such an approach will help to create awareness of the activities of the CSCs, resulting in them being able to serve more people, especially those in remote, marginalized and isolated communities.
- **CSCs:** CSC Coordinators should work with the institutions providing staff to the respective windows to implement a gender-focused approach in their recruitment and deployment of staff in the centres. The MIA should develop gender-related policies for the CSCs that would guide the recruitment,

deployment and roles of staff in the CSCs, as more trained and qualified women are needed to provide essential services especially to women at the county and community levels.

- **CSCO/JSC:** More women should be incorporated into these structures, with an aim to move beyond symbolic representation to a genuine desire to prioritize responding to the security and justice needs of women and girls in local communities. Such structures could also move from reactive to proactive gender-based approaches that would involve women, working with them to promote their safety and security. The study found that these structures are largely male dominated, with that hegemony leading to limited focus on issues and challenges related to women and girls. The existing gap points to the need for specifically tailored training and other capacity-building engagements on gender to position the infrastructures as gender-sensitive and responsive.
- **CPCs/DPCs:** To render them effective, these structures should be provided with the financial and logistical support they require to function. These infrastructures, like the Peace Huts, are regularly informed of conflicts in remote and isolated communities, which they find difficult to access as a result of the unavailability of transportation and communication support. That inability to respond, especially in communities with no government presence, usually leads to the escalation of conflicts or the continuous violation of human rights, with women and children being the principal victims.
- **The LDRU:** The unit, alongside its decentralized structures such as the LCC and the CBMC, should be provided with regular training on gender, with more women included who would also be trained to promote gender responsiveness in the structures. The patriarchal and chauvinistic systems that have existed for decades continue to disadvantage women when it comes to accessing, inheriting and owning land in some communities, thereby also denying them access to their livelihood. The existence of gender sensitive and responsive land conflict management structures would go a long way toward protecting and promoting women's access and ownership of

land in local communities.

- **EWER Focal Points:** These structures should be resuscitated to become fully mainstreamed into the national/ county budgets in order to foster their continuity and sustainability. They play a crucial role and should be enhanced and used to promote peace and stability in local communities. Such structures, which are inexpensive to maintain, help the government to be proactive.
- **SGBV Observatories:** The SGBV Observatories are currently ineffective as a result of financial and logistical challenges. Through the MGCSP, the government should ensure that it resuscitates the observatories and continuously invests in them to render them effective so they can deliver on their mandates. More observatories should be established, especially in remote and isolated communities, to improve access to justice for women and girls.

## 7.3 DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS:

- Liberia's transitional justice process has been mired in significant challenges, which include a lack of political will and the financial and technical resources needed to fully implement an effective programme. Development partners need to reassess their support to the peacebuilding process in the country and work with the government to devise a strategic approach to transitional justice and peacebuilding.
- Development partners should provide very specific and targeted financial and technical support to peace infrastructures, and should establish a coordination group that will work with the MIA-PBO, INCHR and other partners to monitor such support. The support has to move beyond training to ensuring that the infrastructures work in an efficient and effective manner. The coordination group should seek to promote complementarity of efforts and avoid duplication and wastage of resources.
- To ensure that initiatives undertaken produce the desired outputs and outcomes, they must be based on assessments, with evidence-based conclusions used to support their design and implementation. One suggested

contribution of development partners would be to support the development of an M&E framework and system that will regularly assess the peace infrastructures and provide feedback on progress made and areas to improve. The existing gap in data on peace infrastructures is creating the perception that they are achieving very little when this may not be the case.

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