



# POLICY BRIEF

## Sustaining peace in practice Liberia and Sierra Leone

Amanda Lucey and Liezelle Kumalo

Liberia and Sierra Leone are undergoing important transitions. The countries provide important case studies on how the United Nations (UN) can ensure successful transitions, not only from peacekeeping to peacebuilding but also from conflict to building a sustainable peace. With the current UN focus on conflict prevention for sustaining peace, this policy brief provides practical recommendations on what this means in practice.

## Recommendations to the UN

- ▶ Promote transparent and fair government spending and condemn corruption.
- ▶ Support indigenous reconciliation mechanisms and community security.
- ▶ Promote inclusive economic development linked to political inclusivity.
- ▶ Continuously emphasise the need for constitutional reforms.
- ▶ Examine more effective models of decentralisation.
- ▶ Ensure a greater focus on sustained capacity building for civil society.
- ▶ Promote better and coordinated partnerships with regional and sub-regional organisations in terms of capacity building and development, and examine ways of scaling up SSC.
- ▶ Peacebuilding plans constitute best practice but can be extended to other partners.

## Introduction

For a hopeful population, George Weah's victory in the December 2017 elections in Liberia promised the start of a new era. In March 2018 Sierra Leone will hold its fourth elections since the end of conflict in 2002. Both countries are undergoing other types of transitions as well, including drawdowns of United Nations (UN) peacekeeping missions and a growing peacebuilding agenda. Liberia's peacebuilding experiences are also linked to changes at the UN, namely a re-focus on sustaining peace practices and long-awaited institutional changes.

This policy brief<sup>1</sup> looks at Liberia and Sierra Leone to examine what sustaining peace means in practice, and the implication this has for UN missions and their transitions. The analysis is derived from field research carried out from 15–24 November 2017 in Sierra Leone and Liberia.<sup>2</sup>

## What is sustaining peace?

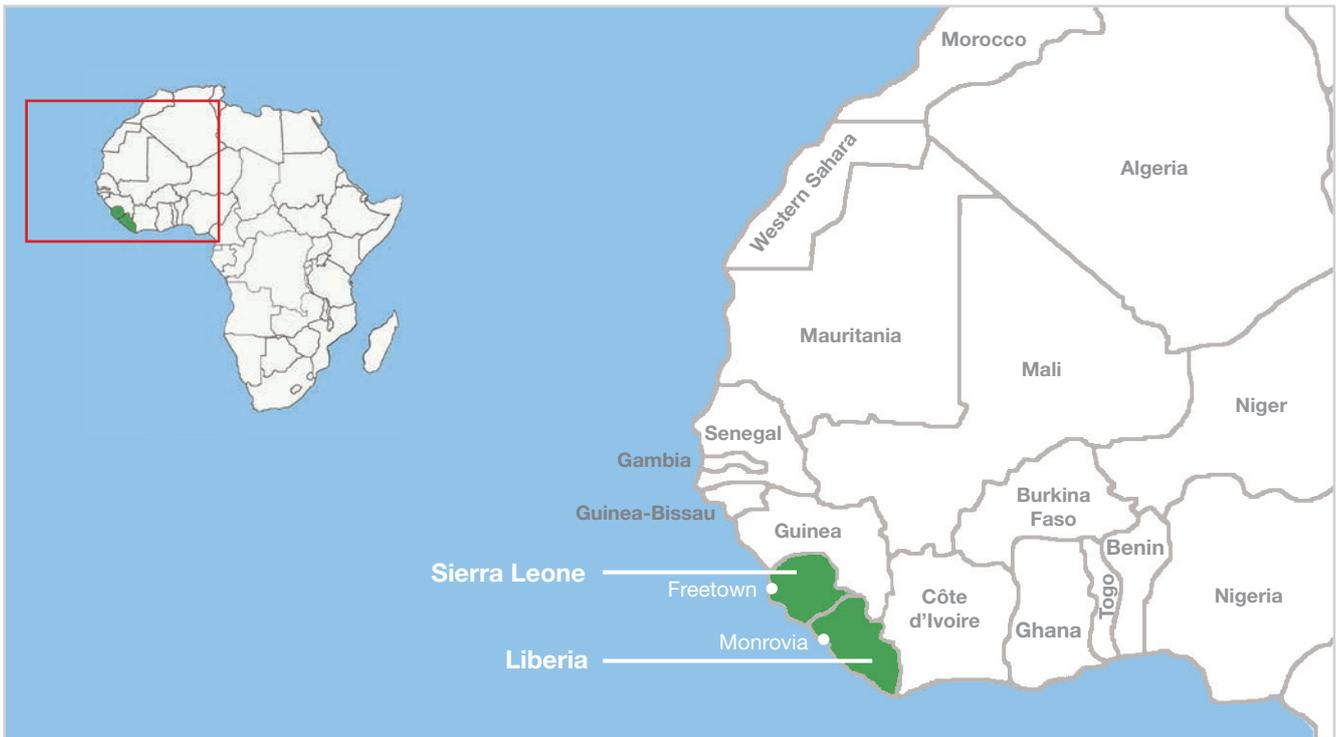
Sustaining peace is defined as a 'goal and a process to build a common vision of society'.<sup>3</sup> In April 2016 the UN General Assembly and Security Council adopted parallel resolutions on sustaining peace, which emphasised the need to support national efforts to build an inclusive and people-centred vision of peace – one that addresses the root causes of violence and promotes rule of law, good governance and human rights. Sustaining peace activities include 'preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict, addressing root causes, assisting parties to conflict to end hostilities, ensuring national reconciliation and moving towards recovery, reconstruction and development'.<sup>4</sup> Sustaining peace therefore has a temporal dimension, operating across different phases of a conflict and being either delayed or enhanced by critical junctures such as elections. It also has a structural dimension, spanning across (thematic) sectors from economic development to governance. Its social dimension includes class dynamics, empowerment and social cohesion.

Sierra Leone and Liberia have demonstrated resilience to challenges but still need support to build a sustainable peace

In January 2017 UN Secretary General António Guterres put conflict prevention for sustaining peace at the heart of the UN.<sup>5</sup> The UN and World Bank carried out research to advance this agenda, using, as a starting point, the activities outlined in the General Assembly and Security Council resolutions on sustaining peace.<sup>6</sup>

The report advocates a holistic and non-linear view of conflict where prevention works with institutions, structures and actors. Here the state is the primary actor driving efforts. However, since the state itself can be an instigator of violence, there is a need to engage all actors in a society,

Map 1: Liberia and Sierra Leone



including women and youth, to build pathways to peace. The report emphasises the need for local ownership and to engage local actors. It promotes the idea of sustaining peace by making grievances, as drivers of conflict, central to the analysis of conflict. These grievances are formed through horizontal inequalities between different population groups on the basis of identity, region and political inclusion.<sup>7</sup>

In recent decades Sierra Leone and Liberia have undergone a number of transitions and have demonstrated resilience to challenges such as Ebola and controversial elections, but they still need support to build a sustainable peace. As such they represent useful case studies of how sustaining peace can be pursued in practice.

## Liberia and Sierra Leone's transitions

### Liberia

After 13 failed peace agreements and a destructive civil war, a Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed in 2003. Following this, Liberia had a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), but never held anyone accountable for atrocities committed

during the war. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) led the peace talks and has continued to play a significant role in the country. The ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) mission deployed the first peacekeepers on the ground, joined by the UN Observer Mission in Liberia, which created the conditions for UN peacekeeping to take over.

If Liberia is to sustain peace, a greater effort in engaging all national, regional and international actors is required

The UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), which began in 2003, will draw to a close in March 2018.<sup>8</sup> The UN has worked hard to ensure a smooth transition, but has seen this as a shift from the peacekeeping mission to the UN Country Team (UNCT) rather than from war to sustainable peace.<sup>9</sup> It has developed a peacebuilding plan that has been adopted by the government and the international community as the focus for continued intervention.

The second phase of the plan will be implemented under the Weah administration. Although the plan's implementation has been delayed, partly as a result of the 2017 elections, it represents a coordinated effort to find sustained financing. It was established initially just for the UN transition, but was expanded to include additional international peacebuilding actors such as ECOWAS, and to look beyond UN-centric activities.

Despite efforts in both countries, it can be argued that the UN transitions have not addressed the root causes of conflict

As UNMIL leaves, the UNCT will have to step up and continue to deliver as a unified partner. There will be an expanded Resident Coordinator's office, which will coordinate a trust fund that will ensure a coherent and predictable approach among donors. A UN Integrated Transition Plan will be developed. The UNCT, led by the UN Development Programme, undertook a critical stocktaking exercise to determine UN capacities for Liberia's needs after UNMIL's exit. Questions remain as to how this can be expanded to include other partners.

The African Union (AU) office to Liberia will stay on until March 2018, but this may be extended. It has already played an important role politically and through the implementation of its Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development (PCRD) Framework.<sup>10</sup> This has included quick impact projects such as building a community college.

ECOWAS will continue to scale up its efforts to integrate Liberia more deeply into the regional community, including through assistance in areas such as agriculture, infrastructure and trade.<sup>11</sup>

Such engagements will be vital in helping the country to become less dependent on the donor community. Yet if Liberia is to sustain peace, a greater effort in engaging all national, regional and international actors is required.

### Sierra Leone

While Sierra Leone signed the Lomé Peace Agreement in 1999, the conflict only ended in 2002. The agreement established a Commission for the Consolidation of Peace, which was responsible for national reconciliation and welfare, including the creation of a TRC.<sup>12</sup> While the Lomé Peace Agreement was empowered to grant amnesty, the Special Court was set up in 2002, with the UN stating that amnesty did not extend to gross human rights violations.<sup>13</sup>

The UN Mission in Sierra Leone operated from 1999–2006. Following the 1996 military coup, an ECOMOG force led by Nigeria returned Ahmed Tejan Kabbah's government to power in March 1998.<sup>14</sup> In 2003 ECOMOG was replaced by the UN Peacekeeping Mission to Sierra Leone, with

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# 2016

THE TWO PARALLEL  
SUSTAINING PEACE  
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AND GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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many regional peacekeepers being ‘rehatted’ under the UN flag.

In 2005 the UN established the UN Integrated Office for Sierra Leone to consolidate peace, which later became the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL). These UN transitions were considered generally successful owing to careful planning, awareness raising, targeted mandates and a peacebuilding strategy that incorporated all UN elements. Even so, funding and integration problems remained.<sup>15</sup> When UNIPSIL left in March 2014, it transferred all of its responsibilities to the UNCT.

The 2015 Report of the Advisory Group of Experts on the UN’s peacebuilding architecture praised the collaboration between the UN Security Council and the Peacebuilding Commission, as well as the UN’s ability to ‘deliver as one’ during Sierra Leone’s transition.<sup>16</sup> Other positives included combining a political and peacebuilding mandate, reaffirming the primary responsibility of the government, deploying an executive representative of the secretary general to streamline action, and seeking closer partnerships with regional actors such as ECOWAS and the Mano River Union. However, the report pointed to the need to involve other UN organs, such as the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly, and to address continued challenges such as governance.<sup>17</sup>

The Liberian Peacebuilding Plan is a best practice for UN transitions, as it presents a coherent and strategic examination of what is required to sustain peace

Despite these efforts in both countries, it can be argued that the transitions have not addressed the root causes of conflict, or created conditions for less aid and foreign dependency.

### Major ongoing concerns: were the root causes addressed?

The sustaining peace resolutions emphasise addressing the root causes of a conflict to prevent a resumption of violence. The examples of Liberia and Sierra Leone demonstrate that the failure to address root causes can remain a cause of concern in terms of sustaining peace.

## Liberia

**Table 1: Liberia TRC: root causes of conflict<sup>18</sup>**

Poverty, governance and over-centralisation
No access to justice
Duality of indigenous and settler political, social and legal systems
Politicisation of ethnicity
Political and social systems founded on privilege, patronage, politicisation of the military and corruption
Historical disputes over land
Lack of clarity and understanding of Liberia’s conflicts
Lack of identity
Breakdown of the family and traditional values

To what extent have these root causes been addressed? The Liberian Peacebuilding Plan indicates some major concerns. The short-term priorities are:<sup>19</sup>

- Access to justice – Liberia’s outdated legal framework lacks capacity, and the government needs to harmonise statutory and customary court systems.
- Security sector reform (SSR) – while significant progress has been made in police reform, resourcing remains a challenge, as does cross-border security.
- Reconciliation – most of the TRC’s recommendations, such as prosecutions, remain unimplemented.
- Inclusive economic diversification and reduction of donor dependency – the government is busy costing the new Agenda for Transformation and will establish a macroeconomic research and policy unit, but it must stop relying mainly on exports of primary commodities.
- Governance – the constitutional review process has to be concluded. In addition, the Local Government Bill and Land Rights Bill must be passed as soon as possible. Decentralisation is another major issue. It must go beyond service delivery to local governance and allow decision-making at local levels.

- Cross-cutting issues – there is a need to further promote human rights instruments, youth employment and education. The National Youth Bill is still underway. Women’s participation is critical. Concessions exploit fragile ecosystems.

In the long term, the plan stresses accountability and anti-corruption. Yet ISS research reveals that the government has not been transparent regarding its budget, most of which is spent on recurring costs, especially the salaries of legislature members.

The peacebuilding plan notes that inclusive dialogues will be at the heart of agreements with international partners. It also specifies the following long-term areas of focus, which build upon short-term achievements and require the approval of the incoming government:

- Justice and SSR – there is a need to focus on legislative and policy changes, decentralise justice and security, carry out a public expenditure review, and focus on traditional mechanisms of justice and security.
- Governance – constitutional reform remains a concern. Decentralisation, land reform and focus on corruption are also necessary.
- Economic reform – there is a need to develop a national development framework and domestic resource mobilisation strategy.
- Ongoing cross-cutting issues – these include addressing human rights instruments and laws, transitional issues addressed in the TRC report, youth employment, civic education, psychosocial counselling, gender affirmative action and the climate-sensitive management of resources.

ECOWAS could help to introduce more cost-effective and context-specific experiences from neighbouring countries

The Liberian Peacebuilding Plan is a best practice for UN transitions, as it presents a coherent and strategic examination of what is required to sustain peace. It also demonstrates a consensus-based approach to conflict sensitivity involving a wide range of stakeholders, including political parties, civil society and international partners, that allows for timely and predictable use of aid. In addition, the sequencing of actions was determined by the following useful criteria: focus on impact, pro-poor policies, realistic implementation and national ownership. Yet delays or lack of achievement in the short term will delay long-term goals.

ISS research showed that there is a need for a strong focus on capacity development in various areas, including civil society and political parties, as well as development within sectors such as agriculture, business and human rights relating to concessions.<sup>20</sup>

The research found that the plan has merit in terms of outlining engagements with partners such as ECOWAS, with a focus on engaging civil society on

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THE UN PEACEKEEPING  
MISSION, UNMIL, DEPARTS IN

March 2018

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its conflict prevention framework, capacity building of women and media and gender-based violence. However, it could have paid more attention to agriculture, economic diversification, the ratification of regional, continental and international protocols, and the development of free trade areas in West Africa.

ECOWAS clearly sees the link between peace and development, and focuses on infrastructure for peace such as the West African Power Pool, which aims to provide electricity in rural areas. ECOWAS also emphasises the need to build capacity in order to ensure national ownership, and could be utilised better in building the capacity of political parties – something most donors are scared to engage in.

Most Sierra Leoneans live in poverty, and maternal and infant mortality rates are among the highest globally

Given that Liberia lacks resources for the developmental aspect of its budget, ECOWAS could help to introduce more cost-effective and context-specific experiences from neighbouring countries, e.g. transitional justice, rule of law and constitutional reform.

The Peacebuilding Plan outlines engagement with the World Bank, including youth programmes and a public expenditure review, but it could also have included other partners such as the African Development Bank (AfDB), the AU and bilateral partners (e.g. the United States [US] and China).

It is still unclear whether the AU will remain in Liberia beyond March 2018, just when it should be stepping up engagements. A premature departure does not fit with the envisaged goals of the PCRD Framework.

The US and China are major players in Liberia, and ISS research suggested some engagements are at odds with sustained peace, for example Chinese loans in exchange for resource exploitation.<sup>21</sup> As the country struggles to finance its peace and development agenda, it will need to maximise its internal finances through resources, and therefore cannot allow its natural resources to be exploited.

## Sierra Leone

**Table 2: Sierra Leone TRC: root causes of conflict<sup>22</sup>**

Endemic greed, corruption and nepotism within government; plunder of national assets by elites
Incompatible indigenous and settler social and legal systems
Politicisation of the military
A deeply religiously and ethnically divided society without a shared national identity
Colonial period created a two-nation state with separate development policies
Majority of people lack access to key services
Dictatorship and centralisation of political and economic power in Freetown

Although Sierra Leone has not reverted to armed conflict, major issues still need to be addressed. Many of the TRC recommendations were not implemented. ISS research highlighted additional underlying issues:<sup>23</sup>

- Justice and security reform – SSR and access to justice is improving but remains a challenge. There is a disconnect between the police and prosecutors, but there are now efforts to work with paralegals to expedite basic legal processes.<sup>24</sup>
- Reconciliation – Sierra Leone had a TRC and a Special Court. But there has only been limited reconciliation on the ground, despite efforts to promote localised systems of justice.<sup>25</sup>
- Civil society – there is a continued closing of space for civil society. In 2009 the government instituted a policy that limited the ability of civil society to receive foreign funding, enabling the government to better control it.<sup>26</sup> Civil society lacks both technical and financial capacity. A large portion of international funds are spent on international workers' salaries instead of programmes and local empowerment.<sup>27</sup>
- Governance – the constitutional reform process is underway. However, the legal structures to ensure decentralisation have not been effectively developed. The lowest decentralised structure – ward committees – are regarded as non-functional and community involvement in local development is thus not as effective.

- Economic reform – the socio-economic situation is still a major concern. Most Sierra Leoneans live below the poverty line, and maternal and infant mortality rates are among the highest globally.<sup>28</sup> As in Liberia, the economy suffered as a consequence of the Ebola epidemic.
- Cross-cutting issues – corruption is very high in the country, which ranks 123<sup>th</sup> out of 176 countries on Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index.<sup>29</sup> Youth and women issues are not adequately addressed.<sup>30</sup> Gender, life expectancy, education and income inequalities remain considerable. Accountability and reconciliation were not obtained despite the TRC's recommendations.
- Electoral violence – the upcoming March 2018 elections have been characterised by violence and political interference.<sup>31</sup> The power struggle in the All People's Congress between President Ernest Koroma and Vice-President Samuel Sam-Sumana resembles the protracted intra-party conflict during the 2007 elections. Sam-Sumana was expelled from the party for apparently inciting violence. The Community Court of Justice for ECOWAS declared the suspension void.<sup>32</sup> The problem lies not only in the fractured ruling party but also in the closing of space for other political rivals, as demonstrated by the arrest of opposition leader Mohamed Mansaray.<sup>33</sup>

An immediate measure to sustain peace is to ensure that high-level government salaries are scaled down without creating incentives for corruption

In addition to the UN-specific transition plans, Sierra Leone is a party to the New Deal for Engagement with Fragile States.<sup>34</sup> The first plan developed by Sierra Leone in line with the New Deal was the Agenda for Change (2008–2012),<sup>35</sup> which focused on strengthening good governance and creating conditions for macroeconomic stability. It then developed the Agenda for Prosperity (2013–2018).<sup>36</sup> However, many of the objectives are ambitious and implementation requires foreign financial assistance. The British government, as the main development partner, invested heavily in building and reforming state institutions, but this requires ongoing attention.<sup>37</sup> With the March 2018 election dominating the agenda, discussions regarding sustaining peace and development have been put on hold.<sup>38</sup>

As international partners consider their future engagement in Sierra Leone, the importance of regional partners cannot be overstated. ECOWAS expects to play an important role in election monitoring and civic education ahead of the elections. However, as in Liberia, it can do much to build a sustainable peace, and is focussing on infrastructure and regional integration.

Beyond this, the organisation can assist in building long-term capacity on issues such as governance. For example, it has a well-established



ECOWAS EXPECTS TO PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN ELECTION MONITORING AND CIVIC EDUCATION AHEAD OF THE ELECTIONS

framework on democracy and good governance and has demonstrated that it can play an integral role in the rule of law.

## Conclusion

While neither Liberia nor Sierra Leone is likely to slip back into civil war in the foreseeable future, the two countries have a long way to go before they will have built enough resilience to sustain peace in the long term. Both have a number of issues in similar thematic areas that need continued and sustained support, materially and financially. Yet dwindling financing for sustaining peace continues to pervade transitions.

Regional and sub-regional organisations should continue to play a critical role in capacity development

It is important to ensure financial accountability, and gradually wean countries off donor dependency. Corruption in Sierra Leone and Liberia remains a problem and consumes a significant portion of the national budget. An immediate measure to sustain peace is to ensure that high-level government salaries are scaled down without creating incentives for corruption. As such, great care needs to be taken to build structures from the outset that do not rely on indefinite foreign support, such as expensive policing or court systems.

The local context must be taken into account through a comprehensive analysis of drivers of peace that examines grievances, inclusive politics, social cohesion and root causes of conflict. Constitutional reforms allow a foundation upon which to build an equitable future, and decentralisation, if done correctly, can provide a means to address governance beyond service delivery.

Civil society remains critical to a functioning system of governance, and this is an area that donors should prioritise, while also paying great attention to whom to support without instituting cumbersome bureaucratic selection procedures, and developing their capacity. This includes developing civil society capacity for strategic planning and determining the reason for their existence, and providing assistance in fundraising and

specific areas of expertise, such as on business rights relating to concessions.

Regional and sub-regional organisations should continue to play a critical role – not only in mediation and peacekeeping, but also in capacity development. Although Nigeria was the major driver of ECOWAS's peacekeeping interventions, the regional community has institutionalised its democracy and good governance protocols.<sup>39</sup> This has allowed ECOWAS to pursue good governance solutions to issues arising in its neighbourhood, such as in The Gambia recently, where member states other than Nigeria sent troops to ensure a peaceful and democratic change of power. It is imperative that ECOWAS – which is likely to maintain a long-term presence in these countries – is included by donors, development partners and the UN in developing plans for sustaining peace.

There are also further opportunities to upscale South–South cooperation. For example, Botswana can provide lessons on fiscal accountability, and has cited Liberia as one of its focus countries.

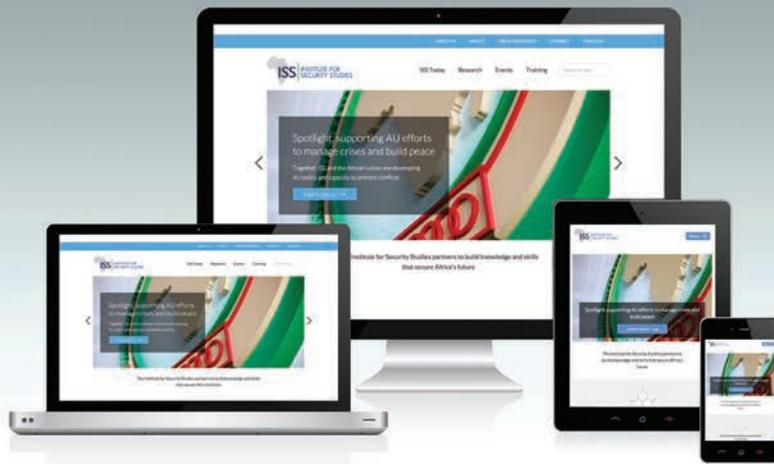
Finally, there is a need to bring partners who are largely absent from peacebuilding plans on board. The US and the AfDB are just two examples of partners missing from Liberia's Peacebuilding Plan. Joint engagement with new partners will allow for innovation that will go a long way to enhancing Liberia and Sierra Leone's development.

## Notes

- 1 This brief is part of a broader project called 'Enhancing African responses to peacebuilding', made up of a consortium of three partner organisations – the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) and New York University's Center on International Cooperation (CIC).
- 2 During the field research in Sierra Leone representatives from the following institutions were interviewed: Center for Accountability and Rule of Law, FAWE, Fambul Tok, MRU Secretariat, ECOWAS, UK Embassy, Campaign for Good Governance, NACSA and WANEP. In Liberia, the stakeholders interviewed were from: UK Embassy, Liberia Peacebuilding Office, UNMIL (DSRSG), UNMIL Civil Affairs, WANEP, Swedish Embassy, Kofi Annan Centre, AU, EU, Independent National Commission on Human Rights, ECOWAS, US Embassy, Mano River Union and SA Embassy.
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