



Applying Sustaining Peace Workshop 7

On February 6, 2018, the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation (DHF), International Peace Institute (IPI), and Center on International Cooperation (CIC) convened a workshop on Liberia's ongoing transition process, relationships with UN and other entities, and implications for sustaining peace in Liberia and other contexts going forward.

The workshop was the seventh in the *Applying Sustaining Peace* series. It focused on the lessons learned thus far from Liberia's relatively smooth democratic transition, experiences with the drawdown of UNMIL and the increasingly important role of the UN Country Team (UNCT) and other actors in Liberia and the broader region.

Participants included representatives from UNMIL, the UN Country Team, DPKO, UNDP, PBSO, EOSG, Member States, and civil society organizations based in New York and South Africa.

The Liberian Transition and Lessons for Sustaining Peace

Summary Report

April 2018

Background

The importance to sustaining peace of peace operations' drawdown or "transition" periods is recognized in the twin peacebuilding and sustaining peace resolutions (A/RES/70/262, S/RES/2282), which note the need for a "longer-term perspective required for sustaining peace being reflected in the formation, review and drawdown of peacekeeping operations and special political mission mandates."

In December 2016, DHF, IPI and CIC co-organized the first *Applying Sustaining Peace* workshop focusing on UN transitions through the lens of sustaining peace, with a focus on the drawdown of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). The discussion reflected on questions of national ownership, realistic Security Council mandates, an active Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), coordinated and joint approaches of actors on the ground, and sustained resources throughout the transition period and beyond.

Just over a year later, we revisited Liberia in the context of recent and upcoming milestones, including the general elections and the transition in March 2018 from UNMIL to the UN Country Team (UNCT). The purpose was to discuss what still needs to be done to ensure a smooth transition from a sustaining peace perspective, and to capture lessons from Liberia relevant to broader discussions on transitions—in particular, the need to focus on planning, integration, national ownership, national capacity development, communication and a variety of partnerships, in order to shore up prospects for sustaining peace.

Liberia is facing a number of transitions. On January 22, 2018, George Weah replaced Liberia's first elected leader following the civil conflict, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, as president. Despite an appeal by two political parties to the Supreme Court, the elections were seen by most observers, including the United States, Economic Community for West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU), as free and fair. With the country clearly demonstrating its desire for peace, this outcome is being hailed as Liberia's first democratic transition in more than 70 years.

The legitimacy of elections and the peaceful transfer of power are also vital to Liberia's longer-term transition toward sustained peace. Although the country has made gains in establishing a stable democracy, it still faces a number of challenges—among them high youth unemployment, limited reconciliation, limited capacity for justice and security, governance issues such as corruption, and the need for economic diversification.

Discussion

Addressing the root causes of conflict

One overarching theme was the critical importance of addressing root causes of conflict, both in Liberia specifically and as a general principle for UN action. Liberia is still dealing with the aforementioned challenges, several of which were identified as precipitating conflict—including the need for greater transparency and fairness in government spending and policymaking, greater political and economic inclusion, constitutional reform, sensible decentralization of government, strengthened civil society capacity, and land reform.

Across the board, discussants expressed concern that after 14 years of UNMIL presence in Liberia, relatively little progress has been made on several of these conflict catalysts. It was widely agreed that UN missions should have appropriate mandates and resources for addressing not only security and human rights issues but also development challenges—moving beyond Quick Impact Projects (QIPs)—while eschewing untenable “Christmas Tree” mandates. Missions (or other kinds of UN engagements) should include clearly defined goals and objectives towards peacebuilding and sustaining peace.

Regarding the present moment, discussants noted that Liberia's lingering problems must be addressed in earnest to prevent relapse into conflict. To this end, there should be clear, attainable development and peacebuilding goals, which the UN, the Liberian government, civil society, regional organizations, international financial institutions (IFIs), investors and trade partners will have to work coherently to achieve. The importance of goal-setting and exit strategies was emphasized both in the current Liberian context and as a best practice in general, as was the importance of national leadership and ownership throughout these processes. In particular, greater attention to an exit strategy in mission mandates are seen as one element of peace operations' effective contribution to sustaining peace. Many participants suggested that the SDGs have a central role to play as both an end in and of themselves and the best defense against violent conflict. Sustainable, inclusive development and peacebuilding are mutually reinforcing.

Progress and partnerships

Discussants also highlighted several positive aspects of the Liberian transition and UN engagement thus far, which could serve as models for other contexts. For one, the convening role of the PBC in accompanying Liberia's transition to date was applauded, including for adding helpful nuance to the Security Council's understanding of and responses to the evolving situation.

The 2017 [Peacebuilding Plan](#) was seen as a positive example of joint cooperation and planning, having been produced inclusively (civil society and various political parties were involved in the consultation process). However, it was generally agreed that the process of putting together the Peacebuilding Plan was rushed (given a three-month deadline), and that more could have been done to connect the plan to the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) for Liberia and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as to create incentives around carrying out the plan's recommendations.

The UN also undertook an important exercise to [map the capacities](#) that would be required to implement the Peacebuilding Plan, leading to strategic repositioning of resources in critical areas that would be weak after UNMIL's departure. This led to the augmentation of expert capacity through surge deployments in these areas. The Secretary-General's Report on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace (A/72/707-S/2018/43) recommends that such a capacity resource mapping of the UNCT against peacebuilding priorities be undertaken during all mission drawdowns.

Progress toward colocation of UN offices and regional organization offices in Liberia was also viewed as a positive development for facilitating coherence and cooperation, reducing costs, and countering the perception among many Liberians that "the UN is leaving."

In terms of next steps, many discussants noted that the UN will be one among many partners for Liberia going forward, and that new regional and international partnerships are crucial for sustaining peace and development in Liberia. For example, ECOWAS could play a role in capacity building for Liberian political parties, media, women and civil society, among other things. The World Bank, African Development Bank, African Union and bilateral partners could increase their engagement on capacity building, as well as make investments in infrastructure, agricultural development, resource extraction, and more. A recurring theme was the importance to Liberia's future of (non-exploitative) natural resource extraction and trade liberalization, possibly involving China, the US, and other bilateral relationships.

Generalizing from this point, it was suggested that the UN think about its engagement with Liberia (or any state) in terms of the UN's "comparative advantage," unique abilities to add value, and exit strategy—at an early stage—in order to cultivate timely partnerships, avoid overextension, and ultimately empower the host country's government and people to lead the way on sustaining peace.

Funding: bridging the gap

Until Liberia's economy finds its footing, grappling with its ongoing challenges will require significant outside resources via the UN and other actors. Funding to address the aforementioned priorities and

challenges was thus another motif of the discussion. Here, the PBC has a specific role in preventing fragmentation across the system and pushing for a more coherent approach—including among Member States. Also, the need to engage IFIs more strategically was reiterated.

One piece of the funding puzzle, described as a “useful innovation,” is the forthcoming Liberia Multi-Partner Trust Fund (LMPTF). This will be a financing mechanism for peacebuilding and development following UNMIL’s departure, which “will bring together contributions from traditional and non-traditional donors, private sector, foundations and other sources,” including to support an integrated and effective implementation of Phase II of the Peacebuilding Plan. The Secretary-General’s Report on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace (A/72/707-S/2018/43) encourages UN senior leadership to map peacebuilding resource needs, based on joined-up risk and analysis, and establish such country-specific pooled funds in support of the UNDAF.

While the LMPTF is certainly a welcome development, discussants acknowledged that this facility is time-limited (three years) and that new approaches to financing are needed, in Liberia and in general. Potential “financial cliffs”—i.e. rocky transitions from assessed funding (when a UN mission is present) to voluntary contributions (post-mission)—shouldn’t imperil peace processes.

There were comments to the effect that UNDP and other UN entities have room for improvement when it comes to creating compelling funding proposals, as well as not confusing strategic plans for funding proposals and vice versa. Further, such plans and proposals should not just fund the usual “institutions and civil servants’ salaries,” but also incorporate more inclusive development initiatives.

Finally, it was reiterated that UN peace operations, with their access to assessed funds, should do much more from the outset (or as quickly as possible) to address a fuller spectrum of conflict drivers, many of which are developmental in nature. In order to sustain peace, these cannot be left only to transition periods or after. As the Secretary-General’s Report on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace (A/72/707-S/2018/43) makes clear, integrated planning early and throughout the life cycle of a mission is critical. The Report also contains recommendations on the types of capacities required by Resident Coordinators, including triple-hatted DSRSGs to support national actors in conflict prevention.

Conclusion

The Liberia example underscores the importance of national ownership, broad and meaningful inclusion in identifying priorities, addressing a broad range of root causes of conflict (including developmental causes), and planning for and fostering appropriate and strategic partnerships. Funding for these activities is a pressing challenge, and interesting innovations like the LMPTF will be put to the test. Given the fragility of the economy and the continued dependence on international assistance, participants noted that their optimism hinges on continued cooperation among member states. On the international level, the PBC can continue to play a positive role in steering the discussion in the right direction, helping to give Liberians and partners on the ground the political space they need to maneuver during this challenging transition.