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Alžběta Šváblová

The Peacebuilding Process in Postwar Liberia

A Tortuous Way Forward

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To Marie,
who uplifts my heart and constantly reminds me
what really counts in life.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

ABA	American Bar Association
ACI	Actor-centered institutionalism
ACS	American Colonization Society
ADR	Alternative Dispute Resolution
AfT	Agenda for Transformation
ASI	African Solidarity Initiative
AU	African Union
BCR	Bureau for Corrections and Rehabilitation
BIN	Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization
CAR	Central African Republic
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
CRC	Constitutional Review Committee
CSC	Country-Specific Configuration
DaO	Delivering as One
DDRR	Disarmament, demobilisation, rehabilitation, and reintegration
DRSRSG	Deputy Representative of the Special Representative of the Secretary General
ECOMOG	ECOWAS Monitoring Group
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EU	European Union
EWER	Early Warning/Early Response Working Group
EWWG	Early Warning Working Group
FIND	Foundation for International Dignity
GBV	Gender-based violence
GC	Governance Commission
GEMAP	Governance and Economic Management Assistance Program
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
GoL	Government of Liberia
HU	Humanity United
ICTJ	International Center for Transitional Justice
IDPs	Internally displaced persons

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IFIs	International financial institutions
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INCHR	Independent National Commission on Human Rights
INPFL	Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia
JPC	Justice and Peace Commission
JSC	Joint Steering Committee
KAICT	Kofi Annan Institute for Conflict Transformation
LC	Land Commission
LCCs	Land Coordination Centers
LDA	Liberia Development Alliance
LDRT	Land Dispute Resolution Taskforce
LEITI	Liberia Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative
LERN	Liberia's Early Warning and Response Network
LNP	Liberia National Police
LPP	Liberia Peacebuilding Program
LRDC	Liberia Reconstruction and Development Committee
LURD	Liberians United for Reconciliation and Development
MDGs	Millenium Development Goals
MIA	Ministry of Internal Affairs
MLG	Multi-level governance
MLME	Ministry of Lands, Mines, and Energy
MODEL	Movement for Democracy in Liberia
MoF	Ministry of Finance
MoGD	Ministry of Gender and Development
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
MPEA	Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs
MSME	Micro, small, & medium enterprises
NCDR/NA	National Center for Documents and Records/National Archives
NGP	National Gender Policy
NPFL	National Patriotic Front of Liberia
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
NTGL	National Transitional Government of Liberia
NTLA	National Transitional Legislative Assembly
OHCHR	United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
PBA	Peacebuilding Architecture

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PBC	Peacebuilding Commission
PBF	Peacebuilding Fund
PBO	Peacebuilding Office
PBSO	Peacebuilding Support Office
PCRD	Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development
PPP	Peacebuilding Priority Plan
PRPs	Poverty Reduction Papers
PRS	Poverty Reduction Strategy
PUPs	Private Use Permits
R2P	Responsibility to Protect
SC	United Nations Security Council
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SRSG	Special Representative of the Secretary General
SSR	Security system reform
TAG	Technical Advisory Group
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UN	United Nations
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDP	United Nations Development Fund
UNDG	United Nations Director General
UN-HABITAT	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia
UNPOL	United Nations Police
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WB	World Bank
WIPNET	Women in Peacebuilding Network

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Abstract

The study examines the postwar reconstruction process in Liberia. It analyses the interaction of the government of Liberia, Liberian civil society, and international actors against the backdrop of four institutions, where these actors meet: the Governance Commission, the Land Commission, Gender-Based Violence Taskforce, and Early Warning Working Group. The book studies the roles of the respective actors in the four fields and attempts to identify factors behind the relatively slow pace of the post-conflict reform process. Designed as a qualitative case study with a strong descriptive component, the study used interviews and observation as the main data collection techniques.

Findings indicate that international actors sketched the broad framework of the reform process, provided financial aid, as well as human resources and know-how. The government chose more specific priorities and disposed of a substantial blocking potential with regard to the passing and implementation of the reforms. Civil society played mainly the role of a service- and information-provider. The progress of the reforms was influenced by a number of factors—the most decisive ones being the standard domestic political processes and the nature of the issue at stake. The Liberian case shows that despite a rich, critical academic debate, the current practice of peacebuilding remains shaped by the neo-liberal paradigm, focuses mainly on institution-building, and stays rather disconnected from the post-conflict realities and individuals on the ground. The blinkered perspective of external actors, largely ignoring the domestic political processes, renders the ultimate fate of the reforms uncertain.

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Summary

The study focuses on the process of postwar reconstruction in Liberia, more specifically on the involvement of three groups of actors—the government of Liberia, Liberian civil society, and international actors. Against the backdrop of four selected institutions, the dissertation analyses the interaction of the respective actors, their roles in peacebuilding, and attempts to find out the factors explaining the relatively low level of progress in the reform process.

The broader debate on post-conflict peacebuilding has covered a number of topics, but recently, it seemed to become somehow self-referential. Several authors have pointed to the need to overcome this tendency and to revive the debate by including more empirical studies. This dissertation attempts to fill part of the "empirical gap".

Apart from the broader debate on post-conflict peacebuilding, the study was shaped by actor-centered institutionalism, useful for the research design, and multi-level governance, which provided a convenient analytical lens. The multi-level governance approach helps to overcome common analytical boundaries by arguing that decision-making processes transpire on a number of levels and transgress the boundaries of nation-states. They also include various actors. The same applies to peacebuilding. The second theoretical approach used in the study, the actor-centered institutionalism, developed by Renate Mayntz and Fritz Scharpf, points to the fact that when studying social phenomena, both institutions and actors should be taken into account, otherwise their analysis would be incomplete. Mayntz and Scharpf suggest to depart from a specific set of interaction in order to identify relevant actors, which was an approach used during the data collection phase.

The dissertation is designed as a qualitative case study, with Liberia as a general case. There are four embedded units of analysis, defined by selected institutions, representing the "places of encounter" for the actors in focus: the Governance Commission, the Land Commission, Gender-Based Violence Taskforce, and Early Warning Working Group. The sub-cases were chosen according to a number of criteria. All four institutions have been set up in order to deal with an issue important for building stable peace. They are different with regard to their size, degree of financial and political support, level of international presence, and political relevance.

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However, they share a common feature, showing little progress in terms of results of their work in the respective fields of reform.

Expert interviews and observation were used as the main techniques for the collection of primary data. After the within-case analysis, the findings from the sub-cases were compared and examined across cases. The four empirical chapters, covering the sub-cases, are complemented by an evaluation of the documents framing the Liberian postwar reconstruction process, and by a detailed analysis of the three groups of actors in focus of the study.

Governance reform, presented in the first empirical chapter, has been a problematic issue since the establishment of Liberia as an independent state. Poor governance and over-centralisation of the state have been at the origins of the growing tensions that contributed to the outbreak of the conflict. The importance of governance reform has been repeatedly emphasised in documents framing the reconstruction, as well as by international and domestic political actors. However, the declared importance of the issue does not match the real support the Governance Commission receives. The GC is in a precarious situation. By the virtue of being an institution that attempts to change established practices, it is quite unpopular with governmental actors. With regard to civil society, they offer each other mutual support. International actors are to a large extent absent in the institution itself; however, they have determined the general direction of the whole reform process towards good governance, with transparency, accountability, decentralisation, etc. The outcomes of the Commission's work are entirely dependent on the legislature, and as such, the institution's political weight is rather low. On the other hand, it has a strong, respected leader, able to leverage support and skillfully manoeuvre the political waters.

A lot of what has been said here applies to the Land Commission as well. Apart from a capable leader, however, land reform also enjoys a fair deal of financial support in addition to the rhetorical one. As an issue with a high conflict potential, it draws the attention of international actors, whose presence at the LC is most significant from all the four selected institutions. However, similar to the GC, the policies the LC proposes have to be approved by the legislature. The experience with passing the Land Rights Act, a major project being blocked by the legislature for several years, shows that the results of the Commission's work can be easily jeopardised, especially by powerful profit-seeking actors behind the scenes.

Gender-based violence has been widespread in postwar Liberia and despite the emphasis on the issue from the side of international actors, the

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phenomenon is very much rooted in socio-cultural values and norms, which makes it difficult to deal with. The efforts of the GBV Taskforce, the main body in charge of the problem, are focused mainly on service provision for survivors. However, even this task is complicated by inadequate support from the domestic political actors and by the generally poor level of law enforcement. International actors provide more material backing and other forms of assistance, although they also shift the agenda by offering funding opportunities mainly for action focused on the fight against rape. On the other hand, the very presence of a UN mission and a number of international personnel is problematic, being linked to a frequent occurrence of sexual exploitation and abuse. Civil society acts mainly as an implementing partner and information provider from the grassroots level. This is especially visible in the GBV Taskforce.

Early Warning Working Group, representing the last sub-case, is an example of a Liberian-led, bottom-up initiative, based on the engagement of civil society, with international actors providing financial and technical support. The system works quite well, but its main ambition, to offer relevant information for policy-makers, remains unfulfilled. The decision-makers are not interested, and most of the other potential beneficiaries of the project are also excluded, out of different reasons. The impact of the whole initiative is therefore limited. The system is influenced by a number of features that are typical for the political realities of postwar Liberia, and for the current practice of peacebuilding, such as high fluctuation of personnel, importance of "rank", or lack of coordination among a great number of actors involved in different initiatives.

In general, despite the variation across cases, it can be said that international actors mainly provide general direction of the reforms and bring material and human resources to support the reforms. The UN is the most prominent actor on the ground and serves as a "manager" of the reconstruction process, breaking the general objectives included in the framework plans into smaller tasks and programs for a subsequent implementation. Bilateral partners are present through their diplomatic representations on the ground, and in the institutions at the supra-national and highest decision-making level. The regional dimension of the reconstruction process and the presence of regional organisations on the ground was marginal. The Liberian government decides over more specific priorities, and most importantly, disposes of a substantial "allowing" and blocking potential. Civil society, despite its higher ambitions, works mainly as an information- and service-provider, implementing the projects of bigger

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players. Due to the dependency on external funding and a general low level of development, its agenda is often donor-driven.

The interaction among the three groups of actors in the four sub-cases was determined by the specific nature and political character of the particular issue at stake. It is facilitated by the relatively small size of the country, and also by the very existence of the institutions and where they can meet. There seems to be a tacit understanding on this division of labour, and despite some underlying tensions, there were no signs of open conflict or rivalry among the different actors. Generally, governmental actors showed a lower level of participation than the other two categories. This might be explained as a result of a meeting fatigue, lack of "buy-in" for the reforms, or a strategy of extraversion.

The explanatory factors behind the lack of progress also varied across the four sub-cases. In the case of land and governance reforms, it was the dependency on other actors in the political process, especially on the legislature, which, out of different reasons, was not favourable. With regard to GBV, the nature of the issue, combined with a low level of priority and financial support, seem to be the problem. Concerning the early warning, the main challenge is its irrelevance for the decision-makers.

More generally, categories of "support" (both formal and financial), which seem to co-relate with the level of international presence, have been decisive for the question of progress. Another one was the nature of the issue at stake—some, such as governance or GBV, are more resistant to change, as they are closely connected to the mindset of people, or socio-cultural values and political culture. Some issues, such as land, have higher conflict potential. However, domestic political actors and processes are the crucial factor, determining the ultimate fate of the reform efforts. Surprisingly, it seems not to be considered by the architects of postwar reforms.

Contextual variables were also essential, starting from the international context, with rules shaped by the neo-liberal paradigm, global commodity prices, and stability in the region, to the domestic level, with a high fluctuation of personnel, low institutional stability, and lack of material and human resources. Additional factors with impact on the reforms were leadership and individual engagement. Many of these factors are not sufficiently reflected in the theoretical literature on peacebuilding.

The Liberian example shows how current peacebuilding practice puts a great deal of emphasis on formal coherence. However, this coherence results in the creation of a self-referential, hegemonic discourse, which does not grant space for alternatives and leads to a blinkered perspective,

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to a large extent disconnected from the postwar reality. There is also a clear detachment from the post-conflict individuals. The ultimate beneficiaries of the reforms are not in the centre of attention. Instead, institutional reforms are in focus, with the underlying assumption that well-functioning states are the best guarantee for stable peace.

In the academic debate, especially in the critical stream of thought, these problematic issues have been pointed to. However, due to a relatively closed nature of both the academic and practitioners' worlds, the insights and recommendations do not translate into changes of peacebuilding policies and strategies. This dissertation, by focusing on peacebuilding practice on the ground, attempts to bridge part of this gap, and provide empirical contribution for the theoretical debate, as well as useful input for the peacebuilding practitioners.

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