Women and Post-conflict Development: A Case Study on Liberia

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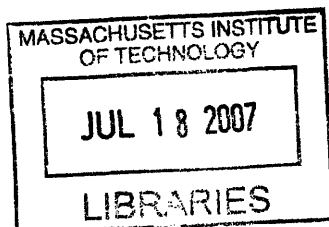
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Abstract

Liberia seems an ostensible 'poster child' in light of the call by women's rights advocates to insert women in all aspects of the political, social, and economic transition in post-conflict countries. Liberia has elected the first female African President and women head the strategic government ministries of Finance, Justice, Commerce, Gender, Youth and Sports and National Police. Women also helped to secure an end to fourteen years of civil war. Pressured by women, the National Legislature has passed a revised law against rape and a Devolution of Estate Act granting women in customary marriages the rights to own property and to take custody of their children.

While acknowledging these remarkable contributions, I argue that reliance on these successes of the women's movement in the last several years is not enough to produce the kinds of changes that will bring economic benefits to ordinary women. I argue that the women's movement plurality neither ensures an automatic and equal representation for all women nor is it an all-encompassing movement for sudden empowerment for all or for equalizing life chances and opportunities.

I then argue that what is needed is a developmental state that ensures a rights-based approach to state building. Without a social policy that protects at the least those whose subsistence have been decimated by the civil war, condition for sustained peace may be eroded. Assuring poor women a modicum of economic welfare is a legitimate goal. And a rights-based approach to state building gives poor women control over all areas of their daily existence and put pressure on the state to be accountable for such obligations.

Dedication

To my daughter, Kpambu and my wife, Bartoe
for the sacrifice and price you paid for
helping me to face my worst fears.

Table of Content

1. Introduction

This thesis argues for a culturally acceptable rights-based approach to state building as an alternative for achieving development for women. By development, I mean the process of social transformation that directly impact on issues such as poverty reduction, governance, political participation, healthcare, education, economic advancement, etc. Already, much has been written about the lack of development for women and the corresponding subordination and marginalization women have faced. Women, we are told, are subordinated to men because of the negative gender and power relationships that impose difficult demands on them. Women's access to land tenure, ownership or security, for example, is severely restricted and legal discrimination limits women's access, control and use of productive resources. Worst still, marriage systems, inheritance laws and customary practices dispossess women (and widows) of their marital rights to property. Even statutory laws remain biased against women as old laws inherited from colonial systems remains on the books. In countries coming from civil war, this already disadvantaged position of women has only gotten worse. There, many women have not only being uprooted entirely from their communities, but have become victims of extreme violence that has included trauma from rape, torture, and killings. Even in the aftermath of many of the continent's raging civil wars, there is no respite for women. They become victims again of predatory masculinities and misogyny manifested by continuous domestic and societal violence (Manchanda, 2001).

This articulation of the barriers to women's development and of their eventual suffering, subordination and marginalization has given rise to a number of policy advice intended to end women's subordination and improve their well being. In post-conflict

countries, in particular, much of this advice is directed at: 1) ensuring that women are represented at peace negotiations; 2) recognizing women's rights to participate in all aspects of the transition including political, social, and economic; 3) developing laws that respect and foster gender equity; and 4) implementing a justice component which ends impunity and ensures accountability for crimes committed during conflict against women and girls. This "solution package" for obtaining development for women recognizes the evolution in the meaning of development from a narrow focus on economic growth to a much broader definition encompassing, good governance, human rights, democracy and political participation, etc.

Judging by these standards then, post-conflict Liberia would seem an ostensible "poster child" for this radical proposition for achieving development for women. In recent years, women in Liberia have achieved a number of significant breakthroughs that have set them apart as an exemplary case. For example, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf was recently elected as Africa and Liberia's first female President. Women also played a profound role not only in inserting themselves in Liberia's peace negotiations, but also in ending it by pressuring Liberia's multiple and often reluctant warring factions to disarm both in 1996 and 2004. Furthermore, Liberian women, along with their counterparts from neighboring Guinea and Sierra Leone working under the banner of the Mano River Union Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET) received the United Nations' Peace Prize for Human Rights in 2004 for their role in working for peace in the sub-region.

Indeed, not only is a woman Liberia's President but also women head several key institutions in the government including the Ministries of Finance, Commerce, Justice, and National Police. In a significant legal victory against the rising incidence of rape,

Liberian women successfully lobbied for the enactment of a revised law against rape crimes. Johnson-Sirleaf is also leading a crackdown on corruption. For example, some members of the former Transitional Government from 2003-2005, especially its Chairman, Charles Bryant and Minister of Finance, Lusinee Kamara, are currently in court on charges of corruption. In many of these initiatives, Liberian women have self-organized and formed alliances with both local civil society and international organizations to transform the political space, that has given women a more visible role in Liberia's post-conflict development process.

Despite this remarkable story of women's success in Liberia and the euphoria surrounding it, I argue that this seemingly successful political and peace activism by women and the election of a female President is necessary but not sufficient to produce substantial, tangible, positive and sustained development for the majority of Liberian women. I argue that the absence of a strong and capable state with institutions that work is the main reason for the lack of development. In failed states, such as Liberia, where there is little or no state capacity, achieving democratic representation, focusing merely on written laws ("gains on paper) or even having women in top leadership cannot by itself guarantee that all women will benefit economically.

A rights-based approach to state-building then focuses on the creation of new institutions that ensure all classes of women achieve a palpable level of economic and social rights as the basis for development. These rights should include benefits, such as, education, health, housing, food, water, work, and an adequate standard of living. Structuring state-building so that it focuses on the production of such rights will do more in helping to increase women's well being than the current emphasis on political

participation. The fact that women's needs are turned into rights gives them the opportunity to create demand and hold the duty bearers accountable for the realization of those rights. This demand driven approach will create the necessary incentives for state institutions to recreate themselves to serve the population. This demand driven approach also creates new arenas for ordinary people to meaningfully participate in issues that affect their lives instead of leaving it in the hands of so-called political representatives.

While a proposal for state building may appear to many as counterintuitive, yet states should be seen as instruments. They can be put to good or bad use. Researchers, such as Professor Alice Amsden[1] in her work on how some Asian countries achieved economic development and Professor Judith Tendler[2] in her research on government-run development projects in Brazil, have demonstrated that even governments can produce the same kinds of results that neo-liberals have only ascribed to the market, NGOs or civil society.

This thesis then is first, an attempt to tell the story of the successes of Liberian women. In doing so, I draw attention to how they played (and are playing) important roles as civil and political leaders, mediators and agents of reconciliation. The thesis focuses on examples of women's organization that have contributed to a post-conflict transitional process. But I also seek a second purpose. That is to demonstrate how the process of securing development for women may in fact be more complex than current conventional thinking of giving women political participation and passing new women-friendly laws suggest. I show that even in this highly successful Liberian case, women's well being is not necessarily assured by women's increased political responsibility.

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[1] See for example Alice Amsden's Asia's Next Giant: South Korea and Late Industrialization (Oxford, 1989)

[2] See Judith Tendler, Good Government in the Tropics (John Hopkins, Studies in Development, 1998)

8

Consequently, in order for women to experience an improvement in their well being, we need to fall back on strengthening the only institution in most third world countries that present the best option of securing development for all classes of women-the state. I argue that both the experiences and obstacles faced in the Liberian case provide useful lessons and are worth considering in the search for effective stratetegies for securing development for women.

1.1 Methodology

In writing this thesis, I have selected examples and experiences from organizations that were either led by women or work predominantly with women. Since most women's organizations gained prominence during the years of the civil war from 1990-2003, I have focused this thesis on those years. It is based on interviews of some of participants in the women's movement during those years and on reports, books and articles written about their activities in different sources. Even so, it is not a comprehensive account of the activities of the women's movements during those years nor is it intended to detail all of the activities of those organizations upon which it is based. It aims instead to provide examples and experiences of some of the key initiatives undertaken by women's organizations in the struggles for women's equal rights in Liberia in order to illuminate the kinds of challenges and opportunities likely to be encountered in the struggle for women's rights in a post-conflict context. The study will hopefully contribute to answering the critical question of how to actualize substantial changes in the lives of women in a post-conflict context.

In it, I seek to answer questions such as why and how did women mobilize in the way they did. What gains have they scored and what are the implications of those gains

on women's newfound influences on political, economic, and social issues? To the extent that women have been successful, can they bring about the long-awaited relief that many women desire. These questions and my desire, as an African student, seeking real solutions to problems of underdevelopment in Africa led me to this research.

1.2 Thesis Overview

This thesis is presented in four chapters. In chapter one, I present a literature review that sets out the key trends in the way women's development issues have been conceptualized in the development context. I begin by reviewing three theoretical frameworks (WID, WAD, and GAD), which explain women's issues and then I set out the kinds of development strategies that have emanated from these conceptual frameworks. Next, I provide a review of the human rights focused discourse that women's rights advocates have used to argue for a normative legal environment in which women can fight for their rights.

In chapter two, I provide a historical and social context within which to situate the Liberian women's rise to prominence. The historical account set out in chapter two illustrates the unresolved ethnic nature of Liberian politics that laid the foundation of a deep-seated conflict, which eventually plunged the country into a devastating civil war in 1989.

In chapter three, I develop three related case studies around three women-led activist organizations: the Liberian Women Initiative (LWI), the Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET), and the Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia (AFELL). The LWI case is an example of women's self-organizing in the political arena of a post-conflict country. The LWI became popular in the early days of the Liberian civil

war for advocating peace and an end to civil war. One of its members, Ms. Ruth Sando

Perry, eventually became Chair of the Council of State, the collective presidency, which

oversaw the transition from war to peace in 1997. WIPNET is an example of an NGO-led

effort to create the necessary space for war-affected women at the grassroots to politicize

their demand. The group played a similar role as the LWI in 2003, when its Ghandi-

inspired nonviolent protest style played a huge role in putting a human face to the

situation of war and suffering endured by innocent civilians. The third case study on

AFELL explores the role played by an elite group of women lawyers who organized

around issues of rape and indigent children, using as their premise international human

rights provisions. The group has since focused on enacting legislations and on seeking

legal remedy to problems facing women and children. At the end of Chapter three, I

synthesize important lessons from the three cases. I draw attention to the how and why

women mobilized and the strategies they used to reach their goals.

In Chapter four, I explore the impact of the women's rise to prominence on the

political, economic, and social landscape as well as its potentials to actualize

development for women. In this chapter, I conclude that despite the seemingly successful

Liberian case, the lives of women remain the same. I argue that hinging women's

development on political participation is an unrealistic proposition because despite initial

successes, the ethnic nature of Liberia politics makes a more robust policy of increasing

women's representation impractical. I also show that even with a clear advantage of

getting elected, key leaders in the women's movement had a general apathy towards the

legislative elections, showing that women are not necessarily interested in occupying

political positions as much as they are in the provisions of basic social services.

Furthermore, even with a female President and women's leadership in key cabinet positions, the majority of poor women, particularly in rural Liberia continue to suffer. I therefore, conclude that what is needed most in bringing development to women is a state sector that has sufficient scope and strength to provide the much-need services that women need to change their lives around.

2.0 Chapter one: Literature Review

One important milestone in development in the 1970s was the emergence of women as a distinctive category in development discourse (Kabeer, 1994). Kabeer suggests that the main indication of this was the classification by the United Nations (UN) of the various decades of development beginning with the 1960s. Whereas there was no mention of women in the early development decade of the 1960s, by the 1980s, the UN had recognized women as " agents and beneficiaries in all sectors and at all levels of the development process". By the 1990s, the emphasis was empowering women for development, which according to the UN would lead to increase output, greater equity and social transformation (UN, 1989a, p.41 as quoted in Kabeer, 1994).

A related evolution in the development thinking has been a shift from looking at development from a purely economic growth perspective to one of empowerment and political participation. The rationale being that inserting women at the very center of decision making and power would help transform their economic well being. It is in this connection that recent developments in Liberia offer a unique lens to look at women's political participation and women's economic development in tandem. The larger point

being that even when political representation is increased, it doesn't necessarily mean that broader economic dynamics have or will improved.

This literature review then traces the emergence of women as a recognized constituency in development and the changes in policy advise which it engendered. Popular discourse on women's development and efforts to achieve it is therefore a convergence of three important and overlapping movements. The first movement represents an evolution in feminist[3] development theories from a focus on women-specific projects to gender mainstreaming[4] at the program and policy level, and perhaps more importantly from an emphasis on top-down planning to bottom-up development strategies (UNRISD, 1995). The second movement represents the evolution of western policy advice concerning women identified by Buvinic (1983) and Moser (1989) as a fivefold policy approach that includes welfare, equity, anti-poverty, efficiency and empowerment. Buvinic identified the first three, while Moser added the last two. The third is the growth in the influence of the international humans rights movement, particularly the United Nations, in defining a normative and international policy framework focusing on a rights-based approach to women's development. Advocates have used these conventions to voice their demands for women's equal rights. In discussing the literature, I begin with the feminist development theories and then move onto the five policy approaches. A discussion of the rights-based approach follows at the end of this literature review.

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[3] Feminism is a very broad term conceptualizing relations between men and women in society. In general, Feminists question and challenge the origins of oppressive gender relations. Feminists have also proposed different strategies that might change these relationships (Mannathoko, 1991).

[4] Gender mainstreaming refers to the process of making the contribution, perspectives and priorities of both women and men an integral part of the design, implementation, and outcomes of development policies and programs. The goal is to ensure that both women and men benefit equally from the development process.

2.1 Feminist development theories

First, theorizing about women's development is rooted in several feminist development theories[5]. Overall, feminists argue that there are unjust and discriminatory gender relations that work to subordinate women to men. Therefore, feminists seek not only to address this injustice and inequality but also to offer a strong critique of male-dominated institutions, values, and social practices that are oppressive and destructive (Mannathoko, 1991). In explaining why women's subordination is so pervasive, especially in development, feminists have advanced generally three reasons: first, some feminist theorists see women as excluded from development planning and implementation. Second, feminists argue that the impact of patriarchy and the capitalist mode of production undermine women's role, status, and position in society. However, I need to point out here that many African scholars have disputed the notion of patriarchy, arguing that patriarchy and gender are western constructs that are foreign to Africa. Nzegwu (2001) and Oyewumi (1997), for example, contend that gender and patriarchy originate with western European epistemology and misrepresents African women's realities. Oyewumi questions the usefulness of gender as an analytical category and its hegemonic influence on African knowledge production, identity of women, marriage and bride wealth, gender division of labor, women control of property and women's sexuality. They dispute that public/private dichotomy is the basis of inequality between sexes. Steady (1987) has even suggested that the differential valuation between the production and reproduction roles of male and females are not issues in African society.

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[5] For a full discussion of various feminist ideals, please see Grimshaw, J. (1986) Feminists Philosophers, Women's Perspectives on Philosophical Tradition, Wheatsheaf Books, and Judith Lorber: " The Variety of Feminisms and their Contribution to Gender Equality" available at http://docserver.bis.uni-oldenburg.de/publikationen/bisverlag/unireden/ur97/kap1.pdf

And third, feminists suggest that the new international division of labor affects women and men differently, often leaving a negative impact on women. These reasons roughly coalesce with the three theoretical models that have been developed to explain why development affects women and men differently. They are: Women in Development (WID), Women and Development (WAD), and Gender and Development (GAD) (Rathgeber, 1990).

2.1.1 Liberal Feminists and WID

Liberal Feminists[6] proposed the WID framework, which called for the integration of women in development planning. The WID approach saw the problem of women subordination as their exclusion from development programs. As a result, integrating women into such programs was seen as the solution to end women's subordination to men. This effort was aimed at correcting the modernization[7] theory of economic development. This development paradigm sees underdevelopment and poverty as a stage in the development process resulting from the lack of political, social and economic conditions for development to take place. Thus women's subordination within modernization paradigm was judged as "backwardness and primitiveness" of the development process (Connelly et al, 2000; Mannathoko, 1991). They argue that modernization (or westernization) promotes egalitarian societies, leads to female liberation, and increases women's involvement in social and economic life because the

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[6] Liberal feminism argues that women and men are essentially similar, and therefore women should be equally represented in public arenas dominated by men -- work, government, the professions, and the sciences. See Judith Lorber: " The Variety of Feminisms and their Contribution to Gender Equality" http://docserver.bis.uni-oldenburg.de/publikationen/bisverlag/unireden/ur97/kap1.pdf

[7] Modernization theory assumes development to be a linear progression whereby so-called "backward" nations in the third world become developed by adopting western technology, institutions, and beliefs (IDRC, 2000).

benefit of development trickles down to the poor[8]. The modernization paradigm

identified women solely in respect to their roles as wives and mothers and prescribed a

welfare approach to dealing with women issues that was restricted to social welfare

concerns such as nutritional education and home economics (UNRISD, 1995). Little or

no mentioned were made of women's productive roles whether for subsistence or for the

market.

WID advocates were helped by Esther Boserup's (1970) seminal book, *"Women's
Role in Economic Development"*, in which she challenged the modernization

assumptions, particularly its "welfare approach" to women's issues. Boserup argued that

Western notions about "appropriate" female roles had undermined women's traditional

roles in agricultural production because it allowed men to monopolize new technologies

and cash crop production that were associated with the modern sector. This according to

Boserup contributed to the demise of the female subsistence agricultural sector, resulting

in women loss of income, status and power relative to men. Boserup argued to the

contrary that development trickles down to the poor, technologically sophisticated

projects undermined women's economic opportunity and autonomy, particularly in the

third world. She showed that far from creating an egalitarian society, modernization

increases women's economic and social marginality and had disruptive effects on the

sexual division of labor. For example, she argued that modernization drew men away

from production based on family labor and gave them near-exclusive access to economic

and other resources. Boserup concluded that the economic survival and development of

the Third World would depend heavily on efforts to reverse this trend and to more fully

integrate women into the development process.

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[8] Ibid

Using Boserup's contribution, WID advocates denounced development policy as having a narrow view of women's role only as mothers and wives. By emphasizing the difference between men and women in terms of their relative economic contributions, WID advocates placed women's subordination (and by implication, ending that subordination) squarely within an economic framework (UNRISD, 1995). They linked women's subordination to their exclusion from the market place and argued for bringing women into the productive sphere more fully.

Armed with Boserup's work, Liberal Feminist continued to articulate their vision of integrating women in the development process. They succeeded, for example, in pressuring the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to adopt the Percy Amendment[9] in 1973 requiring United States foreign assistance programs to "give particular attention to those programs, projects, and activities that tend to integrate women into the national economies of developing countries"[10]. To increase their commitment to integrate women, governments in developing countries set up women affairs offices and international aid agencies hired WID experts. They also ran programs aimed at increasing women access to education, training, property, credit and employment (Overholt et al, 1984).

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[9] In 1973 the US Congress passed the Percy Amendment (Integrating women into National Economies, Section 113 of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961). This amendment remains in effect and authorizes funding to be used to integrate women into development efforts, with a special emphasis on increasing their economic productivity. At that time, the recognition that women were important economic actors in developing countries was itself revolutionary and the guiding principle of the legislation was to ensure that women were given access to development programs that were commonly designed only with men in mind. The principle of women's inclusion was operationalized with the establishment of the USAID Office of Women in Development in 1974. (Gender Audit, USAID, Tanzania: http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNADH239.pdf, Page 9)

[10] U.S. House of Representatives and Senate (2003) Legislation on Foreign Relations Through 2002, Volume I-A of Volumes I-A and I-B, available at http://www.usaid.gov/policy/ads/faa.pdf, Page 58

The increasing influence of the WID perspective in the 1970s encouraged the declaration of the United Nations' "Decade for Women" in 1975 with the Mexico City conference on the theme "Equality, Development and Peace" (Moser, 1993). Sylvia Chant (2005) has suggested that the WID framework made three important contributions to the efforts to end women's subordination and marginalization: it encouraged focus on women as an analytical and operational category; it helped create separate organizational structures for women, and it helped developed female-specific policies and projects. But critics argue that WID framework had serious shortcomings because it was too wedded to notions of modernization and efficiency and emphasized women's roles as producers while ignoring women's domestic labor (IDRC, 2000). They accused WID advocates for falsely assuming that women-oriented policies would enhance women's efficiency consequently enhancing economic development. They also argued that WID policies rarely addressed questions of women's subordination; often ignored impact of global inequities on women in the developing countries and failed to acknowledge the importance of race and class in women's lives[11].

2.1.2 Radical Feminists and WAD

A related framework, the Women and Development (WAD) was introduced in the late 1970s as an antidote to address weaknesses in the WID paradigm. First, advocates of WAD argued that WID's emphasis on integrating women into a patriarchal world was incorrect. They sought instead to create "women-only" projects (Parpart, 1989; Rothgeber, 1990). This was based on the premise that male-dominated states cannot alter

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[11] Ibid

gender inequities. These advocates were influenced by the rise in dependency[12] theory in Latin America and radical-feminist thinking in the west. Both frameworks emerged in an era of serious challenge to existing power structures and both advocated a degree of separation from sources of power and domination (Connelly et al, 2000). Radical Feminists for example, saw men as the enemy and sought to attack male-dominated institutions. They put sexuality, reproduction and patriarchy at the center of political discussions and argued that "the personal is political" (Mannathoko, 1991). Seen in this light, WAD perspectives offered an antidote to WID's confidence in the utility of male-dominated sates to produce equity for women

The WAD framework also laid emphasis on the distinctiveness of women's knowledge, work, goals and responsibilities. It argued that women have always been important economic actors in development processes. Their work inside and outside the household is critical to the maintenance of society(Mannathoko, 1991). For example, the WAD framework called for the recognition of women as the mainstay of agricultural production in developing countries. But WAD also had its weaknesses. Critics argued that it was too inclined to see women as a homogenous class ignoring differences among women, particularly women's racial and ethnic divisions (Connelly et al, 2000).

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[12]Dependency theory suggests that wealthy nations (in the west) need peripheral group of poorer states in order to remain wealthy. These poorer nations, the theory argued provides among other things, raw material, cheap labor and markets, without which wealthy nations could not survived. Wealthy nations therefore perpetuate this state of dependency through a network of institutions including economics, media, politics, banking, education, etc. For more information on Dependency theory, see for example Vincent Ferraro: "Dependency Theory: An Introduction" available at
http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/depend.htm

2.1.3 Marxist Feminist and GAD

The literature also blames women's subordination on the impact of the capitalist mode of production, patriarchy, and the international division of labor. These explanations for women subordination are rooted in Marxist, socialist-feminist, and neo-Marxists critique of capitalism. According to these frameworks, women reproduce the labor force while men produce commodities in exchange for wages (Gundoz-Husgor, 2001; Connelly, 2000). In other words, women are isolated from production outside the home and are confined to the home. Because of this, women are compelled to rely on the "man of the house" for their living, which marginalizes and limits their autonomy and access to resources[13]. This, according to Marxist is the source of patriarchy.

They also argued that if women choose to work outside the home, they are still expected to fulfill their domestic duties, and so they end up working twice as hard as a man, and usually for a lot less pay. Accordingly, these relationships exploit women as workers in the labor force and use them as a kind of "reserve army" for cheap labor for the market. Marxists argued that in capitalism, the constant search for cheap labor and the manipulation of this reserve labor force keep women in subservient positions at home and at work (Taplin, 1989;Tiano, 1987). Thus capitalism and patriarchy become effective mechanisms for marginalizing and exploiting women workers.

Women subordination is also seen as a result of the new international division of labor. This interpretation of women subordination draws heavily on neo-Marxist theories of development. According to these frameworks, in the new international division of labor, Transnational Corporations (TNCs) seeking cheaper, more disposable or flexible labor supply are transferring low-skill, low-paying jobs to the developing world to be

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[13] Ibid

performed predominantly by women, while high-skill, high paying jobs remains within

developed countries where they are performed by men (Berik, 1987; Standing, 1989).

Thus women are exploited by inclusion and segregation into labor-intensive sectors with

low wages and low-skill with little or no prospect of advancement.

The GAD framework then attempts to respond to these concerns over patriarchy,

capitalism, and the global economy and their impacts on development for women. It

examines women material conditions, class positions, and patriarchal structures

responsible for women subordination. It argues that women experience subordination

according to their race, class, colonial history, culture, and the international economy

(Moser, 1993). The framework makes a distinction between women's biological interest,

which it assumes is homogenous for all women group and gender interests, which it

argues are a socially constructed sets of relationships and material conditions (Connelly

et al, 2000). Gender interests are further divided into two, practical needs and strategic

needs. Practical needs refer to such things as health, water, and education. Strategic needs

deals with changing the status of women, which includes policy and legal measures to

deal with issues such as the gender division of labor, domestic violence, and increased

women's participation in decision making. For example, the GAD framework encourages

women to organize themselves into effective political voice in order to strengthen legal

rights and increase the number of women in decision-making positions (Moffat et al

1991). A number of groups were instrumental in developing this framework. The

Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN)[14], a grassroots third

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[14] The "Who we are" on the DAWN websites describes the organization in the following words: "DAWN began in 1984, on the eve of the international conferences marking the end of the UN Decade for Women,

world organization and socialist-feminists in the West were critical in developing this framework.

2.2 Development Policy Advice and Women's Empowerment

Second, the literature on women's development drawn predominantly from these theoretical models have given rise to a body of policy advice relating to practical development approaches for securing women's practical development needs. As the theoretical models (WID, WAD, and GAD), attempting to explain women's subordination have evolved in response to criticisms, so also have the different practical development advice. This progression has seen the growth of five approaches to securing development for women: welfare, equity, anti-poverty, efficiency, and empowerment approaches (Buvinic, 1983; Moser, 1989).

2.2.1 Welfare Approach

In the years following World War II, development policy followed growth-oriented (trickle-down) strategies while ignoring gender inequities (Mannathoko 1991). In concert with modernization theory, the household was assumed to follow idealized western nuclear family with a male breadwinner and dependent children and women (Connelly et al, 2000). Therefore, in dealing with women's issues, planners focused development interventions on domestic and child-rearing roles of women based on the rationale that motherhood and child rearing were the most important roles for women. As

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when a group of feminists from the South with similar visions prepared a platform document for that event and held a number of workshops at the NGO Forum in Nairobi. DAWN's platform document, development, Crises and Alternative Visions: Third World Women's Perspectives (Monthly Review Press 1987), written by Gita Sen and Caren Grown was a South feminist critique of three decades of development. It highlighted the impacts of four inter-linked and systemic global crises - famine, debt, militarism and fundamentalism - on poor women of the South and offered alternative visions". source: http://dawnnet.org/about.html

a result, various welfare programs intended to help women meet such needs as maternal and child health, and family nutrition were initiated. Consequently, gender based productivity gap between men and women widened with negative impacts on women's status in the economy (Mannathoko, 1991).

2.2.2 Equity Approach

As mentioned earlier, Boserup (1970) made a scalding attack on modernization theory pointing out that conventional economic activity severely underestimated women economic contributions by failing to acknowledge the magnitude and value of women's unpaid work at home and paid work in the modern economic sector. She called for an "equity approach" to development policy, which saw women as economic actors rather than welfare clients. She called for the need to improve women's productivity. A radical orientation in liberal feminism also picked up on Boserup's theme by arguing that the "equal opportunity" argument of liberal feminists ignores structural gender inequities, which leads to marginalization of women in the production and reproduction (Connelly et al, 2000; Mannathoko, 1991). But the equity approach did very little to help end the subordination of women because it focused too much on only reducing income inequality (Mannathoko, 1991). This approach was tied to WID argument for integrating women in the economy. Another critique of this approach was that it was too top-down and did little to empower women to bring about change themselves.

2.2.3 Anti-poverty Approach

The policy advice that made headway in the 1970s was the anti-poverty approach. It was based on the argument that there was a clear link between women and poverty.

Advocates pointed to the disproportionate number of poor female-headed households and their responsibilities for meeting families' basic needs (Muyoyeti, undated). The World Bank helped to popularize this approach when it shifted focus from economic growth *per se* to poverty reduction (Mannathoko, 1991). The outgrowth of such policy was an increased in income generation projects to help women meet these needs. But the anti-poverty approach also had its limitations because it focused very little on issues such as justice and empowerment, while heralding the reduction in inequality[15]. Another critique of this approach was that it took little account of the fact that women targeted for income generation project were already overburdened and saddled with other responsibilities. This approach was connected with the WAD theoretical model.

2.2.4 Efficiency Approach

By the 1980s, The 'World Bank and IMF structural adjustment programs (SAPs) with their emphasis on "getting prices right" dominated the policy agenda (Connelly et al, 2000). Development policy took on an efficiency approach. Hence, SAPs were designed to reduce government expenditure and increase the power of the market. Based on liberal development thinking, advocates assumed that SAPs would lead to economic prosperity, which would benefit women as well as men. But the assumption that increasing women's economic contribution would automatically increase overall efficiency and bring about equity for women proved to be inaccurate once again (Moser, 1989, Elson 1992). Cut backs in social services such as health and education hurt women work and overburdened their productive and reproductive responsibilities. To assuage the impact of the short-run dislocations caused by SAPs, development organizations implemented programs targeted

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[15] Ibid

at vulnerable groups such as women, children, the aged, and the disabled (Connelly et al, 2000). For example, family planning services together with female education and employment were seen as critical to reducing high fertility rates among women, while primary health care suggested for helping to reduce maternal mortality.

2.2.5 Empowerment Approach

The latest incarnation of development policy advice is the "empowerment approach". This approach is similar to the GAD framework with it emphasis on gender division of labor. The empowerment approach was influenced by the World Bank's emphasis on pro-poor growth strategies beginning in the 1990s and the United Nations rights-based approach to development (Connelly et al, 2000). In the 1995 World Development Report (WDR), for example, the World Bank (influenced by the work of Economist Amartya Sen) recognized that human factor was an important dimension to development. It articulated development as enlarging "all human choices not just income". It acknowledged the growing feminization of poverty and stated "poverty has a woman's face-of the 1.3 billion people in poverty, 70 per cent are women". The report called on governments to reform policies and to introduce affirmative actions to promote equality and more access to political and economic opportunities for women.

The 2000 WDR report recognized the institutional nature of women subordination, tracing it to factors such as kinship rules, community norms, legal systems, and public provision. It proposed a three-prong strategy to end women subordination: reforming institutions to establish equal rights and opportunities for women and men; fostering a rights-based approach to development and growth as the

most effective way to reduce gender disparity; and taking active measure to redress persistent inequalities in political voice.

2.3 Rights-based Approach to Women's Development

The struggle to achieve women's development has benefited from efforts to define a normative and international policy framework focusing on a rights-based approach to women's development. The establishment of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in 1946, for example, represents one of the earliest attempts to secure rights for women. In its guiding principles adopted in 1947, the commission affirmed its intention to "... eliminate all discrimination against women in statutory law, legal maxims or rules"[16]. The commission outlined separate international measures to secure political, civil, economic, and social and cultural rights for women. In 1952, the commission drafted the convention on the Political Rights of Women and in 1957, the Convention on the Nationality of Married Women (Galey, 1979).

Out of the United Nations International Women's Year Conference held in Mexico City in July 1975 came the United Nations "Decade for women (1975-1985)" with the themes of equality, development and peace (Connelly et al, 2000). Participants finalized and agreed on several important recommendations including one calling for women's full and equal participation in policy and decision-making and in public life. The mid-decade conference in Copenhagen in 1980 adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). This document, which is sometimes called the International Bill of Rights for Women, defines internationally accepted principles and measures needed to achieve equality between

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[16] UN ESOC, Fourth session, Report (E/281/RN.1/RN.1, 1947), pp. 153-162; 235-240

women and men. Ratified by 165 countries, CEDAW calls on nations to embody

principles of equality in national constitutions, establish legal protection of women's

rights, and abolish existing laws, regulations, customs and practices that constitute

discrimination against women[17]. In 1999, the UN General Assembly adopted the

optional protocol to the convention of the elimination of all forms of discrimination

against Women (CEDAW). This convention provides a channel to registering human

rights violation experienced by women on a gender basis[18].

The Beijing Platform for Action signed by 189 countries at the 1995 UN Fourth

World conference on Women, declared "women's rights as human rights". It calls on the

international community to commit to the full implementation of the rights of women and

of the girl child. It insists that rights for women and girls should be seen as inalienable,

integral and an indivisible part of all human rights and fundamental freedom[19].

Furthermore, a remarkable achievement to address women security took place in the year

2000, when the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1325[20]. This resolution

expresses concern that women and children account for a high proportion of those

adversely affected by armed conflict, including as refugees and internally displaced

persons and are increasingly targeted by combatants and armed elements. It reaffirms the

importance of women's equal participation and full involvement in all efforts to maintain

and promote peace and security, and to increase women's role in decision- making in

conflict prevention and resolution. It also reaffirms the need to implement fully

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[17] See CEDAW articles, available at: http://www.ncwnz.co.nz/documents/CEDAW%20Articles.pdf
[18] See Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (A/RES/54/4), available at http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/protocol/text.htm
[19] See Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Fourth World Conference on Women, 15 September 1995, available at < http://www.unesco.org/education/information/nfsunesco/pdf/BEIJIN_E.PDF>
[20] See United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, available at http://www.peacewomen.org/un/sc/1325.html#Full

international humanitarian and human rights law that protect the rights of women and girls during and after conflicts.

Other major international institutions have joined in this effort by establishing new guidelines for dealing with intrastate conflict. The OECD Development Assistance Committed (DAC), for example, established in 1997 guidelines for including gender analysis in relief and development programming (OECD, 1997). In 1998 it developed guidelines focusing on gender equality and women empowerment (OECD, 1998). And In 2001, it recognized war itself as a gendered activity and called attention to women's multiple roles in conflict (OECD, 2001). Even the World Bank, which mandate excludes it from aspects of peace making and peacekeeping has a framework for women's involvement in post conflict reconstruction. In particular, the bank recognizes the role of women in rebuilding social capital and recognizes women as community leaders who can facilitate the rebuilding process (World Bank, 1998).

Operationally, the UNHCR in 1991 adopted guidelines on protecting refugee women to ensure equitable protection and assistance. The ILO in its guidelines for empowerment and skills training in conflict-affected areas emphasized the need to consider how women and men experience conflict and the impact of conflict on gender relations and identities (ILO, 1998). Under the general rubric of governance, peace, and security, UNIFEM has helped to document the impact of armed conflict on women, improved protection and assistance for women, lobbied for gender perspectives in peace processes and promoted gender justice in post conflict settings (Strickland and Duvvury, 2003).

Judging from the literature review, the main thrust of development for women has undergone a major shift from a welfare approach to one encompassing good governance, human rights, democracy and political participation. Indeed, development has now come to be understood not only as an economic phenomenon but also as a governance, peace, and political issue. This shift in paradigm over the past decades has not had the same effect in every country. The reality may in fact be that depending on where a society was located in the past and is at present in terms of how its historical, economic, and political processes have shaped the kinship structure and social relationship determines the level of development of its women. Re-examining local histories then becomes an important focus if the goal is to understand how women adapt their social and economic life in response to the struggles over the material and cultural conditions of their existence (Hill 1986).

Hill's point is an important point of departure for this thesis. It represents an attempt to study such dynamics using Liberia as a case study. In it, I seek to re-exam local Liberian political and social context as a way of understanding women's recent rise to prominence and of their potential to create lasting transformation of the post-conflict Liberian State. In the next chapter, I provide a brief political and social context in which to understand the case studies on women's political and peace building activities that follow it.

3.0 Chapter two: Liberia, a Historical Overview

Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, the 24th and Liberia first elected woman president was inaugurated on January 16, 2006. Her inauguration followed a national election in October 2005 and a November run-off between her and former soccer superstar George

Weah, which she won by 59.4 percent. As the first woman president, Johnson-Sirleaf represents a remarkable breakthrough by the women movement in Liberia, which had backed her candidacy during the run-off against Weah. This was the first time a female candidate had been chosen by the entire electorate, although this was by no means the first woman leader in Liberia. From August 1996 to July 1997, Senator Ruth Sando Perry chaired the collective presidency, the council of state[21], which oversaw Liberia's transition to democracy after the first civil war in 1997. Even before then several women held key positions in government. But the election of Johnson-Sirleaf was significant given that Liberia had never had a woman elected as head of state and never had the country seen women so roused to elect one of their own. On her way to this historic victory, Johnson-Sirleaf did not hesitate to ride high on the crest of the increasing women activism that had been blowing with remarkable success in Liberia since the early 1990s. During the elections campaigns, her supporters wore T-shirts that declared "All the men have failed Liberia; let's try a woman this time". After she won the election, throngs of supporters filled every street corner singing, "Woman, this is your time" and boasting of having wrestled power from a field of male contenders. The euphoria had been breathtaking, leaving questions of whether women takeover of the Liberian state will help to solve intractable problems of governance and development that have plagued the nation since its inception in 1847.

To be sure, this was not the first time a civil society movement had attracted national interest to a fever pitch. But none of the past groups had succeeded in taking over the state machinery through competitive free and fair elections and in such dramatic fashion as the women had achieved. Since the early 1970s civil society movements have

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[21] The Council of State is discussed in more details in the next chapter.

emerged to campaign for social justice and equality in Liberia. Past experiences have shown that despite the promise of change and a glorious future, most civil society movements in the past have withered away or disaggregated leaving both winners and losers among its ardent supporters. And where they have survived, their influence has only waned as the years have gone by. But before evaluating the status of this newest champion of social justice in Liberia, it is perhaps proper to review a short history of Liberia and the conditions that have given rise to different civil society movements in the past including the women movement of today.

3.1 Liberia's Early Beginning and the Development of Ethnic Politics

Liberia today can trace many of its problems from the beginning. The mission to established Liberia in the 1800s as a home for freed slaves from America was christened from the beginning as a "Back to Africa" campaign[22]. But the African expedition in fact turned out to have been instigated by an unsuccessful slave revolt in Virginia, USA. Many white slave owners in the South blamed freed slaves for the revolt. This encouraged a large number of them to join the American Colonization Society (ACS) not to end slavery *per se* but to get rid of the free black slave population (Brown 1982). Established in 1816, the ACS had been responsible for organizing the trip to Liberia. The goal was once emancipated, freed slaves would move to Liberia. This option was preferred to the alternative of allowing a growing number of free black slaves sitting around in America and demanding rights, jobs, and resources. Henry Clay, Speaker of the

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[22] See Helena Cooper's Talking Point: For Liberia a New Leader, and a Ray of Hope, January 31, 2006 available at http://www.tlcafrica.com/Article_06_ejs_hellencooper_talking_points.htm

United States House of Representatives and one of the founders of the ACS said at the

first meeting:

> "Of all the classes of our population, the most vicious is that of the free colored. It is the inevitable result of their moral, political and evil degradation. Contaminated themselves, they extended their vices all around them, to the slaves, to the whites. .....Every emigrant to Africa is a missionary carrying the credentials in the holy cause of civilization, religion and free institution."[23]

This was the first contradiction of the Liberian experiment. The troublemakers

who needed to be shipped out of the country were going to be good God-fearing men

promoting civilization and free institutions. Unfortunately, Clay's prognosis turned out to

be correct. Both the moral, political and evil degradation, with its source rooted deep in

the oppression of black slaves by whites and the holy cause of civilization and religion

form part of the settlers' agenda. Brown (1941) as cited in Archibald et al (2005)

publication on community driven development in Liberia has written:

> "Thus began in a tangible way, the work of founding an African State with republican politics, slave psychology, caste privileges, Christian religion and western civilization".

The indigenous (or native as they would come to be known) Liberians[24] resisted

the new American colonists on arrival in Liberia, and in the years that followed several

battles were fought between the two sides. But with access to what was then modern

artillery and guns (mainly cannons) and in some cases direct help from the United States

government, the settlers emerged victorious. Shortly after the ACS contingent arrived,

they changed the name of the capital city, Christopolis, to Monrovia, after President

James Monroe of the United States. They called the nation Liberia, Latin for "Land of the

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[23] Ibid

[24] There are 16 language groups that make up the indigenous population in Liberia. These include the Bassa, Belle, Dei, Gbandi, Gio, Gola, Grebo,Mandingo, Mano, Mende, Kissi,Kpelle, Krahn, Kru, Lorma, and Vai

Free." On July 26, 1847, the nation declared independence, with a constitution that borrowed heavily from the American Declaration of Independence.

When they arrived in Africa, the former slaves, set up the same type of repressive society they left behind, occupying the top of the social hierarchy, monopolizing government jobs, education, and managing the economy[25]. Their relationship with native Liberians copied the ones European colonizers had with their subjects in neighboring colonial territories, such as Sierra Leone (under the British) and Cote D'Ivoire (under the French). In these relationships, the interests of the center and the periphery were never harmonized. Instead, there was a limited process of incorporating natives into the ruling class. The resulting political and economic subordination of the dominant indigenous population was further consolidated by the concentration of investment in a modern industrial enclave while the indigenous economy was allowed to atrophy into the traditional sector of a predominantly modernization ethos of development[26]. The rationale for this limited incorporation into the ruling class was simply that without it, ethnic relations would be superimposed on class relations with the class connections becoming highly transparent. But with limited incorporation, ethnic divisions do not necessarily disappear but the class relations is now mystified[27].

The assimilation to a 'civilized' state was therefore controlled in such a way as to require the indigenous population to accept the cultural premises of Americo-Liberians and to renounce the ideological connections with the indigenous majority. Thus the use

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[25]See Jannie DeLombard: Sisters, Servants, or Saviors? National Baptist Women Missionaries in Liberia in the 1920s. The International Journal of African Histories Studies, Vol. 24, N0.2 (1991), pp 323-347
[26] Ibid
[27] Ibid

of the term 'civilized' was politically advantageous to the Americo-Liberians because it allowed them to claim a positively sanctioned status without having to modify their behavior. It also allowed them to separate indigenous sub-elite from the rest of the population. The separation was thought to be necessary because it strengthened the elitist ideology that the indigenous had to constantly pursue (Brown 1982).

Without this assimilation, indigenous Liberians were denied the rights to vote until 1946. Even so, it was only extended to a select few, who owned homes and paid taxes in addition to being adjudged as "civilized" (Pham, 2004). According to Pham, the Code of law promulgated in 1956 denied title to the lands indigenous communities and individuals had occupied even before the arrival of the settlers. The 1956 code stipulated that only when "a tribe shall become sufficiently advanced in civilization," it could "petition the government for a division of tribal land into family holdings." [28]

When President William Tubman, who had ruled the country from 1944 to 1971 died in a London clinic, William Tolbert, his Vice President replaced him. Tolbert inherited a country controlled by his ethnic Americo-Liberian and a modern economy in the hands of foreign investors. The majority indigenous population was excluded from the mainstream politics, business, and education. Tolbert tried to institute various changes in the structure of the economy and political life of the country. For example, he broke away from the anti-communist policies of his predecessor to establish diplomatic relations with the former Soviet Union and China[29]. He renegotiated Liberia's concession agreements that had granted foreign investors important tax benefits. For this purpose he

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[28] The Liberian Code of Law, Chapter 11, Section 60-61
[29] See President William R. Tolbert, Jr. (1971-1980) The preacher-President, available at http://www.liberiapastandpresent.org/WilliamTolbert.htm

declared the concept of 'Humanistic Capitalism'[30]. He also announced policies to improve the living conditions of the majority of the people. His progressive policies included his famous 'Total Involvement for Higher Heights', 'Rally Time', and 'From Matt to Mattresses'. These were all geared towards creating according to him 'A Wholesome Functioning Society' and winning the 'War against Ignorance, Disease and Poverty'[31].

But Tolbert faced opposition from within his own True Whig Party, which accused him of selling out to the indigenous population. Additionally, Tolbert lost credibility by maintaining many of his family members in government. For example, one brother was Finance Minister and another was President Pro-Tempore of the Liberian Senate[32]. Thus, his progressive slogans proved to be bloated rhetoric. In the end, Tolbert's once progressive administration became marred by nepotism, corruption and the continuation of privileges (for a few) and poverty (for the masses)[33]. Tolbert's administration was brutally overthrown by the military in 1980. In the next section, I provide a brief review of the civil war and it impacts on the Liberian women. But first, I will review the status of Liberia women before the civil war.

3.2 Native and Civilized Women in Liberian Society

Just like the rest of the population, Liberian women before the civil war divided into two major categories-'native' and 'civilized'. A woman's status was determined in

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[30] Ibid
[31] Ibid
[32] Ibid
[33] Ibid

part by her place in the structure of the economy. Prior to the civil war, farming and petty trading, for example, were aligned most closely with native women than with civilized women. Civilized women participated in the formal wage economy as teachers, nurses, and other civil servants. Native women prided themselves on being the bearers of Liberian cultural heritage and derive pleasure and positive self-esteem from the roles that the culture gave them (Moran 1990). Similarly, civilized women saw themselves as preservers of western civilization, often times taking on the task of converting the native population to 'civilization'.

Among the native women were two classes: the native farmers and the native petty traders. Among the civilized were also two classes: the elite, urban-based professionals women and the non-elite urban-based (and sometimes) semi-educated women. The professional class among civilized women has always had more education and thus has enjoyed more opportunities for participation in politics and the modern economy. Most semi-educated civilized women were homemakers. Wives of important officials in government benefited from the statuses of their husbands, irrespective of their level of education.

Native female farmers lived in more rural areas while native petty traders lived in peri-urban and urban areas. Native female farmers grew and sold extra crops. From the sale of rice, cash and extra crops, native female farmers obtain cash to pay for consumer items needed by the family, such as seasonings, soap, and clothing (Moran, 1990).

Petty traders[34] in the peri-urban and urban areas perform intermediary roles between native female producers of surplus vegetables and tuber crops and the non-food

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[34] Kaba et al (1982) cited in Moran (1990) suggest that the shift to petty trading by women was due to complementary male labor migration from domestic and subsistence farming to labor wage in the modern

producing population (Moran 1990). They also facilitate the sale of imported and locally

produced non-food items to the agricultural and native population. Hasselman (1979)

cited in Moran (1990) refer to native market women as a "social in-between group",

intermediaries, who mediate between native women and families in rural areas and the

civilized class of the urban milieu. As intermediaries, they are important channels for the

transfer of information, and technology between rural and urban populations. They also

transmit social values in the way they receive, accept, or reject urban influences.

Non-elite civilized women also engage in business activities such as sewing and

baking or generally in producing food items that were clearly considered "western" such

as shortbread, biscuits, cookies, and Kool-Aid. Unlike native women petty traders,

civilized businesswomen did not participate in the daily public/open-air markets. Most

sold their wares in small market stalls in front of their houses or use the services of

mainly foster (ward) children. It was a common practice for non-elite civilized

businesswomen to depend on foster native children, who head-loaded items for sale

around town (Moran, 1990).

Elite, civilized, and urban-based women participated in the formal economy as

professional nurses, midwifes, teachers, secretaries, clerks and other civil servants. In the

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economic sector. Handwerker (1974) also cited in Moran (1990) suggests that the general category of
traders emerged in a context that require money to meet subsistence wants but for which there were hardly
any opportunity of earning money without a skill of some sort. Those unskilled women, who could not find
gainful employment, resorted to becoming petty traders. Moran (1990) for her part has suggested a third
reason. She argued that women move to marketing were an attempt to fulfill women's responsibilities (as
complementary breadwinners for their families) in an urban and semi-urban context. In reality, the reason
for the shift is probably a combination of the above reasons. It does appear however that for whatever
reasons women petty traders chose to make the shift to this sector; they did not consider (at least in pre-war
years) entrepreneurship as a viable vocation for their children. In fact, despite the marked financial
independence of many women petty traders, they still prepared their children to enter what Sidney Mintz
(1971), cited in Moran (1990) described as "the obvious non-manual and low-status slots" within western
civilization by training them into vocations such as nursing and teaching.

past, a significant pool of high profile educated professional women occupied important

positions in government. Most of these women were Americo-Liberians and therefore

faced very little obstacles. Some estimates put women's pre-war participation in

governance at around 25%. Angie Brooks Randolph, for example, became Liberia's

permanent representative to the United Nations and later served as President of the UN

General Assembly in 1967. Mary Antoinette Brown Sherman was President of the

University of Liberia from 1978-1984. Others, such as Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf (current

President of Liberia), Kate Bryant, Florence Chenoweth, Hanna Jones, and Mai Padmore,

became cabinet ministers in government before 1980. Although there has not been an

equal representation of women as men in government, it is however difficult to argue that

women have been excluded entirely in national politics and in other important areas of

service. At the same time, only the elites among women have had the opportunity of

functioning at these very high levels of government.

Thus the situation of Liberian women before the war defies any one single

classification. On the one hand, the resources, which native women use to support their

families, were under their exclusive control. Specifically, many women petty traders were

more in control of their households than most civilized women. They seem the most

independent of all the classes of Liberian women because of their economic means[35].

They were even more socially important when they became sole supporters of their

households and show economic largess towards extended relatives. Many women traders

made powerful alliances with civilized men (and sometimes foreign Lebanese

merchants) holding high positions in the formal economy. Through these linkages and

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[35] Ibid

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patronage, they were able to build diverse, well-financed businesses[36]. In some cases, they exercised political influences with the powerful and the elites.

On the other hand, the civilized woman dependence on her male breadwinner, especially if she was not educated enough to get a job, would contrast with this situation of native women. Here the model of the male breadwinner/female homemaker was similar to western societies. Under this arrangement then, the civilized woman's place was gained through her relationship with her husband or partner. Her primary occupation was that of a homemaker and guardian of civilized standards through socialization of her own and foster children[37].

Much of this influence and practice of the domestication of low skilled civilized women have roots in the work of early Christian missionaries from America, especially black Baptist Christian missionaries who dominated the educational sector in Liberia. Jeannine DeLombard (1991) writing about the gender division of labor between male and female missionaries in the 1920s, describes their typical vocations as follows:

> "Mr. Samuel Gardner, finished engineer and cement work, and instructor in blacksmithing, etc., also a practical agriculturist; Mr. Frank Goll, carpenter and native interpreter; Mr. W.A. Corbin, Instructor in wood work, boat building and saw mill manipulation; Rev. J.C. Caston, General Superintendent

> Mrs. E.F. Butler, assistant manager, general instructor in sewing and housekeeping; Miss Lula Cooper, musician and teacher; Mrs. Frank Goll, assistant teachers; Mrs. W.A. Corbin, Kindergarten instructor"

Further quoting a letter written by Sarah C. Willianson, a Baptist woman missionary on Suehn Mission, DeLombard writes:

> "I have been teaching my girls to crochet, knit, handwork, hemstitch and make their own clothing...now my boys! Yes, I love them too but I can't help loving

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[36] ibid
[37] Ibid

the girls best, because I understand them better. My boys have worked so hard to make our campus beautiful.... The boys put in the potato farm...they can drill like real soldiers..."

It probably is not unrealistic then to assume from this typical division of labor that missionary women were supposed to teach sewing and housekeeping to the girls indoors, while outdoors, missionary men taught the boys to farm and to build buildings and boats. The most powerful position of General Superintendent was reserved for a man (DeLombard, 1991).

Consequently, civilized women, who did not have the education and skills to secure a job in the wage sector were the worst affected in this status divide between native women and civilized women. By their status as civilized women, they were barred from businesses opportunities opened to native women petty traders and from providing for their own substance through farming as native non-market women would (Moran 1990).

But this state of ethnic politics and of the Liberian *status quo* that had been held in place for more than 150 years by Americo-Liberians was about to be changed by the devastating civil war. This is the subject of the next section.

3.3 Entrenched Ethnic Politics and the Outbreak of Civil War in   Liberia

In many ways, the Liberian civil war took a toll on the lives of women. Rape and torture are life-threatening experiences. But it was under such an extenuating conditions of war, outlined in this chapter that women' voices, roles and contributions have had their greatest potential. Indeed the situation of war provided the framework under which Liberia's continuing struggle for social and economic development and the crisis of

confidence between the government and its people since the founding of the country were finally exposed on a bigger stage. This section provides a brief account of the events that characterized Liberia's fourteen years civil wars.

In the early morning hours of April 12, 1980, army personnel under the leadership of Samuel K. Doe staged a bloody coup[38]. The first truly indigenous Liberian president, from the ethnic Krahn group took charge of managing the state. Doe's forces executed President William R. Tolbert and 13 of his regime officials, mostly Americo-Liberians. Doe's People's Redemption Council (PRC) suspended the constitution and assumed full legislative and executive powers, thus ending Americo-Liberian political domination. Other leaders of the coup included Sergeant Thomas Weh-Syen, named Vice Head of State and Sergeant Thomas Quiwonkpa, "Strongman of the Revolution" named Commanding General of the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL). People of power, wealth and influence, who were lucky to be alive, were relegated to the bottom rung of the ladder. The intent was to right the wrongs caused by the injustice of more than a century and half. The ills that kept society backwards would now have to be eradicated, thus giving birth to a new order in the life of the nation.

In July 1984 Doe's government issued a new constitution that allowed the return of political parties outlawed since 1980. In 1985, Doe held elections in which his National Democratic Party of Liberia (NDPL) won. The NDPL captured 73 out of 90 seats in the National Assembly election. But local politicians and the international community accused him of fraud and of rigging the elections. In the period following the 1985 elections, there were widespread human rights abuses, corruptions and ethnic

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[38] For a detailed account of the overthrow of the government, see, for example, Global Security.org http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/liberia-1989.htm

tensions. Doe increasingly surrounded himself and the military with his ethnic Krahn

people. His military operatives became increasingly brutal causing several ethnic tensions

and hostilities[39].

By this time the native experiment too was proving to be a mirage. On November

12, 1985, former Commanding Gen. Thomas Quiwonkpa, who had earlier been exiled for

his alleged role in a plot to overthrow the government, invaded Liberia and nearly

succeeded in toppling the government. Members of the Krahn-dominated AFL repelled

Quiwonkpa's attack and executed him in Monrovia. Doe's government launched a bloody

purge against the Gio and Mano ethnic groups in Quiwonkpa's Nimba County, raising

alarm about genocide against the Gio and Mano.

By 1989, nearly a decade after President Tolbert and his officials were executed,

not much had changed. Corruption was back, definitely in much greater strength than

pre-1980. In time, the native too had learned to be cold-blooded masters, silencing all

dissenting voices and using national wealth for personal and ethnic patronage. Native

power had proven incapable of changing rules first shaped by domestic slavery and

sustained by a culture of impunity. If anything, natives were perhaps even more brutal.

Sadly, by this time respect for the rule of law had outlived its significance, giving way to

chaos. Jeremy Levitt (2005) cited in J. Peter Pham (2006) has observed:

> "Doe's native regime ... failed to progressively reconfigure let alone overhaul
> Liberia's sociopolitical order. It rather widened preexisting fissures and sent the
> country spiraling downward into an abyss of darkness from which it has yet to
> recover. The outcome of Doe's rule may signal the extent to which
> authoritarianism, corruption, ethnic divisions, and elitism have been entrenched
> into the Liberian body politic and wider cultural fabric. Hence it may be asserted

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[39] Ibid

that while the 1980 coup brought about the (short-lived) ethnic transformation of Liberia's body politic, it did nothing to reconstruct its constitution of order or fundamentally enhance the quality of life of the Liberian masses. In this sense, the Doe episode demonstrates that majority rule, whether it be settler or native Liberian, is not synonymous with democratization"[40].

What followed Doe's brutal management of the country was civil war[41] in which devastation and lawlessness ensued, including the execution of President Doe himself, the death of more than 200,000 others and the rape and torture of the civilian population. Nearly a million people were left displaced in open shells, displaced people's camps and refugee camps in neighboring countries. The new savior, who masterminded this new order was street smart and articulate Charles Taylor, an Americo-Liberian. His firebrand leadership style appealed to the Gio and Mano ethnic groups seeking revenge on Samuel Doe for his killing of one of their own, one-time strongman Thomas G. Quiwonkpa and for his numerous massacres of citizens from Nimba County. With the passage of time, many young Liberia filled the ranks of his National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), a ragtag army of marauding gangsters. His program was to engineer the rebirth of the nation, doing away with anything that resembled the old order and bringing in the new, the promise of prosperity for the people and greatness for the country. Instead it was hunger and deprivation for ordinary Liberians. People lost their dignity and respect for the government.

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[40] Jeremy I. Levitt, The Evolution of Deadly Conflict in Liberia: From "Paternaltarianism" to State Collapse 203 (Carolina Academic Press, 2005).

[41] For a analysis of the Liberian civil war, see for example Ademola Adeleke, The Politics and Diplomacy of Peacekeeping in West Africa: the ECOWAS Operation in Liberia ; in The Journal of Modern African Studies (Cambridge) 33,4, December 1995, p. 569-593; Margart Vogt (ed.), The Liberian Crisis and ECOMOG: a bold attempt at regional peacekeeping (Lagos, 1992) ; David Wippman, Enforcing the Peace: ECOWAS and the Liberian civil war in Lori Damrosh (ed.) Enforcing Restraints: collective intervention in internal conflicts (New York, 1993).

Barely a year into the Liberian civil war, the terror of various warring factions had fallen ominously on various communities in Liberia. The war, which started in Nimba County in 1989 had quickly escalated and took on an alarmingly tribal nature. First, it was Doe and his Krahn dominated army (with alleged sympathy from the Mandingoes), who massacred ethnic Gio and Mano. In return, Charles Taylor's NPFL (made predominantly of Gio and Mano) massacred Krahn and Mandingo civilians. With much of the country under his control, Taylor hurried to set up his own National Patriotic Reconstruction Assembly Government (NPRAG), based in Gbarnga, in central Liberia, while his breakaway rival, the Independent NPFL, led by Prince Yormie Johnson, took control of much of the capital[42].

In August 1990, the Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS) monitoring force, ECOMOG, with the strength of 2,500 men, entered Monrovia with the agreement of both President Doe and Prince Johnson[43]. Taylor rejected ECOMOG's intervention, arguing that it shored up Doe's tottering regime and denied him the position of power he had earned. His forces attacked ECOMOG as they landed in Monrovia[44]. In that same month, ECOWAS called a meeting of prominent Liberian political and civil society leaders in the Republic of Gambia. As expected, Charles Taylor's NPFL refused to attend but participants at the meeting selected Dr. Amos Sawyer, former head of the Liberian People's Party, as President of an Interim Government of National Unity

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[42] Liberia Assessment, Version 4, September 1999; Country Information and Policy Unit, Home Office, Country Assessment. Available at
http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ERO/records/ho415/1/ind/lib4.htm#siegemonrovia

[43] Ibid
[44] Liberia's Path from Anarchy to Elections; Current History, May 1998, vol. 97, no. 619, pp. 229-233, available at http://www.brook.edu/views/articles/lyons/199805.htm

(IGNU). The installation of Sawyer in November 1990 constituted a de facto divide of the country into two parts: Sawyer led IGNU in Monrovia and Taylor led NPRAG in what was then known as Greater Liberia[45] or "behind the line".

Meanwhile, the remnants of Samuel Doe's Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) were encamped after the October 1991 Yamoussoukro peace agreement. The Independent NPFL of Prince Johnson surrendered to ECOMOG and was subsequently dissolved in September 1992. But in September 1991, ULIMO, a group comprised of Doe supporters and ex-AFL soldiers launched an attack on NPFL-held territory in northwestern Liberia. ULIMO's attacked led to a shattered ceasefire and a lost of territory by Tayor's NPFL[46]. Taylor retaliated with his own offensive on Monrovia in an operation he codenamed octopus in October 1992. To contain the NPFL advance, ECOMOG entered an alliance with both ULIMO and the AFL remnants, which had been effectively confined to barracks since November 1990.

In September 1993, a UN Security Council Resolution 886 established an expanded ECOMOG and a UN Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL), to monitor the Contonou peace accord, which called for a UN-sponsored ceasefire, the disarmament of all combatants, the establishment of a transitional government and eventually, nationwide elections. Despite initial obstacles, in March 1994, the Liberian National Transitional Government (LNTG I) also known as Council of State, with representations from all factions was formed. Headed by Professor David Kpomakpor, the Council of State was installed on March 7, 1994[47]. But soon after this, fighting broke out again only this time

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[45] Ibid
[46] See Liberia First Civil war 1989-1996, available at http:// www. globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/liberia-1989.htm
[47] Ibid

within the ULIMO and NPFL establishments, causing breakaway factions in each group. In March 1994, ULIMO split between its Mandingo wing, led by Alhaji Kromah (ULIMO-K), and its Krahn wing, led by Roosevelt Johnson (ULIMO-J)[48]. The Liberian Peace Council, another Krahn-based faction, led by George Boley, sprang up and controlled areas in the southeast. Taylor's NPFL also split in September 1994 with a renegade faction, the NPFL Central Revolutionary Council, headed by Taylor's one-time defense spokesman, Thomas Woewiyu and other allies including Samuel Dokie and Laveli Supuwood[49]. The plethora of factions and rivalries made reaching a negotiated settlement more difficult.

On December 12, 1994, negotiations between the various warring factions led to the signing of another accord, the Akosombo II or Accra Clarifications under the leadership of President Jerry Rawlings of Ghana. But the ceasefire did not hold. In February 1995, fighting between the factions resumed. Yet another peace agreement was signed in Abuja, Nigeria, in August 1995[50]. Another Council of State (LNTG II) comprising of representatives of all the major warring factions in Liberia was constituted and headed this time by Professor Wilton Sankawulo. Again, there were some disagreements among the warring factions about the distribution of portfolios within the government. But at the heart of much of the difficulties in making the transition to normalcy was the fact that factional leaders profited from the war and risked losing power and wealth in any peace agreement. Taylor, for example, ran his own currency and banking system, radio network, and international trade in diamonds, gold, rubber,

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[48]See Liberia's Path from Anarchy to Elections; Current History, May 1998, vol. 97, no. 619, pp. 229-233, available at http://www.brook.edu/views/articles/lyons/199805.htm
[49] Ibid
[50] The Liberia Post, chronology, available at http://liberian.tripod.com/Post22.html

and timber. He therefore had no interest in cooperating with any agreement that would put him out of business, as were the other warlords[51]. Once the war started, the warlords found wealth in maintaining their own businesses in the extraction and sale of Liberia's primary export product. Over time, the war was increasingly about maintaining control of economic assets such as mines and ports that served to finance and sustain the armed factions[52]. Timber and rubber, for example, are among Liberia's main export items, bringing in on average annual revenues of $85 million and $57 million respectively[53]. Even ECOMOG participated in the market of looted and expropriated goods, perpetuating the war economy that allowed the factions to exist[54].

In February 1996, events in Monrovia took a nasty turn when the leadership of ULIMO-J ousted Roosevelt Johnson. Soon after that, men loyal to Roosevelt Johnson were reported to have killed his replacement, prompting a warrant from the Liberia Ministry of Justice for Johnson's arrest in connection with the murder. An attempt by Taylor, with the support of Alhaji Kromah's ULIMO-K, to implement the arrest warrant led to intense fighting in Monrovia during April 1996. Johnson in turn received support from the Liberia Peace Council (LPC) (another Krahn faction) of Dr. George Boley. The confrontation led to the destruction of Monrovia and to the death of approximately 3,000 people including several hundreds from starvation and disease.

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[51] Liberia's Path from Anarchy to Elections; Current History, May 1998, vol. 97, no. 619, pp. 229-233, available at http://www.brook.edu/views/articles/lyons/199805.htm
[52] Ibid
[53] See Liberia - First Civil War - 1989-1996, GlobalSecurity.org, Available at http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/liberia-1989.htm
[54] [54] Liberia Assessment, Version 4, September 1999; Country Information and Policy Unit, Home Office, Country Assessment. Available at http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ERO/records/ho415/1/ind/lib4.htm#siegemonrovia

Another meeting of the warring factions in Abuja in August 1996 approved a third reconstituted Council of state (LNTG III). A woman, Ruth Perry, a Senator in the previous Doe regime, headed the leadership council this time. The Abuja II accord provided for an immediate ceasefire, disarmament of all combatants and nationwide elections to take place in May 1997. The LNTG III headed by Madam Ruth Perry became the most successful of the all the previous arrangements. Under her leadership, Presidential and legislative elections were held in July 1997. Charles Taylor won by a landslide in a vote that was declared by the international community as free and fair.

3.4 Regional Dimensions of the Liberian Civil War

The involvement of regional actors had a dual effect on the Liberian conflict. Their intervention helped both to prolong and to end the Liberia civil war. ECOWAS' strategy of resolving the Liberian crises consisted of a two-pronged approach of making and enforcing peace (Adeleke, 1995). Making peace involved negotiations and arbitration while enforcing peace included the deployment of 3,000 multinational forces. Previously, member states of ECOWAS had signed two protocols; the 1978 Protocol on Non-aggression requires member states to respect the sovereignty of the other. A second protocol signed in 1981, relating to Mutual Assistance on Defense dealt with issues of external aggression against a member state or an internal conflict that had the potential of endangering the peace and security of the sub-region. This Protocol empowers ECOWAS to initiate armed or collective intervention to counter such threat[55]. This latter protocol and the worsening humanitarian crisis provided the justification for the intervention of

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[55] See Comfort Ero, ECOWAS and the Sub-regional Peacekeeping in Liberia, available at http://www.jha.ac/articles/a005.htm

the sub-region. Even so, ECOWAS lacked the institutions and appropriate frameworks to implement such an intervention. The Standing Mediation Committee[56] created by the Heads of States to act on their behalf adopted the entire recommendations of the Interfaith Mediation Committee (IFMC), a group of Liberian Christian and Moslem leaders, who had been trying for months to mediate between the various warring groups. These recommendations amongst other things called for the setting up the ECOMOG ceasefire-monitoring group, a broad-based interim government made up civilian politicians, the holding of elections, and the exclusion of leaders of warring factions from any interim arrangements[57].

A second factor that complicated the ECOWAS mission was the division between some of its English-speaking members, Nigeria and Sierra Leone and its French-speaking members especially the Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso. The Nigerian leader, Ibrahim Babangida had been a good friend of Liberia's Samuel Doe. Doe had named a Graduate School of International Relations and a highway in honor of Babangida. President Joseph Momoh of Sierra Leone was both a good friend of Samuel Doe and a personal friend of Babangida, with whom he had taken military training at the Nigerian Defense Academy in Kaduna, Nigeria. Taylor had argued that Nigeria's leading role in the formation of ECOMOG was meant to prop up the Doe regime, and thus justified his rejection of the ECOWAS arrangement for that reason. Presidents Felix Houphouët-Boigny of the Ivory Coast and Blaise Campaore of Burkina Faso questioned the legality of Nigeria's

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[56] The committee members included The Gambia, Ghana, Mali, Nigeria, and Togo. Guinea and Sierra Leone were selected as observers.
[57] Ibid, note 55

involvement. But others[58] argue that establishing ECOMOG was because of Nigeria's

economic and security interest in the region. As the dominant military power, Nigeria

could not afford to remain indifferent to trouble fermenting in its own backyard,

especially when at least 700 of its own citizens had been killed[59] while seeking refuge at

the Nigerian embassy in Monrovia. But to deflect some of the criticisms, Nigeria allowed

a Ghanaian general to lead the inaugural ECOMOG peacekeeping troops that went to

Liberia in August 1990[60].

On the other hand, support for the NPFL by the French block was not without its

personal connections. Both Felix Houphouët-Boigny and Blaise Campaore had personal

scores to settle against Doe. During the 1980 coup, Doe had killed Felix's son-in-law,

Adolphus Tolbert and his father, the late Liberian President, William R. Tolbert Jr.

Campaore, who married Adolphus' widow was encouraged by his father-in-law to

support the rebel cause. Compaore in turn introduced Taylor to the Libyan leader Colonel

Ghadaffi, who had interest in creating and supporting an 'anti-imperialist coalition'

against the West and the United States in particular, and to extend his influence in Sub-

Saharan Africa[61]. The difference between the two blocks hampered ECOMOG's peace

enforcement mandate in early years of the Liberia Conflict.

The impasse to implementing the Liberian peace process appeared to have been

removed when the Prince Johnson wing of the NPFL captured and killed Doe in

September 1990. The charge that Nigeria was trying to support a tottering regime could

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[58] See for example, Ademola Adeleke, The Politics and Diplomacy of Peacekeeping in West Africa: the ECOWAS Operation in Liberia; in The Journal of Modern African Studies (Cambridge) 33,4, December 1995, p. 569-593;
[59] Ibid
[60] Ibid
[61] Ibid, note 55

no longer hold. Shortly after that and under the Chairmanship of Abdou Diouf, President

of Senegal, Mali and Senegal sent troops to join the ECOMOG peace mission while

Ivory Coast, Guinea Bissau, the Gambia, Senegal and Togo became members of the

ECOWAS Standing Mediation Committee of five. In the years that followed, there would

be several peace accords providing for the disarmament of combatants[62]. But Taylor

refused to cooperate, prompting the proliferation of multiple warring factions. His refusal

to disarm to ECOMOG also created the need for setting up a 300-member United Nations

Observer Mission and the expansion of ECOMOG troops to include the Organization of

African Unity (OAU) troops from Tanzania, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. But still the goal of

disarming warring factions, especially Charles Taylor's NPFL remained elusive[63].

By 1994, several of the countries in the sub-region had experienced changes.

Nigeria was in the throes of a political crisis with the nullification of general elections

results by Babangida prompting a military take over by General Sani Abacha. Houphouet

Boigny had died, and military officers, who served in the ECOMOG troops in Liberia,

had overthrown Dawda Jawara of Gambia. Ghanaian President Jerry Rawlings had taken

over as ECOWAS chairman. A new Akosombo agreement was about to be signed by

Liberia's warring factions. But the new agreement was different from all the previous

ones in one significant aspect. The principle that no leader of a warring faction would be

rewarded with a political office in the transitional period, and that they had to seek power

through the general elections would now be changed[64]. The new agreement drawn up

under the direction of Ghanaian authorities would now allow leaders of warring factions

to participate directly in the transitional phase. The Ghanaian justified this change on the

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[62]Ibid, note 58
[63] Ibid
[64] Ibid

grounds that it was the only way to secure effective disarmament, which had been the biggest stumbling block to ending the conflict. But it would take two more agreements before peace could return to Liberia[65]. It turned out that Taylor's suspicion of Nigeria's true intention became the final obstacle that had to be cleared. The two met in a private meeting followed on by the Abuja accord mediated by Abacha and Rawlings that included other Liberian warring factions and political leaders[66]. These meetings laid the foundation that ended the Liberian first civil war in 1997.

At the international level, United States preoccupation with the Gulf War and NATO strikes on Serbian positions in Bosnia-Herzegovina took attention away from the Liberia conflict. The UN humanitarian intervention in Somalia and the Rwandan genocide also took away attention from the crisis in Liberia. Earlier, Liberians had hoped that the United States would take a more proactive role in resolving the Liberian conflict. Some observers argued that given the historical ties between the two countries, if the United States had taken a central role as the British did in Sierra Leone, the conflict in Liberia would have ended earlier than it did. But unlike Kuwait and the war against Iraq, Liberia was no threat to America's strategic interest. The United States took the position that the Liberia war was an African problem that needed African solutions[67]. Instead, the United States and other Western countries provided funding and logistics support to the ECOMOG peace operations.

3.5 The Impact of the Liberian Civil War

As in many other countries in Africa, the war in Liberia was rooted in unresolved historical disputes, compounded by economic factors and proliferation of arms in the

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[65] Ibid
[66] Ibid
[67] The Economist, 21 November 1992, p.49

country. With a landscape crowded with warlords, state, and non-state actors, disenfranchised youth all pitched in a battle for control of resources, the Liberia conflict became very complex. Meanwhile throughout the various broken agreements, basic survival was the main issue that the embattled civilian population faced. Livestock, including chickens, pigs, goats, and food had disappeared from every city, town and village. Entire populations had been uprooted and the starving and hungry relied on wild fruits. Families were often separated behind various enemy lines with no means of mobility. Despite the many peace conferences held earlier, very little was happening for the civilian population. Indeed, women and children, civilians and the innocent bore the brunt of the war. The abuse of women and girls, for example, were widespread. They suffered rape, forced pregnancy and prostitution, torture and mutilation of their genitals. With the social fabric of the nation ripped apart by extreme violence and destruction, the precarious humanitarian situation gave rise to many civil society organizations, all attempting to end the Liberia Civil. In the next section, I provide a brief overview of the history of civil society in Liberia of which the women movement has come to play an important part.

3.6 Civil Society and the Campaign to End Liberia's Civil War

The civil society movement in Liberia has grown out of the need to address social, political and economic injustice as summarized in the previous sections. Opposition to Americo-Liberian monopoly of political power and control of the economy set the stage. The earliest actors from the 1950s-1970 were membership-driven organizations. These included, for example, student unions and teachers' associations advocating for their own rights and privileges. Even the women had an umbrella

organization, the Women Development Association of Liberia. Most organizations (for example, medical associations and religious institutions) had women's wings or auxiliaries attach to them. But none of these were involved in any large scale organizing activity that went beyond the immediate concerns of their respective groups or associations.

However, by the 1970s political movements against injustice and poverty, such as the Progressive Alliance of Liberia (PAL) and the Movement for Justice in Africa (MOJA) were organized. Togba Nah Tipoteh, an Economics Professor founded MOJA in 1973. Other prominent members were Professor Amos Sawyer, former Interim President and current Chairman of the Governance Reform Commission and H. Boima Fahnbulleh, former Minister of Foreign Affairs and current National Security Advisor to President Johnson-Sirleaf. Using a pan-African platform of anti-colonialism, MOJA mobilized material support for the liberation movements in Angola and South Africa (Toure, 2002). At home MOJA called for the nationalization of Liberia's major enterprises, including the large landholdings of the country's ruling classes, and the punishment of corrupt government officials. MOJA also operated non-profit businesses and agricultural cooperatives as well as other social services under the umbrella of its SUSUKUU non-profit business affiliate. SUSUKUU received primary funding from agencies in Germany, Holland, and Canada (Pham, 2004).

Gabriel Baccus Matthews and a group of Liberian scholars and students living in the United States spearheaded the organization of PAL in 1975. Matthews had been Liberian Vice-consul in the United States but resigned his job to dedicate more time to political activism. PAL advocated a rapid political reform, the adoption of socialism, and

an activist pan-African foreign policy. Together both PAL and MOJA and a number of

allied professional organizations, and student groups pressed for political reforms. The

situation got out of control in 1979, when President Tolbert's plan to increase the price of

rice, Liberia's main staple diet from $22 per hundred-pound bag to $30 was opposed by

PAL. PAL organized a protest on April 14 that resulted in the death of several people

after police fired on the crowd. By 1980, the tension between these political forces and

the government had grown more acrimonious leading to many violent demonstrations

and rallies. The government responded to these events with imprisonments of pro-

democratic advocates in order to silence their call for equal rights and justice for all. The

military seizing the opportunity of the political vacuum created, overthrew the

government in a bloody military coup d'état.

After the coup, there was a brief cooperation between the ruling military regime

and some civil society actors; particularly ranking members of MOJA and PAL were co-

opted in the government. But this arrangement was short lived. After 1983, the civil

society movement disintegrated after a fallout with the military. The military in turn

clamped down on all forms of civil associations and in some cases brutally murdered

those it believed to be potential opposition figures. The continuing political and economic

injustice led to an eventual civil war in 1989 that I have chronicled above.

Since 1991, the face of civil society in Liberia has changed dramatically. Liberian

civil society has come to be represented by a broad spectrum of non-governmental

organizations, community groups, women's organizations, faith-based organizations,

professional associations, trade unions, self-help groups, social movements, coalitions

and advocacy group. Most of these groups were formed in response to humanitarian

catastrophe created by the war. Faith-based organizations, for example, have historically been prominent in providing educational and health services. These interventions only increased during the war. Yet many civil society organizations were forced to take on new roles and responsibilities thrust on them by the war. During the early days of the civil wars, for example, Liberia Council of Churches (LCC) and the National Muslim Council of Liberia (NMCL) formed the Inter-faith Mediation Committee (IFMC). Through the work of the committee, the two religious groups sought an end to the crisis by organizing a number of mediation meetings among the different warring parties. The Committee's proposals for peace were adopted and articulated as an ECOWAS peace plan for Liberia in early 1991. When subsequent peace agreements rewarded warring factions with positions in government in exchange for disarmament, the committee (with the support of other groups) vehemently opposed these moves by staging successful stay-home actions in 1995 and 1996. The IFMC also organized the Campaign for Disarmament Committee, a consortium of civil organizations, whose purpose was to encourage fighters to disarm. IFMC framework helped to avert a disintegration of the conflict into a religious one.

Human rights organizations and the women's movements also took front stage in efforts to end Liberia's war. Human rights organizations organized in response to the widespread human rights violations carried out by warring groups, such as rape, torture, and massacres. The Catholic Justice and Peace Commission (JPC) and the Center for Law and Human Rights (CLHRE) were among the prominent human rights organizations. Human rights organizations were particularly new additions to the growing field of civil society in Liberia. They called for the respect of human rights and

constitutionalism. They also provided legal aid to victims of human rights abuses. The women's movement, which is the subject of this thesis, grew in influence especially during the period of the war. The women focused on the plight of women and children, drew attention to the crimes committed against women and children, such as rape and mass recruitment of child soldiers. Women became influential and powerful voices in promoting peace building, including conflict mediation and resolution. Women also influenced national policy by successfully lobbying for the enactment of a series of laws intended to improve the welfare of women and children such as the acts creating the ministry of gender and an inheritance law for women in customary marriages. It is to these activist and development roles of three of the key players in the women's movement, the LWI, WIPNET and AFELL that we now turn.

4.0 Chapter 3: The Rise of Women's Peace and Political Activism

At the May 1995 regional mediation committee's meeting on Liberia's protracted civil conflict in Abuja, Nigeria, the Liberian women slipped in two of their members to petition the Leaders of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The women articulated their concern about the mounting wave of killings and destruction that had engulfed Liberia and that had left deep rift among Liberians. They expressed grief at the number of deaths of innocent civilians, many of them women and children. In their petition, they addressed the grievances of the nation and its fears and demanded in clear and concrete terms an end to the senseless war and pillaging of the entire country. They repeated their demand that there should be no elections unless total and complete disarmament was attained. The women also made clear their desire to be involved in the

process of political decision-making and in sharing in the task of national development.

Count 5 of their recommendations to the West African heads of states read as follows:

> "We hereby reiterate our demand that the women of Liberia be included in all discussions on matters concerning the state and the welfare of the people. Our lack of representation in the ongoing peace process is equivalent to the denial of one of our fundamental rights: the right to be seen, be heard, and be counted. This [denial] also deprives the country [of] access to the opinions of 51% percent of its human resources in solving the problems, which affect our lives as a people"[68]

By this request, the Liberian women were attempting to achieve two goals in one battle-peace and national reconciliation on the one hand and women inclusion in national development on the other. While the women's commitment to national peace was clear, they were also proposing an agenda of gender equality and social justice. In view of the history of the country, such a bold move on the part of the women was a radical departure from previous activities, which restricted women largely to social welfare issues. In the remaining of this chapter, I will focus on three of the key women organizations involve in post-conflict peace and development in Liberia. In section 4.1, I will present the case of the LWI. The WIPNET case will be presented in 4.2 and the AFFELL case will be presented in section 4.3.

4.1 Case Study: Liberian Women Initiative (LWI)

The LWI was formed in January 1994 as a response to the continuing stalemate in the peace process. It represented a drastic departure from the relief activities that had occupied many Liberian women up to that point. Mary Brownell, a retired teacher and progenitor thought it was intolerable for women to keep silent while most of the populations suffer at the hands of a few warlords, who kept dragging their feet in

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[68] Liberian Women Peace Makers, Fighting for the right to be Seen, Heard, and Counted: African Women and Peace Support Group, 2004,

implementing the Akosombo Peace agreement, signed in Ghana. She described the

formation of the LWI as the beginning of an inclusive peace movement.

"...the women and children were actually the victims of this civil crisis in Liberia. I saw other women's groups engaged in relief activities, taking food and clothes to displaced people. But I said that we, the women should do a little more than that because there were still atrocities all around... And so, this wild thought came to me that instead of sitting down and saying the men should play the major role [in the political peace process], we women should do something also, because they were the ones who brought about the war. Even though we are the weaker sex, [with] voices joined together as one we could make an impact on the Liberian society and international community.... So we called a mass meeting on February 2, 1994, for women from all walks of life, regardless of where they came from, their ethnic background or religious affiliation. And so all these women came to the city hall...to form this pressure group or this movement, to help in the peace process. We did not have guns, but we felt that we the women...needed to do something[69]".

Brownell's idea of a women pressure group to speak out against the war sparked

interest from many of her colleagues. They subsequently had a series of organizing

meetings, with the first taking place on February 2, 1994. The second took place on

February 4th to finalize a draft position statement and the third on February 9th, to plan the

circulation of the paper. In their position statement, the group resolved to take a unified

stance on the necessity for peace in Liberia and adopted as their theme, "disarmament

before elections". The strongly worded statement they issued later read in part:

"We the women of Liberia are the mothers of the land. We feel the joys and sorrows of this land in a special way because we are women. Not only do we represent one half of the population, but we also feel a special sense of responsibility for our children, our husbands and our brothers who make up the other half of the population. We take care of the society. We soothe the pains. We are the healers and peacemakers. We call on all women of Liberia at home and abroad to unite and join our efforts in aiding the peace process in Liberia clear its final hurdle. The struggle for survival as a nation and as a people is presently at a

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[69] Liberian Women Peace Makers, Fighting for the right to be Seen, Heard, and Counted: African Women and Peace Support Group, 2004, P.17

delicate and crucial stage. For the past four years, we have been killed, raped, starved to death, misused and abused. We have witnessed the horror of having our children, our husbands, our fathers and other relatives killed and maimed before our very eyes. We have experienced starvation to the point of becoming walking skeleton. We have been stripped of our dignity as human beings! The women have been borne all of this victimization with sufferings and stoic silence. The silence is not to be construed as weakness or acquiescence[70]".

4.1.1 Initial Mediation and Networking

LWI initial activities were focused on mediation and networking. The group held meetings with senior diplomats and UN officials, faction leaders and other stakeholders. They used personal contacts with civil society leaders, religious and professional affiliations and kinship ties. The goal was to build bridges to key stakeholders as a means of influencing the peace process.

The women ran a stunning network operation of gathering, transmitting and exchanging information by relying on their members. Some were highly educated, while others were illiterate. Some worked in the United Nations system, while others were unemployed. Ruth Caesar, Director of the Women and Children desk at the Ministry of Planning in the early to mid 1990s described the network as follows:

> "We established a simple information system where if one community got the information on a meeting or a march…before two to three hours the other communities would have been mobilized. We could call a meeting in maybe half a day and get 75-80 persons. We had in place [something] like roadrunners, where information traveled because most of the time we did not have money to pay for the press, newspaper or other media, and there were times when we did not feel like going to the press. We just used the grapevine to get our messages across[71]".

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[70] Ibid, P.8

[71] Ibid, p.14

The women also used their contacts outside the country, including their relatives and friends to keep the issues of peace for Liberia on the agenda in Western countries. They encouraged other Liberian women in exile to lobby government officials in their countries of exile and to promote the Liberian peace process in the media. The women also collaborated with groups with interest in the Liberian peace process. International Alert, the Institute for Multi-track Democracy, the Carter Center and the Nairobi Peace Initiative were groups the women worked with. Friends of Liberia (FOL), a United States-based organization of former Peace Corps volunteers to Liberia also worked with the women in organizing seminars and public meetings as well securing humanitarian assistance for the country. The women took advantage of opportunities for links with regional and global women's movements.

The LWI collaborated and consulted widely with all sectors of the women population, managed a focus on the principle demand of disarmament before elections and a peaceful resolution of the Liberia crisis. The LWI also joined efforts with the Inter-Faith Mediation Council (IFMC), the Council of Chiefs, the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission on a number of peace activities. In concerts with these organizations, the LWI participated in stay-home actions in 1995 and 1996. These successful stay-home actions, which came to be, know as " the ghost town actions" shot down business activities in Monrovia. These very successful events not only provided the emotional high ground that encouraged the women campaigners for peace to continue their

work but they also encouraged increased solidarity between the LWI and other civil society organizations.

4.1.2 Disarmament as a Precondition for Peace

At the Cotonou peace talks [72] in 1993, the warring factions, NPFL, ULIMO, and AFL had agreed to disarm to ECOMOG with the cooperation of the Council of State (I) and under the monitoring supervision of the United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL). The agreement further called on each warring party to ensure that its combatants turned in all weapons and warlike materials to ECOMOG. The accord further mandated ECOMOG to draw up an implementation schedule for disarmament, encampment and demobilization of combatants. The accord admonished warring parties not to create any obstacle to full implementation[73]. But with the women's key focus on disarmament, they feared that installing the transitional government with out a completed disarmament would not augur well for the peace process. Therefore, the LWI decided to campaign against the seating of the government until the factions had completely disarmed. The women sent delegations to the United States and Nigerian[74] Ambassadors, the OAU Representative, the United Nations Special Representative, and the Field Commander of ECOMOG to make their position known. Later, they met with President Rawlings of Ghana to press their case that seating the new government without full disarmament would create more difficulties for the peace process, but the women pleas were dismissed.

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[72] See Liberia Cotonou Agreement; Peace Agreements Digital Collection, United States Institute of Peace, available at http://www.usip.org/library/pa/liberia/liberia_07251993_toc.html
[73] Ibid
[74] Nigeria at the time had the largest contingent of troops in the ECOMOG force and was taking a greater share of the burden to finance the operation.

Undaunted, the women marched through the streets of Monrovia on the day of the installation of the transitional government carrying placards that denounced the seating of the government without full disarmament. Former Interim President, Amos Sawyer, who power turned over power on that day to the transitional government recalled:

> "I recall, even up to the day that the interim government was handing over, there were women carrying placards and saying, " disarmament has not taken place and this indeed is a mistake." If disarmament had taken place back in 1994, as indeed it should have, we probably wouldn't have had April 6, 1996 [when the war came to Monrovia] the advice of women had been "Stick to your agreements. Implement your agreements".[75]"

As a further mark of their displeasure, the women wrote an open letter to Trevor Gordon-Somers, the UN Special Representative to Liberia charging him for aiding and abetting the militarization of politics by facilitating the handover of power from the Interim Government to the Transitional Government without full disarmament. The letter was followed by a big parade in Monrovia in support of disarmament.[76]

At the time when it was most needed, Liberian women stood up and took a proactive stance. They marched, wrote petitions and advocated in every imaginable way. They did not hesitate to offer their own solutions when old ones were not working. For example, when the warring factions were deadlock on how to fill four critical seats in the first transitional government, the women wrote a statement arguing for the inclusion of the civilian majority with no ties to warring faction to be given the chance to occupy the Ministries of Defense, Finance, Justice, and Foreign Affairs. The women further called for a national

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[75]Liberian Women Peace Makers, Fighting for the right to be Seen, Heard, and Counted: African Women and Peace Support Group, 2004, P.20

[76] Ibid

conference that would allow the civilian population to get more involved in

determining the direction of country. They questioned the logic of excluding the

civilian majority to a position of mere spectators while those with arms who had

destroyed the country, were given a sheer monopoly in determining the future

direction of the country. In their quest for peace, women left no stone unturned

as Etweda Cooper, current leader of the LWI reminisced:

> "We tried everything. We lobbied, picketed, sent faxes, went to
> conferences without being invited until eventually we were invited....we
> published statements in the newspapers....whatever it took to bring peace
> to the attention of the Liberian people, we did. And I will say that there is
> a time for each method. There is a time to lobby, there is time to stand
> your ground, there is a time to give in.... it's just that you have to know
> when"[77].

4.1.3 Women's Representation at Peace Talks

Realizing the need to leverage their contributions to the peace process in Liberia,

the women decided that one way to get such leverage was to seek representation at peace

conferences where heads of warring factions and peace brokers were frequently meeting

to decide the future direction of the country. As the leaders of the LWI were never a part

of warring factions, the women faced an uphill battle in their quest for inclusion. But they

believed they had a legitimate reason to be represented and the fact that they were

positioned outside of warring factions helped the women's case. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf,

current President of Liberia recalls:

> "One of the things that women did...was to decide that foreign countries
> were not going to dictate totally on their own the political agenda for

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[77] Ibid, note 75, p. 21

Liberia. Hence they interposed themselves in the process, took a role, found a seat and were able to influence some of the outcomes[78]".

The first real attempts to seek representation came during the Accra Clarifications of the Akosombo Peace agreement in December 1994. The women wrote to ECOWAS requesting official invitations to attend the meeting. When the invitations did not arrive, the women took upon themselves to attend the meeting anyhow. Once in Accra, the women sought to bring attention to their exclusion, using the Ghanaian media including newspaper and television to do so. This tactic paid off. The next day, the women were granted official observer status. Although still short of an official endorsement as participants, the women were able to witness the proceedings and hear various warring parties articulate their positions. This gave the women additional opportunities to design and bring additional pressure to bear on the mediators and negotiating parties. By the third day, the expert maneuvering of the women had paid additional dividends. They were recognized officially as conference participants. With the help of the women, the parties to the conflict agreed to establish safe havens for the civilian population and to establish buffer zones. The parties also agreed to hold elections in November 1995, to demobilize and to reintegrate their fighters.

After the Accra meeting, the women quickly realized that in order to be taken seriously, they had to turn their attention to adequately documenting and substantiating their claims. This became their focus right after the Accra meeting. Led by the LWI and with the help of the Minister of Planning, Amelia Ward and other interested peace activists, the women organized consultative meetings with various women's groups. The meetings resulted into a position statement on the conduct of the war and its impact on

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[78]Ibid note 75, p. 22

women, children and communities. Armed with this document, which the women

considered a mandate, they sought to gain access to future peace talks on the future of

Liberia.

With the experience at Accra, one would think that the ECOWAS leaders had

learned the important lesson of including the women in future negotiations. This was

particularly relevant, because of the established track records of defaults on past

commitments by warring faction leaders. The women presented the only credible means

of applying internal pressure on the heads of warring parties to give in to peace. Once

again with the parties reneging on their agreements made barely eight months earlier, it

became necessary once again to hold another round of peace talks in Abudja, Nigeria in

August 1995. Without an invitation, the women sent two of their members, Theresa

Leigh-Sherman and Evelyn Townsend. A third woman, Clara Almeida, later joined them.

Like Accra, the women had to strategize on how to get into the meeting. With the help of

few contacts they had in Nigeria, the women began holding individual meetings with few

heads of states, international representatives, and the ECOWAS leaders. The usual

responses recalled Theresa Leigh Sherman were "The program is set; you're not on the

agenda." Or "it's never been done before"[79]. But the women did not give up; they kept

pleading with as many leaders as they could, including those of Ghana and Nigeria.

Fortunately, and in what seemed a serendipitous twist of events, the women were given a

moment to say few words by the Ghanaian chair of the meeting, President Rawlings.

Theresa Leigh-Sherman recalled:

> "He said, "Now ladies and gentleman. We're going to deviate for the first time in
> ECOWAS. We have listened to the men, we have listened to all the factions....but
> we have never listened to the civilians, we have never listened to the mothers, we

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[79] Ibid, note 75, p.26

have never listened to our sisters. We have a delegation of Liberian women and they want us to hear what they have to say, and we feel as a community, it is only fair". We just grabbed each other's hand, we were shaking because it looked [like] God had heard our prayers. I just took that.... Paper... and slowly we talked about the killings and how these men were opening these women's stomachs and betting on the babies. We talked about everything because the women were tired. We were just tired. It was a 30-minute paper. We made recommendations. And I tell you the nine Presidents that were there and CNN, BBC; every body was in tears because these are facts that these people didn't know about... But we had gone through it. We had lost everything we worked for[80]".

This presentation gave the women the visibility they had long worked for. In the months and years that followed, the ECOWAS mediators would come to rely heavily on the mediation skills of the women. For example, long after the many meetings, ECOWAS leaders continued to send confidential messages to the women asking them to help clear glitches in the peace process. Relentless, the women had one-on-one meetings with factional leaders, creating opportunities for dialogue and seeking common grounds in the search for solutions to end the Liberian conflict. The women continued their mediation role and eventually helped to convince the heads of warring faction to move their headquarters to Monrovia. In sharing the same living space, Monrovia, the women had hoped that this would encourage all sides to eventually lay down their guns and pursue peace. But even with every warlord now living in Monrovia, peace would remain elusive until finally when the unthinkable happened- Ruth Perry, a woman was chosen to lead the third Transitional Government (LNTG III).

4.1.4 Ruth Perry Becomes Head of Transitional Government

The selection of Ruth Perry as leader of the country was unprecedented. Although women had held high profile jobs in the past, no one ever imagine that there would be a

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[80] Ibid

woman leader in the making any time soon. Perry, herself had been a Senator for Grand

Cape Mount County in 1985, on the ticket of the National Democratic Party of Liberia of

the late President Samuel Doe. She founded the Peace Now, Peace for Liberia

Movement, and was also a founding member of the Women's Development Association

of Liberia, the Liberian Women's Initiative, and Women for Action and Goodwill.

The occasion marking Madam Perry's appointment took place at the second

Abuja meeting (Abuja II). Perry was at the meeting as a member of Council of State

member, Chief Tamba Taylor's, delegation. The Abuja II meeting became necessary after

the first Abuja meeting had been disrupted by the April-May 1996 fighting in Monrovia.

The main goal of this supplement was to reaffirm the first Abuja Accord and to set a new

timetable for disarmament and elections. The details of how Ruth Perry got eventually

selected to lead the Council of State are not clear. Some commentators have argued that

the appointment of Madam Perry was a cosmetic attempt to dilute the overwhelming

authority of armed faction leaders within the Transitional Government. Many women

however, argued that the appointment of Perry was in recognition of the women's role as

capable actors, who could work to bring peace to Liberia. As Perry herself put it:

> "I felt the strength, the need, the will power to take it and move on. But not alone-
> I decided to first of all put it to prayer. Then, secondly, I mobilized the women
> and challenged them because I felt this challenged was not for Ruth Perry alone.
> It was for the women of Liberia and African women as a whole.[81]"

> " To a large extent, I succeeded because I had a well-defined goal and objectives
> in mind. I remained very focused on the mandate given me and did not lobby to
> become any more influential than being an advocate for peace. My position was
> clear: I wanted unconditional peace for Liberia, and I declared that disarmament
> was the key element in the peace process and insisted that there must be total
> disarmament before elections. I projected myself as a true mother and a stabilizer,

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[81] Ibid, note 68, p.26

using faith, discipline, courage, patience and tolerance. Prior to becoming Head of State, I was deeply involved in encouraging and motivating women and all patriotic Liberians to take an active part in the peace process.[82] ".

Not only was her selection significant, but also her task was by no means easy. Under extremely tight time and resource, Madam Perry's work was cut out for her. Her task included disarmament, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration of refugees and displaced people, and transparent elections. With refugees in neighboring West African states numbering around 800,000, there were little resources to bring them back home to vote. But with the support of the Liberian population, the Transitional National Government under her leadership succeeded in disarming and holding the 1997 elections. Perry attributed her success to a six-points plan that included: self-evaluation, reflections on the causes of the Liberian conflict, identification of the impacting factors, building a constituency for peace, mobilization and communication, and post-conflict peace building[83]. After the election in 1997, Madam Perry set up the Perry Centre in Monrovia to provide a range of services to children and youths. She was later appointed as a member of the African Women's Committee on Peace and Development[84].

4.1.5 Regional Peacebuilding Initiatives

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[82] See Angela Ernest Edo, Best Practices in Peace Building and Non Violent Conflict Resolution Some Documented African Women's Peace Initiatives, 1999, available at http://www.peacewomen.org/resources/Organizing/BestPractices1998.pdf

[83] Ibid

[84] See Africa Recovery, Vol.12#1 (August 1998), page 33 (part of feature on ECA conference on Women)

By 1997, the Liberian Women Initiatives had garnered a high degree of credibility. Their much-deserved efforts to gain recognition at the Accra and Abuja meetings had laid a platform for greater recognition of their peace building efforts. At the 6th African regional conference[85] of women in Addis Ababa in November 1999, members of LWI were invited to attend. One of the conference organizers, Femmes Africa Solidarite (FAS) facilitated a side meeting of women from the Mano River Union (MRU) countries (Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone). At their meeting, the women floated the idea of a regional women organization to work on peace issues. By this time all three countries of the MRU had supported dissident fighters in each other's territories[86].

The follow-up meeting to review the women's experiences of the conflict and peace process in the sub-region took place in Abuja, Nigeria from May 1-3, 2000. Chaired by LWI founding member and former head of the Liberian Transitional Government, Madam Ruth Perry, the meeting brought together representatives including government ministers, parliamentarians, journalists, NGOs and representatives from the private sector[87]. Other interested parties from ECOWAS and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) participated as well. In all, 56 participants attended the meeting and the specific objectives included the need for the women to form a strategic alliance and to

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[85] The conference organizers were the African Women's Committee for Peace and Development (AWCPD) AWCDP is a committee of the Organization of African Unity, the West African Association of women (WAWA) and Femmes Africa Solidarite (FAS). FAS is Geneva based Organization with a branch office in Dakar Senegal: Source. Cynthia Cockburn, Sierra Leone: Women, Civil Society and the Rebuilding of Peace, November 10, 2005 available at http://cynthiacockburn.typepad.com//SierraLeoneblog.pdf
[86] Ibid
[87] Ibid

strengthen women's involvement in post-conflict[88]. At the end of their three-days

meeting, the women formed a network they named, the Mano River Women's Peace

Network (MARWOPNET)[89].

The most significant political actions of MARWOPNET took place in 2001. At

that time, relations between the Presidents of Guinea and Liberia had gone from bad to

worst. Guinea's Lansana Conte had accused Liberia's Charles Taylor of sponsoring

rebels in Sierra Leone and Guinea. As a result, Conte had vowed not to have any further

dealings with Taylor. Taylor on the other hand had expelled the Guinean and Sierra

Leonean ambassadors from Monrovia[90] for their alleged support for rebels fighting

against him. According to Mary Brownell, previous attempts to arrange a presidential

summit among the three leaders had failed because of hatred and animosity[91]. But with

the worsening security situation in the sub-region, the women decided they had to do

something to diffuse the tension among the three leaders. As Mary Brownell, prominent

LWI leader put it:

> "Once there is no peace in Liberia, there will be no peace in Sierra Leone. When
> there is fighting in Guinea there has to be fighting in Liberia. That is why we had
> to be in touch as women[92]"

Consequently, MARWOPNET sent a women's leadership delegation from the

three countries that included Ms. Brownell and Ms. Perry to convince the leaders to hold

a meeting. First, the women met with Charles Taylor in Monrovia to discuss the

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[88] See Cyndia Cockburn, Sierra Leone: Women, Civil Society and the Rebuilding of Peace, November 10,
2005 available at http://cynthiacockburn.typepad.com//SierraLeoneblog.pdf
[89] MARWOPNET's vision " is to see a sub-region that is peaceful and prosperous, inhabited by citizens
who are healthy, educated, live in unity and enjoy all their human rights including equity and equality, with
women playing an effective rile in peace and sustainable development processes with in the sub-region,
Africa and the World" Source: Ibid, P.21
[90] Ibid, note 88
[91] Ibid, note 88
[92] Ibid, note 88

worsening security situation in the sub-region and to call on him to work with the other

leaders for peace in the sub-region. During their meeting with him, Mr. Taylor agreed to

recall the expelled Ambassadors of Sierra Leone and Guinea and to participate in a

regional peace summit, which he did.

In their next meeting with President Conte, the women focused on the human

sufferings caused by the continued conflict in the sub-region and emphasized the

necessity of peace. The women also suggested the need to jumpstart peace talks, to

initiate dialogue between the three Ministers for Defense, to re-open the borders, to

rebuild diplomatic relations, to decrease the proliferation of small arms, and to increase

economic co-operation. But Conte remained adamant that he did not want to meet

directly with President Taylor. The Women knew that in order to succeed they had to try

something new. Ms. Brownell provided it. She told Mr. Conté,

> "You and President Taylor have to meet as men and iron out your differences, and
> we the women want to be present. We will lock you in this room until you come
> to your senses, and I will sit on the key[93]."

According to Ms. Brownell, after a long pause, Conte's response was

> "What man do you think would say that to me? Only a woman could do such a
> thing and get by with it[94]... you MRU woman, what you are doing is the best
> thing that has happened [For the region] in 10 years[95]...many people have tried to
> convince me to meet with President Taylor...your commitment and your appeal
> have convinced me[96]."

The three leaders subsequently met at a summit meeting in Morocco on February

17, 2002, at which time the leaders agreed to work towards resolving their differences

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[93] Ibid, note,88

[94] Ibid, note 88

[95] Liberian Women Peace Makers, Fighting for the right to be Seen, Heard, and Counted: African Women
and Peace Support Group, 2004, P.19

[96] Ibid, note 88

through a Joint Security Committee established at the sub-regional level[97].

Unfortunately, the women of MARWOPNET were not invited at the Morocco meeting.

Yet women had scored a major diplomatic achievement, one that both regional and

international mediators had tried and failed.

In recognition of the influential role played by women in the sub-region, the

United Nations General Assembly, at its 58th session in December 2003, selected

MARWOPNET as one of six recipients of the United Nations' Human Rights Prize. In

his citation, the President of the General Assembly, Julian Robert Hunte of Saint Lucia

said:

> " The network has brought an effective multi-dimensional, coordinated and
> regional approach to the struggle for human rights through initiatives to restore
> peace and to ensure that women's voices are included at all levels of the decision-
> making process. It has been active at both the grass roots level and the highest
> levels of government, successfully bringing the heads of States of their countries
> back to the negotiating table in 2001, and as delegate, mediator and signatory to
> the Liberian peace talks in August 2003[98]"

4.2 Case Study: Women in Peacebuilding Network

Many observers believed that the end of the first civil war in 1997 would have

settled the Liberian leadership question and ushered in a new dispensation of political

stability and economic development. But sadly, soon after winning the election in 1997,

Taylor dashed the hopes of many Liberians with his tendency to gravitate toward

dictatorship, his desire to destabilize the West African region and his poor management

of the declining socio-economic conditions. For example, by 2003, the average Liberian

was, by most indices, worse off than before the civil war had started more than a decade

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[97] See Report of the United Nations Secretary-General to the Security Council on Liberia, 11 September 2003, available at http://www.womenwarpeace.org/liberia/docs/sgreptosc11sep03.pdf
[98] Announcement of the awardees of the 2003 UN prize in the Field of Human Rights, United Nations, NY, December 2003, available at http://www.un.org/ga/president/58/speeches/031202-2.htm.

earlier (Pham, 2004). All of Liberia's neighbors had experienced an incursion of some sort emanating from Liberia and the London based Economist Magazine, dubbed Liberia "the world's worst place to live in 2003". The Economist's Intelligence Unit survey further indicated that by African standards, Liberia was only "set to get worse"[99].

Not surprisingly, two years after the 1997 elections, a northern-based armed opposition group against Taylor, the Liberian United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) was established. This development marked the start of the second civil war that lasted until 2003. Neighboring Guinea supported LURD. In time, the LURD insurgency grew to control a significant portion of the country. In April 2003, a second armed group, the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) began incursions into Liberia from the Southeast. Neighboring Cote D'ivoire supported this second group. The clashes between Taylor's forces and these two armed opposition groups created a large-scale displacement of the vulnerable population. By late May 2003, the United States called on all sides to cease their campaigns of violence, and to spare the lives and properties of innocent civilians[100]. But the rebels advanced on Monrovia, demanding the resignation of Charles Taylor. The pressure on Mr. Taylor increased when in June, a UN-backed court in Sierra Leone announced that it had indicted him for war crimes and issued an international warrant for his arrest. The indictment charged Mr. Taylor for "bearing the greatest responsibility for war crimes, crimes against humanity and serious violations of international humanitarian law within the territory of Sierra Leone since 30 November

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[99] See the Perspective, Atlanta Georgia, December 18, 2002. Available at
http://www.theperspective.org/liberia_wwc2002.html
[100] Ibid

1996."[101] . Coincidently, Taylor was at the time attending a peace conference in Ghana. Many expected the Ghanaian authorities to arrest him there and then. But concern about putting the Liberian peace process in jeopardy made the Ghanaian Government not to arrest Taylor but to instead fly him back home.

The impact of this later round of fighting weighed heavily on the civilian population. Relief agencies estimated that the number of internally displaced people in Liberia grew from 130,000 to 200,000[102]. By late May 2003 another batch of 10,000 Liberians had been forced to flee for their lives from Southeastern Liberia due to attacks by the MODEL rebel group.[103] Approximately, 12,000 of those displaced made it to Monrovia, overtaxing food and shelter resources[104]. All sides in the war continued their violence against the civilian population. As in previous clashes, rape, torture, and killings were again used as weapons against the civilian population. Furthermore, all major roads leading away from the overly populated Monrovia area were all closed, making it impossible or more dangerous for the civilian population to escape the imminent fighting that would later engulfed Monrovia. Yet the Liberian Red Cross reported that as many as 150,000 fled Monrovia at great risk to their own lives[105]. French troops evacuated as many as 500 European and US Citizens.

The West African sub-region would once again lead another round of peace talks involving Liberia's multiple warring factions and once again, the Ghanaian city of

[101]Virginie Ladisch, Liberia President Indicted for War Crimes, June 16, 2003: Available at http://www.crimesofwar.org/onnews/news-liberian.html

[102] Liberia - Second Civil War - 1997-2003, globalsecurity.org, available at http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/liberia-1997.htm

[103] Ibid
[104] Ibid
[105] Ibid

Akosombo would be chosen. ECOWAS appointed a Special Mediator, former Nigerian Head of State, Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar to oversee the talks. Gen. Abubakar held several bilateral meetings with the various delegations - chiefly the Liberian Government, the rebel groups of LURD and MODEL, and the 18 political parties representatives. Initial ceasefire negotiation failed to materialize as the fighting entered Monrovia. Another 200-300 lives would be lost and approximately 1,000 people would be seriously wounded[106].

It is against this background that Liberian women would once again need to stand up in order to pressure the warring parties to a ceasefire agreement. The new actors who took center stage at this time were the Women in Peace Network (WIPNET). The group, a part of a larger West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), was established to use women's peace activism in the search for social Justice. As defined by the group, the women's activism went beyond antiwar protests. For them, it included the deconstruction of structural forms of violence existing in every day society based on the premise that systematic violence against women such as rape and forced prostitution, was an expression of a much deeper systemic disregard for women. The group reasoned that by using women's numerical strength and their ability to mobilize around key issues, they could assert themselves and play crucial roles in formal peace processes and decision-making[107].

With LURD and MODEL rebel forces in control of nearly 80% of Liberia in May 2003 and threatening to capture densely populated Monrovia by force, WIPNET women,

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[106] Ibid
[107] Thelma Ekiyor and Leymah Gbowee, Women Peace Activism in West Africa, The WIPNET Experience, available at http://www.peoplebuildingpeace.org/thestories/print.php?id=80&typ=theme

following the example set earlier by the Liberian Women's Initiative (LWI), decided it was time to get off the fence. Led by Leymah Gbowee, WIPNET had recruited widely from all levels of the Liberian society including hundreds of women from refugee camps near Monrovia. By early 2003, WIPNET had a substantial network of community-based women's groups, particularly women in displaced camps. These women for the most part were either victims of rapes or tortures. They had lost love ones including children and husbands or had been displaced from their homes and separated from families for a long time. The feeling among the women was one of "We have nothing to lose; we are ready to do what it takes to end this war"[108]. The women co-named their campaign the Mass Action for Peace and chose as their theme, "We Want Peace; No More War."[109] This theme quickly turned into a mantra and popular refrain, which would be sung by children in every community.

In one of the earliest peace rallies held by the women on April 16, 2003 at the Monrovia City hall, 1,000 women dressed in white launched an all-out campaign against Liberia's continuing war. They invited the government of President Charles Taylor, officials of his government and members of the diplomatic community. Although only the Sierra Leonean Ambassador and his Charge d'Affairs would attend the meeting, the women were not deterred from voicing their displeasure. They complained of how their homes had been looted and burnt and their children forcefully conscripted and drugged by heads of warring factions. A spokesperson for the women declared "We are tired, the women of Liberia say they are tired. Women are sick of seeing our children dying[110] ",

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[108] Ibid
[109] Ibid
[110] See the News newspaper, Gov't stays away from peace rally as women vent out anger, April 13, 2003.

adding "it doesn't matter what it will take us, the women of Liberia say they want peace, and now[111]." The women spokesperson also lamented that warlords who had drugged and sent their (women's) children to die in droves were educating their (warlords') children abroad. The women vowed to put an end to unscrupulous individuals continuing to destroy their children's future[112].

In the beginning the women carried placards and posters in the streets demonstrating before UN offices and other key strategic areas in Monrovia. In time, the group became a constant presence in the streets of Monrovia, rain or shine. Clad in white, the group conducted sit-ins and demonstrations, sometimes for days at a time, refusing water and food. They even demonstrated in the courtyard of former President, Charles Taylor and at the United States Embassy. Relentless and unwavering, the women were determined to continue until each and every rebel combatant was disarmed and peace was achieved throughout Liberia. In what became their trademark meeting, the women gathered every day to pray at end of the runway of a small airstrip in Monrovia. There, both Church and Moslem leaders visited to demonstrate solidarity. Slowly, the protest grew and the women learned to use the media to call attention to their cause. They even succeeded in pressuring President Charles Taylor into meeting with them, which occasion they used to call for an immediate and unconditional cease-fire, dialogue for a negotiated settlement, and an intervention force.

When the peace conference in Accra between the warring parties to the conflict and civil society groups started on June 3, 2003, the Liberian chapter of MARWOPNET was the only women's group accredited to take part in the negotiations. Led by Ruth

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[111] Ibid
[112] Ibid

Sando Perry and Theresa Leigh-Sherman, the delegation had eight members. At the beginning of the meeting, the MARWOPNET women warned that they were holding the United States Government and the international community responsible for genocide. They called on the US government and the UN to take note of the worsening situation in Liberia and take immediate actions to help resolve it. In a declaration titled, " Cry out for Peace," the women said:

> " The Liberian peace process faces a crisis as violence intensifies on the streets of Monrovia. The ray of hope presented by the peace talks dims with every moment. All sides in the conflict seem determined to let guns do the talking[113]"

Despite MARWOPNET's representation at the peace talks, which was a remarkable achievement by Liberian women, WIPNET proceeded to open a new front at the peace talks. Once in Ghana, WIPNET women mobilized Liberian women living in Accra and refugee camps to join the campaign. When the conference moved to Akosombo, the Ghanaian members of WIPNET joined their Liberian counterparts for a demonstration at Akosombo. Like the women in the LWI, the women in WIPNET also learned to use the power of the media to good effect. The sight of women sitting on the lawn holding placards demanding peace not only greeted participants at the peace talks including Heads of States and other international mediators, but it also covered the headlines of newspapers and television news story in Ghana.

The widely held perception that these women represented a segment of the population that had actually experienced the everyday negative effects of the civil war gave the campaign a unique character, thus lending strength and legitimacy to the

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[113] Liberian Women Peace Makers, Fighting for the right to be Seen, Heard, and Counted: African Women and Peace Support Group, 2004, P.49

women's popular nonviolent protest. At last the "ordinary people" were out in the street to voice out their concerns. In addition, the WIPNET women in conjunction with other women Peacebuilding organizations (supported by UNIFEM) conducted a separate Liberian Women's Forum in tandem with the official peace conference. The forum provided the opportunity for the women to reflect on progress made on their key demands and to sharpen their focus on the main issues instead of being sidetracked by the politics of the negotiations[114].

As the talks vacillated several times between Akosombo and Accra, the women felt they needed to apply additional pressure on the mediators and participants to break the stalemate. They barricaded the entrance to the conference hall preventing the mediators, the warring parties, and other delegates from leaving the venue. This sent the loudest message to all the parties concern, 'if you don't reach an agreement, you will not leave'. Soon the women were invited to send representatives to the Political and Security Committees' meeting exploring strategies for peace with both rebels and the mediators.

As a result of the pressure from the women, the parties reached an initial ceasefire agreement on June 17, 2003 but the fighting still did not stop. Instead, it spread to new areas multiplying the number of deaths, suffering, destruction, and hunger for the civilian population. So, the women once again barricaded the entrance to the meeting hall. This time, they refused to leave the entrance even with appeals from Gen. Abubakar. They carried placards that read: "Killers of our people—no impunity this time," "Butchers and murderers of the Liberian people stop!" and "How many babies do you intend to

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[114]Ibid , note 107

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slaughter?"[115] The media hype surrounding the standoff once again helped to publicize the women's cause drawing huge embarrassment for warring parties. The pressure by WIPNET women, in addition to pressure from other groups helped to secure a comprehensive peace agreement after nearly seventy-eight days. At the end of the meeting, businessman, Gyude Bryant was selected as Interim Chairman of another interim administration. In the new government that would be set up later, members of WIPNET were appointed to posts within governmental agencies, the National Human Rights Commission of Liberia, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. One member was also named deputy minister for foreign affairs[116].

Back home, WIPNET continued their peace building work by raising awareness among women about the content of the peace accord and the responsibilities of the parties. They also continued their mass action for peace with their daily presence reminding warring parties that they were still "watching the peace"[117]. The group's meeting continued in four additional locations focusing on the monitoring and implementation of the peace agreement. WIPNET also partnered with United Nations Mission in Liberia to promote disarmament, demobilization, reintegration, and repatriation activities.

During the 2005 elections, WIPNET worked to encourage citizens throughout the country to register and take part in the elections. Their efforts were recognized by the National Elections Commission of Liberia, which presented a certificate to the group in recognition for their role in the elections process. After years of prayers and street protest

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[115] Ibid, note 107
[116] Ibid, note 107
[117] Ibid, note 107

calling for the end of hostilities among the various armed groups, WIPNET became the largest women pressure group. After the elections that brought Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf to power, WIPNET declared in April 2006 that it would be watching that no one wanting to disrupt the hard earned peace in Liberia would succeed. The group presented a 'peace torch' to the newly elected female President of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf[118]. The women also presented a peace torch to the women of Cote d'Ivoire to identify with them in their struggle for lasting peace in the region.

4.3 Case Study: The Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia (AFELL)

The Liberian war had grave consequences for women in general. As I have already discussed, not only were there forced displacements of the local population but also abductions, arbitrary detentions, forced disappearances, trafficking, slavery (including sexual slavery), persecution, harassment and discrimination of which none of the categories of women were spared. The broadening scope of violence that characterized the Liberian civil war posed acute dangers particularly to women. Many women attempting to flee to safety fell victim to rape, extortion of money and belongings, abduction, and death. Others were blocked from traveling, forcing them to hide in buses with little or no food, water, shelter, and medical care[119].

Rape and other sexual violence epitomized some of the most gruesome weapons used against girls and women by all sides of the conflict. Rebel fighters routinely targeted women for rape at checkpoints. Women and girls refusing to provide sexual services

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[118] see Edwood Dennis, The Analyst Newspaper, April 4, 2006, available at http://allafrica.com/stories/printable/200604040204.html

[119] See Liberia: U.N. Action Needed to End Rights Abuses, Human Rights News, New York, 16 September 2003 available at http://hrw.org/english/docs/2003/09/16/liberi6373.htm

were especially high risk. Widely held beliefs among rebel fighters that eating women's

hearts, breasts, and vaginas, would make them stronger in combat precipitated the death

of many women[120]. With overcrowded conditions in displaced camps and shortage of

food and other basic necessities, many women were forced into providing sexual and

other forms of humiliating, degrading, and exploitative services to relief workers in

exchange for money, employment or goods and services[121]. These acts of violence

against women undermined family and community structures.

Women were not only victims of the war, but in some cases were also

perpetrators of violence as well. Black Diamond, a 22-year old leader of the Women's

Artillery Commandos (WAC), for example, joined the fighting after being gang-raped by

government forces[122]. When the LURD rebel faction controlled Monrovia's port in 2003,

she and her WAC group were accused of carrying out a free-for-all while in charge of the

port[123]. Clearly some girls joined the ranks of the rebel fighting forces with an eye for

revenge for the humiliation they suffered. Former Health Minister, Peter Coleman

remarked, " I saw a woman shoot another officer because he raped a woman"[124]. In the

words of Black Diamond: "It made me want to fight the man who caused all that, because

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[120] See The Impact of the Conflict on Liberian Women, UNIFEM Available at http://www.womenwarpeace.org/liberia/liberia.htm

[121] The issue of sexual exploitation by relief workers has been on the rise prompting the Secretary General of the United Nations to give attention to it. In a bulletin on special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse (ST/SGB/2003/13), which came into force on 15 October 2003, the Secretary General defines sexual exploitation as "… any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another' and, similarly, the term 'sexual abuse' to mean: 'the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions." The bulletin further states, "Sexual exploitation and sexual abuse violate universally recognized international legal norms and standards and have always been unacceptable behavior and prohibited conduct for UN staff. Such conduct is prohibited by the United Nations Staff Regulations and Rules."

[122] See BBC news, Liberian Women Killers, August 26,2003; available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3181529.stm

[123] Ibid

[124] Ibid

if you are a good leader you can't behave like that"[125]. In other instances, rebel forces appeared to have targeted girls particularly because of their perceived loyalty to the mission of the civil war[126]. And yet in other cases, women joined the carnage in order to feed themselves and their families with provisions provided by combatant groups. Some protected themselves from further sexual assaults by recruiting or capturing other girls to provide sexual services for rebel men[127]. In general women in rebel militias played multiple roles. Some served as fighters and wives of soldiers or military commanders. Some served as recruiters and spies. Others were manipulated or forced into various roles such as forced sexual slavery and domestic servants for fighting groups[128].

The untended consequences of these exploitations of women and the general economic hardships were many. First, some women were forced into early marriages, even if as a coping strategy in economically desperate households. Girls' enrolment and retention in schools also dropped tremendously. Women suffered social stigma from rape and other humiliating experiences. It was not uncommon for communities, schools, employers and even families to reject women because of the perceived notion that they have contravened socio-cultural norms such as taking part in a war (Aboagye and Bah, 2005). Constant warfare crushed many traditional sanctions, unleashing conducts unthinkable in normal times[129]. Victims of sexual abuse were at times considered as violators of family honor and were treated as outcasts especially in cases where the same

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[125] Ibid
[126] Ibid
[127] See Human Rights Watch, Roles and Responsibilities of Child Soldiers, February 2004 Vol. 16, No. 2 (A) available at http://hrw.org/reports/2004/liberia0204/liberia0204.pdf
[128] Ibid
[129] See "All Sides in Liberian Conflict Make Women Spoils of War" New York times, 20 November 2003 available at http://select.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=F00810F73C5F0C738EDDA80994DB404482

man raped a mother and a daughter[130]. Due to their experiences with rape, some women were discriminated against because of the perception that they were already HIV positive. Lacking social support, the risks for more harassment, abuse, and lack of access to survival only increased the predicament that many women faced.

It is against this background of some of the worst exploitations of Liberian women that led to the formation of the Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia (AFELL). Organized in 1994, AFELL advocates for the rights of and the promotion and advancement of women, children, and indigent persons. Over the years, the group has come to represent an icon for women basic fundamental and legal rights under the constitution and laws of Liberia. AFELL's campaign to advance the status of Liberian women has concentrated in the following critical areas: advocating for the rights of and promotion and advancement of women, children and indigent; running a legal aid clinic for women to prosecute rape cases; lobbying at national and international levels; legal reforms, which includes amendment or repeal of discriminating laws against women; and conducting sensitization and awareness workshops throughout the country on women's basic fundamental and legal rights under the constitution and laws of Liberia, as well as international instruments such as CEDAW and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)[131]. AFELL argues that because of the inclusiveness of gender-based violence, it wants to review all Liberian laws and statutes to determine whether they are responsive to the realities of today.

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[130] Ibid
[131] See AFELL progress report, September 30, 2004, available at http://www.wildaf-ao.org/eng/IMG/doc/Liberia_ENG-2.doc

At the 2003, peace negotiations on Liberia, AFELL participated as an observer. The group was one of the main advocates for the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia. AFELL also gave voice to the concerns and fears of women and children during the peace talks. AFELL has had an extensive record of collaborating with other organizations to further the cause of women and Children in Liberia. Among the organizations it collaborates with are the Consortium of Human Rights Organizations, the Women NGO Secretariat and the Liberia National Bar Association. AFELL maintains a referral network with other NGO's for the collection of data and coordination and control measures for sexual and gender-based violence cases. AFELL is aware that transitional justice cannot be achieved without cooperating and collaborating with the private and other stakeholders. AFELL also has extensive relationship with the UN system. Before, the 2005 general elections in Liberia, AFELL used article XXVIII[132] of the Liberian Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) signed in Ghana in 2003, the act creating the Liberian Gender Ministry, and other international conventions and protocols as the guiding instruments for the promotion of gender equality.

AFELL has also received international recognition. The group attended the UN Conference for the Advancement of Women in Canada in 2003 serving as an expert on the Liberian peace process; AFELL members also attended the Beijing + 5 meeting in New York in 2000.

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[132] Article XXVII says " The Parties shall reflect national and gender balance in all elective and non-elective appointments within the NTGL", source: Comprehensive Peace Agreement Between the Government of Liberia and the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) and Political Parties. Accra 18th August, 2003 available at http://www.usip.org/library/pa/liberia/liberia_08182003_cpa.html

But the most distinctive contributions by AFELL have been in the area of legal

rights for women. To put into perspective the gains AFELL and the women's movement

have made in women's legal rights, a brief overview of the Liberia Justice system is

necessary. The Liberian justice system is a combination of statutory law (derived mostly

from the U.S.) and common law, state-sponsored African customary law, in which chiefs

and local administrators exercise judicial powers. There is also an African customary law

that operates within Poro[133] and Sande[134] associations, councils of elders, and other forms

of dispute resolution including familial ones that are outside of state power[135]. The

statutory[136] law system includes a supreme court; circuit courts, magistrates' courts, and

justices of the peace courts (JPC). There are also specialized courts including probate,

debt, traffic, taxation, labor, etc[137]. The statutory law system operates mainly in urban and

major population centers in rural areas.

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[133] The Poro is secret society for men in Northwestern Liberia

[134] The Sande is secret society for women in Northwestern Liberia

[135] Crises Group: LIBERIA: Resurrecting the Judicial System Africa Report N°107 – 6 April 2006

[136] There are approximately 300 JPC courts in Liberia. These courts were created in areas far removed from magistrate courts. Most JPCs, who preside over the JPC courts, are illiterate. Quite often JPCs adjudicate cases beyond their jurisdiction. For example, it is not uncommon to find JPCs administering justice in rape cases, which are beyond their jurisdictions. Also, although they are unauthorized to detain people, hold trials or hand down sentences, most JPCs do so anyway. As JPCs are not included on the judicial payroll, they often pay themselves by charging excessive fees and fines and are reported to be corrupt and incompetent with no training. In the case of magistrate courts, there are at least 130 of them in Liberia. Like JPCs, magistrates are also reputed for being poorly trained and have little or no access to legal texts. In many places in the country, courts officers such as attorneys, defense counsel, and bailiff are not available. With an average monthly salary of $22, magistrates also survive by imposing ad hoc fees. Circuit courts judges for the most part find it difficult to take up assignments due to poor conditions in the rural areas. As the courts with original jurisdictions in cases such as rape and murder, an inactive circuit court means that justice is not served. This allows perpetrators of crimes to go free. This has undermined the justice system and further the culture of impunity. In the capital, Monrovia criminal courts are backlogged, and prisoners wait for months or years without trials (Source: Crises Group: LIBERIA: Resurrecting the Judicial System Africa Report N°107 – 6 April 2006)

[137] Ibid, note 135

There are two customary law regimes operating side by side in Liberia. One functions under the supervision of the executive branch of government through the ministry of internal affairs. This regime include locally elected paramount, clan and town chiefs and villages elders, whose jobs it is to adjudicate cases at the village, towns, and district levels by calling witnesses, assessing fines, and issuing judgments[138]. Cases in this system can be appealed following the chain of command from town/village chiefs to clan, paramount, district commissioners and county[139] superintendents.

The second customary law regime operates within the poro and sande associations or bush schools. These are outside the supervision of the executive review. The poro and sande initiate males and females into adulthood, resolve disputes and condemned members who have defied established social norms. Leaders in the poro and sande are reputed for having magical and spiritual powers[140].

When the state established this dual system at the turn of the 19th century, it was meant that statutory laws would govern "civilized" people while customary laws would regulate the lives of natives. Although under the current Liberia system the legal statutory law governs all Liberians, yet many people, particularly in rural areas use customary laws for dispute resolutions. Many people also resort to customary laws because the statutory justice system does not serve their needs. In fact, most domestic and cultural matters affecting the so-called natives are heard under customary laws.

Under these judicial systems, AFELL has taken advantage of the post-conflict period to push for new laws or sought to modify old ones that have restricted women's

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[138] Ibid

[139] Politically, Liberia is subdivided into 15 counties.

[140] Ibid, note 135

legal rights. AFELL has tried to bolster women's access to justice even as gender-based violence has continued to plague women. Physical abuse, rape, and sexual assault remain serious issues. Most cases affecting women are adjudicated at the customary level, with men most often presiding[141]. Many reports speak of the continuous molestation of women and girls, many times by family members. Many people argue that resolving rape cases through the use of customary laws means that such crimes go unpunished. This is particularly the case when communities imposed harsh punishments on women who complain or take their cases to statutory courts.

It is therefore not surprising that one important legal reform initiated by AFELL and one that the organization pushed through the Liberia Parliament was a rape bill. The original bill drafted by AFELL called for those guilty of raping children under the age of 18 to be jailed for life and those guilty of gang rape to face the death penalty[142]. The original draft bill also had penalties for forced sexual intercourse between married couples, punishable by 10 years imprisonment[143]. Although all of these provisions of the new law were rejected during Legislative hearings, the inclusion of these provisions in the initial bill was indicative of how women are determined to seek the harshest punishment for those responsible for causing them harm and depredation during and after the many years of civil war. The new rape law makes first-degree forms of rape a non-bailable offence. It also raises the age limit for statutory rape from sixteen to seventeen and expands the definition of rape beyond females to include boys and rape with

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[141] Ibid
[142] See Getting tough on Liberian rapists, BBC news, available at
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4725263.stm
[143] Ibid

objects[144]. The former rape law made rape a bailable offence and offenders could be released within 48 hours if they were not convicted. In many rural communities with no courts and prisons, offenders more often than not got away with impunity.

Under Liberian laws, only government can prosecute criminal cases. So, AFELL lobbied and succeeded in acquiring a letter of patent from the government of Liberia in November 2000 granting them a joint prosecuting role alongside state prosecutors in rape cases against females. Looking back on the process, Counselor Elizabeth Boryenneh, President of the Associations of Female Lawyers of Liberia remarked: "It wasn't easy. It took persuasion and persistence on our part, and a lot of understanding on the part of the justice ministry"[145]. The patent is particularly relevant given the fact that state prosecutors are not readily available to take on cases. In areas where there are shortages of lawyers to adequately bring a case to trial, the patent becomes even more necessary. In such cases AFELL can present the patent to a magistrate or judge to initiate prosecution in a case involving rape. AFELL thinks that the patent will strengthen the hands of female lawyers to speed up trials of rape suspects. As an ancillary, AFELL setup legal aid clinics to offer free legal services to victims of sexual and gender-based violence, including rape, battery and child abuse, especially against the girl-child[146]. The clinics also serve indigent people.

A second significant legal reform initiated by AFELL was its advocacy work that resulted in the adoption by the Liberia legislature of the "Act to Govern the Devolution of

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[144] Ibid, not 126
[145] Peter Kahler, Panafrican News Agency, November 2000, available at http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/34/064.html
[146] Ibid, note 125

Estates and Establish the Rights of Inheritance for Spouses of Both Statutory and Customary Marriages", on October 7, 2003. Initiated in 1995, the bill took eight years to be ratified by the Liberian legislature. AFELL alleges that based on customary practices in most places in rural areas, a man was required to pay a bride wealth when he married a woman. According to AFELL, customary law also allowed the men to request a compulsory return of the bride wealth at the time of divorce and sometimes by the use of force. It was also common for parents to choose their daughter's husband or compel a daughter or a female in the family to marry a man not of her own choosing. AFELL further alleges that under customary law, women were treated as chattel of their husbands and had no rights (including the right to inherit property or to retain custody of children) after his death. In some cases the widow was forced to marry a surviving male relative of the deceased husband. The devolution of estate law, which AFELL initiated and lobbied for its adoption by the national legislature, changed gender relations by putting an end to the ways in which male elders exploited reproductive powers of young women. The law guarantees equal inheritance and property rights for women in Liberia. The law also stipulates that a woman can inherit as much as a third of the husband's inheritance.

When the bill stalled in the national legislature in 2002, AFELL did not hesitate to lead a mammoth march of women on the national legislature to reinforce their view that all laws relating to widows and spouses of both statutory and customary marriages must be unified. AFELL regards customary marriage practices to be repugnant, discriminatory and contrary to the principles of unity and equality enshrined in the constitution of Liberia.

A third human rights contribution that AFELL has made is in the creation of the first juvenile court and the installation of a juvenile justice system in Liberia. AFELL successfully campaigned for the strengthening of magisterial courts to assume juvenile jurisdiction in three counties in Liberia as forerunners to creating juvenile courts in the rural areas. Currently, the country's only juvenile court operates in Monrovia.

4.4 Conclusion and Lessons From the Case Studies

The three case studies on the LWI, WIPNET, AFELL provide many useful lessons on the potential of Liberian women. First, the cases demonstrate that Liberian women are capable of mounting an effective political agenda of their own. Many women saw both the LWI and WIPNET as a political voice and by their activities, the women created the necessary political space that allow them to make their demands. The women's vision embraced the need for political inclusion as key actors. They understood that they could only break the power structure by advocacy, constructive engagement with other stakeholders and successfully campaigning for change. The Women seemed to have particularly taken advantage of the political flux by campaigning not only for peace but also for representation. By bringing their prior experiences and connections to diverse sources to their struggles, the women demonstrated their capacity to overcome obstacles.

Second, Liberian women clearly organized around identities of motherhood and faith. They frequently appealed to what might seem to some scholars as essentialist qualities, but nonetheless one that became a very useful unit of analysis for their struggles. While a further exposition on the place of faith and motherhood in the struggle to achieve development for women may be beyond the scope of this thesis, the fact

however remains that motherhood and faith were important aspects of the story of the women's movement in Liberia.

The case studies clearly show, for example, that motherhood/womanhood was a motivating identity for women's social action. Women's collective action was in defense of their roles as mothers. It would not be an overstatement to argue that Liberian women used an aggressive motherhood strategy, in which they position their struggles as one against suffering and sacrifice in order to oppose ethnic warfare. In fact as President, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf has often presented herself as a mother and grandmother[147].

Also by organizing under the banner of motherhood, the case studies demonstrate the importance of a strong identity around which women need to organize. Women had to fight back against the conditions that imposed total suffering on them and on their ability to perform their roles as mothers. The cases show that continuing warfare meant more suffering for them and out of such desperation they had to counter the instruments and agents of warfare. With dead husbands, dead or drugged children and with themselves ruthlessly abused by marauding bands of thugs, women had nothing to turn to but to insist that the crisis that had put them against such an impenetrable wall be stopped immediately. The WIPNET women in particular epitomized this case. These were ordinary women, many of them uprooted and forced into displaced camps for so many years. Some had missing relatives and others of them had been routinely subjected to sexual violence. As Leymah Gbowee, former head of WIPNET put it

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[147] See for example a Boston Globe article entitled "'Ma Ellen' is delivering Liberia", March 8, 2007, available at
http://www.boston.com/news/globe/editorial_opinion/oped/articles/2007/03/08/ma_ellen_is_delivering_lib eria/?p1=email_to_a_friend

" We are the ones that bear the greatest brunt during conflict. The UN and other humanitarian agencies would be flown out immediately when the situation turn messy. That the very UN and other international actors were saying that was Liberia's "Last Chance", we as women were determined to ensure that we made the best of our last chance"[148].

A second identity element used in the women's organizing was faith. The women constantly invoked God or were involved in prayer vigils as part of their struggles. Indeed, the Liberian case also demonstrates that the practice of their Christian and Islamic faiths was an important dimension of the women's movement. For example, LWI placed advertisements in local newspaper calling for the general public to join the LWI in nightly prayer chains at 10:00 pm. These nightly prayer meetings were obligatory requirements for members[149]. Also, when WIPNET women, held daily public demonstrations for nearly one year, they spent most of that time praying for peace. These "everyday Ghandis" as one website[150] refers to them attracted Christians and Moslems as well as their leaders to their cause. By using identities of motherhood and faith, the women's movement was able to cut across religious and class barriers. For once, women of different social classes, statuses, experiences and political ideologies could see reasons to come together to fight a common battle.

If the premise that women used the institutions of motherhood and faith as a uniting force (as I argue) is accepted, then we could conclude that Liberian women in fact succeeded precisely based on reasons that some feminist scholars have suggested had been responsible for their subordination. Feminists argued that even the ubiquitous and

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[148] See Leymah Gbowee, presentation at UNIFEM panel on DDRR, March 9, 2005, CSW Beijing +10, available at http://www.peacewomen.org/resources/Liberia/DDRGbowee05.pdf
[149] Liberian Women Peace Makers, Fighting for the right to be Seen, Heard, and Counted: African Women and Peace Support Group, 2004
[150] see http://www.everydaygandhis.com/comm-rec.htm

powerful cultural icon of motherhood of women could be deconstructed to show that "neither a woman or a man is born a mother" (Ruddick, 1995). Some Feminists also argue that religion have been responsible for subordinating women to men.

Third, by starting a regional network for peace, the women in the sub-region were able to leverage their impact and gained increasing credibility as important stakeholders for peace within the sub-region. The women's movement also gained from connection with the international women's advocacy organization such as UNIFEM, FAS, and WIPNET. Although such relationships are often characterized by patron-client behaviors, that are sometimes disruptive to the proper growth of local organizations. Yet, these relationships also helped the women to face the complex challenges involve in their advocacy work, such as juggling different arenas and building capacity.

Fourth, the cases also demonstrate how in the beginning, the attitudes of warlords and regional and international mediators toward women unintentionally emboldened women to organize more forcefully. Warlords and other stakeholders failed to perceived women as political actors in their own rights. This created the necessary political space for women to organize in opposition to the war. In fact by their many mass actions, Liberian women helped to undermine the legitimacy of rebel groups thereby contributing to their ultimate demise.

Fifth, the cases demonstrates that although women began their organizing by addressing social welfare issues, such as providing food, trauma counseling and health, in the process they came to address larger issues of development such as women's political participation and human rights. AFELL, for example, have mobilized against rape and

the abuse of women's fundamental human rights. By doing this, it can be argued that in seeking to meet their needs, the women in AFELL have pressed for bigger changes in society as AFELL has demonstrated in respect to the legal reforms it has pursued. This shows how the quest to meet human needs can serve as a political weapon for addressing larger strategic issues.

As encouraging as the findings from these case studies are in that they showcase the talents and ingenuity of Liberian women, there is, however, one critical question that must be asked. And that is, have Liberian women's active political, legal and peace building activities translate into actual developmental outcomes. In the section, that follows, I argue that although Liberian women have increased their participation and are playing important roles in the country's reconstruction, such increased participation by itself is insufficient to guarantee developmental benefits for the totality of Liberian women. I suggest a better alternative is a rights-based approach to state building that allows for the formation of new state institutions whose function it is to ensure that the state's obligation to provide a modicum level of services for all women is implemented. This approach gives women the option to create demand for those services that greatly impact their lives. At the same time, because the services are prescribed rights, it gives women the opportunity to hold state institutions accountable for their provisions.

5.0 Chapter four: The Impact of Women's Activism on Women's Development

In this final chapter, I want to return to the question of whether increasing women's political participation or legislating new laws have stimulated the relevant changes needed to end inequalities faced by women. First, we have to acknowledge that by their legal, peace, and political activities since the early 1990s, Liberian women have tried to achieve peace and national reconciliation on the one hand and on the other, women's inclusion in national development. The women have explicitly pursued both their commitment to national peace and the introduction of an agenda for gender equality and social justice. In view of the history of the country, such a bold move on the part of the women can be seen as a radical departure from previous activities, which restricted women largely to social welfare issues.

As there has recently been an emphasis on the political and institutional aspects of development, the international community has suddenly turned the spotlights on human rights, good governance and political participation. Therefore, one has to ask if the rise in women activism in Liberia has in fact contributed to these larger goals of development. More specifically, have women translated their successes into political and practical benefits? In the next section, I will attempt to answer this question by looking at three areas: women's political participation, women's legal rights and women's economic empowerment.

5.1 Women's Political Participation

Have women collective actions in defense of motherhood strengthened their participation in governance and politics? This is a critical question, which this research may not answer more fully. However, a partial review of the events of the past few years could provide some indications of the potential impact of the women's movement on post-war political processes. One place we may need to look for such indications is in the area of women's participation in the political and democratic processes since 2003.

Women's historic exclusion from structures of power has stimulated efforts by the international community to address this gender imbalance in politics. Advocates in various UN systems argue that women's enhanced participation in governance structures is critical for development. Both intrinsic and instrumentalist arguments have been made for equal participation of women in politics. From a human rights perspective, women equal participation is argue on the premise that they constitute half of the world's population. Instrumentalist arguments are based on essentialist grounds, which posit that women have different vision and concepts of politics and would therefore bring a special caring focus and female values to politics. The purpose of this section is not to argue the merits and demerits of these approaches. Instead, the point I am making is that in Liberia's nascent post-conflict democracy, following a more robust policy of increasing women's political participation may in fact be impractical due the ethnic nature of Liberian politics. I also make the point that despite a clear advantage of getting elected; many key leaders in the women's movement did not pursue political offices.

Mechanisms for increasing women's political participation have included gender quotas, gender mainstreaming, women's budgets, affirmative action, and party list

system. Although not all of these approaches have been tried in Liberia, a few including gender mainstreaming and quotas have been tried without great success. However,the fact that a woman is Liberia's President and several of the key government positions are held by women represent a significant achievement for women. Yet, given the magnitude of the breakthrough that women achieved as laid out in the case studies, one would have expected the number of women both in the government and in the legislature to be more than what it is. In fact, the proportion of women representation in the government has been consistently low since 2003, although there is was an increment in the number of women in government in 2005 than in 2003.

In the Transitional government that followed the signing of the CPA in Accra in August of 2003, for example, there were only 4 women in the Transitional Legislative Assembly out of 76 members and 3 women in the 21-member Cabinet. The women's movement decried this level of women's representation as a mere token. So, the expectation was that the women would in fact mount a serious challenge to increase representation both in government and in the national legislature.

In the 2005 elections, there were a number of steps taken to improve women's representation. For example, former Chief Justice, Frances Johnson-Morris was appointed as Chair of the National Elections Commission (NEC), which had two women out of a total membership of 5. The other female commissioner was women's movement activist and progenitor of the LWI, Mary Brownell. Furthermore, in the draft electoral reform law, submitted by NEC to the Transitional Legislature in September 2004, the commission called for a 30% women's representation for all political parties. Earlier, a

group of women had presented to George Dweh, then speaker of the Transitional

Legislature, a resolution calling for this 30% quota representation for women. When the

measure came up for debate in the Legislature, many members of the body rejected it.

One prominent opponent of the bill was deputy speaker, Eddington Varmah, a former

university lecturer. Varmah argued that the Liberian constitution did not marginalize

anyone for political office. He argued that tempering with the constitution in favor of one

particular group of people, would opened a pandora box for other groups wanting special

treatment.[151] Surprisingly, women accepted the wishes of the Legislature without

mounting a fight as they had done before.

Faced with this predicament, NEC female chair announced that NEC would use

its statutory powers to issue a non-binding guideline[152] requesting the implementation of

the 30% requirement by political parties. Women's movement advocates argued that this

measure helped women to lobbied political parties for more women representation.

Nevertheless no political party met the 30% requirement including the ones led by Ellen

Johnson-Sirleaf and Margaret Thompson, the two female presidential candidates in the

2005 race. In all there were 110 (or 14.4%) female candidates out of a field of contenders

of 762 for President, Vice President, Senate and House of Representatives[153]. On the

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[151]Liberia: Rights-Liberia: Women Demand Greater Participation in Politics, Inter Press Service
(Johannesburg) September 20, 2004, available at http://allafrica.com/stories/200409201121.html
[152] The Political Party and Independent Candidate Registration Guideline states that: " Each political party
shall ensure that 30% of the candidates nominated for public elective offices by that political party shall be
women". Source: National Elections Commission: Guidelines relating to the registration of political parties
and independent candidates, January 2005, available at
http://www.necliberia.org/content/legaldocs/guidelinesandreg/regofpoliticalparties.pdf
[153] Liberian Election Watch, available at http://www.cartercenter.org/documents/2202.pdf

voters' registry, women represented 50% of all voters. Women were the majority voters in 7 out of 15 counties.[154]

Even with a female President, who campaigned openly on a women's agenda, women have only managed a 26% representation in the cabinet, a mere 1% increment over the pre-war estimate of 25% (Moran & Pitcher, 2004). Out of a 30-member Senate, there are five women or 16.7%. And out of the 64-member House of Representatives, there are 8 women or 12.5%.

But why does it appear that in spite of the success of the women's movement in the last several years, they appear not to be represented in increasing numbers in the government and the parliament? In a report released by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs and the Carter Center, they suggested that women found it hard to receive political party representation as candidates for the various elected positions. According to them, becoming candidates required hard lobbying of party leaders and members, a skill, which they argued many women have not had the opportunity to hone[155]. They also argued that even for those women, who managed to win party nominations, many were unable to access party resources to meet up with NEC registration requirements[156].

While these reasons may be contributing factors, they do not adequately explain the small number of women's representation both in the Government and Parliament. It is hard to believe that women, who had so successfully penetrated peace negotiations designed around the agenda of warring factions, aided one of their very own, Ruth Perry

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[154] See 2005, Voters Registration Statistics, 10 September 2005, available at
http://www.necliberia.org/Statistics_Maps/dstatistics10september2005.pdf
[155] Ibid
[156] Ibid

to head a team of warlords that ended Liberia's first civil war, and constituted half of the voting population could have done so poorly. This author believes that several reasons account for the small number of women's representation. First, in the parliamentary elections, the women's movement demonstrated very little interest in fielding their own candidates. For example, none of the movement's key leaders ran for an elected position. Instead, UNDP, UNIFEM, NEC, and the Ministry of Gender recruited them to mobilize the population to vote in the elections. Mary Brownell, for example, was recruited to serve on the National Elections Commission. When she retired from that position, AFELL's former President, Elizabeth Boryennoh was chosen to replace her. Even with her expert performance in steering the country back to democracy in 1997, Ruth Perry, for example, returned to served children and youths at the Perry Center she later set up, instead of pursuing a political office or explicitly helping other women to get elected.

As another example, WIPNET alone enlisted two hundred volunteers who used visual aids, T-shirts and posters to encourage voter's registration[157]. To their credit, 90% of all eligible voters did register[158], for which they were duly recognized by the Elections Commission. And by her own admission, Leymah Gbowee, WIPNET's leader commented, " For the first time in history women are at the forefront of the elections"[159].

Even the well-touted Johnson-Sirleaf was never really seen as a women's movement candidate until the second round of the presidential elections. During the first

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[157] See Beyond Numbers: Supporting Women's Political Participation and Promoting Gender Equality in Post-Conflict Governance in Africa, A review of the role of the United Nationals Development Fund for women, available at
http://www.womenwarpeace.org/issues/peaceprocess/CAMILLE_Final_UNIFEM_Beyond_Numbers_FINAL.pdf

[158] Ibid
[159] Ibid

round, her main rival in the runoff, George Weah scored nearly 10 percentage points ahead of her. In fact, she came into the election as a polarizing figure. As one of Charles Taylor's main financial backers in the early 1990s; she infamously declared, "Level Monrovia and we will rebuild it" [160]. With the carnage that Taylor and his rebel NPFL later unleashed on Monrovia during that siege, many Liberians had come to either love or hate her. Those who hated her claimed she helped start the war[161]. She was also one of the main supporters of Quiwonkpa's failed coup in 1985[162], for which the Krahn ethnic group of Samuel Doe has never liked her. In fact her opponent, George Weah won 96% of the Krahn vote. But many observers believe that she got elected because of the mood of a country yearning for change to the status quo and of a competition that greatly disadvantaged her rival due to his lack of education and experience in public administration. The country had once tried a semi-educated leader in Samuel Doe and was not prepared to repeat the same mistake.

Therefore, the limited number of women in the legislature was a reflection of the general apathy with which the movement handled those elections. This highlights the need to secure women's right and development beyond the confines of politics, because even in the face of a clear advantage to be elected; many women may still choose not to participate in the electoral process. What they may in fact be saying is that they need their own spaces (beyond formal political institutions) in which they can continue to work to influence societal transformation.

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[160] See Jucontee Thomas Woewiyu, An open letter to Madam Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, September 15, 2005, available at http://www.theliberiandialogue.org/articles/c091505tws.htm

[161] Ibid

[162] In fact Quiwonkpa's widow has demanded that Ellen apologizes publicly for her role in setting her husband up for his untimely death in the aftermath of the coup.

On the other hand, the low percentage of women representation in government is a reflection of how difficult it is to amend Liberia's difficult past, especially its ethnic politics and perennial struggles with an overly corrupt, centralized, predatory, and violent State that has for the most part caused suffering for its own citizens. The ethnic divisions that have divided the country, represented by the multiple warring factions and now metamorphosed into 22 political parties are deep and need healing. So, when the Liberian people voted for Johnson-Sirleaf, they did so because they wanted change, healing, reconciliation, and a new direction, more so than the fact that she was a female. Also, she did not just win because she was a female; she did so because she got help from other political parties, who themselves have their own ethnic interests to satisfy.

In that case, it is perhaps unrealistic to have expected a women's agenda to suddenly trump all these concerns and interests. One has to only look at the make-up of the Johnson-Sirleaf's government to understand and appreciate the importance of political inclusion and how a predominant women's led government or a winner-take-all democracy may not have been the best for Liberia. In that regards, Taylor's presidency was an example of the failure to balance all the competing demands and interests in a post-conflict situation, which landed Liberia back into civil war. But to her credit, Johnson-Sirleaf had to create a credible but ethnically balanced cabinet to demonstrate to the international community and the Liberian people how serious she was about tackling the abuses of more than a century and half. In doing so, she needed to bring in both her political allies and political foes, while maintaining competence.

Consequently, from the experiences of the 2005 elections, many would argue that the women's movement failed to capitalize on an otherwise excellent opportunity to increase the number of women in the legislature. At the same time the ethnic nature of Liberian politics makes it more difficult to select a predominantly female cabinet. However, when it comes to more women's representation in the government, it is important to note that Johnson-Sirleaf has only been in office for one year and still has a long way to go in her six-years term. Therefore, it is conceivable that she will continue to increase the participation of women in her government. However, the fact that she was not able to do so immediately following the big euphoria of women suddenly taking power and righting all the wrongs of the past leaves room to believe that it may actually be more difficult to do so in the future.

Even if the current government were successful in bringing in more women in the government, it is not clear how that would improve the economic wellbeing of thousand of poor women. Increased political participation is likely to help only middle class and elite civilized Liberian women as opposed to the poverty-stricken poor rural women scattered throughout the countryside in destroyed and burned down villages. Also, supported by the international community, Johnson-Sirleaf has shown by her policies that she is going to follow a neo-liberal development paradigm with its emphasis on the "magic of the market". She has sought the implantation of a system of individuals and private property rights and a minimal liberal state. As a recently classified failed state with limited or no capacity, it remains to be seen how the current administration, operating under such economic policies, will address the plight of hundreds of thousands of women struggling under huge burdens of need. While at the moment, NGOs, are

helping to mitigate some of the most severe impacts of the recent civil war, it is clear that

NGOs can neither generate collective welfare nor supplant the state provisions of public

goods such as adequate health, education, and housing (Falton, 1995).

5.2 Women's Human Rights

A second place to look for signs of the impact of the women's movement on the

lives of ordinary women is to look at the results of the new rape law passed to protect the

rights of women. When the law was passed in January 2006, many observers believe that

sexual exploitations and gender-based violence would be held in check. At Police

stations, special sections were designated for handling sexual and gender-based violence.

Police officers received training in women's rights and especially in handling the

sensitive nature of rape and abuse cases. Safe houses were designated for rape victims

who may not be able to return to their homes right away after a rape incidence.

Unfortunately, all of these laudable initiatives have not reduced the rate of sexual

violence against women and girls. In fact, sexual and gender-based violence has

increased. A frustrated Lois Brutus, head of AFELL, recently commented, "The raping of

girls and women is a major problem. we have been trying to curtail [these attacks], but it

still continues"[163]. With unemployment rate of more than 85%, even the President,

Johnson-Sirleaf has called on men to stop exploiting the desperate situation of poor

families to lure young girls into exchanging sex for material things, saying:

> "To those of you who are privileged or attained successes in businesses and are in
> our communities, and to those of you who represent the international community,

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[163] IRIN news, Liberia: Government, women's groups decry post-war sexual violence, March 15, 2007, available at http://www.plusnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=64388

I urge you not to use your wealth and power to sexually exploit children and women. It is an unacceptable behavior, and a major challenge currently facing all of us," [164]

The president's statement comes against a backdrop of new reports that there are anywhere between 2-8 victims of rape every week, some as young as five years old.[165] This has prompted the government to launch a new anti-rape campaign that carries the message: "No sex for help. No help for sex. Sex is not a requirement for jobs, grades, medical treatment or other services"[166].

Thus, current realities in Liberia have rendered effective implementation of the law a daunting task. The National Gender-based Violence Plan of Action has aptly summarized the problem: "Perpetrators go unpunished or receive light sentences, few survivors report cases, and law enforcement is known for treating survivors poorly."[167].

A Crises Group report[168] has enumerated a number of reasons for this. First, the report argues that courts throughout Liberia are short on prosecutors and defense attorneys as many of the country's 200 trained Lawyers preferred to practice in the private sector. The report argues that the court system can only prosecute a fraction of all the cases at a time. Furthermore, in many rural areas, there is no access to the statutory legal system and in some cases; victims are too poor to pursue criminal cases.

The report also blames local customary practices, charging that the culture of silence that derives from communities ostracizing victims who make formal complaints

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[164]Ibid
[165] Ibid
[166] Ibid
[167] Ibid
[168] Crisis Group Report: Liberia: Resurrecting the Justice System, Africa Report N°107 – 6 April 2006

of their cases and the practice of settling disputes through customary laws are responsible for the lack of criminal punishment for perpetrators. The report alleges that communities often view matters relating to sexual violence as issues to be settled privately outside the judiciary system.

So while the new rape law meets the three goals of criminalizing rape conduct, deterring and punishing prospective rapists and promoting gender equality, yet the application of the law so far shows its limited impact on the rates of reporting, prosecution or conviction. The Liberian experience provides a number of lessons about the nature of legal rights. First, focusing on guaranteeing rights is only as meaningful as the government's ability to provide for those rights and the ability of people to exercise or access those rights. Therefore, guaranteeing rights against rape in Liberia has not necessarily addressed the underlying structural barriers to exercising them. With a post-conflict State in complete disrepair or in some cases virtually absent in many parts of the country, and a population that views the legal system as costly, discriminatory, or impractical, reducing rape is going to take more than revising criminal codes. Practically, this means that prosecutions are expensive and neither the State nor victims have the capacity or resources for trial costs.

Furthermore, if the statutory systems do not work, then it seems improbable that seeking retributive justice through that system will produce the intended results. On the other hand, if customary laws are in fact the desired choice of dispute resolution by local people, then it would seem impractical to abolish such a system, as some argue, in favor of a system that does not work. What this suggests in fact is that customary laws need not be jettisoned. Instead new laws should be the embodiment of the social values and

meanings that are important to local populations. For example, customary law practices call for rape perpetrators paying the victim's family honor damages. This stems from the belief that rape is a crime committed against the family's honor rather than against the individual. Besides, if most families operating under customary laws prefer rape cases to be settled privately, it seems practical then to base any improvement of the way the issue of rape is addressed on these understandings.

Furthermore, when it comes to reporting rape cases, women, particularly those operating under customary law have to consider social relations based on local value system before going forward with a rape case. Often women are members of families, households and communities and see their interests to be tied to those institutions. They rely on the social networks and support they receive from these institutions. So, when a woman has to report a rape case, that has the potential of imprisonment for the perpetrator for the rest of his life, her decision as to whether to move forward with such actions is not just based on her individual rights. She also considers the well being of other household members and certain moral commitments that may be held as important for that community. The situation becomes complex if the perpetrator is a close relative as is sometimes the case. Here, she has to weigh losing face and support of her community to side with a legal and government systems that has little or no capacity to come to her rescue when she needs it in the future. Of course, perpetrators of rape deserve punishment but that solution should be derived within a system that is more relevant to the every day life of people for whom the rights is being sought.

As Seligma (1992) has written, "the autonomous individual freed from communal, ethnic and class loyalties are nowhere to be found in Africa ...the invention

of imaginary free self-determining woman individuality is mythical". Advocates of social relations (for example, Kabeer, 1994) argue that neo-liberal decision-making framework is not sufficient to understand African cultures based on a system of social relations through which production, distribution and consumption are carried out. A neo-liberal development planning framework that, for example, primarily considers the "autonomous individual" undervalues the more fluid social or relational resources such as rights, obligations and claims that govern most African societies (UNRISD, 1995).

Once again, we see that activities undertaken to secure Liberian women's rights have actually fallen far short of its intended objectives. In this case, we see that the practice of creating a new law using a neo-liberal framework while paying very little attention to indigenous social relations is one reason for the failure of this initiative. But also responsible for its failure is the inability of the state to provide the required infrastructure that would allow for its full implementation.

5.3 Women's Economic Development

Although none of the case studies in this thesis discusses the women's movement role in providing economic development programs, women's economic conditions have more relevance to their daily lives than any of the political or human rights issues we have discussed so far. The fact that many women have become breadwinners of their households while being dispossessed as a consequence of the dislocation of war makes the present condition under which they live more difficult. The practical implication of Liberia's 14-year civil conflict is that it inflicted grave suffering on its people. Not only were food systems disrupted and food stock depleted but also entire farming communities

were displaced as warlords and combatants plundered the fields. Moreover, many families lost homes and physical assets, subjecting them to higher risks of malnutrition, shorter lives, illness and illiteracy. Houses, farms, schools, and hospitals were also affected, demonstrating the extent of civilian targeting during the war.

For the most vulnerable and majority rural population, agriculture has been the primary form of livelihood and the major source of income. The extensive destruction of physical infrastructure and wide displacement of the local population impose serious constraints on economic recovery. State economic failure[169] and rising formal sector unemployment has put pressure on women to seek income-generating activities.

While many women's organizations have implemented such programs since the early 1990s, most of these schemes have been too small to offer any broad lessons for their impacts on the lives of women. Therefore, for this section, I have chosen to review the experiences of a local microfinance NGO, the Local Enterprise Assistance Program (LEAP) and its impact on the lives on women. LEAP has been the most active

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[169] Although a very small country, Liberia enjoyed GDP growth of 9% per annum in the 1950s and 1960s. But by the time the civil war ended in 2003, it was one of the poorest countries in the world, ranked 173 out of 174 countries according to the United Nations' human development index. The mining sector, for example, which had accounted for about 12 per cent of GDP in 1988 decreased to about 0.082 per cent in 2004. At the same time the service sector dropped from 50.5 per cent of GDP to 17.4 per cent. Where as pre-conflict export in 1988 were recorded at $ 460 million, in 2004, it was a mere $25 million. Compared to a GDP of a billion dollars in 1988, Liberia's current economic output is projected at $500 million per year.

As a result of the destroyed economy, poverty levels have risen precipitously to a point where more than 76% of the population survives on less than $1 a day. Chronic poverty level, defined as those living on less than $0.50 per day, is currently estimated at 52%. GDP per capital was estimated in 2005 to be $191. Life expectancy is currently estimated at 47 years, while infant mortality (under 5) is 196/1,000 births and maternal mortality is 578/100,000[169]. Current unemployment in the formal sector has risen as high as 85 per cent. The evidence of deteriorating living conditions and quality of life is obvious in every part of the country. Roads, bridges and community-based water and sanitation facilities were all destroyed. Education and health facilities were totally decimated. With current population of more than 3.06 million and projected annual growth rate of 3.4%, Liberia has a long way to go in meeting emergency and long-term reconstruction needs.

organization working on women's empowerment through microfinance. LEAP is more than 95 percent staffed by women and has served predominantly women clients since its founding in 1994.

According to advocates, the benefit of microfinance is seen not only as a strategy for rebuilding and restarting local economies through financial services, but also as a survival tool for people coming out of civil wars. Some donors have justified, microfinance intervention on the grounds that it provides financial services and products at a time when people need it most because there are no other options. Others argue that it helps to support economic activity and employment creation, thus providing a long-term and more viable option to continued humanitarian handouts.

The introduction of microfinance in the mid 1990s raised hopes that poor women would finally have access to much-needed financial services. Supporters of microfinance argue that the early introduction of microfinance have the potential of having both an immediate and a sustainable impact on poverty reduction. A UNCDF assessment conducted in 2004 estimated that there was a potential market of about 82,000 active clients with a loan portfolio of $19 million[170]. But according to the study, only 10% percent of potential clients or 8,200 clients were being served in Liberia[171]. The

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[170] Ibid, note 171

[171] In 1997, UNDP supported seven NGOs delivering credit to about 4,600 clients. But the program failed, recording only 33% repayment rate. Reasons for failure included lack of microfinance expertise on the part of implementing partners as well as UNDP program staff. UNDP's failure to support operating expenses created problems for implementing NGOs to follow-up on loans. Today, there are two main microfinance programs. The American Refugee Committee (ARC) started Liberty Finance in 2005. ARC has pitched Liberty Finance to be the microfinance answer to Liberia's reconstruction, especially in reintegration returning refugees, IDPs and resident populations in major business centers. It maintains operation in Monrovia, as well as, two branches, in Kakata and in Gbargna and currently has 2,700 clients. Liberty Finance plans to reach 15,000 people by 2009. The other microfinance organization is the Local Enterprise Assistance Program (LEAP), which is the subject of the brief case study below.

assessment suggested that the microfinance sector in Liberia was still at a nascent stage and that supply was only meeting a fraction of the total demand. Consequently, the report recommended that the microfinance industry in Liberia needed considerable support to build capacity, capital base and expansion.

LEAP[172] was started in 1994 and gave its first loans in 1995. The management and staff of the LEAP program want to turn it into a sustainable microfinance institution. The organization aspires to reach a scale of outreach and a level of efficiency that would allow it reach operational and financial sustainability, thus converting it into a "Bank for the Poor"

By the end of the last civil war in 2003, only LEAP had active clients. When the war subsided in 2004, LEAP considered its 6,000 clients active although repayments were very slow and it was very clear that many of its clients would default on loans they had taken prior to the escalation of fighting in Monrovia. But a Bureau of Population Refugee and Migration (BPRM) of the State Department funding in 2004 helped it to revitalize its operation.

LEAP had five branches: a head office in Monrovia and branches in Bassa, Bong, Bomi, and Margrbi Counties. But it has since closed its branches in Bassa and Bong because of a limited client base as well as repayment problems. Methodologically, LEAP

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[172] For the first 10 years of its existence, LEAP operated as the 'microfinance arm' of the Association of Evangelicals of Liberia, a local Christian organization. Today, it is registered as an independent microfinance limited liability company focusing on the provision of financial services. LEAP's international donors have included World Relief USA, World Relief Canada, the World Bank's Consultative Group to Assist the Poor (CGAP) Project, the Alchemy Project of Tuft University, and World Hope. In 2004, LEAP received a half million dollars grant from the Bureau of Population Refugees and Migration (BPRM) within the U. S. Department of State to revitalize its operations. Locally, LEAP has also received funding from UNDP, UNHCR, Save the Children (SCF) and the Ambassador's Self–Help Fund at the United States Embassy in Monrovia.

uses an adapted village banking methodology[173], which it calls community banks for all

entering clients. It graduates some clients to individual lending as their businesses

mature. LEAP also uses solidarity groups. LEAP has also experimented with agricultural

loans but this product did not do well.

Operationally, entering clients within the LEAP program form a group of between

5-20 members; receive training and a loan that last for four months. LEAP promotes

savings, which it uses as security on the loan. Most loans are for petty trading and are

repaid on a weekly basis. Agriculture loans used to be paid on a monthly basis. LEAP's

initial loan average around $50 and its maximum loans are capped at $2,000. On

disbursement, clients receive the full amount. Interest is paid first, then principle.

In spite of operating in a country burdened by over a decade of violence, LEAP

staff estimate that they have served over 15,000 clients, 98% of whom have been women.

This is especially remarkable given that even many well-endowed NGOs working in

Liberia had to flee Liberia's civil war on many occasions. Of course, during the heaviest

periods of violence during 1990s, and in 2003, LEAP was forced to close it doors, but

tried to open shortly there after. Through out the many years of civil war, LEAP survived

because of its steadfast commitment to clients and its ability to react quickly. These

frequent outbursts of fighting made it more difficult for LEAP to expand quickly or

attract substantial funding. But because the organization always maintained a presence

and made efforts to contact clients right after the various fighting episodes, it won the

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[173] Key features of the village banking methodology includes a preference for reaching the very poor,
reinforced by delivering services through groups close to members' homes; 2. Credit for all members at all
times linked to mandatory savings controlled by the group (the internal account); and 3. Self-management
by the group during frequent, regular meetings leading to autonomous local financial intermediation in
three years (source: Craig Churchill, Madeline Hirschland, and Judith Painter
New Directions in Poverty Finance, Village Banking Revisited, SEEP Network, 2002).

trust and confidence of clients. While LEAP kept to good microfinance principles, such as insisting that all loans got paid off even those taken in times of heavy fighting, it has always adapted flexible loan payment schedules to assist its clients during those difficult years.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to measure and attribute the impact of the LEAP program on the lives of its many women borrowers in a scientifically rigorous and acceptable way. However, anecdotal evidence show that the LEAP program has helped to increased women's income and assets. Many clients report using increased income for such things as food, education, and health care. A few have invested in housing improvements.

In a few cases, women have made substantial progress in their businesses. These women now travel on a regular basis to other West African countries to buy clothes and other items for resale in Liberia. A small number have been successful in placing import orders from China. These women appear to have gained confidence and status in the society, as they have been able to increase their businesses.

Yet LEAP staff are quick to point out that implementing financial services for the very poor women in Liberia has been challenging even for an institution that is as committed to such a purpose as LEAP has been. In fact many of the LEAP staff I interviewed admit that the program has not worked for the very poor women, particularly the internally displaced and returning refugees. Extending loans to a destitute population, with no experience of enterprise development or those still in a transient mode made matters worst at times. Even in instances where LEAP used outright grants (as it did in 2004) as a precursor to a loan program, many women seem to be crumbling under

massive burdens of needs that even a succession of grants and loans proved inadequate to help them break through.

According to LEAP program staff, those owning business enterprises before entering the program or those who have been economically active in the past seem to do better than those without any prior experience or other assets. Also, small loans of the size that LEAP gives proved to be problematic for very poor women. Women have complained that small loans are only marginally helpful. At the same time LEAP appears to be reluctant to increase loan sizes for fear of encumbering new clients with repayment burdens they cannot bear. And although LEAP receives massive new entrants every new loan cycle, it also experiences a significant number of dropped outs among those who are dissatisfied with present level of services and those who become delinquent and can longer pay back their loans. Unfortunately, because of its size and resources, LEAP has been unable to do a thorough market research to determine clients' needs for new, effective, and appropriate financial services.

Also, LEAP's program interventions in rural areas have been less successful than its urban-based outreach. As mentioned before, LEAP has had to close down its operations in Bong and Bassa counties, both of them in rural communities, due to poor repayment and the lack of a critical mass of clients to render operations in those areas financially viable. The LEAP experience shows that the desire to reach the very poor in a financially sustainable way in rural communities is fraught with lots of obstacles. And so is the challenge of reaching special population groups such as refugees, returnees, the internally displaced and ex-combatants, people who are worst affected by the war. Over the course of LEAP existence, it has been less successful with these population groups.

LEAP attributes these shortcomings to a number of reasons. First, LEAP acknowledges that although microfinance is a good development instrument against poverty, is it not the most appropriate for very poor people. Second, there is a general low-level demand for goods and services because of the depressed economy with over 85% of the population unemployed. Food items receive the most demand but because there is an over saturation of the market with such items, profit margin tends to be small. Unfortunately, these are the only kinds of businesses that most poor women engage in because of the low level of capital requirement. A third reason for the shortcoming, according to LEAP has to do with the general lack of infrastructure to facilitate economic activities in many parts of the country. For example, the absence of roads makes it difficult to access markets in rural areas. Generally the slow pace of reconstruction activities has made it more difficult to provide financial services for the poor rural communities.

From the LEAP experience, two important lessons emerged. First, the majority of the poor women still face dire economic conditions. Even committed organizations, such as LEAP can only meet a small part of the existing needs. This suggests the need for effective and a much bigger economic intervention that goes beyond microfinance in order to provide a comprehensive rehabilitation covering the entire destitute population. The Assumptions that microfinance is the do-it-all solution for promoting economic activity, employment creation, and mitigating stagnation and spiraling poverty may be overrated. The experience of LEAP demonstrates that many women devastated by civil war, who are unable to meet their daily needs, cannot easily convert to becoming business clients with good repayment potential. Returnees from refugee and displaced

people's shelter, for the most part, need housing, food, safe drinking water, adequate health care, seeds and tools and assistance to rebuild their houses. Many of such people in Liberia are returning to areas where every one fled and basic support systems, such as water and food sources, were destroyed. They need help to rebuild their lives and a dignified and secured livelihood.

The second great lesson from the LEAP experience is that unless there is a strong State commitment to building infrastructure and a sustained attention to reconstruct rural communities, sustainable livelihood for most poor women will be difficult to achieve.

6.0 Conclusion

This thesis has shown the capacity of women not only to contribute to changes but also to lead change in an effective way. It also shows that women have played significant roles in bringing the country back to peace and that Liberia can boast of having a female president and several women holding key positions. However, these gains have not necessarily translated into improvements in women's statuses. The thesis shows that women have not made much gain in their material wellbeing. This leaves the important question of how then can we secure development for women? Obviously, an attempt to prescribe how development may be attained for Liberian women is a difficult task. Perhaps, the best one can hope for is to describe some basic elements of what that process may involve. Along this line, I make three suggestions. One is that any effort to secure development for women requires a strong state. Second, for the totality of women in Liberia to benefit fully from the process of development, it requires disaggregating the various categories of women and then developing specific programs for each category. And third, legal reforms and public policies aim at increasing women's equal right must be informed by social context and local customs through which local people negotiate various relationships.

While acknowledging the role women have played in recent years, I argue that reliance on mere political participation is not enough to produce the kinds of changes that will bring economic benefits for ordinary women. The women's movement plurality does not ensure an automatic and equal representation for all women. Also the women's movement is not necessarily the all-encompassing movement for sudden empowerment for all nor is it necessarily an equalizing of life chances and opportunities entity, as many

of its advocates would have us to believe (Fatton, 1995). Like the rest of the Liberian society, it too is susceptible to be traversed by class interests, ethnic particularizes, and individual egotism.

Furthermore, in a battered and ravished war torn country such as Liberia with little or no private sector investment or state infrastructure, the state must bear an unusually large burden of initiatives to stimulate long-term changes within the economy. It must plan to modernize the economy by transforming subsistence agriculture, industrializing the economy, educating the population, and providing vital services, such as health, housing, food, water, and work. This I argue is Liberia's best option for securing development for women. Current trend towards neo-liberal policies in a setting as Liberia will only exacerbate the level of sufferings poor women are already facing.

Unlike many countries in Africa, Liberia enjoy none of the benefits of European colonization, which is some measure conferred on most other African countries tangible benefits of roads, schools, and well trained bureaucrats (Fatton, 1995). Instead ethnic politics and a strong patronage system took deep roots, stifling development for over a century and a half. Criticism of the president or the government and its policies was always interpreted as disloyalty, sedition, subversion, and punished severely, sometimes by death. With the destruction of the civil war, Liberia's development has been reversed for more than 50 years. To remedy this situation not only for the benefit of women but also for the entire population, I argue for a developmental state that adopts a rights-based approach to state building.

A rights-based approach to state-building then focuses on the creation of new institutions that ensure all classes of women achieve a palpable level of economic and social rights as the basis for development. These rights should include benefits, such as, education, health, housing, food, water, work, and an adequate standard of living. Structuring state-building so that it focuses on the production of such rights will do more in helping to increase women's well being than the current emphasis on political participation. The fact that women's needs are turned into rights gives them the opportunity to create demand and hold the duty bearers accountable for the realization of those rights. This demand driven approach will create the necessary incentives for state institutions to recreate themselves to serve the population. This demand driven approach also creates new arenas for ordinary people to meaningfully participate in issues that affect their lives instead of leaving it in the hands of so-called political representatives.

A proposal for state building may appear to many as counterintuitive. In countering the reach of the state, both the World Bank and the IMF have advocated that Africa needs less government. Yet states should be seen as instruments. They can be put to good or bad use. As indicated in the introduction of this thesis, researchers, such as Professor Alice Amsden in her work on how Korea and Taiwan achieved economic development and Professor Judith Tendler in her research on government-run development projects in Brazil, have demonstrated that even governments can produce the same kinds of results that neo-liberals have only ascribed to the market, NGOs or civil society. Several western countries, for example, Holland, Germany and Great

Britain have also been classified as developmental states in the early stages of their development[174].

Without a social policy that protects at least those whose subsistence have been decimated by the war, condition for sustained peace may be eroded. Assuring poor women at least the right to a modicum of economic welfare is a legitimate goal. And a rights-based approach to state building gives to poor women control over all areas of daily existence –from national policy to housing, from schooling to working conditions, from transport to consumption of food. In fact Development is impossible without the empowerment of poor rural women. It is only when the needs of poor rural women are institutionalized that such true democracy and peace can have a real chance of materializing. Lasting democracy and peace is impossible without such demand driven force behind it that creates a political society in which poor women can engage the political system in order to gain control of the situation of their material and cultural lives.

Another reason why a developmental state is necessary can be seen in the absence of one. In such a situation, the state incapacity fuels the underground economy because the underground economy is an embodiment of the poor response to the state's incapacity to provide the basic framework of material welfare (Fatton, 1995). Fatton argues that in order to survive in midst of unemployment and low wages, the majority poor would have to erect structures that continuously feed the illegal practices of the ever-expanding black markets. Fatton further notes that this new avenue of wealth accumulation defeats and

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[174] See Amiya Kumar Bagchi, The Past and the Future of the Developmental State, available at http://jwsr.ucr.edu/archive/vol6/number2/pdf/jwsr-v6n2-bagchi.pdf

undermines the capacity of the state to dictate the closure of inequality. It emergence as a relatively autonomous economic social realm from the ruins of government incapacity constitute a potential political challenge to equality.

Without a strong and viable State, securing development for women in post-conflict settings may prove difficult. Simply having laws on paper that cannot be enforced or implemented does not help women. For women in rural areas, access to farm-to-market roads to sell their agricultural produce or a health clinic they can attend when they are sick is more meaningful than a quota system that gives women 30% representation in government. Also the emphasis on NGOs and civil society in the development community sometimes tend to sideline official government actors and functions. But efforts to secure more rights for women must include the government. By their nature, NGOs have limitations because they tend to be project oriented and are many times anti-state. The ad-hoc manner in which NGOs move in and move out with services does not foster long-term development. Therefore, the involvement of long-term institutions such as the State is necessary in securing developments for women.

Second, as the Liberian case has shown, women may not necessarily be eager to enter politics. Equal representation in government is not necessarily what many might seek. And even if such a goal were to be achieved, it is not clear how it might actually impact the lives of ordinary women. The interest of Liberian women during this post-conflict period may in fact be many and diverse depending on such things as age, level of education, class, religion and vocations. Thus, the assumption that what the 'generic' women want is more seats in the cabinet and legislature is a gross generalization and one that may divert important resources and focus away from addressing the real problems

that women face. Besides, the notion that more women in government will automatically change the situation for women is in my view placing too much hope in the capacity of women to obtain institutional transformation. Institutional change is difficult and expecting one group to single-handedly turn those institutions around may be an illusion.

Therefore, to achieve tangible and real practical difference in the lives of women, we need to disaggregate the various classes of women. Much research is needed in this area in order to understand how the civil war affected each class that existed before the war or how the war may have helped to create new ones. A microfinance program, for example, would benefit women petty traders more than it might benefit native women farmers. Similarly, increased political participation may benefit elite civilized women more than semi-literate civilized women. Designing specific programs that meet the needs of each group present a better potential for women than generic solutions. As may be expected, the interest, loyalties and desires of the various groups of Liberian women would be dissimilar and continually reformulated, thus making it difficult to generalize about a common real interest for Liberian women (Molyneux, 1985).

Third, legal reforms and public policies aim at increasing women's equal rights must be informed by local customs. Reforms need to begin with the most useful systems that are already in place. The tendency to eschew customary institutions and systems that have been in place for many years is so rampant in the zeal to legislate women rights. One key cultural consideration is to see women's interest as tied to their families, households and communities. A community culture, for example, is highly entrenched in Liberia and the notion of the 'individual' is not as celebrated as it in Western cultures.

Hence, reforms that are based on the notion of the 'individual' as the unit of analysis will most likely failed in communities that are based on customary laws.

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