



Rural Marginalization and Local Conflicts

This report, the third in a series of quarterly publications on Liberia, highlights the marginalization of rural areas in the country resulting from poor roads and limited infrastructure, as well as the presence of ongoing local conflicts. These issues have emerged from incident/issue reports submitted by Liberian civil society for conflict early warning and prevention. Social, economic, and political pressures will be monitored through the UNLock early warning system in the run-up to the October 2011 election with the goal of preventing violence from flaring at the local or national levels. This report presents an aggregation of the data entered into the database by participating civil society organizations located throughout Liberia, now in the reconstruction phase after its devastating civil war, which ended in 2003.

Some issues have emerged consistently in reports from participants during the course of the year. Information collected by civil society on incidents and issues occurring between September and November, 2010, highlighted Public Services, Demographic Pressures and State Legitimacy as the issues of most concern to members of the network, in that order. Public Services and Demographic Pressures were also among the top issues of concern in the two previous reports on Liberia.

For the third time in a row, land competition was the most reported issue within the indicator for demographic pressures, with nine of the 27 reports for that indicator, from five different counties. In this report, concerns rose over issues of State Legitimacy, most of which dealt with various forms of corruption. Reports on police soliciting bribes, in particular, have been increasing. Reports of tensions between ethnic and religious groups also increased from the previous period, some in areas such as Lofa County that have experienced outbreaks of violence in 2010.

Grand Gedeh and Grand Bassa Counties

UNLock workshops were held in Buchanan (Grand Bassa County) in September and in Zwedru (Grand Gedeh County) in October. As a result, these two counties generated the most reports during this period, allowing for a more in-depth analysis of events in those counties during the three-month period of September to November.

In Grand Bassa, the indicators for Public Services, Demographic Pressures, Economic Decline and State Legitimacy received the most reports. Civil society members from the area emphasized insufficient health and education services, poor roads, sea erosion, unemployment and corruption as major issues of concern.

In Grand Gedeh, Public Services was again the most reported indicator, with particular emphasis placed on the deplorable condition of the roads in southeastern Liberia. Shortages of goods and fuel caused by the road conditions, which prevented shipments from getting through, caused prices to rise. State Legitimacy, particularly police corruption, was the second most reported indicator, followed by Human Rights and Economic Decline.



Findings

Reports that The Fund for Peace received from its UNLock Liberia partners (September 2010 to November 2010) indicate that Liberia continues to face social, economic and political pressures at the national and local levels. This report contains a summary of the civil society field reports, by CAST indicator, with maps showing affected counties. Those counties with a green background have field reports associated with them. A green background does not necessarily mean that it is worse off than districts lacking in data, though it does highlight problems that need to be addressed in that particular county or district.

Broken out by indicator and county, there were 157 reports logged during the period in question. Based on civil society reporting, issues relating to Public Services were considered the most salient of the 12 CAST indicators (45 reports), followed by Demographic Pressures (27 reports), State Legitimacy (22 reports), Human Rights (17 reports), Economic Decline/Poverty (15 reports), Group Grievance (9 reports), Uneven Development (7 reports), Security Apparatus (6 reports), Factionalized Elites and Human Flight (4 reports each), and External Intervention (1 report).

Geographically the majority of the reports were from Grand Gedeh County (46 reports), followed by Grand Bassa County with 39 reports, Monserrado County with 13 reports, and River Cess County with 11 reports. The remaining 11 counties received between zero and eight reports between September and November, 2010. It is important to note that this is **not** a comprehensive tally of conflict-related incidents in Liberia. The distribution of reports, both among indicators and among counties, does not reflect the distribution of challenges facing Liberian communities. This merely reflects the challenges highlighted by participating organizations over the time period in question.

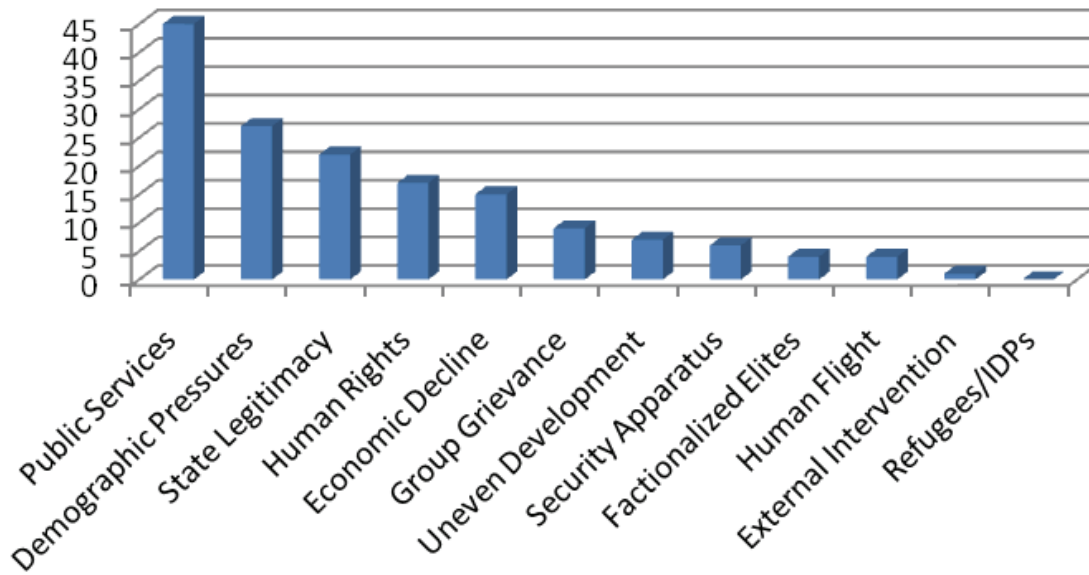
Methodology

Between 2007 and 2010, The Fund for Peace conducted six training workshops on conflict early warning in Liberia, based on our conflict assessment methodology (CAST). Participants included a broad range of civil society representatives in Liberia. The goals of the project are to provide civil society with a framework by which to recognize potential danger signs, document events, gather data from across the country and communicate it to each other for processing and analysis. This information is to be used both for helping people get out of harm's way in the short term, as well as for developing conflict-sensitive approaches to development and policy in the long term. Since the UNLock early warning system was established in 2008, over 500 reports on Liberia (broken out by indicator and district) have been entered into the database as of this writing, most of which were received in 2010. The data generated by the participants has been saved on a password-protected website, accessible by the participants for their own analysis and for the corroboration of details to ensure accuracy.

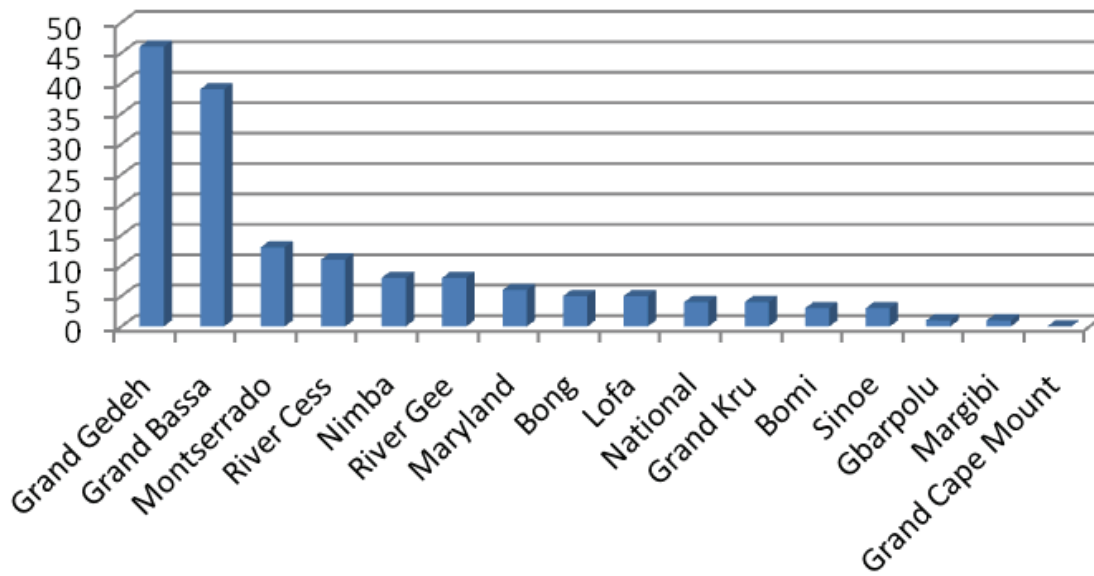
The 12 CAST indicators for which data is sought include:

1. Demographic Pressures
2. Refugees and IDPs
3. Group Grievance
4. Human Flight (including Brain Drain)
5. Uneven Development
6. Economic Decline/Poverty
7. Legitimacy of the State
8. Public Services
9. Human Rights
10. Security Apparatus
11. Factionalized Elites
12. External Intervention

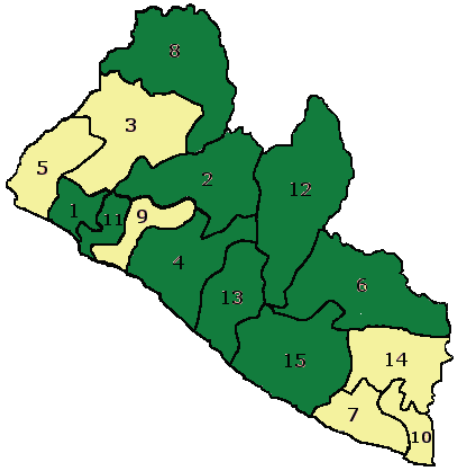
157 Reports by Indicator, September-November 2010



157 Reports by County, September-November 2010



Reported Demographic Pressures



CAST pressures reported in counties with green background.

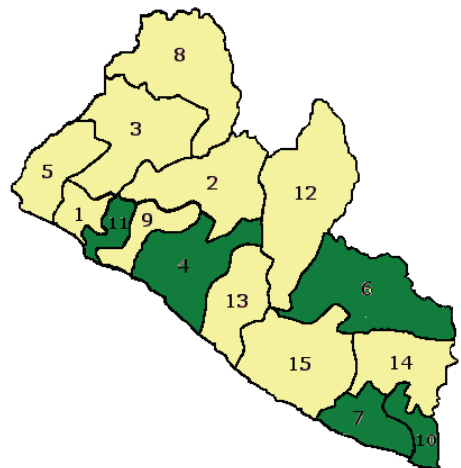
Land competition remains a prominent issue in several counties, accounting for nine of the 27 reports of demographic pressures in Liberia. Six reports indicated environmental degradation issues and six reported abuse of drugs and narcotics. There were two reports on natural disasters, one report each on issues pertaining to disease, population density, water supply, and teen pregnancy. Below is a breakdown of the top three demographic pressures among counties and districts.

- Tensions over land were reported in Lofa (County 8), Nimba (County 12), Sinoe (County 15), and River Cess (County 13) counties. A land dispute was reported between River Cess (County 13) and Nimba (County 12). Citizens petitioned the legislative caucus to resolve the dispute, but the caucus reportedly turned down the petition.
- Sea erosion and environmental degradation throughout Grand Bassa (County 4) destroyed roads and homes in District 4 and Buchanan City.
- Abuse of drugs and narcotics are a burgeoning problem in the country, including among the youth population in Grand Bassa (County 4). Poverty was considered by the civil society representatives reporting the problem to be a contributing factor for the drug use among the youth.
- Floods were reported in the Panta-Kpa district of Bong (County 2) and the Saclepea district of Nimba (County 12). In Saclepea, many houses were reportedly destroyed.

Reported Incidents of Economic Decline

Fourteen reports pertained to issues related to Liberia's economy. Issues included illicit activity in the private sector, as well as rising inflation, poverty, and unemployment. Reports were received from Grand Bassa (County 4), Grand Gedeh (County 6), Grand Kru (County 7), Maryland (County 8), and Montserado (County 11).

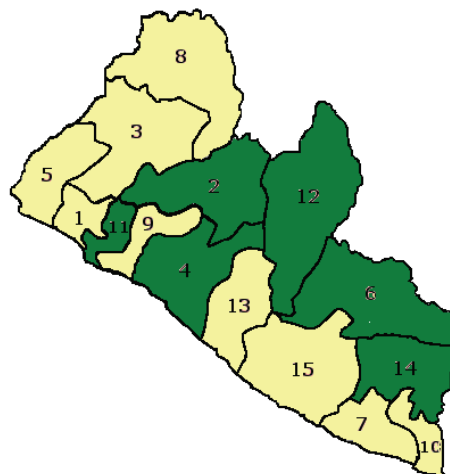
- Increasing inflation was addressed by six of the reports. Poor road systems in Maryland (County 10) and Grand Gedeh (County 6) were believed to be contributing to the rising prices, particularly fuel prices, as road conditions prevented goods from reaching those areas, causing shortages.
- Unemployment remains an issue of concern in Liberia. In particular, job cuts by a major company in Grand Bassa (County 4) were an issue of concern among civil society in that area. High youth unemployment in Grand Gedeh (County 6) was also reported.
- There were strikes in September at the Liberian Agricultural Company (LAC), near Buchanan in Grand Bassa (County 4) as workers demanded better wages and benefits.



CAST pressures reported in counties with green background.

Reported Pressures on State Legitimacy

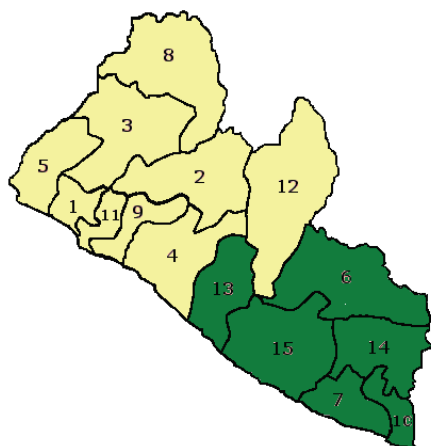
With 22 reports, the indicator for State Legitimacy was the third most reported indicator between September and November 2010. These reports mostly related to corruption, particularly police corruption, which accounted for nearly half of the reports. Reports for this indicator were mostly from Grand Bassa (County 4), Grand Gedeh (County 6) and Montserrado (County 11).



CAST pressures reported in counties with green background.

- There were strikes by the workers of the Liberian Agricultural Company (LAC) demanding greater benefits.
- Corruption was reported within the judiciary, including judges and other court staff receiving cash in order to settle cases. Aside from issues of corruption, there was a backlog of cases, with accused persons spending significant time awaiting trial. These issues were reported in River Gee (County 14), Grand Gedeh (County 6) and Grand Bassa (County 4).
- There were several reports of police corruption in Grand Bassa (County 4), Grand Gedeh (County 6) and Montserrado (County 11), including police extorting bribes from motorists at checkpoints, demanding bribes before filing cases, or demanding bribes before allowing family members to visit prisoners.
- The Ministry of Commerce was accused of fraud in the sale of donated Japanese rice. The Ministry denied the charges and stated that the proceeds from the sale of the rice had been properly accounted for and invested in agricultural projects in Liberia (Daily Observer, October 13, 2010).
- Corruption was reported within the education system, with teachers allegedly demanding bribes from students in exchange for good grades.

Reported Uneven Economic Development



CAST pressures reported in counties with green background.

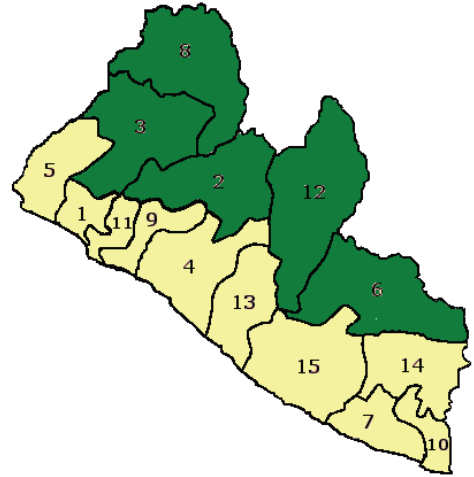
There were seven reports of Uneven Economic Development between September and November 2010, broken out by county and indicator. Most dealt with the marginalization of rural areas, particularly in the southeast.

- Residents of Grand Gedeh (County 6) complained that they had access to fewer schools, hospitals and other services than those in other parts of the country.
- The poor condition of the roads was reportedly causing economic hardship among the counties of the southeast, including high prices for goods.
- In River Cess (County 13), the areas near the coast were reported to be more developed than the rest of the county, where most of its population was living.

Reported Group Grievance

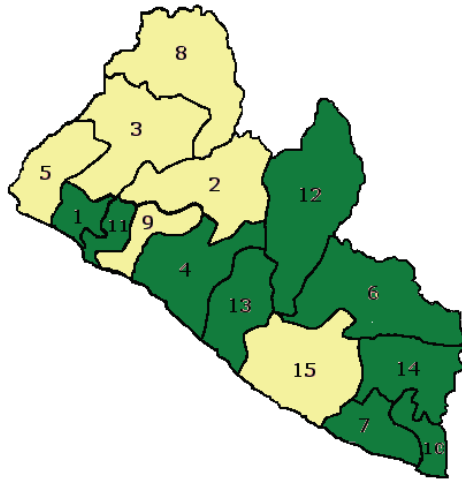
Nine reports were received from several different counties on issues of group grievances, most of which were related to ethnic and religious tensions among populations.

- Tensions were reported between steel workers from Bong (County 2) and Nimba (County 12) and workers of the Bassa ethnic group. Those from Bong and Nimba County were allegedly attempting to stop Bassa people from working at the steel company. Bassa workers then threatened to stop other groups from working in Grand Bassa.
- In Grand Gedeh (County 6), Mandingos reportedly felt marginalized by the majority ethnic group, the Krahn, which was dominant in numbers and political power.
- Controversy in the media erupted in September over a letter from Lofa (County 8) allegedly written and supported by Islamic leaders of Liberia, describing Christian communities in Lofa in unfavorable terms. Lofa County was the location of violence between Christians and Muslims in February 2010 in which several people were killed.



CAST pressures reported in counties with green background.

Reported Pressures on Public Services

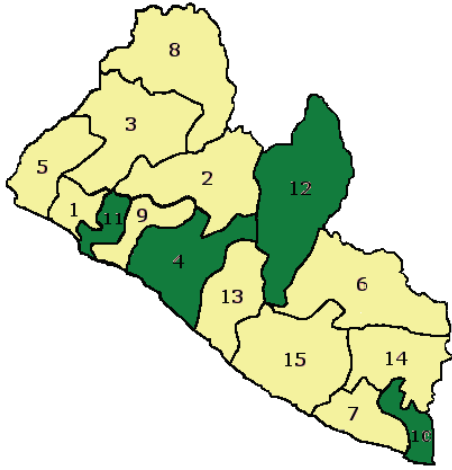


CAST pressures reported in counties with green background.

As in the previous report, issues relating to Public Services received by far the most reports (45) during the period of September-November. Problems with public services were reported in River Cess (County 13), Montserrado (County 11), Grand Bassa (County 4), Grand Gedeh (County 6), River Gee (County 14), Grand Kru (County 7), Maryland (County 10), and Nimba (County 12).

- With 13 reports from six different counties, deficiencies within the health system were the most frequently reported problem within the indicator for Public Services. Issues included insufficient health clinics in rural areas, which forced people to travel long distances for care; clinics that were understaffed and undersupplied; incidents of hospital staff stealing drugs to sell for profit; and a brand new hospital in Tappita, Nimba (County 12) that was not open because there were no doctors to staff it.
- With 11 reports, poor road conditions were the second most reported problem within the Public Services indicator. Poor roads were reported to have caused shortages of food and fuel and rising prices in Grand Bassa (County 4) and Grand Gedeh (County 6). In River Cess (County 13), residents sometimes had to travel by river where roads and bridges were lacking or in poor repair, which was sometimes hazardous. A 15-year-old girl reportedly drowned on the Cestos River when a canoe capsized.
- A lack of sanitation was reported in Bomi (County 1), Grand Bassa (County 4) and Grand Gedeh (County 6).

Reported Security Apparatus Issues



CAST pressures reported in counties with green background.

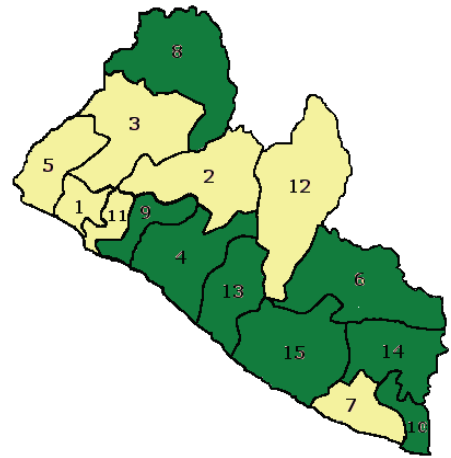
There were five reports relating to the Security Apparatus between September and November 2010. The reported incidents had to do with police impunity and abuse, mob violence, and non-state armed groups. Reports were received from Grand Bassa (County 4), Maryland (County 10), Montserrado (County 11), and Nimba (County 12). An overall lack of faith in the ability of the police and the judicial system to uphold the rule of law has often prompted citizens to take matters into their own hands.

- There were two reported incidents of police brutality, one in Montserrado (County 11) and one in Nimba (County 12).
- In Grand Bassa (County 4) and Maryland (County 10), there were reports that citizens had taken the law into their own hands, attacking or even killing individuals suspected of committing crimes, due to a perception that those responsible would not be prosecuted.

Reported Human Rights Issues

The indicator for Human Rights received 17 reports between September and November 2010, making it the fourth most reported indicator in this time period. The reported incidents took place in Grand Bassa (County 4), Grand Gedeh (County 6), Lofa (County 8), Margibi (County 9), Maryland (County 10), River Cess (County 13), River Gee (County 14) and Sinoe (County 15).

- There were three reports of child labor from Grand Gedeh (County 6), Margibi (County 9) and River Gee (County 14), where children were allegedly working in small scale mining, on rubber plantations (despite strict rules to the contrary) and in the markets.
- There were several reports of sexual violence from Grand Bassa (County 4) and Grand Gedeh (County 6). In Buchanan, Grand Bassa, rape was a problem, with many of the court cases reported to be rape cases. In Zwedru, Grand Gedeh, a government official allegedly raped a woman in September and was arrested.



CAST pressures reported in counties with green background.

Grand Gedeh County



Grand Gedeh County, with 46 out of the total 157 filed reports, accounted for the most incident reports of a Liberian county between the months of September and November 2010. This large number is not necessarily an indication that the pressures the county faces are more severe than other counties. However, the larger number of reports allows for a more detailed examination of the situation in Liberia as a whole.

The most reported issues in Liberia pertained to incidents of inadequate public services, with 45 reports received on the issue for the country as a whole. In Grand Gedeh County, the majority (18), of the county's 46 reports addressed issues of public services. State Legitimacy received ten reports from Grand Gedeh, Human Rights received seven, and Economic Decline received six.

Public Services: 18 of the 46 reports from Grand Gedeh pertained to public service inadequacies. There were four reports on issues of inadequacies within the education system, including the inaccessibility of schools for some communities, bribery and corruption within the system, and a lack of higher education facilities.

Three more were on poor road conditions (as seen in the image at right). Grand Gedeh is located in the more remote southeastern region of the country. There are only a few roads connecting it with the capital of Monrovia and those roads are unpaved and in poor repair, particularly during the rainy season, when they can become nearly impassible.



The main highway to Zwedru, Grand Gedeh County

Four reports were received on the health system, which lacked necessary resources. Reports indicated an inadequate number of health care facilities and the difficulty of accessing them; a lack of doctors and other staff at the hospitals, and shortages of drugs and other supplies.

Legitimacy of the State: 10 of the 46 reports addressed issues of state legitimacy. Police corruption was the most reported issue with seven reports, but corruption was also reported within the judiciary and the school system. Several of the reports dealt with police extorting bribes from motorists at checkpoints and demanding bribes before performing their duties.

Human Rights: Seven reports highlighted human rights abuses in the county, including violence against children, extortion, gender discrimination, and acts of sexual violence.

Economic Decline: Six reports were received on economic issues, particularly rising inflation. The poor road conditions were seen as contributing to the rising prices, including the price of fuel, which ranged from 550 to 700 Liberian dollars (about 8-10 USD) in Zwedru, Grand Gedeh. Prices of food and other goods also rose as a result of problems with transportation. High unemployment was also reported.

Grand Bassa County



Grand Bassa County accounted for 39 of the total 157 reports from Liberia during the period of September-November 2010, making it the second most reported county after Grand Gedeh County. Indicators of inadequate public services, common throughout the country as a whole, and demographic pressures were the most reported issues in Grand Bassa. Reports of inadequate public services accounted for one third (13 out of the 39) of the total reports for Grand Bassa. There were 10 reports on demographic pressures. Indications of economic decline (6 reports) and concerns of state legitimacy (5 reports) were also prominent issues in Grand Bassa.

Most reports in Grand Bassa (25 out of 39) were received from District 4, where the county's urban center of Buchanan is located and where an UNLock training workshop was held. Nine of the district's reports indicated demographic pressures, including issues with drugs and narcotics abuse and environmental degradation. Seven of the reports indicated problems with public services, including issues with the education, health, sanitation, and road systems. Four reports indicated economic issues, state legitimacy issues (mainly corruption) were addressed in three of the reports, and two reports indicated issues with sexual violence.

The following issues were reported in Grand Bassa County on public services, demographic pressures, economic decline, and issues of corruption:

Public Services

- Reports indicate that the educational facilities in the county are inadequate with a lack of school buildings and unpaid staff.
- Health services in the county are sparse, making travel to the facilities extensive and lengthy and endangering the lives of those in need of immediate medical attention. In addition to inadequate access to health services, hospital staff have been reported stealing or selling medicines for personal gain.
- Poor road conditions and damaged bridges impeded the transportation of goods to and from markets and contributed to economic hardship.
- The county faces sanitation issues due to lack of public toilets and improper waste disposal.

Demographic Pressures

- There were a number of reports of drug and narcotics abuse, particularly among the youth.
- Sea erosion was a prominent environmental issue, with all reports come from Grand Bassa County. The rising sea level has led to the erosion of houses and roads, impeding work and travel.

Economic Decline

- Unemployment and poverty were issues of concern, including protests over downsizing at Buchanan Renewable Energy.

Legitimacy of the State

- Corruption in the police and judiciary were reported, including unfair or improper trials and police officers demanding bribes.

Context, Implications, and Recommendations

This report highlights national and local pressures facing Liberia that could contribute to outbreaks of violence as presidential elections approach in October 2011. Many of the problems outlined in previous reports continued during the period of September to November 2010, and some new ones emerged. If not addressed, public discontent over these issues could continue to escalate as the 2011 elections draw closer, and identity conflicts and tensions over land could continue to rise.

Public Services

Deficiencies in public services such as health care, education and road networks are consistently the most reported issue by civil society in Liberia. This is particularly the case in rural areas such as the Southeast, where the few roads linking the region with Monrovia are unpaved, in poor repair, and can be nearly impassible during the rainy season. Citizens in those areas are increasingly frustrated with the government's inability to provide them with services, and feel that their region is disadvantaged compared to the rest of the country.

Corruption

The number of reports of corruption rose during the period of September to November 2010, particularly reports of police corruption. Many reports had to do with police soliciting bribes at checkpoints or demanding money in exchange for performing their duties. This issue further erodes popular confidence in the police, undermining the rule of law. Corruption in the judiciary, also reported during this time period, further undermines confidence in the rule of law. Efforts to stamp out corruption and improve both the capacity and the accountability of the police and justice system could help to prevent future outbreaks of violence.

Land Conflict

Land conflict has been the most prominent issue under the indicator for Demographic Pressures for the last three quarters. Incidents of land conflict and land competition have been reported in ten of the 15 counties over the past nine months. These conflicts ranged from disputes between individuals or communities to disputes over border demarcation between counties. Between September and November, land conflicts were reported in Lofa, Nimba, Sinoe and River Cess Counties. The fact that the problem is so widespread and is continually being reported in new areas suggests the need for a national-level approach. As recommended in previous reports, all levels of the problem need to be addressed, from clarifying property rights and improving means of dispute resolution to resolving issues of border demarcation.

Group Grievance

Tensions continued to simmer between Muslims and Christians in Lofa County, the site of an outbreak of violence in February. Controversy erupted in September over a letter sent to Dubai, allegedly written and supported by Liberian Islamic leaders, describing Christian communities in Lofa as "pagans." Ethnic tensions were reported in other parts of the country as well, including Bong, Gbarpolu, Grand Gedeh and Nimba Counties. Another issue of concern as the elections approach, with voter registration beginning in January 2011, is the question of who is a Liberian citizen and eligible to vote. Some UNLock participants have voiced concerns over the possibility of non-citizens voting and swaying the election results. This could become a problem at election time if there are widespread perceptions that this is happening, regardless of whether it is actually occurring. Initiatives to mediate tensions and promote understanding between ethnic and religious groups could help to mitigate some of these tensions.

About The Fund for Peace

The Fund for Peace is one of the world's leading institutions developing creative strategies to prevent and resolve conflict. An independent research and educational organization, we have spent the past twelve years pioneering new tools for decision makers.

Our focus is on developing early warning and performance measures; promoting transparency and accountability among governments, the private sector, and non-state actors; limiting the proliferation of weapons of war; and protecting civilians caught in the crossfire of conflict. Our methodologies use information technology and social science to promote sustainable security for a safer world.

About Liberia Democracy Watch

Liberia Democracy Watch was established in late 1996 in the build up to the 1997 elections in Liberia. The organization founded by a group of university graduates envisioned a society devoid of socio-political abuses, corruption and the weaning respect for the rule of law. As part of its first engagement, LDW was a founding member of the elections observatory group: Liberia Elections Observers Network (LEON), a collection of local elections observers group funded by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) which comprised the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission (JPC), FOCUS and many other local organizations. Between 1997 and 2005, Liberia was wrought with both socio-political and economic abuses necessitating the shift to human rights and related issues.

About this Report

This report was compiled by Joelle Burbank and Lauren Morris, assisted by Nate Haken and in collaboration with Liberia Democracy Watch. It is the third in a series of reports on Liberia that is part of a project to integrate data and perspectives from populations in conflict-affected zones into CAST, the FfP's conflict assessment methodology. The project, the Early Warning and State Building Initiative, is made possible with funding from Carnegie Corporation of New York, Humanity United, and the National Endowment for Democracy. The statements made and views expressed are solely the responsibility of the authors.

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