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RRN  
NETWORK paper**The war economy  
in Liberia:  
a political analysis****by Philippa Atkinson****Abstract**

In the light of recent research in Liberia and elsewhere on the role of economic factors in supporting and fueling conflict, it appears increasingly important for the humanitarian community to attempt to understand the dynamics of the political economy of war. In Liberia the NGO community has been assessing and developing its current policies, and exploring alternatives to traditional relief provision. It is crucial for such policy development to consider the implications of the way in which illegal economic activities provide the motivation and the means for the continuation of the conflict.

This paper aims to provide an analysis of the mechanisms of the war economy in Liberia, examining the linkages between factional activity and the political process at government level, as well as the ways in which micro-level survival strategies feed into the illegal economy. Through such analysis it is possible to highlight the

various policy strategies that may help to limit or counter the effects of the political economy that has developed. These may challenge the orthodox role of humanitarian relief, but radical solutions are necessary because of the nature of the prolonged crisis in Liberia.

The study is divided into two parts with an introductory background section. The first offers a descriptive analysis of the workings of the war economy, its effects and implications, while the second focuses on the experience of NGOs in Liberia and the possibilities that exist for them to respond to the realities of the conflict using advocacy and other non-traditional policies. Recommendations for further action include the need for more detailed research on particular aspects of the war economy, as well as the need for the humanitarian community to lobby donors and other actors to increase their understanding of its mechanisms.



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## 1

# INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 History

The Liberian civil war is a complex and dynamic conflict that has in its seven year duration caused well over 150,000 deaths, and displaced as much as 80% of the 2.5m population. The war has been fought in various phases, with important developments in the tactics and objectives of those involved. The first phase, from December 1989 to November 1990, took the form of a revolutionary struggle to oust the ten-year corrupt and repressive government of Samuel Doe. Charles Taylor's NPFL swept through the country, gaining popular support, and reaching the capital Monrovia within six months. Both his rebel troops as well as those of the government army, the AFL, were responsible for many ethnically targeted atrocities against civilians, which greatly hindered his initial bid for state power, damaging both his internal and external reputation. This first war led to major refugee movements into Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea, and movements of displaced into Monrovia.

The arrival of West African peace keeping troops, the ECOWAS Monitoring Group, or ECOMOG, in Monrovia in August 1990, helped establish a cease-fire which was formalised in November in Bamako. Nigeria took the lead within ECOWAS, encouraged by the US, to mount the world's first regional military intervention, with Ghana, Sierra Leone, Guinea and The Gambia also sending troops. ECOMOG's neutrality was questionable from the beginning, as Nigeria's President Babangida had been a close business associate of Doe, and most

Francophone countries refused to participate, with Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso open supporters of Taylor. Taylor has benefited from the start of the war from the support of many prominent Liberian and foreign politicians and business people. At the cease-fire Taylor's NPFL controlled the entire country outside Monrovia, and he established a separate administration, the NPRAG, in 'Greater Liberia' (November 1990-October 1992), encouraging the resumption of upcountry economic activity. The IGNU was established in Monrovia, with the protection of ECOMOG, who were also based in the capital.

The first cease-fire lasted until Taylor attacked Monrovia in Operation Octopus of October 1992, in a second attempt to gain control by force. A new faction ULIMO, set up by Krahn and Mandingo refugees associated with the former Doe government, and supported by ECOMOG, had however been attacking NPFL territory in western Liberia since early that year. Following Octopus, ECOMOG launched an all-out attack on NPFL territory, openly allying with ULIMO and re-arming the AFL. From 1993 fighting again became widespread, with ECOMOG bombing strategic and civilian areas in NPFL territory. Many economic operations closed down, and civilians fled into the safe haven of Monrovia or across the borders. The Cotonou agreement of July 1993 had little impact on the fighting, but initiated the process of direct factional involvement in central government, allocating various government positions to each faction. Another new faction, the LPC, emerged in

late 1993, initially as a proxy for the AFL, and began attacking NPFL territory in the south-east. ULIMO split in March 1994 into K and J, Mandingo and Krahn factions respectively, who began to fight each other in the west.

Fighting continued sporadically throughout 1994 and 1995 between all factions, and became increasingly concentrated in diamond-rich western Liberia, and in south-eastern Liberia where gold and timber resources are located. The Abuja accord was signed in September 1995, following Taylor's first visit to Nigeria since the start of the conflict. This accord completed the process of the factionalisation of the government begun at Cotonou as Taylor himself arrived in Monrovia to participate in the transitional government. Its implementation has been continually delayed by more outbreaks of fighting. NPFL territorial control has been gradually eroded since 1993, and no other faction has been able to emerge as a military winner. Monrovia was attacked again on April 6th 1996, sparking six weeks of looting and fighting for control between NPFL, then allied with ULIMO-K, and the Krahn factions, ULIMO-J, AFL and LPC (see Map 1 on page 16 showing areas held by the factions and recent NPFL territorial gains). Abuja II, signed in August 1996, is in the process of implementation at the time of writing, with all factions having nominally disarmed and transformed into political entities. They are now awaiting the rescheduling of the recently postponed elections, with other civilian candidates.

## 1.2 Causes of the war

Although the war began as a classic attempt by one rebel movement to gain control of the state, it has developed into a competition for territorial control and economic gain by up to six different factions including ECOMOG. The ultimate aim of only the original faction, the NPFL, remains a serious bid for state power, with others fighting to prevent domination of the political sphere by Taylor and the NPFL, and to gain some access to economic power through military means while the conflict lasts. In Liberia political power has always been closely linked to economic gain, with force used by the state on occasion to ensure political control of lucrative economic activities. In the period of extension of national Liberian control over the hinterland in the first half of the twentieth century, military force was used systematically by the state to impose taxation and conscript labour. The war

has developed this earlier pattern to an extreme, with fighters controlling the production of civilians in many areas, and members of factions and the government enjoying the profits on resources directly as they are earned and exported.

The continuation of the war can be attributed to the interaction of a number of internal and external factors. The international community has consistently failed to establish a resolution to the conflict, focusing instead on support for the dubious operations of ECOMOG, and the provision of massive humanitarian aid, costing up to US\$100m annually. The fueling of the war through the illegal sale of Liberia's natural resources has been ignored at the international level, in spite of early evidence and analysis of its nature and of the involvement of major international players (Reno, 1993; *The Independent*, 22 November 1992). The involvement of regional countries in supporting all parties to the conflict, and the partisan nature of the internationally supported peace-keeping forces, has been a major factor throughout the war. As in other complex emergencies, humanitarian intervention has been used as a substitute for effective international political action (Scott and Minear, 1995).

The internal economic, political and social factors fueling the war are highly complex, involving issues of access to power and resources at local and national levels. Politically-manipulated ethnicity has remained a factor, as Krahn people identified with the former government of Samuel Doe have continued to fight as a group to try to maintain their access to power in the face of increasing marginalisation. Poverty and lack of opportunity, intensified because of the war, have helped promote the attractiveness of fighting as a means for survival and empowerment particularly among youth. The tactics of factions designed to threaten the basic rights of civilians have been highly effective in weakening civilian opposition. Fighters have continuously attacked civilians, destroying their villages or taxing production, to ensure either flight from an area, or compliance with factional economic activities.

## 1.3 Sustaining the war

The war economy encompasses all activities relating to the illegal extraction, taxation and export of Liberia's natural resources, particularly timber, rubber, diamonds and gold. Fighters, faction and government members directly control the flow of all resources including taxation at local and national

level, and any redistribution takes place informally. War economy has been used as a description of the post-World War Two Western economies that have been built on massive and thriving defense industries justified by the Cold War. In the context of Liberia and other modern conflicts, the term is increasingly used to refer to the exploitative reliance of warring factions on the economic production of territories they control. In the absence of superpower funding, modern rebel groups are compelled to seek economic support directly from the populations they control, usually by coercive or military means. In Liberia this political economy of war operates at macro and micro levels. Faction leaders, their associates and politicians, are reliant on their control over valuable resources to fund arms purchases and patronage. Fighters at the local level exploit civilian production to provide their food and other needs.

The war economy has developed in different phases with the changing nature of the war. In the Greater Liberia period (November 1990-October 1992) many companies resumed their former activities, with multi-nationals, timber companies and individual businessmen negotiating with Taylor's NPRAG government in Gbarnga. Taxes were paid at pre-war levels, often in kind, and employees enjoyed normal working conditions. The IGNU government in Monrovia operated as before the war, with some diversion of the greatly reduced revenues. Economic activity was legal in form at least,

developing pre-war patterns of corruption-fed patronage networks, with no systematic violence against civilians, and redistribution to some extent of income and taxes. However, the large profits from this period helped fund continuing NPFL activity including the Octopus offensive.

Since the escalation of the conflict, multiplication of factions and factional involvement in government from 1993 onwards, economic activity has become smaller scale, more informal and more illegal. The few foreign businesses remaining now make deals directly with factional leadership, local commandos, and ECOMOG, paying protection or fees for export to whoever controls the area of operation or relevant government department. The factionalisation of the government has led to the integration of the illegal economy with state functions. Most of the foreign companies are run by individuals with prior links with Liberia which greatly facilitate their ability to do business in such a risky environment, with a few newly arrived opportunists. The majority of economic activity continues at a very small scale in the informal economy, involving local commandos, fighters and ECOMOG soldiers, with civilian populations benefiting in some areas. The use of forced labour has become widespread, both for resource extraction and food production. At the point where military force is used directly for economic gain, Liberia's political economy diverges from pre-war and broader African trends.

# 2

## The War Economy

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### 2.1 Typology

In order to present the complex mechanisms of the war economy in as clear a format as possible it is useful to develop a typology of the economic activities involved. This classification shows the different resource flows within the economy. Macro, meso and micro level classification relates to the scale of the activity, to differentiate between activities organised by civilians or fighters in the informal economy, and those controlled at higher levels of factions or government. Legal classification has important implications for policy strategy. Activities at all levels cross the boundaries of legality, with many falling in a 'grey area' where it is difficult to define which specific laws apply, or where they form a relatively unthreatening part of local survival strategies. Some activities are illegal in terms of international human rights law, while others violate internal Liberian commerce, property and land tenure legislation.

All large-scale extraction and export of resources takes place at the macro level, where government taxation and regulatory functions should apply, and where the Liberian economy is linked to the international economy. Many expatriate companies or individuals now deal directly with local commandos at the meso level for extraction or buying of products, with export involving higher level negotiation. A share of most resource extraction or sale organised at meso level will accrue

upwards to factional leadership, as the majority of local commandos form part of relatively organised factional command structures (Captier, 1996; Weissman, 1996). Many factional associates and politicians organise their own business ventures, forming direct partnerships with expatriates and benefiting at the export stage through government positions.

At the micro level, activities involve the survival strategies of local populations and fighters. Fighters are expected to support themselves, through economic exploitation of the area in which they are stationed. They operate at a very local level, and while some use violence and forced labour for extraction, production and trade, many also become part of existing local economic and social networks, forming non-exploitative relationships with civilian populations. Fighters account for a large proportion of upcountry populations in some areas, integrating in various ways with remaining civilians. Civilians in relatively secure areas have attempted to continue pre-war production activities, and some grow and trade food and cash-crops, the latter sometimes becoming part of the illegal war economy at the point of sale or export. Similarly, in Monrovia many pre-war informal activities have continued and expanded, with petty trade in food crops and imported manufactured goods supporting the majority of the population. This trade is integrated to some extent with upcountry production, depending on security.



| <b>Box 1</b>                       |  |  |  |
|------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| <b>Typology of the war economy</b> |  |  |  |
|                                    | <b>Macro</b>   | <b>Meso</b>  | <b>Micro</b>   |
| <b>Legal</b>                       | Aid business<br>Import of consumer and capital goods<br>Manufacturing and services in Monrovia   | Trading of produce and imported goods  | Cultivation of foodcrops and cashcrops, incl. palm oil, coffee and cocoa<br>Trading, including crossborder<br>Small-scale manufacturing & services   |
| <b>Grey Area</b>                   | Export of resources - rubber, timber diamonds, gold<br>Extraction and export of iron ore pre-1993<br>Government taxation on exports<br>Government revenue collection<br>Allocation of maritime funds | Plantations and mines run by local commandos<br>Trading, incl. crossborder organised by local commandos<br>Links between government officials and faction members  | Small-scale extraction of rubber, diamonds and gold<br>Checkpoint extortion<br>Small-scale smuggling<br>Lower levels of civil service involvement<br>involvement in diversion  |
| <b>Illegal</b>                     | Large-scale extraction and export of timber, rubber, diamonds, gold<br>Government corruption, including scams, diversion of resources, stealing<br>Trading, stealing and export of goods by ECOMOG   | Deals between local commandos and expatriates<br>Taxation by local commandos on local people<br>Relationships between government officials and factions<br>Stealing and trading in looted goods by local commandos & ECOMOG soldiers | Small-scale extraction of rubber, diamonds<br>Harvesting of others' farms and plantations<br>Stealing goods and crops<br>Trading in looted goods<br>Civil service corruption<br>"Taxation" of production and trade by fighters |
| <b>Human Rights Violations</b>     | Use of forced labour in large scale extraction of resources<br>Diversion of profits from publicly-owned resources into private hands   | Use of forced labour on commando-run plantations & mines<br>Armed robbery  | Use of civilians by fighters for harvesting and load-carrying<br>Armed robbery   |



Gross human rights violations are classified separately in the typology to emphasise the particular role that violence plays in the war economy. Many serious human rights violations have been perpetrated during the war, but some relate specifically to activities in the war economy. The use of forced labour contravenes Article 8 of the 1966 Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, while the basic right of the population to enjoy the product of their country's resources, enshrined in Article 25 of the 1966 Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, is being systematically violated by the actions of faction leaders and politicians in the government. Liberia is a signatory to both 1966 International Covenants, on Civil and Political Rights and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, as well as to the 1949 Geneva Conventions.

## 2.2 Activities

Map 2 on page 17 shows the principal industrial/agricultural areas within Liberia.

### *Natural resource extraction*

Activities related to the extraction and trade of forest and mineral resources form the basis of Liberia's war economy. The main products involved are diamonds, gold, timber and rubber. Production, extraction and trade all take place at the micro, meso and macro levels, controlled by individual civilians and fighters, by commandos and traders, and by political players and international businessmen. Before the war the total export value of these activities amounted to \$390.7m, or approximately 40% of Liberia's GDP (EIU, 1996). There is some understatement in the figures, especially for diamond and gold exports.

Before the war these activities provided income to the majority of upcountry Liberians in the form of wage labour and returns from cash-crop farming, small-scale mining, and trading. Government income from all these activities was redistributed to a certain extent on public goods such as education, health-care and transportation, and pre-war the government sector accounted for 27% of GDP (EIU, 1992).

Since the war central government has relied on earnings from Liberia's Maritime programme (sailing under Liberian flag) of US\$15-20m annually, and up to \$10m from immigration, import and export duties, with international relief inputs supporting many former government public service functions, particularly in Monrovia and among refugee populations. The NPRAG government raised and redistributed some taxes on natural resource extraction and export, with Firestone for example paying tax in the form of rice for the fighters, and electricity in Buchanan provided by the iron-ore mining operation. Since 1993 income from natural resources has accrued to those organising extraction, often fighters and faction members, and those involved in trading, exporting and shipping, often individual expatriates, with the government taking some share. The few larger concessions remaining have had to negotiate protection and taxation throughout the war at the highest political levels.

### **Rubber**

Pre-war rubber production, in 1988 of 120,000mt worth \$111.6m, consisted of 50% small-holder production, with 50% from the large concessions of Firestone at Harbel, the Liberian Agricultural Company (LAC) in Grand Bassa, and Guthrie in Bomi county. Employment in the concession sector

#### Box 2

#### Liberian export earnings

|                      | 1995 (averages) | 1988 (EIU) | 1980 (EIU) |
|----------------------|-----------------|------------|------------|
| <b>Iron ore</b>      | -               | \$219m     | \$310.3m   |
| <b>Rubber</b>        | \$27m           | \$111.6m   | \$102.3m   |
| <b>Timber</b>        | \$53m           | \$33.6m    | \$72.5m    |
| <b>Diamonds/gold</b> | \$300-500m*     | \$8.4m     | \$33.5m    |
| <b>Coffee/cocoa</b>  | -               | \$6.0m     | -          |

All figures are from the EIU, 1995-96, and 1992, and William Twaddell's Report to the US Congress, June 1996  
1995 figures are in US \$m, with pre-1990 figures in Liberian \$ at a rate of 1 to 1

\*Estimate

was approximately 15,000, while the 4000 small-holdings employed up to 28,000 workers. The majority of small-holdings were less than 100 acres, with the 30% larger holdings mainly owned by prominent political or business families. All exported rubber was processed at Firestone's factory, and subject to 25% export tax. The rubber industry before the war supported directly perhaps 20% of Liberia's population.

Since the war, production has fallen substantially, to an estimated 20,000mt in 1995, worth \$27m. Although many holdings have been abandoned, tapping has continued both legally and illegally. Fighters organise much of the illegal tapping of abandoned plantations, with forced labour sometimes used, for example by ULIMO-J on Guthrie plantation, whose British owners left in 1993. Other plantations have been tapped in share-cropping arrangements with owners, and Firestone and LAC have maintained some production using paid employees.

Firestone has suffered damage on up to 50% of the plantation, due to over-tapping as well as the cutting of rubber trees for firewood and charcoal-burning.

Rubber from small-holdings is collected in small lots and sold to buyers from Monrovia, sometimes directly to expatriates, mainly from Europe and South-East Asia, and sometimes through Liberian middlemen, faction and ECOMOG members. 21 foreign-owned businesses and 11 joint ventures were registered in the agricultural sector in 1996 (Ministry of Commerce, 1996). Income earned at the micro level from rubber is small, with the price paid to upcountry extractors or traders of rubber less than 20% of the world price. The management at Firestone and LAC have come to various arrangements with factional leadership during the war to organise protection and export of their product, with Firestone reportedly paying the NPFL \$2m annually for protection alone. Both companies have been accused of providing military logistical support for factions (Reno, 1996a; de Montclos, 1996).

Since 1993 export taxes have been paid through the government for rubber exported through the Freeport in Monrovia, while ECOMOG soldiers who have controlled the port since March 1993 have benefited from much of the trade through Buchanan. The Rubber Planters Association of Liberia (RPAL) estimated illegal taxes paid to export one shipment of rubber in 1996 as \$4000, or roughly half the

value of one container (RPAL, 1996). 25% of the value of each shipment is also surrendered to the NBL in US dollars and refunded in Liberian at the pre-war 1 to 1 rate. Exports are shipped by registered expatriate and partnership companies, and some records thus exist of those involved and the destinations of the goods (Shipping records, 1995).

### **Diamonds and gold**

The value of mineral exports is difficult to calculate, with pre-war figures, of \$8.4m in 1988, highly understated due to the extent of smuggling. By the end of the 'eighties, Monrovia was one of the main diamond buying and exporting centres in West Africa. Production of minerals was organised on a small-scale by individuals with land rights, who would form partnerships to raise capital and contract teams of diggers for extraction. Contracts normally involved profit sharing for diggers unless capital in the form of machinery was provided by an investor. Some foreign funded capital-intensive mining was carried out particularly in western Liberia using digging, dredging and washing equipment, and employing wage labour.

Larger-scale mining continued in the Greater Liberia period, and massive profits are believed to have accrued to NPFL leadership from its activities in western Liberia during this period, in partnership with remaining expatriate prospectors. Mining since 1993 has been manual and small-scale, with all factions involved and much extraction organised by fighters. ULIMO-K and J control and dispute rich mining areas in western Liberia, and the use of forced labour has been reported on LPC gold mines in the south-east. Estimates of diamond exports during the war, now routed through Cote d'Ivoire, vary from \$300m to \$500m, although this refers to values in Antwerp, the main destination for Liberian diamonds. Estimates of Belgian imports from Liberia based on IMF trade returns show \$309m in 1994, and \$371m in 1995 (EIU, 1996). These figures may include exports smuggled from other African countries, particularly Zaire. The value in the country may be as little as 10% of this, but is widely distributed among diggers and middlemen, the majority, as before the war, Mandingo or other West African Muslim traders. All faction leaders have been personally involved in diamond and gold operations.

Buyers of Liberian diamonds, now mainly registered in Cote d'Ivoire with only 6 remaining in Monrovia by 1996 (Ministry of Commerce, 1996), sell the

product on to agents of De Beers or Antwerp-based companies.

The mineral business is structured around individual players, even though the value of business controlled is vast. 56% of the world's diamond trade, worth \$23bn, goes through 1200 Antwerp-based companies (Reuters, 11 March 1997), many represented in West Africa, as is De Beers, by individuals in partnership with small local companies or locally registered West African Muslim traders, including of Lebanese origin. Although all companies involved and any larger value exports are registered at some point, it is very difficult both to record reliable information on the trade, or to attempt to regulate or tax the flows.

### Timber

Timber is another highly valuable resource, and one which has been almost exclusively controlled by factions at the highest levels, in partnership with locally registered foreign-owned businesses. Many of the 48 timber companies present in Liberia before the war attempted to reactivate their operations after the first cease-fire. In the Greater Liberia period until late 1992, companies operated under the same regulations as pre-war, and paid taxes to the NPRAG government including land tax, volume tax, export tax and port tax. Logs were exported primarily through Buchanan port. Civilians benefited to a certain extent from this early activity, as employees of concessions, through the multiplier effects of the economic activity of the logging companies, and through some redistribution of taxation (Atkinson 1992). Production was estimated at 197m<sup>3</sup> in 1992 by the International Tropical Timber Organisation (ITTO, 1997), with France being the major importer (de Montclos 1996), compared to an average of approximately 900m<sup>3</sup> between 1985 and 1989 (FAO Forest Products Yearbook 1991).

Following the 1993 bombing by ECOMOG of the ports at Buchanan and Greenville, most companies have withdrawn from Liberia, and the 12 or so remaining operate in a highly risky environment. Logging companies such as ITI and Timco have survived through forming direct relationships with faction leaders, and all involved have been able to make large profits when shipments are possible. ECOMOG has also benefited from timber exports through south-eastern ports. However, production has been greatly reduced by the continuous insecurity in Buchanan and Greenville port areas over long periods.

The average estimates of the value of the trade of \$53m made by Twaddell appear highly overstated (Twaddell, 1996), with ITTO estimates of average timber production from 1993-1996 as 46m<sup>3</sup>, and exports of only 40m<sup>3</sup> (ITTO, 1997). Singapore and Malaysia have become major buyers of Liberian timber. All expatriates deal directly with faction leaders and with company buyers in their own countries, with at least the shipping itself being registered. The government agency the Forestry Development Association (FDA) has recently been attempting to reassert its claim on the timber industry, calling on the remaining companies to establish a presence in Monrovia and respect government regulations.

### Iron ore

The iron ore mine at Yekepa was reactivated after the first cease-fire, and operated until early 1993, when all expatriate staff withdrew. The value of activity in this period has been calculated as \$41m annually between 1990 and 1993 by Twaddell, and \$10m a month in 1990 and 1991 by Reno (Twaddell, 1996; Reno, 1996a). De Montclos reports that almost 2 million tonnes of production, worth \$18m, was exported in 1992 to the French steel company Usinor (de Montclos, 1996). As with rubber and timber activities in the period of Greater Liberia, some benefits accrued to civilians, at Yekepa and at Buchanan port, and through the multiplier effect. A high proportion of the export value accrued directly to NPFL leadership.

Damage and insecurity since 1993 have prevented further iron ore activity. Remaining stockpiles at Buchanan, valued at \$14m, cannot cover the estimated \$50m rebuilding cost of the mining, railway and port equipment, much of which has been looted or destroyed. Bong mine will remain closed, the cost of repairing damage exceeding the value of remaining reserves. The importance of iron ore lies now in the major reserves over the Guinean border, which require Liberian participation in transporting the ore to the coast for export.

The Mifergui project, a partnership between the Liberian government, 100% owner of the infrastructure of the Yekepa mine since 1990, the Guinean government, and private investors, including the African Mining Consortium Limited (AMCL), the London-based management company of Yepeka, is believed to have been part of the negotiations between Charles Taylor and General Abacha in Nigeria in August 1995. The high grade deposits in Guinea are worth billions of dollars.

### *Government collection and distribution of resources*

The involvement of the government in the war economy stems from the factionalisation of first ministerial and parastatal management positions in the Cotonou Agreement, and other important economic functions including the director of the National Bank of Liberia (NBL) in subsequent accords. All important economic positions are now allocated between factions, with ULIMO-K controlling the Commerce and Finance ministries and the Freeport, ULIMO-J heading the NBL, and various factional appointees in charge of the parastatals. Factional insiders have been appointed directly to some posts, while existing employees have allied themselves with the factions to maximise their access to resources. The factions have also gained control of security and regulatory government functions, with the police force and Justice Ministry allocated to the NPFL, and factional appointees in the Supreme Court.

Various kinds of government corruption were already endemic in pre-war Liberia, with deals between government contractors and private companies increasingly common during the latter years of the Doe government. IGNU employees were equally involved in diversion and scams, taking advantage of temporary access to government revenues to support their own precarious positions. Since 1994 the factionalisation of the government has led to the gradual integration of corrupt government regulatory and taxation functions with the illegal economy upcountry. Illegal practices have greatly increased within government as factions have taken over taxation and regulatory functions, and the extent of illegality of the current operation of the economy is unprecedented in Liberia.

Revenues that still accrue to the government, including \$15m-\$20m annually from the Maritime programme collected by the US-based International Trading Company (ITC), and up to \$10m from taxation, licensing and other fees, are diverted at all levels. Liberia's Maritime programme, the second largest in the world, consists of the registration of ships under the Liberian flag, the majority Hong Kong merchant ships and US oil tankers, as well as off-shore company registration. The registered tonnage has actually risen during the war, due to competitive pricing and the fact that the entire programme is run externally by ITC, with no direct involvement of the Liberian authorities. Money accrued to ITC is usually paid directly to the NBL in Monrovia.

Many other taxes and fees are paid directly into the NBL or Finance Ministry accounts, with dispersals restricted to authorised expenses for the day to day operation of the government. Much official expenditure finances the activities of faction members and other politicians, with the remainder taken by individual politicians and civil servants through a series of scams to supplement their non-existent salaries. The extent of diversion by 1995 has led to the retention of funds from the Maritime programme by the NBL in New York, and most transactions currently bypass the NBL in Monrovia. Ministries use private accounts in the four banks remaining since April 1996, and the ITC bank, the only one audited to international standards, acts as bank of last resort. The use of the private banking system has made transactions even more opaque and less subject to control. Although some accounting functions are still carried out within government departments, no ministries are subject to any external auditing procedures.

The most common scams used to generate revenue flows involve over-invoicing for goods purchased by ministries, or invoicing for goods which do not exist. Deals are made between higher-level civil servants and private importing or supply companies, with both sides benefiting. Sham companies are also used. Deals take place between different ministries and parastatals, particularly where the same faction controls connected functions. This enables deals to be made between high level individuals, involving diversion of export taxes for example, with complete impunity. Goods to be exported are systematically under-reported, with the savings on export taxes shared between the exporter and officials.

The amount of bureaucracy involved in exporting goods has markedly increased, with the RPAL calculating 31 paid signatures required to export a shipment of rubber, 26 of which are illegal (RPAL, 1996). Credit is also commonly used by ministries to gain access to cash or goods. The Finance Ministry in particular is able to obtain cash from the private banking system, or goods from suppliers, on the basis of its claim on the Maritime funds. The payment of invoices and repayment of advances can subsequently be negotiated privately, between civil servants and private businessmen, bypassing official channels to the benefit of both parties.

Outright stealing of government funds and property is less common, but a number of glaring exceptions exist. Recent scandals include the trucking of Liberian bank-notes from the NBL building in

central Monrovia in August 1996, witnessed by many people. Then manager of the NBL, Raleigh Seekie, fled the country leaving behind less than 10% of a new delivery of Liberian dollars from British banknote producers Thomas de la Rue. Another example concerns large amounts of fuel that disappeared from the LPRC during the April 1996 fighting, with an estimated value of \$1.5m. The manager of LPRC, an NPFL appointee, has been accused by the Monrovia press of stealing the fuel for private sale. The shipping from Buchanan and Monrovia port of looted goods, especially scrap metal, is a further example of direct illegality. Scrap from the cannibalisation of infrastructure such as the Bong mines railroad has been shipped throughout the war, usually to West African destinations. Although mainly organised by ECOMOG and fighters, this trade has involved the complicity of government port officials, and has been highly lucrative, particularly following periods of fighting as after April 1996.

Although these activities are reported and publicly discussed, the fact that those involved are high-level political and factional figures renders them immune to prosecution under the law. Even if cases could be brought to court, many judges are themselves factional appointees or sympathisers, who cannot be relied upon to convict their political allies or protectors. Many activities are relatively small-scale, involving officials who may sign papers or channel goods to earn some supplement to unpaid civil service salaries.

Diverted resources are redistributed in some way, to the extended families or political supporters of those involved. However this complicity of officials at all levels with corruption feeds the vicious cycle of extra-legal transactions.

### *The informal economy*

Micro-level activities in the informal economy support the majority of the population, both in Monrovia and upcountry in rural Liberia. This economy includes legal activities and illegal war-related activities, and is based mainly on the production and trade of agricultural food crops. Crops, grown both for subsistence and trade as before the war, include rice, cassava, vegetables and fruit, palm oil, and coffee and cocoa. Extraction and trade of rubber and minerals also form part of the informal economy. Production, greatly reduced since the war, is traded between rural Liberia and Monrovia, and across borders to Guinea and Cote

d'Ivoire, with volume depending on security. Trade also takes place in imported manufactured goods, including used clothes, batteries, and utensils. Some small-scale manufacturing and services still operate upcountry, particularly the manufacture of charcoal for trade to the city, but the majority of this type of activity is found in Monrovia. Looted goods form part of informal trading markets, and new markets developed after the April 1996 fighting, including in Monrovia, those for Buy Your Own Thing Back. Valuable items including vehicles and computers have been traded across borders, while scrap has mainly been exported directly from Monrovia.

Many trading networks are now controlled by fighters and their relatives, as security prevents many civilians from risking involvement. Fighters have more access to capital and transport, and are in a better position to negotiate the checkpoint taxes that are charged on all private transport. While the trading of some goods is based on extortion, where fighters take crops directly from civilians after harvest in a form of taxation, there is also some legal trade where civilians are paid for labour or goods. Outright stealing is more commonly used to obtain cash or food crops, especially rice, as trade requires a more stable source of supply. Forced labour has been used in some instances, for example in the production and harvesting of fruit crops and rubber in western Liberia by ULIMO-J fighters.

Other illegal activities include those where crops are harvested from land owned by absent landlords, reported particularly for coffee, cocoa rubber and palm plantations. There are also many cases reported involving the clearing of entire villages by fighters in order to steal crops after harvest, or other stored items of value.

Civilians are involved in some trade, in secure areas of the country in the north and north-west, and in Monrovia where direct factional involvement in the informal economy is limited to the sale of upcountry produce. Joint ventures between fighters and civilians are common, and new social and patronage networks have developed around local commandos and individual fighters who have started businesses during the war. All traded goods pass through many different middlemen, and profits are earned at each stage. Profits on much trade are however minimal due to the relatively low levels of demand and the high level of competition in the market. People survive by pooling resources within households, and continue to rely on the provision of relief aid for basic services and food in some cases. Some small-

scale manufacturing and services operate in Monrovia, such as furniture production and vehicle mechanics, but activity is subdued due to greatly reduced purchasing power.

### *The formal economy*

The small formal economy, based almost exclusively in Monrovia, includes wage labour for the various aid organisations, and employment in the private sector, in manufacturing, and in activities related to import and export. Aid agencies employ skilled and non-skilled personnel, and pay salaries in US dollars. They have been since the start of the war an important part of the formal economy in Monrovia, creating demand for goods and services that supports other private sector activity. Manufacturing activity in Monrovia has been greatly reduced as a result of the war. The biggest employers in this sector are USTC, owned by Firestone, which produces soft drinks, Club Beer, and Cemenco, the Swedish owned cement factory. The import and export sector is larger, with numerous small companies involved in importing, distribution and retail of consumer and capital goods, and in related services such as shipping. Most of these operations are owned and managed by locally-based Lebanese and Indian nationals, or by other foreigners.

Some private companies are involved in the illegal war economy through their links with the export of natural resources, or with government business.

## 2.3 Implications

As has been described, the war economy directly involves the general population of Liberia at all levels. Its operations have gradually developed into a vicious circle, feeding the war by providing resources to the factions, and motivation to their leaders, members and associates. Many top level faction members and associates have become rich over the course of the war. Twaddell estimates that Taylor alone controls an average \$75m a year of business (Twaddell, 1996). One shipment of timber can be worth \$.5m, and one jar of diamonds \$20m. The control by factions of both government structures and resource-rich territory enables them to operate with impunity in the extraction of resources for their personal benefit. It also facilitates international partnerships and links with the illegal global economy. 'Pirate' companies or individuals, protected by their relationships with factional insiders from Liberian law, are thus able to act

beyond the reach of international law.

At the macro level, the danger of the mechanisms of the war economy lies in the institutionalisation of a lack of respect for the rule of law in public life, deepening a problem already acute in the pre-war Liberian political economy. The politics of patronage have now been superseded by warlord politics, where political elites compete for control of resources using military strategies and supported by international commercial ties (Reno, 1996b, 1996c). For Taylor whose ambition is to control the state, warlord politics is an extension of neo-patrimonialism, with economic means used to balance and reward the competing interests of his associates and supporters, as well as to fund the arms purchases that are necessary to ensure his continuing control. Taylor has used his resources also to gain popular support, investing since the Greater Liberia period in media ventures, rice distributions and other self-publicity.

For other faction leaders without any real chance of national political success, and for individual fighters, the motivation for war may be "to make money while it lasts, and to try to make it last long enough to make some real money" (Keen, 1995). The current political and economic success of all the factions is based ultimately on their military strength.

At the micro level, the informal economy has developed with the war so that illegal activities have become integrated into the social and economic life of ordinary Liberians. Reliance on the factions and the war economy for economic survival has become a reality for many different sectors of Liberian society. Fighters form part of local communities, and have developed their own economic strategies, involving varying levels of violence and based in some part on traditional methods of economic and social transactions. Trade with fighters or in looted goods has become a rational survival strategy for many civilians attempting to protect their own livelihoods. The social and political implications of this process at the micro level lie in the disempowerment of local people that occurs through their participation in the war economy. The ability of civil society to respond to the debilitating effects of war has been seriously weakened by the economic and social necessities created by the war. Many Liberian commentators stress that the war is an internal crisis, and that it is self-perpetuating at macro and micro levels because of the nature of the economic and social relations that have developed.

## 2.4 Potential Solutions

It is possible to identify various practical solutions to the problems of the war economy in Liberia. It is essential to tackle the problem internally, as the roots of the conflict lie in the breakdown of internal mechanisms of social and legal order. The strengthening of Liberia's capacities for democracy, justice and peace must be an integral part of any strategy to promote a long term resolution to the conflict. The basic issue is the reestablishment of the rule of law, and the reconstitution of the Liberian state functions of regulation, policing and protection. This is the *sine qua non* of the resolution of the Liberian crisis. Control of the state remains the goal of those fighting the war, indicating that the nation state will survive as a political unit.

But external support for workable and accountable state institutions and a functioning civil society will be necessary to counter its current criminalised form (Ellis, 1996).

The development of an accountable state appears a highly ambitious proposition, given that trends in the Liberian political economy pre-date the current conflict, and form part of the wider African pattern of internal and external economic exploitation. However, the strategy of using threats or sanctions at the highest political levels has already been shown to be effective, having helped bring factions to the current stage of partial disarmament and participation in a political process. An international commitment to the enforcement of international law in Liberia through the use of sanctions, accompanied by the strengthening of internal capacities to enforce national laws, could have a lasting impact on the political environment in Liberia.

### *Illegal macro activities*

The difficulties of tackling macro level legal aspects of the war economy through the enforcement of international law are complicated in Liberia by the continued existence of a quasi-legitimate national government and internal legal system. Various methods may be used however in attempting to reestablish the rule of national law. The strengthening of internal legal structures, including an independent judiciary, police force and civil checks and balances, is essential. These functions must be separated from factional control. Support can be provided in different forms, including physical support in terms of logistics, equipment or training, and symbolic support through advocating, nationally

and internationally, on behalf of Liberian civil institutions.

A crucial area in the reestablishment of the rule of law must be the documentation of abuses, an aspect continually stressed by Amnesty International and other human rights organisations (Amnesty International, 1993/5). Justice must be achieved in some form, even through acknowledgment of crimes committed. The collection and compilation of data relating to human and economic rights violations should be carried out to build a case for a future tribunal, and to put pressure on those involved at high levels, both nationally and internationally.

As in Bosnia and Rwanda, the human rights abuses perpetrated in Liberia are serious enough to warrant international investigation, while the economic crimes committed during the war must also be addressed at this level.

The support of civil initiatives, including existing democratic institutions of civil society, both traditional and modern, should be an important part of any strategy aimed at promoting long term peace in Liberia. These institutions, such as trade organisations, the independent media, political lobbying groups, human rights, advocacy and religious groups and women's groups, can play a major role in educating the general population on the actions of the factions, helping to mobilise civil opposition and alternatives and putting pressure on the factions. Many potentially powerful local civil initiatives could greatly benefit from sustained international support. This type of support is by its nature political, and must involve careful analysis of the organisations that may benefit from logistical or symbolic support (Carl, 1996).

### *Micro-level activities*

At the micro level, the problems of the war economy lie in the social and economic relationships that have developed in the war. The role of fighters in local communities is a crucial factor in the perpetuation of the war economy at the informal level, and low level corruption fuels the culture of illegality in government. An understanding of the motivations of those involved in illegal activities is necessary in order to analyse the processes by which individuals become part of the war. The factors which drive people to violence at the micro level must be recognised as rational responses to the situation faced, and policy designed accordingly (Keen, 1996). Frustration at the lack of education

**MAP 1: The military situation in Liberia at the signing of the Abuja Accord, August 1995 (NPFL advances since April 1996 added)**

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MAP 2: Liberian war economy resources

and other services, the lack of opportunity, and the monopoly over economic activities by the political elite, have been identified as the major factors motivating youth in Sierra Leone to become rebel fighters (Richards, 1996). In Liberia, similar forces are at work, and poverty and destitution caused by the war itself fuels the process.

International relief could have an impact on limiting dysfunctional coping strategies, or strategies of accommodation by civilians with the factions, through interventions specifically designed to support non war-related economic activities. Micro-level agricultural projects could be linked to support for related government export functions, for example, with the objective of promoting legitimate and sustainable income flows for both groups. The provision of economic alternatives to fighters, particularly through vocational and skills training, is suggested by many Liberians as a potentially effective strategy to encourage them away from the war. Activities to promote social empowerment at the community level for fighters and civilians must also be developed based on careful research. Community sensitisation on the role of fighters in

the war is important, both to enable communities to forgive the atrocities committed and accept fighters back into the community, and to demonstrate to the fighters that alternative social structures exist to that of the factions.

Political work at the micro level should focus on education in the principles of democracy and economic and human rights, in order to promote understanding and empowerment at the community level. Democratisation work may take many different forms, but will entail working with existing local groups and structures. As with the strengthening of internal processes of law, support for local advocacy groups and media may be logistical and symbolic, involving material help with infrastructure, equipment, logistics and training. Support should focus on local initiatives for rehabilitation and reconstruction, especially in the rebuilding of education and other community institutions, with policies designed according to local priorities (Carl, 1996). As with macro-level political support, careful analysis must be carried out of the objectives of local organisations, and transparency in all activities is crucial.

# 3

## NGO POLICY

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### 3.1 Introduction

The NGO community is trying to develop a more strategic approach to the giving of relief aid, entailing a deeper understanding of the causes of conflict. However, the political economy of war is still relatively unexplored and the role of NGOs in conflict situations is not well defined or understood. Current advocacy work by NGOs tends to be focused on specific development issues, such as the debt crisis or the environmentally-damaging practices of multi-national companies, with few explicit attempts until recently to address issues of internal political empowerment in conflict situations, or to lobby donors directly for changes in their relief aid policies. The difficulties of a more proactive approach to aid in conflict are apparent from the preceding discussion of the mechanisms of the war economy. Although the input of humanitarian aid is important in providing support for local populations, and has some financial and symbolic impact at a political level, it is not a significant part of the conflict (Weissman, 1996). The major dynamic of the war is located in the relationships between economic and political power both internally and externally, and traditional relief activities have only a subsidiary impact on these relationships. It may therefore be difficult to envisage what positive role can be played by the humanitarian aid community, and by NGOs within the community, in limiting the war.

However, an understanding of the mechanisms of the conflict allows for an identification of potential

solutions, or at least of activities with a positive impetus. The role of the relief community in the support of basic needs and services continues to provide a vital safety net for populations affected by the conflict. These activities must however be redeveloped in the context of protracted conflict. All interventions should be informed by an understanding of the relationship between local coping strategies and the war economy, and of their political context (Keen, 1996). A reorientation of existing programmes to take into account these realities could in itself have a long term impact on populations served. NGOs may also attempt to address the vicious cycle of the Liberian war economy through developing their work in advocacy.

By advocating for the strengthening of the application of law in Liberia, both at the national level through the direction of UN or donor programmes, and at the international level through the establishment of a war crimes tribunal, NGOs may influence developments in the conflict itself.

Policy strategies must be both programmable and practical, and for some agencies it may be difficult to envisage the transformation of emergency feeding programmes into politically empowering micro projects or themselves into effective international lobbyists. The division of labour within the humanitarian system allocates such tasks to specialist agencies. However, the good level of both coordination and understanding in Liberia means that the NGO community as a whole may be able

to advocate effectively for policy change. The NGOs should work together for a reorientation of existing programmes, and in lobbying donors, the UN and other NGOs, to promote understanding of the causes of the conflict and debate on potential solutions. This would require a stronger community-wide analysis of the mechanisms of the conflict, as well as a commitment to work to promote real change in the long term. Given the dangers of the negative impact of current practices, and the continuing seriousness of the crisis in Liberia, this is an urgent task. Specific policies, following from the previous section on potential solutions, are discussed further below.

### 3.2 Historically

A brief survey of NGO activities in Liberia and of the political climate in which they operate follows, in order to highlight some of the issues and difficulties faced by NGOs at field level. For a detailed discussion see Weissman (1996) and Scott and Minear (1995).

Since 1991 when the international humanitarian community began to establish a major presence in Liberia, it has become an important institutional player, channeling an average of \$100m a year in relief aid, the majority from the US and EC. The bulk of this has been food aid distributed through WFP and CRS, with perhaps a quarter of the value accounted for by small-scale health and social welfare programmes implemented by NGOs (Weissman, 1996).

The delivery of food and basic services to the population, mainly in Monrovia and refugee areas, has had a political impact both materially and symbolically. For the government and faction leaders with national political aspirations, the relief aid has served a useful purpose in supporting the basic needs of the populations, allowing them to exploit economic resources with limited pressure for redistribution. The power that is invested in politicians through their role in the distribution of humanitarian aid has helped to bolster their legitimacy vis a vis the population, while the diversion of relief aid by factions through various means has provided them with resources to use directly in the war (Weissman, 1996).

The military response to the conflict was delegated from the start by the international community to ECOWAS, through the ECOMOG force. The US

government was reluctant to become involved in the Liberian crisis, and gave its support to ECOWAS directly, providing financial assistance for the force, and via the UN, although no formal resolution was adopted. The anti-NPFL stance of ECOMOG, evolving from Nigerian policy as well as NPFL resistance to the force, was also supported, informally, by the international community. The lack of a direct diplomatic or political engagement by the UN allowed the humanitarian community to claim some neutrality. However, the initial concentration of the relief community in Monrovia, and the negative stance of the international community created distrust of humanitarian agencies in Greater Liberia, and access had to be negotiated. Harassment was common, and MSF-Belgium, CRS, LWS and ICRC were the only agencies prepared to work in Greater Liberia in 1990 and 1991. The UN agencies started to establish a presence on the ground in 1992, by which time safe access had been gained in most areas, and relatively good coordination had been achieved within the humanitarian community under UNSCOL.

After Operation Octopus in October 1992 and the subsequent escalation of the conflict, the UN began to take an active political role in the conflict. A military embargo on Greater Liberia was introduced by the Security Council in November 1992, their first resolution related to Liberia (Resolution 788). Explicit international approval of ECOMOG's strategy was thus formalised, through the support of the newly appointed SRSO Gordon-Somers, and in subsequent resolutions.

Although direct military intervention was still delegated to ECOMOG, the neutrality of humanitarian operations was compromised by this precedence given by the UN to military objectives over humanitarian ones. By this stage the ambiguity of the ECOMOG operation, in terms of its role as peace-maker and its involvement in illegal economic activities, had been recognised and discussed in various fora, but no action was taken until the Cotonou agreement of July 1993. The force was then expanded to include soldiers from non-ECOWAS countries, and a UN force, UNOMIL, was mandated to monitor the ECOMOG operation and to report on violations of international humanitarian law, although with little impact until recently (See Olonisakan, 1996, for discussion).

The new UN strategy was resisted by the NGOs, who continued to work in Greater Liberia

throughout 1993, provoking suspicion of their relationships with the NPFL. ICRC's neutrality was somewhat protected by virtue of its mandate, but other NGOs were actually subject to attack by the ECOMOG forces, on the grounds that relief programmes upcountry could be used as a cover for military activities. An MSF-B cross-border convoy was strafed in April 1993 by Nigerian planes, and a CRS warehouse in Buchanan port was bombed in May (see Scott and Minear, 1995). Controversy continued throughout 1993 over the extension of the military embargo by ECOMOG to include humanitarian aid, a policy supported within Liberia by the SRSB, with ICRC making a rare international press statement accusing the UN of "a grave violation of international humanitarian law" (The Independent, 2 September 1993).

High levels of generalised violence in terms of factional fighting and abuses against civilians since Octopus have included more direct attacks on the aid community, for looting and for targeted destruction. Food distributions and operations outside the ECOMOG-patrolled triangle have been particularly vulnerable, necessitating the use of ECOMOG and factional military escorts. Food has been stolen on a small and large scale, and offices and property of agencies have been attacked on a number of different occasions. Harassment of personnel is also common, including many serious incidents of hostage taking.

The factions have become increasingly sophisticated in relation to the distribution of relief aid as the war has continued, enabling them to manipulate the relief community in various ways. Local NGOs have been used by factions to gain control over the distribution processes, and food aid and logistical equipment such as vehicles and radios have been targeted directly (Weissman, 1996; Prendergast and Scott, 1996). NGOs, UN agencies and the EC have however continued throughout to provide relief and rehabilitation aid, which has been largely concentrated on the relative safe haven of Monrovia and its environs.

### 3.3 Policy responses

The humanitarian community in Liberia has gradually built up some institutional learning of the mechanisms of the war in Liberia that has helped it to minimise behaviour that may feed into the conflict in unintended ways. The first major joint initiative, originally proposed by SCF(UK), led to the

adoption in July 1995 of Principles and Protocols of Operations in Liberia (PPOL) by the entire humanitarian community. These were developed following the joint withdrawal of all agencies from upcountry Liberia after massive looting during the fighting in Gbarnga and other locations in late 1994. They were broadly based on the Red Cross/INGO Code of Conduct for working in conflict (RRN, 1994), but were developed specifically for the situation in Liberia by an ODA-funded consultant, who spent six months in the region.

The PPOL clarify issues such as the use of security for relief activities, and the importance of neutrality in terms of targeting assistance based on need. They focus on the protection of humanitarian access, including the rights of the Liberian civilian population to receive humanitarian relief, and the safety of the relief community. The adoption of joint principles demonstrated the increasingly sophisticated understanding by the relief community of the difficulties and ambiguities of delivering aid in the conflict, as well as a commitment to a common position in relation to the warring factions. The PPOL include practical guidelines for operations as well as stating the basic humanitarian principles which should underlie all relief work.

Adherence was initially on a voluntary basis, with no mechanisms established for dealing with non-compliance, by agencies or factions. Abuses by the warring factions continued undeterred by this more careful and coordinated policy of the relief community, and the situation culminated in the outbreak of fighting and massive looting in Monrovia in April and May 1996.

The looting of up to \$20m worth of equipment from the UN and NGOs alone was seen as an integral part of the strategy of some factions, and involved members of ECOMOG at all levels. This third attempt by the NPFL to take Monrovia by force, accompanied by advances against the LPC throughout the south-east, prevented further implementation of Abuja I, Liberia's thirteenth peace accord. The NGO community in particular felt it was necessary to respond strongly to this violation of the rights of the Liberian people and of their own property rights. Following negotiations at head office and field levels, a Joint Policy of Operations (JPO) was developed by the twelve international NGOs remaining, designed both to minimise the harmful impact of relief interventions, and to convey to the factions the resolve and outrage of the NGO community. The JPOs of May

and August 1996 were focused on the restriction of NGO interventions to 'life-saving' activities, to avoid feeding the conflict materially, and on the importance of the protection of humanitarian and human rights. The later document developed a stronger NGO commitment to advocacy work, and attempted to separate advocacy functions from those of operations.

The development of the advocacy component of the new strategy was informed by a growing recognition of the need for positive action by the NGO community at the political level, in addition to actions to minimise any negative effects of aid. Analysis of the ambiguous role of aid in the conflict had led to a greater understanding of the possibilities for a proactive response, particularly at field level. Advocacy has increasingly been seen as the most constructive way to address some of the deeper issues of the conflict. The strategy was implemented through sending a series of press releases and letters to ECOWAS to call on the international community to put pressure on the factions leaders to respect international humanitarian laws.

These statements have also drawn attention to the issue of the war economy, and its role in funding the continuation of the war, and called for sanctions to be used against participants (NGO Press Statements, 31 May 1996, 25 July 1996).

NGO lobbying has been accompanied by an increasing commitment within donor communities to tackling the realities of the war. In June and July 1996 both the US government and the OAU acknowledged the nature and importance of the war economy in the conflict. Sanctions against faction members were introduced for the first time in Abuja II in August 1996, in the form of threats to set up a war crimes tribunal, and to freeze assets and restrict travel for factional associates. This latter was actually carried out in September, when the US embassy in Monrovia refused to issue visas to a number of factional associates. The resolve of the international community as demonstrated by the use of sanctions has been partially effective in gaining compliance of the factions with the peace process. However, abuses by factions still continued in the latter part of 1996, with the unprecedented manipulation of the civilian population by fighters to attract food aid to western Liberia in September, and numerous other violations.

NGOs have attempted to develop their strategy further, holding a 'smart aid' workshop in Monrovia

in October 1996 in order to maintain commitment to the JPO from all agencies, and to clarify operational issues. Consultants from the Mary Anderson 'do no harm' group were invited to help generate debate on implementation of policy. Important progress has been made in this area, with joint assessment procedures established, geographical division of labour, and improvements in food aid implementation policy in some particularly sensitive areas such as western Liberia. The November 1996 JPO again emphasised the importance of advocacy work, and initiated the process of employing an NGO facilitator for advocacy work, to help develop and implement policy. This post has been called for by the field in order to develop a practical and focused advocacy response, involving international lobbying as well as internal work with local groups.

The compliance by factions with the Abuja II peace process dating from December 1996, has however served to alter the context of interventions, and the momentum to take action at the political level has been somewhat lost. Sanctions and the war crimes tribunal have now disappeared from the international political agenda, and the humanitarian community is starting to expand activities in response to the current peace process. Appeasement has been judged the most pragmatic approach, with a tendency to sideline the difficult issues of political accountability and longer term trends in the Liberian political economy. Although NGOs are still committed to the JPO, the need to respond to the changing environment in terms of initiating rehabilitation and development programmes is currently taking precedence over any discussion of advocacy work.

The development of NGO policy highlights a number of issues. The attempts by NGOs to take a more active political stance in their approach to policy have met with some resistance, both within the NGO community, and from external actors. The restriction of activities to life-saving work only has been the most controversial aspect of the policy, with disagreement over definitions of which activities should be included, and how capital inputs should be limited. Though most agencies agree in principle that harmful interventions must be avoided, the practicality of working with reduced inputs raises difficulties. Limiting the extent of interventions challenges the basic role of NGOs as providers of welfare services, and many are reluctant to face this fundamental issue of redefining the type of assistance they offer.

The difficulties of operationalising the coordinated strategy increased with the entry of new NGOs following the September 1996 crisis in the western counties. CARE, Oxfam, Tear Fund and others arrived in the country following international press coverage of the crisis, and became involved, with existing agencies, in a classic capital-intensive emergency operation. Although this intervention was justifiable in terms of saving lives, it is arguable whether it was necessary for new agencies to become involved when the community as a whole was trying to restrict capital inputs. Mechanisms for implementing the JPO have remained informal, with decision-making by consensus, and the higher number of agencies involved has led to more divergent opinions.

Even where basic agreement prevails at field level, as with the November 1996 JPO, it may be difficult to translate into action because of the many different considerations that prevail at head office level within the various agencies.

While the advocacy component of the JPO has been relatively limited this aspect has not caused major disagreement. Attempts to expand advocacy work however, including through the appointment of an NGO ‘advocacy facilitator’, have been delayed by a lack of consensus. Given the major differences in mandates, cultures and political analysis of the agencies involved, the level of coordination reached is impressive. However, the extent of coordination that can be achieved in practice, particularly where more political issues are involved, may be limited by the number of diverse agencies, and the unwillingness of individual agencies to relinquish direct control over policy. The delegation of advocacy tasks to specified agencies within a coordinated policy may be the only effective way of achieving real action in these areas, but this would require the establishment of joint mechanisms with the authority to develop and implement policy independently of individual agencies.

External criticism has centered on the issue of putting conditionalities on relief aid, and on whether it should be the role of NGOs to take such steps. While the JPO has been supported to a certain extent by the UN and principal donors, the EU and US, their own policies have remained essentially unchanged, focused on the provision of basic services. The strategy now being pursued is of normalisation through an expansion of rehabilitation and development programmes, even though this involves further legitimisation of existing political structures. There

is little linkage between humanitarian relief policy and political negotiation, with only the EC attempting to impose some conditionalities on its funds in the form of strict accounting requirements for grants to government agencies, a strategy that could usefully be emulated by other agencies. The use of informal warnings to faction leaders by the EC during the April 1996 crisis helped to ensure that their offices were left out of the general looting. These are timid conditionalities compared with the proactive and assertive conflict prevention policy that being advocated as a cornerstone for an EU Common Foreign and Security Policy.

The need to develop alternative implementation strategies has at least been recognised to a certain extent by donors and the UN, and policy consultation on operational issues now takes place at the highest levels between all actors in the field.

Commitment to the PPOL has continued, with some mechanisms for their enforcement having been established following the April 1996 crisis, in conjunction with the Committee for Violations of the peace accord. Respect for humanitarian rights was included as part of Abuja II, and violations by factions are now systematically reported to the SRSR and the ECOWAS Committee of Nine who are overseeing implementation of Abuja. However, these mechanisms, consisting mainly of negotiation with some use of threats, have not been strong enough to ensure factional compliance when their interests lie elsewhere. The impact on factional behaviour of the use of various sanctions has not yet been examined, and no assessment has been made of the further potential of this kind of policy. The action of NGOs throughout 1996 helped to put some of these issues on the agenda of other international actors, and a greater emphasis on lobbying for policy change, supported by careful analysis, could have an important impact.

### 3.3 Policy strategy

The November 1996 JPO emphasises the importance of advocacy, and the need to advocate internally, in terms of informing and educating people, and supporting local initiatives for reconciliation. It further commits NGOs to supporting local community structures in rehabilitation and reconstruction activities. Externally, the need is seen to be the promotion of international commitment to a real peace process, and the exposure of serious human rights abuses. These areas of policy fit in to

the analysis of the different levels of the war economy as discussed above. Following from the discussion of potential solutions in Part I, specific NGO strategies will now be examined in three areas; of tackling human rights and economic abuses at the international level; of strengthening internal mechanisms of law and order; and of strengthening micro level community structures.

1. Work must focus on the systematic collection of information on violations of human rights and illegal economic activities with the aim of building a case for an international tribunal. The mechanisms of the war economy involve illegality in terms of ownership of resources and profits, and in terms of methods of extraction which involve violation of individual human rights. Both aspects need to be covered in the documentation process. This may be done by a specialised legal or human rights organisation, in conjunction with existing local human rights groups. The information can be used for the prosecution of war crimes by faction leaders and members, as part of the reconciliation process, and as part of internal attempts to re-establish respect for the rule of law in Liberia. It can also be used in attempts to limit the involvement of international business and importing countries in the illegal Liberian economy.

Data collection should concentrate on documenting the companies involved in the export of rubber, timber, gold and diamonds in Liberia and Cote d'Ivoire, and their local partners – Liberian businessmen, politicians and faction members. Some information is available locally on the amounts of goods exported and their destinations, while other data can be collected through international sources. The documentation of economic practices at the micro level that involve human rights abuses such as the use of forced labour, should also be carried out. Local people who have experienced crimes directly must be interviewed in order to build up hard evidence of these activities to present to a court. Some case-studies have already been collected, by Human Rights Watch/Africa and the Liberian Justice and Peace Commission. Liberians themselves may be best suited to collecting information on both economic and human rights crimes, and a few respected organisations already exist.

The role of the NGO community should be to lobby donors to support the involvement of a specialised human rights organisation to coordinate the work. NGOs could exploit their own knowledge of the

situation and of local people and structures, to facilitate contacts between new NGOs and local groups. NGOs could become involved directly in funding studies through field offices and local organisations, and could also have an important role in publicising the campaign, in Liberia and internationally.

2. A complementary strategy must be the support and strengthening of legitimate government and civil structures, in order to address the issues of the institutionalisation of the war economy at state level. This objective will be helped by the setting up of an international tribunal, however local institutions must play an important part in the reestablishment of the rule of law, and in helping to promote local commitment to democratic processes. Local initiatives for peace and democratisation should be recognised and helped to work effectively against the structures of the war economy, especially in the context of the proposed elections. Material and symbolic support should be directed at both government departments and ministries, and at a variety of civil organisations. Within the government, key departments and non-factionalised individuals should be identified and supported with equipment, logistics and training. Public information campaigns should be used to help educate the population in aspects of good governance and democracy, and to undermine those engaged in illegitimate activities.

This type of work is more in the domain of the UN specialised agencies, and specialised NGOs, however, the existing NGO community can play an important role in lobbying donors and the UN to reorient their programmes. They may also help identify qualified NGOs who work in these areas in other countries, and encourage their involvement in Liberia. Policy strategy must draw both on local knowledge and on international experience of similar work in other countries. The fundamental political issue of how to identify which local structures to support and strengthen can be overcome through careful assessment, which existing NGOs can help provide. As suggested above, the unparalleled experience of the NGO community of the war and the country means that it can play an important part in this area.

3. At the micro level activities must focus on community level work with fighters and civilians that supports both economic and social empowerment. The provision of alternatives to combatants, particularly in the area of education and training,



will be an essential part of any peace-building programme. Local priorities must be identified, and research on the needs of fighters and communities must be carried out to inform policy development. A survey of the opinions and experiences of both fighters and local experts would provide vital information on the process of reintegration. Community structures have a key role in reconciliation and the rehabilitation of Liberian society, and potentially effective local institutions should be identified and supported. The role in the peace process that may be played by womens' organisations, traditional economic institutions such as the ku system, and newer social organisations such as the SELF community welfare teams in Monrovia, should be examined. As at the macro level, local capacities can be helped in different ways, and methods should be developed that are transparent and informed by local priorities.

There are fewer constraints on this type of work at the micro level. Programmes can be developed from

existing NGO work, and expanded to include objectives for strengthening local structures. The political issue of how to identify which institutions to support applies as at the macro level. Detailed research is necessary to examine the options in Liberia, and to learn from experience elsewhere. The issue of security, especially for programmes concerning fighters, and in rural Liberia, poses difficulties which can be overcome through careful political analysis and sensitive design of programmes. It is crucial to work with initiatives for peace that exist already in Liberia, and to support local processes of reconciliation even while the conflict continues (Robinson, 1996). The importance of this aspect of advocacy work is recognised in the new JPO, and is emphasised by Liberians in their analysis of the conflict. NGOs should try to redevelop their existing programmes, and should lobby those involved at the macro level to similarly reorient their programmes to include explicit long term support for local capacities and initiatives against the war.

# CONCLUSION

The mechanisms of the war economy in Liberia have become a vicious cycle at both macro and micro levels. The economic and political incentives for faction and government members to pursue illegal activities outweigh any incentives to work for peace or democracy. The control by the warring factions of state institutions since 1993 has served to further entrench the processes of exploitation. Until the rule of law can be reestablished in Liberia, the warring factions and expatriate businessmen will continue to exploit the people and resources of the country with impunity. At the micro level, incentives to fighters and civilians involved in the war economy are also high. Civilians may be forced, through violence or by necessity, into activities that feed the wealth of fighters and faction leaders, while fighters may perceive participation in the war as the only rational option available.

The internalised nature of the war economy in Liberia means that strategies to address the problems must focus on internal activities. Support must be given to local alternatives to involvement in the conflict, and to the process of strengthening internal civil and state institutions. Research into existing local capacities and local priorities must be the starting point. Where the war economy is connected

to the international world, at the point of sale of Liberian resources, research must be carried out to establish the individuals, companies and countries involved, and the precise ways in which international and Liberian laws are being violated. This information can then form the basis of any international action against war criminals, and form part of the process of the reestablishment of the rule of law.

The NGO community in Liberia can take advantage of its high levels of coordination and its understanding of the mechanisms of the conflict, in order both to reorient its own programmes to support local initiatives for peace, and to lobby donors and other parties to do likewise. Donors appear willing to support advocacy work and internal programmes aimed at promoting capacities for peace. An active role by NGOs in lobbying for the setting up of an international tribunal could be a crucial element in the process of reestablishing the rule of law in Liberia.

The postponement of the planned May 1997 elections will allow the current political structures to persist, and thus the urgent need to work to establish an environment for peace in Liberia continues.

# Annex 1

## Joint Policy of Operations (22 November 1996)

Following the complete breakdown of any semblance of law and order in Monrovia in April 1996, INGOs have been attempting to reduce the potentially harmful effects of humanitarian assistance, through limiting their interventions to 'minimum life saving' activities. In August 1996 this agreement was translated into a formal Joint Policy of Operation (JPO) at a meeting in Geneva. INGOs affirmed their commitment to work together to maintain a limited input policy and to ensure the careful targeting of any interventions.

A workshop held in Monrovia 25-27 October 1996 created a forum for INGOs working in Liberia to review current methods of delivering assistance and their present JPO. By October, additional INGOs had come to Liberia in order to respond to the needs of populations in areas which had recently been opened up to outside assistance. This INGO 'Smart Aid' workshop was seen as an opportunity for the recently arrived INGOs to understand and make a commitment to a revised common JPO. During the workshop the INGOs reaffirmed their resolve to be united and coordinated in delivering humanitarian aid, and in dealing with other institutions within and outside of Liberia.

Key issues in the revised JPO now include and reinforce promoting peace through an advocacy campaign and working with local structures; using strategies that minimize the harmful effects of humanitarian assistance; limiting INGO import of capital assets to those essential for the needs of vulnerable populations in order to minimise the risk of fueling the war; continuing with a self regulating mechanism to monitor adherence to the JPO; and continuing to support local structures where appropriate to ensure continuity, sustainability and self-sufficiency in communities in Liberia.

The commitment to the Mission Statement of the Humanitarian Community in Liberia and the Principles and Protocols of Operation (July/August 1995) was also reaffirmed.

INGOs in Liberia agreed further commitments to the people of Liberia, specifically :

**To actively support activities designed to promote peace through advocacy.**

An advocacy campaign will be developed with the aims of creating an informed and structured information base to operate as a nexus for an advocacy campaign; educating the populace in human rights and the principles of democracy; continually informing and education the factions about the rights of the people of Liberia and the principles and protocols of humanitarian operations; creating an environment for reconciliation and reconstruction; promoting a regional and international commitment to a real peace process in Liberia; and exposing serious human rights abuses committed with the aim of prolonging the war in Liberia.

**To endeavor to do no harm through INGO assistance to programme beneficiaries, implementing partners and programme staff.**

Potentially harmful effects of assistance will be minimised through a variety of key strategies such as analysis and evaluation of programmes; security risk assessments for beneficiaries and implementors; a common approach to needs assessment; targeted and monitored interventions to support and encourage research into the potentially negative effects of aid; and a commitment to the sharing of information.

To provide only the essential capital assets needed to address the 'agreed to' needs of the beneficiaries so that the INGOs minimise the risk of fueling the war in Liberia.

Although levels of resources and staff will be left to the discretion of each organization, sharing of resources and equipment will be encouraged, as appropriate. Operations will be decentralised to minimise potential losses of equipment and commodities. Cross border operations will be encouraged.

**To support local communities to ensure continuity, sustainability and self-sufficiency.**

The INGO community will encourage the use of localised community-based structures throughout all the programmes.

**To continue with a self regulating mechanism.**

The Monitoring and Steering Group (MSG) comprising the heads of all INGOs working in Liberia will meet on a weekly basis in order to

facilitate all activities among INGOs in Liberia; co-ordinate activities with UN agencies and national NGOs; review and recommend new interventions for INGOs; share information about current programmes and plans for the future; and send representatives to participate in the Programme Violations and Compliance Committee.

**To identify and support local capacities for peace.**

Support peace and reconciliation efforts at the local community level.

## Annex 2

### Methodology

This study was carried out on behalf of the NGO community in Liberia, and is based on a short field trip to the region in October 1996 as well as an extensive review of the available literature. The research has also greatly benefited from other field research on related issues. Information on the war economy is by its nature highly sensitive, and thus an attempt was made to develop a picture of its workings and trends, rather than to establish exact figures and flows in detail. Much of the information on which this picture is based is anecdotal, whether gleaned from the small existing literature or from interviews in the field and in Europe. International and Liberian press sources since 1990 have also been used, as well as various UN and NGO reports and documentation. The only published economic data available are based on approximate trade returns figures. Due to the sensitivity of the subject, I have avoided citing individual sources. However, all information, unless otherwise stated, is based on observed and reported facts and events.

## Acronyms

|        |  |
|--------|--|
| ACF    | Action contre le Faim                            |
| AMCL   | African Mining Consortium Limited                |
| CRS    | Catholic Relief Services                         |
| EC/EU  | European Commission/Union                        |
| ECOMOG | ECOWAS Monitoring Group                          |
| ECOWAS | Economic Community of West African States        |
| ICRC   | International Committee of the Red Cross         |
| IGNU   | Interim Government of National Unity (1990-1993) |
| ITC    | International Trading Company                    |
| ITTO   | International Tropical Timber Organisation       |
| JPO    | Joint Policy of Operations                       |
| LAC    | Liberian Agricultural Company                    |
| LNTG   | Liberian National Transitional Government        |
| LPC    | Liberian Peace Council                           |

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| LPRC    | Liberian Petroleum Refinery Corporation           |
| LWF/WS  | Lutheran World Service/World Federation           |
| MSF     | Medecins sans Frontieres                          |
| NBL     | National Bank of Liberia                          |
| NPFL    | National Patriotic Front of Liberia               |
| NPRAG   | National Patriotic Government of Reconstruction   |
| PPOL    | Principles and Protocols of Operations in Liberia |
| RPAL    | Rubber Planters' Association in Liberia           |
| SCF     | Save the Children Fund                            |
| SELF    | Special Emergency Life Food                       |
| SRSG    | Special Representative of the Secretary General   |
| ULIMO-K | United Liberation Movement, Alhaji Kromah         |
| ULIMO-J | United Liberation Movement, Roosevelt Johnson     |
| UNOMIL  | United Nations Mission in Liberia                 |
| UNSCOL  | United Nations Coordinated Response in Liberia    |
| WFP     | World Food Programme                              |

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# RRN

## **Background**

The Relief and Rehabilitation Network was conceived in 1992 and launched in 1994 as a mechanism for professional information exchange in the expanding field of humanitarian aid. The need for such a mechanism was identified in the course of research undertaken by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) on the changing role of NGOs in relief and rehabilitation operations, and was developed in consultation with other Networks operated within ODI. Since April 1994, the RRN has produced publications in three different formats, in French and English: Good Practice Reviews, Network Papers and Newsletters. The RRN is now in its second three-year phase (1996-1999), supported by four new donors – DANIDA, ECHO, the Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland and the Department For International Development, UK. Over the three year phase, the RRN will seek to expand its reach and relevance amongst humanitarian agency personnel and to further promote good practice.

## **Objective**

To improve aid policy and practice as it is applied in complex political emergencies.

## **Purpose**

To contribute to individual and institutional learning by encouraging the exchange and dissemination of information relevant to the professional development of those engaged in the provision of humanitarian assistance.

## **Activities**

To commission, publish and disseminate analysis and reflection on issues of good practice in policy and programming in humanitarian operations, primarily in the form of written publications, in both French and English.

## **Target audience**

Individuals and organisations actively engaged in the provision of humanitarian assistance at national and international, field-based and head office level in the 'North' and 'South'.

The Relief and Rehabilitation Network is supported by:

Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
DANIDA

ECHO

Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland

Department For International  
Development(NEW LOGO!)