A BUMPY ROAD TO PEACE AND DEMOCRACY:
LIBERIA’S POWER-SHARING GOVERNMENT, 2003–2005

SYNOPSIS
In 2003, after 14 years of civil war and as many failed treaties, representatives of Liberia’s government, rebel groups, and civil society came together in Accra, Ghana, to negotiate a peace agreement. They chose Gyude Bryant, a businessman unaffiliated with any of the factions, to head a transitional government made up of ministers from the incumbent political party, the two main rebel groups, and independents, including opposition politicians and civil society leaders. Bryant’s primary goals were to maintain peace and pave the way for elections by the end of 2005—an assignment that entailed disarming and demobilizing more than 100,000 combatants, creating the means to deal with crucial issues ranging from truth and reconciliation to governance reform, and addressing a long list of other tasks—all of it under the scrutiny of Liberia’s legislature as well as regional and international organizations. Although successful democratic elections in late 2005 marked the achievement of Bryant’s primary aims, his fractious government failed to reach many other objectives, including building capacity and ensuring that resources earmarked for development served their intended purposes. The difficulties led to a novel, temporary system of governance—shared with international partners—that targeted procurement, spending, and other aspects of financial management. This case offers insights useful for planning transitions in low-income, divided societies where prolonged conflict has gutted institutional capacity.
INTRODUCTION


Bryant, who died from an illness in 2014, made his inauguration speech after accepting to lead a transitional unity government following Liberia’s civil war. As chairman—a role equivalent to president—he had a tall task ahead of him: to consolidate the nascent peace, disarm and demobilize 100,000 combatants, and lead the country to democratic elections in just two years. “I see myself as a healer,” Bryant told the New York Times. “I see myself as neutral. I side with no group.”

From 1989 to 2003, two civil wars in Liberia claimed more than 250,000 lives, displaced one-third of the population, reduced gross domestic product by more than 90%, and drove up unemployment rates to 85%. The most-recent fighting had pitted the government of President Charles Taylor against two rebel groups, both of which were supported by other West African nations: the Guinea-backed Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy and the Côte d’Ivoire–backed Movement for Democracy in Liberia. By the middle of 2003, as the rebel groups closed in on the capital city of Monrovia and UN sanctions stymied his ability to resupply his troops, Taylor agreed to a peace conference facilitated by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) (figure 1).

The talks got off to a rocky start on June 4, 2003. When Taylor first took the microphone, some of the rebel leaders walked out, assuming that the president planned to try to retain his position. However, Taylor left the conference after a UN-backed court in Sierra Leone unsealed an indictment against him for war crimes his forces had committed under his direction during the decade-long Sierra Leone Civil War, which had ended the previous year. Blamoh Nelson, who was in Accra at the time and later served as an adviser to Bryant, said that when Taylor left, “a window of opportunity for peace opened.”

While firefights between rival militias continued to flare up back home, the delegates hammered out a cease-fire agreement and peace plan, including the structure of the incoming transitional government’s cabinet and legislature. After accepting the final agreement on August 18 (a week after Taylor resigned and left the country), the parties to the peace talks came together to select new leaders for the positions of chairman and vice chairman. They agreed on Bryant, a businessman and longtime resident of Monrovia, for the post of chairman. Wesley Johnson, a United States–educated accountant and diplomat, who led the United People’s Party, which opposed Taylor, became vice chairman.

Lamini Waritay, Bryant’s communications adviser, remembered Bryant as a charismatic man who would brush off criticism to focus on the bigger...
picture. Toga McIntosh, executive director of the Governance Reform Commission, called Bryant a “Monrovia boy”—a reference to Bryant’s personal familiarity with many of Liberia’s political and factional leaders. “A Man Without Enemies,” as the headline of one New York Times profile described him, he would have to marshal all of the skills and relationships at his disposal if he was going to be able to implement the peace agreement and lead his fractured country to democratic elections during the next two years.8
THE CHALLENGE

In his inaugural address in October 2003, Bryant promised that his government would “scrupulously and meticulously” implement the peace agreement during its two-year mandate. But doing so would be no small feat. “The [transitional government] was essentially a precarious patchwork of warring factions, political parties, and civil society groupings,” Waritay said. “Like many a transitional government, it was designed to stop hostilities and achieve a level of stability and political accommodation that would create the enabling sociopolitical environment for democratic elections.” The negotiations had occurred in the shadow of an earlier, failed transitional government (1990–94) and hasty, 1997 elections that had solidified Taylor’s power.

Parties to the peace talks were well aware of the risk that Liberia might again descend into civil war, as fighting continued throughout the two-month negotiation despite a cease-fire agreement in place. The Accra accord, called the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, or CPA, was the 15th peace treaty signed since the war began in 1989.

In that context, Bryant’s government faced several likely impediments to success. First, the agreement set out a dizzying list of priorities for the new transitional government, including disarmament and demobilization of combatants, security sector reform, revival of a dead economy, humanitarian relief, refugee resettlement, fundraising from international donors, and a smooth handover of power after democratic elections in October 2005 (text box 1).

To achieve those goals, the transitional government would have to coordinate closely with a broad coalition of external partners: the United Nations, the Economic Community of West African States, the African Union, the European Union, the United States, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank, which supported the transitional government both technically and financially. As a result, Bryant’s schedule had to block considerable time for working with those institutions as well as for balancing donor demands with the interests of Liberian political factions.

The external partners collaborated under the umbrella of the International Contact Group on Liberia. Led by Ghana and the European Commission, the contact group included representatives from the United States, France, Morocco, Nigeria, the United Kingdom, the United Nations, ECOWAS, the European Union, and the African Union. Unlike multilateral governmental organizations like the African Union and the United Nations, which often have to temper their language for fear of overstepping, the
contact group could freely tell the Liberian government what the international partners thought. US Ambassador John Blaney, who participated in the contact group, remembered, “They were fundamental, and oftentimes delivered the hard message.”

In addition, the structure of the transitional government created several challenges. The peace agreement had set up a power-sharing arrangement that allotted five cabinet positions to each of the two rebel groups and Taylor’s supporters and assigned the remaining six posts to independent political parties and civic leaders. Taylor’s incumbent faction received the ministries of internal affairs, defense, planning and economic affairs, health and social welfare, and post and telecommunications. Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy took transport, justice, labor, finance, and the Ministry of State. The Movement for Democracy in Liberia received agriculture, commerce, foreign affairs, public works and land, and mines and energy. The unarmed political parties and civil society organizations headed

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**Text Box 1: Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement Priorities**

The peace agreement signed by the three warring factions, the political parties, and civil society organizations contained 37 articles. The first 25 articles clarified how to stop the fighting and steps toward disarmament and demobilization and involved only the three warring factions in negotiations. Political parties and civil society groups weighed in on the remaining 12 articles, which involved issues about transitional governance. The main priorities laid out in the agreement were:

- Immediate cease-fire and cease-fire monitoring
- Deployment of an international stabilization force
- Cantonment, disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation, and reintegration of combatants
- Security sector reform
- Establishment of a:
  - Human rights commission
  - Truth and reconciliation commission
  - Governance reform commission
  - Contract and monopolies commission
  - National elections commission to oversee elections no later than October 2005
  - National transitional government that would include executive, legislative, and judicial branches
- International assistance in implementation and monitoring of the peace agreement
- Immediate humanitarian relief and refugee resettlement.

Four annexes detailed the cease-fire agreement, a selection process for the positions of chairman and vice chairman, an implementation timetable for the peace agreement, and the allocation of cabinet positions, public corporations, and autonomous agencies and commissions.

Each of the factions also received two deputy ministerial posts for each portfolio allotted to them as well as the power to nominate people to lead public corporations specified in the agreement (figure 2). The legislative assembly retained the power to approve or reject candidates for those positions.

In the transitional legislature, the allocation of seats was similar, with 12 seats each awarded to Taylor’s government and the two rebel groups, 18 seats each for the political parties, 1 each for the 15 counties, and 7 for civil society. Unlike appointments in the cabinet, each of the groups could freely select its legislators without having to clear the candidates with another branch of government.

It was especially important that Bryant had to lead his cabinet without having a power base of his own to help leverage votes or marshal public opinion in support of his positions on issues. Although he had become acquainted with many of the leaders involved in the peace negotiations while conducting his business in Monrovia, he had not developed a loyal following. Michael George, an administrative assistant to Johnson, Bryant’s vice chairman, said leaders of the former rebel factions and the Taylor government believed that Bryant owed each group individual—and often conflicting—concessions because of the instrumental roles they had played in the choice of Bryant as chairman.
Bryant’s title of chairman, chosen by the authors of the peace agreement in lieu of the title president, underscored Bryant’s limited mandate. “His powers were so tenuous and watered down that he could hardly dismiss any official of government without risking the potential for unraveling the transitional government,” said Waritay.

Bryant also had to grapple with the entrenched transactional nature of the government. The framers of the peace agreement were well aware that the tenure of the transitional government would feature a significant division of spoils among the most-powerful militias. General Jacques Paul Klein, who led the UN mission, said the guiding logic was, “if we give the armed factions a piece of the cake, we might be able to begin the serious job of rebuilding Liberia.” Mediators did not balk at the size of the cabinet—21 ministers, 73 deputy ministers, and 109 assistant ministers—because the proliferation of posts encouraged the factions to trade weapons for jobs and representation. “With all manner of individuals and groups making up the [transitional government] and lacking a center of political gravity in the form of a politically strong presidency . . . ,” Waritay said, “many government officials [among them, people who had never before held a government job] scrambled for the few resources that were available.”

Low government capacity was yet another major impediment. Willie Belleh, who became Bryant’s chief of staff, called the problem “an ugly consequence of armed conflicts because competent people usually leave the country in such chaotic and violent situations . . . and capacity issues did influence work performance. But that was the trade-off Liberians had to make for the sake of peace.” Most of the new ministers and their deputies lacked significant experience in government, and many staff members had obtained their positions on the basis of political affiliation rather than skill.

Ministries lacked not only human capital but also material resources. On their way out in 2003, members of Taylor’s government took whatever they could. Natty Davis, who became Johnson’s chief of staff, said Bryant and Johnson found their offices stripped of equipment and furniture, a problem that news media reported in other parts of government as well. US Ambassador Blaney said that by the time the fighting stopped in August 2003, most buildings had been destroyed, schools and hospitals no longer functioned, and the streets were empty. He likened the experience to “walking on the moon.”

FRAMING A RESPONSE

Given the magnitude of the challenges he faced, Bryant focused his energies on steps that would prepare the groundwork for the next elected government, and he did so in close cooperation with international partners.

Bryant first worked on bolstering capacity in the center of government to assist with those partnerships. He created the Office of the Chief of Staff and Director of the Cabinet, merging two existing posts, and chose Belleh, a
close associate who was secretary-general of one of Liberia’s political parties, to lead the office. Belleh brought experience from both government and academia, having served as a member of the Council of Economic Advisors and the Board of Governors of the Central Bank of Liberia in Taylor’s government, as well as a university dean. Belleh also had participated in the peace negotiations. Asked why he accepted such a difficult job, Belleh replied, “I believed that with these challenges came the opportunity to serve my country at a time when I was most needed: a time to bring real and lasting peace to Liberia.”

A conflict over Belleh’s appointment illustrated the precarious nature of the peace during the early days of the transitional government. When Bryant announced on national radio that Belleh would become chief of staff, the warring factions wrongly understood the position to mean chief of staff of the army—in other words, overseer of the armed forces—and threatened to resist the appointment “even if it meant going back to war,” according to Belleh. Bryant immediately convened a high-level meeting with faction leaders to dispel the misunderstanding. Under the peace agreement, the UN and international partners were responsible for demobilizing, restructuring, and training the armed forces.

Staffing in Belleh’s office was limited to a few administrative personnel, but Bryant quickly moved to recruit a core team of advisers to correct the lack of capacity in his cabinet. For communications, Bryant appointed Waritay, a former minister of information under Liberia’s previous transitional unity government and communications professor, who left a lucrative consultancy with the Open Society Foundations to take up this role. And Bryant selected others to handle security, economic affairs, and international affairs. To track progress on the transitional government’s chief mandate—implementation of the peace agreement—Bryant installed Nelson, a longtime political activist, as “Advisor to the Chairman on the Scrupulous Implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement.”

Bryant ensured that each warring faction was represented, but because he did not know whether he could rely on those people, he also appointed other advisers, who overlapped in roles and in areas of expertise.

In addition to creating a core team of advisers and staff, Bryant expanded Johnson’s role to permit a division of labor. The vice chairman would coordinate disarmament and demobilization of former combatants and with humanitarian assistance, while Bryant would oversee elections, economic renewal, and peacekeeping. Johnson quickly brought in Natty Davis as his chief of staff. Davis, who was a member of Johnson’s political party, was working for the United Nations in Botswana at the time on HIV/AIDS-related projects. He brought private sector experience and a technical background, having served as deputy minister of commerce and coordinator of the Ministry of Finance’s Economic Financial Management Committee in the early 1990s.
To carry out the terms of the peace agreement, which stipulated that an international stabilization force would demobilize combatants and rebuild military and police services, the government formally asked the United Nations to deploy a peacekeeping force. In September, the UN Security Council authorized the establishment of the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) with a broad mandate and extensive resources, including an initial deployment of 15,000 troops. Headed by Klein, the UN force had multiple responsibilities: to protect civilians, oversee the disarmament and demobilization of combatants, provide security and support for national elections, reform the security sector, and monitor sanctions compliance.\(^{23}\)

Setting up a system to monitor implementation and identify problems also was a crucial initial task. The peace agreement called on international partners to provide technical and financial support and implementation monitoring. One article of the agreement specifically called on the United Nations, the African Union, the European Union, the International Contact Group, and ECOWAS to establish an Implementation Monitoring Committee that would ensure strict implementation of the peace agreement and that would hold regular joint meetings with Bryant and other representatives of the transitional government.\(^{24}\) According to Davis, the jointly run committee met weekly throughout the transitional government’s two-year mandate.

Dispute resolution was another important consideration in a power-sharing government of former military enemies. The peace accord served as a backstop—a standard or reference that spelled out activities not explicitly permitted under the agreement. However, when differences arose over interpretations of that agreement, the parties called on Abdulrasil Abubakar, a retired Nigerian general who had been chief ECOWAS mediator during the Accra negotiations. Before matters reached that level, cabinet meetings served as venues for settling differences, and on some occasions traditional and religious leaders stepped in. Waritay said Bryant also played a central role in resolving disputes: “By dangling a few incentives at dissatisfied complainants, he would get parties and individuals to a conflict to settle their differences.”

**GETTING DOWN TO WORK**

With advisers appointed and systems in place, Bryant turned his attention to implementation of the peace agreement, which set priorities and served as a general policy road map. According to Davis, Johnson’s adviser, the peace agreement “provided the bulk of the policy prescriptions. The primary role of the ministers and government was to ensure its effective implementation.” In particular, Blaney and Klein urged Bryant to take early and swift action on disarmament and demobilization. With an extensive agenda to accomplish in a brief, two-year time frame, the government had no time to waste, and Bryant got down to work before all of the government’s
ministers, deputy ministers, and assistant ministers had been appointed. The appointment process continued during the first few months of Bryant’s tenure and did not wrap up until other activities were well under way.

Appointing cabinet ministers

The treaty stipulated that the parties had seven days to choose their nominees and forward the names to the chairman. Bryant then had three days to send the names to the National Transitional Legislative Assembly, which had seven days to either approve or deny the nominations. Bryant had no authority to veto nominees for cabinet positions, but Davis said he used his personal relationships to head off problematic candidates before they became nominees.

Despite Bryant’s efforts, the cabinet confirmation process was troubled from the start. A thorny issue arose over 86 assistant ministerial positions, which the peace agreement did not allocate across factions, parties, and civil society, as it had done for ministerial and deputy ministerial portfolios. Consistent with the peace agreement’s instruction to favor technocrats, Bryant decided to appoint to these positions people who possessed essential skills and who were unaffiliated with the warring parties.

In late November, a month and a half after Bryant’s inauguration, arguments over the positions imperiled the entire confirmation process. Leaders of all three armed factions walked out of an Implementation Monitoring Committee meeting on disarmament as a protest against Bryant’s decisions. The group leaders handed co-chairs Bryant and Klein a letter warning that their militias would disarm only if their members received the assistant ministerial positions and calling on ECOWAS to mediate the rift. ECOWAS recommended a yearlong hiring freeze on the positions, saying the government’s budget was already overstretched.

Faced with a stalled cabinet confirmation process in addition to a stalled disarmament process, Bryant enlisted the help of Blaney, the US ambassador. The Implementation Monitoring Committee also issued a statement condemning any linkages between the distribution of posts and the disarmament and demobilization program. With international pressure mounting, the faction leaders backed down and allowed the disarmament process to begin. However, the issue remained unresolved, and in January 2004, two rebel-group leaders called for Bryant’s resignation as chairman. To keep the peace process moving, Bryant agreed to assign 51 of the 86 positions to the warring factions, leaving less than half of the positions to civil society and political parties.

Developing a strategic plan

Even though the peace agreement gave him a policy guide, Bryant needed a coherent and specific plan to guide his cabinet and to present at an international conference scheduled for February 2004, when donors would
decide how they could best support reconstruction. Without hundreds of millions of dollars in aid, Liberia would be unable to rebuild.

To develop a comprehensive and coherent reconstruction and development plan, the transitional government worked with the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank to undertake a joint needs assessment. Ministries provided information and analysis when available, and UNMIL played a central role in fact finding. The process lasted from November 2003 through January 2004 and grouped Liberia’s highest priorities into nine clusters: security; disarmament, demobilization, reintegration, and rehabilitation; reintegration of internally displaced persons, returnees, and refugees; governance and rule of law; elections; basic services (health and nutrition, education, and water and sanitation); productive capacity and livelihoods; infrastructure (power, transportation, and communications); and economic policy and development strategy.

The needs assessment resulted in the Results-Focused Transition Framework, which the transitional government officially endorsed in January 2004. The goals of each cluster came with a shared target date of December 2005, the last month before a new, elected government would take over.

With the donor conference fast approaching, Bryant also wanted to get a truth and reconciliation commission up and running in order to demonstrate to donors that Liberia was undergoing a healthy process of postwar healing. During peace negotiations, the warring factions settled on the establishment of a commission rather than a criminal tribunal. Such a step enabled them to avoid criminal accountability and prosecution, but it nonetheless imposed a requirement to discourage future impunity by collecting information about abuses and shining a light on a terrible period in the country’s history. Bryant moved quickly to nominate nine commissioners, and the legislative assembly approved the appointments by the end of January 2004.

With the framework in hand and the truth and reconciliation commission formed, Bryant and other representatives from the transitional government traveled to New York in early February to attend the Liberia Reconstruction Conference, cohosted by the United Nations, the World Bank, and the United States. International donors adopted the transition framework as the centerpiece of the Liberia’s reconstruction agenda and pledged $522 million in assistance, which totaled 80% of the identified need.

Because Liberian government ministries had lost capacity during the war, international organizations stepped up to partner on implementation of the transition framework. Bryant chaired the monitoring committee that provided general policy guidelines on implementation. A full-time support office in the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs had two national and two international support staff. The office conducted capacity-building workshops and reported on transition framework progress by means of a
quarterly newsletter. Responsibility for implementation rested with nine committees, one for each cluster. Cabinet ministers led the committees in partnership with relevant international co-chairs, who were from such organizations as the United Nations or the World Bank (exhibit 1).

Starting the disarmament and demobilization process

With the cabinet appointment and donor coordination processes in motion simultaneously, the government addressed disarmament and demobilization, which took on a special urgency. Klein and Blaney pressed to begin the disarmament process as quickly as possible, motivated by the simple theory, “either start to disarm the warring factions very soon, or risk a quick return to war.” Until the transitional government developed stronger capacity, the responsibility would lie mainly with UNMIL, although political leaders still played a role. Referencing the Implementation Monitoring Committee, Blaney said, “We had this commission system with the [transitional government]. Gyude [Bryant] would chair it, but we kept the tempo of it ourselves, and one of the things we put forward in this agenda most aggressively was disarmament and demobilization because we were having these ruptures in violence and also the danger of restarting the war. So I pushed for an early start.” Bryant also pushed for a rapid timeline after receiving several threats from former Taylor government soldiers eager for a payout in exchange for their arms.

Johnson, the transitional government’s vice chairman, co-chaired a disarmament committee with a representative from UNMIL to assess the technical and logistical challenges of disarming 100,000 former combatants, to develop a plan, and to coordinate with the UN peacekeepers who would carry out the task. For advice on how to move forward, the committee turned to Alan Doss, who had gained significant disarmament experience during the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone. (Doss was later appointed as head of non-peacekeeping UN operations in Liberia.)

Klein favored a weapons buyback as the quickest way to achieve disarmament. Informed by his experience with disarmament and demobilization in Sierra Leone and Côte d’Ivoire, Doss was not in favor the buyback strategy from the beginning for three reasons. First, he said, “what tended to happen is, if you start buying arms, it would be an endless flood. Second, by buying them individually, you didn’t break down the organized structures of the militias. And third, frankly you give an ex-combatant a couple hundred bucks, and I can assure you within two or three weeks it’s gone.” He was also concerned that a cash-for-weapons plan would lead to an inflow of arms from neighboring countries.

But Klein was not convinced, and, as Doss wrote in a memoir, “countered with his own UN experience from the Balkans, where he had launched a weapons buyback program.” Doss said Klein “saw this as the
quickest way of achieving disarmament and putting the armed groups out of business.”

Davis, Johnson’s adviser, was responsible for analysis and for engaging the experts needed to identify who was eligible to participate in the program and to determine how much money the government should pay to buy back their weapons. Determining eligibility was not an easy task. Davis said that, among other things, it meant deciding “whether or not you treat people who were taken to prepare food, to carry munitions and things of that nature. Do you consider them combatants or ex-combatants? Because again, by so doing, it changes the dynamics and the numbers of them, the settlement arrangement, and all of those kinds of things.” In the committee, Davis worked to reach a compromise between the warring factions, which wanted a broad definition of combatant in order to qualify more of their people for payments, and UNMIL, which faced tight budget constraints.

To implement the arms-for-cash arrangement, Blaney, UNMIL, and the Liberian government set up a site just outside Monrovia, called Camp Schieffelin. After the facility opened in late 2003, the number of ex-combatants coming in for payments overwhelmed the United Nations staff that ran the operation. Riots broke out at the camp after the facility had decommissioned only 7,000 guns. The protests continued for several days, and the transitional government, UNMIL, and Blaney decided to suspend the process in order to make more-substantial preparations. The disarmament committee redesigned the process, calling for more camps and larger numbers of peacekeeping troops. It also increased the number of education and training programs to cut down on the long waits ex-combatants had to endure before accessing the services.

After this “tactical setback,” as Blaney called it, the transitional government restarted the disarmament process in April 2004.

Organizing the elections

With the disarmament process under way, Bryant turned his attention to another critical activity: organizing national elections. Like other aspects of the transitional government’s mandate, the peace agreement laid out many of the requirements. The most pressing was an October 2005 deadline for the national vote, and Bryant and others knew that the transitional government might encounter attempts to delay the election.

The peace agreement required Bryant to appoint seven new commissioners to a National Elections Commission. Nominated by civil society groups, the commissioners had to have backgrounds in civil society or justice and had to come from different counties in Liberia. Bryant selected the commissioners from a list of 40 nominees, and the legislative assembly quickly confirmed the appointments.

In April 2004, the assembly approved Bryant’s selection of Frances Johnson-Morris to head the commission. Johnson-Morris, a former chief
justice of the Supreme Court and head of the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, had only 18 months to prepare the country for elections. Infrastructural damage from the war had rendered large parts of Liberia inaccessible by road, thereby adding to the logistical challenge of registering and educating Liberians about the elections. Cell phone service reached only half of those unfamiliar with electoral processes.

While the commissioners met to discuss these hurdles, the assembly drafted legislation on electoral reform, in line with the peace agreement’s provisions. The law, passed in December 2004, required candidates for president and vice president to win an absolute majority of votes cast; runoff elections would decide the winner if no candidate received a majority. The law also removed a condition stipulating that presidential candidates had to have lived in Liberia for at least 10 years.46

To support the resource-heavy work of running elections, the United Nations and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, a United States–based nonprofit organization, provided technical and logistical support, and external partners covered 75% of the nearly $20-million election budget. UNMIL helped the commission hire 19,000 poll workers, and other international partners assisted in a voter drive that registered more than 1.3 million Liberians, or 90% of those eligible.47 (For more on the conduct of the election, see companion ISS case study “A Path to Peace: Liberia’s First Post-War Elections, 2004–2005.”)

Blaney said Johnson-Morris faced tremendous pressure from several constituencies to postpone the elections, and a late crisis nearly forced her to do so. After the elections commission rejected applications from five presidential candidates who lacked adequate voter signatures, the applicants argued to the Supreme Court that they were entitled to a seven-day grace period to rectify their faulty documentation. The court ruled in favor of the applicants just two weeks before election day. Because complying with the decision would likely require the reprinting of ballots and a delay in the voting, Johnson-Morris appealed to ECOWAS chief mediator Abubakar. After negotiations, Abubakar managed to get the candidates to withdraw their nominations for the sake of the peace process, and the elections proceeded on schedule, as required by the peace accord.48 “If you make a timeline, you must stick to that timeline,” Johnson-Morris said. “You don’t waver on this kind of issue.”

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

Disputes and demands by the warring factions threatened the transitional government many times during its two-year tenure. To keep the peace, Waritay said “the chairman himself was sometimes literally compelled to mobilize unbudgeted resources for heads of warring factions who demanded that some food and cash incentives be given to their men for adhering to the peace process.”
Corruption and financial mismanagement threatened the legitimacy of the transitional government throughout its tenure. Doss said disappointment among international donors set in within months of the transitional government’s taking power. In his memoir, he wrote, “President Kabbah [of Sierra Leone] confided to me his exasperation about this state of affairs, having seen a huge bill for expenses from the Liberian government for a short visit to Freetown funded by the Sierra Leone government. The European Union and the United States were especially frustrated as they struggled to get the rehabilitation of the power grid and other infrastructure projects under way. The Chinese ambassador too privately expressed to me his intense frustration with the way China’s aid was being handled.”

The event that precipitated action by the international donors was a financial audit of the transitional government completed by the European Commission (EC) in early 2005. Bryant had initially asked the EC to audit the Liberian government from the Taylor years to the present in an effort to uncover the full extent of corruption and financial mismanagement under his predecessor, but lack of documentation from that time meant the EC quickly moved on to the financial dealings of the transitional government itself. The audit report laid bare the extent of corruption and underscored the fact that Bryant had little control over his own cabinet.

The EC delayed the initial release of the report because of fears that it would arouse an explosive response. The anticipated reaction came swiftly. During an annual progress meeting for the Results Focused Transitional Framework, held in Copenhagen in early May 2005, contact group members pointed to corruption as the main factor holding back Liberia’s economic recovery. In response, the leader of the Liberian delegation, Minister of Planning and Economic Affairs Christian Herbert, capitulated to donors’ demands for a greater international role in the country’s public financial management.

The international partners took that admission as their cue to send a clear and strong message to the transitional government. That message came in the form of the Economic Governance and Action Plan, the first official iteration of what later became the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Program, or GEMAP. Presented to the transitional government in May 2005, the draft plan referenced the EC audit as a catalyst for concern within the contact group.

The plan’s provisions went well beyond improved budgeting and tighter management controls. For example, it proposed creating an externally managed agency to manage procurement, with strict oversight of concessions and contracts. It recommended asking judges from neighboring countries like Sierra Leone to serve on Liberian courts as an anticorruption measure. And it set up an Economic Governance Steering Committee—co-chaired by the Liberian government and international partners—that would exercise veto power over “any government policy, contract, concession, travel advance,
waivers on duties/taxes, disbursements.” Davis said he advised Bryant and others that “this is not something that’s going to go away.”

In June, the transitional government countered with a proposal of its own that rejected several aspects of the contact group’s first draft, including the steering committee’s veto power and the introduction of foreign judges into the Liberian judicial system. After joint discussions, the contact group submitted the final version of GEMAP to Bryant on August 3, with a one-week deadline for agreement. The EC even added a personal letter to Bryant, clearly stating that future aid for Liberia hinged on the transitional government’s acceptance of the arrangement.

Davis recalled that Bryant was furious after receiving the EC letter because he considered GEMAP an infringement on Liberia’s national sovereignty. But further pressure from the United States and the EC in the form of threats to revoke foreign assistance weighed heavily on Bryant. Finally, in his penultimate month as head of the transitional government, Bryant signed the GEMAP proposal.

The final, September 2005 version of GEMAP pinpointed the need for better financial management, referenced the EC’s audit and other findings on corruption, and designated the Results Focused Transitional Framework as the guiding document for donor coordination. The plan contained six interlocking components: bolstering financial management and accountability, improving budgeting and expenditure management, improving procurement practices and the granting of concessions, establishing effective processes to control corruption, supporting key institutions, and building capacity (exhibit 2). To strengthen financial management and accountability, under the terms of the arrangement, Bryant issued an executive order creating a central treasury account into which all revenue would flow. The plan gave international experts binding co-signature authority in five of the country’s state-owned enterprises: the National Port Authority, Roberts International Airport, Liberia Petroleum Refining Co., the Forestry Development Authority, and the Bureau of Maritime Affairs. To improve budgeting and expenditure management, GEMAP called (1) for the enlistment of international experts who could build the capacities of the Bureau of the Budget, the Ministry of Finance, and other ministries, as well as the Cash Management Committee (an interministerial group responsible for implementing cash-based budgeting), and (2) for the establishment of an integrated financial-management information system. International experts also had binding co-signature authority over decisions made at major financial institutions such as the Central Bank of Liberia and the General Auditing Office and assisted the General Services Agency, the Governance Reform Commission, and the Contracts and Monopolies Commission. Because procurement processes had long been easy targets for corruption, GEMAP called for implementation of a basic electronic
procurement system that would require mandatory listing, open competitive bidding, and publication of public tenders. To empower a judicial system weakened after decades of civil war, the plan also called for the deployment of international legal experts who could advise the Liberian judiciary, and it mandated the establishment of the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission.59

Despite Bryant’s acquiescence to GEMAP, the job of implementing the plan fell mostly on his successor, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who was elected later in 2005, and took office in January 2006.

ASSESSING RESULTS

“With transitional governments, we have to be careful about what the expectations are,” cautioned Gyude Moore (a distant relative of Bryant), who later became minister of public works under President Sirleaf. “This wasn’t a cabinet that was intended to deliver services, to grow the economy; that wasn’t it. The primary objective, the overarching need for this cabinet, was the ability to keep the country stable enough into an election. And as long as the factions from which the cabinet ministers were chosen remained happy with the arrangement and had no reason to renege on their promise to end the war, then it was successful.”

Bryant’s transitional government faced a significant, multifaceted challenge but had few resources. Overall, the government’s performance was mixed, succeeding on some fronts and failing on others. Belleh said: “Our biggest achievement was to stabilize the country and hold free and fair elections within the time frame established by the Accra peace agreement. Various elements tried to convince us to maneuver so as to remain in power for additional years. Chairman Bryant and I did not share those inclinations and views. Our mission was a mission of peace, and it was simple: disarm the warring factions, stabilize the political situation, and hold free and fair elections.” The National Democratic Institute and the Carter Center called those elections the most competitive in Liberia’s history, thanks to an election day that was “violence-free, orderly, and well-administered, despite the massive logistical difficulties.”60 Belleh also pointed to $500 million of donor assistance as a major accomplishment.

Davis said shortcomings were inevitable because the transitional government was meant to be inclusive rather than technocratic. “You just have to accept the inherent defects that come along with this decision that was made. And let’s see now how we can cross this river and get successfully to any elections.”

To assess the transitional government’s overall performance on its chief mandate to implement the peace agreement, Nelson, the advisor to the chairman on the “scrupulous implementation of the comprehensive peace agreement,” prepared a report for Bryant in December 2005. Nelson found that of the peace agreement’s 37 articles, the transitional government and its international partners had implemented or completed 26, with the remaining
articles—mostly longer-term initiatives like refugee resettlement—in progress. Michael George, Johnson’s administrative assistant, echoed the findings of Nelson’s report, stating that the transitional government had implemented every aspect of the agreement “to the letter.” Doss, who worked on peacekeeping missions in post-conflict Sierra Leone, Côte d’Ivoire, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, said that of the peace agreements in those countries, “only in Liberia was a peace agreement actually implemented more or less as expected.”

Analysts from the United Nations and the World Bank around that time took a similar favorable stance on the transitional government’s performance on the Results Focused Transitional Framework, which hewed closely to the articles of the peace agreement. Published in July 2006, their final report said, “There has been noticeable progress in key . . . result areas, including: security sector reforms, re-establishment of rule of law, access to all counties and districts; disarmament and demobilization of over 101,495 (children, women and men) ex-combatants; return and reintegration of over 500,000 [internally displaced persons] and refugees; gradual restoration of state authority; and the successful completion of the all-important October 2005 elections.” However, the report went on to attribute much of that success to robust international participation, and it tempered optimism by stating “the political will and capacity of the [transitional government] during its tenure to frame and implement governance reforms, rein in corruption, control off-budget spending and provide the most basic of public services for the Liberian people remained questionable against an uneven performance record at multiple levels of government.” The report pointed to the transitional framework’s cluster committees in particular as weak points in implementation because the minister in charge of each committee demonstrated apathy toward coordination and therefore received limited financial support to carry out activities.

Criticisms of the transitional government centered on corruption and financial mismanagement. Moore recalled that the transitional government’s reputation was so toxic that “when President Sirleaf came to power, for at least eight or nine years [she had two 5-year terms], she avoided hiring or appointing anyone who had been in Gyude Bryant’s cabinet because that government is basically remembered for being one of the most corrupt in terms of governing the country.” The many incidents that precipitated such a sweeping reform as GEMAP spoke to the scale of corruption in the transitional government. When Transparency International released its corruption rankings in October 2005, as Liberia was conducting elections and the transitional government was preparing to hand over power, the country ranked 137th out of 158 countries surveyed.

Still, Waritay asserted that assessments should take context into account: “While no one wishes to give a pass to those [transitional government] officials who indulged in one form of corruption or the other, the nature of
the government was such that censoring or sanctioning or outrightly dismissing such officials was not only difficult but ill-advised given the volatility of the situation and the reality that officials drawn from warring factions still had ready access to weapons.”

Despite the country’s legacy of corruption and financial mismanagement, the transitional government and its international partners succeeded in achieving three crucial goals that previous interim governments had failed to achieve: keeping the peace, carrying out disarmament and demobilization, and implementing elections. Aside from periodic skirmishes and firefights, the peace established in Accra held, thanks in large part to UN and ECOWAS peacekeeping forces. According to database ACLED—the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project—after a peak in violence at the end of the war in 2003, with 324 battle deaths reported, 2004 and 2005 saw a total of only one death in battle.67

After the false start at Camp Schieffelin, disarmament continued apace, culminating in the demobilization of more than 100,000 combatants and the destruction of 27,000 heavy weapons, 6,153,631 small arms and ammunition, and 29,794 other types of ammunition and explosives.68 In October 2005, more than 700 candidates from 21 political parties ran for office in what international observers deemed a well-managed and neutral election. After a runoff election in November, Liberian voters elected Sirleaf, Africa’s first female head of state, as president.69

REFLECTIONS

The democratic election of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf did not mark the end of Liberia’s postwar reconstruction and reconciliation process but, rather, a beginning. Chairman Gyude Bryant, his transitional government, and their international partners had ushered the country through democratic elections, but Sirleaf still had to deal with many of the same problems Bryant had faced. Antoinette Sayeh, who served as Sirleaf’s finance minister, recalled that she and other new cabinet members found their ministries overstaffed but bereft of capacity. Donald Booth, who succeeded John Blaney as US ambassador to Liberia, recalled that vehicles and furniture disappeared from the ministries during a chaotic period between the Bryant and Sirleaf administrations. Having few systems to build on, Sirleaf established her own policies and procedures with regard to cabinet management.

However, there were also important differences in the situations of the two leaders. The transitional government had amplified the voices of a few—mainly, the warring parties—for the sake of peace. Sirleaf had to restore the representative equilibrium as head of a democratically elected government and incorporate the many voices of her country. Moreover, Sirleaf could build on the partial foundation laid by the transitional government. On top of disarming and demobilizing the militias, Michael George, assistant to the vice chairman of the transitional government, stressed the establishment of
important institutions such as the Public Procurement and Concessions Commission, the Governance Commission, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, all of which Sirleaf reinforced.

Alan Doss, who represented the United Nations in various roles, said the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Program, or GEMAP—developed by a group of nations and regional organizations—“came too late to save the reputation” of the transitional government, but “it did have an important impact on the government and governance after the elections.”

Several factors outside the government’s control contributed to successes during the transitional period. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement negotiated in Accra laid the foundation and set concrete dates for democratic elections, which gave the transitional government a clear sunset at the end of its two year-mandate.

Robust security, financial, and technical assistance from international partners proved essential to the transitional government’s success. For those international partners, momentum was an important factor, as Blaney and General Jacques Paul Klein, who led the United Nations Mission in Liberia, later wrote, “One needed to create the impression that the proverbial ‘train was leaving the station,’ and that those who wanted a stake in postwar Liberia had to get on or be left behind.”

Personal relationships and deep local knowledge helped the head of the transitional government navigate the political world of postconflict Liberia. As a “Monrovia boy” who’d never left his hometown, Bryant was acquainted with many of the influential people in the small community of Liberian elites and factional leaders. When he felt it necessary, Bryant made concessions to keep the peace process moving, which almost caused his undoing. During Sirleaf’s administration, Bryant was arrested and charged with economic sabotage, theft of property, and embezzlement, though the charges were later dropped. Despite an uneven legacy, Bryant managed to help lead Liberia toward a new era of peace.
Exhibit 1: Results-Focused Transitional Framework Implementation Structure

![Diagram of RFTF Technical Working Committees (RWC)](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/6294478732FFBCCE85256FF6005D9711ntgl-lib-30apr.pdf)

Names and Associated Acronyms for Exhibit 1

ACF       Action Contre La Faim
AFELL     Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia
ARC       Agricultural Research Consortium
AU        African Union
BOCERO    BOCERO
BSE       Bureau of State Enterprises
CBL       Central Bank of Liberia
CCC       Community Care Center
CCF       Christian Children Fund
CDA       Cooperative Development Agency
CEA       Community Empowerment Approach
CENDE     Center for Democracy and Elections
CMC       Mining Contractors, Incorporated
CSA       Civil Service Agency
DDRR      Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration
DSRSG     Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General EC European Commission
ECOWAS    Economic Community of West African States
EOC       Emergency Obstetric Care
EU/ECHO   European Union/European Commission’s Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection
FAO       Food and Agriculture Organization
GAO       General Auditing Office
GBC       Governance Reform Commission
GRODP     GRODP
GSA       General Services Agency
GTZ       Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (Germany)
HC        Humanitarian Coordinator
HCS       Humanitarian Coordination Section
HIC       Humanitarian Information Center
IACFT     Intra-African Trade Fair
ICGL      International Contact Group on Liberia
ICRC      International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP       Internally Displaced Persons
IMC       Implementing Monitoring Committee
JMC       Joint Monitoring Committee
JPC       Justice & Peace Commission
JRS       Jesuit Refugee Service
LBA       Liberian Business Association
LBDI      Liberian Bank for Development and Investment
LCC       Liberia Council of Churches
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LEC</td>
<td>Liberia Electricity Corporation</td>
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<tr>
<td>LFZA</td>
<td>Liberia Free Zone Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>LMA</td>
<td>Liberia Marketing Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>LPMC</td>
<td>Liberia Marketing and Produce Corporation</td>
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<tr>
<td>LRDU/RFA</td>
<td>Liberian Rubber Development Unit</td>
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<td>LRRRC</td>
<td>Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>LTC</td>
<td>Liberia Telecommunications Corporation</td>
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<tr>
<td>LURD</td>
<td>Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy</td>
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<tr>
<td>LUSH</td>
<td>Lush Cosmetics Inc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LWSC</td>
<td>Liberia Water and Sewerage Corporation</td>
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<tr>
<td>M&amp;E</td>
<td>Monitoring and Evaluation</td>
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<tr>
<td>MC&amp;I</td>
<td>MC&amp;I</td>
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<tr>
<td>MCC</td>
<td>Monrovia City Corporation</td>
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<tr>
<td>MDG</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goal</td>
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<tr>
<td>MERLIN</td>
<td>Medical Emergency Relief International</td>
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<tr>
<td>MIA</td>
<td>Ministry of Internal Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>MLME</td>
<td>Ministry of Lands, Mines and Energy of Liberia</td>
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<tr>
<td>MOD</td>
<td>Ministry of Defense</td>
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<tr>
<td>MOE</td>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>MOHSW</td>
<td>Ministry of Health and Social Welfare</td>
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<tr>
<td>MOI</td>
<td>Ministry of Interior</td>
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<td>MOJ</td>
<td>Ministry of Justice</td>
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<td>MOL</td>
<td>Ministry of Labor</td>
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<td>MOPEA</td>
<td>Ministry of Planning &amp; Economic Affairs</td>
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<td>MOT</td>
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<td>MPW</td>
<td>Ministry of Public Works</td>
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<td>MRD</td>
<td>Ministry of Rural Development</td>
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<td>MRD</td>
<td>Movement for Restoration of Democracy</td>
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<td>MSPA</td>
<td>Maritime Security Patrol Area</td>
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<td>MYS</td>
<td>Minister of Youth &amp; Sports</td>
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<td>NARD-TRA</td>
<td>NARD-TRA</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCDRR</td>
<td>National Commission on Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration</td>
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<td>NEC</td>
<td>National Elections Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>NHRC</td>
<td>National Human Rights Commission</td>
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<td>NIC</td>
<td>National Investment Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>NPA</td>
<td>National Port Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>NRC</td>
<td>Norwegian Refugee Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>NTGL</td>
<td>National Transitional Government of Liberia</td>
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<tr>
<td>NTLA</td>
<td>National Transitional Legislative Assembly</td>
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Exhibit 2: The Six Components of GEMAP

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Goals</th>
<th>Plan</th>
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<tr>
<td>(i) Financial management and accountability</td>
<td>To address extensive revenue leakages and protect the revenue streams of key revenue-generating agencies and institutions and to obtain revenues from customs duties, import levies, and taxes</td>
<td>• Under terms of the arrangement, Bryant issued an executive order creating a central treasury account into which all revenue would flow • Deployment of international experts with binding cosignature authority in five state-owned enterprises • Enforcement of (1) Bryant’s Executive Order No. 2, which centralized the authority to collect revenue at the Ministry of Finance and (2) government accounts at the Central Bank of Liberia • Establishment of a new post of chief administrator of the Central Bank of Liberia, who would—together with an international expert given binding cosignature authority—oversee internal controls and audits for the National Port Authority, Roberts International Airport, Liberia Petroleum Refining Corporation, the Forestry Development Agency, and the Bureau of Maritime Affairs</td>
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<td>(ii) Improving budgeting and expenditure management</td>
<td>To rehabilitate the budget formulation, budget execution, and financial-reporting systems</td>
<td>• Capacity building across the Bureau of the Budget, the Ministry of Finance and other ministries, and the Cash Management Committee (an interministerial committee responsible for implementing cash-based budgeting) • Provision of an integrated financial-management information system • Development of realistic cash and procurement plans • Establishment of an adequately staffed technical secretariat for the Cash Management Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>(iii) Improving procurement practices and granting of concessions</td>
<td>To safeguard against the loss of natural and financial resources through stronger and more-transparent procurement, concession, contract, and licensing practices</td>
<td>• Implementation of a basic e-procurement system that requires mandatory listing, open competitive bidding, and publication of public tenders • Coverage of procurement disclosures in print and other media • A strengthened compliance role for the Contracts and Monopolies Commission • Liberian accession to the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme and the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative to enhance transparency in revenue flows associated with natural resource extraction</td>
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<tr>
<td>(iv) Establishing effective processes to control corruption</td>
<td>To empower a judicial system weakened after decades of civil war and lacking adequate resources, trained manpower, or proper facilities and to combat corruption</td>
<td>• Provision of policy advice, technical assistance, and support for renovation of facilities through the international community • Establishment of an independent anticorruption commission, with technical support from the subregion to assist in fraud and corruption investigations • Deployment of international legal experts to advise the judiciary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(v) Supporting key institutions</td>
<td>To build capacity and remove constraints across major institutions related to economic governance</td>
<td>• Provision of international experts with binding cosignature authority in such institutions as the Central Bank of Liberia and the General Auditing Office and international assistance at the General Services Agency, Governance Reform Commission, and Contracts and Monopolies Commission • Hiring of an external audit agent to support the General Auditing Office and offer technical assistance to the Ministry of Finance</td>
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<tr>
<td>(vi) Capacity building</td>
<td>To sustain the interim efforts of international experts in their advising on Liberia’s economic governance for the long term</td>
<td>• Development of a plan for major national capacity building that would specify activities planned for building local capacity, a timeline for measuring results, and an exit strategy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References
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42 Alan Doss. A Peacekeeper in Africa: Learning from UN Interventions in Other People’s Wars. (London: Lynne Rienner, 2020), 112.
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GLOBAL CHALLENGES: POWER SHARING
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