

Views of Liberia on Promoting development through reducing and preventing armed violence

Executive summary

Liberia experienced armed conflict from December 1989 – August 2003 during which every fact of life was terribly affected. Liberia thus has interest in and is committed to promoting development through the reduction or even the elimination and prevention of armed violence wherever it may be.

Liberia is therefore of the opinion that:

- The causes and effect of armed violence should be thoroughly investigated;
- Post conflict countries should be paid special attention and supported to consolidate peace through development;
- The problem of armed violence needs to be measured so that action can be taken to reduce it;
- Programmes on armed violence prevention and reduction need to be integrated as key elements of national and local development strategy and planning;
- There must be demonstrated commitment to existing international and regional treaties and agreements that support armed violence prevention and reduction; and
- Sufficient aid must be committed (in addition to existing funding) to act effectively on armed violence and development.

The relevant forms of armed violence in **Liberia** since the sustained armed conflict are:

- Armed robbery
- Ethnic feuds
- Land disputes

As indicated in Liberia's second MDGs Report, 'Liberia's Progress Towards the Millennium Development Goals 2008', the lingering effects of armed violence have diminished hopes for positive outcomes of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. Development prospects and the means to earn sustainable livelihood have been stifled. Poverty is pervasive, with 64 per cent of the population living below the national poverty line of less than US\$1 per day, maternal and infant mortality rates are as high as 578/100,000 live births and 117/1,000 live births respectively, as are the rates of illiteracy (65 per cent) and unemployment among 15-24 year olds (88 per cent).

Given this clear link between armed violence and sustainable development in our country, reducing and preventing armed violence and conflict must underpin any progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Liberia's Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS).

Introduction

Armed violence constitutes a significant burden on development in Liberia. The prolonged armed conflict has disrupted agriculture production and food security on which majority of the country's population depends as a source of livelihood; destroyed basic facilities and delivery systems in almost every sector, including the education and health sectors; caused the internal and external displacement of nearly one million people; and resulted in the death of over 250,000 persons who could have contributed meaningfully to the country's peace and development process.

Exacerbating the situation is the proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons, which is directly impeding Liberia's chances of development, scaring away potential foreign investments and contributing to continued violence and personal insecurity in the country. Armed robbery, ethnic feuds, land disputes are among the most frequently reported forms of armed violence.

Liberia is of the opinion that four strategic goals can be identified in order to offer experiences in how action can be taken to prevent and reduce armed violence in support of development and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs):

1. Improving measurement of armed violence;

2. Integrating armed violence prevention and reduction with development programming to address common root causes;
3. Complying with international agreements aimed at or relevant for armed violence prevention and reduction; &
4. Ensuring adequate official development assistance directed to the combined programme of 'armed violence reduction and development' (AVD)¹.

Achieving these strategic goals will require a more coherent approach to support for Member States across the UN system, including existing coordination mechanisms such as the Coordinating Action on Small Arms (CASA), Inter-Agency Standing Committee, etc., but also engaging the major UN implementing agencies, and the International Finance Institutions.

Any and all strategies pursued are under the authority of and/or at the specific request of recipient States, for example, through the national Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, and should not be a condition imposed by the donor community.

1. Measuring armed violence

Armed violence in Liberia since the sustained armed conflict mainly occurs during:

- Armed robbery
- Ethnic feuds
- Land disputes

The areas/groups most affected are:

- Rural communities and populations particularly in the South-eastern, North-western and Central regions of Liberia
- Urban communities and populations in Monrovia
- Women, children, the elderly and disabled
- Minority ethnic groups

Armed violence undermines development in Liberia by:

- Causing the illegal exploitation of natural resources
- Disrupting and destroying basic facilities and delivery systems in almost every sector
- Causing economic decline
- Causing Economic hardships
- Causing instability and insecurity, thereby making it very difficult to plan and implement development programs
- Scaring away potential foreign investments and leading to the exodus of private investments
- Depopulation of regions and counties
- Disintegration of families

Problems in development, such as corruption and bad governance, increase the risk of armed violence in Liberia by rendering the population vulnerable to:

- Unemployment
- Extortion
- Violent death
- Threats of violence
- Deprivation
- Marginalization and exclusion from institutions of governance and access to land, etc.
- Various forms of injustices, human rights violation and gender inequality

Liberia recommends that data collected on armed violence in each State be consolidated and made publicly available (for example on the government website).

2. National programming on armed violence and development

¹ We stress that.

National programming is central to achieving measurable reductions in armed violence by 2015. Strategies need to be preventive and dynamic, able to respond to changing situation. Strategies should address immediate risk factors in armed violence (such as arms availability), but should also address more structural factors to prevent violence and conflict from starting.

Liberia has undertaken the following actions to prevent or reduce armed violence and promote development:

- Establishment of the Liberia National Commission on Small Arms
- Establishment of a National Peace Building Fund Secretariat for the formulation and implementation of peace building policies and projects
- Formulation of a National Security Strategy
- Formulation and implementation of a Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS), with enhancing national security as one of four main pillars
- Enactment of the Anti-Rape Law
- Disarmament, demobilization rehabilitation and reintegration of ex-combatants, including thousands of former child soldiers
- Collaboration with UNDP for the implementation of the Arms for Development program
- Reintegration and resettlement of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees
- Adoption of a National Plan of Action on UN Resolution 1325
- The Kimberly Process Certification Scheme and the Liberia Extractive Industries for Transparency Initiatives (EITI)
- Enactment of the Environmental Protection and Management Law
- Enactment of the Armed Robbery Law
- Implementation of the Millennium Village Project
- Implementation of the Accelerated Enrolment Programme
- Provision of Basic Package of Health Services (BPHS)
- Establishment of the Governance Commission
- Establishment of the National Veterans Commission
- Establishment of the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission

The national development plan of Liberia, the PRS, includes a direct reference to armed violence prevention and reduction:

Pillar 1: Enhancing National Security.

This issue seeks to address social, economic and political factors that increase the risk of armed violence:

Pillar 2: Revitalizing the Economy, addresses economic factors

Pillar 3: Strengthening Governance and the Rule of Law, addresses political factors

Pillar 4: Rehabilitating Infrastructure and Delivery of Basic Services, addresses social factors

In collaboration with donors and other stakeholders, Liberia intends to strengthen action to prevent/reduce armed violence through the national development plan. This will include specific targets for reducing armed violence and for reducing the causes of armed violence.

Liberia has undertaken the following programs on armed violence prevention and reduction:

- Liberia National Commission on Small Arms
- Small Arms and Light Weapons Perception Survey in West Africa
- National Peace Building Program
- National Security Strategy
- Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS), with enhancing national security as one of four main pillars
- Enactment of the Anti-Rape Law
- Disarmament, demobilization rehabilitation and reintegration of ex-combatants, including thousands of former child soldiers

- Collaboration with UNDP for the implementation of the Arms for Development program
- Reintegration and resettlement of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees
- National Plan of Action on UN Resolution 1325
- Liberia Extractive Industries for Transparency Initiatives (LEITI)
- Environmental Protection and Management Law
- Millennium Village Project
- International Women's Colloquium

The primary coordinating agency for armed violence reduction as part of the development framework is the Liberia National Commission on Small Arms (LiNCSA).

Liberia aims to strengthen government action on armed violence by extending armed violence prevention and reduction responsibilities to other ministries or official bodies such as the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Defence, Information, Culture Affairs & Tourism, State for Presidential Affairs (Special Security Services), Internal Affairs, Justice (Liberia National Police, Bureau of Immigration & Naturalization, and Drug Enforcement Agency) , Youth & Sports, Gender and Development, and Planning & Economic Affairs.

3. Fulfilling international commitments

There are many existing and emerging international norms and legal agreements that States should implement in order to promote development and reduce armed violence. Among the existing agreements Liberia is actively implementing:

International agreements

- The UN Programme of Action on Small Arms & Light Weapons (2001)
- Ottawa Convention on anti-personnel landmines (1999)
- Oslo Convention on cluster munitions (2008) – we have signed this, and plans are underway for its ratification
- UN Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials – not yet incorporated into national legislation, but generally support the principles and procedures
- UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials – not yet incorporated into national legislation; a draft legislation is before the National Legislature for enactment into law
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
- Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
- Chemical Weapons Convention – ratified by Liberia in 2006
- Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)
- Treaty of Rome and the International Criminal Court (ICC)
- SC Resolution 1325 – we are developing a National Action Plan, which will be published in 2009
- SC Resolutions on children in armed conflict
- Arms Trade Treaty (developing) – we submitted our views in support of a strong treaty to the UN Secretary-General in 2007 and very recently reiterated our views at the Dakar Regional Meeting of States on the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) on 28-29 April 2009

Regional agreements

- ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and Other Related Materials – signed and ratified
- Bamako Declaration on the Common African Position on the Proliferation, Circulation and Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons

In addition to these agreements, which are important to promote development, Liberia believes that it would be useful to develop a new international goal on reducing and preventing armed violence globally as a part of sound development practice, and that this would, therefore, complement the existing Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

4. International cooperation and assistance

Liberia has integrated explicit programming on armed violence prevention and reduction within its national development plans, notably the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers and other development frameworks, and has committed budget lines from the national budget to implement these programs.

However, there is a need for donor countries to take advantage of the empirical evidence in Liberia, which shows some level of progress and positive changes in the quality of peace, security and sustainable development, and increase their assistance in order to further strengthen national capacity for reducing and preventing armed violence and promoting sustainable development.

In Liberia, the following independent governance and oversight bodies have the authority and capacity to support and oversee national coordinating agencies on armed violence reduction:

- Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Ministry of Defence
- Ministry of Information, Culture Affairs & Tourism
- Ministry of State for Presidential Affairs
- Ministry of Internal Affairs
- Ministry of Justice
- Ministry of Gender & Development
- Liberia Reconstruction and Development Committee (LRDC)
- MDGs National Steering Committee