



## COLLABORATIVE LEARNING PROJECTS

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### **CREATING A RIVER BETWEEN TWO FIRES**

*Impact Assessment of the  
Locally Initiated Networks for Community Strengthening Program (LINCS)  
Lofa County, Liberia*

A Program of  
CHF International - Liberia  
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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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This document reports the findings of an impact assessment of the Locally-Initiated Networks for Community Strengthening Program (LINCS) operated by CHF International in Lofa County, from 2004 to the present. The assessment is focused primarily on the conflict resolution and reconciliation elements of the program.

In some ways, this was not a “standard” evaluation, as CHF and the assessment team were interested in the broader societal impacts of the program—impacts on “Peace Writ Large” in Liberian society. While the assessment touched on the typical inquiry regarding whether the program completed certain activities efficiently and on time, we were mainly interested in whether the program contributes to proximate and long term peace in Liberia—and how. Fulfilling the basic program requirements does not, in itself, address the question of broader impacts. The findings reported below address issues regarding program implementation, but largely with respect to how changes in program approach might increase the contribution to peace and reconciliation.

### **INTRODUCTION TO THE ASSESSMENT**

The Terms of Reference for this assessment stated the purpose of the effort as follows:

1. To determine to what extent CHF’s efforts in Lofa have succeeded in helping to stabilize the post-war environment;
2. To determine to what extent structures and processes established by LINCS have either prevented escalation of conflicts in communities or are serving to transform the conflict by addressing the attitudes, behaviors, and structures that have been driving forces in the conflict;
3. To assess whether and how LINCS has contributed to Peace Writ Large; and
4. To determine whether LINCS-created structures and process can contribute to a base-level justice system.

In addition, CHF staff and USAID officials indicated interest in learning about several important topics in relation to the LINCS Program, including leadership and decision making at the community level; dispute resolution processes and access to justice; deeper reconciliation, truth, justice and tolerance issues; the development of democratic mechanisms; the evolution of security in the area; linkages among program elements. This group of questions and topics served as the basis for our inquiry. Each of these topics is addressed—often in multiple ways—in the full report.

### **Sources of Information**

The CDA team gathered information from several sources, including:

- a. Interviews with groups and individuals in 13 Lofa County communities that have been participating in the LINCS Program;

- b. Interviews conducted in 3 Lofa County communities that have not been participating in the LINCS Program;
- c. Interviews with CHF staff in Monrovia, Lofa County; Washington and Boston;
- d. Interviews with other NGO staff working in Lofa County, as well as local officials and UN personnel in Lofa;
- e. Interviews of government officials and NGO staff in Monrovia;
- f. A conflict analysis workshop conducted with members of several communities in Lofa County; and
- g. Review of project documents and reports.

## **BACKGROUND OF THE LINCS PROGRAM**

The LINCS Program was designed to address the objectives of USAID Liberia’s Next Steps in Peace Program (NSPP). The goal of NSPP was to support the early stages of the peace process and facilitate a peaceful reintegration of displaced persons, refugees, and ex-combatants. Within this overall goal, NSPP sought to (a) strengthen constituencies for peace; (b) mitigate ongoing violence and avert imminent violence, and (c) address some of the causes and consequences of conflict. CHF’s LINCS Program sought to support the building and strengthening of peace constituencies at the community and district levels in Voinjama, Zorzor, and Salayea districts of Lofa County with a core goal of improving community level conflict management capacities.

The choice of Lofa County was significant, as this area was the scene of some of the worst violence (massacres, atrocities, destruction of churches, mosques and sacred spaces, widespread destruction of housing, etc.). During the fourteen years of warfare, the violence in Lofa County followed ethnic lines, and, in the aftermath, the contending tribal groups harbor deep resentment, fear, mistrust, and hostility towards each other. Groups that reportedly lived in relative harmony for many decades now live apart, as some groups have refused to return to their former houses and lands, and other groups have refused to receive their perceived enemies. Lofa County is considered as one of the areas of Liberia where violence is most likely to recur, a “flash point” county in a country only beginning to reemerge from national trauma.

### **Major Program Elements**

For more than two years, the LINCS Program has included three major components:

1. Establishment of Community Peace Councils and support for local leadership development, including training programs and associated awareness-raising activities.
2. Conduct of forums or dialogue sessions across ethnic lines, more formally called the National and County Level Forums.
3. Undertaking of livelihood projects and other joint community efforts communities.

### ***Community Peace Councils***

In brief, the Community Peace Councils (CPCs) were established as an alternative mechanism for handling a range of dispute types at the community level, especially in the absence of an effective judicial system. CHF hoped that the CPCs would provide a means for early resolution of conflicts that would contribute to preventing escalation to violence, especially conflicts associated with IDP/refugee returns and reintegration of ex-combatants. The CPCs were also meant to become a peace constituency and to provide leadership in their communities. Finally, it

was intended that the CPCs would offer a model of an inclusive community structure that would help ensure participation by all groups in local level governance.

Efforts were made to make sure that all key groups were represented among the CPC membership: men/women; old/youth; and all ethnic groups. Most CPC members received four different training programs: basic peacebuilding skills, leadership, trauma healing, human rights, community security and community policing. Many of these training programs were also attended by other key community leaders (town chiefs, elders, members of women's and youth groups, etc.). The CPCs serve as CHF's principal point of contact in the communities, and are the base for organizing other community activities, including livelihood projects (see below).

### ***National and County Level Forums***

CHF realized that, while the CPCs might be able to address a variety of conflicts at the community level, some issues would likely be beyond their capability. One of the most salient inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflicts in Lofa County is between the Lorma tribe (and, in Salayea District, the Kpelle tribe) on one side and the Mandingo tribe on the other, largely as a result of actions taken by armed members of these ethnic groups against each other during the past fourteen years. The most obvious result is that many communities remain split. In some cases, groups that formerly lived intermingled are now living separately but near each other; in other cases, Mandingo families have not returned to their former communities at all.

CHF found that powerful people connected with the area, but living in Monrovia or Guinea, often determine policies and actions at the community level. Therefore, as they wished to contribute to reconciliation among Lorma/Kpelle and Mandingo, they worked to identify those "opinion leaders" and bring them into the dialogue process. CHF, with support from the Foundation for Human Rights and Democracy (FOHRD) and other implementing partners, held a series of forums during 2004/5 among contending groups in several key communities. In the spring of 2006, CHF hired an additional staff person to focus solely on organizing and implementing forums, as a follow-up to the earlier efforts. CHF staff and its implementing partners facilitate inter-ethnic dialogue sessions in an effort to identify outstanding issues and grievances and to negotiate agreements.

### ***Community and Livelihood Projects***

For several reasons, CHF undertook additional practical efforts in the communities. These projects generally took two forms: construction of community centers and income-generating or livelihood efforts, usually support for some form of farming or animal husbandry. One purpose of these efforts was to provide more concrete benefits to the participating communities, to give people tangible results from inter-ethnic cooperation, and to engage members of various tribes in working together on common projects to promote tolerance and cooperation. The projects also provided personal benefit to CPC members as incentive for continued service.

## **APPLICATION OF RPP TOOLS**

Section III of the full report explores the LINCS Program, using a set of concepts and frameworks developed through the Reflecting on Peace Practice process (a project of CDA Collaborative Learning Projects). These tools were devised as a way to assess the effectiveness

of peacebuilding programs, including whether and how the program contributes to broader peace in a society experiencing violent conflict—what we call “Peace Writ Large.” The report explores the LINCS Program using four tools/concepts from RPP: the RPP Matrix; Theories of Change; Criteria of Effectiveness; and Conflict Analysis. The program analysis presented in this Section provides the basis for the conclusions presented in Section IV.

## **LINCS PROGRAM IN RELATION TO ITS OBJECTIVES AND EXPECTED RESULTS**

The LINCS Program proposal to USAID articulated several objectives, including those restated below, along with a brief summary of the CDA team’s findings in relation to these objectives.

### **1. Strengthen and Expand Constituencies for Peace**

Program objectives: a) Increase the effectiveness of peace-building constituencies at the local, district and country level; b) Strengthen democratic civil leadership with a vested interest in peace; c) Increase quantity, quality and timely delivery of communication on issues affecting national to local peace building processes; d) Build capacity for local organizations to advocate for responsive national policies that contribute to peace; e) Provide logistical support for advocacy and collaboration; and f) Assist community leadership groups to build inclusive and transparent management.

The CPCs may consider themselves to be, broadly speaking, peace constituencies, but they are not mobilized to advocate for peace. Rather, they are working—effectively in many cases—on local and interpersonal issues of conflict. They are not engaging in advocacy activities at the local, county or national levels. The team did hear repeated support for peace, exhaustion with the war process, a willingness to put the experiences of the past fourteen years behind them, a desire to avoid further violence, and a pragmatic desire to get on with life. In other words, there is strong public support for peace—but there is no identifiable civic organization or network of organizations advocating for it, and the CPCs do not appear to be filling this role. Furthermore, it is important to note that, alongside the verbal support for peace, we observed stark separation of populations along ethnic lines and explicit refusal to allow Mandingos to return to their lands, and heard persistent expressions of hostility based on war experiences.

The Forums, however, represent the potential for building a durable peace in Lofa County, supported by influential people both living in the county and in Monrovia. In a sense, then the Forums may be, slowly and indirectly, developing a peace constituency, though not by that name. If the Forum process succeeds at both the community-by-community and county levels, and if an institutional base can be found to continue support for an ongoing long-term reconciliation process, a truly influential peace constituency could emerge.

The program objectives stated above also call for strengthening democratic and civic leadership and inclusive and transparent management. The overall LINCS Program effort, including all of the training programs for the CPCs and others in leadership, has injected new concepts and skills into the communities. However, the CDA team also directly observed the dynamics among participants in the interviews (most of which were in groups), and we saw little evidence that the workshops have resulted in obvious democratic practices, either within the CPCs or in the larger communities.

While it is too early to know for certain, the Forums may induce changes in leadership of some of the communities—either changes in the approaches to problem solving by individual leaders,

or changes in the expectations of community members towards their leadership. The agreements themselves, if well implemented, will also reinforce community desires for peace.

In sum, the LINCS Program has laid the groundwork for addressing these objectives. However, additional work is needed to consolidate the introduction of new concepts in leadership and to truly mobilize constituencies for peace advocacy in the County, and a number of specific components need to be realized in the Forums for their contribution to become significant.

## **2. Mitigating Conflict and Violence**

Program objectives: a) Build and/or support local and county capacity for ongoing conflict mitigation, adjudication and peace building activities; b) Prepare communities and leadership for potential outbreaks of conflict and deal with the after effects of violent acts; c) Promote dialogues and collaboration among contentious ethnic groups; d) Build local capacity for reconciliation of all returnees; e) Assist democratic leadership to build skills and confidence in effectively managing community security and in reducing the impact of conflict; and f) Build the effectiveness of traditional and culturally appropriate mechanisms for reconciliation.

An ultimate conclusion about the effectiveness of the CPCs turns on the expectations about what they could/should be handling. As noted above, the CPCs represent a new community-based mechanism for handling a wide range of conflicts. With the exception of land conflicts and the deeper inter-ethnic tensions, the CPCs are currently capable, in many cases, of addressing most of the conflicts that arise at the community level, promote communications among parties, and perform a referral function for cases they cannot handle. CHF staff also report that the CPCs are able calm down volatile situations and did address land issues earlier during the transition period

The capacity of the CPCs could be argued two ways. On the one hand, with considerable variation from community to community, they are addressing most community-level conflicts. On the other hand, they are not currently dealing with those conflicts most likely to result in widespread violence (land and religious/cultural issues). The CPCs' positive and helpful role and experience needs to be expanded and strengthened to achieve a social institution closer to the stated program objectives.

As regards the objectives calling for dialogue and collaboration among contending ethnic groups and the application of culturally appropriate mechanisms for reconciliation, the Forums program represent the best hope for achieving these desired outcomes. If well executed, the Forums show promise for exerting a significant impact in this regard.

Considering the combined impacts of the CPCs and the Forums, the LINCS Program, as a whole, is achieving progress towards the objectives stated above.

## **3. Address Causes and Consequences of Conflict**

In this area, the program objectives were to: a) Facilitate peaceful resolution of property and resource claims, perceived war crimes; b) Build Lofa-based peace constituencies' ability to affect national decisions on resource allocation, management of extractive resources; c) Build Lofa-based peace constituencies' ability to affect national decisions on composition and civil leadership of reconstituted military and/or police; d) Build number and quality of psycho-social assistance mechanisms in Lofa.

So far, the LINCS Program is not addressing the peaceful resolution of property and resource claims or perceived war crimes. Interpersonal issues regarding property hidden as people fled the area have been handled by the CPCs, but as discussed already, the CPCs have not so far dealt with more serious land and property disputes—and certainly not war crimes.

The team did hear accounts of trauma healing workshops, held under the LINCS Program, in which individuals were able to recount their personal experiences of atrocities—and some level of interpersonal reconciliation took place, when people who had participated in such activities were present. One woman interviewed in Voinjama District said that she faced a young man who had killed her son and told him, “You must disarm your heart.” So far, these kinds of healing encounters are not a regular occurrence in the county, however. The LINCS Program has cooperated with other programs working on trauma healing. For instance, LINCS arranged for performances by the Flomo Theatre group. These performances brought together up to a thousand community members and addressed, through drama, issues regarding ex-combatant reintegration and reconciliation. In these public settings, community members were able to reach out to each other and shout out how they should forgive each other and move on.

As mentioned elsewhere, the community Forums may be able to incorporate some elements of reconciliation and healing by working directly across the ethnic groups on specific issues and grievances that divide them. The CHF staff were clear that the objectives associated with national level policy advocacy have proven unrealistic, as least to date.

In sum, the LINCS Program has contributed in small ways to achievement of this set of objectives. With some rethinking and restructuring, the program has potential for making a more significant contribution.

### **Expected Results**

The LINCS Program, by achieving the three major goal areas above, was expected to show the following results by the end of the program: a) Reduced violence in Lofa County; b) Peaceful return of internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees, and ex-combatants; c) Facilitation of reconciliation between ex-combatants and their families; d) Facilitation of reconciliation between ex-combatants and their ‘host’ communities; e) Development of Community Councils which can support reintegration, act to resolve disputes and adjudicate perceived crimes, and mobilize the community to work towards peace; f) Community Councils trained and active in sensitizing the community to addressing the special issues regarding returned ex-combatants; g) Increased participation by all community members in community decision making; h) Increased peaceful interaction among diverse, sometimes contentious groups within the community; i) Increased effectiveness and organization of district and county peace constituencies; and j) Creation of a mechanism to facilitate communication between Community Councils and other leaders with UNMIL, UNCIVPOL as well as the NTGL’s new security forces.

The full report includes an extensive discussion of these Expected Results and how the various program components have contributed to them.

From our community visits and from discussions with local officials and UNMIL personnel, the CDA team feels that there is a relatively low level of violence in Lofa County, people have returned and been reintegrated successfully *within* their own ethnic groups, but not *across or between* different ethnic groups. Most disputes are handled nonviolently, so far. While the

LINCS Program may have contributed to these results, it would be difficult to attribute these outcomes solely to LINCS activities. In addition, they may have, through their very existence, promoted an atmosphere of conflict resolution and problem solving without resort to violence.

In our view, the results regarding reconciliation have not been accomplished in Lofa County, as yet. In Zeawordemai a group of women and youth asserted that they would “never forgive, no matter what.” They recalled that 500 boys were killed by Ulimo on Black Monday, an incident still on their minds many years later. This ongoing pain and hostility reinforces the need for the CHF Forums program, which has promise for making a significant contribution in this area.

In terms of democratic decision making and participation, our observations field suggest that traditional forms of leadership are in full operation, with elders, town chiefs and landlords firmly in control. Women and youth are formally represented in town discussions, but their voices are not strong. Minority groups do not speak up readily. Clearly more work is needed in this area.

In relation to the creation of peace constituencies, as already noted, there is strong public sentiment in favor of peace, but no active and visible constituency openly advocating for it—and there is persistent hostility and tension, unresolved incidents from the war, and obvious separation along ethnic lines.

As regards security issues, in repeated comments, communities attributed security to the presence of UNMIL—and appreciated their role. The team heard reports of young men (some ex-combatants) volunteering for the new Liberian army and police—an indication that communities favor these revived national institutions and hope that they will be able to guarantee peace after UNMIL withdraws. It is hard to attribute this situation to the LINCS Program, although one set of workshops under the program addressed community-police relations.

## **SUMMARY OF PROGRAM STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES**

The following is a summary of strengths and weakness of the Community Peace Councils and National and County Level Forums, which are directly addressed in the Recommendations presented in Section VI.

### **Community Peace Councils**

#### ***Strengths:***

The CDA heard from two different community members that the CPCs are a “river between two fires” (from which we have taken the title for this report). We take this as an appreciation for the effective role the CPCs play in handling local disputes.

- The program has created the foundation for longer term, larger scale dialogue processes.
- The program informed communities about conflict and basic problem solving approaches.
- CPCs provide a low-cost mechanism for handling local-level (mainly) interpersonal disputes.
- CPCs provided an effective dispute resolution mechanism during the critical transition time of the return and reintegration of IDPs/refugees, handling interpersonal disputes and, in some cases, land issues.
- CPCs have provided some forms of leadership in communities, supplementing (and not replacing) traditional authorities.

- CPCs are an appropriate mechanism that do not contradict existing and historical structures that do work.
- The program introduced key leaders to a variety of important skills and concepts that can be useful for any future development and/or conflict resolution programming.
- CPCs have provided a useful entry point to communities for other important programs (e.g., Land Mine Action, domestic violence, trauma healing).
- The CPCs, with additional attention and resources, constitute a possible new permanent social institution for first level dispute resolution.

***Weaknesses/Critiques:***

- CPCs are currently out of date, in terms of their representative function and credibility, since they were formed in 2004, and many more people have now returned to the communities.
- While the CPCs members have received at least four training programs, there has been little direct follow up to see whether/how people are applying those skills and concepts—CPCs are left to function on their own without direct support or mentoring, such as sitting in on actual dispute resolution processes or regular CPC meetings to discuss cases.
- The main contact between CHF and the CPCs is a monthly visit in which the group reports on their activities.
- There is no independent verification regarding the actual roles that CPCs are playing (types of cases handled, processes used, style of mediation/arbitration employed, rate of settlement, acceptance of any settlement, durability of agreements, etc.).
- CPC members feel burdened by their role, in terms of the time requirements without compensation—which has raised questions about the sustainability of the model, as interest may wane without some better reward system.
- In many cases, only a few CPC members are truly active.
- CPCs are not able to contradict traditional authorities—and in some cases town chiefs, elders and other leaders are fully involved with the CPCs (which has both positive and negative effects!).<sup>1</sup>
- Generally, the CPCs reflect the same prejudices and dominant/subordinate patterns of their social context: minority groups in the towns are also minority groups on the CPCs, and have no stronger voice there than in other settings.
- The CPCs are mostly dealing with interpersonal disputes that the town chief is happy for someone else to handle; more serious issues, including land disputes, are handled through other more traditional means. (Whether this is a weakness or not depends on what the groups are expected to do.)
- CPCs are not equipped to address deeper issues of inter-group reconciliation or more difficult types of disputes, and are not used directly to support Forum activities, such as following up, monitoring compliance, helping to negotiate actual implementation, etc.
- There is widespread confusion about the real function/purpose of the CPCs (livelihood project implementers, dispute resolvers, the “CHF group,” etc.), and many community members (perhaps mostly recent returnees) are not aware of the services available.

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<sup>1</sup> Many CPC members were elected/selected because they were respected members of the community. In some cases, this means they are part of the town power structures, not an alternative to them. Other CPC members were simply those present in the early days of returns—and as traditional authorities have returned, their influence has diminished, in some cases.

- The CDA teams found that some CPCs appear to be inactive, while there is open conflict among CPC members in other cases.

## **National and County-Level Forums**

### ***Strengths:***

- National forums represent a potential for deeper resolution and reconciliation of inter-ethnic conflicts.
- The Forums offer relatively neutral outside facilitation that enables contending groups to address sensitive issues.
- The Forum program is able to bring together all of the key players, including influential people from Monrovia and Guinea.
- The Forums support the negotiation of agreements between conflicting groups, that can serve as the basis for resolving many specific disputes, especially over land ownership/use.
- The Forums can help to develop a model of inter-group dialogue and negotiation that would be applicable elsewhere in Liberia.
- The Forums are organized in a way that links national, regional and local levels regarding inter-ethnic tensions.

### ***Weakness/Critiques:***

- At present the CHF Forum program is understaffed and overstretched, trying to organize processes in too many communities at the same time. High quality processes in a few places may be better than poorly implemented processes in many.
- The program is not benefiting directly from previous experiences of dialogue and negotiation in Liberia, during earlier periods or by other organizations.
- Previous dialogue/negotiation efforts by CHF and its partners (in 2004-5) resulted in formal agreements, but these were not written down, nor was there adequate follow up.
- Formal agreements appear to be at the level of broad principles only—more concrete and specific actions and an implementation plan are not addressed. For instance, in Ziggida, local people said that a Forum had negotiated an agreement, but tensions arose again, partly because the agreements were never implemented.
- Current staff do not have the time to provide sufficient follow-up to the current round of dialogue processes.
- In the long-term, this kind of effort needs a sustainable Liberian institutional base.
- There is not always good communication to community members about what the purpose and result of the Forums are. Community members seldom mentioned the Forums in interviews, and in two communities their impression was that the Forums were “just another workshop.”<sup>2</sup>

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The full CDA team met in Monrovia to develop an initial set of recommendations—which were then presented and discussed with the CHF Country Director. The summary of the recommendations presented below are only slightly different in substance and include

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<sup>2</sup> The current round of Forums are apparently making more specific plans for reporting back to the communities.

explanatory text not included with the originals presented in Monrovia. (See Section VI of the report for the full text, with extensive discussion and explanation.)

The first section of recommendations addresses the overall CHF program. We are assuming that conflict resolution and peacebuilding will remain at least one major program focus. Conditions in Lofa County certainly support a continuing emphasis on reconciliation and peacebuilding. Subsequent sections address the two major peacebuilding efforts.

### **General Program Recommendations**

1. Adopt narrower goals/objectives, expected results and indicators.
2. Develop a stronger long-term plan, with associated staffing and structure of CHF programs.
3. Create better communication and cooperation among CHF program components—less compartmentalization.
4. Develop closer cooperative working relations with other NGOs working on similar/allied issues in Lofa County.
5. Provide for explicit follow up to training in concepts and skills: tracking of indicators that the training is being used; coaching in skills application support for desired changed behaviors.
6. Establish a more robust M&E plan, including baseline data, specific indicators, a tracking and reporting system.

### **Community Peace Councils**

The CPC program has made a significant contribution during the past two years—and the program was appropriate for that transition period. The situation has changed considerably. Therefore, CHF needs to rethink the structures and approaches for this program component, even if this is only one of several different major program elements. The CDA team recommends that CHF perform a fundamental program redesign, building on the best elements of the past two years, and preparing for follow-up efforts.

We don't have a clear recommendation regarding the exact direction the program should take, but we do see a range of possible options to be considered. Consider the following **OPTIONS** for the CPCs (*not all mutually exclusive*):

1. **Phase them out.** Consider that the CPCs were a good mechanism for a transitional time, but that continued effort is not appropriate.
2. **Transition them into development committees.** As CHF undertakes other more development-oriented activities, build on the relationships established through the CPCs as the base for that work, but discontinue their conflict resolution role.
3. **Wait and see.** Merge with traditional mechanisms for dispute resolution. Watch what happens with the new government in relation to base level justice. Explore a role for the CPCs in terms of decision making and local level dispute resolution, if appropriate.
4. **Explore a role in relation to the TRC process.** The CPCs could play a role in identifying local people to testify, and to participate in County-level activities. CHF could facilitate such participation with transport and other support. The CPCs might also play a role (with others) in local-level truth and reconciliation activities.

5. **Conduct a participatory process to determine the future shape, function, etc.** Let the communities themselves decide the future of the CPCs. This might lead to a phasing out (#1 above), serious investment (#6) or some combination.
6. **Make a serious investment in full development of the CPC model.** Figure out how to transform the present structures into a sustainable community-level mechanism that is fully owned by the communities and performs a needed dispute resolution function.

Numbers 1 - 5 above are fairly self evident. We have offered specific detailed recommendations about how to approach Number 6. The headlines of those detailed recommendations are presented below.

### **Redevelopment & Strengthening of the CPCs**

Throughout the report, we have indicated ways in which the CPCs have contributed, and some ways in which they miss the mark. We believe that the CPCs show potential for playing a more important role, but to realize that potential will require revision of the concept and further investment in the people and necessary structures. If CHF chooses to pursue #6 above, the following elements will be needed:

- a. Clarify the model and functions through a participatory process.
- b. Clarify the roles and functions of the CPC through participatory development of a simple charter (composition, functions, types of cases in/out, operating principles...).
- c. Restructure and “re-elect” the councils.
- d. Complete the mediation training, using the ABA/CHF model.
- e. Follow up training with direct coaching and mentoring.
- f. Establish a better tracking and monitoring mechanisms.
- g. Solve the compensation/reward issue.
- h. Seriously reduce the number of members.
- i. Develop (with ABA?) a resource center in Lofa County that offers resources, support, technical assistance.
- j. Reduce the number of CPCs by developing town clusters.

### **County and National Forums**

By our assessment, already laid out earlier in this report, the Forum effort shows great promise, and the potential for having a profound effect on inter-ethnic relations in Lofa County. The suggestions below are intended to indicate how the program could be strengthened further.

1. Devote more staff resources: reduce dependence/burden on one person.<sup>3</sup>
2. Clarify/tighten the goals and objectives of the program.

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<sup>3</sup> This recommendation, reported informally while the CDA team was still in Liberia, has been implemented already, and there are now three staff working full time on the Forums effort.

3. Ensure that any agreements reached include a specific implementation plan. Develop the staff capacity to provide follow up.
4. Find an appropriate long-term institutional base for this kind of effort, and cooperate in development of that mechanism. (Options: university, government agency, combo, free-standing reconciliation NGO, sub-group of TRC...)
5. Draw on expertise/experience regarding this type of dialogue and negotiation process held by other people/organizations in Liberia. Be sure to learn from past failures and successes. Develop capacity to share lessons learned in Lofa County.
6. Engage Forum participants in a process to determine future directions.
7. Complete a thorough review/assessment/stocktaking at completion of the current round of Forums, using an outside independent evaluator.
8. Participate in Lofa County meetings in Monrovia for background information about what opinion leaders and others are thinking about.
9. Explore the potential roles for religious/ spiritual leaders in the Forums.
10. Bring issues to closure: don't open issues and then leave. Consider these deeper reconciliation efforts as a long-term commitment.

## **CONCLUSION**

The LINCS Program represents an admirable contribution to peacebuilding in Liberia. Most of the programs effects remain at the community and Lofa County level, and there is a mixed picture regarding the program's achievements against its stated objectives. However, the current progress and potential impacts from this effort have significance for the entire country, as Lofa County is well known as one of the most volatile areas that suffered most deeply during the war. Few other organizations are attempting community-by-community reconciliation in Liberia—and for this reason alone, the LINCS Program represents a valuable initiative. While we have made recommendations for program strengthening during the next phases of CHF programming, overall, we were impressed with the accomplishments to date and the dedication of local and international staff members.

# **I. INTRODUCTION & APPROACH TO THE ASSESSMENT**

This document reports the findings of an impact assessment of the Locally-Initiated Networks for Community Strengthening Program (LINCS) operated by CHF International in Lofa County, from 2004 to the present. The assessment is focused primarily on the conflict resolution and reconciliation elements of the program.

This first section reviews the purpose of the assessment and the approach taken to accomplish it. Section II presents the basic background, in brief, to the LINCS Program, while Section III applies the tools and concepts of the Reflecting on Peace Practice (RPP) Project, as one way to explore the LINCS Program. Section IV presents the essential findings of the assessment team, and Section V addresses a set of key questions posed by CHF and/or USAID in preparation for the assessment. Finally, Section VI offers recommendations, based on the observations and conclusions in the early sections of the report.

In some ways, this was not a “standard” evaluation, as CHF and the assessment team were interested in the broader societal impacts of the program—impacts on “Peace Writ Large” in Liberian society. While the assessment touched on the typical inquiry regarding whether the program completed certain activities efficiently and on time, we were mainly interested in whether the program contributes to proximate and long term peace in Liberia—and how. Fulfilling the basic program requirements does not, in itself, address the question of broader impacts. The findings reported below will address issues regarding program implementation, but largely with respect to how changes in program approach might increase the contribution to peace and reconciliation.

The full CDA team would like to express its appreciation for all of the assistance received in Monrovia, in Lofa County and in Washington, from many CHF staff members. It was a real privilege to be offered the opportunity to accompany this significant program, even for a short while, on their journey towards peace and reconciliation in Liberia.

## ***Purpose of the Assessment***

The Terms of Reference for this assessment stated the purpose of the effort as follows:

1. To determine to what extent CHF’s efforts in Lofa have succeeded in helping to stabilize the post-war environment;
2. To determine to what extent structures and processes established by LINCS have either prevented escalation of conflicts in communities or are serving to transform the conflict by addressing the attitudes, behaviors, and structures that have been driving forces in the conflict;
3. To assess whether and how LINCS has contributed to Peace Writ Large; and
4. To determine whether LINCS-created structures and process can contribute to a base-level justice system.

In addition, CHF indicated interest in learning about several important topics in relation to the LINCS Program:

- *Leadership*: Has the program helped develop more effective and responsive leadership, as well as opportunities to reduce and manage conflict?
- *Dispute Resolution Processes*: Has the program contributed to development of mechanisms for dispute resolution?
- *Truth, Justice and Tolerance Issues*: Has the program created processes for addressing outstanding justice issues?
- *Democratic Mechanisms*: Has the program created more access to decision making that affects individuals in the community and/or forums for discussion of issues critical to the community?

Finally, USAID staff in Monrovia identified the following themes of interest:

- What are the dynamics of decision-making in the communities, and how are these changing? (Related to the Leadership and Democratic Mechanisms questions above.)
- How is the security situation evolving at the community level, including the persistence or dropping away of old military command structures?
- How do the various elements of the CHF program link to each other: community peace councils, livelihood projects, and the construction of community centers?
- What processes are helping to address deep seated problems and more profound reconciliation? (Related to the Truth, Justice and Tolerance question above.)
- Is the program succeeding in forming “peace constituencies”?
- Is the program helping people gain access to the justice system, in the absence of rule of law? (Related to the Dispute Resolution and Truth, Justice and Tolerance questions above.)
- Should donors promote traditional rituals in reconciliation?

This group of questions and topics served as the basis for our inquiry. Each of these topics will be addressed—often in multiple ways—in the report below. As much as possible, the issues have been grouped in logical ways, to avoid repetition. See also Section V, where some of these questions have been addressed separately.

### **Challenges in Impact Assessment**

In the proposal for this assessment, CDA addressed some of the possibilities and limitations of impact assessment:

“CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, mainly through its Reflecting on Peace Practice Project (RPP), has been working with the conflict resolution and peacebuilding communities regarding a broad range of issues and controversies regarding the evaluation of programs that aim to contribute to peace. To date, experience shows that it is possible,

using standard methods, to evaluate the immediate *outputs* (activities performed, events held, numbers of participants engaged, etc.), against project plans. More importantly, it is possible to ascertain the proximate *outcomes* of those efforts, in terms of relatively short-term changes in behaviors, attitudes, establishment of new institutions, and so forth. The peacebuilding community as a whole is still struggling with the issue of how to measure *impacts*, on what we have called “Peace Writ Large” or the broader societal level peace. Here, the question is, given the successful delivery of outputs and the observable immediate outcomes, can we determine if these have contributed to the broader peace?

In this case, CHF has already documented the projects outputs, through a series of reports already available to the donor and others. Some of those reports also provide indications about outcomes—in terms of disputes resolved, participation in reconciliation activities, leadership development, and so on. The job for the Impact Assessment will be to obtain additional information about outcomes in the participating communities, and to explore the impacts at the Lofa County level. It may prove too early to make any definitive judgments about impacts at the national level, but the assessment team will work with the information that emerges and, as the evidence accumulates, infer the linkages between the proximate outcomes and the national peace and reconciliation process.”

This estimation of the possibilities and difficulties proved accurate. As we report in full below, we came away with a clear sense of the near-term outcomes to date and some indications of their potential impacts on Peace Writ Large. Possible longer term impacts of the program can be projected—but these cannot be verified conclusively at this stage.

## **Approach to the Impact Assessment**

### ***CDA Assessment Team***

Five people participated in gathering information for the assessment:

Mabel Kear: An experienced Liberian organizer and trainer who has worked with several NGOs on peacebuilding programs.

Maureen Lempke: A professor of Development Studies at Duke University and an experienced project manager.

Christof Kurz: A PhD candidate at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University, who has worked for several years in NGO program administration in West Africa.

Korto Williams: Former USAID staff in Liberia and an experienced program organizer.

Peter Woodrow, staff of CDA Collaborative Learning Projects and Co-Director of its Reflecting on Peace Practice Project, who served as team leader.

Peter Woodrow consulted with CHF staff in Washington and Monrovia to establish the parameters of the assessment and worked with the team to set up the protocols for field data gathering. The bulk of the community-level and other interviews in Lofa County were conducted by the other team members, while Peter pursued other contacts in Monrovia.

## ***Process and Methodology***

The CDA team gathered information from several sources, including:

1. Interviews with groups and individuals in 13 Lofa County communities that have been participating in the LINCS Program;
2. Interviews conducted in 4 Lofa County communities that have not been participating in the LINCS Program;
3. Interviews with CHF staff in Monrovia, Lofa County; Washington and Boston;
4. Interviews with other NGO staff working in Lofa County, as well as local officials and UN personnel in Lofa;
5. Interviews of government officials and NGO staff in Monrovia;
6. A conflict analysis workshop conducted with members of several communities in Lofa County; and
7. Review of project documents and reports.

## ***Community Interviews***

The CDA team spoke with a wide range of people in Lofa County. These interviews were focused conversations, rather than the administration of a formal survey or questionnaire. While the team used a consistent set of topics for discussion, this was not the administration of a questionnaire.<sup>4</sup> This process, used by CDA in many settings, allows for more interaction and follow up for clarification, and also gives room for the local people to talk about what is most important to them.

The team talked with a range of groups and individuals in the communities, including local-level leaders or officials (town chiefs, elders, landowners, heads of women’s and youth groups, etc.), members of the Community Peace Councils that CHF had created, and community members encountered “on the street.” In each locale, the team endeavored to hear from men and women, old and young, and from different ethnic groups.

During the past two years, CHF has implemented the LINCS Program in 70 communities in Lofa County. In order to gain a full picture of the project outcomes and impacts, the assessment team conducted interviews in 13 of those communities, in the districts of Salayea, Zorzor and Voinjama. A list of the communities visited is presented in Appendix B. These visits represent interaction with approximately 270 people, almost always in groups—although it is difficult to estimate the exact number, as in many cases people joined and left in the course of conversations.

The team also conducted interviews in four communities similar to those where CHF has been working, but where no CHF activities have taken place. About 85 people were interviewed in that process, again almost all in groups. This provided information for purposes of comparison with the participating communities. We explored the same general themes as with the

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<sup>4</sup> See Interview Protocol in Appendix A.

“participating” communities, leaving out those directed specifically at the LINCS Program. Several of these communities were quite remote and had little contact with NGOs.

An effort was made to interview people in Monrovia who have participated in the National Forum program (described in full below). However, due to logistical difficulties, only one such interview was completed.

### ***Interviews with CHF Staff, Officials and NGO Staff,***

The team made an effort to speak with all CHF program staff in either Monrovia or Lofa County, to obtain their own reflections on the program. Conversations with other officials (magistrate, development committee members, Ministry of Internal Affairs, UNMIL) and NGO staff were conducted in order to gain information about conditions and trends in the area, as well as additional perspectives on the CHF program.

### ***Document Review***

The CDA team reviewed various documents. These included:

- CHF initial LINCS Program proposal and other conceptual/analytical documents;
- Regular LINCS Program quarterly reports, staff reports and assessments, and reports from implementing partner organizations; and
- A sampling of field reports from contacts with Community Peace Councils in Zorzor

While this was not an exhaustive review, it did include the vast majority of the relevant and available documents.

### ***Conflict Analysis***

In order to assess the impacts of the CHF program, the CDA team needed an analysis of the conflict dynamics in Liberia at the Lofa County level. Such an analysis provides the basis for determining whether the project is addressing the right issues, as articulated by those who live in Lofa. To gain an analysis, the CDA team conducted a conflict analysis exercise in Konia town (Zorzor District), with participants from four nearby communities (Zegeda, Boi, Borkeza, Konia), one CHF staff person, and a representative of a CHF partner organization. The resulting analysis, expanded and refined through additional conversations in Lofa County and Monrovia, is presented below in Section III.

### ***Strengths and Weaknesses of the Data Gathered***

It is our judgment that the interview process enabled the CDA team to gain a thorough understanding of community-level dynamics in Lofa County and the effects of the CHF program in those communities—within the limits that any outsider would encounter. Indeed, the Liberian team members, while better able to communicate directly with villagers, were clearly outsiders to these remote areas as well. Thus, even though we were obtaining good and (as a whole)

reliable information, we were aware of deeper levels and layers of culture, dynamics and history that were not accessible to outsiders, perhaps rightly so.

At times, townspeople actively discouraged the team from making contact with minority group members—and the ability of minority group representatives to express themselves in larger gatherings was clearly proscribed. The team found ways to gain access to those groups and to supplement mixed group conversations with separate frank exchanges.

In addition, the towns selected by CHF staff for visits turned out to be mainly those that CHF calls “flash point” (i.e., high conflict) communities. Thus there was a bias towards more difficult areas, rather than a mix of less and more conflictual areas. We do not feel that this bias causes a real problem in the data, as it would if the tilt were towards more peaceful communities. In other words, the team saw the program where it was challenged most deeply. And, if we compare the participating and non-participating communities, they all face more or less the same issues.

In sum, we feel comfortable with the information gathered at the community level. While no single interview would provide a clear picture, the sheer number of discussions with a diverse range of people provided sufficient information to draw conclusions about the contributions of the Community Peace Councils, livelihood projects and, to a certain extent, the National and County Level Forums.

A final note about the data: While we had thorough conversations with CHF staff and with one participant in the National and County Level Forums program, we do not feel that we gained adequate information for a full assessment of that program element, although we will address its place in the range of program activities and its potential impacts. We recommend below (see Section VI) that, upon completion of the current round of forum events, CHF undertake an independent, locally-based (that is, lower cost!) stocktaking of the forum program, including interviews with a range of direct participants in Lofa County and Monrovia.

### ***Team Discussions and Data Analysis***

Upon completion of community and other interviews in Lofa County, the full CDA team reconvened in Monrovia for two days of analysis and reflection. The team identified patterns that they observed, lessons learned and recommendations. These preliminary findings were shared in Monrovia with the CHF Country Director.

## **II. BACKGROUND OF THE LINCS PROGRAM**

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The LINCS Program was designed to address the objectives of USAID Liberia's Next Steps in Peace Program (NSPP). The goal of NSPP was to support the early stages of the peace process and facilitate a peaceful reintegration of displaced persons, refugees, and ex-combatants. Within this overall goal, NSPP sought to (a) strengthen constituencies for peace; (b) mitigate ongoing violence and avert imminent violence, and (c) address some of the causes and consequences of conflict.

Applicants for NSPP funding were asked to proposed programs to address these objectives in some way. CHF's LINCS Program sought to support the building and strengthening of peace constituencies at the community and district levels in Voinjama, Zorzor, and Salayea districts of Lofa County with a core goal of improving community level conflict management capacities.

The choice of Lofa County was significant, as this area was the scene of some of the worst violence (massacres, atrocities, destruction of churches, mosques and sacred spaces, widespread destruction of housing, etc.). During the fourteen years of warfare, the violence in Lofa County followed ethnic lines during significant periods, and, in the aftermath, the contending tribal groups harbor deep resentment, fear, mistrust, and hostility towards each other. Groups that reportedly lived in relative harmony for many decades now live apart, as some groups have refused to return to their former houses and lands, and other groups have refused to receive their perceived enemies. Lofa County is considered as one of the areas of Liberia where violence is most likely to recur, a "flash point" county in a country only beginning to reemerge from national trauma.

The rationale behind the LINCS Program is that a focused, locally-based mechanism for conflict resolution, involving mentoring and targeted skill building, would create strong peace constituencies at the community level. Therefore, the LINCS Program intends to develop community councils and other peace-building structures, in order to provide communities with the tools needed to address the ongoing challenges of building peace in Liberia. In other words, the LINCS Program seeks to contribute to "Peace Writ Large," on the premise that by improving the conflict management and reconciliation environment at the local level, security in Liberia as a whole will be enhanced, thus providing additional assurance of reduced violence in the period after peacekeeping troops and other external (international) sources of support leave.

### **Major Program Elements**

For more than two years, the LINCS Program has included three major components:

1. Establishment of Community Peace Councils and support for local leadership development, including a series of training programs and associated awareness-raising activities.
2. Conduct of forums or dialogue sessions across ethnic lines, more formally called the National and County Level Forums.

3. Undertaking of livelihood projects and other joint community efforts in participating communities.

We will describe each of these components in brief below—and they will be discussed at length in subsequent sections.

### ***Community Peace Councils***

In brief, the Community Peace Councils (CPCs) were established as an alternative mechanism for handling a range of dispute types at the community level, especially in the absence of an effective judicial system. CHF hoped that the CPCs would provide a means for early resolution of conflicts that would contribute to preventing escalation to violence, especially conflicts associated with IDP/refugee returns and reintegration of ex-combatants. The CPCs were also meant to become a peace constituency and to provide leadership in their communities. Finally, it was intended that the CPCs would offer a model of an inclusive community structure that would help ensure participation by all groups in local level governance.

The CPCs were established over a period of months in 2004 and early 2005 and initially included about six members, expanding over time to about twelve. Efforts were made to make sure that all key groups were represented among the CPC membership: men/women; old/youth; and all ethnic groups. Most CPC members received four different training programs: basic peacebuilding skills, leadership, trauma healing, human rights, community security and community policing. Many of these training programs were also attended by other key community leaders (town chiefs, elders, members of women's and youth groups, etc.). The CPCs serve as CHF's principal point of contact in the communities, and are the base for organizing other community activities, including livelihood projects (see below).

### ***National and County Level Forums***

CHF realized that, while the CPCs might be able to address a variety of conflicts at the community level, some issues would likely be beyond their capability. One of the most salient inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflicts in Lofa County is between the Lorma tribe (and, in Salayea District, the Kpelle tribe) on one side and the Mandingo tribe on the other, largely as a result of actions taken by armed members of these ethnic groups against each other during the past fourteen years. During the war, massacres and atrocities were committed, homes destroyed, people assassinated, churches/mosques and other sacred places desecrated. The most obvious result is that many communities remain split. In some cases, groups that formerly lived intermingled are now living separately but near each other; in other cases, Mandingo families have not returned to their former communities at all. In most (but not all) areas of the three districts, the Mandingo are a distinct minority.<sup>5</sup> For more information on this conflict, see the conflict analysis of Lofa County in Section III.

CHF found that powerful people connected with the area (raised there, often with family still living there), but living in Monrovia or Guinea, often determine policies and actions at the

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<sup>5</sup> While there is some tension between Lorma and Kpelle, the conflicts between either of those groups and the Mandingo are the most serious.

community level. Therefore, as they wished to contribute to reconciliation among Lorma/Kpelle and Mandingo, they worked to identify those “opinion leaders” and bring them into the dialogue process. CHF, with support from the Foundation for Human Rights and Democracy (FOHRD) and other implementing partners, held a series of forums during 2004/5 among contending groups in several key communities. In addition to dialogues focused on specific communities, they also organized at least one county level meeting to address broader issues.

In the spring of 2006, CHF hired an additional staff person to focus solely on organizing and implementing forums, as a follow-up to the earlier efforts. In May 2006, this new staff member performed an assessment in sixteen designated “flash point” communities in Lofa County, identified opinion leaders that would need to participate, and communicated with government authorities and others. In both the earlier effort and in the most recent activities, CHF staff and its implementing partners facilitate inter-ethnic dialogue sessions in an effort to identify outstanding issues and grievances and to negotiate agreements. The current effort is focused on those flash point communities in the three districts.

### ***Community and Livelihood Projects***

For several reasons, CHF undertook additional practical efforts in the communities. These projects generally took two forms: construction of community centers and income-generating or livelihood efforts, usually support for some form of farming or animal husbandry.

One purpose of these efforts was to provide more concrete benefits to the participating communities—since the conflict resolution functions were less visible. CHF field staff reported that a main thrust of the community center and livelihood projects was to give people tangible results from inter-ethnic cooperation. That is, if all ethnic groups work together and reap the fruits from it, there will be peace. CHF also hoped that engaging members of various tribes in working together on common projects would promote tolerance and cooperation. A second reason for these projects was that CPC members were devoting their own time and energies to community level issues and needed some form of personal benefit as incentive for continued service. Finally, CHF envisioned a time when they would be undertaking additional development-oriented programming, and initial projects would serve as an introduction to such efforts. As in other programs around the world, CHF uses its PACE (Participatory Action for Community Enhancement) methodology for this aspect of the program.

### **III. APPLICATION OF RPP ANALYTICAL TOOLS**

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This Section explores the LINCS Program, using a set of concepts and frameworks developed through the Reflecting on Peace Practice process. These tools were devised as a way to assess the effectiveness of peacebuilding programs, including whether and how the program contributes to broader peace in a society experiencing violent conflict—what we call “Peace Writ Large.” The TORs for this evaluation also states that it will, “assess whether and how LINCS has contributed to Peace Writ Large.”

The program analysis presented in this Section provides the basis for the conclusions presented in the following Section. Some readers may prefer to “skip to the bottom line” (Section IV), but they may also find that the conclusions presented there are not fully understandable without the analysis here in Section III.

One might also ask whether it is “fair” to assess the LINCS Program according to concepts and criteria that were not part of its original conception, even if those concepts are basically generic. All peacebuilding programs desire to contribute to peace in some way, and the goals and objectives of the LINCS Program are quite ambitious—and clearly at the Peace Writ Large level.

We will use four concepts from the Reflecting on Peace Practice (RPP) process to explore the LINCS Program:

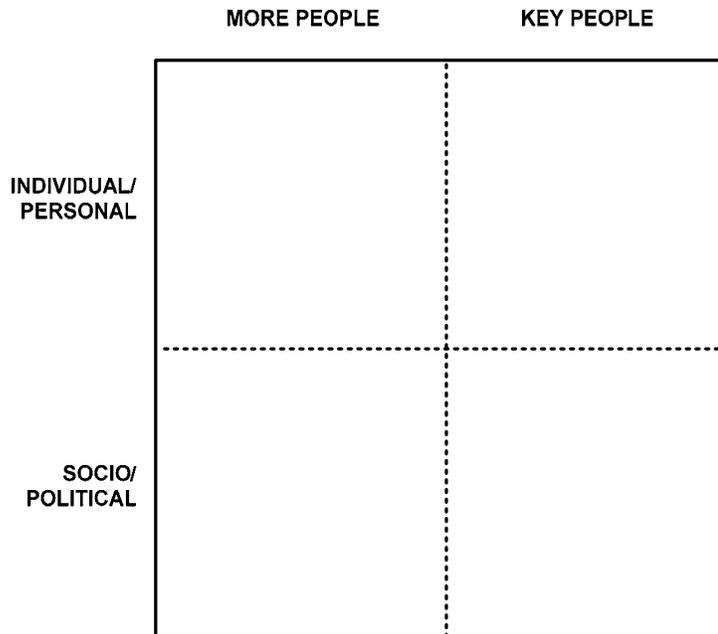
- The RPP Matrix
- Theories of Change
- Criteria of Effectiveness
- Conflict Analysis

The RPP Matrix and the Theories of Change work together—and the Criteria of Effectiveness and Conflict Analysis also function together, at least in part.

#### **The RPP Matrix and Theories of Change**

The RPP Matrix was developed during the earlier phase of RPP (1999-2003), through research and writing of 26 case studies, cross-case analysis, and workshops with peace practitioners across the globe. It represents one way to delve into a program’s strategy—often uncovering an implicit strategy and the choices made by the project or program.

The RPP Matrix reflects the fact that peace practice is driven by two essential strategies, represented by the two columns of the matrix. The first is aimed at influencing “key people,” those who have the power to decide for or against peace. While key people often hold recognized positions in society, they may also be people who are not so obviously powerful. A good example of a less obvious key people group is former soldiers (ex-combatants). While ex-combatants do not often hold important positions and may be unemployed, they can undermine a peace process, as they maintain contacts with former colleagues and commanders, retain weapons, and have suffered trauma.



**Figure 1: The RPP Matrix**

The other main program strategy is aimed at “more people,” based on the understanding that it is necessary to educate and mobilize large groups of people into active support of peace (or at least acceptance) to make progress towards peace. Some such programs seek, eventually, to influence key decision makers by building a strong constituency in support of peace. Others proceed on the assumption that engaging larger and larger groups of people and helping them develop resistance to further violence is a critical aspect of peace making.

The rows of the matrix show two levels of change at which most peace practice is aimed. The top row represents changes in individual skills, attitudes and behaviors, while the bottom row represents socio-political changes in social norms, institutions, laws, rules, regulations, structures and relationships among groups.

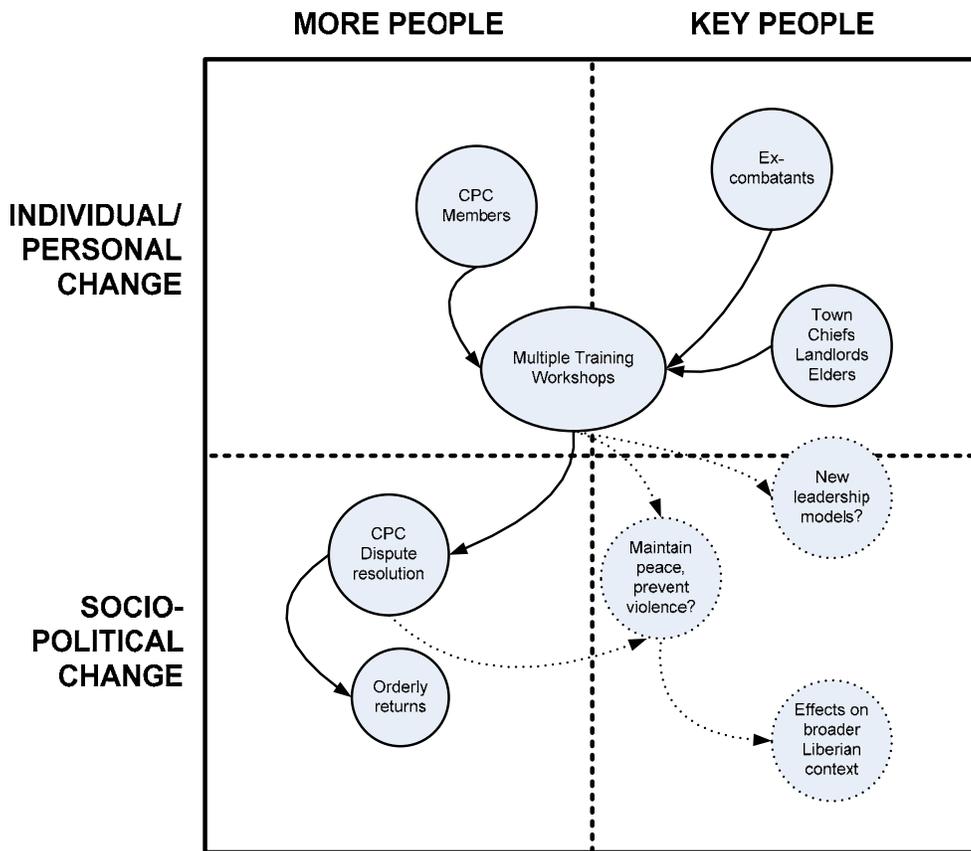
Theories of Change (or Theories of Peacebuilding) are the underlying assumptions built into a program regarding how to induce the changes we seek. In simple generic terms a Theory of Change might state: “If we do X [action], it will result in Y [change in favor of peace]. Program designers rarely state their theories of change explicitly—although it is usually possible to figure them out from the program logic presented. In the RPP process, we have been working with peace practitioners to make their Theories of Change explicit—so that the assumptions can be tested against reality and the experiences gained through program implementation.

In the text below we will look at two program components: Community Peace Councils and National and County Level Forums. We will not discuss the livelihood components of the program here, as they are not, in themselves, peacebuilding efforts and are not suited to application of these analysis tools.

**Community Peace Councils (CPC)**

Figure 2 below presents the CPC program as understood through the RPP Matrix. In the LINCS Program, once the CPCs were formed, the members and other key community members received a series of training workshops designed to enhance their skills in handling conflict and to build their leadership capacities as well. This initial series of activities is represented on the matrix in Figure 1, showing the CPC members and others receiving training. CPC members are shown on the “more people” side but somewhat towards the “key people” side, as the members are, in many cases, respected and/or influential individuals. Ex-combatants, and other influential town members are shown as key people, since they have greater direct influence on peace.

The CPC itself is shown as a new tentative social institution, designed to handle local level conflicts and prevent escalation. The matrix then shows dotted lines to “maintaining peace and preventing violence” and from there to an effect on the broader Liberian context. The lines are dotted because these impacts are hoped for but not proven.



**Figure 2:  
Application of RPP Matrix to CPC Program Strategy**

Evidence from our interviews in communities participating in the LINCS Program indicates that the CPCs are handling interpersonal conflicts at the local level and work with other authorities to

address more difficult issues, such as land disputes. The types of conflicts handled by the CPCs alone involve domestic quarrels and violence, petty theft, claims regarding property hidden during the war and found by others, unpaid debts, public drunkenness and minor squabbles leading to fist fighting.

The most serious conflicts in these communities involve religious/cultural issues and land claims (house sites and/or farm land). In most cases (with a few exceptions), the CPCs are not handling such cases. Rather, we heard reports that the members of the CPCs help identify emerging disputes and then recruit other authorities (town chief, landlord, elders) to bring resolution at the local level, if possible. Cases that remain unresolved at that level are referred on to a paramount chief and/or to the court system (which is widely regarded as ineffective, corrupt and expensive). Newly reestablished government Land Commissions will also begin to reassert their role.

The CPCs also helped to smooth the process of IDP and refugee return to the communities, including addressing some land issues, especially during the past two years of transition, when few local authorities (town chiefs, elders, district and county authorities) were present. Now that those authorities are back, the role of the CPCs in this area is less certain. While the CPCs were originally envisioned as addressing issues with respect to ex-combatants, community and CPC members did not mention their role in this. It is possible that they have contributed indirectly insofar as ex-combatants were parties to interpersonal disputes. In addition, some of the LINCS training programs (trauma healing, Flomo Theatre) addressed ex-combatant issues directly, which contributed to the ability of communities and ex-combatants themselves to cope with tensions.

CHF also hoped that the CPCs would represent a new model of inclusive leadership. However, training, awareness, and a position of responsibility do not necessarily counterbalance socialization and the profound effects of war and violence. While some CPCs seem to have succeeded in bridging the inter-ethnic divide, in most cases, the prejudices, resentments and distrust that prevail in the community at large are reflected in CPC members as well. One Mandingo group was quite vociferous: “The CPC cannot help, because they do not have equal membership and issue biased decisions. The CPC will never vote with a Mandingo. The good thing is that it is a place to bring problems, and the decisions that they make do stand.” While this is only one direct statement, the team did hear such doubts expressed frequently by Mandingos. This issue should be addressed in future programming decisions.

### ***Theory of Change for the CPCs***

The CPC effort is based on several Theories of Change, which we will examine one by one. These theories (in bold italics below) have never been stated in this form in program documents, although they are implicit throughout. Rather, these formulations are the CDA team’s extrapolations from the program proposal and from discussions with CHF staff in the field.

Embedded in the original concept for the CPCs was the following Theory of Change:

***Theory #1 (CPCs): By establishing a new community-level mechanism for handling a range of dispute types, we will contribute to keeping the peace and avoiding incidents that have the potential for escalating into serious violence.***

This theory represents a challenging issue not only for the LINCS Program, but for the entire peacebuilding field. Peace practitioners are engaged in efforts to develop new or enhanced base-level community alternative dispute resolution (ADR) processes in many conflict zones around the world. Many of these efforts explore traditional conflict resolution mechanisms and seek to reinforce and/or modernize them. Other efforts seek to connect local level ADR with the lowest levels of the judicial system.

The question is whether such community-level ADR processes contribute to the broader peace—and if so, how. The answer turns on the extent to which local conflicts have the potential for escalating and inciting widespread violence. If they do, then local level mechanisms for containing such conflicts would directly contribute to stopping a key factor in violent conflict. If, however, local conflicts are unconnected to the driving factors of the conflict or the local level conflict handling mechanisms are not able to address the types of conflict most likely to escalate, then the ADR effort would make little or no contribution to Peace Writ Large. On the other hand, such program may be quite important, useful and effective for entirely other reasons—contributing to PWL is not the only reason to undertake such efforts!

The CPCs have provided a more accessible form of dispute resolution for a wide range of community-level problems. Thus, they contribute to containing local-level violence, and, during the transition period, some CPCs were able to handle certain land issues—one of the concerns most likely to lead to violence. At present, however, they are not dealing directly with the most volatile issues likely to result in violence (land and religious practices). The CPCs do reinforce the general notion of peace and model how to find nonviolent solutions to problems. In some circumstance, CPC members and other participants in leadership positions may apply the skills and concepts presented in training programs in considering a wider set of approaches to conflict resolution. They also, on occasion, prompt early response to rumors and volatile situations.

Another theory behind the CPCs concerns the idea of inclusion:

***Theory #2 (CPCs): By creating inclusive structures for community problem solving, we can improve communication, respect and productive interactions among subgroups in the community, and improve the access of disenfranchised groups to decision making.***

Simply by requiring representation from all “quarters” (ethnic and other divisions) within the communities, the CPC program may have helped erode the sense of separation resulting from the war. However, minority groups (mainly the Mandingos) in the community are also in the minority on the CPCs—and have no more power and influence on the CPCs than they do in other community forums where they are always outnumbered and their views can be dismissed.<sup>6</sup> In meetings of the CDA team with groups of CPC members, it was evident that the Mandingo members did not feel free to speak openly. On those occasions when Mandingo members did speak up, this was often followed by sharp exchanges in local languages (hence incomprehensible to the team) that seemed to silence the minority members. In separate

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<sup>6</sup> This poses an issue regarding the nature of “democracy.” If minorities are consistently denied their rights and/or a full voice, because they can always be outvoted, does this represent democracy? Structures that provide more equal voice/representation, while not reflecting the same proportions as the population, may be more effective, depending on the goals of the overall effort.

interviews, Mandingo community members were much more open and quite critical of community leadership and, in some cases, of the CPCs themselves. Mandingo members of CPCs who are able to exert influence in community decision making are probably able to do so because of the positions of respect they continue to hold, not because of their CPC membership.

As the CDA team conducted interviews in the communities, they heard many expressions of appreciation and respect for the CPCs. However, this appreciation was rarely (only one or two comments) associated with the inclusive nature of the group.

A third theory behind the CPCs and the broader LINCS Program training effort concerns the development of new leadership models:

***Theory #3 (CPCs): By creating a new leadership group infused with democratic concepts and provided with critical skills, we can foster more effective and responsive leadership.***

Most of the leadership training provided to CPC members was also provided to other town/community leaders (town chiefs, elders, women's and youth group leaders, landlords, etc.). CHF partner organizations who provided some of the training report that they saw and heard participants gaining new insights about leadership in their sessions. The CDA team also heard some references to concepts that interviewees must have picked up in training workshops. Since there were multiple participants from each participating community in those workshops, it is possible that they will be able to reinforce or challenge each other with regard to how leadership is exercised in the communities.

In some communities, new leadership is emerging—although it is certainly too early to tell if they will be any more responsive than the old leaders. In any case, it would be difficult to attribute any of these changes to the CPCs or the LINCS Program generally.<sup>7</sup> The various training programs, offered to both the CPC members and others, may begin to sink in and produce some changes over time. On the other hand, there is little or no follow-up to the training, no accompaniment of people as they attempt to apply the skills, and no mentoring of training participants. As far as we could see, CHF staff are not sitting in on community meetings or tracking specific decision making processes to see whether there are any discernable changes in leadership and how decisions are made. (I.e., are the skills introduced in LINCS workshops being applied?)

### ***National and County Level Forums***

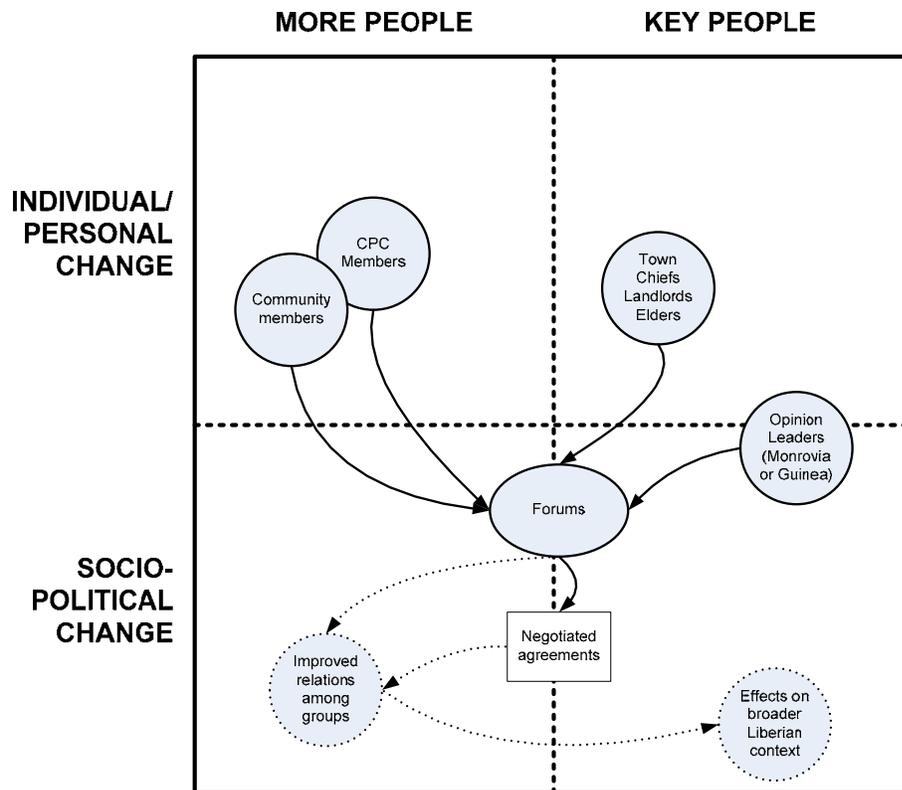
If we apply the RPP Matrix to the National Forum program, the diagram in Figure 2 results. This program places greater emphasis on “key people,” as opinion leaders in Monrovia and Guinea are engaged in the process—recognizing that these people exert influence for or against reconciliation in Lofa County communities. By necessity, local and County level authorities and UNMIL representatives—who also influence peace and violence—are also engaged. The

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<sup>7</sup> It might be interesting (a research project by a university student from Lofa?) to explore the relationship between the CPCs and new/emerging leadership. A study could look at the past and current positions of CPC members and how they interact with traditional leadership structures.

Forums have also involved broader representation from the communities, including members of the CPCs.

The Forums themselves represent an activity at the socio-political level, since they deal with relations among significant groups. That is, the dialogues are aimed not at improving interpersonal relationships but at negotiating real agreements on important issues. We have placed the Forums on the line straddling More People and Key People, since larger groups of the community are involved, along with the more powerful participants.



**Figure 3:**  
**Application of RPP Matrix to National Forum Strategy**

If all goes well, each Forum results in a formal written agreement regarding how the two (or more) groups will interact as they live together in the communities. Such agreements, if honored, could result in actual improved relations among groups in the long term. In fact, it is possible that the increased positive contact and communication of the Forums could directly improve relationships. Those improved relations (from the Forums and/or agreements) would, in turn, produce positive effects on the broader Liberian context—demonstrating the potential for reconciliation and peaceful coexistence.

In Figure 2, the “improved relations” and “effects on the broader Liberian context” are presented in dotted lines, since those are hoped-for impacts not yet realized. CHF reports from the earlier round of Forums indicate that some improvements were noted following the interactions—in Konia, for instance. However, in other communities, earlier Forums did not result in improvements, and CHF staff are undertaking further rounds of talks in an effort to make

headway. In Borkeza, for instance, a group of influential people from the community and from Monrovia met several times and drew up a series of agreements. However, these were not written down formally and subsequent actions by the two groups eroded trust. In most areas, the Forum efforts are just beginning, and it is too early to tell whether they will succeed.

### *Theories of Change for the Forums*

The issues between Mandingo and Lorma/Kpelle tribal groups are quite difficult, derived in large measure from the damage done by groups perceived as coming from the various ethnic groups during the war. Early in the 1990s there were ethnically-based attacks on Mandingos—and Lorma/Kpelle were seen by some as cooperating or even assisting these attacks. Later, in the late 1990s, Mandingos and others formed LURD (Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy), which attacked and occupied Lofa County for several years. LURD and its allies committed numerous atrocities, often perceived as targeting Lorma and Kpelle groups and their sacred places. In addition, Mandingos are often seen as “foreigners” for a variety of reasons. Some Mandingos have lived in Lofa County for many generations—even predating other tribes in some places. However, many Mandingos engage in trade throughout the region (Liberia, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast) and families are often quite dispersed and mobile.

This is a highly simplified recounting of a complex history. In any case, Lormas/Kpelle and Mandingos harbor deep resentments, distrust and fear of each other—as demonstrated by changed housing patterns and widespread disputes over house site and farm land use and ownership. The need for the Forums arises from a need to address these intense inter-ethnic tensions. The situation calls for a deeper process of reconciliation facilitated by relatively neutral outside parties with the skills for inter-group dialogue and mediation of actual agreements.

The Forum program embodies two theories of change that we will examine in turn.

***Theory #1 (Forums): If we bring together influential representatives and other community members of both (all) ethnic groups that are experiencing tension to engage in dialogue and negotiate formal agreements regarding outstanding issues, we can improve inter-ethnic relations and develop the basis for long-term coexistence.***

This basic premise appears warranted by the situation and the programmatic approach. A process of reconciliation on a community-by-community basis is clearly needed, in order to address the hostility created by actions taken during the war. The effort is also engaging the appropriate mix of local and national/regional actors in the negotiation process.

However, success of the Forums will likely depend on the details of implementation, including the role of the facilitator(s); the quality of agreements reached (including implementation plans); the “meaning” of written statements; the degree of implementation and follow-through; linkages among levels (community, district, county and national); involvement of formal authorities (tribal chiefs, district and county government, national ministries); and ongoing and repeated processes of reconciliation at multiple levels. These issues will be discussed in the Recommendations section of this report.

One might also consider whether negotiated agreements are the best or only means for addressing inter-ethnic tensions. Indeed, the dialogue process itself opens up communication and sharing of perspectives about the traumatic events experienced by all groups over the past years of warfare. It will be interesting to see how the overall process of reconciliation unfolds—and which mechanisms prove most effective in resolving issues and improving relationships. The program should assess, in an ongoing way, how the different Forums succeed and why.

Some dialogue processes in Liberia have included various traditional methods of reconciliation. Some people think that these traditional ceremonies are an important component of the process, while others stress that such ceremonies are most useful for reinforcing concrete agreements achieved through some form of negotiation. Indeed, we heard Liberians expressing cynicism about high officials arriving in communities to preside over empty rites (slaughtering of a cow, and so forth) that did nothing practical to improve relationships. Liberia has also launched a national truth and reconciliation process—and Lofa County will participate. It remains to be seen whether that national process will have impacts at the county and local levels (and vice versa).

A second theory is implied by the Forum approach:

***Theory #2 (Forums): If we can negotiate the basis for coexistence among influential people at the national level and key local leaders of contending ethnic groups, it will become more possible to settle individual disputes over such issues as land claims.***

By this approach, rather than trying to deal with many individual disputes, the program attempts to develop broad agreements in principle—which can then guide resolution of specific claims. This is a sound logic to this approach. There is, however, also a risk that groups will remain deadlocked at the leadership level, leaving many festering land issues (and others) that could, over time, lead to violence, especially as the pressure on land increases with the return of more people to their former communities.

Separate attempts are underway to address land issues without any broader inter-ethnic agreements. Town chiefs, landlords, elders, paramount chiefs, district and county officials, Justices of the Peace, magistrates and the courts (insofar as they exist) and the revived Land Commission are all theoretically empowered to address land issues. However, these officials and institutions are all controlled by the dominant ethnic groups, and the minorities (Mandingos) have no faith in their ability to handle inter-ethnic issues fairly. The same institutions/officials are unable to address the other key area of concern, religious and spiritual practices. Rather, the various formal and informal religious leaders must be engaged in resolving those.

Disputes also arise over interpretations of the Liberian constitution and provisions that allow land ownership by all Liberian citizens and guarantee ownership to those who have used a plot for twenty years. In particular, these provisions are disputed in relation to Mandingos, and there is widespread refusal to acknowledge their citizenship or their user rights to land.

## RPP Criteria of Effectiveness

The first phase of RPP (1999-2003), developed several Criteria of Effectiveness—elements of peacebuilding that all peace programs should address in one way or another. These Criteria continue to evolve as learning and testing proceeds during the current phase of the RPP process. Although still evolving, these constitute a useful lens for looking at program effectiveness. We are currently using the following six Criteria:

1. The effort *addresses a key driving factor* of the conflict or tensions.
2. The effort results in the *creation or reform of institutions or mechanisms* that address the specific grievances or injustices that are factors in this conflict.
3. The effort causes participants and communities to develop *independent initiatives* that decrease inter-group dividers and increase inter-group connectors.
4. The effort prompts people increasingly to *resist violence* and provocations to violence.
5. The effort results in an *increase in people's security* and in their sense of security.
6. The effort results in a significant improvement in *relations among groups in conflict*.

The Criteria can be used as one method for assessing whether a program is likely to have an impact on the wider peace (“peace writ large”). While individual programs seldom address all of the areas included in the Criteria, RPP found that the more Criteria that a program addresses, the more likely the program is to contribute to the larger peace.

The CDA team used the Criteria as one framework for determining topic areas to be covered in community interviews and other forms of inquiry regarding the LINCS Program.<sup>8</sup> Thus the CDA team was interested in seeing whether and how the program was addressing key driving factors, whether the CPCs and Forums might be the kernel of new community-level institutions to address abiding grievance, and whether communities are induced to take their own initiatives as a result of the program. Similarly, we explored issues of violence and security and how the program might have had impacts in that domain. The issue of inter-group relations was a key issue of concern, as this had been identified as a major source of conflict in the area.

The RPP learning process has also found that, as the Criteria are applied to programs, it is also necessary to pose several additional questions that cut across the Criteria: Is the program fast enough? Is the program big enough? Is it sustainable? And is the program linked to other levels (local to district to county to national to regional) and other to other programs addressing similar issues using complementary approaches? The relationships of each program component to the Criteria and to these cross-cutting factors (fast enough, big enough, etc.) are discussed further below.

### Conflict Analysis as a Basis for Identifying Key Driving Factors (Criterion One)

Before we discuss the program components and the Criteria, we must first look at conflict analysis. In order to determine if a program has contributed to “stopping a key driving factor of conflict” (the first Criterion), it is necessary to perform an analysis that identifies those key

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<sup>8</sup> See the interview protocol in Appendix A.

driving factors. For this reason the CDA team worked with CHF staff to organize a one-day workshop in Lofa County, to hear the perspectives of local people regarding the ongoing conflicts in their area. That workshop provided useful information for the CDA team regarding how local people view the key driving factors of the conflict.

When the workshop information was supplemented by information from other sources (program documents and the full range of interviews at the community level, and with officials and implementing partners), we gained a comprehensive picture of the nature of conflict at the Lofa County level. Figure 4 presents that information as a conflict system, showing the dynamics among the conflict factors. This method of conflict analysis considers conflicts as “systems” of factors that operate in a pattern of dynamic interactions.

In the Lofa County context, the combination of the mutual destruction and killings during the war and the resulting mistrust, fear and hatred are the central factors that link other elements. “Key driving factors” of the conflict are shown in larger and different typeface and include the two central issues already mentioned (war and the resulting mistrust, etc.), plus discrimination/unequal power, the influence of opinion leaders, ignorance and misunderstanding, and the debate over who is a “real” Liberian.

Broadly speaking there are two major areas of concern in the conflict system in Lofa County. The first surrounds the dynamics of land and land ownership, which results from the war experiences and the questions raised about the citizenship status of Mandingos. Long-term arrangements for land use, rarely written or provided in a formal title, have now been rejected (referred to as “breaking of pre-war arrangements” on the conflict map).

The other major issue area concerns the isolation and separation of populations. In some communities, no Mandingos have returned at all. The team heard a story in Boi about the attempt of one Mandingo man to return, only to be chased out. In other places the separation is only a few hundred yards, as the Lorma have occupied one area, while the Mandingo are living in another (examples: Borkeza and Nekebouzo).

In Nekebouzo for example, the CDA team heard from a mixed group of Mandingo and Lorma youth. At one point in the conversation, one youth accused the Lorma of killing and raping Mandingo, and then another said the Mandingos killed Lormas—and an argument ensued. The team asked why people are “confused and tense,” and why they are separated into an old town (now mostly Lorma) and new town (now Mandingo). They heard the following two perspectives:

*Lorma perspective:* The Mandingos refuse to live in the old town where we all used to live together. Everyone has land and they are free to return to where they lived. The problem is that the community now has “aliens” from Bong, Nimba and Guinea, and they don’t belong in the community at all. These people are taking the land by force in the new town section. Prior to the war the new town section was market land. There was one man who had a coco/coffee plantation but that was all. There are some Mandingoes who have returned and they have returned to old town.

A document was signed between the Lorma and Mandingo chiefs in 2000 in Baziwen[?] stating that the Mandingo would leave new town and allow that land to return to its pre-war status as market land. We really want to work together with the Mandingos and don’t understand why they are living separately



*Mandingo perspective:* That agreement is completely illegitimate for several reasons. At the court site Lorma held guns and forced our leaders to sign it. The document contained nothing about a land agreement but rather was an entirely different document that stated that the Mandingo admitted to killing all the Lorma. The new town was not market land at all, but was where Mandingo had lived and farmed

This brief exchange illustrates the depth of the hostility between groups in the wake of the fourteen years of war and violence, much of it undertaken with an ethnic twist. The issue of ignorance and misunderstanding—in addition to the destruction of churches, mosques and sacred places during the war—lies behind much of the current tension over religious practices. The relative isolation exacerbates that problem, and underlines the need to involve religious leaders in dialogue and negotiation processes.

Based on the village-level interviews and discussions with local officials, the situation in Lofa County could be characterized as a “fragile peace.” One young man in Konia stated, “There are no guns, but there is no peace....I can forget, but I will not forgive. I know people who murdered my family and friends.”

While the various armed groups have been demobilized and UNMIL troops are in place, NGOs and officials assert that many ex-combatants maintain contact with their former comrades-in-arms and commanders. Some armed groups associated with the former LURD forces are said to be armed and ready to respond if needed just over the border in Guinea.<sup>9</sup> Whether this latter is true or not, people in the communities perceive it to be true—which represents a threat to security or their sense of security.

In this context, the land issues, and the causes of them, acquire significance as potential catalysts of violence, especially if the groups that remain armed perceive a threat to groups whose interests they are pledged to protect. Will groups currently excluded from farm land and house sites they formerly occupied for generations move to repossess them? How will other groups respond if such forcible reoccupations take place? If UNMIL withdraws will the situation of relative calm deteriorate?

While this analysis is useful for thinking about the first criterion, it can also serve as the basis for thinking more broadly about program strategies and determining whether a program is appropriately targeted—that is, addressing the right things.

### **The Criteria and the Community Peace Councils**

The chart below indicates our assessment that the CPCs have had only a subtle and indirect impact on the key driving factors of conflict (Criterion #1). As already mentioned, the CDA team found that the CPCs, while performing an appreciated and valuable service in relation to interpersonal conflicts and some other forms of local conflict, are not addressing

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<sup>9</sup> Note that the CDA team has no direct evidence to support or refute these rumors, but is reporting the experience of others in Lofa.

those issues most likely to escalate towards serious violence. (Fist fights and domestic violence are serious concerns, but not likely to precipitate widespread bloodshed.) If the CPCs are contributing at all to stopping key driving factors, it is by promoting a general atmosphere of problem solving and quelling rumors.

Criterion	Community Peace Councils
1. The effort <i>addresses a key driving factor</i> of the conflict or tensions.	Earlier contribution Currently indirectly
2. The effort results in the <i>creation or reform of institutions or mechanisms</i> that address the specific grievances or injustices that are factors in this conflict.	Certain kinds of disputes, potential for more
3. The effort causes participants and communities to develop <i>independent initiatives</i> that decrease dividers, increase connectors.	In some cases (but signs of dependency also present)
4. The effort prompts people increasingly to <i>resist violence</i> and provocations to violence.	Yes, at a local level
5. The effort results in an <i>increase in people's security</i> and in their sense of security.	Somewhat
6. The effort results in a significant improvement in <i>relations among groups in conflict</i> .	Not directly

In most communities, the CPCs bring people together for joint community projects. These efforts begin to address, in small ways, the lack of community unity and low development factors (which are effects rather than key factors in our analysis). “Contact theory” or the “contact hypothesis”<sup>10</sup> would suggest that joint projects are an effective way to erode distrust and fear. Might the LINCSS livelihood projects and construction of community centers, undertaken across ethnic lines, contribute to reducing some of the factors in the analysis, such as the cycles associated with “separation and isolation” and “communities not together”? CHF staff reported that the joint projects do have these objectives.

In response to critiques of the original contact theory, social scientists found that increased social interaction can be effective in reducing prejudice, distrust and fear, but only under specific conditions: the groups must have mutual interdependence, common goals, equal status, informal and personal contacts, social norms of equality, and the support of

<sup>10</sup> Originally posited by Gordon Allport in the 1950s and elaborated by Armour and Pettigrew (among others). See Allport, Gordon, *The Nature of Prejudice*, Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1954; Armour, D. 1972. "The Evidence on Busing." *Public Interest* 28:90-128; Pettigrew, T.F., "Intergroup Contact Theory", *Annual Review of Psychology*, 49 (65-85), 1998.

authorities, among others.<sup>11</sup> While some of these conditions are met in the relations among tribal groups in Lofa County, others are clearly not—which may, then call into question the effectiveness of activities based on the assumption that contacts will help reduce hostility.<sup>12</sup>

The strongest contribution of the CPC program is towards Criterion #2: creating/reforming an institution to address specific grievances or injustices. As already noted, the CPCs are handling a range of interpersonal disputes, including petty theft, personal property claims, and domestic issues. Community members frequently expressed appreciation for the CPC's services, as they do not like paying the town chief to resolve issues or using the slow and corrupt judicial system.

We should note that there is widespread confusion about the true role and function of the CPCs, including among CPC members themselves. In the course of our interviews, we heard reference to the following roles:

- Community mediators
- Development project managers
- Fund raisers
- CHF contact persons
- Community mobilizers and leaders
- Landmine action contacts
- Human rights activists
- Child protection agents

While some mix of these roles may be appropriate for the CPCs, nevertheless, community members were not clear about what the groups are really for. Given this confusion, if the CPCs are to become a more permanent and useful social institution for base-level justice and dispute resolution, there must be greater clarity—among community members—about what they want the CPCs to do.

As noted already, the biggest issue is land disputes—and the CPCs, with a few exceptions, are not able to address these directly, at least not at present. CHF staff report that earlier in the program, before local authorities (town chief, landowner, elders) had returned, CPCs were playing a much more direct role in resolving land issues, although this was not reported in our interviews. The team found that CPCs are involving themselves in land issues, but are not playing a mediating or arbitrating role themselves. Rather, they identify the problem and bring it to the town chief and other authorities for resolution. In some cases, the town chief and other influential elders serve on the CPC—and therefore play a more central role in land disputes, but this is not due to their CPC membership. If the CPCs are to play a more significant role in handling more difficult disputes and deeper

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<sup>11</sup> See, for instance, Aronson, E. and D. Bridgeman. 1979. "Jigsaw Groups and the Desegregated Classroom: In Pursuit of Common Goals." "Equal-Status Inter-racial Contact: A Review and Revision of a Concept." *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 2:161-185

<sup>12</sup> Indeed, other social scientists have gone to great lengths to challenge the basic assumptions of contact theory. See H. D. Forbes, *Ethnic Conflict: Commerce, Culture and the Contact Hypothesis*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.

issues at the level of grievances and injustice, they will require additional capacity. This issue is taken up in Section VI/Recommendations.

Regarding Criterion #3, the team found considerable evidence that most of the participating communities are not taking their own initiatives. The dependency syndrome is announced loudly, as the entrance to every community is adorned with multiple signboards declaring the active engagement of NGOs (and some foreign governments) in aid to that town. Of course, this situation was not created by CHF. In fact, most of those agencies arrived in Lofa County after CHF did. However, the general atmosphere is one of waiting for the initiative of the NGOs. Most NGOs have their own point-of-contact groups in the communities, resulting in a dizzying array of local community groups, each associated with a different NGO effort, and lots of overlapping memberships. This situation is regrettable and outside of CHF's control—and correcting it would require efforts of coordination.<sup>13</sup>

In contrast, the team's visits to "non-participating" communities in which CHF and other NGOs are *not* active, revealed that community members there, while just as poor or even poorer than communities with extensive NGO involvement, were much more engaged in self-initiated efforts. For instance, in Bulor, a poor and isolated all-Mandingo community, they had rebuilt the mosque and town hall on their own initiative.

Of more direct concern for CHF, team interviews in the communities revealed, in many cases, that the CPC is viewed as the "CHF group," not as a function or body fully owned and supported by the community. As they consider future programming, CHF must think about how to transfer greater ownership of the CPC function to the communities. Even though CHF is not solely responsible for the dependency dynamics noted above, they must still consider how their own program can minimize the negative effects.

Regarding Criteria 4 and 5, the team found evidence that the program has contributed to containing violence at the local level—particularly interpersonal disputes that might escalate. In this way, local people may feel more secure if such incidents are handled well and in a timely manner. However, when the team asked people whether they felt secure (and many did), they attributed that sense of security to the presence of UNMIL and the new Liberian police, the reestablishment of government functions, the revival of economic activity, and the return of people to their homes. The CPCs were never cited as the source of a sense of security, even though most interviewees knew that we were there to talk about the LINCSP Program. The LINCSP Program also provided workshops on community policing, but community members rarely mentioned those—and those activities probably have gotten lost in the innumerable workshops provided by so many different groups. We were not able to determine whether people are more resistant to violence than previously—even though there is a strong sense of weariness with war.

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<sup>13</sup> In fact, the team heard repeated complaints from community members about actions of various NGOs that exacerbate conflict, such as inequitable distribution of relief and resettlement goods, favoritism towards certain leaders and their cohorts, and differential access to water and sanitation facilities. These issues were outside the scope of this assessment, but a multi-agency "Do No Harm" analysis of aid to the County is sorely needed!

In terms of Criterion #6, the CPCs are not addressing inter-ethnic issues directly. If they are having an impact on inter-group relations, it is through joint projects, such as construction of community centers and livelihood projects. (See the discussion above regarding contact theory.) The fact that all “quarters” (geographic and ethnic areas) are represented on the CPCs themselves represents the potential for impact on inter-group relations. Interactions and cooperation among multi-ethnic members of the CPCs may have improved relationships in some instances, but those interviewed in the communities did not mention this.<sup>14</sup>

As for the cross-cutting factors (fast enough, big enough, sustainable and linked), the CPCs demonstrate some commendable attributes. Certainly, CHF introduced the CPS effort in a timely manner as the first significant numbers of people were beginning to return to their communities. In the crucial transition period, the CPCs are reported to have played an important role in facilitating orderly returns and reintegration (at least among those ethnic groups allowed to return!). In recent months, it appears that this leadership role has passed back to traditional authorities in most cases—and many other NGOs are operating in Lofa County.

The coverage of the CPC program is impressive: seventy towns in the three districts of Lofa County. This is a scale that has potential for real impacts. Those impacts will be stronger if the role of the CPCs can be expanded and consolidated, with full community ownership and support, as needed, from CHF.

The sustainability of the CPC program is a serious question, treated more fully below in the Recommendations section. We see three dimensions of this issue: a) how to sustain participation of CPC members (through some form of compensation/reward); b) how to further evolve the dispute resolution function of the CPCs; and c) how to gain greater community ownership. Although the livelihoods projects were conceived partly as a way to provide some compensation to CPC members, they do not always see the projects as compensation. In one community, the CPC members were under the impression that CHF had promised compensation, but none was forthcoming—and they said, “The sheep [from the livelihood project] are not compensation.” While not always stated this way, the issue of compensation was repeated in almost every conversation with the CPC members. Quite likely, the program should hold to the volunteer principle (partly because any form of monetary compensation is a slippery slope!), while looking for other ways to reward participants.

The CPCs would benefit from better links with base-level government and, if the taint of corruption can be eased, judicial functions. Recently, CHF has developed a partnership with the American Bar Association program on dispute resolution—which may provide a natural avenue for linking the CPCs to the judicial system and to other dispute resolution

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<sup>14</sup> CPCs operate differently in handling specific disputes/cases. In some cases, individual CPC members handle the issue. In others, they work in teams. In still others, the CPC acts as a full group. Given these wide variations, it is difficult to tell how much actual interaction takes place among CPC members of different ethnic groups.

efforts. As for other linkages, so far, the CPCs have largely functioned independently from other programs, and the CDA team heard sharp criticism of CHF from several other organizations for not attending key coordination meetings in Voinjama—whether this is deserved or not. On the other hand, the team did hear of ongoing cooperation with CCF’s work on gender-based violence and with Land Mine Action, and, in the early phases of the program, with Lutheran efforts for trauma healing. Decisions regarding which institutions, organizations and programs to link with (since they take time and energy) should be based on a conflict analysis and strategies for enhancing the effectiveness of the program.

### **The Criteria and the National and County Level Forums Program**

The chart below presents the CDA teams assessment of how the Forums program contributes to the Criteria of Effectiveness. In our view, the Forums are potentially (but not yet) a powerful means for addressing some of the key driving factors of the conflict, including those most likely to precipitate renewed rounds of violence.

If the National and County-Level Forums can effectively address some of the issues that divide the tribal groups, including those that have caused groups to refuse to return, refuse to live alongside people from the other group, or refuse to allow people to return to former lands, they will make a significant contribution to stopping key driving factors of the conflict and improving inter-group relations (Criteria #1 and #6).

<b>Criterion</b>	<b>National and County Level Forums</b>
1. The effort <i>addresses a key driving factor</i> of the conflict or tensions.	Potential significant impact
2. The effort results in the <i>creation or reform of institutions or mechanisms</i> that address the specific grievances or injustices that are factors in this conflict.	Possible modeling of mechanisms for wider application
3. The effort causes participants and communities to develop <i>independent initiatives</i> that decrease dividers, increase connectors.	Unclear
4. The effort prompts people increasingly to <i>resist violence</i> and provocations to violence.	Potential indirect effect
5. The effort results in an <i>increase in people’s security</i> and in their sense of security.	Potentially
6. The effort results in a significant improvement in <i>relations among groups in conflict</i> .	High potential

It remains to be seen whether the Forums will be able to negotiate agreements on relatively practical issues (land use and access, respect for religious practices) without dealing

directly with the more emotive issues that may require deeper levels of reconciliation (acknowledgement, apology, forgiveness, cleansing, and so forth). The Forum process is currently understaffed and overstretched, which impedes its capacity to follow up and follow through on dialogue and negotiation sessions. This concern will be addressed further in the Recommendations section.<sup>15</sup>

The Forum program might be considered an experiment in reconciliation at the community and county levels. Other such efforts have been attempted in Liberia in the past—and CHF would benefit from learning more about the successes and failures of those other efforts from Liberian experts available in Monrovia.<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, the Forum program has potential for being incorporated into a new/renewed Liberian institution that takes responsibility for long-term attention to ground level reconciliation among contending groups (Criterion #2). So far, the appropriate institution has not been identified, and CHF will need to undertake additional consultations to determine how their efforts can contribute to related national initiatives.

It is too early to tell if the current round of Forum activities will help communities to start taking their own initiatives for inter-group reconciliation (Criterion #3). We can imagine a scenario in which formal agreements that are implemented fully would contribute to people's resistance to violence and to an increase in their sense of security, at least over time (Criteria #4 and #5).

As for the other cross-cutting factors (fast enough, big enough...), for the Forums, the real question is quality, rather than speed or quantity. The dialogue process needs to proceed at its own pace, without delaying unnecessarily. We also address the issue of size in the Recommendations, as we are convinced that undertaking dialogue processes well in fewer communities will be more beneficial than spreading resources too thin.

Ultimately, the CHF effort cannot be sustained, so a high priority for the next period will be to find a strong Liberian institutional base for such efforts. We also suggest in the Recommendations that CHF link more closely with others who have previous experience with dialogues in Liberia. A key element of the program is developing community to county to national linkages, so this is a real strength.

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<sup>15</sup> CHF has increased staff support and budget for this program component since the CDA team's visit.

<sup>16</sup> Former WANEP director, Sam Doe, would be a place to start.

## **IV. ESSENTIAL FINDINGS**

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This section will present the basic conclusions of the CDA assessment team regarding the LINC'S Program. We start with a reiteration and discussion of the program's goals and objectives, followed by a reflection on the strengths and weaknesses of the main program elements.

### **The LINC'S Program in Relation to Its Objectives and Expected Results**

The LINC'S Program proposal to USAID (and other subsequent documents reporting on the program) articulated several objectives, including those restated under the subtopics below. Taken together, these represent an ambitious set of goals—more than a single program might accomplish in a relatively short period! [We might note, in passing, that CDA's Reflecting on Peace Practice Program (RPP) has discovered a common deficiency in peacebuilding program planning: broadly stated goals that claim (hope for) too much and expected results that are difficult to measure.]

#### **1. Strengthen and Expand Constituencies for Peace**

In this area, the program objectives were to:

- Increase the effectiveness of peace-building constituencies at the local, district and country level.
- Strengthen democratic civil leadership with a vested interest in peace.
- Increase quantity, quality and timely delivery of communication on issues affecting national to local peace building processes.
- Build capacity for local organizations to advocate for responsive national policies that contribute to peace.
- Provide logistical support for advocacy and collaboration.
- Assist community leadership groups to build inclusive and transparent management.

The CPCs may consider themselves to be, broadly speaking, peace constituencies, but they are not mobilized to advocate for peace. Rather, they are working—effectively in many cases—on local and interpersonal issues of conflict. They are not, as far as we could see, engaging in advocacy activities either locally, at the county level, and certainly not at the national level. The team did hear repeated support for peace, exhaustion with the war process, a willingness to put the awful experiences of the past fourteen years behind them, a real desire to avoid further violence, and a pragmatic desire to get on with life. In other words, there is strong public support for peace—but there is no identifiable civic organization or network of organizations advocating for it. And the CPCs do not appear to be filling this role. Furthermore, it is important to note that, alongside the verbal support for peace, we observed stark separation of populations along ethnic lines and explicit refusal to allow Mandingos to return to their lands, and heard persistent expressions of hostility based on war experiences.

The Forums, however, represent the potential for building a durable peace in Lofa County, supported by influential people both living in the county and in Monrovia. In a sense, then

the Forums may be, slowly and indirectly, developing a peace constituency, though not by that name. If the Forum process succeeds at both the community-by-community and county levels, and if an institutional base can be found to continue support for an ongoing long-term reconciliation process, a truly influential peace constituency could emerge.

The program objectives stated above, although not clearly defined, also call for strengthening democratic and civic leadership and inclusive and transparent management. The overall LINCS Program effort, including all of the training programs for the CPCs and others in leadership, has certainly injected new concepts and skills into the communities. In one community, a young man volunteered the statement, “true leaders do not seize power,” as something he had learned in the leadership workshop.

However, the CDA team also directly observed the dynamics among participants in the interviews (most of which were in groups). We saw little evidence that the workshops have resulted in obvious democratic practices, either within the CPCs or in the larger communities. Rather, participants frequently interrupted and intimidated each other and engaged in heated arguments. These encounters went beyond healthy debate and were usually unproductive and discouraging of frank exchanges.

On the other hand, the experiences of war and displacement, participation in programs in refugee/IDP camps, and the emergence of younger leadership seem to foreshadow a trend towards more democratic and transparent processes, as people’s expectations of their leadership have shifted. These changes cannot be attributed to the LINCS Program, although, again the training programs and some contribution from the CPCs may support movement in that direction.

While it is too early to know for certain, the Forums may induce changes in leadership of some of the communities—either changes in the approaches to problem solving by individual leaders, or changes in the expectations of community members towards their leadership. If new agreements support coexistence, towns may seek leaders who are best able to implement such concepts. The agreements themselves, if well implemented, may also reinforce community desires for peace. Finally, if the Forum processes include effective elements of reconciliation, they may strengthen the notion that peaceful coexistence is even possible among formerly hostile groups.

In sum, the LINCS Program has laid the groundwork for addressing these objectives. However, additional work is needed to consolidate the introduction of new concepts in leadership and to truly mobilize constituencies for peace advocacy in the County, and a number of specific components need to be realized in the Forums for their contribution to become significant.

## **2. Mitigating Conflict and Violence**

In this area, the program objectives were to:

- Build and/or support local and county capacity for ongoing conflict mitigation, adjudication and peace building activities.

- Prepare communities and leadership for potential outbreaks of conflict and deal with the after effects of violent acts.
- Promote dialogues and collaboration among contentious ethnic groups.
- Build local capacity for reconciliation of all returnees.
- Assist democratic leadership to build skills and confidence in effectively managing community security and in reducing the impact of conflict.
- Build the effectiveness of traditional and culturally appropriate mechanisms for reconciliation.

An ultimate conclusion about the effectiveness of the CPCs turns on the expectations about what they could/should be handling. As noted above, the CPCs represent a new community-based mechanism for handling a wide range of conflicts. With the exception of land conflicts and the deeper inter-ethnic tensions, the CPCs are currently capable, in many cases, of addressing most of the conflicts that arise at the community level, promote communications among parties, and perform a referral function for cases they cannot handle. CHF staff also report that the CPCs are able calm down volatile situations and did address land issues earlier during the transition period. Some town chiefs refer cases to the CPCs, and some CPCs ask town chiefs to refer cases to them. There is wide variation in the relationships between the chiefs, representing the traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, and the CPCs.

Therefore, the capacity of the CPCs could be argued two ways. On the one hand, with considerable variation from community to community, they are addressing most community-level conflicts. On the other hand, as noted in Section III, they are not currently dealing with those conflicts most likely to result in widespread violence. The CPCs' positive and helpful role and experience needs to be expanded and strengthened to achieve a social institution closer to the stated program objectives.

The CPCs appear also to have played a useful role in helping to smooth the process of return for refugees and IDPs. CHF staff report that CPCs handled land disputes during the transition period. Some of the CPCs are also playing an early intervention role—responding to rumor and information about impending violence. This role could be further reinforced, particularly as it becomes clearer how the CPC are to relate to other authorities (town chiefs, police, government officials, etc.).

As regards the objectives calling for dialogue and collaboration among contending ethnic groups and the application of culturally appropriate mechanisms for reconciliation, the Forums program represent the best hope for achieving these desired outcomes. If well executed, the Forums show promise for exerting a significant impact in this regard.

Considering the combined impacts of the CPCs and the Forums, the LINCS Program, as a whole, is achieving progress towards the objectives stated above.

### 3. Address Causes and Consequences of Conflict

In this area, the program objectives were to:

- Facilitate peaceful resolution of property and resource claims, perceived war crimes.
- Build Lofa-based peace constituencies' ability to affect national decisions on resource allocation, management of extractive resources.
- Build Lofa-based peace constituencies' ability to affect national decisions on composure and civil leadership of reconstituted military and/or police.
- Build number and quality of psycho-social assistance mechanisms in Lofa.

So far, the LINCS Program is not addressing the peaceful resolution of property and resource claims or perceived war crimes. Interpersonal issues regarding property hidden as people fled the area have been handled by the CPCs, but as discussed already, the CPCs have not so far dealt with more serious land and property disputes—and certainly not war crimes.

In reality, the picture is quite mixed regarding land disputes. We found some CPCs that claimed they were handling land disputes, but when we probed further about exactly what they did, it turned out that they played a role in identifying the issue and bringing the appropriate authorities (usually the town chief and/or landlord) forward to make decisions. Some CPCs apparently handled house site and/or farm land issues by themselves in the earlier period, but we did not find a lot of evidence that they are currently playing this role.

The team did hear accounts of trauma healing workshops, held under the LINCS Program, in which individuals were able to recount their personal experiences of atrocities—and some level of interpersonal reconciliation took place, when people who had participated in such activities were present. One woman interviewed in Voinjama District said that she faced a young man who had killed her son and told him, “You must disarm your heart.” So far, these kinds of healing encounters are not a regular occurrence in the county, however. The LINCS Program has cooperated, at least in its early stages, with other programs working on trauma healing.

CHF staff also described the performances by the Flomo Theatre group in the area, arranged through the LINCS Program. These performances brought together up to a thousand community members and addressed, through drama, issues regarding ex-combatant reintegration and reconciliation. In these public settings, community members were able to reach out to each other and shout out how they should forgive each other and move on. This type of dialogue in a public setting was apparently a rare occurrence.<sup>17</sup>

As mentioned elsewhere, the community Forums may be able to incorporate some elements of reconciliation and healing by working directly across the ethnic groups on specific issues and grievances that divide them.

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<sup>17</sup> Although these experiences were apparently rare and moving, interviewees in the communities rarely mentioned them. Even when prompted directly, interviewees only remembered them vaguely.

The CHF staff were clear that the objectives associated with national level policy advocacy have proven unrealistic, as least to date.

In sum, the LINCS Program has contributed in small ways to achievement of this set of objectives. With some rethinking and restructuring, the program has potential for making a more significant contribution.

### **Expected Results**

The LINCS Program, by achieving the three major goal areas above, was expected to show the following results by the end of the program:<sup>18</sup>

- Reduced violence in Lofa County;
- Peaceful return of internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees, and ex-combatants;
- Facilitation of reconciliation between ex-combatants and their families;
- Facilitation of reconciliation between ex-combatants and their ‘host’ communities;
- Development of Community Councils which can support reintegration, act to resolve disputes and adjudicate perceived crimes, and mobilize the community to work towards peace;
- Community Councils trained and active in sensitizing the community to addressing the special issues regarding returned ex-combatants;
- Increased participation by all community members in community decision making;
- Increased peaceful interaction among diverse, sometimes contentious groups within the community;
- Increased effectiveness and organization of district and county peace constituencies; and
- Creation of a mechanism to facilitate communication between Community Councils and other leaders with UNMIL, UNCIVPOL as well as the NTGL’s new security forces.

The Expected Results presented above are, in many cases, stated in terms of activities (facilitation, training, establishment of institutions), rather than in terms of specific outcomes or impacts—what those activities or entities might accomplish. In some cases there is an implied desired outcome, such as increased participation, increased interaction, increased effectiveness. Furthermore, there is no baseline data that would enable determination of whether the expected outcomes had occurred.

Nevertheless, it is possible to extrapolate a set of specific outcomes that the program was striving towards. These are presented below in present tense, positive terms, along with possible measures offered for illustrative purposes. In most cases, these are restatements of the Expected Results above in a somewhat different format. Note that these are still goals—and the use of the present tense is a convention in goal statements and does not imply that the aims have been achieved. We discuss the extent to which these have been accomplished in Lofa County below.

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<sup>18</sup> From the LINCS program description (Attachment 2 of the Cooperative Agreement).

We have taken the time to offer these restatements and possible measures below because these represent the kinds of things that the CDA assessment team tried to explore during visits and interviews in the communities and interviews with officials. Clearly the team did not attempt to gather information on all of these factors, which would have been an impossible task. However, especially in those areas where CHF staff indicated that they thought the program had achieved some impact, the team tried to find out what results could be observed. Community interviews touched on each of these topics to some extent, although not in equal measure. (Number 7, for instance, was not a major focus, since CHF indicated that they had not expended a lot of program resources in that area.)

1. Lofa County communities experience low levels of violence. [Possible measures: number of violent incidents, murders, attacks, intimidation; rate of calls upon UNMIL or Liberian police/security forces to intervene in violent situations; increase in the sense of security among all groups.]
2. Communities have accomplished the peaceful reintegration of returnees and ex-combatants. [Possible measures: percentage of families returned to communities; proportion of different ethnic groups returned; active participation of ex-combatants in community life/work/activities; housing and land use patterns based on ethnicity or other factors; peaceful resolution of competing claims for land; positive attitudes towards people perceived as “different” in some way; growing acceptance of all as Liberians.]
3. Contending groups (ex-combatants/families, other groups undefined) have achieved reconciliation (undefined) and interact regularly and peacefully. [Possible measures: observed “normal” interactions among groups formerly hostile; willingness of victims and perpetrators to place past history of violence behind them; open expressions of regret and/or forgiveness; evidence of joint rebuilding and/or reparation activities; spaces established and used for recounting difficult personal histories from the war; active trauma healing programs used by all groups.]
4. Disputes at the community level are handled effectively and without resort to violence. [Possible measures: documentation of the number of disputes, types, parties and issues; tracking of the processes used to attempt resolution; rate of successful resolution by the varied mechanisms; durability of settlements; “satisfaction” surveys among disputants.]
5. All constituencies have a voice in community decision making. [Possible measures: attendance by various groups (young/old, women/men, X/Y ethnic groups, etc.) in community meetings; tracking of who speaks how often and with what force; who is listened to and by whom; tracking of decisions actually made by whom and taking into account what input.]
6. There is a mobilized, visible and credible constituency for peace. [Possible measures: there are groups who self-identify openly as peace advocates; individuals representing such groups speak up and/or intervene regarding potentially volatile issues; locally-initiated activities bring people together across various divides for dialogue and/or joint work.]

7. Community members are in regular positive communication with security forces. [Possible measures: how secure do people feel by their own report and why; numbers of meetings between community members and security forces; number of issues/problems brought to security forces; positive attitudes by community towards security forces and vice versa (by survey); rate of local people signing up to serve in forces.]

From our community visits and from discussions with local officials and UNMIL personnel, the CDA team feels that numbers 1, 2 and 4 above have taken place in Lofa County. That is, there is a relatively low level of violence, people have returned and been reintegrated successfully *within* their own ethnic groups, but not *across/between* different ethnic groups. Most disputes are handled nonviolently, so far. While the LINCS Program may have contributed to these results, it would be difficult to attribute these outcomes to LINCS activities. The Community Peace Councils appear to have facilitated smooth returns and are handling interpersonal disputes. In addition, they may have, through their very existence, promoted an atmosphere of conflict resolution and problem solving without resort to violence.

In our view, the reconciliation called for in #3 has not been accomplished in Lofa County, as yet. In Zeawordemai a group of women and youth asserted that they would “never forgive, no matter what.” They recalled that 500 boys were killed by Ulimo on Black Monday, an incident still on their minds many years later. This ongoing pain and hostility reinforces the need for the CHF Forums program, which has promise for making a significant contribution in this area.

Based on our observations in the field, # 5 is problematic. Traditional forms of leadership appear to be in full operation, with elders, town chiefs and landlords firmly in control. Women and youth are formally represented in town discussions, but their voices are not strong. Minority groups do not speak up readily. Clearly more work is needed in this area.

In relation to #6, as already noted, there is strong public sentiment in favor of peace, but no active and visible constituency openly advocating for it—and there is persistent hostility and tension, unresolved incidents from the war, and obvious separation along ethnic lines.

As regards #7, in repeated comments, communities attributed security to the presence of UNMIL—and appreciated their role. We also heard reports of communities calling on UNMIL to intervene when situations seemed to be getting out of hand. One group said that they called UNMIL right away when they saw a group of young men fighting. Another called upon UNMIL when hunters in the bush frightened people by shooting too close to towns.

The team also heard reports of young men (some ex-combatants) volunteering for the new Liberian army or for the renewed police—an indication that communities favor these revived national institutions and have hope that they will be able to guarantee peace after UNMIL withdraws. It is hard to attribute this situation to the LINCS Program, although one set of workshops under the program addressed community-police relations.

## **Summary of Program Strengths and Weaknesses**

The following is a summary of strengths and weakness of the Community Peace Councils and National and County Level Forums, which we have directly addressed in the Recommendations presented in Section VI.

### **Community Peace Councils**

#### ***Strengths:***

The CDA heard from two different community members that the CPCs are a “river between two fires” (from which we have taken the title for this report). We take this as an appreciation for the effective role the CPCs play in handling local disputes.

- The program has created the foundation for longer term, larger scale dialogue processes.
- The program informed communities about conflict and basic problem solving approaches.
- CPCs provide a low-cost mechanism for handling local-level (mainly) interpersonal disputes.
- CPCs provided an effective dispute resolution mechanism during the critical transition time of the return and reintegration of IDPs/refugees, handling interpersonal disputes and, in some cases, land issues.
- CPCs have provided some forms of leadership in communities, supplementing (and not replacing) traditional authorities.
- CPCs are an appropriate mechanism that do not contradict existing and historical structures that do work.
- The program introduced key leaders to a variety of important skills and concepts that can be useful for any future development and/or conflict resolution programming.
- CPCs have provided a useful entry point to communities for other important programs (e.g., Land Mine Action, domestic violence, trauma healing).
- The CPCs, with additional attention and resources, constitute a possible new permanent social institution for first level dispute resolution.

#### ***Weaknesses/Critiques:***

- CPCs are currently out of date, in terms of their representative function and credibility, since they were formed in 2004, and many more people have now returned to the communities.
- While the CPCs members have received at least four training programs, there has been little direct follow up to see whether/how people are applying those skills and concepts—CPCs are left to function on their own without direct support or mentoring, such as sitting in on actual dispute resolution processes or regular CPC meetings to discuss cases.

- The main contact between CHF and the CPCs is a monthly visit in which the group reports on their activities.<sup>19</sup>
- There is no independent verification regarding the actual roles that CPCs are playing (types of cases handled, processes used, style of mediation/arbitration employed, rate of settlement, acceptance of any settlement, durability of agreements, etc.).<sup>20</sup>
- CPC members feel burdened by their role, in terms of the time requirements without compensation—which has raised questions about the sustainability of the model, as interest may wane without some better reward system.
- In many cases, only a few CPC members are truly active.
- CPCs are not able to contradict traditional authorities—and in some cases town chiefs, elders and other leaders are fully involved with the CPCs (which has both positive and negative effects!).<sup>21</sup>
- Generally, the CPCs reflect the same prejudices and dominant/subordinate patterns of their social context: minority groups in the towns are also minority groups on the CPCs, and have no stronger voice there than in other settings.
- The CPCs are mostly dealing with interpersonal disputes that the town chief is happy for someone else to handle; more serious issues, including land disputes, are handled through other more traditional means. (Whether this is a weakness or not depends on what the groups are expected to do.)
- CPCs are not equipped to address deeper issues of inter-group reconciliation or more difficult types of disputes, and are not used directly to support Forum activities, such as following up, monitoring compliance, helping to negotiate actual implementation, etc..
- There is widespread confusion about the real function/purpose of the CPCs (livelihood project implementers, dispute resolvers, the “CHF group,” etc.), and many community members (perhaps mostly recent returnees) are not aware of the services available.
- The CDA teams found that some CPCs appear to be inactive, while there is open conflict among CPC members in other cases.

## **National and County-Level Forums**

### ***Strengths:***

- National forums represent a potential for deeper resolution and reconciliation of inter-ethnic conflicts.
- The Forums offer relatively neutral outside facilitation that enables contending groups to address sensitive issues.

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<sup>19</sup> Records regarding each CPC and its cases are kept in the CHF field offices. The CDA team reviewed the files in the Zorzor office and found that records there were fairly complete through February 2006, but were quite incomplete after that.

<sup>20</sup> CHF records rely on accurate reporting by the CPCs themselves. While the groups have no particular reason to distort the facts, they may not fully understand terminology—and CHF staff may not either. For instance, the records report that many cases are “mediated,” yet it is also clear that CPCs are almost all using an arbitration model. Sorting that out would require direct observation by an informed person.

<sup>21</sup> Many CPC members were elected/selected because they were respected members of the community. In some cases, this means they are part of the town power structures, not an alternative to them. Other CPC members were simply those present in the early days of returns—and as traditional authorities have returned, their influence has diminished, in some cases.

- The Forum program is able to bring together all of the key players, including influential people from Monrovia and Guinea.
- The Forums support the negotiation of agreements between conflicting groups, that can serve as the basis for resolving many specific disputes, especially over land ownership/use.
- The Forums can help to develop a model of inter-group dialogue and negotiation that would be applicable elsewhere in Liberia.
- The Forums are organized in a way that links national, regional and local levels regarding inter-ethnic tensions.

***Weakness/Critiques:***

- At present the CHF Forum program is understaffed and overstretched, trying to organize processes in too many communities at the same time. High quality processes in a few places may be better than poorly implemented processes in many.
- The program is not benefiting directly from previous experiences of dialogue and negotiation in Liberia, during earlier periods or by other organizations.
- Previous dialogue/negotiation efforts by CHF and its partners (in 2004-5) resulted in formal agreements, but these were not written down, nor was there adequate follow up.
- Formal agreements appear to be at the level of broad principles only—more concrete and specific actions and an implementation plan are not addressed. For instance, in Ziggida, local people said that a Forum had negotiated an agreement, but tensions arose again, partly because the agreements were never implemented.
- Current staff do not have the time to provide sufficient follow-up to the current round of dialogue processes.
- In the long-term, this kind of effort needs a sustainable Liberian institutional base.
- There is not always good communication to community members about what the purpose and result of the Forums are. Community members seldom mentioned the Forums in interviews, and in two communities their impression was that the Forums were “just another workshop.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> The current round of Forums are apparently making more specific plans for reporting back to the communities.

## **V. REFLECTIONS ON KEY QUESTIONS**

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This section addresses a series of issues raised by CHF in the Terms of Reference and/or USAID. In some cases, the comments here are quite brief, as the issue has already been addressed elsewhere.

### **The Security Dimension**

We have already commented on our perceptions regarding the current security situation in Lofa County, which we have characterized as a “fragile peace.” Local people and CHF’s implementing partners and staff all assert that old command structures, if not formally in place, still exist informally, and some armed groups are rumored to exist in Guinea.

The CDA team did explore people’s perception of security—whether they felt secure and why, whether this had changed over the past year or more and why. Generally people did feel fairly secure, and attributed this to mainly UNMIL. Many community residents mentioned that they hope that UNMIL’s peace keeping mission will be extended until an effective security system (police and military) is set up in Liberia. Residents also mentioned the formation of the new government; there is a lot of faith in the new government’s ability to really change things. As indicators of security, people pointed to the ability to travel and go to market without fear, the resurgence of economic activity, the widespread (although incomplete) return of IDPs and refugees, rebuilding of homes and other structures, and the functioning of schools.

### **Decision Making, Leadership and Democracy**

As noted earlier in this report, traditional structures and styles of leadership are reasserting themselves in Lofa County. On the other hand, there are forces of change at work, and there may be opportunities for change. CHF can build on the training programs offered through the LINCS Program by reinforcing the skills and concepts and accompanying community leaders as they try to apply them. In the Recommendation section we discuss several options for the future role of the CPCs—and several of those options would lend themselves to supporting further community leadership development.

### **Access to Justice: Civil Adjudication and Mediation Processes**

People in the communities feel alienated from the official justice system, finding it universally corrupt, slow and expensive. One interviewee said, “There is no justice.” This is one of the reasons they appreciate the CPCs, limited as they are. If the CPCs can be strengthened, they have the potential for expanding their role to a more regularized/institutionalized community mechanism for dispute resolution. Further cooperation with the ABA program is one avenue for supporting the CPCs, and other suggestions are offered in the Recommendations section.

In most communities, even where the CPCs were quite active, the traditional conflict resolution systems are functioning, especially for the more serious issues, such as land

disputes. Some issues are taken up by a quarter chief (sub-area of a town) and referred from there to the town chief, elders and paramount chief. Some people mentioned a role for the District Commissioner as well.

If that route fails, then the issue is taken to the court system, as problematic as it is. If the issue is a land dispute, the landlord (a traditional hereditary role) is seen as the final decision maker at the local level, although his decision can be appealed to the court system. We found that the town chiefs are often referring cases to the CPCs and the CPCs are either referring cases to the chief or asking for permission to handle cases. Decisions by the CPC are sometimes reviewed by the town chief and/or elders.

All of these processes use an arbitration model in which the authority (CPC, chief, etc.) hears from the parties and renders a decision, which the parties can accept or reject. Only recently has a more mediating (i.e., non-decision making) role been introduced through the ABA/CHF training program.

### **Deeper Conflict Resolution: Truth, Justice and Tolerance**

At present, the various ethnic groups harbor deep resentments, distrust, fear and even hatred, as a result of actions that the groups (or their representatives) took against each other during the war. If the recently launched national truth and reconciliation process can reach to the local level, it might have a beneficial effect. However, additional mechanisms will be needed at the local level to supplement whatever processes are undertaken nationally—and it is also important that local people be given a chance to participate (testify) at the national process.

Meanwhile, as noted, the Forums provide an opportunity to explore deeper reconciliation on a community-by-community basis. It will be important to engage in ongoing reflection on what is working and not—and document the process so that others can benefit from this experience.

### **The Role of Traditional Reconciliation Methods**

We did not uncover a lot of information about traditional methods of reconciliation. However, we did hear cynicism regarding empty ceremonies that have not been preceded by serious negotiation and reconciliation. Thus traditional rites can be (mis)used to gloss over real problems. But they have their place in long-term committed processes of conflict transformation and reconciliation.

We did find, however, that traditional culture—which is a tightly guarded secret—is an unspoken yet powerful force in the conflicts. Secret societies play a role that is only dimly understood by outsiders (including our team!) or even by local people who are not part of them. In some cases, traditional practices (visits by the “devil” for instance) seem to be used to control and intimidate minority groups. Important aspects of the conflicts in Lofa County involve such traditional practices. Therefore, local religious leaders will have to be involved in any successful reconciliation efforts.

## **Linkages between Livelihood and Conflict Resolution Processes**

While community members expressed appreciation for the LINCS livelihood programs, they have also caused some problems. In some cases, the livelihood efforts have helped CPC members who have not otherwise been compensated for their work. However, even though the livelihood projects are not at the core of the program, they have absorbed enormous amounts of time, energy, attention and resources. As far as the CDA team could tell, CHF staff have been almost exclusively focused on the livelihood projects and community center construction in recent months, and have reduced support for the CPCs in their conflict resolution role.

In addition, there is confusion in the communities (and in the CPCs) about the role of the CPCs and the Project Management Committees. In some cases community and CPC members could not distinguish the two groups. Despite written agreements (contracts) for the livelihood projects, community members appeared quite confused about who would benefit and in what proportion from the projects.

## **VI. RECOMMENDATIONS**

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The full CDA team met in Monrovia to develop an initial set of recommendations—which were then presented and discussed with the CHF Country Director. The recommendations below are only slightly different in substance and include explanatory text not included with the originals presented in Monrovia.

The first section of recommendations addresses the overall CHF program. We are assuming that conflict resolution and peacebuilding will remain at least one major program focus. Conditions in Lofa County certainly support a continuing emphasis on reconciliation and peacebuilding. Subsequent sections address the two major peacebuilding efforts.

### **General Program Recommendations**

1. Adopt narrower goals/objectives, expected results and indicators.

The LINCS Program goals and objectives were extremely broad, making it difficult to determine the extent to which the program was achieving the outcomes desired. Future program efforts would benefit from tighter goals and objectives aimed at accomplishing a few key things well. It also should prove possible to articulate more specific indicators for such objectives. As one step in program planning, it would also be important to make the program's Theories of Change explicit and to test whether they are valid in the situation.

2. Develop a stronger long-term plan, with associated staffing and structure of CHF programs.

The LINCS Program was undertaken during a transition period, when swift action was warranted. Future programming can and should take a longer view, and build on the areas of considerable success of the program so far. Staff should be recruited and trained with the expectation that they will be retained for an extended period, and their skills should be keyed to the specific program goals. In particular, greater staff diversity (reflecting the ethnic makeup of Lofa County)<sup>23</sup> and more emphasis on conflict resolution skills would strengthen the program.

3. Create better communication and cooperation among CHF program components—less compartmentalization.

The CDA team found that CHF team members were not always aware of what other program elements were doing or why. The Forum program does not build on the CPCs directly. The livelihood staff are not fully informed about the Forum effort, and do not seem interested in further development of the CPCs.

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<sup>23</sup> However, CHF cannot assume that simply by hiring from all ethnic groups that they will benefit inter-group relations. CHF can model fairness and equality in their manner of working—and avoid mirroring current social inequalities in society.

CHF should ensure that all staff understand the overall program and how CHF intends to achieve them, in their own area and other areas. Although the CDA team may have visited the field at a particularly hectic time (many CHF staff were preoccupied with completing certain tasks before specific deadlines), the interviews with staff indicated that some were not fully aware of how the overall program fit together—how the CPCs, livelihood projects and Forums are related. The overall program would be strengthened by a greater sense of team, in which everyone knows their own role, the functions performed by other units, and how it all fits together.

4. Develop closer cooperative working relations with other NGOs working on similar/allied issues in Lofa County.

Whether it is deserved or not, CHF is perceived by other NGOs and UN staff working in Lofa County as going it alone. CHF has made efforts in the past to cooperate more fully, but currently the program would benefit from closer ties, especially with those groups that have related programs. We are not suggesting coordination for its own sake, but rather carefully determining where linked efforts will enhance effectiveness.

5. Provide for explicit follow up to training in concepts and skills: tracking of indicators that the training is being used; coaching in skills application support for desired changed behaviors, etc.

CHF/LINCS and its implementing partners have invested considerable time and energy providing training to the CPCs and other leaders in Lofa County. However, in most cases there is no follow up to support training participants in the application of the skills and concepts presented in workshops. Received wisdom in the professional training field indicates that a high percentage of training is wasted when there is no system for supporting and coaching trainees. CHF should adopt a strategy for reviewing and reinforcing the skills and concepts already introduced, and for accompanying people who are trying to use them, in order to mentor/coach in a way that will improve decision making and conflict resolution efforts.

6. Establish a more robust M&E plan, including baseline data, specific indicators, a tracking and reporting system.

In 2004, it was difficult to collect baseline information in Lofa County. The situation is much more stable at present, and a full monitoring and evaluation plan can be implemented, including specification of indicators that will be tracked. Those indicators will be most useful if baseline information can be collected on them.

The CDA team also came away with the impression that CHF field staff are not sure why they are collecting information about what the CPCs are doing—and how this might inform their own work. Rather, the information is fed upward in the organization for inclusion in quarterly reports. It also appears that the information-gathering process has deteriorated during recent months, as the priority was placed on completing certain deliverables. CHF should develop a system for collecting and analyzing data from its

programs, and use the results as feedback to the program that also informs mid-course changes.

## **Community Peace Councils**

Section IV above on Essential Findings summarized the strengths and weaknesses of the CPC program element—which already raised questions about possible future directions.

The CPC program has made a significant contribution during the past two years—and the program was appropriate for that transition period. The situation has changed considerably. Therefore, CHF needs to rethink the structures and approaches for this program component, even if this is only one of several different major program elements. The CDA team recommends that CHF perform a fundamental program redesign, building on the best elements of the past two years, and preparing for follow-up efforts.

We don't have a clear recommendation regarding the exact direction the program should take, but we do see a range of possible options to be considered.

Consider the following ***OPTIONS*** for the CPCs: *(not all mutually exclusive)*

1. ***Phase them out.*** Consider that the CPCs were a good mechanism for a transitional time, but that continued effort is not appropriate.
2. ***Transition them into development committees.*** As CHF undertakes other more development-oriented activities, build on the relationships established through the CPCs as the base for that work, but discontinue their conflict resolution role.
3. ***Wait and see.*** Merge with traditional mechanisms for dispute resolution. Watch what happens with the new government in relation to base level justice. Explore a role for the CPCs in terms of decision making and local level dispute resolution, if appropriate.
4. ***Explore a role in relation to the TRC process.*** The CPCs could play a role in identifying local people to testify, and to participate in County-level activities. CHF could facilitate such participation with transport and other support. The CPCs might also play a role (with others) in local-level truth and reconciliation activities.
5. ***Conduct a participatory process to determine the future shape, function, etc.*** Let the communities themselves decide the future of the CPCs. This might lead to a phasing out (#1 above), serious investment (#6) or some combination.
6. ***Make a serious investment in full development of the CPC model.*** Figure out how to transform the present structures into a sustainable community-level mechanism that is fully owned by the communities and performs a needed dispute resolution function.

Numbers 1 - 5 above are fairly self evident. Number 6 requires a bit more explanation—and some further specific recommendations.

## **Redevelopment & Strengthening of the CPCs**

Throughout the report, we have indicated ways in which the CPCs have contributed, and some ways in which they miss the mark. We believe that the CPCs show potential for playing a more important role, but to realize that potential will require revision of the concept and further investment in the people and necessary structures.

### **a. Clarify the model and functions.**

Make a basic choice regarding the appropriate model and function of the CPCs for the future and secure buy-in from other authorities (town chiefs, Superintendent, district authorities, appropriate national ministries, etc.)

There are many variants on the community peace council model, each implying different roles and functions, membership, relation to other authorities and structures (such as the justice system). Some of these variations are discussed more fully (yet still briefly) in Appendix C, including inter-ethnic councils, community mediation panels, a land dispute resolution mechanism, and community councils.

Depending on which model/function is chosen, the CPCs might have quite different membership, training needs, etc. For instance, the inter-ethnic council model would imply equal membership by ethnic group, and the role of the group would be to monitor relationships among the tribal groups, calling joint meetings for problem solving as needed.<sup>24</sup> This is quite different from the violence-prevention function of the community council, which keeps alert to rumors of impending violence, and uses a council widely representative of women, men, elders, youth, police, and local government to initiate early intervention. Still another model, a local land dispute resolution group, requires more technical knowledge, and works closely with a land commission or ministry. Of course, these models are not mutually exclusive, and many different combinations and variations could be devised.

If CHF is moving forward with the CPCs (whether called by that name or another), this fundamental choice of model and function must be made. Who should be consulted and/or decide that model/function is an important question. Local authorities (County Superintendent), Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Justice, and people in the communities themselves are some of the groups that might be consulted. If time, energy and resources are going to be invested in a future function, it will be important to develop wide agreement that the groups should exist and what they are expected to do.

### **b. Recharter the CPCs.**

Clarify the roles and functions of the CPC through participatory development of a simple charter (composition, functions, types of cases in/out, operating principles...).

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<sup>24</sup> Inter-ethnic councils can be structured or composed in many ways. Generally, though, efforts usually try to equalize membership, rather than reflect the proportions in society. Otherwise, minority groups remain minorities, even in an entity designed to improve relationships. If the dynamics of dominance are carried into such a group, it is less likely to succeed in promoting better interactions.

As we have noted previously, there is a lot of confusion, even among CPC members themselves, about what the functions of the CPCs are. If the CPCs are to continue, one way to clarify their role would be to convene a representative group of CPC members who would, first, discuss the ways the CPCs have functioned best, and second, outline the future functions for the councils. The same group could also discuss a “charter” that would define membership, means of election, criteria for membership (issues of diversity of gender, age, ethnicity, etc.), the types of cases the CPCs would be empowered to handle, relationship to other authorities, and so forth.<sup>25</sup> The charter could also lay out the principles and ethics for the functioning of the CPCs, such as impartiality and confidentiality. [Note: Suggestion b) could be done without a). Or b) could be undertaken after a), in order to determine more detailed parameters within the basic model chosen.]

**c. Restructure and “re-elect” the councils.**

Since most of the CPCs were formed in 2004 or early 2005, they were selected by the communities members who were present at that time—and many more have returned since. It is widely acknowledged, including by CHF, that the groups need to be reconstituted, if only to gain the credibility of being elected by the current community members.<sup>26</sup>

If the groups are going to be reconstituted, consistent procedures for election/selection should be clearly laid out, possibly using a process designed by local people as suggested in b) above. New selection should await the redefinition of the role, since that should guide choices of community members to serve.

**d. Complete the mediation training.**

The ABA mediation training model (which CHF helped develop) would be appropriate and useful under most of the models and functions discussed. The training might need to be further adapted somewhat, depending on the functions of the redefined CPCs. It should be noted that, in the view of CHF staff, the CPCs are currently using basically an arbitration model consistent with traditional practice in the area. That is, the CPC members hear from the parties and offer a solution—which the parties can accept or not. In some cases, the “decision” is referred to the town chief or elders for approval or enforcement. So far, then the CPCs do not provide a different kind of procedure, rather they are more immediately available and cheaper than going to the town chief or magistrate.

[CHF has an ambitious schedule of training planned for the next four-five months, training hundreds of people. This should be slowed down, awaiting a firm decision about the future role and function of the CPCs. If the CPCs are also reconstituted through a new election/selection, the new members will have to be trained as well—again arguing for slowing the training process down.]

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<sup>25</sup> As many community members are illiterate, strategies would be needed to cope with that reality.

<sup>26</sup> The CDA team also found that the process for designating the current CPCs varied widely. In some communities, they were selected by the elders and town chief, after discussion in a community meeting. Formal voting election seems to have been the exception, rather than the rule.

**e. Follow up training with direct coaching and mentoring.**

Experience shows that training in new personal skills is usually ineffective unless a) participants have an immediate opportunity to apply the skills with support to do so; and b) benefit from coaching/mentoring from a person more skilled than they are. If the CPCs are expected to function truly as mediators, the mediation training will not be enough. This has been proven over and over in the U.S. context and elsewhere—and there is no reason to believe that the situation in Liberia is different.<sup>27</sup> In addition, the mediation model included in the ABA/CHF training contradicts the traditional modes of conflict resolution in Liberia, emphasizing a neutral/impartial mediator and a confidential process. (Indeed this model, widely used in the U.S., is also a challenge for most Americans!) If we really expect Liberians to apply this model of mediation, coaching is required. If so, then that may be an argument for reducing the total numbers of mediators (CPC members...) in order to focus on quality, rather than quantity.

**f. Establish a better tracking and monitoring mechanisms**

The program would benefit from better information regarding how and where CPC's exactly resolve disputes, settlement rates, methods used, adaptation of models/methods, learning and feedback.

So far as the CDA team could tell, CHF staff members do not observe the CPCs when they actually attempt to resolve local conflicts.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, there is a gap in understanding how they are functioning, what methods they are using, whether concepts and skills introduced in training are applied, and so forth. Several of the recommendations above suggest that CHF needs staff in the field who have skills in conflict resolution (mediation, negotiation, reconciliation) and are prepared to work more directly and consistently with the CPCs, monitor their progress, and keep consistent records.

**g. Solve the compensation issue**

CPC members mentioned the lack of compensation in almost every conversation with the CDA team. This is a huge issue for the sustainability of this community institution. Clearly a first step will be to gain greater community ownership of a dispute resolution (or other) function that they truly value. With that community ownership, it may be possible to devise a system of in-kind payment to CPC members, through community labor donated to their farming or other mechanisms. This is an issue for many NGOs all over Liberia—and would benefit from coordination, at least within Lofa County, as the strategies of one NGO will affect the others.

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<sup>27</sup> The main author of this report, Peter Woodrow, was a mediation trainer in the U.S. and in various international locations for more than ten years, and speaks from personal experience.

<sup>28</sup> Apparently one CHF staff person was previously placed in the field and worked more closely with the CPCs. That staff person now works from Monrovia and has little opportunity to monitor CPCs functions or to support them.

**h. Seriously reduce the number of members.**

As already noted, it may prove helpful to reduce the total number of CPC members—to focus on quality, allow for coaching/mentoring, reduce the compensation burden, and, under some models, equalize the participation from different ethnic groups. Of course, the number of members should be driven by the function(s) of the councils. In line with g. above, if there were fewer members, it would be possible to increase a focus on developing greater professionalism. Another strategy would be to concentrate on high priority communities (perhaps the flashpoint ones) or those CPCs/individuals that are most effective.

**i. Develop (with ABA?) a resource center in Lofa County** that offers resources, support, technical assistance.

Depending on the model/function, it may prove effective to establish a resource center in Lofa County that provides ongoing support and technical assistance to the councils. Ideally, such a center would be established under an appropriate government body, in order to gain at least some assurance of sustainability.

**j. Reduce the number of CPCs by developing town clusters**

Another idea for reducing the burden of support, training and skill development would be to reduce the number of CPCs by establishing CPCs with fewer members that serve several neighboring communities.

**County and National Forums**

By our assessment, already laid out earlier in this report, the Forum effort shows great promise, and the potential for having a profound effect on inter-ethnic relations in Lofa County. The suggestions below are intended to indicate how the program could be strengthened further.

**1. Devote more staff resources: reduce dependence/burden on one person.<sup>29</sup>**

The Forums are an important and sensitive initiative. They are also a high gain and high risk venture. If they fail, for whatever reason, the effects could be widespread, souring efforts to bring contending groups together elsewhere in Lofa County and Liberia. We recommend, therefore, a deliberate pace with sufficient staff resources and time. Quality is much more important in this effort than quantity. Any success at resolving issues between ethnic groups in one community will have an effect on others nearby. Therefore it is more important to move slowly and steadily, taking on only the number of communities that can be responsibly engaged with the staff resources available. While the CDA staff were there, the two staff people working on this were functioning at their limit—and doing well. But they acknowledged that they were barely able to maintain the pace required to meet contract deliverables.

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<sup>29</sup> This recommendation, reported informally while the CDA team was still in Liberia, has been implemented already, and there are now three staff working full time on the Forums effort.

## **2. Clarify/tighten the goals and objectives of the program.**

The staff people working on this program are the most senior and most skilled at CHF, and by all reports they know what they are doing. (The CDA team did not have an opportunity to observe them at work.) We recommend that the program develop quite specific objectives for each community, based on the situation there and the potential for success. It should also be possible to identify several indicators that can be tracked for each community, in observable behavioral terms. Examples: follow-up contacts between groups on their own initiatives; agreements implemented; new problems identified and addressed independently; changes in housing/land use patterns (better mixing, more permission to return to farming, etc.).

## **3. Ensure that any agreements reached include a specific implementation plan. Develop the staff capacity to provide follow up.**

So far, agreements appear to be stated in terms of broad principles, with few specifics and no implementation plans (who will do what, when, how, with what resources, etc.). If such detailed implementation plans are negotiated and agreed, there will be increased need for CHF staff to follow up to see if the plans are carried out. Additional negotiation regarding implementation may also be required.

## **4. Find an appropriate long-term institutional base for this kind of effort, and cooperate in development of that mechanism. (Options: university, government agency, combo, free-standing reconciliation NGO, sub-group of TRC...)**

In the long term, Liberia needs the institutional capacity to undertake reconciliation at the community-level (and at other levels!), including negotiation of practical issues. CHF can be working with other groups to help develop that capacity, whether it is based in a government department or at a university or straddling the two, or another model.<sup>30</sup>

## **5. Draw on expertise/experience regarding this type of dialogue and negotiation process held by other people/organizations in Liberia. Be sure to learn from past failures and successes. Develop capacity to share lessons learned in Lofa County.**

Several people interviewed in Monrovia noted that this is not the first effort at community-level dialogue, reconciliation and negotiation in Liberia. There have been notable failures and some successes in the past—from which the CHF-led effort can learn.<sup>31</sup> At the same time, CHF should increase its ability to document, analyze and share what it is learning.

## **6. Engage Forum participants in a process to determine future directions.**

In July, CHF was completing one round of community Forums. Participants in those activities should be consulted/interviewed to determine their level of satisfaction with the process, to hear any ongoing concerns about the process, and to obtain suggestions for next steps, in relation to their particular community or for the Forum project in general.

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<sup>30</sup> UNMIL is concerned with developing this capacity and Interpeace (formerly the War-Torn Societies Project) is in the process of developing a new community dialogue effort in Liberia.

<sup>31</sup> The CDA team did not research such past efforts. CHF could start by talking with Sam Doe (formerly with WANEP) and its partners at LISTALS for references.

**7. Complete a thorough review/assessment/stocktaking at completion of the current round of Forums, using an outside independent evaluator.**

Related to number #6 above, we recommend that CHF hire a local person or team to undertake a more thorough review of the Forum program to provide specific and detailed feedback before CHF staff launch the next round of dialogues. That feedback should be the basis for a thorough internal discussion at CHF to determine how to revise the program approach to better achieve its ambitious objectives.

**8. Participate in Lofa County meetings in Monrovia** for background information about what opinion leaders and others are thinking about.

The CDA team became aware that there is a regular set of meeting of Lofa County-related people in Monrovia, most likely attended by many of the influential persons that CHF wants to engage in the dialogues. As possible and appropriate, CHF could attend these meetings to gain additional perspectives on events in Lofa County.

**9. Explore the potential roles for religious/ spiritual leaders in the Forums.**

As noted, religious leaders are an important set of stakeholders in any dialogue about community and inter-ethnic issues in Lofa County. As far as possible, they should be included in any negotiations, as they would likely invalidate any agreements touching on religious matters that did not involve them.

**10. Bring issues to closure:** don't open issues and then leave. Consider these deeper reconciliation efforts as a long-term commitment.

Related to #1 above, it is more important to bring a few things to real closure, than to address too many issues. And, if there is any question regarding future funding for the Forums component of the program, CHF should immediately scale back to what they can accomplish responsibly and fully within available resources.

**Conclusion**

The LINCS Program represents an admirable contribution to peacebuilding in Liberia. Most of the programs effects remain at the community and Lofa County level, and there is a mixed picture regarding the program's achievements against its stated objectives. However, the current progress and potential impacts from this effort have significance for the entire country, as Lofa County is well known as one of the most volatile areas that suffered most deeply during the war. Few other organizations are attempting community-by-community reconciliation in Liberia—and for this reason alone, the LINCS Program represents a valuable initiative. While we have made recommendations for program strengthening during the next phases of CHF programming, overall, we were impressed with the accomplishments to date and the dedication of local and international staff members.

## **APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

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Interviews took place along several dimensions of change that are important to peacebuilding, including: 1) sense of community security; 2) conflict resolution and management; 3) community decision-making and leadership; 4) inter-ethnic relations.

Within these lines of inquiry, we developed illustrative questions that address the six RPP Criteria of Effectiveness, among other things. These questions did not constitute a questionnaire or survey, but represented directions a conversation could take.

### **1. Sense of Community Security**

#### **LINCS issues and goals relevant to this area:**

- Improving local security
- Accelerate flow of information on national peace process
- Increase quantity, quality and timely delivery of communication on issues affecting national to local peacebuilding processes
- Prepare communities and leadership for potential outbreaks of conflict and deal with the after effects of violent acts
- Build local capacity for reconciliation of all returnees.
- Assist democratic leadership to build skills and confidence in effectively managing community security and in reducing the impact of conflict.
- Addressing substance abuse and violent behavior in ex-combatants

#### **Potential questions:**

- How secure do feel now in your community? Why/why not? What does security mean for you? What are the indicators of security?
- Has security changed in the past two or more years? How?
- Have people mostly returned to your community or not? If so, why? If not, why not? Percentage of people returned? IDPs/refugees? Have community leaders and chiefs also returned?
- Are community institutions functioning?
- Are some of your family members living elsewhere? What is the family coping strategy?
- What would make you feel more secure here in your community?
- How do questions of reconstruction and economic well-being affect the security situation?

### **2. Conflict Resolution and Management**

#### **LINCS issues and goals relevant to this area:**

- Provide technical and organizational support to the community councils and other legitimate peace constituencies on a range of challenges to peace such as: facilitating fairer and more peaceful adjudication of claims; and creating and improving reconciliation mechanisms;
- Build and/or support local and county capacity for ongoing conflict mitigation, adjudication and peace building activities;

- Build the effectiveness of traditional and culturally appropriate mechanisms for reconciliation.
- Facilitate peaceful resolution of property and resource claims, war crimes;
- Build Lofa-based peace constituencies' ability to affect national decisions on resource allocation, management of extractive resources;
- Build number and quality of psycho-social assistance mechanisms in Lofa.

**Potential questions:**

- What kinds of disputes/problems among people typically arise in your community? Have the kinds of issues changed since the war?
- In the past, how were such disputes in the community handled? Did that process work well, or were there ever problems with it?
- Are those traditional dispute resolution processes still available and functioning? Do people still use that process? Why/why not?
- Are you aware of any new mechanisms for resolving conflicts? How does that work? Are people using that way of handling problems? Is it working well—or are there problems with it?
- [If they don't mention the CPC] Do you know about the CPC and how it works? What have you heard about it?
- What kinds of conflicts has the CPC been working on? Have they been effective? Why/why not?
- Who has access to the CPC? Does everyone use it? Why/why not?
- Are there any other kinds of issues that are not handled adequately in the community—and how should they be addressed?
- What is the relationship of the CPCs to the traditional ways of handling disputes?
- Will the CPC likely continue or not?

### **3. Community Decision-making and Leadership**

**LINCS issues and goals relevant to this area:**

- Build effectiveness of peace constituencies through targeted support for:
  - Improving vertical linkages with, among others: UNMIL (security support), and national peace constituencies (engaging in national policy issues on resource extraction and the composition and responsiveness of security forces).
  - Improving horizontal linkages to like-minded Lofa County groups seeking to improve collaboration on approaches to reconciliation, security, and advocacy on key national issues.
  - Increase the effectiveness of peace-building constituencies at the local, district, and county level
  - Strengthen democratic civil leadership with a stake in peace
  - Build capacity for local organizations to advocate for responsive national policies that contribute to peace. Provide logistical support for advocacy and collaboration.
  - Assist community leadership groups to build inclusive and transparent management.

- Build Lofa-based peace constituencies' ability to affect national decisions on composure and civil leadership of reconstituted military and/or police.

**Potential questions:**

- How are decisions made in the community? Who takes part?
- Do you feel that you have a say in decisions that are made?
- Has community decision making changed since before the war? If so, how?
- Are there processes that seek input from community members regarding decisions for the whole community? How do those work? Who is involved or not involved?
- Have there been any recent changes in the ways that people participate in decision making. Are these improvements or not?
- Have the CPCs played a role in helping make decisions? What is your view of that?
- Who is taking leadership in the community for peace and reconciliation? What are they doing?
- Is your community able to (1) identify and define problems and (2) formulate and apply solutions to those problems? Is this working better or worse than before the war? Why?
- How do you get information about what is happening outside of your village?

**4. Intergroup/Inter-ethnic Relations**

**LINCS issues and goals relevant to this area:**

- Encourage civil society links across ethnic and tribal lines and build multi-ethnic organizations
- Promote dialogues and collaboration among contentious ethnic groups.

**Potential questions:**

- Are different groups in the community getting along, or are there serious tensions? Are the inter-group tensions increasing or decreasing? Why/why not?
- What kinds of disputes arise between different groups in the community? What are the usual issues?
- How are those issues between groups (as opposed to issues between individuals or families) handled? Who gets involved? How does it work out?
- Who is involved with the CPC in your community? Does this represent all of the "quarters"?
- How were the CPC members chosen? What is your view of participation from all quarters?
- Have CPCs tried to address issues or tensions among different groups in the community? How has this worked out?

## **APPENDIX B: LIST OF COMMUNITIES AND INTERVIEWS**

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### *Participating Communities (estimated # of people in parenthesis)*

#### Zorzor

1. Zorzor Town (20)
2. Borkeza (35)
3. Konia (15)
4. Boi (30)
5. Ziggida (20)
6. Nekebouzo (15)

#### Salayea

7. Salayea Town (15)
8. Telemai (15)
9. Gorlu (20)

#### Voinjama

10. Malamai (15)
11. Selegai (20)
12. Velezala (12)
13. Zawordemai (40)

### *Non-Participating Communities*

14. Bulor (Voinjama district) (12)
15. Boiboimai (Voinjama district) (20)
16. Kalimai (Zorzor district) (25)
17. Gpayaquelleh (Salayea district) (30)

### *Other Interviews*

#### Monrovia

- Brett Massey CHF Country Director ( 2 interviews)
- Albert Collee, CHF Mediation Training Specialist
- Guessippina Bonner, American Bar Association
- Tom Ewertt, Mercy Corps
- Prof. Joseph W. Geebro, Ministry of Internal Affairs – Deputy Minister
- Sharon Pauling, USAID Liberia Mission Office
- Mike Curry, LCIP
- Erin McCandless, Jonathan Andrews, UNMIL
- Forum participant from Mkapamai
- Implementing Partners:
  - NEPI: Zeleh Kolubah
  - LISTALS: Sam Hare, Jesse Karanley, Kemoh Sharif
  - FHORD: John Jallah and Thompson Keyta

#### Zorzor

- UNPOL Zorzor
- LWS: Mr. Howard LWS
- Concern
- CHF Staff:
  - Momo Kamara
  - Phillip Zoryu
  - Peter and Manyou
  - Swengbe

#### Salayea

- District Development Committee coordinator

#### Voinjama

- LRRRC
- Legal/Judicial Watch UNMIL
- IRC Field Coordinator
- IRC, Gender Based Violence Manager
- Mandingo Chief
- Magistrate
- CHF Staff: CPOs and Field Director

## **APPENDIX C: MODELS OF COMMUNITY DISPUTE RESOLUTION**

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The following are thumbnail sketches of four quite different models of community-based dispute resolution mechanisms. Each model was developed in response to different conditions and problems, and was also adapted to local cultures. The documents noted (with the exception of the video) are provided in a separate volume for use by CHF.

### **Rumor Control/Early Intervention (Wajir, Kenya)**

The Peace and Development Committee in Wajir, northeastern Kenya was initiated by local women who were tired of burying their sons as a result of inter-group fighting, often associated with cattle rustling or other illegal activities. Some of the incidents leading to deaths were caused by rumors that had no basis in the facts. The group of local women initiated dialogue with groups of youth, and with elders, local government authorities and the police. The result was the establishment of the Peace and Development Committee, which operated across a series of towns in the area, and included representatives of youth, women, elders, government administration and police. The group was trained in dispute resolution techniques, including early intervention, and was prepared to respond immediately to any hints or rumors of impending violence.

#### **Documents:**

- “Kenyan Peace Initiatives: Kenya Peace and Development Network, the Wajir Peace and Development Committee, the National Council of Churches of Kenya and the Amani People’s Theatre.” Janice Jenner & Dekha Ibrahim Abdi, RPP Case Study, 2000.
- “Kenyan Women Lead Peace Effort,” Emma Dorothy Reinhardt, *National Catholic Reporter*, April 26, 2002
- “The Wajir Story” Video documentary. Responding to Conflict, Birmingham, UK and Coalition for Peace in Africa, 2002.

### **Inter-ethnic Councils (southern Bulgaria)**

The inter-ethnic councils were established in southern Bulgaria, as a way to avoid the inter-ethnic bloodshed witnessed in neighboring former Yugoslavia. The council idea was developed through a series of participatory workshops that included representatives from the three key ethnic groups, Bulgarians, Turks and Roma (gypsies). The council concept was written up as a formal charter, which was then presented and approved through a vote of the town council in five communities. Each inter-ethnic council had an equal number of representatives of each ethnic group, all of them respected members of their communities. The council served as a place a) to build closer relationships and communication between key community leaders, and b) to identify and solve problems of common concern.

#### **Documents:**

- “Accommodating Diversity, Promoting Cooperation and Managing Ethnic Conflict in Central Europe: Final Report.” Submitted to the Pew Charitable Trusts, by CDR Associates, November 1995
- Project to Institutionalize Multiethnic Participation and Democratic Decision Making in Bulgaria: Final report.” Submitted to the Pew Charitable Trusts, by CDR Associates, November 1998

## **Land Dispute System (East Timor)**

As the Indonesian occupation East Timor ended, many of the records of deeds were deliberately destroyed, resulting in widespread chaos regarding land ownership, particularly in urban areas. In some cases, there were competing records (privately held) from Portuguese colonial authorities and from the Indonesian administration. In rural areas, most land was held in common and had no formal written title. Many people were displaced (IDPs and refugees) in the fighting during the long occupation and most intensely in the period leading up to independence. Due to these long absences, people appropriated property, occupied dwellings and farmed land to which they had no legal claim. As a result of all of these factors, there were many land claims in both urban and rural areas—and no functioning judicial system to deal with them.

The Land and Property Directorate (of the Ministry of Justice) was charged by the new government to establish a way to resolve the many land claims, recognizing that it would be many years before a newly reestablished judicial system could deal with them. The Directorate set up a mediation program. In urban areas, Directorate staff trained as mediators worked directly on cases. In rural areas the trained staff mediators worked closely with the traditional land authorities to mediate disputes together. Disputants were given choices of how they wanted a dispute mediated—and could revert to the courts if needed.

### **Documents:**

- “Designing Dispute Resolution Systems and Building Local Capacities for Settling Land and Property Disputes in Post-Conflict and Post-Crisis Societies.” Christopher Moore, Gary Brown, CDR Associates, 2006.
- Land and Property Directorate (LPD) Dispute Resolution System (Graphic), CDR Associates, 2003
- “Custom and Conflict: The uses and limitations of traditional systems in addressing rural land disputes in East Timor.” (A discussion paper prepared for a regional workshop on “Land Policy and Administration for Pro-Poor Rural Growth”, Dili, December 2003.) Laura S. Meitzner Yoder, with research assistance from Calisto Colo, Zacarias F. da Costa, and Francisco Soares. 2003
- “Report on Research Finding and Policy Recommendations for a Legal Framework for Land Dispute Mediation.” Timor Leste Land Law Program. 2004

## **Community Mediation Panels (Sri Lanka)**

In Sri Lanka by the late 1980s, it would take at least five years for a civil claim to be heard in a court of law. Recognizing the enormous backlog of cases, the Ministry of Justice sought an alternative way to handle at least some matters. With technical support from the Asia Foundation, they established a network of Community Mediation Panels throughout government-controlled areas of the country. There are now 273 mediation boards and 5,860 mediators.

The mediation panels are comprised of respected local people—people like school teachers, Buddhist monks, and local landowners. The panels work as a team (usually three people) and hear cases on a designated day in a public space. The parties are instructed to appear on the appointed day and, when their case is called, present their issue to the mediation panel—often with their families and neighbors in attendance. The panel then

asks questions of the parties or of anyone else who may be present, probes for possible solutions, confers among themselves and, using a fair amount of persuasion, moves the parties to resolution, if at all possible. If the parties reject the proposed settlement, the case can be appealed to the court system.

Note: this model is quite different from the “pure” mediation model used in most US-based mediation programs. The mediators (plural, rather than singular) are well known to the parties (rather than unknown/neutral); the process is quite public (as opposed to confidential); the mediators are free to question anyone they like (rather than only the parties or their legal representatives); the panel usually offers a proposed solution and will exercise their moral authority to try to persuade acceptance (as opposed to a purely facilitative mediation model). These elements are appropriate to the Sri Lankan context and work well there.

**Documents:**

- Mediation Boards Act, No. 72 of 1988, Government of Sri Lanka, Ministry of Justice.
- “Designing Dispute Resolution Systems and Building Local Capacities for Settling Land and Property Disputes in Post-Conflict and Post-Crisis Societies.” Christopher Moore, Gary Brown, CDR Associates, 2006.
- [Additional reports to Asia Foundation may be available if needed.]