Overseas Development Institute

Capacity Gaps at Centres of Government – Coordination, Implementation Monitoring, Communications and Strategic Planning in Post-Conflict and Fragile Situations

Country Case Study: Liberia

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Part 1: Introduction

1. Purpose of the study and methodology

This case study on Liberia is part of a Partnership for Democratic Governance (PDG) study analysing 'Capacity Gaps at Centres of Government – Coordination, Implementation Monitoring, Communications and Strategic Planning in Post-Conflict and Fragile Situations'. The objective of the overall study is to advance knowledge on the policy environments and the policy management systems within post-conflict and fragile states, and to contribute to better approaches to strengthening strategic planning, policy coordination, and monitoring in these states.

This paper builds on analysis carried out in an earlier phase of the project. The first phase consisted of a literature review that sets out some key concepts and practical insights into what shapes the forms and functions of centres of government (CoGs), drawing on a (relatively narrow) body of literature looking at CoGs, while also drawing on a broader literature examining policy processes, political settlements and state-society relations (see OECD/PDG 2011).

This study on Liberia is one of two country cases intended to be developed as part of a second phase of this project. The second case study will be on Rwanda. Together they will form the basis of a synthesis report for the OECD/PDG intended to provide accessible, evidence-based knowledge about capacity gaps in CoGs in fragile states as well as lessons and recommendations about realistic possibilities for promoting the strengthening of policy and decision-making systems and developing the effectiveness of CoGs.

This case study on Liberia attempts to map and assess the policy system in Liberia today, taking into account how it has evolved over time. Grounded on a political economy approach, it also seeks to provide a better understanding of the incentives and disincentives for reform and capacity building in the CoG in Liberia, and draws some lessons and recommendations for donors. The study is based on field work carried out in Liberia in November 2010 over the course of one week to interview key country-based stakeholders, as well as telephone interviews with other stakeholders (see Part 6 for a list of interviewees). It also draws on a limited review of a few key documents that are available. The information thus gathered helps provide an assessment of how effectively the various functions are carried out, and how, collectively, the functions required of a centre of government are performed. On the other hand, it is also essential to keep in mind that, given the limited nature of this exercise, it was not always possible to obtain a complete picture, and the analysis presented here relies on the information interviewees provided based on their given perspective and experience.

This study is organised around 5 Parts. Part 1 consists of this introduction explaining the purpose and methodology of this study, as well as of a section that highlights why a well functioning CoG is essential in fragile contexts. Part 2 provides a brief overview of Liberia today and a contextual analysis of the key elements and processes in the formation of the Liberian state that have impacted the creation of the country's CoG. Part 3 then focuses on the CoG in Liberia, exploring both what the CoG formally looks like and where power lies in actual practice. Part 3 also looks at relations between the CoG and other key institutions and actors, including the Governance Commission (GC), the legislature, civil society, and donors. Part 4 discusses donor engagement in the CoG in Liberia and draws out some key lessons and

recommendations from the overall analysis. A list of references and of individuals interviewed as part of this case study is provided in Part 5.

2. Why a well functioning CoG is essential in fragile contexts

The importance of strategic policy making and political leadership in fragile and post-conflict states is increasingly recognised. In many countries recovering from conflict, there may be a 'strategic gap' due to the absence of planning and prioritisation frameworks that can help steer policy processes (Chandran et al 2008). There may be a variety of reasons for this, including lack of capacity, but also political considerations and constraints. In this context, there has been growing interest in the roles and functions of centres of government (CoG).

As highlighted in the Terms of Reference for this study, the CoG, which formally sits within the executive branch of government, consists of the (set of) institution(s) intended to support decision-making by the chief executive and the work of the government in any given state. The Literature Review developed for this project defines the CoG as consisting of the organisations and structures which serve to pull together and integrate central government policies, or act as final arbiters within the executive when conflicts arise between different elements of the government machine (OECD/PDG 2011). The Review further notes that the CoG acts as a coordination hub in terms of both intra-organisational coordination (i.e. within its own parent institution) and inter-organisational coordination (i.e. in relation to core actors across government policy making) (OECD/PDG).

In theory, CoGs are intended to perform two key functions (OECD/PDG 2011):

1. Manage the policy process: The policy system includes strategic and operational policy planning, policy development, policy coordination, consultations and communications, and the monitoring of implementation. The CoG is intended to manage this process. There is also growing agreement that this includes both policy coordination and policy formulation, in close collaboration with line ministries.

2. Support to the political leadership: The key question here is how systems of the centre (can) help the leadership to make effective use of their authority. This involves the provision of logistical, policy and political advice as well as support to the political leader(s) of a given country (which might include the President, Prime Minister or chair of the Council of Ministers) (Ben-Gera 2009). As Tony Blair (2010) has noted, 'the effectiveness of the [CoG in supporting political leadership] —how access to the leader is regulated, how the leader's day is allocated, the quality of the analytical support and advice the leader receives, the way in which the leader's decisions are communicated to the rest of the system, the ability of the leader to track progress on his or her priorities—is a critical capacity need'.

Under these two functions, eight core "dimensions of coordination" have been identified (James and Ben-Gera 2004: 13-14):

- Co-ordinating organisational arrangements in preparation for government sessions or meetings;
- Co-ordinating the policy content of proposals;
- Co-ordinating the legal conformity of draft bills;

- Co-ordinating the preparation of Government programme and priorities, and their links to the budget;
- Co-ordinating communications messages;
- Co-ordinating the monitoring of Government performance;
- Co-ordinating relations with other branches of the state, such as the Parliament; and
- Co-ordinating specific cross-government strategic priorities.

The list above emphasises how centres of government relate to other state actors, and the roles they can play in both inter-government coordination (for political leaders) and intra-government coordination (across government departments and ministries). However, it is also essential to highlight the leadership role of the CoG, given its centrality in leading the rest of the government and in pursuing the policy agenda of the Executive.[1] The CoG is the apex of the wider administrative machinery of the state composed of ministries, departments, agencies, commissions, etc. CoGs also often play wider roles in their engagement with other key stakeholders, including civil society, both as part of policy coordination/formulation and in their political advisory roles (OECD/PDG 2011). While there is relative agreement on the formal forms and functions of centres of government, as noted in the Literature Review prepared as part of this overall study, in practice there is a wide diversity in terms of how these manifest themselves and actually work in different countries as a result of contextual and capacity factors (OECD/PDG 2011). As this report will attempt to show, the case of Liberia is no exception.

Since policy making and policy management are central activities of the Executive, and since the policy system comprises a multitude of actors and processes, it is universally recognised that the capacity to manage the policy system effectively, and to provide policy advice to decision-makers are of critical importance to the success of the performance of the Executive branch of government in leading the nation and serving the public (OECD/PDG 2010). For fragile states in particular, a functioning CoG is essential because it is a critical hinge in the state-building effort, helping to build the legitimacy and effectiveness of the state. Leadership is crucial here. But effective leadership is not simply a function of good intentions but of the capacity of institutions that support leaders to articulate their priorities and deliver on them (Blair 2010). What is needed is the establishment or strengthening of a machinery, of systems and processes by which policy conflicts within government are recognised, explored, and arbitrated, and decisions are reached. This becomes increasingly important in the measure that the policy process in a given (fragile) state becomes more elaborate, complex and uncertain. Not surprisingly, any such institutional design for the Executive takes us back to the CoG, which is the only locus where such an administrative mechanism can be placed if it is to have the necessary authority to act.

[1] We are grateful to AGI for this insight.

Part 2: Context

1. Brief overview of Liberia today

Liberia today is undergoing a remarkable transformation from civil war to (relative) peace and stability, and from a context of acute fragility towards the laying of the foundations of a functioning and more effective state. Between 1989 and 2003 Liberia experienced two exceptionally bloody civil wars that were rooted in a long history of exclusion, marginalisation, and highly uneven patterns of political, economic, and social development (see Section 2 below). The conflict killed over a quarter of a million people, displaced a further 1.3 million (equivalent to one third of the population), and devastated the country's economy and infrastructure.

In 2003 a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed by the major warring factions in Accra, Ghana, under international auspices, and the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) representing the various factions was established in mid-October 2003. The NTGL had a two-year mandate and brought together a wide variety of Liberian stakeholders, including the three main warring factions and community-based organizations. Historic elections considered by international observers and most Liberians to be free and fair were held in October/November 2005. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf won the election, thus becoming the first democratically elected female Head of State in Africa. Elections are due to be held in October 2011. President Johnson-Sirleaf is expected to win once again, even if her support among the population has seen some decline since she first came to office, partly as a result of corruption scandals as well as the perceived failure of her administration to deliver tangible improvements in the standard of living (EIU 2011).

Strong international support has been instrumental in helping to consolidate peace and security in Liberia. The establishment of the UN peacekeeping mission (UNMIL) in 2003 to support the NTGL and oversee security, humanitarian relief, and efforts at building and/or strengthening governmental institutions opened the way to considerable donor reengagement in the development of Liberia. President Johnson-Sirleaf in particular is widely perceived among donors as an effective and strong leader committed to reform. Under her leadership, Liberia has made considerable strides in crucial areas of policy, including in particular macroeconomic policy, public financial management, the completion of the heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) process, road construction, the encouragement of large-scale private sector investment, and continued support for the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Program (GEMAP) (for more on GEMAP see Section 2.3 below as well as Part 4). The Government of Liberia has also developed a comprehensive and well received Poverty Reduction Strategy for 2008-2011 which is intended to be "the bedrock of [President Johnson-Sirleaf's] policy direction" (President of the Republic of Liberia 2007).[2]

Indeed, Liberia has made tremendous progress in the recent past, notably since the new, democratically elected government (including the President and Parliament) came to power in January 2006. However, it continues to face an immense task in consolidating peace and establishing an effective and responsive state, as well as in the reconstruction and

[2] The strategy is organized around four pillars: i) consolidating peace and security; ii) revitalising the economy; iii) strengthening governance and the rule of law; and iv) rehabilitating infrastructure and delivering basic services.

development of the economy. The Centre of Government (CoG) in Liberia is an essential piece in this puzzle, and, as will be suggested in this paper, the CoG faces a variety of capacity gaps that may hamper its effectiveness.

However, it is also essential to keep in mind that the current workings of the CoG in Liberia need to be appreciated in the context of the country's historical state-building trajectory and its emergence from one of the most protracted and violent conflicts in Africa's recent history. This conflict led to a complete breakdown of government services, and some of its legacies include a steady brain drain of the country's most educated civil servants, significantly reduced capacities, and ruined public buildings without adequate working facilities. Moreover, it is worth emphasising that many of the issues, challenges and weaknesses that are highlighted in this Report are not unique to Liberia or even to fragile states, but, as noted in the Literature Review (OECD/PDG 2011), are also present in countries throughout the developing (and developed) world.

2. Key elements and processes in the formation of the Liberian state that have had an impact on the creation of a Centre of Government

Analysing the origins and drivers of fragility in Liberia is a necessary starting point for understanding how the Liberian state has evolved over time and how that trajectory has impacted the development of a CoG and ongoing efforts to reform it. As will be discussed further below in this section, the exclusion and marginalisation of a large proportion of the Liberian population has been a root cause of fragility in Liberia, and was the primary factor leading to the conflict that started in 1989 and persisted intermittently until 2003 (UNDP & World Bank 2009).

2.1 The founding of Liberia and Americo-Liberian rule

Liberia shares with Ethiopia the unique status in Africa of not having been formed as a state by the colonial development of European powers. It had brushes with European powers as early as the 15th century, but it was never colonized. Instead, Liberia was originally founded by free African-Americans and freed slaves from the United States in 1820. That 'caste' of Americo-Liberians established a system of rule that was designed to meet the needs of the settler population through the domination of the resources of the state and the entrenched subjugation of the indigenous population (UNDP & World Bank 2009). The Republic of Liberia that was created in 1847 had a style of government and constitution fashioned after the United States, at least in principle. Three branches of power were established, the executive, legislative, and judicial. Despite this formal separation of powers, however, Liberia was characterised by one-party state rule until 1980, with the Whig Party dominating all sectors of Liberian political, economic, and military life. Americo-Liberian oligarchic rule ended in 1980, when indigenous Liberian Master Sergeant Samuel K. Doe seized power in a coup.

The creation of the modern form of the Liberian state dates from the 1926 concession given to Firestone to develop the world's largest rubber plantation, not far from Monrovia. This agreement set the terms for the development path the country was to follow for decades to come. It was based on a model of granting concessions for natural resources extraction and management to foreigner investors that was equivalent to the 'colonization' of the Liberian state's own ungoverned territorial hinterland. As captured in the book *Growth without Development* (1966), the strategy of state formation pursued by the Americo-Liberian elite,

which numbered no more than 5 percent of the total population, was anchored in a form of exclusion that ensured that indigenous people participated only minimally in the flow of benefits from concessions, while the government and its political supporters profited handsomely from the distribution of rents. While wealth from primary industries such as mining and rubber was considerable, there was virtually no investment in the physical and social infrastructure of roads, agriculture, health and education necessary for development (UNDP & World Bank 2009).

For several decades, the task of running the state did not seem complex or onerous. It was essentially run out of the Executive by the President and a small coterie of personal appointees whose primary qualification was their loyalty and allegiance to the President. Decision-making was highly personalised and based on key investor relationships rather than on the needs of and linkages with a wider society. This system of rule did not evolve much over time and was not conducive to the development of (formal) state institutions capable of overseeing the policy process.

This began to change when President Tubman, who had ruled the country since 1944, died in 1971. His death created an opportunity for a more conscious reorganization of the way in which the government – and the state more broadly – had operated until then. The new President, William Tolbert, set out to modernise the management of the state by creating new institutional forms of governance that were aimed at establishing the foundations of what is today understood as a centre of government. Tolbert sought to strengthen the Civil Service, to expand services to areas beyond Monrovia and begin engaging more fully with indigenous populations, and in general to promote a more uniform merit-based government. Among the specific actions he undertook was the creation of the Ministry of State for Presidential Affairs (Office of the President) in 1971 and the Ministry of State Without Portfolio in 1972. The Ministry of State (MoS) as a whole sought to enhance accountability, encourage efficiency, and break up the hold on power of the elite within the executive office of the president. The Ministry was also created to streamline decision-making among the various ministries of the Executive branch of the state. (OTI/USAID 2006)

2.2 End of Americo-Liberian rule and the path to civil war

The reforms instituted by President Tolbert were short-lived. Although the MoS remains in place to this day (more on this in Part 3), post-Tolbert administrations did not embrace nor enhance its efficacy and effectiveness, nor that of a Centre of Government more generally. In effect, between 1980 and 2005 (so from the overthrow of Tolbert until the democratic elections in 2005), successive leaders reverted to old patterns of behaviour, with power, decision-making and resources concentrated in the hands of a few and distributed on the basis of patronage networks and rents (OTI/USAID 2006, Sawyer 2005).

Doe, whose violence-based rule began with several rounds of public political assassinations, especially among the Americo-Liberian elite, lived in perpetual fear of rivals and their threat of retribution. Preoccupied with survival and accumulation, he never addressed the questions of how to constitute and modernise the state of Liberia. Under Doe's rule, a new Constitution was proclaimed, which came into effect in 1986 and replaced the Constitution of 1847. But overall, Doe did not get beyond his overriding concern to simply hold on to power, and to find the cash flows to pay for it. The level of depredation on society increased.

The Doe regime, which progressively fractured along ethnic lines, prepared the way for the first civil war (International Crisis Group 2002; UNDP & World Bank 2009).[3] Charles Taylor's invasion from Cote d'Ivoire in December 1989 developed into a militia occupation which splintered into multiple competing factions across the country. Doe himself was ousted in 1990. Between 1990 and 1994, an Interim Government of National Unity (IGNU) was installed under the auspices of ECOWAS. Dr. Amos Sawyer (who is currently the head of the Governance Commission), was appointed interim president. However, Liberia remained torn between different warring factions despite the existence of a formal cease-fire. A Comprehensive Peace Agreement brokered by ECOWAS in August 1993 and backed by a UN Observer Mission failed to stop the resumption of fighting. Elections planned for 1994 were deferred until 1997. Charles Taylor was finally elected President in an election that was characterised by fear and intimidation (UNDP & World Bank 2009).

Rule under Taylor became the prototype of what has come to be known as the "imperial presidency" (Sawyer 2005). Under him, power was (once again) heavily centralized and personalized, and very little attention was placed on developing an institutional structure that could enable the state to function (more) effectively. The focus of the regime was on power, status, and wealth, with Taylor as the master brokering the distribution of concessions and patronage among a narrow circle of elite players (Sawyer 2005, Andersen 2007).

Civil war broke out again in 1999, with two rebel groups gaining control of a large part of the country beyond Monrovia by 2003. Under a negotiated settlement in August 2003, Taylor relinquished power. A Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) provided for the establishment of a National Transitional Government with backing from a UN Peacekeeping Mission. There was no clear winner from the conflict, with a balance of factions emerging from a peace settlement borne of "intense regional and international pressure" (UNDP & World Bank 2009).

2.3 National Transitional Government of Liberia

The ensuing two-year NTGL was mandated to ensure the "scrupulous implementation" of the Peace Agreement; to implement the provisions of the Ceasefire Agreement; to oversee and coordinate implementation of political and rehabilitation programmes; to promote reconciliation to ensure the restoration of peace and stability; and to contribute to the preparation and conduct of internationally supervised elections (CPA 2003). The NTGL comprised a National Transitional Legislative Assembly (NTLA), and Executive and Judicial branches.[4] The NTGL Chairman (Gyude Bryant) and Vice-Chairman (Wesley Johnson), the NTLA Speaker (George Dweh) and Deputy Speaker (Eddington Varmah), were all selected according to a process set out in the CPA and were precluded by the CPA terms from standing for public office in the 2005 elections.[5]

[3] Interethnic tensions have been a longstanding and severe source of conflict in Liberia. The ethnic groups in Liberia are Bassa, Belle, Dei, Gbandi, Gio, Gola, Grebo, Kpelle, Kissi, Krahns, Kru, Loma, Mandingos, Mano Mende, Sapo, and Vai. Despite the lessons from the effective apartheid of Americo-Liberian rule, Doe's rule began to resemble that of his predecessors as he created a governmental system that benefited one ethnic group – the Krahns – who made up only 4 per cent of the population (ICG 2002). Doe's repression of certain tribal groups served as a recruiting sergeant for Taylor when he launched his rebel offensive in 1989.

[4] The composition of the NTLA was fixed by the CPA as follows: GOL -12 seats, LURD -12 seats, MODEL -12 seats, Political Parties -18 seats, Civil Society and Special Interest Groups -7 seats, Counties -15 seats. (CPA 2003)

[5] The Speaker and Deputy Speaker were both suspended indefinitely in March 2005 for alleged misappropriation of US$ 90,000 in allowances (ICG 2005a).

The NTGL did not achieve much progress in terms of strengthening the internal workings of the state, and of the CoG in particular. The main purpose of this transitional government was to maintain the peace not only by sharing power but also by dividing control of the state's revenue-generating assets between the warring parties.[6] Well-placed observers have said that NTGL members ran government agencies as personal fiefdoms – in effect treating state institutions (and their assets and revenues) as private property (Sawyer 20008 among others).[7] Despite the agreed allocation of portfolios and the selection of a "solid technocrat" and former businessman as NTGL Chairman, there were early disagreements between Bryant and the warring factions over the appointment of Assistant Ministers (International Crisis Group 2004; The Economist 2004). The fact that Bryant was obliged to concede to their demands and to award 51 of the 86 positions "for the sake of peace" indicates his own lack of power in the NTGL relative to the rebel groups (GoL, LURD and MODEL),[8] while questions were also raised about his own intentions and alleged political ambitions (Hedger 2011).

It was in large part as a result of the perceived excesses of the NTGL that the international community spearheaded the establishment of GEMAP in 2005. GEMAP's main objective is to address economic governance in Liberia and to improve control over Liberia's public finances (including efforts to build capacity within the civil service through training, signing off on expenditure, promoting record keeping and good accounting practices, etc.) (see Part 4 for more details).

2.4 The birth of a (fragile) multiparty democracy

Liberia is now a multiparty democracy. However, it is still a fragile state and the task of consolidating the country's emerging democratic institutions remains a daunting (and long term) challenge.

In accordance with the CPA timetable, presidential and parliamentary elections took place in October 2005 and a government was formed by President Johnson-Sirleaf (a former finance minister who has strong international credentials from working previously for the World Bank and the UN) in January 2006. Her main opponent George Weah and his supporters contested the result and raised accusations of electoral fraud, but eventually dropped the case.[9]

The parallel legislative elections brought together a large number of political parties and a mixed bag of National Assembly members in terms of their political background, education and experience (UNDP and World Bank 2009). Several were former factional leaders or

[6] Ministerial and agency portfolios under the Executive branch were allocated as part of the CPA negotiation, with the share of specific ministries as follows: GOL -5, LURD -5, MODEL -5, Political Parties and Civil Society -6 (CPA 2003).

[7] On the other hand, as per the terms of the CPA, NTGL members formally forfeited control of these assets once elections were held, and they were not allowed to stand for election.

[8] ICG (2004) singles out particularly Chairman Conneh of LURD, Chairman Nimley of MODEL (and the 'Boys from Philadelphia'), and former President Taylor's commanders as "potential spoilers" of the peace process. All were motivated more strongly by "power, money and self-aggrandisement" than by a commitment to peace.

[9] The first round of the Presidential election produced no decisive result, with most votes gained by George Weah (275,265 and 28.3%) and with Johnson-Sirleaf in second place (192,326 and 19.8%). Johnson-Sirleaf won the second round run-off in November 2005 by 478,526 votes (59.4%) to Weah's 327,046 (40.6%) (ICG 2006b).

close associates.[10] Some are limited by literacy and language, and many are first-time legislators who are unfamiliar with their formal role and its execution. This points to considerable capacity gaps in the quality of the Legislature not only individually but also institutionally.

There is also no collective memory of how an effective legislature can function. Throughout its history, the Legislature in Liberia existed either as the exclusive constitutional preserve of a small elite or as a rubber stamp for a dominant executive. This is the first time in Liberia's history that the National Assembly is not dominated by the Executive and is functioning as an independent branch. It appears to be savouring its newly discovered independence, and is flexing its muscle on key elements of the President's legislative progarmme, from successive national budgets to important areas of new policy (UNDP and World Bank 2009).

One important consequence of the fragmentation within the National Assembly has been that even the five most powerful parties in combination only secured two thirds of the seats. This deprived the President of any possibility of establishing a stable coalition of support in the House, thus requiring repeated deal-making on specific reform issues (International Crisis Group 2006). Political parties themselves tend to be loose groupings with weak structures, top-down organisational management, and non-transparent sources of funding. They are perceived as corrupt and not deeply rooted in society. They are also ideologically vague and have not succeeded in developing programmatic platforms that offer real choice or alternatives (IDEA 2007). On the other hand, there may be a gradual maturation of the political process taking place, as evidenced by the recent consolidation of political parties including not only the incumbent party but also some among the opposition. In 2009, the President's Unity Party merged with the Liberia Action Party and the Liberia Unification Party. The merger has also helped to strengthen the President's position in the Legislature (EIU 2011).

2.5 Unfinished process of national reconciliation and unity?

As discussed above, historically, the state-building process in Liberia has been highly exclusionary and repressive. The dominant Americo-Liberian elite that ruled the country until 1980 viewed the state as a source of personal enrichment and advancement, and this perception of the state did not change much with the rulers that followed. As such, there has been very little sense of a collective 'Liberian' identity based on a cohesive and shared concept of the nation-state. The ruling elites have tended to see themselves very much separately from the rest of the population. Such distance has also been reinforced physically and geographically by the fact that there is no effective transportation system linking the different parts of the country together, and to this day the reach of the central government remains correspondingly limited.

This problem of a weak sense of a shared vision, identity or purpose persists in Liberia today. As Professor Amos Sawyer and others have noted, the reconciliation process in Liberia remains incomplete (Andersen 2007, Sawyer 2008, de la Cruz Gitau 2010). After the signing of the CPA in 2003, there were many pressures, both from internal actors and the international community, to hold democratic elections as soon as possible (Blaney 2010). There was an acute perception that creating a government that was duly legitimatised in the

[10] Weah's Congress for Democratic Change (CDC) won more seats in the House of Representatives than any other party – securing 15 seats of a total 64. Johnson-Sirleaf's Unity Party secured 8 seats in the House. The most powerful parties were therefore COTOL, CDC, Unity, Liberty and NPP.

eyes of the population through an electoral process to be held as quickly as possible was an absolute necessity – especially as an antidote to the NGTL, which, as discussed, had turned out to be little else than an arrangement to enable ruling elites to continue to plunder their country (Sawyer 2005 and 2008, Blaney 2010). But holding the elections within such a tight timeframe also implied that the other important processes of national reconciliation would have to be postponed. As former Ambassador John Blaney (2010) has put it, "[s]ome senior statesmen and respected figures in Liberia suggested national conventions and a rewriting of Liberia's constitution before any election, [but s]uch a process would likely have taken many years."

As a result, a broadly accepted, unifying Liberian identity has yet to be articulated. In the words of Professor Sawyer (2008),

> in the absence of a serious reconciliation programme, several tendencies from bitter debates of the ... pre-coup years remain relevant twenty-five years later. Two of the most prominent of these tendencies are manifested among individuals and groups associated with the deposed [Americo-Liberian] oligarchy and those who openly opposed the oligarchy. The former seem to be seeking to reinvent the oligarchy..., restor[e] their control of the economy... [and vindicate] its pre-coup leadership... [while the latter view this group with profound suspicion.] Apart from such differences regarding how to address questions emanating from the 1980 coup [and ensuing conflict, including issues of justice and reconciliation], there are profound differences between these groups on the interpretation of Liberian history [and] its choice of future."

The Governance Commission (GC) (more on this Commission in Part 3) has attempted to spearhead a "national visioning exercise" in an effort to pick up on this issue and encourage a national dialogue that can foster national reconciliation. Unfortunately, this initiative took considerably longer to get off the ground than had been expected, and it has been halted for the time being so as not to interfere with the electoral process. In addition, today, Liberia continues to be ruled by a Constitution that was proclaimed by Doe -- which provides for a system of rule and power led by a warlord. There is a referendum on constitutional changes scheduled for 23 August 2011. As highlighted by several well-placed observers, however, these changes remain narrowly focused on rather technical aspects (e.g. residency requirements for presidential and vice-presidential candidates, retirement age for Supreme Court Justices and other judges, and the dates for national elections and staggered subnational elections, which have yet to be held for this first time) and so far the constitutional reform process has not been broadly participatory and inclusive or inviting of a national dialogue or conversation.

Perhaps the most significant constitutional amendment being proposed is a permanent switch from a two-round voting system to a first-by-the post one for congressional and municipal elections, given that the former electoral system is so much more expensive.[11] But in a country with a party system as fragmented as Liberia's, a system like the two-round voting system may be instrumental in helping to encourage moderation and conciliation, since a given candidate has to make broad appeals that cut across fault lines of conflict in order to win. That is how and why Johnson-Sirleaf was elected President in 2005 – and importantly

[11] During the 2005 elections, the constitutional mandate to require second-round elections for legislative candidates who did not obtain an absolute majority in the first round (so 50% +1 of the votes) was suspended, while it was upheld in the case of the presidential elections.

the constitutional amendment would preserve the provision for a run-off election in presidential contests. By contrast, under first-past-the post, candidates for the Legislature and municipalities can get elected by a relatively small percentage of votes. As a result, candidates may not have the incentive to compromise or make broad-based appeals, which in turn may undermine the prospects for reconciliation (for more on this see Horowitz 2003 and Reilly and Reynolds 1999).

Yet, reconciliation and the development of a broadly shared notion of a national project matter because they are instrumental in addressing a root cause of conflict in Liberia and in establishing a durable peace. They are also essential in helping to arrive at a basic understanding and agreement on the fundamental rules of the game among relevant contending actors or forces. What may be happening in Liberia today as a result of this unfinished process of reconciliation and identity building is that the political settlement is not all that firm, and different actors may manipulate "the rules of the game" in ways that could be destabilising. As a joint UNDP-World Bank report on Liberia (2009) has noted, "the rules for the use of power – its source, nature, application and abuse – are not settled in Liberia as we can see from the immediate reaction to the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission". The resurgence of violent conflict remains a latent possibility. As will be suggested in the analysis developed in the sections that follow, at the level of the Centre of Government, this may manifest itself in the precariousness of reforms that are deemed to be too politically sensitive, and actions that on the surface may appear to undermine reform efforts intended to achieve greater effectiveness may in fact have a logic of their own in terms of helping to preserve stability and an (awkward) equilibrium between competing forces.

Part 3: The Centre of Government in Liberia

1. Formal Centre of Government in Liberia today: a snapshot

As illustrated by the analysis above, by the time President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf took power at the end of 2005, in practice, the government of Liberia as a whole had not been functioning in any serious way for over two decades (UNDP & World Bank, 2009). Since 1980, there had been an acute deterioration of government systems and a steady decline and/or draining of human resource capacity caused by widespread and intermittent violence and internal conflict. In terms of a formal institutional setup that can be built upon to use as the foundation for a functioning CoG, there has thus been relatively little to draw on.

The Centre of Government in Liberia formally revolves around the Executive Mansion.[12] The Executive Mansion consists of the President of the Republic of Liberia, the Vice President, a Cabinet Secretariat with a Director General (more information on Cabinet is provided in Section 2.6 below), and the Ministry of State for Presidential Affairs (Office of the President) and Ministry of State Without Portfolio. Since 2006, after a fire damaged the Executive Mansion, most of its offices have been housed over two floors and about thirty rooms (including meeting rooms) in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is next to the Executive Mansion in the centre of Monrovia. The Office of the Vice President is located in the Capitol Building across the street.

The President is the head of state and head of government of Liberia, and s/he serves as the leader of the Executive branch and as commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces. The 1986 Constitution gives the President the power to appoint all cabinet ministers and sub-cabinet positions, judges, ambassadors, heads of autonomous bureaus and agencies, heads of public corporations and their boards, sub-national leaders and sub-national public officers, and military officers with the advice and consent of the Senate. The President also has the power to dismiss all appointees from office at his or her discretion. The President conducts all matters of foreign policy, though all treaties and international agreements must be ratified by both houses of the National Assembly as well. The Constitution also grants the president the power to declare a state of emergency during times of war or civil unrest and suspend civil liberties during the emergency as necessary. The President also has legislative functions, which include signing all legislation passed by the National Assembly, and she also has veto power (which may be overturned by a two-thirds majority in both houses. The President may extend a legislative session past its adjournment date or call a special extraordinary session when he or she deems it necessary in the national interest.

The Vice President is the second-highest executive official in Liberia. The Vice President is elected on the same ticket with the President to a six-year term. The Vice President also serves as the President of the Senate. As such, he or she presides weekly over plenary sessions of that body, and may cast a vote in the event of a tie. As per the 1986 Constitution, the Vice President formally assists the President of the Republic of Liberia in running the day-to-day affairs of the country. The Office of the Vice President currently has a staff of 40 people, including a Chief of Staff.

[12] For more information see the Executive Mansion website: http://www.emansion.gov.lr/index.php. However, please note that this website is still "work in progress", and a lot of information about the structure of the Mansion and the different offices is not available or incomplete (see for example section on the President, or that on the Cabinet). The site does not appear to have a search function as of yet.

The President is primarily supported by the Ministry of State and its two different arms. The Ministry of State for Presidential Affairs (Office of the President) is charged with, among other things, "the responsibility of coordinating activities and operations of the Office of the President...; and providing support to the President in carrying out the Executive Functions of the State through close consultation with the Cabinet, key agencies and other institutions, i.e. private sector and civil society."[13] The major departments of the Ministry of State for Presidential Affairs include the Office of the President, Administration, Public Affairs and Information Technology. The Minister of State for Presidential Affairs is the President's Chief of Staff and covers a wide range of tasks related to central and routine government activities. In addition, the President has a Special Assistant in her personal office, and there is a Presidential spokesperson, a Protocol section, and a Security Section. The President also has a few personal advisers (covering e.g. security, politics, economy, international relations, and law), now numbering five in total. The Ministry of State for Presidential Affairs is currently hosting a small team of international advisers provided by the African Governance Initiative (AGI), with the overall objective of improving centre of government functions.

The Ministry of State Without Portfolio is primarily intended to assist the President to administer affairs of state that do not fall within the domain of Cabinet, including primarily big foreign investors, special projects, charities, and civil society. The mandate and scope of the Ministry has expanded considerably over time. As described by the Executive Mansion, some of the most salient responsibilities of the Ministry of State Without Portfolio and its Minister include the following:[14]

- Organizing incidental activities of the President, especially as they relate to local government and international matters;
- Coordinating activities between the Executive and the National Legislature (through the recently established Legislative Liaison);
- Handling matters emanating from statutory and non-statutory Commissions (e.g. Investment Commission), as well as matters before the President from non-governmental organizations; and
- Liaising with political parties and appropriately advising the President on multi-party interactions.

The CoG in Liberia is in the process of undergoing some reforms intended to strengthen its overall capacity in critical areas including ministerial and policy coordination, communication, strategic planning and monitoring of implementation (the remainder of Part 3 and some of Part 4 discusses elements of such efforts in greater detail). However, it is fair to say that, until now, the Centre of Government as a formal body has remained weak, and there is very little elaboration in terms of formal structures and systems in the Presidency to underpin the work of the President. As an illustration of this, Box 1 below outlines some of the main challenges that the Ministry of State for Presidential Affairs, which in principle should play at central role in carrying out the administration's mandate, faces in fulfilling that role.

Box 1: Assessment of the Ministry of State for Presidential affairs

[13] http://www.emansion.gov.lr/content.php?sub=Presidential Affairs&related=Ministry of State
[14] http://www.emansion.gov.lr/content.php?sub=Without Portfolio&related=Ministry of State

The following assessment of the Ministry of State for Presidential Affairs was made by USAID in 2006. Among other things, the report notes the following concerns:

- The Ministry of State for Presidential Affairs is not functioning at or near capacity
- The Ministry continues to function in a reactive rather than proactive mode, going from crisis to crisis rather than following a defined agenda. As a result, many day-to-day decisions are made hastily with little input from stakeholders. Participation, information sharing, and accountability are often sacrificed for expediency.
- Standard operating procedures are not in place, priorities are not fixed or adequately enforced, internal/external communications are poor, inter-office and cross ministry coordination is minimal, the chain of command is not vigorous, job descriptions/responsibilities are not clear, performance measurements are not in place, and functional responsibilities are blurred.
- The organisational structure of the Ministry is horizontal with approximately one-third of the senior staff reporting directly to the President, consequently weighing down the President with matters more appropriately handled at lower levels.
- Lack of discipline contributes to poor planning, disconnected strategies, conflicting targets and objectives, poor oversight, and few opportunities for evaluating performance.
- Policy development and implementation also are adversely affected by the absence of a coherent chain of command.
- With the exception of weekly Cabinet meetings for the President, there are few regularly scheduled meetings within the Ministry.[15]
- Inter-office updates on activities, progress, or priorities are not required.
- Most information is communicated verbally with little or no documentation. In many offices within the Ministry, data collection, visitor's logs, meeting notes or general recordkeeping are not routinised.
- Communication infrastructure within the Ministry is uneven – a few offices are equipped with computers, appropriate software, and internet connectivity while many others have only rudimentary office tools. The single greatest deficit in communication is the absence of formal mechanisms for the timely sharing of information. Critical information affecting administration priorities/policies are at times hoarded or withheld (particularly if it is negative news) from relevant decision makers.
- External communications with other ministries are even more constrained by the lack of connectivity and timely mechanism/systems for information sharing.
- Much greater clarification is needed to specify roles, duties and responsibilities of staff in the office of the President.

Source: OTI/USAID 2006

[15] From the information we were able to piece together from different respondents, it appears that Cabinet meetings were being held on a weekly basis at the beginning of the Johnson-Sirleaf administration. This was something that donors in particular supported, given the many challenges and tasks confronting the newly elected government. However, the frequency of these meetings became less regular/frequent over time, especially in light of the tendency/preference of the President and her Ministers to meet on a more informal and personalized basis. Since 2010, there have been renewed efforts to hold Cabinet meetings more regularly once again, and generally to bring greater regularity and predictability to the President's schedule to make the use of her time more effective. These issues are discussed in different sections of Parts 3 and 4 in this report.

While, as will be discussed later, this situation has improved in some important respects, many of the key challenges highlighted in Box 1 above continue to be present. In Liberia today, there is no permanent machinery at the centre of government that can provide the President with the kind of (multidimensional) capacity that is needed to support her in her strategic leadership role.

2. Locating the "actual" CoG in Liberia

2.1 Distinguishing the formal CoG from the "actual" one

As discussed in the Literature Review prepared as part of this study, while a centre of government may take a specific form and carry out specific functions on paper, in practice it is likely to manifest itself very differently. In part, this reflects wider structural, institutional, and more contingent factors, including, among other things, historical legacies, the nature of the political system, the role of informal institutions and political leadership, levels of state capacity, and the administrative or bureaucratic culture. These factors all contribute to shaping the particular configuration and roles of the centre of government. Moreover, fragile and post-conflict contexts pose some particular challenges for centres of government, including recurrent risks of conflict, very low state capacity (particularly in terms of human resources), potentially closed or top-down decision making processes, and a proliferation of actors and institutions involved in policy making processes (including donor agencies). These factors mean that centres of government themselves are dynamic and changeable, can take a variety of forms and functions beyond their formal structures on paper, and may be spread across a range of actors and institutions on a more informal basis. (OECD/PDG 2010)

As will be discussed in the analysis below, Liberia is a powerful illustration of this: the formal CoG may sit in the Executive Mansion and consist of the various organs discussed in Section 1 above, but in actual practice it manifests itself and functions very differently. As suggested in Section 2 in Part 2, reasons for this are in part deeply rooted in the history of the evolution of the state in Liberia. That history reveals that, for most of the country's existence, there has been relatively little preoccupation with building strong and effective formal institutions, within the centre of government and beyond, that could provide critical facilitation, coordination, communications, and policymaking roles.

Liberia today is undergoing a challenging transition from what can be called a "centre of power" towards a more established and formally institutionalised CoG, and as a result the actual CoG remains more informal in nature. This is by no means a situation unique to Liberia but prevalent in many post-conflict settings. As attested by several of the people interviewed for this study, despite some ongoing reforms, the CoG in Liberia as a ***formal*** structure/set of institutions of decision-making and policy management and coordination remains underdeveloped. Thus, as the Literature Review also suggests (OECD/PDG 2011), looking at the CoG through purely formal institutions masks the fact that in practice much power and decision making takes place through informal channels. In actual practice, until now the CoG in Liberia has existed in more of an *ad hoc* form, and it can be described as remaining highly centralised and personalised in the figure of the President. In general, the impression that emerges from numerous interviews in the field is that the Vice President plays a rather marginal role within the daily workings of the CoG and that he has been useful mostly in terms of helping to secure support from a political fraction in society.

2.2 Governing style and its impact on the functioning of the CoG

In part, the dominance of the President in the CoG and the system of governance more broadly has a formal basis. As discussed in the Section 1 above, the Liberian Constitution gives the President powers of appointment over all public and government positions.[16] However, these formal arrangements have a significant impact on how power dynamics play out on a more informal basis. The reach of the President goes down into every village in the country, and places him or her at the apex of a complex pyramid of patronage networks that has historically characterised Liberian politics and social relations. Equally importantly, while government ministers are political appointees and are therefore the beneficiaries of Presidential patronage, they also have independent political power bases and can place effective limitations to Presidential discretion. In Liberia, the assignment of Ministerial portfolios has often been a mechanism to secure cooperation between rival factions, many of which were protagonists during the civil war (Hedger 2011). As noted in the Literature review, understanding the dynamics embedded in these patronage networks is important because they fundamentally shape the nature of the CoG and the locus of power (OECD/PDG 2011).

The picture that emerges from the various interviews in the field is that the current President is very hands-on, self-sufficient, strategic, and compartmentalised in her sharing, even with those who are closest to her. This was vividly illustrated in her decision in early November 2010 to dismiss her whole Cabinet (except for the Presidential Affairs Minister). According to several observers, this move was apparently completely unexpected, and the President seems to have acted without consulting even her closest advisors – in a way to show who is in charge and to keep her Ministers (most of whom were eventually re-appointed to their same posts) on their toes. President Johnson-Sirleaf also tends to conduct a lot of her work and her dealings with others directly and personally, on a one-on-one basis and often without any record being kept. For example, she meets her key ministers and advisers very frequently for face-to-face discussions, and such meetings are more frequent than group discussions. It is also said that she uses up to six different phones, and for the most part her calls are not transcribed or logged by her office.

President Johnson-Sirleaf's management and decision-making style has been to get deeply involved in the details of issues that she cares about and is strongly committed to. This can be a highly effective way to exert leadership and get things done, even in the face of profound (formal) institutional weaknesses. The Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative is a very good illustration of this. Upon taking office, the President put highest priority on achieving the elimination of Liberia's official debts, and this issue (along with managing relations with the donor community) seems to have occupied considerable time in the early years of her term. The HIPC process was officially taken forward by the Ministry of Finance, but according to several well-placed observers the President remained in control of the whole initiative, and managed the process in a fairly direct manner. Completing the HIPC process is one of the leading achievements of the Johnson-Sirleaf administration, and the speed with which it was accomplished is a testament to the President's skills and commitment.

But the flip side of such presidential activism and hands-on management may be that the President is taking on too much without having structures of support that are sufficiently well developed, and especially the time to oversee so many different issues and personalised

[16] All Ministers serve at the pleasure of the President. Their roles are also bureaucratic in the sense that they are the senior officials accountable for use of public resources by their ministries (i.e. the 'Accounting Officer' role).

transactions. Often, ministers refer up to the president for decisions. Many of the people interviewed for this study commented that the President is sent many more documents and orders to be signed than she can possibly read, and yet she relies on herself to do so. In addition, the incentive structure as it currently exists thrives on informal individualised exchanges and bargaining: most public officials depend on their personal standing with the President for their livelihoods, and the President also needs to rely on them for cooperation and ongoing stability (Anderson 2007). As such, individual ministers and other appointees have *obligations* to the President and *privileges* arising from their status or their connections, rather than more formal rights and responsibilities. A careful balancing game is thus preserved.

These personal and behavioural characteristics inform the way the Centre of Government functions in Liberia in actual practice. As has been noted, when the first democratically elected government came to power in January 2006, there was very little in the way of pre-existing institutions in place that could be built upon to enable the effective workings of a formal CoG. The Ministry of State and the Cabinet Office, for instance, had not been functioning in any meaningful manner at least since Doe's coup in 1980. As suggested by several well-placed observers, at the time of the transition, conscious decisions about what formal systems should be installed were perhaps not thought through enough. Some of the advisors that President Johnson-Sirleaf drew upon once she took office had worked in the Executive Mansions of Presidents Tubman and Tolbert, which, especially in the latter case, had some (if only short-lived) functioning administrative machinery for managing the work at the centre of government, and they had some recollection of how that had worked. However, from the various conversations we had in the field, it is also apparent that there is a tendency to idealise the way in which the systems and models of government that were in place functioned, particularly under Tolbert. This may help to explain why these haven't been replicated in any successful manner. Interestingly, very early on during the Johnson-Sirleaf administration, USAID prepared a report (from which the challenges outlined in Box 1 are drawn) outlining a simple basic structure of administration for the CoG, but it didn't seem to get much traction.

2.3 Ongoing efforts at reform

On the other hand, there is growing awareness within the Ministry of State that administration, coordination, management and communications systems need to be improved, and that capacity at the centre needs to be developed to carry out the leadership mandate more effectively. Among other things, this will require streamlining and regularizing systems around the President to ensure that her time, which is one of the most valuable resources the Government of Liberia actually has, is used as effectively as possible. With critical technical support provided by the Africa Governance Initiative (AGI) (AGI involvement in Liberia is discussed in different sections of Part 3 as well as Section 2 in Part 4 of this report), there have been ongoing efforts in the following areas, which in different ways address many of the weaknesses outlined in Box 1 above:

- Develop a list of top priorities that the President wishes to focus on delivering, given that the President cannot focus equally on all the (300+) deliverables in the PRS. A list of clear priorities is intended to help the President structure her time more effectively and strategically around those priorities, and should also provide guidance to the rest of the Ministry of State about where their efforts should be focused (for diary, briefing, correspondence etc).

- Develop greater capacity for summarising and prioritising reports to the President
- Empower other institutions of government – particularly Cabinet – to deliver (more on this below)
- Develop a regular and standardised process for the President to receive updates on her top priorities
- Give greater structure and regularity to the President's diary
- Improve coordination within the Executive office
- Introduce minute takers and action notes taking to major policy meetings

Some progress has been achieved in some of these areas. For example, the President has developed her top priorities (roads, energy, ports), though greater communication and awareness about them is still needed (more on communications in Section 3.3 below). There are also now more written records of key meeting proceedings, and coordination and communication between the different parts of the Ministry of State is improving (e.g. between the diary keepers and the Director General of the Cabinet). On the other hand, progress remains slow. Despite ongoing efforts, demands on the President's time have not been substantially reduced. Still, it is important to keep in mind that this may be natural given that the reforms being introduced require changing both formal but especially informal ways of working and interacting at the CoG and beyond that have been in place for a long time.

2.4 Key Networks around the Presidency

The President has a diversity of advisors, both formal and informal, with whom she interacts on a regular basis, and she has woven some key networks of support and advice around herself to support her in the process of leading the country.[17] She also maintains numerous "back channels" by which she personally triangulates the advice and information offered to her. Naturally enough, it also appears that she is selective not only about whom she shares her views with, but also what she shares with each of them. The President manages all these networks mostly by phone, face-to-face interactions, and personal contacts, which as discussed in Section 2.2 above can be intensive and time-consuming.

Liberia is a very small country, and a lot of the people who have been in government know one another well and have worked together at some point. This is clearly the case of the group of key advisors, numbering perhaps a dozen, who assisted Johnson-Sirleaf as part of her election team. Among them are Professor Harold Monger, the current Director General of the Liberian Institute of Public Affairs (LIPA), who is representative of the 'old guard', having worked in the Executive Mansion of both President Tubman and President Tolbert (as the President herself did); and the Hon Amara Konneh, the current Minister of Planning and Economic Affairs, who is representative of the younger technocratic breed that trained in the USA during the period of the civil war. Such advisors, valued mostly for their political skills and support, are all in key government positions, and the President relies on them

[17] There is nothing that is peculiar to Liberia about this since leaders everywhere seek advice both formally and informally from various sources.

extensively, both formally and on a more individualised basis. President Johnson-Sirleaf is also likely to continue to draw on their support in her forthcoming re-election campaign.

In order to put together an entire administration, the President has also had to make appointments from among Liberians she did not know well, or did not know at all. A committee for appointments was set up after the presidential election to vet and shortlist candidates, on which Prof. Monger (mentioned above) was a key member. The committee was disbanded once the administration was formed, and no permanent system to make appointments was left in place.

However, while it was in operation, the commission identified many of the key people who were brought in and have subsequently risen to positions of some authority. They include people like the Director General (DG) of the Civil Service Agency (Dr. William Allen), the Minister without Portfolio in the Presidency (Natty B. Davis), who has now moved to become Chairman of the National Investment Commission (NIC), and the Chairman of the Public Procurement Commission (Prof. Willie Belleh). All of these appointees were technocrats in the previous interim administration, and they were brought into government out of necessity due to the shortage of talent. Many of these advisors were also educated and/or trained abroad and came back to Liberia after a prolonged period of absence due to the internal conflict. Most of these advisors have by now developed a close relationship with the President and once again they enjoy substantial access both formally and informally as the President seeks their advice and opinion on different matters.

Interestingly, to this day many of the President's key ministers and commissioners are not members of her party, and may have associations with or even have active roles in other parties. This may affect how Cabinet functions, and may constrain the President to some degree, for example in regard to such details as whether to keep records of meetings. But it may also be advantageous in terms of building crucial alliances across parties, as the recent merging of one of the opposition parties (led by Prof. Belleh) with the President's party attests.

Beyond this, the President also seeks advice from a variety of other individuals or groups in a more informal basis, and these can provide both political and more technical support. The Chairman of her party is particularly important from a political perspective given that patronage plays a key role in party building, as well as in coalition building or power sharing arrangements with other parties or members of the Legislature. Observers have also mentioned that President Johnson-Sirleaf has enjoyed close personal relations of friendship and trust with a few key women, both from Liberia and beyond, who form part of a 'sisterhood'. In particular, the sisterhood includes the ex-Danish ambassador, who now heads up UNMIL, and the former US ambassador, with whom she goes as far back as the days of the Tolbert administration. These two women are intimately informed and closely involved on Liberian affairs, but they are distinctly external and "third party" in their relations and don't have domestic political aspirations. The President is apparently in touch with them on a very regular basis and often relies upon them for substantial advice.[18] In a way, given their respective positions, these women can be complementary conduits of vital information and intelligence: UNMIL has unparalleled internal security reporting, to which the US can add;

[18] As an example of this, one well-placed observer mentioned that the President shared an early draft of the country's National Development Plan with them, and they both expressed that security needed to be given greater prominence and more funding within the Plan. This was advice that the President proceeded to take on board.

and the US Embassy can provide a balanced assessment of the key regional sovereign actors, to which the UN system can add. According to several well-placed observers, the President draws on further networks of clan, family and friendship (for example old friends from school) for advice on different issues and concerns, but these seem harder to pinpoint more explicitly.

2.5 Political-administrative interface

In Liberia, there are a number of highly talented and motivated individuals, both within the CoG and other government institutions, who are committed to making the Liberian state more effective and better able to respond to the needs of the population and provide basic services. Yet, against a backdrop of a steady brain drain of the country's most educated civil servants and significantly reduced or non-existent technical capacities as a result of the prolonged internal conflict, the quality of the administrative (i.e., professional and non-political) civil service is very low. There is no permanent civil service structure in place, and the concept of an appointment and pay system based on merit and experience remains shallow. Despite multiple attempts at reform (see Box 2 and Box 4), the difficulty of attracting qualified and well trained permanent staff remains a key challenge. The development of human capacity in Liberia is a critical need that lies at the foundation of everything else (see also OECD/PDG 2011 for a broader discussion on the quality of the civil services and challenges specific to fragile states).

In effect, most of the advisors at the CoG are political appointees who do not always have the necessary technical or sectoral expertise.[19] As has been mentioned, this power of appointment provides the President with an enormous source of patronage but it is also an essential bargaining tool to ensure cooperation. As illustrated in Box 2 below, exceptions to this general observation about the political nature of the civil service are beginning to emerge, though these remain limited in scope.

Box 2: Examples of initiatives intended to professionalise the civil service in Liberia

The Senior Executive Service (SES), which is a scheme administered as a special project by the DG of the Civil Service Agency (CSA) with support from UNDP and USAID, includes around 100 special positions that are filled on the basis of professional merit selection, and not by Presidential appointment, to act as "change agents" (Allen 2010). There was an assumption that key reforms of the civil service would take place in time to absorb many of these individuals into permanent posts and structures, at reasonable pay levels, but this has yet to happen. In addition, there are some technical advisors at the heart of the CoG who are also supported by interested donors. These include the small AGI team sitting in the Ministry of State, as well as (at present) ten midcareer professionals who are part of the Liberia Fellows programme. These fellows, appointed on the basis of competitive selection and on internationally competitive salaries, work as "special assistants" to Cabinet level Ministers and Senior Officials, taking on a wide variety of tasks ranging from public policy to ministerial coordination to administration (JSI Research & Training Institute 2010).

On the other hand, these donor-supported special postings are all temporary. As a result, in an attempt to ensure domestic capacity can be carried forward even after special advisors leave, President Johnson-Sirleaf launched a sister programme to the Liberia Fellows, the President's Young Professional Programme (PYPP), in August 2009, with support from the JSI Research and Training

[19] Beyond Monrovia, in the fifteen counties and five key municipalities that make up Liberia, the President's powers of appointment also include the County and Municipal Superintendents as well as the first line of subordinate officials who report to them.

Institute. This initiative, which is closely coordinated by the CSA and the Ministry of Planning, provides opportunities for recent Liberian college graduates to work for different government ministries and agencies on a competitive basis over a two-year period. In this way, the programme is intended to support the country's efforts to build a strong and responsive workforce and offer leadership opportunities and training to its youth. Graduates of the program will be encouraged to continue to work for the government. (JSI Research & Training Institute 2010)

Overall, one of the consequences of having a Presidency that is almost entirely equipped with political and very few technical advisors is that the structure of the CoG is both top heavy and flat[20]. It includes, on the one hand, a large number of very senior people at the top, and, on the other, many Departments and units at the bottom. There are very few linkages in between, to provide a gradual and consistent hierarchical structure. An issue that was regularly mentioned during the course of our interviews is that, in the present setup, there is very little work of substance that is delegated to permanent officials by political appointees. Permanent officials tend to receive instructions, and in general they do not seem to exercise much initiative – nor are they expected to do so. It is a two-tier system of those who make decisions and give instructions, and those who are intended to carry them out. As discussed in Section 3.1 below, in Liberia there have been different efforts at reforming the civil service to make it more professional and less political, but such efforts have thus far not gotten very far.

2.6 The Cabinet and Cabinet Secretariat

In principle, the Cabinet in Liberia is a leading decision-making body for the executive, giving strategic direction and control to the government as a whole.[21] Its main role is "to provide advice to the President on policy issues and manage the delivery of government priorities. Under the direct guidance and supervision of the President, the Cabinet seeks to bring collective wisdom to the conduct of government business. Cabinet discusses issues of significant national interest and recommends and decides on actions to take in advancing these issues into policies." (Cabinet Secretariat, Ministry of State for Presidential Affairs 2010). The Office of the Cabinet is thus central to the functioning of government and the role of the DG of the Cabinet is vital. The DG is intended to play a key role in managing the policy cycle and in coordinating the business of Government.

However, the Cabinet as a collective body in Liberia has not been effective. In the words of an observer, it is a body "consumed by politics". Despite continual references back to the President for some types of decisions, ministers also tend to get on with their own business without consultation or explanation in a range of areas that they consider of personal interest. Several well-placed observers commented that Cabinet ministers operate as isolated enclaves protecting their own turf. There tends to be little interaction of genuine substance between ministers as a formal group, and collaboration remains limited. Cabinet meetings are more about discussions than about coordination and decision-making, and they tend to take up a lot of senior officials' time for uncertain benefits. The informal interactions between different Ministers before or after the Cabinet meeting are often more important than the meeting itself.[22] The CoG thus faces a particular challenge as it seeks to perform its function in terms

[20] Again, this kind of situation is one that is by no means unique to Liberia and can be observed in countries throughout the developing world.

[21] The Cabinet is chaired by the President and it consists of all Ministers in Liberia as well as the Chair of the National Investment Commission, the DG of the CSA, and the DG of the General Services Agency, which are also ministerial posts. Presidential advisors and others may also be invited to attend Cabinet meetings.

[22] But note that this is true more universally as well!

of the government's collective responsibility. Portfolio and collective responsibilities of Ministers may need to be better balanced, and the Cabinet as a unified body may need to be able to exercise greater autonomy and independence.

Supported in part by advisors from AGI who are hosted within the Ministry of State for Presidential Affairs,[23] some efforts are now under way to make the Cabinet a more effective, cohesive, and well-coordinated (collective) body, especially through the strengthening of the Office of the Cabinet. The Office of the Cabinet is being gradually transformed into a Cabinet Secretariat. As such, it was moved from the Office of the President to become an autonomous unit in the Ministry of State. It now has two permanent professional staff, including a Programme Coordinator and a Policy Analyst, to support the DG of Cabinet. Previously, the DG had only one administrative officer, and the main task of the Office was to organise cabinet meetings and carry out clerical work. Under the current DG, Dr Momo Rogers, who assumed his post in June 2009, there is an aspiration to expand the function of the office so that it can begin for the first time to take responsibility for the products and outcomes of Cabinet decision-making, and not merely for the process of organizing meetings.

A large part of the work of the DG has been devoted to putting more formal systems in place to make the functioning of the Cabinet, including Cabinet meetings, more effective and efficient. A Cabinet Manual to guide the modus operandi of the Cabinet system and processes was produced in 2010, the first such manual of its kind (Cabinet Secretariat, Ministry of State for Presidential Affairs 2010). Among other things, the manual explains who the Cabinet members are, what issues the Cabinet can consider, how ministers can submit an Agenda item for Cabinet, how ministers should prepare for Cabinet meetings and submit documents and presentations, etc. There is a perception among well-placed observers that, with the establishment of these guidelines, there has been some better and more regular control exerted over the Cabinet agenda, and better preparation prior to meetings.[24] This has helped to improve the quality of the discussion, and decision-making within the Cabinet is becoming more effective. The DG is also now better equipped to follow up with different ministers on agreed actions and implementation, which is important in terms of promoting accountability

Other efforts to restructure the Cabinet Secretariat have entailed improving information sharing across all areas of the Ministry of State, and encouraging communication with and the sending of documents to the Secretariat by email where possible. This is still challenging given that email and internet access remains uneven and poor throughout government offices. The DG is also trying to institute a system whereby meetings requested by members of Cabinet to see the President are scheduled in advance, as part of an effort to ensure the President's time is better planned and managed. In addition, at the request of the President, the DG has become responsible for communicating with the public about what his Office and the Cabinet do, through such mechanisms as press releases after each Cabinet meeting and radio interviews. The annual Cabinet retreats have also been changed to encourage greater coordination and interaction among Ministers related to the planning and the substance of the retreat.

Another innovation has been the recent introduction of Cabinet sub-committees, based on the four pillars of the PRS (peace and security, economic development, governance and the rule of law, and infrastructure and basic service delivery). These sub-committees, which have yet

[23] AGI placed a Governance Advisor within the Cabinet Secretariat in June 2010, for a period of 18 months.
[24] Regularly scheduled Cabinet meetings are held monthly, but the President also tends to call meetings more often than that.

to start meeting on a regular basis, are intended to provide a forum for more frequent formal interaction between Ministers. The intention is that the subcommittees will generate policy documents for discussion, so that less time for discussion is taken up at Cabinet meetings. On the other hand, it is not clear as of yet what the value added of these subcommittees will be. As different observers noted, they mirror the (already existing) four Working Committees of the LRDC (see Section 3.5 below), which makes sense intuitively but may lead to some duplication of efforts; they are not intended to prepare or simplify the Cabinet agenda; and they may make additional claims on the time of Ministers, since Ministers are intended to sit on them. Several of our interlocutors commented that it might make little sense to create sub-committees in a setting where Cabinet itself is still struggling to become more effective.

In all these efforts, it is important to highlight that the DG has trodden very lightly. Upon assuming his post, the DG did ask the President to give him ministerial ranking so that he could engage with Ministers on the same level. On the other hand, he has also focused on building good relationships with all Ministers, and he has emphasized his role as facilitator rather than another (political) player. It helps that, given his background, he is not perceived as a rival with competing interests. Before returning to Liberia in 2008, the DG had been a professor of mass communications at a university in the USA, and he had remained disconnected from the Liberian political scene until he took up this post.

From the discussion above, it seems that the elements of a more permanent and less ad hoc Cabinet Secretariat are beginning to be put in place. However, all of the changes that have been outlined above are very recent and they will need to be tested. These adjustments may make an incremental difference over time, and in that way they may contribute, even if slowly, to the improved effectiveness of the CoG overall. On the other hand, the ambition to turn the Secretariat into a more powerful institutional body that can help manage and coordinate the policy process and help the President deliver on her/his agenda remains a long-term challenge. Part of this challenge relates to what the Cabinet Secretariat can build on to develop a vision of what it wants to be. As with the National Assembly (more on this in Section 3.2 below), there is no collective memory of what a properly functioning Cabinet looks like. Crucially, this vision need not and should not be based on an idealised model that has little relevance to Liberia. But there is an opportunity to learn about how other Cabinets in both the developing and the developed world work, and to apply lessons that may seem relevant or useful. This is something that Liberian officials have not been exposed to but have expressed interest in.

3. CoG linkages to other key institutions and actors

3.1 Governance Commission (GC)

At least in principle, there is an ambitious project of administrative reform in Liberia, which is in part intended to streamline the functioning of the CoG. The leading agency responsible for carrying out the task of reforming the state is the Governance Commission (GC), in close collaboration with both the Civil Service Agency (CSA) and the Liberian Institute of Public Administration (LIPA). Like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the GC was created as part of the peace process negotiations in response to pressure from civil society organisations. Its remit, which has expanded over time, covers civil service reform, judicial reform, constitutional reform, land reform, anti-corruption strategy, codes of conduct for public officials, decentralisation, legislative capacity building, and security sector reform (World Bank 2007). President Johnson-Sirleaf herself headed the GC in its early years,

during the interim phase before her election. It is now headed by Professor Amos Sawyer, a respected academic who was the President of Liberia during the interim period between 1990 and 1994.

Since its inception, the GC has done a great deal in various important areas, including anti-corruption, decentralisation and national visioning. However, key areas of the administrative reform process have been stalled. Among other things, the GC has tried to undertake two fundamental reforms intended to create a more effective, streamlined and professionalised state, both within the CoG and beyond. The first entails reconfiguring the overall architecture of the administration by applying a standard suite of changes that would clarify and rationalize the mandate, functions, structures, processes and staffing requirements of all ministries (see Box 3). At the same time, through the CSA, the GC has also tried to lead a process of depoliticising many political appointments (such as Assistant Ministers) to make room for and allow the parallel creation of a more managerial and competent permanent civil service (see Box 4).

Box 3: Reform efforts to rationalise ministries

With the formal backing of the President, the GC developed a proposal for a new process by which Cabinet would review and agree to the necessary restructuring of the architecture of the administration, including all ministries and commissions in the Liberian government. The restructuring would also entail revising functions and ministerial responsibilities. The new process calls for the exercise to be implemented from the top down, beginning with the Executive Mansion and the Presidency, and cascading down through a cluster of "power ministries" including Finance, Planning, and Foreign Affairs, before coming to the others, also in clusters. However, many Cabinet ministers have not been fully behind this proposal. Significantly, the CSA has been restructured in line with the proposed new architecture of the administration, as a model for other Ministries to emulate. But this has not proven sufficient to turn the reform initiative into a reality. Its success is likely to require the authority and commitment of the President, not just in official pronouncements, but also by the force of her example: for instance, submitting the Executive to such rationalization would prove instrumental in helping to overcome the reluctance of individual ministers in ways that the restructuring of the CSA has not managed to. This initiative also needs the championing of Professor Sawyer at the GC and other key luminaries to give it real momentum. However, it is now highly unlikely that much more will happen with this reform effort before the next election.

But as several observers have noted, at least some elements of this reform agenda have languished because there has not been enough support, leadership, coordination and/or strategic planning at different levels of government (these are issues that the Literature Review highlights more generally as well – see OECD/PDG 2011). Part of the challenge is that, while the GC is intended to work together with LIPA and the CSA on the different aspects of the reforms and coordinate their efforts, in practice, the structure has proven cumbersome and fragmented. Despite the fact that all three individuals heading these agencies know each other extremely well and share a history of working together under different governments in Liberia, their collaboration on this administrative reform has remained limited, and there seems to be considerable in-fighting as well as a lack of clarity about mandates and responsibilities.

Box 4: Efforts to depoliticise the civil service

In 2008 the President approved a major civil service reform strategy, which was prepared with

intensive donor support. Among other things, the President asked that the system of politically appointed Assistant Ministers be replaced by merit-based permanent appointment of professionals who would provide the new managerial cadre of the reformed administration. However, very little has happened since in terms of its implementation.

How can that be explained? Part of the problem is that proposals submitted to Cabinet for the reform's implementation were not fully worked out – they did not, for example, provide careful analysis of the options to be considered, or clarification of the political choices and adjustments that would need to be made and systems that would need to be put in place in order for the new policies to be implemented and monitored successfully. But the technical weakness of the proposals is only one factor helping to explain the failure to make meaningful progress in this area. Perhaps a more fundamental one has to do with substantial gaps in the CoG in providing a coordination, strategic planning, and implementation role in the policymaking process, and insufficiently sustained political leadership from the top.

To begin with, the management of the Cabinet meetings was particularly weak. There were no pre-Cabinet meetings or sub-committees of Cabinet to thrash out difficulties and surface objections in advance. Beyond that, and perhaps more fundamentally, while the President has stated her commitment to civil service reform and has asked her advisors to deliver on it, civil service reform is a very politically sensitive topic, especially in an election year. The DG of the CSA is a highly competent and powerful player in the Liberian system, but the proposed reforms challenged many members of Cabinet, who perceived them as threatening to their power and standing and therefore resisted them. On his own, the DG did not have sufficient authority and personal confidence to carry them through against such opposition. At the critical juncture the President did not give him support, either personally, through informal political manoeuvrings behind closed doors, or through any formalised institutional mechanism in the Presidency (which as discussed is not really in place).

The role of donors is also telling here. While the civil service reform strategy had been developed under a DFID-supported reform programme, the donor community did not engage at the level of the CoG to support the administration in pushing through the necessary decisions, essentially because, for the most part, donor attention in Liberia has been elsewhere (e.g. Health, Education, Transport, Finance, Security).

A second effort to engage on the reforms to depoliticise some of the civil service appointments was made in late 2009 and early 2010, in the closing months of the DFID reform project. Cabinet has agreed in principle for the GC to prepare draft legislation for submission to the Legislature later this year – but of course Cabinet will still have to review and agree to that draft before that can happen. It may be that with the recent changes that have been introduced to the way the Cabinet works as a decision-making body (see Section 2.6 above), this will prove less difficult than it was the last time around, which would constitute considerable progress in its own right.

Moreover, there have also been weaknesses at the highest levels of the Executive. A critical gap that has become evident through these reform efforts is that the (formal) CoG lacks a firm grip of the policy process. The administrative machinery of the state could not be reformed because the CoG lacked the capacity (not only technical but also, crucially, administrative, institutional and political) to support the decisions required. This is a general organisational problem that goes beyond the personal authority of the President. Even a President that is highly respected and enjoys considerable support from the population needs the support provided by formal mechanisms and structures to be able to carry out her vision and implement her programme of reform. As Tony Blair (2011) has put it, "good leadership is ... not merely a function of good intentions but of the capacity of the institutions that support leaders to turn those intentions into practical results".

Indeed, a key lesson from this experience of failed administrative reform is that the authority of the President may wear thin given that so much depends on it, and that it is called upon on a constant basis. As noted in Sections 2.1 and 2.2 above, it is challenging (and also unrealistic) to maintain such a high level of focus and impact across a very large number of areas. The fate of both of these initiatives helps to highlight the fact that successful reform requires ***both*** sustained political commitment and engagement from the very top (i.e. the President) ***and*** champions from within who can drive the process forward – as well of a functioning CoG that can provide the support needed in terms of coordination, strategic planning, and implementation.

3.2 Executive-legislative relations

Until very recently, relations between the Executive and the Legislature also remained highly personalised, and they have not always been cooperative. For the most part, they have been based on one-on-one interactions and negotiations between the President and individual legislators. Some legislators expressed that, in their view, this type of arrangement has proven impractical, extremely time-consuming and unmanageable. It also generates the impression of preferential treatment and privileged access to the President.

Following requests that originally stemmed from the Legislative and were supported by the Governance Commission (GC), the President created a new legislative liaison position within the Ministry of State without Portfolio in March 2010. The main aim of this appointed liaison is to improve the consultation and coordination process and to bring greater regularity and systematisation to the relationship between these two branches of power. While both the Executive and the Legislature agree the creation of this post is an important reform, it is still too early to tell whether relations between the two will in fact become more formalised. But discussion inside the Executive seems to have gradually shifted towards improving cooperation with the Legislature and taking the lead through early and constructive engagement with relevant legislators and committees on emerging policy which will flow through into legislation (UNDP & World Bank, 2009). This task should also be greatly facilitated by the legislative liaison. The President pro Tempore of the Senate[25] has also proposed having regularly scheduled, bimonthly meetings with the President to discuss the legislative agenda and monitor progress, though such meetings are not yet in place. These are signs that the machinery is beginning to operate more effectively (UNDP & World Bank, 2009).

3.3 Communications

As was noted in Section 1 in Part 2 of this report, Liberia has made considerable progress in a variety of areas since President Johnson-Sirleaf took office in 2006. However, according to several well-placed observers, many of the achievements of the Government have not been effectively communicated to the people of Liberia, some of whom are not necessarily feeling the benefits of ongoing reforms and improved administration (EIU 2011). Part of the problem is that very high expectations are being placed on a government that has inherited considerable problems and challenges tied to the legacy of the internal conflict and the deeper roots of exclusion and marginalization. On the other hand, as is further elaborated below, the government has not always done an effective job of delivering a coherent message. Many of

[25] While the Vice President of Liberia is the President of the Senate, the President pro Tempore leads the day-to-day business of the Senate.

the people interviewed for this study, both within and outside government, commented that there seems to be some confusion regarding what the key messages emanating from the Executive should be, and what the roles and responsibilities in communicating these messages are.

According to several sources, internal communications within the different parts of the CoG, and communications between the CoG and other key ministries and organs of the government, remain weak, unstructured, and ad hoc. At a very basic level, as highlighted by a large majority of the individuals interviewed for this study, communications are heavily constrained by the lack of connectivity and timely mechanisms and systems for information sharing. This is a problem that was highlighted in the original assessment that USAID/OTI carried out in 2006 (see Box 1), and remains valid today. Such poor communication makes the formulation and coordination of a coherent and consistent policy message difficult to achieve. As an example, several well-placed observers highlighted that, while the President has spent considerable time trying to define and sharpen her top priorities, these have not always been successfully communicated even to her Ministers.

There is also frequent confusion between the Office of the President and the Ministry of Information (MoI) regarding communications. The Presidential spokesperson is supposed to speak for the President, while the MoI speaks for the government. However, this theoretical distinction is often hard to maintain in practice. This is an area where daily collaboration is probably needed to keep the joint, shared, or separate messages clear. AGI is currently supporting a technical advisor to work with the Communications division of the Presidency to promote better coordination and planning between the Executive and the MoI, but regularised and frequent communication between the two is not yet happening.

In addition, some observers noted that the work of the Executive (and indeed the Legislature and the Judiciary as well) in the area of communications suffers from a general lack of skills and that the staff needs more professional training. For instance, officials do not know how to handle relations with the media, or how prepare press releases. MoI is promoting training and workshops for all three branches of state to try to inculcate some of these basic professional skills.

Furthermore, the government lacks a coherent, overall strategic plan for communications both in the short and in the long term. For instance, there is no communication strategy embedded into the day-to-day of government, in part because this would require a more intensive interface between the Presidential Press Secretary and the Minister of Information, which, as has been noted, remains infrequent. There is also no communications planning embedded into the diary process or the cabinet process to ensure alignment with the President's time and between Cabinet ministers (though as noted in Section 2.6 above the DG of the Cabinet Secretariat now has developed some processes to communicate with the media and the public on a more regularised basis). And there are no cross-government communications plans around major policy issues, including for example the HIPC completion point or the visioning exercise being led by the GC (in fact the MoI seems to have very limited information about that initiative). Once again, this is an area of strategic planning that AGI advisors are trying to support.

Beyond this, the quality of the media in Liberia remains weak. Without a doubt, there are some professional media outlets that have developed (especially in terms of radio and newspapers). However, with the advent of political liberalisation in the country, some of the

media have enjoyed a newfound freedom without necessarily having the necessary professional capacity or standards to assume some of the responsibilities that such freedom entails. But the issue of how to set and maintain standards of media reporting, and of the institutional arrangements that would need to be devised for that purpose, is not something that the Government of Liberia, either within the CoG or beyond (e.g. the GC) has focused on. A troika of the Minister of Information, the Minister of State without Portfolio and the Head of Public Broadcasting did start meeting on the subject of managing media relations, with the initial aim of defining some procedures to follow, and developing key policy messages. However, this never got much traction.

3.4 Civil society

Civil society organisations proliferated in Liberia beginning in the early 1990s, mobilising in particular around the need to find a peaceful resolution to the violent conflict that had engulfed the country (Atuobi 2010). CSO representatives fought for and secured a space at the table in the peace talks in Accra that led to the CPA in 2003, and they were signatories of the Agreement. During the peace negotiation process, civil society strongly advocated for the establishment of both the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Governance Commission. Civil society also played an active role under the NTGL, with some CSO representatives gaining formal positions and becoming part of the transitional government. CSOs more broadly also were important in creating an enabling environment for the negotiation and implementation of the GEMAP (Dwan and Bailey 2006), and, alongside government and donor representatives, civil society has been an equal participant in the tripartite membership of the Economic Governance Steering Committee (EGSC) responsible for oversight of GEMAP implementation (Dwan and Bailey, 2006).

With a democratically elected government in office beginning in 2006, the direct participation of civil society groups in the government of Liberia came to an end. This has called for a shift in the relationship between civil society and the state of Liberia from direct partnership to the traditional watchdog role of civil society (Atuobi 2010). This, however, has not ended the expectation of civil society groups that they should be continue to enjoy the necessary space to engage with the affairs of the country. Liberia today has an active, outspoken and articulate civil society which has been closely involved in key reform and decision-making processes.

Relations between the Executive and organised civil society are managed through the Ministry of State without Portfolio, while they are regulated and monitored (at least in principle) by the Ministry of Planning and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Ministry of State without Portfolio consults different civil society groups on a regular basis to elicit their advice and ideas on a broad set of policy issues that range from human rights and justice to corruption to basic service delivery. For example, civil society groups were included in the Steering Committee tasked to supervise the selection of projects and the allocation of resources from the UN Peacebuilding Fund (PBF). Civil society groups have also been involved in spearheading important initiatives, such as the Whistler Blower Protection Act, which was passed by Executive Order following a series of meetings between the Presidency and civil society. Overall, among those interviewed as part of this study, there is a general feeling that civil society enjoys regular access to the Executive and that the Johnson-Sirleaf administration has made a genuine effort to include civil society organisations in decision-making processes. On the other hand, some interlocutors expressed that such engagement can also be selective and opportunistic at times (see also Atuobi 2010 on this). Moreover, civil

society involvement in the policymaking process has not been sufficient to ensure the proper implementation of policies (as in the prosecution of high-level officials accused of corruption, for example), and that remains a key challenge.

3.5 Donor Coordination

In Liberia today, there is a (relatively) successful system in place for managing relations with the international donor community. The Liberian Reconstruction and Development Commission (LRDC) was created in 2007.[26] For President Johnson-Sirleaf, the development and maintenance of strong relations with donors was a crucial priority from the start, and as such she very closely led and oversaw the creation of the LRDC.

The LRDC has four pillars of national transformation: i) Security, ii) Economics, iii) Governance, and iv) Infrastructure/Services. These are the same as the PRS pillars (which was developed with assistance from the World Bank in 2008), to ensure greater coherence of and donor alignment with the development agenda. Initially, oversight of this mechanism was placed within the Presidency, so as to provide the President with a means of enhancing both partner coordination and, crucially, internal government management. Under the leadership of the President, the structure could thus be used to monitor the implementation of the PRS agenda through the Cabinet and heads of autonomous agencies. In that way, the President, together with the Cabinet, should be able to set goals, identify working resources, and, in conjunction with the respective partner agencies, expect them to deliver and hold them accountable for results. The Minister of Planning also elaborated a set of oversight and reporting procedures with multiple levels of reporting on goals, milestones and deliverables, by a range of internal and external actors.

President Johnson-Sirleaf appointed her (then) Minister of State without Portfolio as well as key ally, Natty B. Davis, to oversee the LRDC. Davis had headed the equivalent function in the transitional administration. The LRDC secretariat was eventually moved out of the Presidency into the Ministry of Planning in 2009. There were several reasons for this. Firstly the Minister without Portfolio was by that time shifting his attention to management of the flow of large foreign investors and potential investors to Liberia. The Ministry of Planning is also the official home of the PRS, so it made sense to bring the donor coordination function under that roof. Attention is now shifting to the new Peace Building agenda being led by the UN, which should replace the PRS when it closes in mid-2011.

Whether donor coordination is located at the heart of the CoG or in the Ministry of Planning, there is a growing realization among different stakeholders that coordination, collaboration, and communication across Ministries remains considerably ineffective. Several donor representatives commented that, from their perspective, the policy process within the

[26] The coordination body that had been in place before the establishment of the LRDC was a framework led by the NTGL that was centred around delivering on the Results Focused Transitional Framework (RFTF) that had been adopted by Liberia's development partners at the Liberia Reconstruction Conference (LRC) in 2004. However, while the RFTF proved to be an innovative tool for post-crisis management and donor coordination and there was noticeable progress in key RFTF result areas, there were also substantive gaps. The debilitating factors were not only technical and financial but also organizational and political. Inadequate skills available in key administrative and management areas, insufficient and delayed releases of pledged funds, and widespread problems of coordination and accountability were particularly pronounced. The ever prevalent and openly held view of the NTGL's inability to institute prudent and transparent mechanisms for managing public resources, and keeping to terms of good economic and political governance agreed to with donors and partners, presented real threats to the viability of the RFTF.

government tends to be scattered and uncoordinated, and they have stated that it is often difficult to know who within the government of Liberia is in charge of overall policy strategy and guidance. For example, when the President appointed her (then) Minister of State without Portfolio as coordinator of the donor group on economic development, some of her other Ministers (Agriculture, Commerce, etc) remained unaware of this for some time.

But the capacity of the CoG is of great importance to the effectiveness of donor programmes, especially if those programmes involve more than one Ministry or more than one branch of the state. The effectiveness of donor initiatives can be undermined by the (lack of) coordinating and oversight capacity of government. A good example where problems may arise is provided by the programme to support Liberia's agricultural development through and by the private sector that is being proposed by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). Such a programme, intended to bring together a variety of stakeholders within and outside the government of Liberia as well as the donor community, can be of immense value to the country, but it is also likely to prove complex and challenging in its implementation. As a single donor, SIDA can achieve some coordination indirectly through spending. But the overall coordination of several ministries, along with the private sector, different communities, and the NGOs, is something that only the government of Liberia can accomplish through its CoG, and that should be the government's key role and contribution in undertaking such a programme.

Part 4: Donor engagement in CoG in Liberia and lessons and recommendations

1. Brief overview of general donor engagement in Liberia

As has been noted, the international donor community has played an instrumental role in helping to consolidate peace and security in supporting state-building processes in Liberia. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2003, brokered with the support of the international community, paved the way for a large UN peacekeeping force, the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), with the objective of restoring order and stability and creating the space for rebuilding state institutions and structures (see Box 5). The opening of this space facilitated the considerations of the humanitarian and developmental dimensions of the challenge, and opened the door for extensive and sustained donor engagement in Liberia.

Box 5: United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL)

UN Security Council resolution 1509 (2003) authorised the deployment of a stabilisation force of up to 15,000 United Nations military personnel for a period of 12 months under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. That force took over peacekeeping responsibility from ECOWAS on 1 October 2003. The UNMIL mandate has since been extended by a series of UN SC resolutions up to September 2011. Authorised troop strength was has remained 14,875-15,000 military personnel throughout the period since October 2003. The presence of UN peacekeepers continues to play an important role as a deterrent to the resumption of conflict by any of the former factions. However, the slow pace of original troop deployment, the mishandling of the disarmament process in December 2003 and the lack of early cohesion between the military and civilian arms of UNMIL all compromised initial efforts to disband and reintegrate the LURD and MODEL militias (ICG, 2004; The Economist, 2004).

The UNMIL remit under resolution 1509 extends substantially beyond peacekeeping operations, covering: *"support for implementation of the Ceasefire Agreement; protection of United Nations staff, facilities and civilians; support for humanitarian and human rights assistance; support for security reform; and support for implementation of the peace process"*. UNMIL also played a critical role in the process of negotiating GEMAP both within the international community and with the NTGL, requiring the mission to play much more of a political role than had been originally envisioned.

Source: Hedger 2011

From 2003 to 2006, the majority of aid channelled to Liberia was for humanitarian purposes. Since that time, non-humanitarian / developmental aid to the country has increased considerably, with a growing focus on state-building (World Bank & UNDP 2009). Major areas of donor engagement have included:

- Promoting peace and security
- Promoting democratic institutions and accountability
- Strengthening the rule of law
- Rebuilding state capacity in economic policy, public financial management systems and public administration
- Rehabilitating the country's socio-economic and physical infrastructure and mechanisms to attract private sector investment
- Promoting sustainable economic development at the local level
- Capacity building at the individual, organisational and institutional level

Through the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Programme (GEMAP), the international community has in many ways acted as a default government in Liberia in the area of economic governance. During the NGTL, issues of corruption and mismanagement of public funds so worried donors that, under the leadership of USAID, they jointly conceived GEMAP as a highly interventionist programme that inserted international personnel with signing authority into several critical areas of fiscal management and oversight. The programme was so controversial in nature that it had to be submitted to the Security Council for endorsement and UNMIL's mandate had to be adjusted accordingly (See Box 5 above). However, while GEMAP was imposed on the NGTL, the Government that came to power in 2006 has been closely engaged in its management and has openly supported it. Implementation is supervised by an Economic Governance Steering Committee chaired by the President with an international development partner as deputy, and Committee members include senior government personnel, donors, and civil society. GEMAP officially ended in 2010 but a new donor programme, led once again by USAID, is being developed to continue to work on GEMAP's work.[27]

2. Donor efforts targeted at the CoG in Liberia

Despite such intensive (and at times quite intrusive) level of international engagement in Liberia related to areas of governance and state-building, for the most part donor involvement has not focused explicitly or directly on the CoG. For a brief period after the CPA was signed in 2003, a few donors in Liberia did engage in activities that sought to identify and strengthen institutions at the CoG and develop proposals for possible reform. As several of the people we interviewed as part of this study, including especially representatives from the international community, most of these initiatives were scattered and short-lived, including some efforts led by the UN as it oversaw the transitional arrangements in Liberia between 2004 and the presidential elections in 2005, as well as from the European Community.

Perhaps the most significant of these efforts was the programme launched by the USAID Office of Transition Initiatives in February 2004. Part of the programme was initially intended to provide sustained support for senior executive and coordinating offices, including the Ministry of State for Presidential Affairs and other key Ministries (OTI/USAID 2007). Among other things, the programme carried out an assessment of the short-term operational needs for the Ministry of State for Presidential Affairs and laid out a proposal for reforming the Ministry (OTI/USAID 2006. Box 1 in Section 1 of Part 3 summarises some of the key challenges that undermine the effectiveness of the Ministry identified by the assessment). However, as has been noted, this proposal did not make much headway within the CoG in Liberia and, as suggested by our interviews, has been largely forgotten. In addition, though the USAID programme was extended to provide needed assistance to the newly elected government against "the acute deterioration of government systems" and other challenges, the focus of the progarmme shifted away from direct support to the CoG towards other activities (USAID 2007).

Another initiative very closely albeit not directly related to CoG reform and institutional design at the centre was the DFID project on civil service reform (2006 to 2010) mentioned in Box 4. Paradoxically, as mentioned in Section 3.1 in Part 3 of this paper, this effort foundered in large part because of a lack of coherence and coordination within the CoG in

[27] For more information, see GEMAP's website: http://gemap-liberia.org/about_gemap/index.html; as well as USAID@s webpage: http://liberia.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/Liberia_Briefer_GEMAP.pdf

Liberia. Most donors had particular forms of support in mind, and they were not particularly keen to get involved in reforms that were so close to the seat of power. In the end, this progarmme produced very little in the way of results. DFID disengaged from the process of civil service reform once the project came to a close, and a few well placed commentators mentioned that DFID has left a big hole that other donors have been reluctant to fill.

Another initiative that touches upon the CoG is the Liberia Fellows programme (see Box 2), which sponsors a select group of highly trained young professionals to serve in Liberia for one year as special assistants to senior Liberian government officials, primarily members of Cabinet. The Liberia Fellows programme began in mid-2007 with a grant from Ed Scott and an inaugural class of six fellows. The programme has expanded with an additional five rounds of selection, comprising a total of 31 fellows, many of whom have worked in the MoS and the Cabinet, as well as other Ministries. This programme has also proven significant in facilitating the return of the Diaspora. According to the programme's latest Report, nearly half of all Fellows, both past and present, are Liberians who left during the conflict and have now gone back. As the programme entered its fourth year at the end of 2010, all Liberian fellows recruited back to the country through this programme remained in Liberia, and many of them continue to serve as senior officials within the Government of Liberia (John Snow Research & Training Institute 2010). Both this programme and its sister President's Young Professional Programme (PYPP) (see Box 2) have attracted support from a variety of philanthropic organisations, including the McCall MacBain Foundation, Open Society Institute, the Nike Foundation, Belinda Stronach Foundation, Joseph L. Mailman Foundation, Daphne Foundation, Simonds Family Foundation, and the Hess Family Foundation, and they are run as a collaborative effort between the Liberian government and the John Snow Research and Training Institute. (John Snow Research & Training Institute 2010).

The AGI, launched by Tony Blair in 2007 and active in Liberia since 2010[28], is the international initiative most explicitly and directly engaging with the CoG in Liberia today. As has already been noted in this paper, AGI supports an on-the ground team of 5 technical advisors recruited from the international public and private sectors to provide strategic support and advice to government officials at the highest level within the Ministry of State for Presidential Affairs. Many of the efforts carried out by AGI have already been discussed, but in essence AGI's work in Liberia (as elsewhere) is intended to help "build an effective centre of government in order to enable delivery of critical priorities necessary for the country's reconstruction and prosperity"[29] through four areas of work:

- Support to the Executive office of the President
- Support to the Cabinet Secretariat
- Support to the Communications division within the Presidency
- Support to programme delivery

AGI's original mission was intended to support the Government of Liberia to (re)organise the Ministry of State around a few key priorities identified by the President and focus on their delivery through the creation of a Programme Delivery Unit (PDU). However, the focus of the initiative is now much more on enhanced cohesion and coordination within the Ministry, in part because it has been hard to sustain the focus of counterparts on prioritisation. This

[28] Scoping work started in 2009. AGI is also present in Rwanda and Sierra Leone
[29] For more information, see: http://www.tonyblairoffice.org/africa/pages/liberia/

helps to highlight that, while high level political support is absolutely essential for CoG reforms to succeed, so is internal leadership by a sufficiently senior official who can carry the reform forward (OECD/PDG 2010). It also illustrates the need for flexible and strategic approaches to CoG that can be adapted in response to context.

3. Making the CoG in Liberia more effective: a political and not purely a technical challenge

A good argument can be advanced that the installation of a machinery of policy management and coordination at the CoG is not only the way to deal with complexity and uncertainty of the policy process, but can also enhance effective leadership and improve the quality of the decision-making process. As the discussion in the previous sections suggest, there are some real human and technical capacity gaps that undermine the effective functioning of the CoG in Liberia (e.g. poorly skilled and trained staff, lack of basic communications and physical infrastructure, etc). However, the deeper challenges to setting up a more formalised and permanent system of coordination and accountability are almost certainly political. We can note a few here. The politics of patronage and the personalisation of political power both have deep roots in Liberia and continue to characterize most institutional practice in the country. In addition, Liberia is a small country in which people know each other or know of each other and where social ties and expectations can be quite binding. Politicians are often instinctively uncomfortable with the constraints that formal and standardized hierarchies of administration may impose, and may prefer more informal and personal modes of interaction.

As suggested in Section 2.5 in Part 2, there is also the likelihood that the incompleteness of the peace process (especially with regard to an incomplete process of internal reconciliation and to the lack of a fundamental agreement on the rules of the game) sets 'silent' limits on what kinds of reform may be deemed acceptable in the area of the CoG, which is extremely politically sensitive in nature. The President has the task of forming a stable, dominant coalition from among the assorted members of the power elite of the country, to ensure that Liberia never again falls back into violence and war. In doing so, she has to manoeuvre cautiously so as not to set off old antagonisms. She has to arrange matters so that the group she selects has the incentives to hang together and continue to cooperate. That imposes a discipline upon the President. She cannot afford to set up a more formal coordination mechanism that might just conceivably operate in a way that could antagonise them, or set them at each other. Any attempt at introducing a new, formalised system that may alter informal understandings and power dynamics introduces such a possibility, but the degree of risk is actually quite difficult to ascertain.

Within the CoG the President will naturally be cautious about setting up rules and procedures to enforce formal discipline and accountability that may antagonise her ministers and other powerful appointees. At the moment, she manages them skilfully by other, more politically attuned and informal methods. But this can be time consuming and distracting, and may not always be consistent with the demand of running a state of growing complexity where there are acute needs and competing priorities. This is the dilemma that the current executive faces: How far it is safe to move in the direction of institutionalising the machinery of the COG will depend on the President's sense of assurance that the political appointees she has in place to oversee it, at the level of her Ministers and Deputy Ministers of State, and her Minister of Cabinet (i.e. DG of the Cabinet Office), can be trusted to operate the new machinery safely. It is notable that the DG of the Cabinet has fully understood this point, and is extremely sensitive and concerned about the way his reforms of the cabinet system impact the key

ministers. As was discussed in Section 2.6 in Part 3, the Cabinet Secretariat has published a new (and first ever) Cabinet Manual, but whether it takes root and succeeds in changing patterns of behaviour that have become entrenched over time remains to be seen.

4. Lessons and recommendations emerging from the case study in Liberia

It has become increasingly recognised that there is a critical need to provide direct support to the CoG (OECD/PDG 2010), and in many ways it should be considered as an essential hinge in the state-building agenda: a functional CoG is instrumental to enable leaders to deliver, which in turn is important to help build the legitimacy and responsiveness of the state in the eyes of the population. However, as highlighted in the Section above, this is not an easy area of engagement. In effect, most donors seem reluctant to engage at the CoG directly because, by its very nature, it is work that is very sensitive and political. This kind of work also very much depends on supporting leadership at the top, which can be risky (Blair 2011). Recipient governments, for their part, may also deem it inappropriately intrusive for donors to get involved in what is essentially the centre of power in their country. They may therefore not welcome this kind of assistance unless they have an extremely close and trust-based relationship with a given donor (-- or, as with the NTGL and GEMAP, they have no other choice...).

So how to approach this kind of work? This case study on Liberia points to several strategic and programmatic lessons and recommendations that are worth highlighting.

4.1 Strategic level

- Feel comfortable with the political nature of the work involved in reforming the CoG

Working at the CoG is very sensitive given the political nature of this institution. Thus, international actors and organisations who want to be engaged in this kind of support must feel comfortable with politics, without feeling that they are compromising their impartiality. Interestingly, the initiatives closest to the CoG in Liberia today (AGI, the Liberia Fellows Programme and the PYPP) are not led by bilateral or multilateral donors, but by private foundations or individuals. This suggests once again that more conventional donors find it difficult to provide this kind of assistance because it is deemed to be too politically sensitive. On the other hand, GEMAP and the isolated examples of bilateral and multilateral support to CoG reflect that it may be possible for such donors to institute reform processes that may appear quite politically challenging at the start.

- ‘Get’ the politics

It is imperative to engage on CoG work on the basis of a solid understanding of the context and the political dynamics that are at play, including informal institutions and the (dis)incentives for reform and capacity building in the Centre of Government. Developing sound political economy analysis is a necessary precondition for engagement in this area.

- Do not engage in this work on the basis of preconceived models of what works

There are different strategic and institutional configurations that can lead to a more or less effective centre of government, so even if one aspect of it looks dysfunctional, that does not mean it is not serving a useful purpose.

- Make sure that structural reforms and capacity building are clearly linked to the implementation of government priorities

Capacity building interventions depend on political leadership and so they need to be clearly linked to the delivery of the government's own agenda. Capacity building in a vacuum will be ineffective.

- Build on a relationship of trust at the highest level of government as a crucial entry point

For a donor to engage in this kind of work successfully, it is essential to enjoy a very strong relationship at the highest levels of government that is based on trust. Such a relationship is a crucial entry point, and without it, it will prove extremely difficult to gain the kind of access that is needed at the very centre of power and to have any traction. AGI for instance is able to do what it does in Liberia (and elsewhere) in large part as a result of the long standing and strong relationship that exist between Former Prime Minister Tony Blair and President Johnson-Sirleaf.

- Do no harm

Donors should engage cautiously in this kind of support on the basis of sound contextual analysis, and they should tread lightly to ensure their interventions don't end up exacerbating tensions or generating (further) conflict.

4.2 Programmatic level

- Engage with informal institutions

The CoG in Liberia is not the product of a conscious design. Rather, as is true elsewhere, its evolution has been incremental, haphazard, and highly dependent on the country's context. Its development has been shaped by, among other things, political circumstances, structural constraints, and the personality and management style of Liberia's political leaders across time. Successful donor engagement with the CoG must start by building on the system that is already in place (no matter how rudimentary and problematic), rather than by artificially importing models from abroad. This entails engaging with the informal features embedded in existing systems, and assessing whether and how they can be harnessed to promote more effective systems (by taking into account, for example, the question of 'what's in it for the Minister' if they promote change – which GEMAP seems to have done through a system of rewards and punishment).

- Focus on realistic possibilities for reform rather than on 'best practice' (World Bank 2010)

Given the very serious (political) challenges that efforts to reform the CoG may entail, it is essential to approach such efforts from an incremental, strategic and targeted perspective rather than from an absolute and normative approach. Support should be designed based on a clear diagnosis of the barriers to the implementation of government priorities. As some of the examples outlined in this case study suggest, even small improvements to the systems and procedures around a leader – such as reforms to presidential diaries or more effective and

systematic Cabinet processes – can make a meaningful contribution in improving the effectiveness of the Executive to deliver.

- Ensure there is a solid basis of internal support for the kinds of reform to the CoG being sought

As the analysis provided in this case study highlight, for reforms to be successful, they need to enjoy full political support at the highest level of government (i.e. the President), and not only verbally but also in practice. However, this kind of support is in itself not sufficient to ensure success. Reforms also need active internal leadership by an official of sufficient seniority who can see them through.

- Promote South-South learning and other kinds of exchanges

In Liberia, the memory of how previous systems used to work before the Doe coup is remote, and seems to have become idealised. Thus, providing leaders with the opportunity to observe first hand how key CoG and other institutions (e.g. cabinets but also Parliaments) function in a variety of countries, especially those that may have experienced or are experiencing similar challenging transitions, can be extraordinarily important in providing a frame of reference for what is possible.

- Be flexible and adaptable and remain engaged over the long term

Donors need to approach engagement with CoG on the basis of discrete and flexible working procedures that are adaptable to (changing) circumstances. Part of this entails remaining realistic about what can be achieved and the timeframe needed, and planning accordingly over the long term.

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2. List of people interviewed

Name	**Position or Function**	**Organisation or Affiliation**
Dr. William Allen	Director General	Civil Service Agency
Othello Weh	Dep. Director General	Civil Service Agency
The Hon. Elizabeth Hoff	Deputy Minister	Ministry of Information
Col. Richard Baillon	UK Mentor to Minister of Defence	British FCO
Richard Belgrove OBE	UK Government	British FCO

	Representative	
Shaun Chau	Head of AGI advisory team in the Presidency	African Governance Initiative (AGI)
Paul Skidmore	Visiting representative	AGI
Professor Harold Monger	Director General	Liberia Institute of Public Administration (LIPA)
The Hon. Natty B. Davis	Minister of State (without portfolio)	President's Office
The Hon. Edward B. McClain	Minister of State/Chief of Staff to the President	President's Office
The Hon. ?? Jalloh	Deputy Minister	Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs
Dr. Momo Rogers	Director General and Secretary of Cabinet	President's Office
Commissioner Dorleah	Commissioner for Decentralisation	Governance Commission (GC)
Commissioner Carlon	Commissioner for Public Sector Reform	GC
Commissioner Elizabeth Mulbah	Commissioner for Civic Engagement and National Vision	GC
David Kialain	Lead Analyst	GC
Dominic Tarpeh	Senior Analyst	GC
Dr. Gun Eriksson Skoog	Country Manager/ First Secretary	SIDA/Embassy of Sweden
The Hon. Cletus S. Wotorson	Senator	President Pro Tempore of the Senate
The Hon. Blamoh Nelson	Senator	The Senate
Thomas Nah	Executive Director, National Chapter	Transparency International (TI)
Sarnyenneh Dickson	Program Manager	TI

Moustapha Soumare	Dep. Special Rep. Of the UN Sec. Gen.	UNMIL
Prof. Willie Belleh	Chairman	Public Procurement and Concessions
James Thompson	Management consultant and local historian	Subah-Belleh Associates
Amb. John Blaney	Ambassador to Liberia (2002-2005)	USA Department of State (now at Deloitte Consulting)
Amb. Donald Booth	Ambassador to Liberia (2005-2008)	USA Department of State (now Ambassador to Ethiopia)
Maia Stead	ODI Fellow and Technical Advisor	Ministry of Finance
James Fennell MBE		IDL Group