

2013

Liberia Early-Warning and Response Network (LERN) Trend Analysis Report



Early Warning Early Response (EWER) Working Group

Monrovia, Liberia
May, 2013

Project Contributing Organizations:

Action on Armed Violence
Citizens Bureau for Development and Productivity
Fund for Peace / Liberia Democracy Watch
Liberia's Armed Violence Observatory
Liberia Media Center
Liberia Peacebuilding Office
West African Network for Peacebuilding
United Nations Mission in Liberia
Ushahidi/iLab

Acronyms and Abbreviations

CIBDAP	Citizens Bureau for Development and Productivity
CPC	County Peace Committees
EWER	Early Warning/Early Response
FfP	Fund for Peace
FP	Focal Person
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
LAVO	Liberia Armed Violence Observatory
LDW	Liberia Democracy Watch
LERN	Liberia Early-Warning and Response Network
LMC	Liberia Media Center
LNP	Liberia National Police
PBO	Peacebuilding Office
UNLoCK	Universal Network of Local Knowledge
UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia
UNPOL	United Nations Police
WANEP	West African Network for Peacebuilding

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1. Overview of the EWER Working Group

The mission of the Early Warning and Early Response (EWER) Working Group is to foster collaboration among early warning actors in Liberia. The EWER Working Group strives to build synergies among member organizations working on issues of conflict, early warning, and prevention, while effectively supporting the work of peace committees in various communities. The EWER Working Group is comprised of civil society organizations, government agencies, UN agencies and other international partners working on issues of peace building and conflict prevention. The Liberia Peacebuilding Office coordinates the group as based in Monrovia, the capital. The working group meets twice monthly for general meetings and occasionally for task force meetings and special events as needed. To date, the EWER Group comprises of 18 active organizations and a large network of reporters that work to provide relevant data for the EWER incident-reporting map, the Liberia Early-Warning and Response Network (LERN) instance, developed by Ushahidi and currently managed by iLab Liberia.

The goal of the Working Group is to work collaboratively for the early detection of issues that could lead to the escalation of violence by identifying and addressing possible causes of conflict, advancing recommendations to mitigate probable violent conflict situations, and provide a baseline for conflict trend analysis. The objectives of the EWER Working Group are as follows:

- *To work towards the standardization of indicators and other tools used for data collection.*
- *To engage in credible forecasting based on in-depth analysis of high-risk issues.*
- *To share information that develops and strengthens early response capacity for all organizations and institutions.*
- *To effectively link with response actors and engage in first-stage early response activities, such as third party intervention, additional inquiry/fact-finding, and a creation of space for conflict transformation processes.*
- *To provide expert technical support to member organizations including mobilizing resources for critical EWER work in Liberia.*

2. Executive Summary

This document presents findings from the Early Warning and Early Response (EWER) Working Group's three-year study to measure trends in the occurrence of incident cases reported across Liberia. Data collected from 2,335 reports between January 2010 and December 2012 have been presented in graphs and are available on the LERN website (www.lern.ushahidi.com). These incident reports were received from four main sources: the Peacebuilding Office (PBO), Liberia Armed Violence Observatory (LAVO), West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), and

Fund for Peace/Liberia Democracy Watch producer of the UNLock Liberia report. Using the graphs created by Ushahidi¹, the EWER editorial committee analyzed the data to detect improvement or regression trends over the reporting period. The Trend Analysis Report shows that reports cross-referenced as “youth-related”² are the highest across all 15 Liberian counties.

Among the 15 counties, Montserrado has the highest incidence of reports on armed robbery, assault, youth, governance issues, economic issues, and corruption, showing 732 reports, two and a half times more than Bong with 314 cases. Grand Gedeh and Nimba have 258 and 242 reports, respectively, followed by Lofa, with 231 reports, and Bomi, with 170. The lowest number of case reporting were noted in Maryland, River Gee and River Cess showing an average of 25 reports, with only six reports for Grand Kru. Montserrado County has the country’s highest population density at around 1.14 million, which is over 1,500 persons per square mile and accounts for 32% of Liberia’s population naturally causing it to have the highest amount of reports. Liberia’s 2008 Population and Housing Census showed that Montserrado had the greatest urbanization rate compared to other counties. Though there is a correlation between the number of reported cases decreasing as the population also decreases, this may not be a direct causation. For instance, Nimba has a larger population than Grand Gedeh, yet they have almost the same number of reports. This yields to the logistical implications of implementing such a project and the ease of access to Montserrado in comparison to other counties. There needs to be an emphasis that differences in the number of reports per county have as much to do with the extent of the Group’s local network as with the county’s population. Therefore, the LERN data does not provide a complete snapshot of the situation, since the Working Group’s coverage is not comprehensive. This report cannot and does not show changes in the overall situation, but instead trends in that data which is collected by the Working Group

The total reporting trend (Figure 2.1) showed an all-time low in December 2010 at 5 reports, compared to the previous 50 average between March and September 2010. There was a rapid increase in the number of cases between July 2011 and October 2011 (19 cases reported in July and 180 in October) which could be attributed to the Presidential elections that were held in October of 2011. Between October 2011 and April 2012 there was an average of 137 reports, peaking once again in May 2012 at 181 reports, then steeply falling to about 40 cases in September 2012. The upsurge noted in 2012 can be explained by the political instability of Cote d’Ivoire which led to a high influx of Ivorian refugees to Liberia and some cross-border incidents along the Ivorian/Liberian borders. This shows that the LERN instance is sensitive to

¹ Ushahidi is a non-profit tech company that specializes in developing free and open source software for information collection, visualization and interactive mapping

² Youth in Liberia is defined as being between the ages of 15-35. Reports involving youth actors are categorized as “youth-related”.

organizational reporting rates and aims, as is seen by increased organizational activities during the election period. However, it is important to note that reporting is not consistent throughout the three-year time frame due to organizational capacity, the commencement of training during the first year, and the lack of a standardized and concurrent reporting system.³

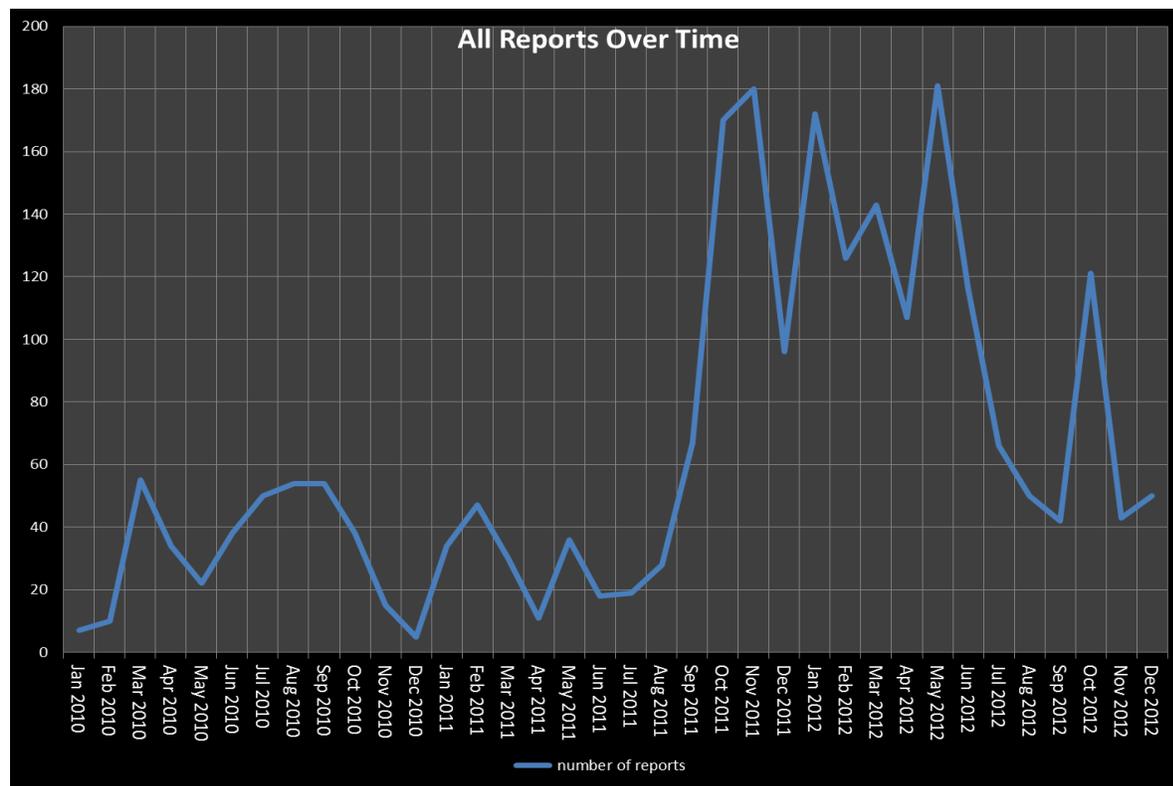


Figure 2.1 Total Reports Over Network Time

The reporting trend shows that three organizations contributed heavily to the database. 48% of the reports were monitored and issued by UNLock Liberia (1110), followed by the PBO (456 reports at 19%) and LAVO (316 reports at 14%). These three organizations will be covered in detail in section 5 of this report. The number of reports not affiliated with any specific organization⁴ is significant reaching 263 reports at 11%. The remaining portion is representative

³ “According to both LAVO findings and the AOV baseline assessment household survey data, the majority of armed violence incidents take place in the capital, Monrovia, where around half of Liberia’s population lives. However, the Monrovia household survey data produced a lower percentage of incidents, indicating that fewer incidents are reported to formal institutions in the countiesIn terms of data collection, differences remain between the capital and rural areas in terms of capacity, communication and infrastructure. The LAVO data however revealed a slight increase in reports from the counties towards the end of the data collection year.” Liberia Armed Violence Observatory, Second Report, July 2012, pg 5

⁴ These individuals learned of the network through project work or awareness campaigns and took it upon themselves to contribute.

of WANEP and CIBDAP, both of which have a smaller implementing capacity in relation to the others. None of these partners had an exclusive project focused on generating reports for LERN though some, such as Liberia Democracy Watch (as part of UNLock Liberia), chose to undertake specific initiatives. In all, every group contributed with the EWER Working Group as the focus for the database's development.

The trends found in the graphs can be collaborated by other organizational reports. The 2012 Corruption Perceptions Index⁵ indicates that Liberia climbed 16 points, from 91st position to 75th in the last year. This improvement means that Liberia is now ranked as the third least corrupt country in West Africa, behind Cape Verde and Ghana. The LERN Trend Analysis report shows that governance issues have decreased significantly since its inception in 2010 even though slightly affected by the October elections. This interesting correlation between an internationally recognized report and the LERN report's own trends shows the potential of the LERN initiative.

3. Methodology

The LERN platform's collated data provides the unique opportunity to examine Working Group members' areas of overlap and of unique expertise; members' geographical coverage and thematic foci; and finally the Group's priority issues and how these are similar to and differ from issues reported. Because it was not the original intention of the Working Group to generate a conflict analysis report from this data, there was no standardized methodology in place when gathering or sharing the data; instead, individual members followed organization-specific frameworks and indicators, contributing to the LERN platform at different rates on a range of topics. The effects of integrating multiple early warning frameworks are discussed in the Limitations and Challenges section. The goal of this report is to highlight the Working Group's dynamics and to take this opportunity, more than two years after the Group first formed, to reflect on its contributions, recognize its limitations and plan for its meaningful contribution in the future. It is the hope of the EWER Group to strengthen the LERN instance and produce a more consistent reporting system on early warning in Liberia.

4. Limitations and Challenges

Part of the strength of the Working Group is the diversity of its members, particularly the five member organizations that contributed the bulk of the data found on the LERN platform. Thanks to these varied members, the Working Group collects data on everything from motorbike-related incidents, hospital records, armed violence, land disputes, corruption and more. At the same time, the Working Group members' differing methodologies and pre-existing objectives have at

⁵ Transparency International. *Corruption Perceptions Index 2012*. Berlin: Transparency International, Dec. 5, 2012

times been stumbling blocks for the Group in developing standardized reporting methods, communications with reporters, and a unified response to critical incidents.

Another limitation has been the Group's lack of definition for broad categories such as "conflict" and "youth". In late 2012, the Working Group developed a severity ranking matrix that outlines categories of conflict and types of incidents that range from critical to minor; while this listing includes categories as does the LERN platform, the Group still needs to do more work in creating a common and more comprehensive definition of conflict as it relates to the Group's early warning work. Similarly, "youth" was not formally defined by the Group until late 2012, when the issue was raised that Liberia's average life expectancy is 56 years of age and the national definition of "youth" is persons up to 35 years old; this means that by default roughly 62% of all reports are going to be categorized as "youth". The Group agreed age groups could be further defined in sub-categories on the LERN platform in order to maintain the national definition and indicate what incidents involved youth of specific age ranges. Any changes to LERN in deference to the severity ranking matrix and project category definitions can be applied retro-actively to the database, giving the network a greater degree of flexibility.

One challenge has been Working Group members' inconsistent administrative oversight of incident reports. Some members regularly approved and published incident reports on the LERN platform; others were infrequent administrators who did not review incoming messages in a timely manner; and many contributing members did not ensure the quality of each report was consistent, the incident was properly tagged or the content was relevant to the Group. Over time, the reports' erratic quality built up and the Ushahidi Liberia team hired consultants to clean up the LERN database of those reports lacking sufficient detail and better categorizing those that were only partially allocated. In lieu of a more sustainable approach, the Ushahidi team, now iLab Liberia, will continue to offer quarterly clean-ups for the LERN platform data to correct for these collective shortcomings.

As mentioned previously, Working Group members contributing to the LERN platform did not consistently report in real-time. Some members, due to pre-existing project implementation strategies, schedule data input at monthly or quarterly intervals; out of the top three contributing members, only one member approves and publishes reports in near real-time. Originally, the LERN platform was conceived as a source for timely information about conflict and peacebuilding in Liberia; it has recently become apparent, due to members' varied reporting timelines, that the platform cannot serve as a source for real-time reporting but rather as an archive of conflict and peacebuilding data that has the potential to reveal trends in these fields and in the Working Group's dynamics over time.

Because the Working Group did not, in its earliest stages, identify conflict analysis as one of its primary goals, the data discussed herein has not been collected using a single methodology. As a

result, the data cannot be accurately extrapolated to represent conflict in Liberia at a regional or national level. While this may seem like a limitation, it is also an opportunity to focus this analysis on the Working Group itself, and to derive a clear understanding of its strengths and weaknesses as well as what can be done to support the Group’s focus on conflict analysis that provides policy-relevant findings. By the time of the next report, the Group aims at having a more systematic analysis of the LERN instance trends.

5. Incident Reports by Organizations

There have been a total of 2,335 reports published on the LERN platform between January 1, 2010 and December 31, 2012. Of those reports, five Working Group members have contributed the bulk of the reports (as seen in Figure 5.1). These members, listed from highest contributor to lowest, include: UNLock Liberia (1,110 reports), The Peacebuilding Office (456 reports), Liberia’s Armed Violence Observatory (316 reports), WANEP (159 reports), Citizens Bureau for Development and Productivity (31 reports). Prior to the LERN data clean-up, Liberia’s Armed Violence Observatory (LAVO) held the highest number of reports; many of these reports were deleted in the clean-up because their content, while relevant to LAVO’s own objectives, did not contain sufficient geospatial detail and/or incident description to serve the Working Group or responders who might reference the LERN platform. As a result, UNLock Liberia became the predominant contributor, responsible for 48% of the reports.

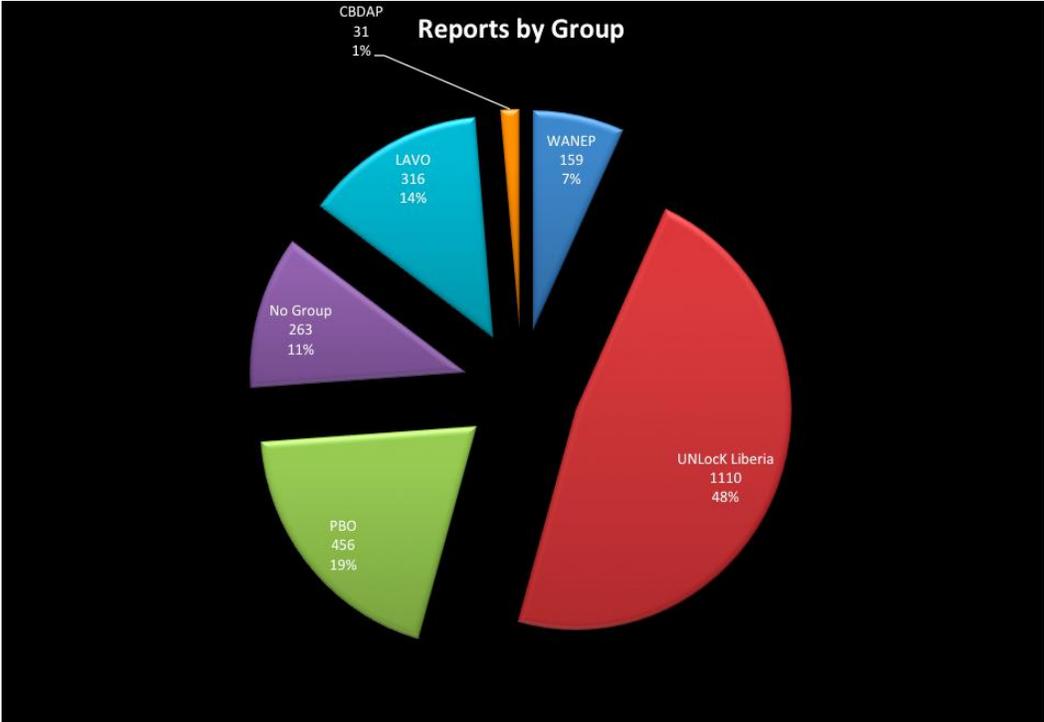


Figure 5.1 Reports sorted by organization/Working Group member

These five contributing members had significantly different reporting habits over time, as is illustrated in Figure 5.2. In order to understand the reporting habits of these members, the top three will be examined in detail.

Fund for Peace/Liberia Democracy Watch

While UNLoCK contributed the most reports over the 3-year period, a pattern is not immediately apparent in its reporting habits. However, there does appear to be 5- to 7-month gaps between the highest reporting peaks: March to September 2010 (6 months), September 2010 to February 2011 (5 months), February to September 2011 (7 months), and September 2011 to March 2012 (6 months). The reporting peaks are not, however, of the same range and do not repeat but rather reach a new total with each peak. As is seen, UNLoCK reports on a quarterly basis but does not show a constant total of reports each time, rather, the peaks fluctuate reaching different totals each time⁶.

As seen in Figure 5.3, the top 5 categories for UNLoCK reports are: governance issues, economic issues, employment issues, corruption, and youth related. In the first 4 of these 5 categories, UNLoCK contributed far more reports than any other partner, and all of which are related to governmental and economic challenges. These are unique and critical contributions to a Working Group that otherwise tends to report more on assault, homicide, gender-based violence, and other more explicitly violent incidents. Considering that governance and economic issues can also contribute to discontent and possibly conflict, UNLoCK's reports provide a more comprehensive perspective on the potential triggers for conflict.

The Peacebuilding Office

The Peacebuilding Office (PBO), at the Ministry of Internal Affairs, contributed the second-highest number of LERN reports via County Peace Committees (CPC's) and their Focal Persons (FPs) stationed throughout the country. As of November 2011, the PBO recruited 45 FPs in Bong, Lofa, Nimba, Grand Gedeh, Cape Mount, and Grand Bassa⁷. The PBO's reporting to LERN remains low to non-existent until September 2011; it should be noted that the PBO was reporting prior to this date, however these reports were sent exclusively to the PBO's customized Ushahidi instance before September 2011 and were then forwarded to LERN from September

⁶ The Fund for Peace, in collaboration with Liberia Democracy Watch, conducted conflict assessment workshops and Conflict Assessment System Tool (CAST) framework trainings with individuals who in turn contributed to the LERN instance.

⁷ The PBO trained them in conflict identification and incident reporting while giving a minor cash incentive for the task.

onwards. Additionally, the PBO initiated its CPC engagement project in November of 2011. The PBO's reporting saw another spike in May 2012 at a time when the PBO and the Ushahidi Liberia team began conducting more comprehensive field trainings for FPs.

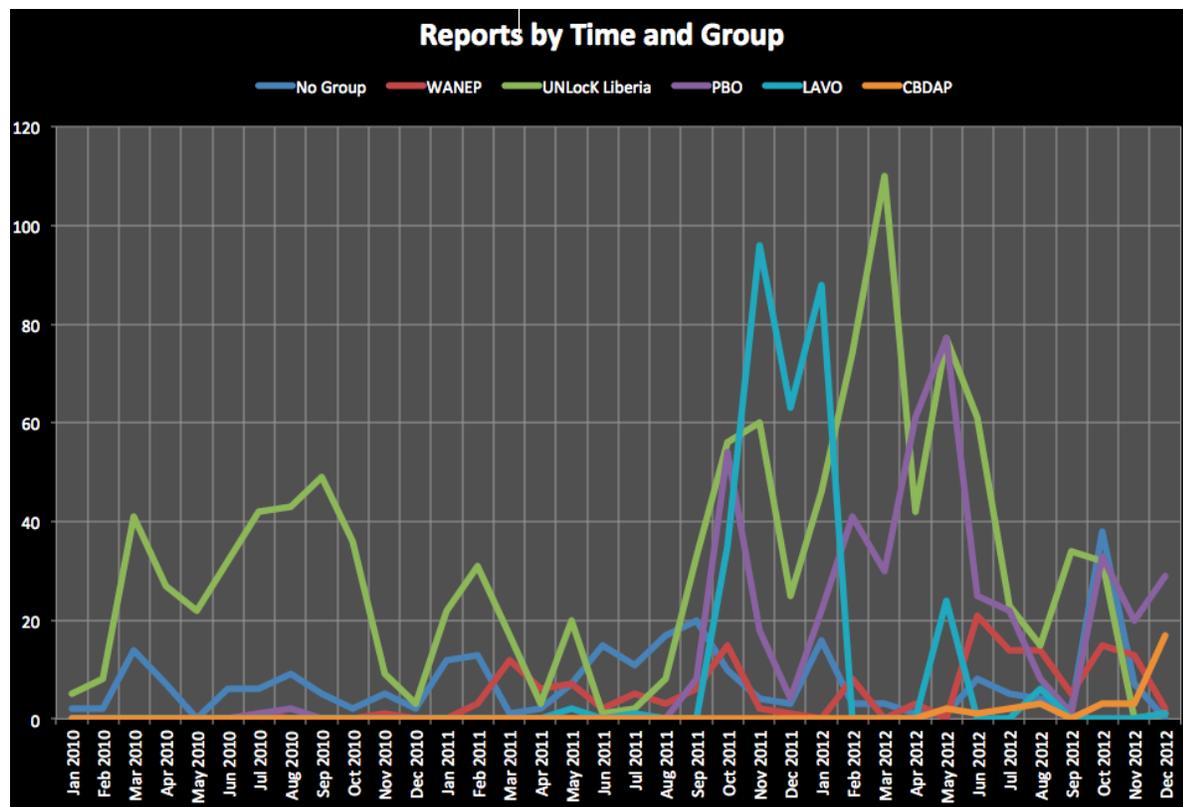


Figure 5.2 Reports by contributing organization/member over time

The PBO's top five categories include assault, youth related, Gender-Based Violence (GBV), land disputes, and homicide. Although the PBO does not contribute to any one of these categories more than other members, the PBO's reporting is significantly lower for all other categories, the only exception being political/election-related reports that are nearly the same in number as homicide reports. It is useful to visualize, via Figure 5.3, what issues are most often shared by PBO reporters in order to further investigate if these issues are in fact the predominant types of indicators for conflict in FP communities, or if these reporters are exposed to these issues more frequently than others are. Better understanding potential biases such as these will provide useful information as to whether these are trends in conflict indicators within CPC communities or rather indicators of FPs' exposure to specific types of incidents that do not represent local drivers of conflict.

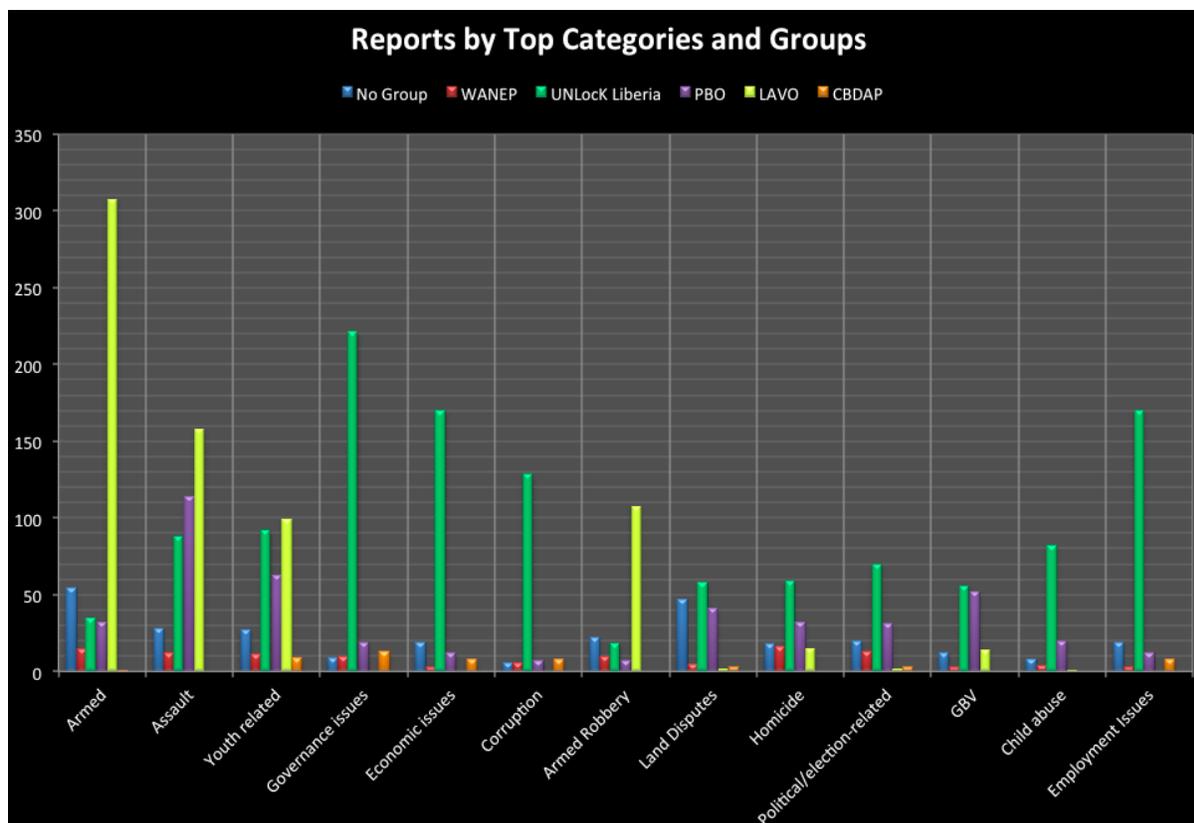


Figure 5.3 Reports by groups on top categories

Liberia’s Armed Violence Observatory

Liberia’s Armed Violence Observatory (LAVO) contributed the third-largest number of LERN reports. LAVO was established by Action on Armed Violence (AOAV) in March 2011, yet it receives a good portion of its information from the Liberia National Police (LNP), United Nations Police (UNPOL), West Africa Network on Peacebuilding (WANEP), and the EWER Working Group. LAVO’s reporting to the LERN platform has significant peaks between October 2011 and January 2012, dropping off as significantly as it began at the end of January with another much smaller surge in May 2012 and again in August 2012. This pattern seems to follow a quarterly reporting schedule that began in October 2011, though has not seen a recurrence since August 2012. The lack of reporting since August is not representative of LAVO’s data collection during this time; rather it represents the departure of LAVO’s liaison to the Working Group in August 2012 and the handover of responsibilities to other LAVO colleagues that has not yet resulted in a full LERN upload of LAVO data. As of March 2013, LAVO has begun improving some of its data transfer procedures to ensure a more rapid and comprehensive upload of LAVO data to the LERN platform.

LAVO’s top five reporting categories are armed, assault, armed robbery, youth related, and GBV. The distinction between “armed” and “armed robbery” for LAVO’s reports is not

immediately apparent and in conducting this analysis, it is clear that adjustments need to be made to LERN's categories for "types of violence." Currently, "armed" and "armed robbery" – as well as "assault", are all sub-categories of "types of violence". However, outside of LERN reporting, LAVO categorizes its "armed" reports with a number of specific sub-categories, including "armed robbery". Moving forward, the LERN platform will transition the "armed" category to become a parent category including detailed sub-categories aligned with LAVO's. In this way, it will be possible to better differentiate between what types of armed incidents are taking place rather than simply having a single category for "armed"⁸ with incidents sometimes repeating in other categories such as "armed robbery." These detailed sub-categories will also help to quickly identify what kinds of arms are involved; currently, violent incidents involving cutlasses as well as household objects such as scissors are all called "armed", and it will greatly improve the LERN platform's data to further break down this category to determine what objects are most commonly associated with conflict.

LAVO dominates in the categories of armed, assault and armed robbery, greatly surpassing other contributing members' reports in each category. This is because LAVO's mission is to track armed violence specifically, and they receive data from such relevant sources as the Liberia National Police, World Health Organization, and local hospitals in order to chronicle not only the armed incidents themselves. LAVO's reporting in other categories is limited to non-existent because issues such as governance and the economy are not reflected in their objectives or information sources.

6. Incident Reports by LERN Categories

Figure 6.1 illustrates the top five categories on the LERN platform are: armed (445 reports), assault (400 reports), youth related (301 reports), governance issues (272 reports), and economic issues (212 reports). Interestingly, the number one category, armed violence, is comprised of almost entirely LAVO reports, and the total LAVO reports for this category (308 reports) exceeds any other organization's contributions to a single category (see Figure 5.3). This does not necessarily mean there were more incidents of armed violence than any other kind of incident in Liberia, nor does it suggest that this is the most common type of incident among Working Group members. Instead, it may be related to LAVO's singular focus on armed violence in Liberia; as mentioned above, unlike other Group members that address a number of issues across sectors, LAVO focuses exclusively on armed violence. This is primarily because, reports of any armed incident are categorized under "armed", meaning that "armed robbery" may in some cases be counted twice given the overlapping nature of these two categories, neither of

⁸ It should be clarified that all LAVO reports are classified as 'armed' and then given a second or third classification to specify the type of 'armed violence' the incident report refers to. For example an armed robbery leading to death would be categorized as 'armed' 'armed robbery' and 'homicide'.

which are subsets of each other. LAVO also contributes more than any other member in the “youth related” category, suggesting that there is a strong correlation in their data

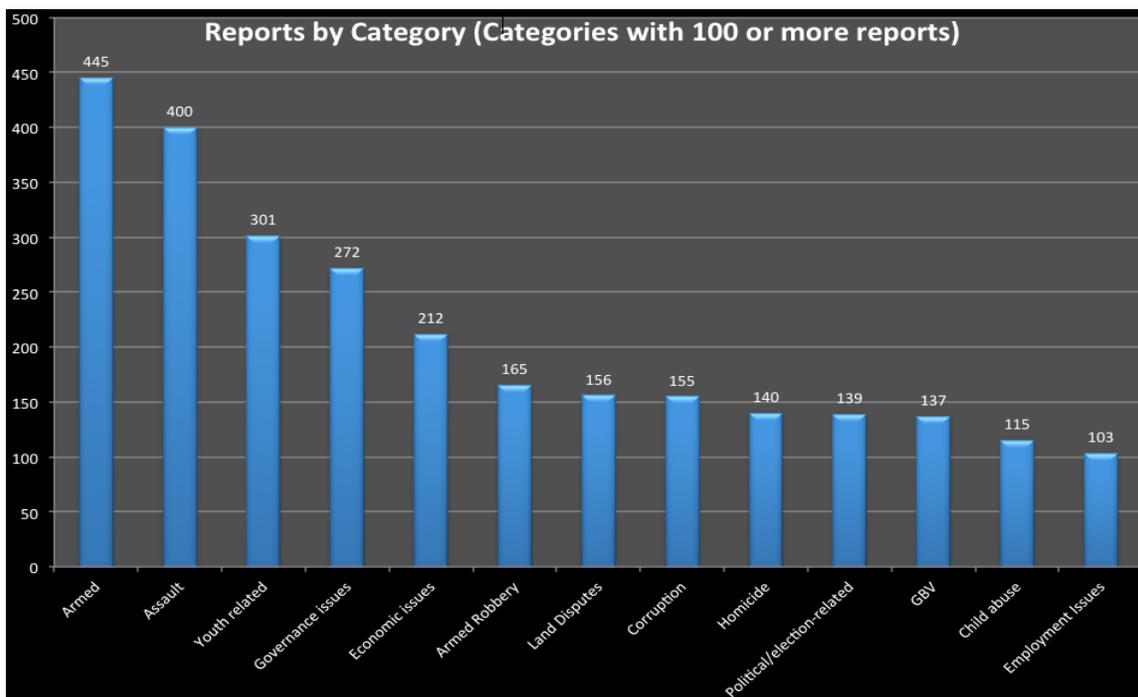


Figure 6.1 Categories with 100 or more reports

between youth-related and armed (as is demonstrated in Figure 6.2). LAVO’s data is particularly specific when it comes to victims’ and perpetrators’ age ranges, making it possible for them to determine if those involved were 35 years or younger and therefore “youth related”.

The “assault” category is a close second to “armed”, another category dominated by LAVO (see Figures 5.2 and 5.3). But unlike “armed”, the “assault” category includes significant contributions from the Peacebuilding Office as well as UNLock Liberia, perhaps indicating this is a type of incident relevant to a number of Working Group members and their field reporters. A similar trend can be seen in the third most popular category, “youth related”; UNLock Liberia and LAVO are nearly tied for high reporting rates in this category, with the Peacebuilding Office close behind. A common misconception might be that, judging from Figure 6.1, armed incidents are the most commonly reported among Working Group members. However, looking more closely at the distribution of reports in Figure 5.3, it is apparent that “assault” and “youth related” reports are more evenly distributed among different contributing members and this might be a stronger indicator for what categories best represent the Working Group’s coverage.

Governance and economic issues, the fourth and fifth most popular categories, are almost entirely populated by UNLock, indicating not only that these may not be areas of focus or concern for other members and their field reporters, but also suggesting that these may be

specific to the geographical areas in which UNLock reporters are stationed in Liberia. Perhaps these areas were already politically contentious cities or districts, or those reporting for UNLock receive most of their information from government sources and/or citizens who are disproportionately affected by public service delivery in those areas as opposed to armed violence or other conflict-related issues. Further investigation into these issues will support the Working Group’s future understanding of how to better understand members’ and their field reporters’ contexts and pre-existing concerns with certain issues that may influence what data is shared with the LERN platform.

It is also worth reiterating that the armed robbery category is the sixth most populated LERN category, however this is not representative of where armed robbery ranks within the LERN categories. During the next LERN data clean, one of the primary objectives is to distinguish between what incidents of armed violence were robberies and to separate these from other armed incidents.

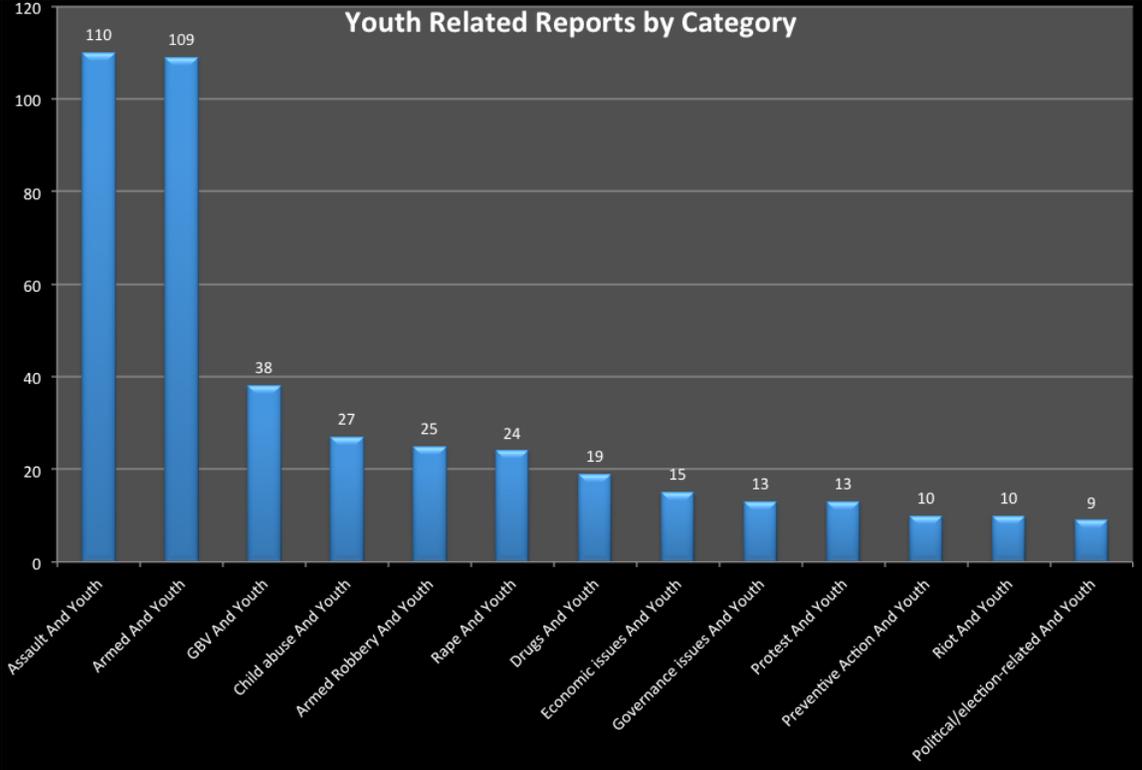


Figure 6.2 Youth related reports and correlated categories

According to Figure 6.3, the most frequently reported category over time was youth-related incidents which, as in the case of armed violence, can be double-coded with other categories. At times tripling any other category, youth-related incidents show an initial spike in October 2011, coinciding with the presidential election, and afterwards dramatic increases and drop-offs into 2012. Yet it should be noted Figure 6.3 represents the Working Group’s Priority Categories,

while Figure 6.4 lists the most popular LERN categories over time. In Figure 6.4, youth-related reports only top the charts in May 2012, otherwise falling in third place and sometimes, in 2010, in fifth place behind governance and economic issues. The discrepancy between these graphs signifies an opportunity for the Group to further explore what gaps may exist between its anticipated priority categories and those most often reported by field reporters.

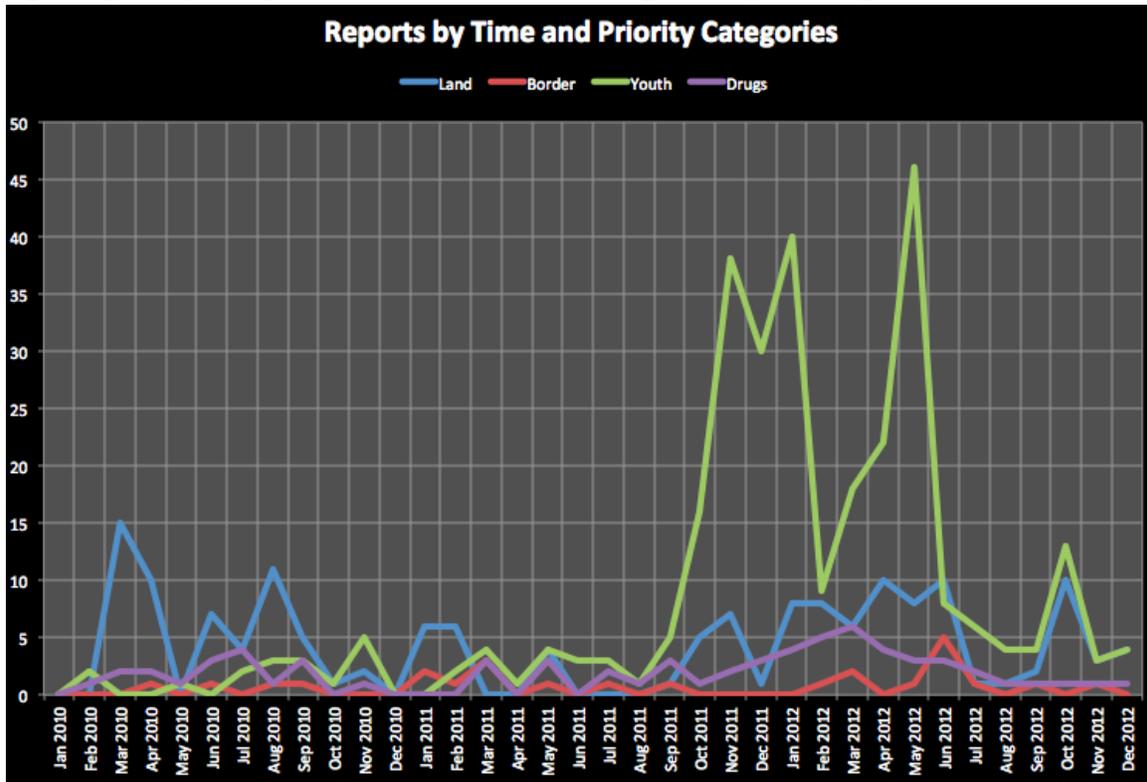


Figure 6.3 Reports by time and priority categories

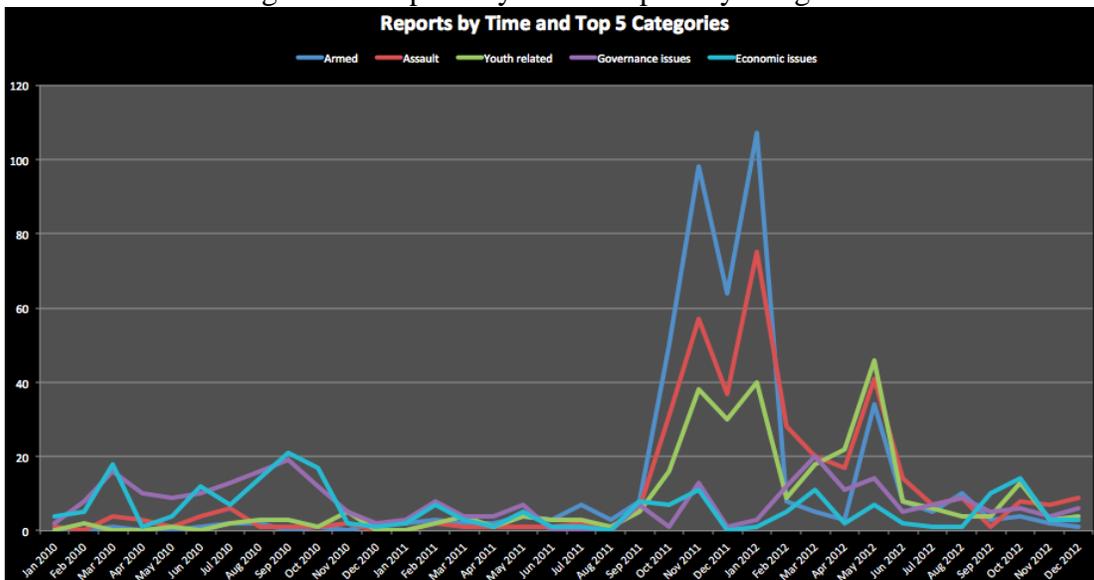


Figure 6.4 Reports by time and top 5 categories

7. Incident Reports by County

Out of the 2,335 reports on LERN, 732 came from Montserrado County; in other words, roughly 31% of all reports. This is not surprising considering that Montserrado County is the most populous county in Liberia. While this may be representative of which county experiences the most incidents of conflict, first and foremost in this analysis it reflects the Working Group members' primary area of coverage. Nearly all members are based in Monrovia and conduct a significant portion of their operations in Monrovia.⁹

While a number of members have programs and field reporters that cover several of the outlying counties, it is clear which counties are significantly underrepresented in the Working Group when looking at Figure 7.1 - specifically: Gbarpolu, Grand Cape Mount, Grand Kru, Maryland, River Cess and River Gee counties. The remaining counties are well-represented with several members operating in Bomi, Bong, Grand Gedeh, Lofa and Nimba counties. What remains unknown is whether or not reporting from these counties was consistent over the two-year reporting period, or if in certain counties it was primarily during the election that reports were sent. This kind of information will be useful to extract from future LERN datasets in order to better understand if some counties are only represented during certain political processes, for example, to inform Group members as to whether or not they should explore more consistent representation in these areas.

Figures 7.4 and 7.5 illustrate the discrepancy, at the county level, between the frequency of reporting on the Working Group's prioritized categories and that of the top 5 categories. The Working Group anticipated that land, border issues, drugs and youth related incidents would be the most pressing and common problems for Liberia; however, only one of these issues – youth-related incidents – ranks among the most common incidents in the overall categories, and primarily only in 4 of the 14 counties (see Figure 7.5). Note that the Group identified priority issues in early 2012, while these Figures demonstrate reporting over the entire two-year period.

Figure 7.2 demonstrates Working Group members' reporting by county, with UNLoCK leading in 12 of 15 counties. LAVO's reports are almost entirely derived from Montserrado County, which is in-line with LAVO's information sources. The PBO provides significant reporting from counties such as Lofa, Bong, Grand Gedeh and Nimba, representation that correlates to the County Peace Committees' presence in those areas. WANEP's reporting is distributed similarly to the PBO's, though often a far third from UNLoCK and PBO's reporting rates in these counties.

⁹ Counties reflecting a low number of incident reports are not covered by regular and established reporting systems. These are occasional reports and are generated through systems such as UNLoCK and LAVO's information gathered via LNP and hospital records.

In this instance, we can see that this is a function of the number of reporters in each county as facilitated by contributing organizations.

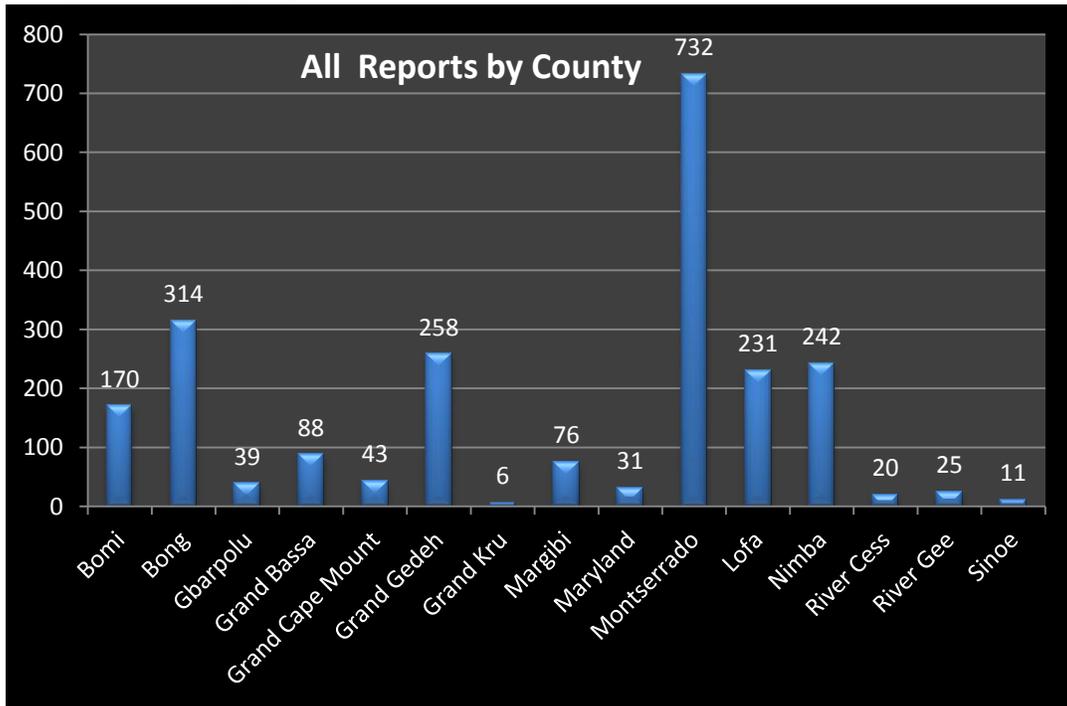


Figure 7.1 All LERN reports by county

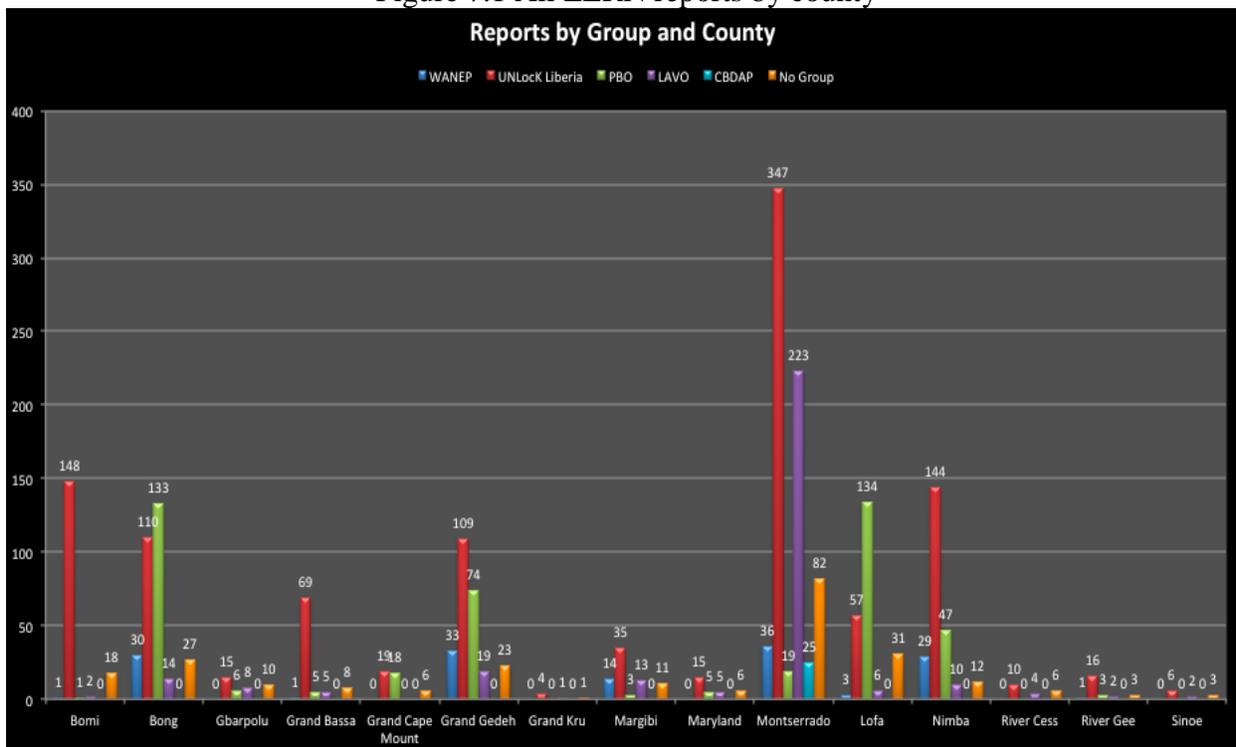


Figure 7.2 Reports by group and county

The most reported categories in Montserrado county – armed leading with assault in second place and youth related in third – did not appear in the same order of importance in other counties; only Gbarpolu counties, with very low reporting, demonstrated the same order of top three categories. Economic issues were the leading category in Grand Bassa and River Gee counties, while Bong county saw a dramatically high rate of assault reports relative to other counties. These figures do not therefore indicate that armed incidents are higher in Montserrado, Margibi and Grand Gedeh than in other counties, while Bong has the highest relative number of assaults; rather, it demonstrates the issues about which Working Group members’ report most frequently from those counties.

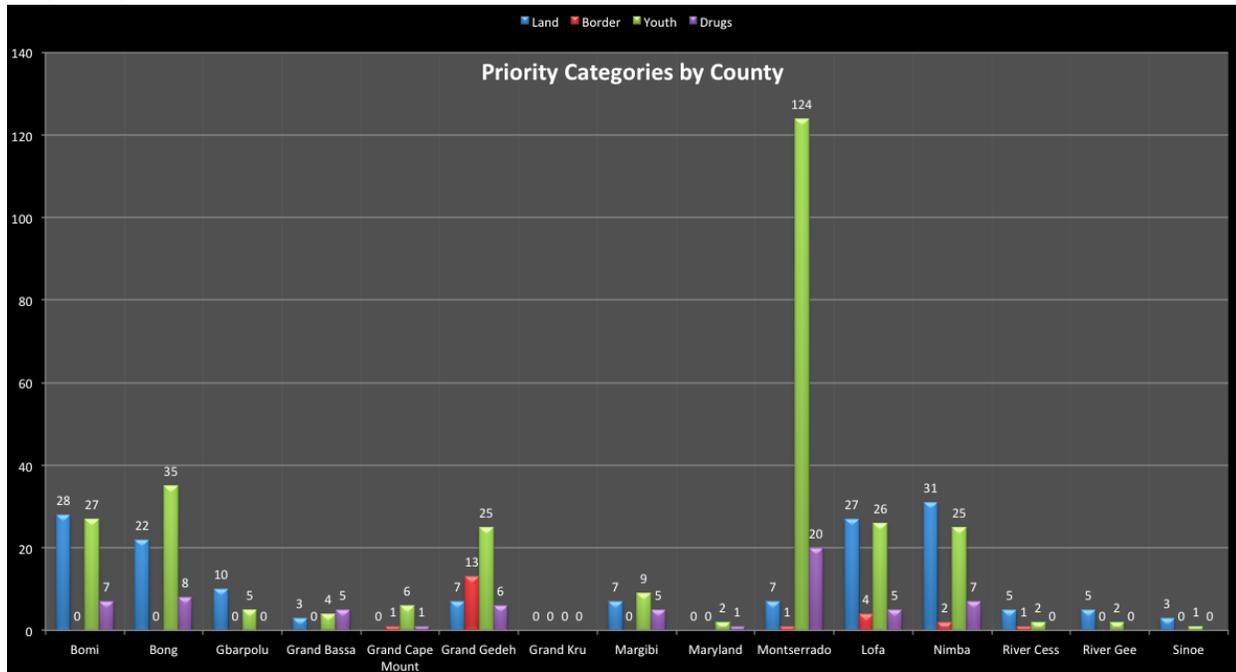


Figure 7.3 The Working Group’s priority LERN categories by county

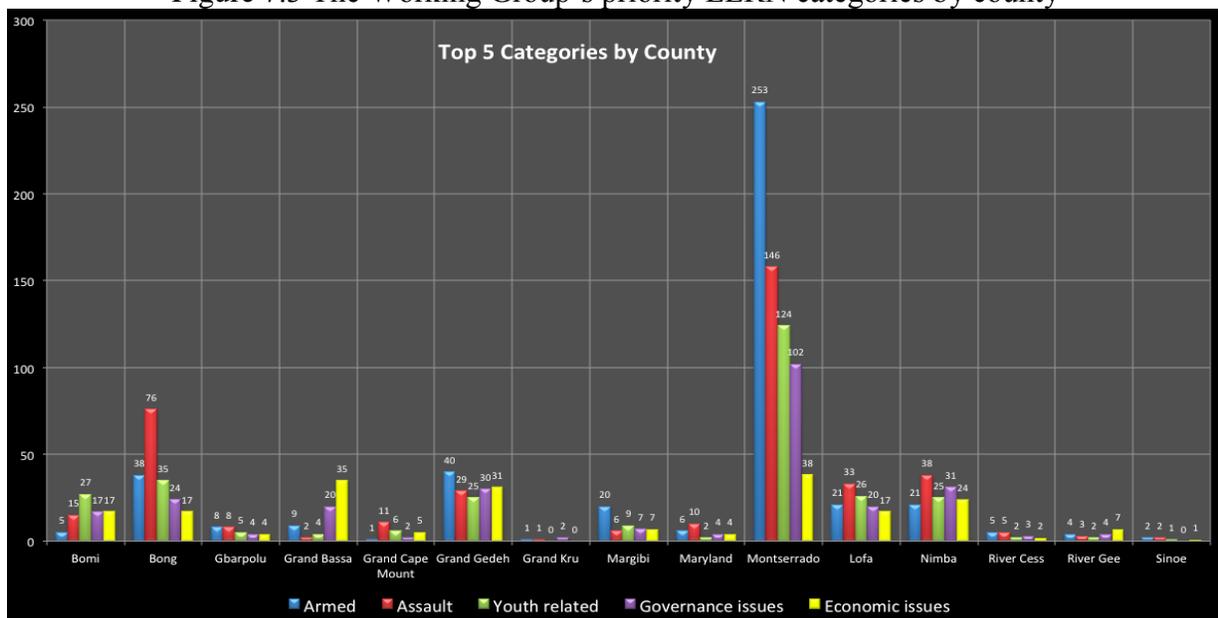


Figure 7.4 Top 5 LERN categories by county

8. Incident Reports by EWER Priority Issues

In addition to receiving reports, monitoring and reporting on various categories of LERN, the Working Group is focusing more attention on four key categories as its priority issues: Land, Youth, Border, and Drugs. All of the categories were determined and analyzed at a working session and these four were determined to be high-risk issues. Most of the reports received fall into at least one of these priority categories, with youth issues among the highest reported.

Land Issues

Land-related conflicts and potential conflict issues continue to threaten Liberia's peace and security. There were a total of 155 land-related reports with the majority of them coming from Lofa, Nimba, Bomi and Bong counties. This is not a suggestion that there are little or no land conflicts in other parts of the country, as it could be concluded that land issues are also contentious in areas not fully covered by EWER Working Group. Even though youth issues dominate as far as the EWER priority issues are concerned, it is important to note the severity and multi-dimension of those related to land. Land disputes in Liberia often have religious and ethnic dimensions. This is especially true in the case of Nimba and Lofa, two counties with the longest history of religious and tribal conflicts.

Considering Grand Kru and Maryland along with other counties with less than five reports, it is primarily due to the absence of reporters¹⁰ rather than the absence of issues.

Another important dimension of land-related reports is that which relates to agricultural land concession. The Working Group has been looking at issues that relate to land concessions and, in July, 2012, published a report that focused on land concession conflicts. Among others, the report notes that as the result of extensive land appropriation and land speculations, specifically since the first land concession in 1942, there have been so much uncertainties and conflicts in some areas in rural Liberia over issues of land ownership and long-term tenure. Non-participation of local residents in land-related concession agreements causes confusion that often leads to devastating consequences. When a government issues concessions without consulting local communities, it often breeds considerable animosity between local communities and concession owners, or between government authorities and the local people¹¹.

¹⁰ The working Group is currently making plans to extend coverage through its members to more counties in the southeastern region of the country.

¹¹ <http://lern.usahidi.com/page/index/3>

Consequently, residents of indigenous communities feel marginalized and excluded. The report notes further that when local dwellers are excluded from the land and the economic benefits, except as in the case of poorly paid plantation workers directly contracted by the concessionaires, there are acute tensions that could eventually lead to widespread violence.

Border Issues

According to the latest LERN report, border incidents were very low (21), compared with Youth related (298), GBV (298), Assault (387) and homicide incidents (135). Notwithstanding fewer occurrences, the nature of the incidents cannot be underestimated because they could have far-reaching effects especially along the Ivory Coast, which borders Liberia in Grand Gedeh, Nimba, River Gee and Maryland counties.

Adequate security to patrol not only the Liberia/Ivorian borders but also border crossings with Guinea and Sierra Leone pose a serious challenge to tracking cases of drug trafficking, illicit mining and smuggling, all of which are prevalent in the Cape Mount region. Liberian Security officers' movement is impaired because of hardships such as inadequate transportation (vehicles and motorbikes), hardship, gasoline and logistics. The closure of all borders with the Ivory Coast still in force, as of writing of this report, may have reduced tensions but issues that could ignite conflict still remain unresolved. Smuggling of cocoa, gold and illicit gold and diamond mining has the potential to increase conflict in these areas.

Border control and monitoring is consistently shifting in certain areas. As taken from the most recent report concerning border issues "Concerned citizens of Foya are calling for more security as the UNMIL is gone and the border is still vacant for free entry of people.." ¹². It is important to note that porous borders in parallel with an incomplete border control system yields to an increased risk of conflict. The LERN report is vital for pinpointing continued trends, such as in the Toe Town border crossing in Grand Gedeh, as well as the aforementioned, case by case, reports. In this manner, the LERN report can support the creation of correct policy making in regards to border issues.

A concerned Liberian government official, River Gee County Superintendent Billy Johnson has called for a high-level review of the Liberia/Ivory Coast border situation and an open corridor for legal trade. "While we do not encourage the opening of the borders to allow rebels to cross into our territory, there is a need for a high-level review of the situation right now and see if a corridor can be opened for legal trade," said Superintendent Johnson. Johnson says there is a need for the both the Liberia and Ivory Coast governments to put in place mechanisms that will

¹² <http://www.lern.usahidi.com/reports/view/8166>

ensure that traders are screened properly to avoid rebels crossing in rather than keeping the borders closed. Johnson says the prolonged closure of the Liberia-Ivory Coast Border will encourage smuggling of illegal goods through the use of other entrances. Johnson disclosed that legal and illegal goods are currently being smuggled into Liberia through other entrances as a result of the current border closure¹³.

Many of the reports on the LERN database stem from issues along the Liberian-Ivorian border. This is rooted in the recent conflict in the Ivory Coast and the LERN report gives credence to the continued issues that have arisen not just from the influx of people but of those that would return to Ivorian soil. The LERN database supports the undeniable fact that border issues can cause many individual conflicts that, possibly, could escalate to entire communities.

Superintendent Johnson named Nigerians as some of the foreign Nationals that are involved in illegal trade and stressed the need for a national holistic approach in tackling the situation. “We are giving this situation serious attention on our county’s joint security action for this year to make sure that there is some joint action at the regional level. “ He said superintendents of River Gee, Grand Gedeh, Grand Kru and Maryland counties have agreed to hold a conference to put in place plans to deal with the situation.

UNMIL, the international peacekeeping force that has been in Liberia since 2003, still maintains that there are security gaps. The mission is expecting a “smooth transition from a large peacekeeping mission to an eventual successor”, and is considering three options for withdrawal. Primary among the options is to wind down the military component more gradually considering the situation in Ivory Coast.

Key peace stakeholders should encourage UNMIL to adopt the above option to ensure that peace prevails in the areas and the country as a whole. A crucial observation based on the LERN report is that there were very few peace-building activities during the period under review.

Youth Issues

Young people constitute 65% of Liberia’s 3.5 million populations as mentioned in section 4. It is therefore no wonder or amazement that their presence and involvement in all aspects of the

¹³ The superintendent stated “we currently have this issue of illegal drugs flowing into the country this is something that is on our agenda for this year to address in terms of Marijuana and Cocaine and we think there is a need to put a stop to that because it is infesting our youthful community,”

According to him, as a result of ongoing illegal cross border trade, the county officials through a joint security operation of security apparatus recently discovered and burned over 400 metric tons of drugs in River Gee County.

society is highly noticeable and strongly felt. Youth are among the worst affected by the civil crisis. When the fighting began in Liberia's Civil War, different military groups searched for soldiers in the ranks of children. Perhaps as many as 20,000 children, some as young as 6-years-old, were recruited, often forcibly. "They were forced to kill friends and family members including their parents, rape and be raped, serve as sexual slaves and prostitutes, labor, take drugs, engage in cannibalism, torture and pillage communities," says the report from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia. In particular, there have been multiple assertions that a surging youth population or, youth bulge, combined with unemployment, urbanization and other factors, can lead to violence.

While this may paint an opaque picture of the youth population of Liberia, the question of what age constitutes "youth" may raise a new and different level of debate that could prove or disprove the perception about the high rate of youth involved in violence. The official age range of youth in Liberia is 18-35 years. Holding this age range constant for Liberia and with 10 years since the violent civil war ended means that a majority of this population have either experienced violence, been exposed to it, or been involved in violence. One could argue that unless the official age range is brought down between 18- and 25, many adults will remain classified as youths. If we say that "youth" is a period between childhood and maturity, then when does maturity begin? In Liberia, anyone who is 18 years and above is a legal adult. How then can the same person be a youth and a young adult? Constitutionally, at the age of 25, one can be a member of the House of Representatives and at 35 a person is qualified to be a senator or president, positions perceived to be only for adults.

Liberia, like many other countries, is faced with serious difficulties surrounding social and economic status required for a youth's transition to adulthood. Factors such as (1) unemployment, under-employment, and lack of livelihood opportunities: (2) insufficient, unequal and inappropriate education and skills training: (3) poor governance and weak political participation; (4) gender inequalities and socialization and (5) a legacy of past violence, which arguably increases the likelihood of youth engagement in violence. However, the above picture is not a full-blown indictment on the youthful population of Liberia, as many youth play positive roles in the government, the private sector, civil society sectors, and many others.

The LERN reports, as indicated in Figure 4.2, show a high relationship between youths and crimes such as armed violence and assault. This could probably be due to the fact that one of LERN group members, the Liberia Armed Violence Observatory (LAVO) focuses its attention on tracking and reporting on incidents of armed violence.

LAVO gathers its data from official data sources such as the Liberia National Police (LNP) United Nations Police in Liberia (UNPOL), hospitals and others. The demographics of the LAVO data show that the perpetrators and victims of armed violence and assault are those

between the ages of 19 and 35. Though there is a strong association within the LERN database between youths and high rates of armed violence and assault, as caused by LAVO's concentrated reporting, it is granted that if the definition of youth doesn't change and other organizations start reporting on it consistently, there would be an even greater increase in that correlation. Even if reports start coming from counties that are under-reported in the LERN network, youth issues would still be likely to dominate those reports, because in every county, no matter how low the population, "youth" as currently defined will constitute the majority. As a matter of fact, the LNP and UNPOL data are gathered from almost all the counties. According to data gathered and published by LAVO, UNPOL reported a staggering 88% of all incidents it reports on as armed robberies, while the LNP reported 53% of its respective cases as assault incidents.¹⁴ In both cases the youth have been the most common perpetrators and victims.

Youth unemployment and poverty have made majority of the youths susceptible to all kinds of anti-social behavior, including drug abuse, armed violence, assaults and others. They cannot be gainfully employed because they lack the required skills. Age, social, economic and peer pressure have forced many youth into early marriage and adulthood-a responsibility they are too often not economically and developmentally prepared to shoulder. Even the youth who have acquired some level of formal education and those with other skills cannot find a job to support themselves and their families. For some of these "overgrown" youth, life becomes a matter of daily struggle for survival, even if it means armed robbery, it is considered a "necessary evil."

It is in this sense that the LERN report is also vital. Each contributing organization has facilitated capacity building in their immediate volunteers (i.e. FPs from the PBO, monitors from LAVO, etc.) and has had the individual effect of developing counter-narratives to this general negative perception of youth. This specific effect can be broadened by including more organizations and more volunteers to report against these acts of conflict as well as increasing capacity in reporting skills.

The LERN report like many other previous reports, which have highlighted the correlation between youth and violence, should no longer be looked at as data for future action, but as a wake-up call to government and its partner for immediate action.

Drug Use and Abuse Issues

One of the most serious challenges facing West African countries as regards its youth population is the high influx of illicit drugs. This is related to border issues (which shows how interconnected the varying categories are), coupled with the lack of political will by the national

¹⁴ LAVO First Report on Progress, December 2011 page 5.

Legislature to enact into law a rigid Drug Law; where the possession or sale of illicit drugs will invariably bring stiff penalties. This Drug Bill has been languishing in the house for a couple of years now since it was submitted. These flows have become so massive that the West Coast of Africa, with Liberia being no exception, is now popularly referred to as the “Coke Coast”. Around 30 percent of the cocaine consumed annually in Europe passes through West Africa¹⁵.

The effect of this trade is further compounding the challenges of state fragility in the Sub-region. Recent case in point is the crisis in the neighboring country, La Cote D’Ivoire. Warlords usually take advantage of the vulnerable youth to recruit and drug them to go and fight their proxy wars. The scale of the problem is such that it is now more than a drug problem, but a serious early warning security threat that necessitates a high profile early response mechanism involving major response actors through programmatic activities as awareness and sensitization, training/development of affected youth and the enactment and enforcement of a strong drug law to serve as deterrent.

The reality of the problem of drug abuse among youth is that, while some see it as a threat, the majority of those actually involved see it as an important part of their livelihood and achieving social status. The use of drugs have lured many of them from school and other areas of training, and some females engage into prostitution and teenage pregnancy. The Early Warning and Early Response Working Group has identify the high usage of drugs among youth as the second most reported issue by its LERN network members and a prevalent security threat to Liberia.

Realistically, a political initiative needs to be undertaken outlining the commitment of relevant authorities to tackle the drug menace among youth in all its manifestations especially as it relates to prioritizing drug control and instituting a proactive method by ensuring that adequate resources are provided for the rehabilitation of drug addicts. It is critical to recognize that unlike other national problems facing Liberia’s emerging democracy, the challenges posed by this social enigma among youth poses an even higher risk of undermining the peace consolidation efforts, youth empowerment and social renewal in Liberia.

In addressing some of these problems, state authorities have been swift, as burning of the drugs or narcotics seized. But these are reactions to the crisis rather than solutions based on empirical research and analysis. From EWER’s viewpoint, based on analysis of reports gathered and field work, Government, CSOs National and International NGOs, need to provide immediate intervention by enacting the appropriate laws, and providing treatment for youth addicts, break the cycle of violence and abuse of the youth by their parents or guardians by addressing youth

¹⁵ “Excluding what is imported for local consumption, it is estimated that about 21 tons of cocaine were trafficked from West Africa to Europe in 2009” (UNODC - The Transatlantic Cocaine Market Research Paper April 2011)

victimization, abuse and neglect, strengthen and mobilize communities as to the dangers of drug abuse by implementing an aggressive public outreach program on effective strategies to combat drug abuse and juvenile youth violence, and lastly support the development of innovative approaches to monitor and evaluate these strategies.

9. Conclusion and Recommendations

The information that has been provided by the LERN database and the implementing EWER Working Group organization should be taken as a great work in progress. This report was designed to show how the collaboration between distinct organizations, though facing many challenges and limitations, particularly as concerning the standardization of its categories and the methodologies used, can achieve a network which can properly delineate case-by-case incidents of conflict, graph them, and monitor the trends that are produced. Organizational differentiation was a necessary factor, as many of the contributing organizations incorporated this network as part of their own thematic implementation. Category definitions and priorities, especially in the face of Liberia's definition of the term "youth", show that some issues arose since the consolidation of the data for this report. The priority issues, as defined by the Group, target the very real implications behind the graphs and show how important it is to have networks, such as LERN, which can provide data to the Government of Liberia and INGOs working towards aid and development.

As developed within the report, many recommendations can be made to facilitate a stronger network. The next steps should be:

- *a standardization of the LERN reports and methodologies to consolidate category definitions and organizational targets*
- *an increase of network presence within counties that have less reporting*
- *a continued monitoring of conflict trends while maintaining a response to case-specific reports which could escalate conflict*
- *an agreed upon definition of the term "youth" and what it incorporates*
- *a greater inclusion of other organizations that could assist in the reporting and analysis of conflict*
- *establishing a higher involvement from government agencies which is vital both in terms of data collection and the sustainability of the project.*

10. References

The Transatlantic Cocaine Market Research Paper, UNODC , April 2011
First Report on Progress, Liberia Armed Violence Observatory , December 2011
Corruption Perceptions Index 2012. Transparency International, Dec. 5, 2012
Second Report on Progress, Liberia Armed Violence Observatory July 2012, pg 5

Liberia's Early-Warning and Response Network (LERN), <http://www.lern.ushahidi.com/>,
Ushahidi

11. Early Warning/Early Response Working Group Membership

Center for Democratic Empowerment (CEDE)

Innovation for Poverty Action Liberia (IPAL)

Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)

Global Alliance for Peace and Sustainability (GAPS-Liberia)

Landmine Action/Action on Arm Violence (LMA/AOAV)

Liberia National Police (LNP)

Bureau of Immigration & Naturalization (BIN)

National Disaster Relief Commission (NRDC)

Justice and Peace Commission (JPC)

Liberia Media Center (LMC)

United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL)

Ministry of Justice, Republic of Liberia (MoJ)

Foundation for Peace & Development (FPD)

Citizen Bureau for Development & Productivity (CIBDAP)

Liberia Peacebuilding Office (PBO)

Ushahidi/iLab Liberia

United Nation Children Education Fund (UNICEF) Liberia

Youth Crime Watch Liberia (YCWL)

Trust Africa (TA)

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

Peacebuilding Resource Center (PBRC)

Liberia Democracy Watch (LDW)

Inter-Religious Council of Liberia (IRCL)

Lutheran Trauma Healing & Reconciliation Program (THRP-LCL)

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West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) Liberia

Platform for Dialogue and Peacebuilding (P4DP)

Rice and Rights Foundation (RRF)

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