

**WAR IS BEHIND US NOW**

**A report on focus group research in Liberia  
October 2004**

A project of the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), with support  
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Democracy depends on legislatures that represent citizens and oversee the executive, independent judiciaries that safeguard the rule of law, political parties that are open and accountable, and elections in which voters freely choose their representatives in government. Acting as a catalyst for democratic development, NDI bolsters the institutions and processes that allow democracy to flourish.

***Build Political and Civic Organizations:*** NDI helps build the stable, broad-based and well-organized institutions that form the foundation of a strong civic culture. Democracy depends on these mediating institutions—the voice of an informed citizenry, which links citizens to their government and to one another by providing avenues for participation in public policy.

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International cooperation is key to promoting democracy effectively and efficiently. It also conveys a deeper message to new and emerging democracies that while autocracies are inherently isolated and fearful of the outside world, democracies can count on international allies and an active support system. Headquartered in Washington D.C., with field offices in every region of the world, NDI complements the skills of its staff by enlisting volunteer experts from around the world, many of whom are veterans of democratic struggles in their own countries and share valuable perspectives on democratic development.

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## PREFACE

NDI has conducted focus group research in a number of post-conflict environments, including East Timor, Afghanistan and Iraq. Focus group research can be used to widen the views and perspectives available to policy makers and those taking part in public debate. In post-conflict societies where traditional means of communicating with the wider population have been disrupted, the Institute has found that focus group research is a useful tool to gauge the attitudes of citizens and the existing space for social and political discourse at the local level.

**Purpose of this report.** The principal objective of this report is to provide Liberian civic groups with a tool to aid their efforts to facilitate information sharing and interaction between citizens and government during the political transition, and to support the fulfillment of their self-identified missions as advocates, educators and watchdogs.

**Sample.** Twelve focus group discussions were conducted in four counties in Liberia from June 25 to July 7, 2004 with a cross section of citizens – men and women, young and old, urban and rural, internally displaced persons and former combatants – in order to understand the political dynamics of Liberia during the transition period. Appendix A profiles each discussion group.

**Research methodology.** Working from a standard set of questions contained within Appendix B, a focus group is a semi-structured group interview that proceeds according to a research design that includes careful recruitment of participants. Groups are recruited to be homogenous (according to gender, age, education and life experience, such as being displaced or a former combatant) for two reasons: in order to identify and clarify the views held by a particular sub-group of the population, and to enhance the comfort level of participants so they feel they are among peers and that everyone is equally entitled to express an opinion. Successful focus groups are free flowing, open-ended, and often unpredictable. A more complete description is provided in Appendix C, “Notes on Methodology.”

**Unique to this research project.** NDI and its partners conducted the focus group discussions in the Liberian vernacular and all quotations in this report are transcribed exactly as expressed by participants. NDI and its civic partners feel that allowing Liberian voices to be heard verbatim makes this report a more useful tool to inform future activities. In addition, much of Liberia’s population was displaced at the time the research was conceived and implemented, and large sections of the country were insecure. While focus group research in a particular country does not need to reach all geographic areas to be able to provide valuable insights into how particular groups in the community think and feel, NDI deliberately sought out internally displaced people (IDPs) and others affected by the war to obtain a range of representative views. With separate organizations conducting research in Liberia on issues such as transitional justice and aspects of the ongoing disarmament, demobilization and reintegration program, NDI’s research project was designed to focus on areas within the Institute’s core mission of supporting democratic political processes.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

One year after the signing of the Liberian Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in Accra, Ghana, Liberia remains a country at peace. The United Nations (UN) peacekeeping force has grown to 15,000 and a transitional government is in place with a mandate to lead the country to elections in October 2005. While Liberia may qualify as a "failed state," this transitional period represents for many Liberians a window of opportunity and great hope for the future. NDI's research project highlights Liberians' deep desire to live in a country governed by democratically elected leaders where rule of law and fulfillment of citizens' basic needs are paramount. The project brings into sharp focus the importance of marshalling the political will and resources, both domestically and internationally, necessary to repair the country's devastated infrastructure, broken political system and frayed social fabric.

This focus group research attempts to capture the voices of those who were not at the negotiating table in Ghana when the CPA was drafted and signed. Many of them are displaced, traumatized, and unemployed survivors and former combatants trying to restore and repair their lives in post-Taylor Liberia. At a time when the window for political change remains open in Liberia, the findings of this research project demonstrate the need for political engagement with the broader population in implementing a successful transition process and laying the groundwork for democratic governance. The main findings of the research include the following:

**A Welcome Peace.** Liberians are grateful that the war is over and relieved by the diminishing number of weapons on the streets. They are optimistic that the peace process and ensuing elections will result in new leadership capable of leading the country toward a more stable future. This optimism is tempered, however, by memories of past unsuccessful peace agreements, the shortcomings of the current agreement and a perception of widespread corruption in government.

**Wounds of War Unhealed.** Liberians have lived through an extraordinarily brutal decade. One year of peace is insufficient to heal the deep wounds of war, and much of the population remains deeply traumatized.

**Rising Expectations and Growing Frustration.** With whole communities displaced by war and family structures in disarray, daily life for most Liberians consists of a difficult struggle to survive. While participants have received limited relief since the signing of the CPA and the start of the disarmament process, they believe government should be doing more to help citizens. Participants expressed widespread cynicism and much doubt that those currently in power were governing in the public interest, especially as they witness growing corruption and the continuation of the poor governance habits of the past.

**Political Marginalization.** While knowledge of the CPA was inconsistent among participants, many expressed general confidence that the peace process and scheduled elections would bring improvements to their lives. To date, however, there have been few opportunities for interaction between Liberian citizens and

transitional political leaders in either the legislative or executive branch, or with political party leaders.

**Faith in Democracy.** Participants demonstrated an understanding of democratic principles and expressed keen interest in more open government. They voiced a desire to engage in meaningful dialogue with political leaders and for appropriate representation from those in the transitional government.

**Mixed View of Elections.** Participants recalled the atmosphere of intimidation and fear that forestalled the exercise of free choice in the 1997 election. At the same time, many associate that election with ushering in a period of peace. They believe in the possibility of positive change through the ballot box, and most reported that they are ready to vote.

Liberia’s transition process provides a unique opportunity to break with a bloody past and a history of corrupt misrule by leaders unaccountable to the public. However, citizens displaced and traumatized by war — whose daily life consists of a struggle to survive — require special attention if they are to be brought into the country’s political process in meaningful ways. Despite their stated attachment to democratic ideals and readiness to vote in the future, Liberians do not generally recognize the role and potential power of an active citizenry that holds its leaders to account. A more robust civic education effort is desperately needed to inform Liberians about the transition process and prepare them for the upcoming elections, particularly in rural and displaced communities. Transitional government officials in both the executive and legislative branch have a responsibility to reach out to the public during this critical period, as do candidates for public office in the run up to the elections. Finally, the transitional government must attach a greater priority to the delivery of essential public services, such as water, health and sanitation, education, public safety and electricity. These are the key concerns of Liberians and, ultimately, what they want most from their elected leaders.

## **BACKGROUND**

Liberia was founded in 1820 as a settlement for freed slaves from the United States of America, and became independent in 1847. These freed slaves, known as Americo-Liberians, modeled the country’s constitution and political institutions after those of the U.S., but developed an increasingly authoritarian, and often brutal, style of governance that enriched the narrow Americo-Liberian minority by disenfranchising the rights of indigenous Africans. Liberia’s last “settler” leader, President William Tolbert, was overthrown and assassinated in 1980 by Master Sergeant Samuel K. Doe, an indigenous Liberian from the Krahn ethnic group. Doe presented himself as a populist committed to protecting the rights of all indigenous Liberians, but his regime came to be increasingly dominated by fellow Krahn who plundered the country’s natural wealth. Doe relied on military force to keep his increasingly corrupt and dysfunctional government in power, and won an obviously rigged election in 1985.

Deepening ethnic tensions between Doe’s Krahn and the Mandingo, Gio and Mano ethnic groups, as well as the remaining Americo-Liberians, led to the formation of militarized ethnic factions, many armed and supported by Liberia’s neighbors. In 1989, Charles Taylor, a former member of the Doe government who fled Liberia and was briefly imprisoned in the U.S. on embezzlement charges before escaping the country, formed the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) and led an insurgency in 1989 that triggered a brutal seven-year civil war. In 1997, after several broken ceasefire agreements, Taylor agreed to demobilize his rebel army and participate in UN-sponsored elections. Taylor and his party won a landslide victory from an intimidated electorate exhausted from years of civil war.

For six years following Liberia's 1997 national election, Taylor's government routinely persecuted opposition figures, human rights activists, the press and members of civil society. In much the same way as previous governments, he enriched himself and those around him at the expense of the broader population. Externally, Taylor's support for rebels in Sierra Leone and his involvement in illicit diamond trading and arms trafficking led the international community to withdraw support and eventually impose economic sanctions in 2001. In 2000, an armed insurgency, Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), invaded northern Liberia from bases in Guinea. The LURD repeatedly threatened Monrovia, causing massive waves of population displacement and a deepening humanitarian crisis. A second rebel group, the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL), composed primarily of members of the Krahn ethnic group, split from the Mandingo-dominated LURD in 2002.

By August 2003, an estimated 75 percent of Liberia's population had fled the spreading conflict by migrating to the relative safety of Monrovia as rebel forces advanced to the city outskirts. As had been the case during the seven-year period before Taylor came to power, murder, rape, widespread looting and the use of child soldiers were emblematic of this brutal period in Liberia’s tortured history. On August 11, 2003, Liberian President Taylor stepped down from office and accepted asylum in Nigeria. Days later, the Liberian government and rebel forces signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) after months of negotiations in Accra, Ghana. In addition to defining the terms of



a ceasefire, the CPA laid out the structure and scope for a transition authority to guide the country toward democratic elections in 2005 and the installation of an elected government by January 2006.

Following the signing of the Agreement, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) deployed a Nigerian-led peacekeeping force to provide security for Monrovia and environs during the initial months of the two-year transition period. Recognizing that a much larger force would be necessary to stabilize the entire country, the UN mandated a peacekeeping operation of 15,000 that began deploying on October 1, 2003. CPA signatories chose Gyude Bryant, a widely respected business leader, as chairman of the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL). The new government was formally inaugurated in Monrovia on October 14, 2003. Under the complicated terms of the CPA, an array of representatives from Taylor's former government and armed militias, the LURD, MODEL, political parties and civil society assumed positions in the NTGL, while each group selected 12 members of the 76-member National Transitional Legislative Assembly (NTLA).

## PRINCIPAL THEMES FROM THIS RESEARCH

### **A Welcome Peace**

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) ushered in a period of relative peace and stability in Liberia for the first time in years. The guns have fallen silent and the residents of the capital say they can "sleep soundly" after the resignation and voluntary exile of Charles Taylor. However slowly, the country is moving forward toward elections in 2005. A number of focus group participants readily expressed optimism for the future. After the horrors of conflict, many see good fortune in merely having survived.

*As we are talking, we are feeling a bit good than when the war was going on. Gun was firing, no food, no this, no that, we were feeling bad; at least God has made it. We are feeling good now. **Female C. Monrovia 25 -35 years***

*We are happy to see situation today, because we not hear no gun sound. We bring the arms and turn over to UN for peace. For peace sake, we are happy. **Male GOL ex-militias 18 - 25 years***

*As for me and my children, in the future, let them learn. I thank God today, the way our days looking today, their days will not be looking like this tomorrow. They will learn. They'll not be like us. War, it behind us now. **Female IDP 18-25 years***

Having lived through unspeakable horrors for over a decade, Liberians are profoundly grateful for what good they find in their otherwise dire circumstances. When prompted to describe the positive things in their lives, those most affected by the war speak of what they see as life's small victories. Former combatants relish being paid or having the opportunity to go to school. Others are thankful to have left their weapons behind, returned to their community and been accepted by their families. Research participants were almost unanimous in their praise of the peace and disarmament process.

*After I disarmed, my family and community people accepted me. **Male GOL ex-militias 18 - 25 years***

*Tell God thank you plenty because no body died from us during the war. **Female IDP 18-25 years***

*Thank God, I am still alive. **Female IDP 18-25 years***

*The disarmament is already satisfying me. The fighters are turning in their guns [and this] is a good thing. **Male Kakata City 25 - 35 years***

*Without disarmament, there can't be peace. **Male MODEL ex-combatants 18 - 25 years***

*The best thing is Taylor is gone and we have a new government. **Male GOL ex-***

### **militias 18 - 25 years**

An increasingly peaceful environment has ushered in freedoms long denied to citizens forced to flee their homes or hemmed in by rebel armies. The critical role played by the international community, in particular UNMIL peacekeepers, is recognized and appreciated.

*The best thing that is going on now is freedom of movement because before I can't leave from [the IDP camp] alone. The trousers, they will take it from you, they take out all the slippers from your foot but now any hour I feel like moving, I can move freely. **Male IDP 35-45 years***

*We appreciate what they are doing because brother and brother were fighting and they came in between us. They put situation under control. And as they got here the promised ceasefire has come. **Male IDP 35-45 years***

There appears to be broad support for the CPA. While the provisions of the CPA are not fully understood, its signatories are appreciated for having negotiated a ceasefire agreement intended to bring peace to a country tired of war.

*They agreed for peace because [the] Liberian people were suffering. **Female C. Monrovia 25 -35 years***

*When everyone knew that no one could win the war, they decided to talk so that peace could come to the country. **Male GOL ex-militias 18 - 25 years***

The Agreement's provisions on disarmament were seen as important prerequisites for progress in other areas.

*The best goal is disarmament because when you disarm and encamp these boys, people will have chance to go around and meet their families. After you disarm, you take the guns from them, and then those displaced from their homes, places will be able to go back. They will be free. **Male C. Monrovia 35 - 45 years***

There was widespread understanding that the CPA had established an interim government that would lay the groundwork for elections in 2005.

*I have heard about the peace agreement. I have heard about elections that will be held next year. **Female C. Monrovia 18 - 25 years***

### **Wounds of War Unhealed**

The guns may have fallen silent, but the drastic consequences of war linger for many Liberians, especially internally displaced people. Familial and social relationships were fractured by the war, and memories of trauma are fresh in the minds of participants. The physical damage of the war is omnipresent and self-evident, while the psychological toll of the conflict in terms of death, disablement, trauma, fractured families and torn

relationships is less visible but equally as prominent, even one year after the signing of the peace agreement. Participants talk of selfishness, even among family members, as individuals struggle to survive. To Liberians who have lived through this difficult and trying period, the human cost of the war is a central part of their lives.

*For me, Liberia [is] bad because the war made Liberia bad. When the war comes, people can be killing people and they can be killing our people from behind us. We living like this now, man come and be fooling us. And when they [make us] pregnant, they take us out of school. **Female IDP 18-25 years***

*Before the war, my mother used to help her family. But since the war came, and we are in displaced camp, they have been playing selfish ways on us. They have not been helping us. [There is] no one to help us. We got to go here and there before we can eat. **Female IDP 18-25 years***

*Now I am in this displaced camp [with] nobody to help me. I'm with my sister; she [does] nothing to help me. I'm just here hustling on my own. I have two children whose pa died and I have to take care of them. **Female IDP 18-25 years***

*Some people depend on some one to get help and this person will sometimes let them down because the person themselves don't have it. This is a very bad thing for the family. It is not good to depend on someone to help you all the time. **Male C. Monrovia 35 - 45 years***

### **Rising Expectations and Growing Frustration**

With only a glancing understanding of the CPA, many participants seemed to read into it commitments that would be expected from a fully functioning government.

*The agreement also says that the NTGL should make sure that we have basic social services. **Female C. Monrovia 18 -25 years***

*This new government should make education good for everybody. **Female C. Monrovia 18 -25 years:***

*The agreement also talks about reconstruction and rehabilitation. **Female C. Monrovia 18 -25 years:***

*The peace agreement says that women have rights; the government should have gender equality. **Female C. Monrovia 18 -25 years***

*They talked about 50 percent jobs for women. **Female Sinkor/Monrovia 35- 45 years***

*Health, hospitals and education. They talk about all this in the agreement. **Female Sinkor/Monrovia 35- 45 years***

In reality, what remained of the country's public infrastructure was looted and stripped

by both advancing rebels and retreating government forces. By the time of Taylor's exile and the inauguration of the NTGL, Liberia had largely ceased to exist as a state. The government's ability to provide even the most basic of services was, and largely remains, minimal. Even in peacetime, the crippled economy provides few new jobs to address the country's chronic unemployment. Making ends meet is a major preoccupation of many of those who took part in the focus groups.

*No water, no light, we [are] just living in the darkness. Things are not going on well. **Male C. Monrovia 35 - 45 years***

*Everybody is facing problems. We are just trying to live. Since this morning I've not eaten anything. The situation is bad for me. **Female LURD Ex-combatants 18-25 years***

*I've about nine people living with me, plus me I make them 10. The half bag of bulgur wheat they give to us, it can't do anything. **Male IDP 35-45 years***

Some had great expectations of the transitional government and do not feel that these have been met.

*The financial situation of mine is very hard, just like before. We were thinking that when we get new government everything was going to be fine. **Male C. Monrovia 35 - 45 years***

Participants lamented the absence of effective government. They decried the difficulty of finding paid work and earning a regular income. Participants spoke of relatives employed by the government and the private sector who are not paid on a regular basis and sometimes not at all.

*The worst thing is the job business. When you don't have job, you don't have any respect. **Male Kakata City 25 - 35 years***

*[If] the men are working they don't get paid. They talk about the pay but the money cannot come. **Female Sinkor/Monrovia 35- 45 years***

*My uncle is working and the government is not paying his salary on time. At the end he can not carry anything home. We said Taylor was buying big, big, cars, but now Gyude Bryant is buying big, big, cars. **Male Vai Town, 18 -25 years***

Liberians are doubly penalized by the rising prices of basic commodities such as food, clothing and fuel, in part due to a weakening local currency. Basic commodity cost increases have led to higher prices for secondary goods and services, such as transport.

*Since the new government came the U. S. dollar rate is climbing up higher each day. This is making things difficult for us. **Female C. Monrovia 18 - 25 years***

*The government said the price of things was going to drop, but no prices are*

*going down. We are asking Gyude Bryant to bring the prices of goods down. Life is difficult. **Female C. Monrovia 25 -35 years***

High unemployment and limited economic opportunities appear to have resulted in an increased crime rate. Participants spoke of the shift in their security concerns from factional fighting to rising street crime in some areas. Violent crime, including kidnapping and murder, was seen by some participants as a growing problem, especially in the IDP and demobilization camps.

*We find people roaming around burglarizing people house in the night with the same weapon. **Male Vai Town, 18 -25 years***

*Small things are still going on bad. The government workers are not taking pay and UNMIL is not deploying in the whole country. Some of our people are still catching hard times. **Male GOL ex-militias 18 - 25 years***

*The worst thing now is the slide, slide (secret) killing that is going on. Putting people in cars. **Male MODEL ex-combatants 18 - 25 years***

*Armed robbery and people are going missing too much. **Female IDP 18-25 years***

*Child abuse and the prostitution [is] going [on] too [much]. Some of the children dress half-naked on the streets because they want to be on the street working to attract the men just to get their daily bread because right now their mothers and fathers are not giving good support. **Female Sinkor/Monrovia 35- 45 years***

Among the focus group participants, the displaced appear the hardest hit by the war and the most despondent about their situation. Many of those in camps are weak and demoralized by years of displacement and poor nutrition, sanitation and access to health care. Most of the children growing up under these circumstances have had little or no access to education. The tone of some focus groups often became downbeat as both present and future were discussed. For people living on the edge, one problem often collides with another as challenges merge and multiply.

*Things are going in the wrong direction because Liberia was not looking like this before. Five minutes when our parents struggle they look for money to send us to school, five minutes war comes. Some of our people, one like me, my father is not living, so my ma one helping us. She can struggle before we can eat. **Female IDP 18-25 years***

*My heart is not satisfied because, I was in my home, I was living in good condition and my pa (father) was living in good condition. But now, the war make it when I never learned and now when I see my friends going to school, I feel sorry for myself. We left Lofa in 2001, walking until we reached Monrovia. Everyday [with] bundles on our heads. When you want to learn, no way for you, the war is troubling. **Female IDP 18-25 years***

*The worst thing in Liberia today is poverty. We don't have money. We don't have food. The prices are too high for us. We living in the displaced camps don't have money. Rice is too costly at \$ 10.00 per cup and not every body can afford it. **Male IDP 35-45 years***

The burden of making ends meet falls disproportionately on society's weak and most vulnerable members. As the primary caregivers for children, women bear a heavier load.

*I suppose to be out of high school and be doing different job. Now, because of the war, I'm not going to school. I have got pregnant and delivered and when will the child walk for me to go to school. **Female IDP 18-25 years***

*Some of our men died in the war and we [had their] children, [with] four living children, just imagine, [there] is nobody to help me. **Female LURD Ex-combatants 18-25 years***

*My children [are] not going to school because their father [is] working, [but] he [is] not getting [paid]. Each time they will say that they will pay them, they can't pay them. So I had to go and sell in the market before they can even eat. So this year I was not able to send them to school. **Female Sinkor/Monrovia 35- 45 years***

With an upbringing in such an environment, some participants worried about the long-term impact of the war's brutality on the country's children.

*The worst thing that is happening in our country now is the children. The youth of Liberia have been lost because of the war. They are lost beyond repair because of the poverty and other things. There is no respect. **Female Buchanan 25-35 years***

### **Political Marginalization**

The focus group discussions revealed a fundamental distrust and distance among Liberia's political institutions, key actors and common citizens. Equally, there seems to be widespread dissatisfaction with the influence of the former warring factions that were signatories to the CPA and whose members now dominate the NTLA. There is an expectation that political and former faction leaders should do more to control their members and give greater support to the disarmament effort. The fractious performance of the NTLA is not appreciated.

*They should advise the President because it is they who make the law but the lawmakers are just sitting there for themselves (and) they are not talking for the people. **Female Sinkor/Monrovia 35- 45 years***

*For me I don't know their work, but I think they are not doing their work, because they suppose to make law and we don't hear about any law that they made. **Male Kakata City 25 - 35 years***

*I see nothing they are doing. **Male C. Monrovia 35 - 45 years***

*The same duping they just carry on there, so we are not satisfied with them. **Male MODEL ex-combatants 18 - 25 years***

*Their performance is very bad, which of course we don't like. They (factions) don't trust each other and they are not working with the interim government. **Male Vai Town, 18 -25 years***

*They should be encouraging their boys or fighters to go ahead with the peace process and disarm. The boys that have fought for them, give them opportunities or jobs so that they can find something to do so that their minds don't go back to where they are coming from. **Female LURD Ex-combatants 18-25 years***

*I believe that the head of those factions should gather their people together, make them to understand that the war is over and try to encourage them to get back to school, to learn. **Female Buchanan 25-35 years***

*As for me I am disappointed with them. You know every day they are fighting in that house. They want changes to take place where in it is not possible. If they really want to work in the interest of the people, let them stop fighting or forget about this leadership business. **Male IDP 35-45 years***

Though participants universally praised the return to peace, support for the poorly understood transition process remains weak. Perhaps reflective of Liberians' poor experience with government, focus group research participants demonstrated signs of active cynicism or latent apathy that could hamper public engagement in the political processes.

*When they went to Ghana for the meeting, they didn't care for the Liberian people. They were just there enjoying themselves, riding their big, big cars. Sleeping in good motels, hotels, that is all they were after. **Female Buchanan 25-35 years***

*The things are so many, we are thinking on how to get food, to eat for that day and some of those things. So sometimes when they talk it sounds like foolishness to us now. We just depend on God and are going about our business. **Female Buchanan 25-35 years***

While some participants were cognizant of the main points of the CPA, others knew very little about it. Few had any knowledge of the transitional institutions created to guide the country toward democratic rule, such as the Governance Reform Commission (GRC) and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Possession of a copy of the CPA was rare, and most participants relied on word of mouth or radio reports for information on its contents.

*I never see the document so I don't know anything. **Male MODEL ex-combatants 18 - 25 years***



*Most of the time I don't even get time to listen to radio because I got my policy saying that I don't like listening to radio as I will hear news that will frustrate me more and more. **Female Buchanan 25-35 years***

Perceived government spending on high profile purchases, especially new cars, serves as a touchstone for those angered by increasing corruption. Corruption is linked in the eyes of many to restricted access to government services, such as education .

*We got so many people in the government; they [are] enjoying [themselves]. No money in the country, they take the money they carry to different country, invest in different country than to invest in their own country. Go to different Country, buy houses, do other things there. **Female Buchanan 25-35 years***

*I don't know whether the fault is the government's [for] not paying the teachers, but the teachers use the children to get their pay. If a child goes to school maybe studies hard, and another sits next to them and doesn't study. In the end this person makes the same grade because [they] can afford a few dollars to pay the instructor. **Female LURD Ex-combatants 18-25 years***

*School students from 11<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grades, most of them only go to school the time they feel like going to school. They have the grades they want because they have the money to buy grades from teachers. They will not even take their test because they feel they are able to go and give the teacher envelope to build up their grades. **Female C. Monrovia 18 - 25 years***

*The worst thing is corruption. People ask for power and when power is given to them, there is no change. Government is buying big, big car just like the old government. **Male C. Monrovia 35 - 45 years***

The focus groups exposed various circles of dissatisfaction. Most worrying were the former combatants, the group least positive in their perceptions of the NTGL.

*I think since we came from out of the war, it is very difficult for us. Like before, I think when the very man (Charles Taylor) himself was in seat, we were facing problem with him by this war. Since we get out of the war, we just gather together, nothing we get to do. Nothing at all. We just sit together. Nothing to find to eat. **Male MODEL ex-combatants 18 - 25 years***

*I want to say something, I got problem with Liberia and Liberia got problem with me because when I'm not satisfied Liberia will not be satisfy. **Female LURD Ex-combatants 18-25 years***

Participants expressed resentment, not untypical in such circumstance, that those most responsible for the war were being effectively rewarded and receiving preferential treatment through the payouts and privileges provided by the disarmament process. However, at the time of the research there were still frustrations in the wider community with the pace of disarmament and demobilization.

*Disarmament is slow because they are only disarming in the city side. Our brothers in the bushes. In the night those LURD boys they can take guns and harass the people. **Male Vai Town, 18 -25 years***

*The security situation is still not good. Other rebels are still disturbing, taking their things from people. This is happening in the countryside you know. So, United Nations have to come up to do something better about this peace process, that is to deploy very fast. **Male C. Monrovia 35 - 45 years***

### **Faith in Democracy**

Focus group discussions examined attitudes toward democracy, with the aim of measuring the potential willingness of individuals to participate in key political processes. Many participants saw an active role for themselves and citizens like them in ensuring the successful implementation of the CPA. It is worth noting with a measure of alarm, however, that focus groups comprised of young men, both former combatants and urban residents, evinced the least interest in working toward the successful implementation of the transition process.

*We the civilians will make the peace process work because [it is] we the people who you will vote. **Female IDP 18-25 years***

*We brought our own problems; so we must settle them. We've got to come to one agreement. That's the only way peace will come to Liberia. **Female IDP 18-25 years***

*The very people who responsible for this agreement are the very citizens of Liberia. **Male IDP 35-45 years***

*We the citizens of Liberia should support our own process. If somebody is washing your back, you should be washing your stomach. **Male IDP 35-45 years***

Within each of the focus groups, participants collectively identified the key elements of a democracy, with the exception of the poorly educated and marginalized. Most of the focus group participants support core democratic values, including the concept of representative government.

*In a democracy the people tell the government what to do because people make the government. **Male MODEL ex-combatants 18 - 25 years***

*The people will tell the government what they want the government to do for them. **Female LURD Ex-combatants 18-25 years***

*The people must tell the government what to do, because the people put him there. So he has to listen to the people. **Female IDP 18-25 years***

Participants supported such key concepts as freedoms of speech and association, and

respect for fundamental human rights and rule of law.

*They are talking about free speech, for you to say something for no body to look for you and take to jail. **Female Buchanan 25-35 years***

*This also means a fair society. People will respect the law and there will be no confusion. **Female C. Monrovia 18 -25 years***

Furthermore, participants expressed strong views about the need for accountable and transparent government.

*When the people don't tell him what to do, he'll do his own wrong thing and when he does it, it will not be straight. Then 'halla-halla' [chaos] will come here again. **Female IDP 18-25 years***

*Government should be for the whole people not only for him and his family. **Female Sinkor/Monrovia 35- 45 years***

*Government should be accountable to the people. **Male GOL ex-militias 18 - 25 years***

*I believe that the government, the people who up there representing it should reach to us and find out our needs in the community, then they will know what to say there on behalf of the people. **Female Buchanan 25-35 years***

Participants understood the importance of political parties, but expressed the hope that they will work in the future toward the betterment of the nation by focusing on pertinent issues, such as education, development, employment and youth.

*There will be nothing to call democracy [if] the political parties do not take active part. They have to be serious so that we can have election. **Male GOL ex-militias 18 - 25 years***

*They suppose to be helping the Liberian people with development. Like fixing roads, helping to bring safe drinking water, building toilets around the community, things to keep the Liberian people healthy and happy. **Female LURD Ex-combatants 18-25 years***

*Let's say that three or four parties should run because the country too small. Every body wants to be president. The people will be confused. They won't know who to vote for. And at the end they can be thousand people; one person just has to win. The parties are too many. **Female C. Monrovia 18 -25 years***

*I believe that they should cut some of these parties down. Not every day forming a new party as that can be a cause of the election not being fair. **Female Buchanan 25-35 years***

*Political parties will have to merge so Liberia can have three parties. They should*

*at least merge together to have three parties. **Male C. Monrovia 35 - 45 years***

Both male and female participants stated that women had an important role to play in Liberia's democracy.

*Democracy is having to do with men and women, so women too have a part to play. **Male GOL ex-militias 18 - 25 years***

*We shouldn't sideline the women. They have potential too. They can even do better than the man. **Male Vai Town, 18 -25 years***

*Women are the same citizens and they should have their equal rights, especially in a democratic government. Women should compete with men as much as possible. **Male IDP 35-45 years***

*Women are able of doing like the men therefore, they should have equal right. **Male C. Monrovia 35 - 45 years***

*Government business is a woman's business. Women should advise the government. **Female Sinkor/Monrovia 35- 45 years***

As is the case in other countries, women in political office are often seen as less susceptible to corruption.

*I believe that if a woman is the president of this country they will do better. You know we tried many times putting men there, ahead of us. Most times they build mansions in other countries. People here they become president and ministers but they don't have even single houses here. They do every thing out of the country. **Male IDP 35-45 years***

### **Mixed Views Toward Elections**

Participants made a clear link between the importance of elections as a key form of citizen participation and democracy.

*In a democracy, everyone is free to vote. The whole thing is that no body is forced to vote. Everybody can vote for the person they want or like. **Male Kakata City 25 - 35 years***

*Democracy means having elections to elect new government. **Male GOL ex-militias 18 - 25 years***

*Voting is the important part [of democracy] because it makes everybody to choose who they want to be president. **Male GOL ex-militias 18 - 25 years***

*All the trouble in the country is about power and people taking big jobs in government. So when there are free and fair elections in the country, then*

*people will get to know that we need to have elections for people to have big jobs. Then people will understand that only the people that are elected are the ones that everybody wants. **Female Buchanan 25-35 years***

Most participants see next year's election as a cause for optimism rather than a potential source of conflict. Most participants said they were ready and eager to vote in the planned 2005 elections. Furthermore, future elections are seen as a means to resolve conflict.

*The best thing that is going on now is the election. **Male IDP 35-45 years***

*The best thing happening is the government says that it will help us stop the war and have elections. **Male Kakata City 25 - 35 years***

*I feel good because next year we'll be having elections. If we have elections, we will be going back home and we will not be slaves. We will go to our homes nobody will be there to trouble anybody again. **Female IDP 18-25 years***

With future civic and voter education programs in mind, the participants were asked to describe what motivates their interest in voting. They responded with answers that capture Liberians' sense of civic duty and belief that they can influence their destiny through choices made at the polling booth.

*I'm voting for democracy **Female LURD Ex-combatants 18-25 years***

*I will vote because I want to be able to choose the next president. **Male GOL ex-militias 18 - 25 years:***

*I want for peace to come in my country. **Male MODEL ex-combatants 18 - 25 years***

*I will vote because my one vote is important. **Male MODEL ex-combatants 18 - 25 years***

*We want for our country to be settled. We don't want no "hala-hala" [chaos] again because we want everybody to be doing things in common. **Female IDP 18-25 years***

*It's our right to vote. There should be peace. If peace is in the country we can do everything freely without any tension behind us. **Female C. Monrovia 18 -25 years***

*The next one I'll vote, I'll vote. Yes! We all want peace in the country. Yes! So I'll vote. **Female C. Monrovia 25 -35 years***

*As long as the election is free and fair, I will vote, even ff my candidate doesn't win, I will have no problem [voting]. **Female Buchanan 25-35 years***

*Why I personally want to vote is to vote for a president that can able to do good for me in this country. **Male IDP 35-45 years:***

*Mainly we want to vote, because we are citizens. We suppose to vote. **Male IDP 35-45 years:***

*I want to vote because I will vote for peace. **Male C. Monrovia 35 - 45 years***

*I will vote for one reason because maybe my vote will make somebody to win. **Male C. Monrovia 35 - 45 years***

Those who said they did not intend to vote expressed both cynicism and disengagement from the political process.

*I will not vote because I don't know those who want to get in the in chair. **Male Vai Town, 18 -25 years***

*I will not vote because all the past leaders lie to us. When the other come he talks bad about his friend and we put him there he does the worst thing. We will accept the one God or America will give us. **Male Vai Town, 18 -25 years***

*I will not vote because the people who want to president are too plenty. I am confused right now because everybody says they will make the country good. **Male Kakata City 25 - 35 years***

*I will not vote because all the time when somebody wants to be president, he says that he will do this and that. But when he gets there he can't do the things that he say he will do. **Male Kakata City 25 - 35 years***

Liberia's last election was conducted in a highly charged atmosphere with widespread violence and intimidation against voters. At that time, Taylor and his supporters were clear and unequivocal in their assertion that war would resume if Taylor did not win the presidency. Memories of that election were still fresh in the minds of some participants.

*He said we want papay [Charles Taylor]; you kill my ma, you kill my pa, I will vote for you. I voted for him. Majority of the people voted for him- Charles Taylor and that's how he won. **Female IDP 18-25 years:***

*I voted because I wanted to see president in the seat because if we were not going to vote for Charles Taylor, we were still going to be in jeopardy. **Male MODEL ex-combatants 18 - 25 years***

*People were scared of him. If he did not become president, we're going to be at war until today. **Female IDP 18-25 years:***

*The experience that I get during Charles Taylor time I not want it be on election again because Charles Taylor brought the war and he do all kind of cheating, putting fear in people, so other war lord them will bring war back again. **Male IDP***

### **35-45 years**

The terminology of a “free and fair election” was widely used by participants to describe the 1997 election, but not clearly understood. Participants seemed to confuse access to the polls as sufficient to constitute such a standard. For others, the fact that the count appeared to be accurate was sufficient, despite the widespread violence and intimidation ahead of polling day. Others took the word of election officials at face value.

*The elections after Taylor won I never heard anything that he cheated. Maybe they talked it, but I never heard anything like that. **Female C. Monrovia 25 -35 years***

*The election was free and fair according to the elections commissioner. **Female Buchanan 25-35 years***

*The 1997 elections were free and fair because plenty people voted in 1997. **Male GOL ex-militias 18 - 25 years:***

*Everybody agree with the result, even the international community. **Male GOL ex-militias 18 - 25 years***

*The election was free and fair because everybody who wanted to vote voted. **Male Kakata City 25 - 35 years***

*There was no fighting, so it was free and fair. **Male Kakata City 25 - 35 years:***

*Nobody forced anybody to vote for them. So the voting was fair. **Male Kakata City 25 - 35 years:***

Some participants believed that voter intimidation and electoral irregularities called into question the credibility of the 1997 election. Some participants saw vote buying and other forms of improper political influence as fundamentally unfair.

*The election was not fair because they were not supposed to bring the ballot boxes from the various counties to Monrovia. **Male Vai Town, 18 -25 years***

*They say somebody [was] supposed to win but we heard they cheated and Charles Taylor won. **Female C. Monrovia 25 -35 years***

*In front me I saw a soldier that was taking care of the place making a lady who came and could not read and write vote for Taylor. This is not fair. Maybe the lady could vote for someone else. **Male C. Monrovia 35 - 45 years***

*Charles Taylor brain washed the people and some of them were illiterate. They fooled them with a few bags of rice. **Female LURD Ex-combatants 18-25 years***

*They were voting for rice and besides rice, money or a few things that they were in need. So if you give them [these things] they will vote for you. **Female***

### **LURD Ex-combatants 18-25 years**

A number of participants who were too young to vote at the time told of casting ballots, illustrating the lax registration and polling station verification procedures in place for that election.

*I was 14 years when I voted. **Female IDP 18-25 years***

*I voted in Buchanan. Nobody noticed that I was under age. **Female C. Monrovia 18 -25 years***

*I saw my friends standing on the line so I went there. They weren't really looking at the age once you got breasts, anything you tell them, they will take it and agree. **Female C. Monrovia 18 -25 years***

*The people that were doing the NPP campaign just came and sat among us, lecturing how Taylor would electrify the city and that kind of thing. We said we had not yet reached the age to vote, but the man say he will carry us to go vote. He carries us and issues us something to vote at the voting center. **Male Vai Town, 18 -25 years***

*Things were easy in voting. You could walk to any intersection (polling booth) and vote. **Male MODEL ex-combatants 18 - 25 years***

The strongest feelings were held by those who felt the climate of fear and intimidation created by Charles Taylor had undermined the freeness and fairness of the election.

*It was not free and fair because some people voted because they were afraid of a particular person. They were afraid that if they did not vote for that person certain bad thing may happen or take place that will affect the nation. Maybe if that person didn't win, he will go back to war. **Female C. Monrovia 18 -25 years***

*Some people were saying you kill my ma, you kill my pa, I will vote for you. So I fell that it was free and fair, because they did not force any body. If even he killed your parents, if you don't want to vote for him, you won't vote for him. But you saw all what he did to you, and you voted for him so it means that you were in favor of him. Well they know he had already killed their ma and their pa they don't want him to kill the children. That's why they voted for the man. **Female C. Monrovia 18 -25 years***

*The older people voted for Charles Taylor because the boys were going around threatening the people. **Female C. Monrovia 18 -25 years***

*I will say it wasn't free and fair because the people were afraid, we never wanted for war to come in Liberia and people were carrying rumors around," If Charles Taylor doesn't win the war will still continue". So some people were force to vote for Charles Taylor. **Female Sinkor/Monrovia 35- 45 years***



Perhaps because of all these problems with the 1997 election, focus group participants expressed solid support for domestic and foreign electoral observation to ensure the integrity of the process.

*We should have some monitors from Liberia and they will work with the other monitors then from other countries. When monitors are in election they can help to make it look good. So we need them. **Male Kakata City 25 - 35 years***

*We should have both international and local independent elections monitors and observers. **Female C. Monrovia 18 -25 years***

*The American people know who to send. The American people must send someone. **Female C. Monrovia 25 -35 years:***

*I would rather an international person because our Liberians, we are not fair to ourselves. **Female Buchanan 25-35 years***

*I want for people to come from different, different countries to be in the time of voting. Nigeria, Ghana, America and all. They can come and be with us here in case of anything. We need their help too for them to be among us to see what's going on. **Female C. Monrovia 25 -35 years***

## CONCLUSION

As much as Liberia’s war weary citizens appreciate the return to peace, they remain largely marginalized from the country’s political processes. While enthusiastic over the prospect of voting in October 2005, few see a participatory role for themselves during the ongoing transition. Caught up in the daily struggle to survive and lacking information about the process underway, Liberians do not know how to channel their aspirations and frustrations into political action or citizen participation. On the receiving end of years of failed peace agreements and corrupt governments, Liberians need to be coaxed into political engagement and shown that their participation can have a positive effect on the overall peace process and prospects for democratic rule in the future.

A robust program of civic and voter education is key to engaging the public. Citizens have the right to know more about the provisions of the CPA and how the agreement is being implemented. Common misconceptions of what the CPA will provide Liberians during the transition period should be addressed and corrected. A wider effort to teach citizens the fundamentals of democratic rule is also critical, as will be specific voter education programs to enable voters to make informed decisions at the polls. Special attention needs to be paid to rural and marginalized groups, such as IDPs, illiterates and former combatants, whose understanding of democratic principles is weak. Many of these marginalized groups include young men with a tenuous commitment to the peace process.

Beyond civic and voter education, a public campaign to bring Liberian voters to a common understanding of what constitutes a credible election could serve as an important tool in building overall confidence in the electoral process. There appears to be widespread knowledge of the intimidation of voters and other irregularities that characterized the 1997 elections, and fears that these conditions could come to the fore again.

While the current transitional government was not elected and therefore does not hold itself accountable to voters *per se*, members of the NTGL and NTLA have a responsibility under the CPA to prepare the country for the transition to democratic rule. They should respond to the expressed desire of Liberians for more information on government activities and greater accountability by conducting public outreach activities, holding themselves to higher standards of transparency and placing a greater priority on the delivery of essential public services to all Liberians. Progress made in these areas during the transitional period will increase public confidence, set new standards for political behavior and lay the groundwork for improved governance by an elected government.

### APPENDIX A – List of focus groups

<b>Date</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b># of Participants</b>	<b>Demographic</b>
June 25	Central Monrovia	6	Female 25 - 35 years
June 25	Central Monrovia	8	Male 35 - 45 years
June 26	Central Monrovia	7	Female 18 - 25 years
June 26	Vai Town, Bushrod Island	10	Male 18 - 25 years
June 29	Sinkor, Monrovia	10	Female 35 - 45 years
June 30	VOA Cantonment Site, Montserrado County (Former GOL militia)	10	Male 18 - 25 years
July 2	Kakata City, Margibi County	10	Male 25 - 35 years
July 2	Mount Barclay IDP Center, Montserrado County (IDPs)	10	Female 18 - 25 years
July 2	VOA-1, IDP Center, Montserrado County (IDPs)	10	Male 35 - 45 years
July 6	Buchanan, Grand Bassa County (Former MODEL combatants)	10	Male 18 - 25 years
July 6	Buchanan/Grand Bassa County	10	Female 25 - 35 years
July 7	Tubmanburg, Bomi County (Former LURD combatants)	10	Female 18 - 25 years

## **APPENDIX B – The Focus Group Guide**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Introduce yourself and describe your role as a facilitator to guide the discussion and make sure everybody has a chance to speak. Note that the discussion will take about two (2) hours.

The purpose of this research being conducted by a number of CSO activists like us in conjunction with NDI is to find out what Liberians like yourself think about the peace process and transition.

There is no right or wrong answer. Everybody’s opinion is important. You may disagree with the opinion of others but do it in a respectful and polite way. [You can also change your mind during the discussion.]

This research is intended to be confidential and anonymous. We have a tape recorder only so that we may record your views accurately to produce a report of our findings for public distribution.

Let’s go around and introduce ourselves to each other use first names/nick names and tell us something about yourself or your families etc.

### **SITUATION OF THE COUNTRY**

First, tell me how are things going in the country these days? Are things going generally in the right direction? What is the best thing about the current situation in Liberia? What is the worst thing about the current situation in Liberia?

### **FAMILY SITUATION/PERSONAL LIFE**

Looking at your own personal situation, how are things going these days for you/your family? What is the best thing (happiest thing) that has happened in your life/family in recent months? How closely is your personal situation tied to the fate of the nation?

### **THE COMPREHENSIVE PEACE AGREEMENT**

Tell us what you know about the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) otherwise known as the Accra Agreement? How do you know this information about the agreement? What are the agreements most important parts? Does everyone agree? What is the goal of the current peace agreement? What can you tell us about how the peace agreement was made? Who is responsible for implementing the agreement and making it work? How has the implementation of the agreement gone so far?

Specifically, an important part of the peace agreement is disarmament, demobilization, resettlement and reintegration (DDRR), how do you think this process has been going in recent months?

## **DEMOCRACY**

Now, we will shift to another subject. When I say the word "democracy" what comes to your mind? For Liberians like you, what are the most important aspects of democracy? In a democracy, what do you think the relationship between the government and the people should be? Does the government tell the people what to do or do the people tell the government what to do in a democracy?

What do you think should be the role of women in a democracy? Do you believe women should be given more power, more positions in the government or do you believe they should equally compete with men?

## **ELECTIONS**

What experience have you had with elections? Can you tell me briefly?

What was your experience in participating in the 1997 National Election? Who voted? Why did you vote? Why did you not vote? In your opinion, was this election free and fair? Did you agree with the result? Why or why not?

What needs to be done in future elections for you to regard the election as being free and fair or to accept the result? Elections have been proposed for no later than October 2005, what type of elections should take place? While this is still some time away, who is considering voting in this election? Why?

Why won't you participate in this election? What can be done so you would trust the final result? What role is there for independent observers or monitors in elections? How would this help elections in Liberia? Who should these independent monitors be?

## **POLITICAL ACTORS/INSTITUTIONS**

- **National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL)**

What is the role, function and purpose of the National Transitional Government of Liberia? How well do you think the government of Gyude Bryant is doing? What is the best thing it has accomplished so far? Do you have any disappointment so far with the work of the Government? Do you believe that the members of the Government are working for the best interests of the country?

- **National Transitional Legislative Assembly (NTLA)**

What do you know about the work of the National Transitional Legislative Assembly? What is its role in Liberia's transition? How relevant is its role as to the peace process or the re-building of democracy in Liberia? How well does the NTLA represent the interests of the Liberian people?

- **Factions**

What role should the factions play now that they are disarming? Have you had any disappointment of the role played by the factions since the establishment of the NTGL? Can you explain this?

- **Political parties**

What do you think about the role of political parties in Liberia's democracy? What role should political parties play in the future of Liberia?

## **GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES**

As you think of the future, tell me what do you think **should be** the highest priorities for Liberia's government? In order, what is the most urgent problem that needs to be addressed? Briefly, can you explain why these problems most important? In your view, what is the biggest obstacle/challenge the country faces?

## **THE FUTURE**

Finally, after this discussion today with your peers, do you feel optimistic (positive/good) or pessimistic (negative/bad) about next year (12 months)? What about the future for your children or your families as Liberian citizens?

Thank you.

## APPENDIX C - NOTES ON METHODOLOGY

**Focus group research:** Focus groups are semi-structured group interviews that proceed according to a careful research design. Groups are recruited to be homogeneous (according to gender, age, education, voting history, ethnicity and/or religious affiliation) for two reasons: in order to clarify what are the views held by a particular sub-group of the population, and to enhance the comfort level of participants, so they feel they are among peers and that everyone involved is equally entitled to express their opinion. When done well, they are free flowing, open-ended, and often unpredictable. They are designed to elicit a wide range of ideas, attitudes, experiences, and opinions held by a selected small sample of recruited respondents on a defined topic.

Focus groups are useful in helping understand the language that people use when they discuss particular ideas or concepts. They are also useful in gaining a deeper appreciation for the motivations, feelings, and values behind participants’ reactions. It is a flexible form of research that allows one to probe into issues important to the research sponsors, while permitting participants to raise other issues or concerns that might not have occurred to the researchers. As an organized group discussion, it provides a forum that enables participants to stimulate each other in an exchange of ideas that may not emerge in individual in-depth interviews or quantitative surveys that rely on one-on-one questionnaires.

Focus groups such as these can help one better understand the many shades of gray – hesitations, enthusiasm, anger, or uncertainty. Focus groups are first and foremost concerned with understanding attitudes, rather than quantifying them. Because of the small numbers involved, however, focus group participants cannot be expected to be thoroughly and statistically representative of the larger population from which they are drawn, and findings ought not be generalized beyond the small number of participants. They offer insight into emerging ideas and popular attitudes on key issues, but it would be unsound to extrapolate to firm conclusions about what “all” or “most” Liberians believe based on such a small sample of individuals.

**The project team:** This research project and guide was designed by NDI’s Senior Advisor for Citizen Participation Jim Della-Giacoma, who is also the principal author of this report. Field management was conducted by NDI’s Liberia field representative Sidi Diawara and Program Officer Thomas Du. The research project field consultants were drawn from Liberian NGOs and trained 21 – 23 June in Monrovia by Mr. Della-Giacoma. The first two groups were monitored by closed circuit television for quality control and training purposes. Project staff consisted of four teams of facilitators and three teams of recruiters, with facilitators also doubling as recruiters for four groups distant from Monrovia. Separate (or some of the same teams) transcribed the focus groups. A full-time member of NDI’s staff was present and supervised the implementation of each focus group. Transcription of the report did take longer than expected due to unfamiliarity with software and equipment. The report was written in early August 2004 in Washington, D.C.

**Group selection:** Working with the limits of the budget of this project, NDI set out to conduct 10 focus groups. With this target in mind, 12 groups were planned with the expectation based on experience that sometimes groups are unable to take place or unsuccessful once conducted. While location shifts were required for some groups, it is a credit to NDI’s Liberia office staff and those working on the project that 12 groups were successfully completed with only a few days delay. The groups that were conducted are listed in Appendix A.

It must be noted that conducting a larger number of focus groups does necessarily improve the quality of the research. The groups were selected to broadly represent the Liberian community. There were equal groups of men and women with six groups from the 18 -25 year old age bracket as well as three groups each from the 25 -35 and 35 – 45 age brackets. There were a larger number of groups in the 18 -25 years age bracket to recognize the country’s youthful population, the role of young combatants in the war as well as, in theory, understand the views of first voters. Few, if any, of this age group should have voted in the 1997 election. The fact that a number did vote has created an unexpected finding. The second age group was selected with the idea that they had voted in 1997 and lived through the war as adults. The third group should have had opportunity to vote in two elections and lived through both the Taylor and Doe periods.

Security concerns and logistical challenges meant that the geographic scope of the project was limited to Monrovia and the surrounding counties. Recognizing that the interior had been depopulated during the war, two groups specifically targeted internally displaced people from more distant and inaccessible counties.

Other special target groups were for former combatants from the government militia as well as the LURD and MODEL factions. A further special recruitment criteria for the MODEL former combatants was to select for female former combatants.

Recognizing that more than a decade of war has disrupted education in Liberia, only one group was recruited for those who had graduated from high school (Central Monrovia, Female, 18 -25 years), seven with participants having at least a primary (elementary) school education and three groups with a low level of education defined as some primary education or no formal education at all. Liberia’s rate of literacy of persons older than 15 years is 54.8 percent (2001).

There was no specific groups recruited on either religious or ethnic grounds, although the groups were known to have participants who were Christian and Muslim as well as Americo-Liberian and Afro-Liberian.

**Recruitment:** Participants were recruited by special teams using an eight question “screener” customized for each group. Participants were intended to be unfamiliar with fellow participants. When recruiting from a particular part of Monrovia or a regional town, recruiters were instructed to further divide the recruitment area into 10 parts and recruit one participant from each. The recruitment was done the day before the group and names addresses and ages of the participants were reviewed by the management team. In some case, when it was observed that participants lived too close together, some were struck off the list and recruiters were sent out to find fresh participants.



This form of “randomized” recruiting was more difficult to do in the IDP and former combatant camps and smaller towns. However, recruiters tried and were able to recruit participants who were unfamiliar with each other.

**Language:** All the groups were conducted in Liberian English and recorded on portable audio cassette recorders. Written transcripts were produced for each group and used to prepare this report.

**Special challenges in Liberia:** Beyond the difficulties in organizing communication (poor telephone network system, bad roads, and poor security in the country side) the biggest logistical challenge is finding the right locations to hold the groups. Understandably, there are no professional focus group facilities (with one way mirrors and recording equipment) in Liberia. Most discussions took place in schools as well as one in a hotel conference room (Sinkor, Monrovia) and some in the open at IDP camps.

**Ethnicity and religion:** While the participants of the focus group were not recruited based on their ethnic or religious backgrounds, those dimensions became evident in the groups with former combatants and IDPs. The several of the original members of the GOL militias were from the Gio and Mano ethnic groups from Nimba. However, Taylor’s long presence in Monrovia had weakened this dominance and at most those groups were primarily at the leadership level of both the ATU and GOL militias. LURD historically was dominated by Mandingo and within the leadership it was Krahn, Lorma and Gbandi. The foot soldiers were more mixed including the Lorma, Kissi, Gbandi, Mandingo, Belle, and Mende ethnic groups.

The participants recruited from the VOA-1 IDP camp were from the Grand Capemount and Bomi Counties. Additionally, most of the people from these two counties are Muslim as were the some of the participants.

## **APPENDIX D – NDI in Liberia**

In 1997, with funding from USAID, NDI trained members of the Liberian Election Observer Network (LEON) to monitor that year's presidential and legislative elections. LEON, a coalition of pro-democracy organizations, deployed observers to more than 1,200 of the 1,800 polling places in the country.

Following the elections, NDI organized a legislative orientation gathering Liberia's 90 newly elected Representatives and Senators. The orientation focused on the themes of establishing democratic practices in the budget process, legislative oversight of the executive branch, minority party rights and constituent relations.

At the same time, NDI implemented grassroots civic education programs called Civic Forum to promote citizen participation in the political process. Held in Monrovia, as well as in Grand Bassa, Montserrado and Margibi counties, series of small discussions groups helped participants to better understand their rights in a democracy. In addition, NDI also provided sub-grants to four Liberian groups – the Liberian Democracy Watch, Liberian Women's Initiative, National Youth Council of Liberia and FLOMO theatres – to conduct civic education activities the targeted at women and youth.

In April 2004, following an in-depth analysis of the role of civil society in Liberia's transition, the Institute opened a field office in Monrovia with funding from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). Over the summer, NDI conducted the research contained in this report and planned for a high-profile three-day accountability forum assessing the first year of the political transition held in October 2005. In the coming months, NDI plans provide financial and technical assistance to select, competent civic groups to use the information gathered during the focus group project and the accountability forum to further enhance their ability to take political action during Liberia's fragile transition process.

## **APPENDIX E - TERMS USED IN THIS REPORT**

<b>ATU</b>	Anti -Terrorist Unit
<b>CPA</b>	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
<b>C. Monrovia</b>	Central Monrovia
<b>DDRR</b>	Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration & Resettlement
<b>ECOMIL</b>	Military contingent of ECOWAS
<b>ECOWAS</b>	Economic Community of West Africa
<b>GOL</b>	Government of Liberia
<b>IDP</b>	Internally Displaced Persons
<b>LURD</b>	Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy
<b>MODEL</b>	Movement for Democracy in Liberia
<b>NEC</b>	National Elections Commission
<b>NPP</b>	National Patriotic Party
<b>NTGL</b>	National Transitional Government of Liberia
<b>NTLA</b>	National Transitional Legislative Assembly
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNMIL</b>	United Nations Mission in Liberia