The Effect of the Ebola Crisis on the Education System's Contribution to Post-Conflict Sustainable Peacebuilding in Liberia

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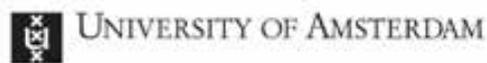# The Research Consortium on Education and Peacebuilding

Between July 2014 and December 2015 the Research Consortium on Education and Peacebuilding, a partnership between UNICEF and the University of Amsterdam, the University of Sussex, Ulster University and in-country partners, will address one of the UNICEF Peacebuilding, Education and Advocacy Programme (PBEA) key objectives, 'contributing to the generation and use of evidence and knowledge in policies and programming related to education, conflict and peacebuilding'.

Consortium teams carried out research in four countries over the course of the project: Myanmar, Pakistan, South Africa, and Uganda. Each team will produce a specific country report which, alongside thematic Literature Reviews, will form the basis for three synthesis reports addressing the following specific thematic areas:

• the integration of education into peacebuilding processes at global and country levels;
• the role of teachers in peacebuilding;
• the role of formal and non-formal peacebuilding education programmes focusing on youth.

In addition, throughout the research project and as a cross cutting theme in all three areas, the research project aims to understand the dynamics and impact of various forms of direct and indirect violence in relation to education systems and educational actors in situations of conflict. Each thematic focus will also include a gender analysis.

The research seeks to generate evidence that can inform policy and practice aimed at the global and national peacebuilding community, and the global and national education and international development communities.

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The Ebola Crisis in West Africa between 2014-15 had a devastating effect on Liberia's citizens and infrastructure, while the efforts of more than a decade of post-conflict reconstruction and development were threatened. The outbreak of Ebola itself revealed the uneven nature of post-conflict reconstruction, particularly in the social sectors, including health and education. This research looks at the effects of the Ebola crisis on peacebuilding efforts through education, asking questions about how it has interacted with the Liberian education system's longer-term post-conflict recovery. In so doing it seeks to reflect on the relationship between different types of crisis and shocks, including conflict and disease outbreaks, and their various impacts on education. Addressing these questions in the context of the Peace Building Education and Advocacy (PBEA) program in Liberia, the research seeks to support both post-Ebola and post-conflict recovery processes through the national education system, with a view to contributing to the promotion of sustainable peace and development in Liberia.

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Background

Education and Peacebuilding: The '4 Rs' Approach

Central to our understanding of education is that it is often centrally implicated in conflict contexts. Education as a core social service matters to people, and its presence or absence, its quality and content, are important variables in understanding the drivers of disaffection in such contexts. The 4 Rs Analytical Framework that we adopt in this research, combines social justice and transitional justice thinking to develop a normative framework for the study of education and peacebuilding. It does so by recognising the multiple dimensions of inequality and injustice that often underpin contemporary conflicts and the need to address the legacies of these conflicts in and through education. It builds on this thinking, developing a normative approach that seeks to capture the multiple economic, cultural, political, and social dimensions of inequality in education and the ways in which these might relate to conflict and peace. The framework combines the dimensions of recognition, redistribution, representation, and reconciliation to explore what sustainable peacebuilding might look like in post-conflict environments.

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Post-war Context in Liberia

The last 15 years represent a period of ongoing recovery in Liberia from what was a devastating civil war. Since the end of the conflict in 2003, the economy has not yet reached pre-2003 levels of real per capita GDP. Liberia remains a poor and unequal country, with low levels of male education and employment and even lower levels for women and girls. A regional comparison highlights the particularly deprived conditions of those living in the districts of Lofa and Bong. Furthermore, with the exception of Monteserrado, all counties have significantly high levels of deprivation in terms of access to health, and a high prevalence of

extreme stunting. In 2013, just prior to the Ebola outbreak, half of Liberia's counties were still registering significant outbreaks of violence with, on average, more than one violent occurrence per week. The northern-most counties and the capital city were particularly affected, with Nimba, Bong, Lofa and Monteserrado registering over 4 violent incidents per week.

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Young people have experienced significant changes in their lives as a direct consequence of Liberia's civil war and are seen as particularly vulnerable to post-traumatic stress. While some war-related experiences may have ended with the resolution of the conflict, previous studies suggest, and qualitative interviews in this study have confirmed, that the monetarization of social relations has emerged during the Ebola crisis. At the same time, young people are often acutely aware of wealth and power inequalities, while contrasts between purported norms of State behaviour, such as what is learned in civic education, and daily practices can trigger further disaffection. In the complexity of Liberia's post-war context, approaching education as a mere component of a pacification strategy to mitigate youth involvement in violence, risks it becoming part of an underlying narrative that simply posits youth as a threat. This risks overlooking young people's legitimate concerns and aspirations, which may also be fuelled by internationally-led aid projects.[9] For example, manifestations of urban bias and privileging the interests of an urban elite contribute to the alienation of rural youth and add incentives for rural-urban migration.

Current Challenges for the Liberian Education Sector

Education statistics for 2014 show strikingly low levels of access to primary education at a national level, along with the comparative dominance of Monteserrado county, which accounts for nearly one third of the total primary school student population. The relative weight of Monteserrado among secondary school students in 2014 is even more apparent, revealing the significant socio-economic privilege of the capital and the depth of the urban/rural divide. The 2014 national data collection took place in March, the same month that the first two Ebola cases were reported. As such it is likely that enrolment figures for this period over-represented true attendance.

Teachers in Liberia

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Teaching capacities in Liberia are weak. In previous research, the teaching cadre has not only been described as having insufficient formal education and a lack of basic skills, but as also having to work in environments with substandard infrastructure and a lack of resources, with little or no accountability. Concerns extend to the under-representation of female teachers in schools, a situation whereby Liberia currently has the smallest percentage of female primary school teachers in the world.

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9 This risk is compounded when aid-led projects fail to recognize context and mimic those put in place in non-conflict settings.

Peacebuilding, Education and Advocacy in Liberia

The significant challenges for Liberia's education system also affect the capacities and willingness of schools and teachers to play a role in the construction of peace. Yet the role of education in peacebuilding cannot be overstated. In the Liberian Strategic Road Map for National Healing, Reconciliation and Peacebuilding (Ministry of Internal Affairs et al., 2012), there are many thematic areas where the country's education system is explicitly called on to play a role, or has an implicit contribution to their success.

UNICEF's Peacebuilding, Education and Advocacy (PBEA) program values the role that education can have in conflict prevention, social transformation, civic engagement and economic progress. Seeking to address the multidimensionality of peacebuilding, PBEA seeks to involve governments, civil society and UN agencies, together with international and national partners. It adopts a conflict sensitive approach to education, and by valuing a robust understanding of the interactions between interventions and context, seeks to avoid negative impacts and maximise positive impacts of conflict risk reduction.

The events in Liberia constituted a multiple correlate risk scenario, whereby biological hazards, such as the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) crisis, school-related gender inequalities, poverty, and complex risks such as conflict, overlapped. The PBEA program in Liberia, originally called on to address conflict risks in a poor and gender unequal context, was forced to adapt in order to address the Ebola crisis.

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A key aspect of this adaptation was the redeployment of trained national volunteers who were originally engaged in conflict resolution and support to education, to also act as health activists by sharing information and mitigating the potential for misunderstandings about the Ebola crisis. A total of 300 National Volunteers (NVs) were trained and deployed in 12 counties: Bomi, Bong, Gbarpolu, Grand Bassa, Grand Cape Mount, Grand Gedeh, Lofa, Margibi, Maryland, Monteserrado, Nimba and Sinoe. In a project managed by the Ministry of Youth and Sports (MoYS), 241 NVs took teaching placements in 83 public schools. Originally working prior to the Ebola outbreak, they were redeployed with a reviewed brief to the same counties they had worked in before.

Meanwhile, under the auspices of the Ministry of Internal Affairs –Peacebuilding Office (MIA-PBO), 75 Junior National Volunteers (JNVs) were trained and deployed to promote mediation, early warning conflict tracing, early response and peace advocacy at community level. Each JNV, in their own communities, established Community Peacebuilding Committees (CPCs) with trained conflict mediators. At the same time, they were also deployed in the effort to fight the Ebola outbreak. This led to youth volunteers reaching more than 5,200 families in 3 months. Their work was the object of research conducted by Gercama and Bedford (2016). It is also analysed here, as a component of the education sector's response to Ebola.

The Ebola Crisis

Emerging from the forest region of Guinea in December 2013, from May 2014 the Ebola epidemic quickly accelerated and spread through the countries of Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia, evenutally reaching urban areas and killing more than 3600 people in Liberia alone (Abramowitz et al., 2015). With regard to the economic impact of the epidemic, the World Bank (2014) reported a reduction of more than half of the prospective economic growth in Liberia (from 6.8 per cent to 3.0 percent), estimated to amount to $250 million in 2014-15. Subsequent research found confirmation of these estimates, including reports of loss of income, increased difficulty in accessing health and, particularly among survivors, stigma and reduced employment opportunities. Beyond economic hardship, the effects of Ebola on survivors and contacts ran deeper, inducing psychological distress.

Along with the widespread reduction in income and resources at the household level, the fiscal health of the State was acutely hit, forcing an increase of public expenditure in the effort to address the epidemic. Added to this, the reaction to the Ebola crisis negatively affected Liberians' perceptions of their own government and public workers, despite reported frequent communication by public officers. Rumors combined with incorrect and misleading early official information, together with an historical distrust of government and public health messages, significantly delayed popular awareness and learning about Ebola.

The systemic limitations uncovered by the Ebola crisis were not constrained to the Liberian public sector and economy. Previous studies reported perceptions of poor performance by the international community for downplaying the risks in

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the beginning, being slow to react, and acting indecisively when the severity of the crisis finally became evident. At the same time, the need for an emergency reaction to the Ebola crisis led to a diversion of spending, at the expense of infrastructural and social (health and education) expenditure, with potentially long-lasting impacts on the country's peace dividends.

Ebola and Education

> "By the time schools were ordered to close in July 2014, only two counties were still unaffected by Ebola and the crisis in Lofa was nearing its worst level."

The education sector's reaction to Ebola started in August 2014, six months after the first case was reported in Lofa county, and after the peak stage of the crisis, representing a significant delay. As Ebola was spread through human contact, schools were identified as hotspots, "locations of serious risk of transmission" (Skovgaard 2015, pp. 5), and therefore closed as a public health security measure. By the time schools were ordered to close in July 2014, only two counties were still unaffected by Ebola and the crisis in Lofa was nearing its worst level. Seven months later they were allowed to reopen, in what was called a "condensed school year". The main activities put in place to prepare for reopening were maintenance and repairs, followed by Ebola prevention and awareness, including radio education programing and the development of regional guidance, as well as national protocols on Ebola. The strategies adopted within the formal education system focused almost solely on hygiene and sanitation practices, such as regular hand washing and information about Ebola symptoms.

The creation of procedures that would seek to secure an environment 'as sanitized as possible', informed the Protocols for Safe School Environments in the Ebola Outbreak in Liberia (MoE Liberia, 2015a). According to the Protocols, a suspect person - someone considered to have had contact with an Ebola patient and therefore a suspect of being a patient her/himself – included anyone who had direct physical contact with a patient, contact with a patient's fluids (blood, urine, vomit, faeces, sweat or saliva), touched his/her clothes or linens, slept in the same household as a patient, or attended a funeral. A suspect person was not allowed to go to school for 21 days from the date of reported contact (including attendance at a funeral).

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It is particularly important to realise that while students and teachers died, many more had relatives who had contracted Ebola. Meanwhile the mere display of Ebola-like symptoms (most shared with common diseases such as malaria) was likely to lead to Ebola suspicion and quarantine. The "no-touch" and bar on access rules, particularly targeting those who had come into contact with the disease through relatives or friends, resulted in added stigmatization.

Measures put in place by the Education Sector

An Education Cluster under the leadership of the Liberian Ministry of Education, with coordination support from UNICEF and Save the Children and the collaboration of 30 education and WASH partners, sought to provide a response to the crisis.

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In the last Ebola Response Phase and following the Liberia Education Cluster (2015b), the role of education included refreshing the training and knowledge on the Protocols for school personnel and PTA members, the distribution of hygiene kits, and psychosocial support sessions with students, parents and school personnel. Feedback provided by school agents in focus group and key informant interviews for this study highlighted the importance of the training given for psychosocial support. In particular, school principals stressed the significant role of National Volunteers (NVs), trained in conflict mediation and peace advocacy, who became focal points for many of the Ebola response initiatives within schools. At the community level, among those communities visited, a similar role to the NVs was also assumed by Community Peacebuilding Committees (CPCs) and Junior National Volunteers (JNVs).

Important Lessons from the Ebola Epidemic

The Ebola crisis revealed dynamics of rural exclusion and rural-urban migration. While the disease originated in rural areas, it had its most destructive impact in urban spaces, such as slums. As Leach (2014) highlights, such dynamics risked the construction of a narrative of blame that would attribute responsibility for the health crisis to rural practices and other environmental myths, sidelining the central problem of a weak and neglected health system. When engaging with Ebola in its aftermath, a peacebuilding approach to education not only needs to stimulate a necessary dialogue within the school community regarding healthy and sanitary practices, but must also ensure that wider social and communitarian practices that serve individual and collective needs are not overlooked or de-prioritised.

Effects of the Ebola Crisis

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At the social level, one of the most damaging problems exposed by the EVD crisis was the wide mistrust of health workers and of health advice provided by public sources and NGOs, which weakened early Ebola awareness efforts. In the interviews conducted, there was a clear and frequent reference to a culture that presumes gain and exploitation of other people's problems to make money. In this context, only the death of relatives, neighbors and, in particular, health workers themselves, made people realise that the health messages were true. Fear and rumours extended to the safety of accessing the EVD health care provided, and to a large extent early EVD responses added to those fears.

The Ebola contagion followed established trade and migration routes, becoming urban in part due to the migration of affected populations to Monrovia. This, in turn, increased pressure on the education system in these areas, particularly in the underserved slums. For example, the contagion and death count in West Point, the most populous slum in Monrovia and the densest territory in the country, eventually led to it being quarantined in its totality. While this situation clearly highlighted weaknesses in infrastructure and urban management, these weaknesses were not fully addressed through the reaction and emergency aid put in place by the Government, NGOs and the international community.

Led by fear, but also by health recommendations, Liberians isolated themselves and chose not to gather in the market, church or other public spaces, including at events such as health awareness and peacebuilding workshops. Such reclusion from economic and social community spaces had detrimental effects on family income and social cohesion, while the reclusion from community level information-sharing also contributed to the delays in responding to the disease.

"The restriction of movement and suspension of economic activities were particularly stringent for those who were quarantined, resulting in even greater negative social and economic impacts on those affected. A quarantine would be enforced upon anyone who had lost members of their household or friends to Ebola. After their quarantine had ended, many continued to experience difficulties in trading in the market, some were refused housing, friends refused to approach or touch them, and some broke contact altogether.

Effects of the Ebola Crisis on the Education Community

While the Ebola crisis did lead to the deaths of students and teachers, the literature reviewed indicates a relatively low incidence of EVD infections and related deaths within the education community. Most teachers were without work when the schools were closed, with the exception of a group of 5,884 teachers that were involved in health awareness and social mobilization workshops (from an original target of 11,140 out of a total of 34,057 teachers, of which 19,753 were on the payroll).

The Ebola response also fuelled popular fears about the safety of schools. Although only one or two schools were turned into Ebola Treatment Units (ETUs), the Ministry of Health communicated that more were used as transition centres. Fear and mistrust manifested themselves when schools were reopened. The application of the Protocols, particularly the supply of great quantities of chlorine and the creation of an isolation room, were understood by some parents as a threat – a sign that schools were still not safe and that if one of their children was taken into isolation they might never see them again.

The education system in Liberia, and the PBEA program in particular, sought to address the challenges of the Ebola response through four fronts: health awareness, case referral and tracing, Ebola Protocols, and psychosocial support. While the application of resources to the fight Ebola led to a relative divestment from the peacebuilding dimension of the PBEA project, and as such the peacebuilding role of education throughout the health crisis, the interventions adopted also had positive effects. In particular, they have helped pave the way for more effective future peacebuilding interventions, particularly those that rely on the volunteers activated during the Ebola crisis.

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Effects on the Post-conflict Reconstruction and Peacebuilding Role of Education

"The peacebuilding training undertaken by NVs and JNVs proved to be instrumental, not only in enabling their capacity to conduct crucial health awareness activities, but also in encouraging their positive attitudes and actions in support of the Ebola response effort."

All components of the PBEA program were challenged by the onset of the Ebola crisis. The development and implementation of a conflict sensitive curriculum, to be led by the Ministry of Education and mainstreamed throughout all levels of education (including literacy, accelerated learning and community education streams) was significantly delayed, and ultimately failed to be implemented within the program's schedule. There was also a weakening of efforts to foster a more equitable provision of quality education between counties and along the urban/rural divide, while planned investments in the correction of the gender imbalance in the teaching community did not happen. Meanwhile the plans for peacebuilding awareness activities and workshops were negatively affected by the increasing aversion of people to converge in public gatherings, as well as the need to prioritise a different set of messages that were specifically related to the EVD crisis.

At the same time, however, the peacebuilding training undertaken by NVs and JNVs proved to be instrumental, not only in enabling their capacity to conduct crucial health awareness activities, but also in encouraging their positive attitudes and actions in support of the Ebola response effort.

The reconciliation activities of NVs and JNVs, including their identification of community actors to be represented through the Community Peace Committees (CPCs), were among the most positive applications of a 4 Rs strategy. At the same time, community development activities were reported to be critical to the success of the wider social mobilization and peacebuilding roles of NVs, JNVs and CPCs. Their activities for conflict resolution (palaver management) also gained credence in light of the tensions arising from the EVD crisis.

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Key to the effectiveness of these activities, which included health and peacebuilding awareness interventions, case referral, tracing and psychosocial support, was the deployment of NVs to counties and communities they had worked in before, as well as the selection of JNVs to work in their own communities.

As a process of informal education for peacebuilding, the training given to NVs and JNVs, now tried and tested through their interventions in extremely difficult community contexts, should be regarded as an effective strategy in Liberia. Furthermore, the widely recognized effectiveness of the NVs and JNVs has now conferred upon them an increased legitimacy for their peacebuilding activities in the post-Ebola context.

Weaknesses Revealed in the Formal Education System

"While schools were open from March to June 2014, classes were not used as spaces for Ebola awareness. Even though partly involved by the Ministry of Education in an initiative on health awareness, teachers do not appear to have been significantly mobilised in the Ebola response effort."

Previous evidence, along with data gathered through the interviews conducted for this study, suggest that formal education was not a significant source of knowledge and good practice on the prevention of risks related to Ebola. In particular, while schools were open from March to June 2014, classes were not used as spaces for Ebola awareness. Even though partly involved by the Ministry of Education in an initiative on health awareness, teachers do not appear to have significantly mobilised in the Ebola response effort.

The Ebola Protocols also mandated a reduction in the number of students per class. Yet the feedback received in key informant interviews at school, district and council levels, was that such instruction was either not followed by schools or, where it was, demanded the rationing of enrolment in public education. This, in turn, either pushed school age children and youth to private schools (bringing added strain on family finances) or out of school altogether. The condensed school year once the schools reopened generated grievances that continue to contribute pressures on the system: lost curriculum for those that were promoted and the doubling of applicants to West African Examinations Council in 2016.

Beyond the EVD crisis, the PBEA implementation revealed serious structural weaknesses in the Liberian Education System. An analysis of the Liberian State Budget for 2016 already shows a clear lack of ownership and, potentially, of public commitment to education. When looking at the Liberian State accounts, it becomes apparent that the country's investment in the education of its people is insufficient. The education effort relies on continual support from international actors, and through their financial commitment they have become the key

stakeholders of the entire process. This dependency creates the need for a yearly renegotiation of priorities in the education sector, while those that may arise from the Liberian Executive or its Parliament need still to be vetted by international donors.

Potential Positives Revealed by the Crisis

There are, however, some real positives to the situation. The Ebola awareness work conducted by NVs and JNVs, despite being a diversion of resources from the original goals of Peacebuilding, did deliver positive achievements that deserve commendation. As alluded to above, it took advantage of the previous peacebuilding work conducted in the communities, and benefited from the cultural awareness and conflict mediation skills acquired as part of NVs and JNVs' training as peacebuilders. Finally, it has conferred added legitimacy on the peacebuilding work of the NVs and JNVs following the end of the Ebola crisis. Thus, the training and activation of National Volunteers and Junior National Volunteers should be regarded as one of the key successes of the PBEA project, and as an effective mechanism of informal education for peacebuilding, with clear impacts at individual community and school/education system levels.

However, to make full use of this potential, the Liberian Education System still lacks the mechanisms to make the reported positive results sustainable. Namely, it lacks:

- A mechanism that streamlines the recruitment into schools of National Volunteers with strong evaluation both as teachers and peacebuilding agents.

- A mechanism that gives sustainability to the volunteering programme itself, as an informal education public structure that fosters active citizenship, social and regional cohesion and Peace.

- A robust teacher recruitment strategy that responds to the clear lack of human resources revealed in the country's statistics, namely providing successful volunteers the possibility of acquiring the B level teacher training certificate.

Finally, while there is strong evidence that the shift of the Liberia PBEA programme towards a focus on the Ebola Crisis was the right decision at the time, there remains a huge amount of work needed in the education system for the sector to fulfil its promise and potential as an engine of peace and sustainable development.

Conclusions, Critical Reflections and Recommendations

1. The education system remains under-prioritised and riddled with inequalities across the economic, political and cultural domains. Issues of redistribution remain paramount – and while recognised have not been adequately addressed. Girls, youth, urban-rural divides, and ethnic marginalisation traverse the system and require concerted effort to overcome. Similarly, these issues extend into the domains of recognition and representation, with the most marginalised communities feeling subject to misrecognition and discrimination and having little faith and say in the decisions that affect them, from school management to national government.

2. This failure to prioritise addressing the multiple dimensions of inequality in the education system in Liberia is a result of the over-emphasis on the part of the national and international peacebuilding community on security, democratic elections, and economic reforms at the expense of prioritising the basic needs of the citizens of Liberia to access quality basic health and education services.

3. When the Ebola outbreak emerged, the health system was woefully inadequate to address the challenges that the disease brought. Similarly, the education system, which could have acted as a national preventative factor in combatting the outbreak, became instead a risk factor, with poor hygiene and sanitation and lack of preparedness evident in the delayed response by the sector to the challenges that Ebola brought.

4. Linked to the earlier points, the Ebola crisis revealed a lack of governance mechanisms in place in both the health and education systems to deal adequately with the crisis, which reflects broader systemic governance issues in Liberia.

5. Much more positively, there appears to have been a sharp learning process which took place in the midst of the crisis to address some of these misconceptions and challenges, with more bottom-up community processes emerging as a key catalyst to redressing the effects of the outbreak and containing it.

6. The role of the National Volunteers, looks now from the evidence presented to have been a highly useful initiative, which had and has multiple potential added value for the education system and for the broader peacebuilding process. Drawing upon youth as a resource for the future, rather than a security risk – as is so often the case in many post-conflict societies, the National and Junior Volunteers seemed to have played a really important role in raising awareness about the disease, providing community guidance and building trust between communities and the state.

7. Finally, the crisis also revealed the virtues of coordinated action between different government bodies. In the context of the PBEA conversion into the Ebola response effort, a strong coordination was revealed between the MoHSW, the MoE, the MIA-PBO, the MoYS and, to a lesser extent, the MoGD. The quick and effective reactions to the two outbreaks that happened after Liberia was considered "Ebola free" suggest that there were important lessons learned that were acted upon.

Recommendations

Building on these learnings, some steps should be put in place:

- It wasn't only the health system that revealed weaknesses. Much still needs to be done in the education sector. In particular, Liberia needs to take a stronger ownership of the education of its population. Among the policies the Government of Liberia needs to take a lead and invest on is the provision of long term training for teachers and the establishment of a recruitment process that enables the entrance to the MoE's teaching staff of those that, enrolled as National Volunteers in education, show motivation and quality work (including creating the opportunities for adequate pedagogical training).

- The learnings on hygiene need to be reinforced, taking the link to health beyond Ebola prevention. A stronger coordination with the health service structures is advised. Schools also need to embody this learning by having proper Water and Sanitation facilities. The education system, through curriculum, formal and informal teaching spaces needs to provide better health information, not just on Ebola but in other diseases.

- The Ebola related health education should integrate, therefore, two added relevant dimensions: the recognition of the diverse communitarian and social practices, such as burial rituals, promoting their adaptation (instead of their substitution) towards health hazards prevention; maintain the awareness of Ebola as a present health risk, together with other preventable health hazards, such as cholera.

- The process of Education Transformation, including curriculum revision and the development of a Civic Education curriculum with Human Rights, Citizenship and Peacebuilding concepts cannot be suspended. Health awareness and citizenship are not incompatible, much to the contrary.

- The crisis revealed the need and virtues of a quick information flow towards the communities. Decentralising and giving authority to local administrations can have a positive impact, a better impact than deciding all centrally. This, however, requires a stronger, unbroken line of communication between all levels. Within the education system, the information needs to properly flow between Students, Parents and Teachers to and through the School Principals,

the District Education Officers, the County Education Officers and the Ministry of Education Headquarters, both top-down and bottom-up. The strengthening of Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning mechanisms may assist in this.

- The channels of informal education, such as the radio and youth volunteering, need to be kept and strengthened. In particular, the volunteering programme, as an informal education strategy for peacebuilding and citizenship, needs to be developed and strengthened.

- Sustain the benefits of the volunteering programmes (NVs, JNVs and CPCs), streamlining integration of those teaching volunteers of proven quality and institutionalizing those programmes, eventually within a Liberian Youth Volunteer Service, as an effective tool of informal civic youth education.

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Full Report

Introduction

The Ebola Crisis in West Africa between 2014-15 had a devastating effect on Liberia's citizens and infrastructure. The tragic loss of life, with more than 3,600 fatalities,[10] has been accompanied by widespread social disruption, economic decline and challenges to Liberia's peacebuilding aspirations that emerged after the resolution of the civil war in 2003. Liberia experienced a 14-year-long civil war, from 1989 to 2003, that left a devastating mark on society. The effects of the Liberian conflict encompassed the education sector, with nearly 80% of the country's 2400 schools destroyed (Shriberg, 2008). It affected lives and left psychological stress on both teachers and students. Many young people were deprived of education during the war and while some returned to school after the war, increases in the average age and age dispersion in each grade added further pressures to the pedagogic efficacy of an already deprived system (Stromquist et al., 2013).

More than a decade of post-conflict reconstruction and development has been threatened by the Ebola crisis. Furthermore, the outbreak of Ebola has itself revealed the uneven nature of post-conflict reconstruction, particularly in the social sectors. In the health sector, at the onset of the outbreak, there were only 50 Liberian doctors, for a population of nearly 4.5 million. Similarly, in the education sector, schools often lacked sanitary conditions, including functioning latrines, which undermined the capacity of the education system to contain the Ebola Crisis. This failure to sufficiently develop both the health and education sectors in the post-war period contributed to the failure to adequately respond to the Ebola outbreak.

The under-prioritisation of the social sectors in UN-led peacebuilding programmes is not unique to the Liberia case. There has been a substantive body of research over recent years that has challenged the logic and priorities of UN peacebuilding missions. Much of the research points to the way the prioritisation of security (reintegration of ex-combatants, reorganisation of national military and police, reform of the prison system etc), democracy (the execution and administration of elections), and the opening up of markets (free trade reforms) in post-conflict societies has resulted in the neglect of the social sectors. For several commentators, this has created a 'negative peace' whereby the return to armed conflict has been prevented, but not the underlying drivers of conflict which are often rooted in social exclusion, marginalisation and inequalities across the system, including in access to quality education and health care.

In Johan Galtung's terms, what is needed is a move towards 'positive peace', which addresses both the violence and the reasons that led to the violence. The UNICEF Peacebuilding, Education and Advocacy programme (PBEA) was underpinned by these core arguments, and has sought to advocate and implement policies

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10 We attempted to identify statistics that could inform on indirect fatalities correlated with the Ebola crisis. The underlying assumption is that the collapse of health services had an impact not only on Ebola related deaths but also on other due to lack of health support to more common diseases. Throughout the period of research it was, however, impossible to access Liberian health statistics in the Ministry of Health's website, despite having been directed to it by the key informant. Throughout all the period, this website reported being under construction.

"This research seeks to support both post-Ebola and post-conflict recovery processes in the education system and contribute to the promotion of sustainable peace and development in Liberia."

for a more central role for education in peacebuilding in order to support the development of a socially just peacebuilding model. The PBEA programme began globally in 2012, and carried out innovative programing in 14 conflict affected contexts. Liberia was one of the target PBEA countries (see UNICEF, 2016 for a review of the entire PBEA programme).

According to PBEA Liberia (2015), Liberian conflict dynamics stem from a range of factors:

- Cross-border vulnerabilities, including concerns over migration from Sierra Leone and the presence of armed groups on the border with Cote d'Ivoire;

- A weak judicial system, deemed inefficient, slow and corrupt;

- A weak governance system, lacking accountability and transparency, giving rise to corruption, nepotism and patronage being seen as commonplace;

- Ethnic tensions, some of them stated to be linked to religious divides, and an engrained "historic fracture between Americo-Liberian and indigenous populations" that have not been sufficiently addressed by the education system;

- Inadequate access to quality education;

- Poverty and unemployment, causing particular frustration among children and youth;

- Intergenerational tension between sets of values considered "traditional" and "modern" or "western", with perceptions of an institutional backlash seeking to prioritise "traditional" values within the education system;

- A culture of violence, including within households and extending to sexual violence and sexual harassment across the society and, in particular, within the education system; and

- Land and property disputes.

This research seeks to link the Ebola crisis and Peacebuilding together, asking questions about how the Ebola crisis has affected the Liberian education system's post-conflict recovery. In doing so it seeks to reflect on the relationship between the different types of crisis and shocks, conflict and disease outbreak, and their impacts on the education system. It looks at this in the context of the Peace Building Education and Advocacy (PBEA) programme in Liberia, outlined briefly above. As a result, it seeks to support both post-Ebola and post-conflict recovery processes in the education system and contribute to the promotion of sustainable peace and development in Liberia.

To pursue these goals, we undertook site-based qualitative research in the counties of Grand Bassa, Bong and Monteserrado. A total of 27 interviews were conducted (8 focus groups and 19 individual interviews, of which 11 were key informants), with a total of 53 people interviewed. A summary list of stakeholders and research participants is provided in the appendix. The research also made use of secondary literature on Ebola, peacebuilding and education in Liberia, including

statistics from the Education Management Information System (EMIS) of 2013 and 2014, the 2013 Liberia Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), WHO Ebola statistics and the Liberia Early Warning System.

By analysing a country that underwent a biological emergency while still recovering from a conflict, this study illustrates how these two hazards interact. In particular it reveals how risk factors immanent to conflict such as inequality, weak governance, patrimonialism/clientelism, poor recognition and representation, and an unresolved process of reconciliation contribute to a country's vulnerability to health hazards such as the Ebola Virus Disease. On the other hand, it also reveals how peacebuilding strategies that include dimensions of Redistribution, Recognition, Representation and Reconciliation showed particular efficacy in supporting the country's reaction to the outbreak.

The report develops as follows. Firstly, it provides a synopsis and explanation of our analytical approach to the research, which builds on broader work on the relationship between education, peacebuilding and post-crisis recovery. Secondly, it reviews the socio-economic and education context of Liberia, prior to the Ebola outbreak and seeks to summarize the aims and challenges of the PBEA Programme in Liberia. Thirdly, it reviews the literature already produced on the Ebola crisis in Liberia and its impacts on Education. Fourthly, it excavates some of the lessons learned on the impacts of the Ebola crisis and the measures put in place to tackle the outbreak, reviewing the evidence collected in the field. The report finishes with main insights and recommendations.

> "This study reveals how risk factors immanent to conflict contribute to a country's vulnerability to health hazards such as the Ebola Virus Disease. It also reveals how peacebuilding strategies that include dimensions of Redistribution, Recognition, Representation and Reconciliation showed particular efficacy in supporting Liberia's reaction to the outbreak."

Background

Education, Peacebuilding and the '4 Rs' Approach

Central to our understanding of education, is that it is often centrally implicated in conflict contexts. Education as a core social service matters to people, and its presence or absence, its quality and content are important variables in understanding the drivers of disaffection in these contexts. Furthermore, education is a double-edged sword, it can both promote or undermine peace and social cohesion – before, during and after violent conflict (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000; Novelli & Smith, 2010).[11]

The 4Rs Analytical Framework that we adopt in this research, combines social justice and transitional justice thinking to develop a normative framework for the study of education and peacebuilding. It does so by recognising the multiple dimensions of inequality and injustice that often underpin contemporary conflicts and the need to address the legacies of these conflicts in and through education. The framework is in line with broader and well-established peacebuilding thinking (c.f Galtung; Lederach) of the need to address both negative peace (the cessation of violence) and positive peace (the underlying structural and symbolic violence that often

> "Education as a core social service matters to people, and its presence or absence, its quality and content are important variables in understanding the drivers of disaffection. Furthermore, education is a double-edged sword, it can both promote or undermine peace and social cohesion – before, during and after violent conflict."

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11 See Appendix 1 for a brief review of the two-way relationship between education and conflict.

underpins the outbreak of conflict – the drivers of conflict). It also recognises the importance of addressing and redressing the 'legacies of conflict' in tandem with addressing the 'drivers of conflict'.

"In armed conflicts, real or perceived horizontal inequalities can provide a catalyst for group mobilisation and uprisings. "

Within conflict studies, there has been a long and heated debate on the relationship between inequality, injustice and conflict. The debate is often framed in terms of "greed versus grievance" explanations, with the former suggesting that wars are driven less by justified "grievances" and more by personal and collective "greed" (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004). Humans are viewed as engaged in conflict as "economic agents" making cost-benefit calculations and trying to maximize returns on engagement in violent conflict. Therefore, the route to peace and security is not through addressing injustice, inequality and structural exclusion, but through increasing the cost of access to resources for violent actors.

A strong critique of this work argues that horizontal inequalities (between groups) are important indicators for conflict outbreak (Stewart, 2010), arguments supported by strong econometric evidence (Cederman et al., 2011). Horizontal inequalities, which often relate to ethnicity, tribe, or religion, involve a range of dimensions: economic (access to land, income, and employment), political (access to political power and representation), social (access to public services),[12] and cultural (respect for difference and identity, language rights, etc.). In armed conflicts, real or perceived horizontal inequalities can provide a catalyst for group mobilisation and uprisings.

There is limited research on the relationship between education and inequality in the outbreak of armed conflict. However, recent quantitative research drawing on two international education inequality and conflict datasets (FHI 360, 2015) demonstrates a robust and consistent statistical relationship, across five decades, between higher levels of inequality in educational attainment between ethnic and religious groups, and the likelihood that a country will experience violent conflict.

"The 4Rs framework builds on this thinking, developing a normative approach that seeks to capture the multiple economic, cultural, political and social dimensions of inequality in education and the ways in which these might relate to conflict and peace."

Focusing on Liberia, a qualitative conflict analysis conducted with 1,006 people (of which 384 were children) noted that vulnerabilities and inequities in the provision of education represent a cause of resentment and represent a conflict risk (PBEA Liberia, 2015). Lack of access to quality education, namely primary education and vocational training, and particularly for children and youth with disabilities, along with a lack of teacher accountability for abusive behaviour (including bribery and eliciting sexual favours) were referred to as dimensions in need of improvement.

However, this research is less able to identify causal mechanisms. As the authors note in their conclusions, there is a need to explore the multiple dimensions of inequality beyond educational outcomes, as well as the different ways in which the education system might contribute to or alleviate conflict.

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12 As referred by McCandless et al. (2012:9) "if administrative and social services are not administered and delivered in a conflict sensitive manner, they can do more harm than good by reinforcing the horizontal inequalities that triggered conflict in the first place."

"The framework combines dimensions of recognition, redistribution, representation and reconciliation, linking Fraser's work on social justice with the peacebuilding and reconciliation work of Galtung, Lederach and others, to explore what sustainable peacebuilding might look like in post-conflict environments."

The 4Rs framework builds on this thinking, developing a normative approach that seeks to capture the multiple economic, cultural, political and social dimensions of inequality in education and the ways in which these might relate to conflict and peace (see Novelli et al., 2015). The framework combines dimensions of recognition, redistribution, representation and reconciliation, linking Fraser's (2007, 1995) work on social justice with the peacebuilding and reconciliation work of Galtung, (1976), Lederach (1997), and others, to explore what sustainable peacebuilding might look like in post-conflict environments. The examination of inequalities within the education system seeks to capture the interconnected dimensions of the "4Rs":

- **Redistribution** concerns equity and non-discrimination in education access, resources, and outcomes for different groups in society, particularly marginalised and disadvantaged groups.

- **Recognition** concerns respect for and affirmation of diversity and identities in education structures, processes, and content, in terms of gender, language, politics, religion, ethnicity, culture, and ability.

- **Representation** concerns participation, at all levels of the education system, in governance and decision-making related to the allocation, use, and distribution of human and material resources.

- **Reconciliation** involves dealing with past events, injustices, and material and psychosocial effects of conflict, as well as developing relationships of trust.

Figure 1. The '4 Rs' Approach
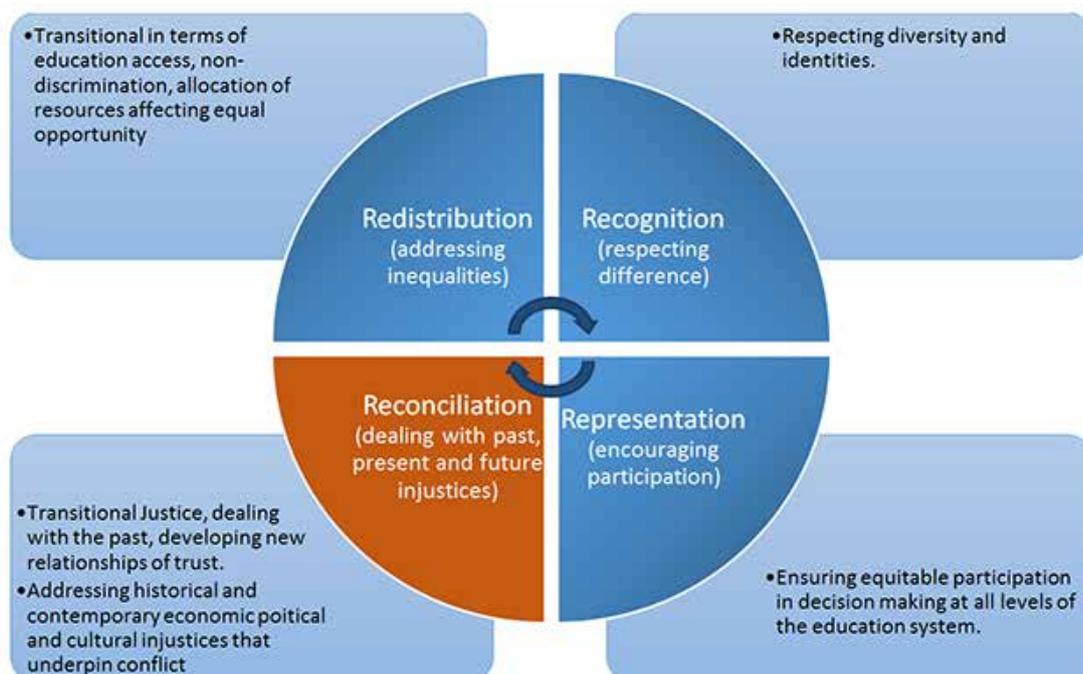
The framework below provides a useful tool to analyse the extent to which education is/can support cross-sectorial programming for conflict transformation in terms of redistribution, recognition, representation, and reconciliation and as an analytical tool within the education sector, as outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. Analyzing education systems using the 4Rs: Potential 'Indicators'

Redistribution (addressing inequalities)	• Vertical and horizontal inequalities in education inputs, resources, and outcomes (quantitative data) • Redistribution in macro education reforms or policies (e.g. impact of decentralisation and privatisation on different groups and conflict dynamics)
Recognition (respecting difference)	• Policies on language of instruction • Recognition of cultural diversity and religious identity in curriculum • Citizenship and civic education as a means of state-building
Representation (encouraging participation)	• Participation (local, national, global) in education policy and reforms • Political control and representation through education administration • School-based management and decision-making (teachers, parents, students) • Support for fundamental freedoms in the education system
Reconciliation (dealing with injustices and the legacies of conflict)	• Addressing historical and contemporary injustices linked to conflict • Integration and segregation in education systems (e.g. common institutions) • Teaching about the past and its relevance to the present and future • Vertical trust in schools and education system, and horizontal trust between identity-based groups

This approach will be applied to explore the peacebuilding dimensions of the Liberian education system and as an analytical frame to explore the different possible impacts that the Ebola Crisis has had on the education system in terms of Redistribution, Recognition, Representation and Reconciliation.

Background to Liberia

For Liberia, the last 15 years have been a period of recovery from what was a devastating civil war. The country's economic activity is still in recovery from the end of the conflict in 2003 and has not yet reached pre-2003 levels of real per capita GDP. The economic effects of the Ebola outbreak are very clearly indicated in a drop of 1.7% in real per capita GDP, from 2013 to 2014. Meanwhile, another Human Development indicator, life expectancy at birth, suggests a significant recovery.

Figure 2.
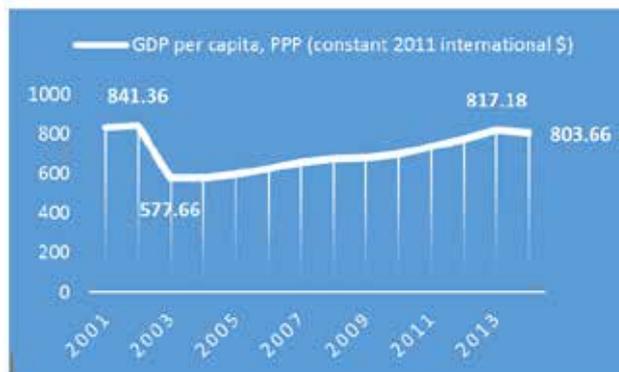
Figure 3.
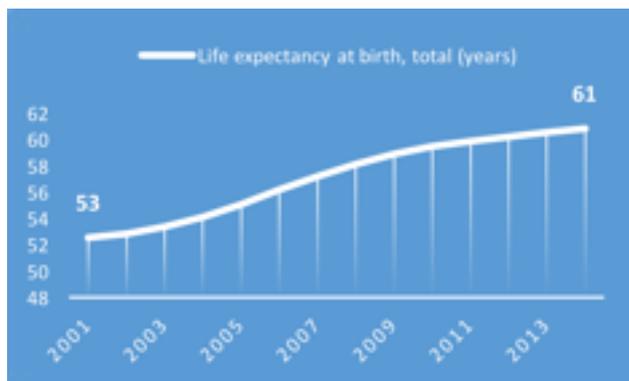
Source: World Development Indicators Dataset (World Bank, 2016)

Figure 4. Early Warning System: Reported Violent Incidents in
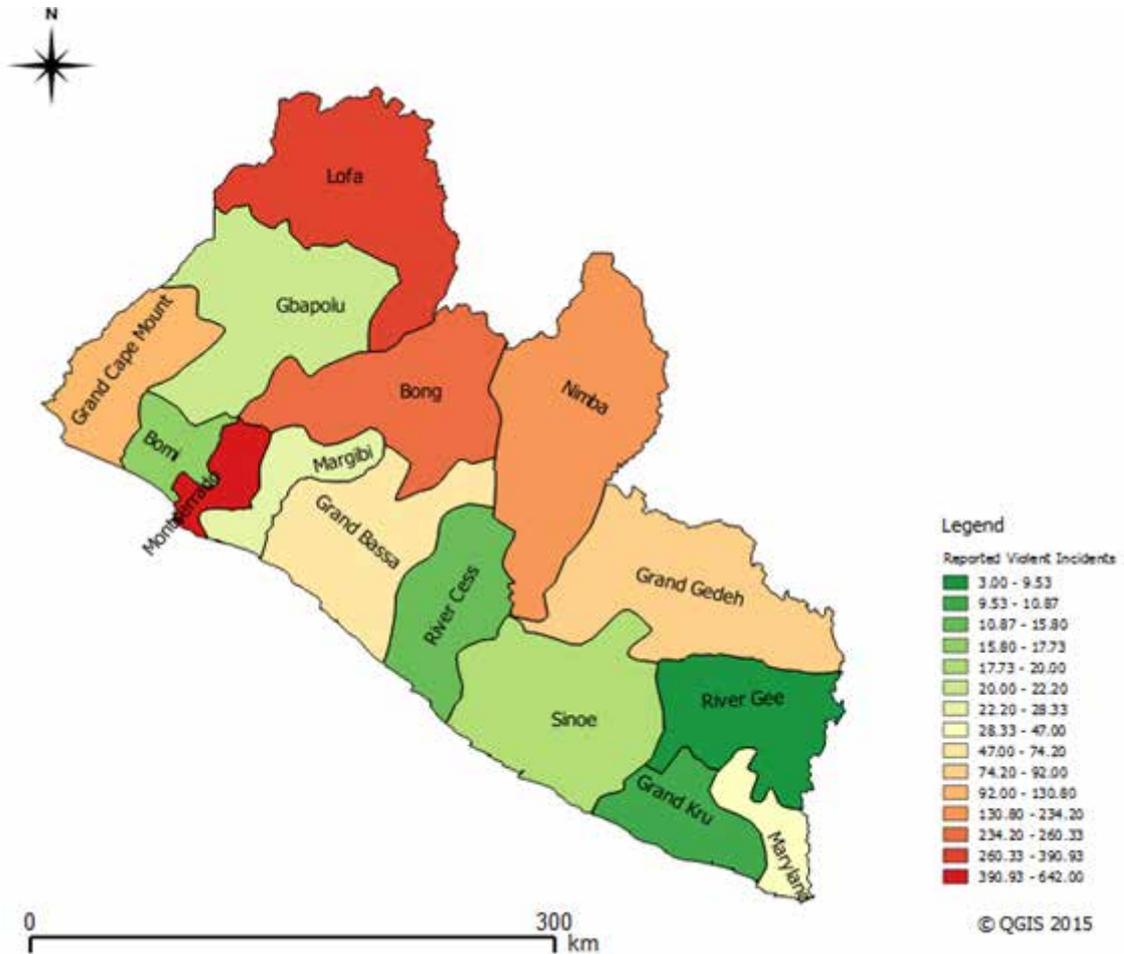
Source: Author's mapping, from Early Warning Early Response (EWER) Working Group (2014, pp. 12)

"In 2013, just prior to the outbreak of Ebola, half of Liberia's counties were registering, on average, more than one violent occurrence per week. Particularly violent appeared to be the districts of Lofa, with an average of one violent occurrence per day, and Montserrado with a total of 642 reported cases, close to 1.8 cases a day."

The economic recovery and the increase in life expectancy are not translated, however, into a safe and peaceful Liberian society. In 2013, according to the Early Warning Early Response (EWER) Working Group (2014), Liberia was still registering relevant levels of violence in some of its counties, as shown above in Figure 4. During that year, just prior to the outbreak of Ebola, half of Liberia's counties were registering, on average, more than one violent occurrence per week. The northernmost counties and the capital city's county were particularly affected, with Nimba, Bong, Lofa and Monteserrado registering over 4 such incidents per week. Particularly violent appeared to be the districts of Lofa, with an average of one violent occurrence per day and Montserrado with a total of 642 reported cases, close to 1.8 cases a day.

Table 2. Socio-economic Indicators

2013 County	% among 40% poorest	rank	Women's Education						Men's Education						Unemployed (last 12 months)			
			% with no education	rank	Median years of education	rank			% with no education	rank	Median years of education	rank			Women	rank	Men	rank
Bomi	51.4%	4	42.0%	7	2.4	5			15.0%	10	6.2	5			57.4%	14	27.7%	11
Bong	69.7%	9	55.3%	13	0.0	13			24.3%	13	3.7	15			26.8%	2	11.9%	5
Gbarpolu	78.2%	13	43.2%	9	0.1	10			17.1%	11	4.0	13			21.0%	1	5.4%	2
Grand Bassa	60.5%	6	53.3%	12	0.0	12			20.4%	12	3.8	14			42.4%	6	13.2%	7
Grand Cape Mount	62.5%	7	56.2%	14	0.0	14			27.7%	15	4.2	12			38.1%	3	5.7%	3
Grand Gedeh	64.4%	8	33.3%	4	3.1	4			7.1%	2	6.4	3			51.2%	12	17.7%	9
Grand Kru	85.3%	14	47.3%	10	0.7	8			6.1%	1	6.6	2			49.1%	10	15.5%	8
Lofa	72.7%	10	56.5%	15	0.0	15			24.8%	14	5.3	8			43.8%	7	37.3%	14
Margibi	31.5%	2	40.7%	5	1.4	7			10.5%	6	5.8	6			58.3%	15	29.0%	12
Maryland	52.3%	5	30.7%	3	3.6	3			9.0%	5	6.4	4			50.7%	11	40.7%	15
Montserrado	4.5%	1	18.7%	1	6.5	1			8.0%	4	8.8	1			47.3%	9	30.1%	13
Nimba	41.3%	3	23.0%	2	3.6	2			10.8%	7	5.1	9			39.3%	4	23.2%	10
River Cess	92.1%	15	47.9%	11	0.0	11			7.3%	3	4.4	11			44.7%	8	3.4%	1
River Gee	72.7%	11	41.1%	6	1.5	6			13.8%	9	5.5	7			39.5%	5	8.8%	4
Sinoe	76.4%	12	42.3%	8	0.6	9			13.1%	8	5.1	10			56.3%	13	12.7%	6
Liberia	40.0%	-	33.2%	-	3.4	-			12.9%	-	6.5	-			44.4%	-	23.9%	-

Source: LDHS 2013 statistics (DHS 2013); rankings calculated by author.

Table 3. Access to Health and Health System Performance

2013 County	Percentage babies delivered by a skilled provider (a)	rank	At least one problem accessing health care	rank	Among children under 5 with fever		Percentage of children with diarrhea for whom advice or treatment was sought from a health facility or provider (a)	rank	Height-for-age (b)	
					Percentage for whom advice or treatment was sought from a health facility or provider (a)	rank			Percentage below -3 SD	rank
Bomi	69.0%	4	64.2%	6	68.1%	2	(69.4%)	1	15.3%	10
Bong	44.5%	13	73.6%	11	57.1%	8	42.0%	13	14.6%	9
Gbarpolu	51.9%	11	54.8%	3	49.8%	11	44.2%	12	6.9%	1
Grand Bassa	41.9%	15	73.0%	10	45.5%	15	33.5%	15	17.5%	13
Grand Cape Mount	44.2%	14	75.0%	12	52.1%	10	48.5%	7	10.2%	4
Grand Gedeh	73.4%	2	59.2%	4	62.8%	5	46.4%	10	13.4%	8
Grand Kru	57.9%	7	70.1%	8	49.1%	12	52.7%	5	11.2%	6
Lofa	71.8%	3	80.0%	15	59.6%	7	54.0%	4	8.8%	3
Margibi	56.9%	9	59.3%	5	56.4%	9	41.5%	14	10.5%	5
Maryland	54.8%	10	66.3%	7	60.4%	6	55.1%	3	15.9%	12
Montserrado	81.0%	1	49.9%	1	65.3%	3	50.%	6	7.4%	2
Nimba	49.8%	12	77.7%	13	48.1%	14	47.0%	9	18.9%	14
River Cess	63.4%	5	78.7%	14	49.0%	13	44.9%	11	15.5%	11
River Gee	57.5%	8	70.3%	9	71.6%	1	62.4%	2	21.1%	15
Sinoe	60.2%	6	52.7%	2	63.2%	4	47.3%	8	13.4%	7
Liberia	61.1%	-	62.3%	-	55.7%	-	46.8%	-	12.3%	-

Source: LDHS 2013; rankings calculated by author. (a) Excludes pharmacy, shop, traditional practitioner, and black bagger/drug peddler (b) Recumbent length is measured for children under age 2, or in the few cases when the age of the child is unknown and the child is less than 85 cm; standing height is measured for all other children.

"A review of socio-economic indicators displays Liberia as a poor and unequal country, with low levels of male education and employment and even lower levels for women and girls."

A review of socio-economic indicators in Table 2, from the 2013 Liberia Demographic and Health Survey (LDHS 2013; LISGIS et al., 2014) displays Liberia as a poor and unequal country, with low levels of male education and employment and even lower levels for women and girls. This reveals tensions regarding a desired redistribution dimension in post-conflict education. The highest level of median years of education, for women (6.5) and for men (8.8) are reported in Monteserrado, where the capital, Monrovia, lies. This was also the county with the highest reported wealth. Together with the satellite county of Margibi, these are the only two where less than 40% of their population are among the national 40% poorest. These regional inequalities place both counties under stress of internal economic migration. Notably, the districts of Lofa and Bong lie among those with poorest socio-economic indicators (they were already among those with higher incidence of violence in 2013), while Grand Bassa lay very close to the regional median.

With a high prevalence of extreme stunting, as Table 2 suggests, Liberia did not seem to manifest extreme regional inequalities to the extent that, other than Monterrado, all counties presented significantly high levels of deprivation in access to health. However, it is very noticeable how Lofa and Bong, in most indicators, presented worse performances than the median county. Again, this reality imposes challenges for the redistribution dimension of education and peacebuilding. In particular, more than 70% of those interviewed in Lofa, River Cess, Nimba, Grand Cape-Mount, Bong, Grand-Bassa, River Gee and Grand Kru for the LDHS 2013 survey reported at least one problem accessing health care in 2013, in the wake of the Ebola crisis.

Liberian youth

As both the major victims and perpetrators of violence during the Liberian civil war, young people are counted as the most vulnerable to post-traumatic stress disorders by Levey et al. (2013). Their vulnerabilities can be physical, emotional, medical, psychological or educational. In this research, Levey et al (2013) found majority support for assisting vulnerable youth populations. However, they noted that older men, a group in the Liberian population that carries particular power at the local level, favored a punitive response to youth transgressions and an investment in securitizing their communities against potential future acts of violence. This is particularly relevant if it is shown to reduce the space for youth representation in decisions regarding social relations and, in particular, in education.

"As both the major victims and perpetrators of violence during the Liberian civil war, young people are counted as the most vulnerable to post-traumatic stress disorders. Their vulnerabilities can be physical, emotional, medical, psychological or educational."

Earlier, McCauley (2002) had already described significant changes in the experiences of youth, as a direct consequence of the Liberian civil war. According to her research, the Liberian civil war brought changes in family roles and responsibilities, with increased empowerment of women and youth themselves. This came also with an increase in the role of money with apparent effects such as increased commercialization of education and the selling of sex for cash or favours. This increased women's empowerment derived from changing employment patterns, although coming with an added cost of

"While war connections may have slowly died out with the resolution of the conflict, monetarization of relations was often suggested in qualitative interviews as very much present during the Ebola crisis."

domestic and sexual violence. As it wasn't fully integrated at a cultural level, the added recognition evidenced came, therefore, at the expense of added violence. The increased commercialization that allowed youth access to new sources of income and agency also came with the weakening of agencies that were not backed by money or connections linked to the war. This brought discomfort not only to many of the young people but to adults as well. While war connections may have slowly died out with the resolution of the conflict, monetarization of relations was often suggested in qualitative interviews as very much present during the Ebola crisis.

Young people in Liberia, as Quaynor (2015) points out, can be acutely aware of power and voice inequalities related to economic factors, while the contrasts between purported norms of State behaviour learned in civic education and daily practices may arouse further disaffection. This may explain why civic commitment and violent youth behaviour can co-exist in some Liberian school environments, and again reinforces the importance of an education system that fosters redistribution.

Studying neighbour Sierra Leone, Novelli and Higgins (2016) point to a persistence in the post-conflict context of the precursor conditions that lead youth to participate in violence in the first place, particularly high levels of poverty and unemployment. In Sierra Leone, a lack of investment in technical and vocational education, mismatches between the skillset provided in secondary and tertiary education and labour market needs, and barriers to access to education beyond primary school levels are highlighted by National Youth Commission (NAYCOM) and Ministry of Youth, Employment and Sports (MYES) (2012). These are relevant insights for Liberia. If education is regarded as a mere component of a pacification strategy aimed at mitigating risks of youth involvement in violence, it can become part of an underlying narrative that posits youth as a threat. Such a narrative overlooks young people's legitimate aspirations, including aspirations that have been fuelled by international aid-led projects. When such projects fail to recognize context and mimic those put in place in non-conflict settings, manifestations of urban bias and privileging the interests of an urban elite not only alienates rural youth but adds incentives for rural-urban migration, weakening the education system's capacity to promote redistribution.

Current Challenges of the Liberian Education System

"The LDHS 2013 socio-economic indicators (captured in Table 2) indicate strikingly low access to primary education overall, and the dominance of Monteserrado, which accounts for nearly one third of the total student population in primary school."

The LDHS 2013 socio-economic indicators captured in Table 2 above indicate strikingly low access to primary education overall, and the dominance of Monteserrado, which accounts for nearly one third of the total student population in primary school. Lofa's socio-economic indicators are relatively good in comparison to most other counties, while Bong and Grand Bassa have the lowest indicators. Monteserrado, Nimba, Margibi, Lofa and Bong are among the top five in terms of students. However, as the Ebola outbreak struck, the high degree of concern among the student population about schools as possible transmission hotspots would become evident.

Table 4. Education performance indicators, Primary Education

County	Primary Education										
	Students		Net Enrolment				Schools			SCR(c)	
	2014 (b)	rank	2013 (a)	2014 (b)	rank		2013 (a)	2014 (b)	rank	2013 (a)	rank
Bomi	12,968	9	28%	36%	2		99	137	10	32	6
Bong	30,829	5	16%	18%	14		283	292	4	28	4
Gbarpolu	8,736	14	25%	19%	12		106	117	12	33	8
Grand Bassa	14,847	8	20%	18%	13		136	158	8	33	7
Grand Cape Mount	24,531	6	25%	29%	5		187	272	5	39	11
Grand Gedeh	12,861	10	20%	20%	11		105	129	11	33	9
Grand Kru	10,385	12	31%	36%	1		111	108	14	51	15
Lofa	33,303	4	25%	27%	7		264	306	3	27	2
Margibi	35,215	3	28%	36%	3		153	251	6	36	10
Maryland	19,169	7	20%	27%	6		98	149	9	44	13
Monteserrado	130,272	1	16%	32%	4		445	949	1	28	3
Nimba	64,481	2	22%	25%	8		462	573	2	29	5
River Cess	7,348	15	14%	15%	15		98	117	13	25	1
River Gee	10,258	13	17%	22%	9		98	104	15	45	14
Sinoe	11,426	11	14%	20%	10		125	192	7	42	12
Liberia	426,629	-	20%	27%	-		2770	3854	-	32	-

Source: (a) EMIS Liberia 2013; (b) EMIS Liberia 2014, from MoE Liberia (2015b). (c) SCR = Students per Classroom Ratio, ranking calculated by author.

"At secondary school level, the regional ranking of students and schools still show the same five counties leading. However, levels of enrolment even among these counties are already extremely low, with only two counties above 20% and the fifth county presenting a very low net enrolment of 10%. It is important to notice that these statistics predate the Ebola outbreak."

The relative weight of Monteserrado among secondary school students in 2014 is even more striking and revealing of a situation of significant socio-economic privilege of the capital. At secondary school level, the regional ranking of students and schools still show the same five counties leading. However, levels of enrolment even among these counties are already extremely low, with only two counties above 20% and the fifth county presenting a very low net enrolment of 10%. It is important to notice that these statistics predate the Ebola outbreak. The 2014 data collection occurred in March, the month when the first two cases were reported. There is, therefore, strong reasons to believe that, more than in other cases, the numbers of enrolment over-represent true attendance.[13]

In their assessment of the implementation of the EGRA-Plus programme in Liberia, Davidson and Hobbs (2013) highlight a reality where the challenges in accessing school and of low education quality contribute to a high drop-out rate

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13 The release of EMIS statistics for the school year 2015-2016 may allow some comparative analysis of possible effects on enrolment. Qualitative evidence, from the interviews that were conducted, indicates that levels of enrolment post-Ebola may have recovered quickly and no significant effect at this level will be signalled by statistical data.

Table 5. Education performance indicators, Secondary Education

County	Primary Education											
	Students		Net Enrolment			Schools			SCR(c)	
	2014 (b)	rank	2013 (a)	2014 (b)	rank	2013 (a)	2014 (b)	rank	2013 (a)	rank
Bomi	12,968	9	28%	36%	2	99	137	10	32	6
Bong	30,829	5	16%	18%	14	283	292	4	28	4
Gbarpolu	8,736	14	25%	19%	12	106	117	12	33	8
Grand Bassa	14,847	8	20%	18%	13	136	158	8	33	7
Grand Cape Mount	24,531	6	25%	29%	5	187	272	5	39	11
Grand Gedeh	12,861	10	20%	20%	11	105	129	11	33	9
Grand Kru	10,385	12	31%	36%	1	111	108	14	51	15
Lofa	33,303	4	25%	27%	7	264	306	3	27	2
Margibi	35,215	3	28%	36%	3	153	251	6	36	10
Maryland	19,169	7	20%	27%	6	98	149	9	44	13
Monteserrado	130,272	1	16%	32%	4	445	949	1	28	3
Nimba	64,481	2	22%	25%	8	462	573	2	29	5
River Cess	7,348	15	14%	15%	15	98	117	13	25	1
River Gee	10,258	13	17%	22%	9	98	104	15	45	14
Sinoe	11,426	11	14%	20%	10	125	192	7	42	12
Liberia	426,629	-	20%	27%	-	2770	3854	-	32	-

Source: (a) Students per Classroom Ratio; (b) EMIS Liberia 2013; (c) EMIS Liberia 2014

"Liberia is still recovering from a war that destroyed close to one third of public schools and one fourth of community schools, killing or forcing the migration of many teachers."

throughout the system. Quoting Brown (2010) they state: "many parents keep their children out of school because they know that education systems are failing their children" (Davidson and Hobbs 2013 pp. 283). Liberia is still recovering from a war that destroyed close to one third of public schools and one fourth of community schools, killing or forcing the migration of many teachers.

The nature of inequalities in the access to education in Liberia is also illustrated by Figure 5, which compares net enrolment in 2014 in relation to both gender and regional location, according to the Ministry of Education's Education Management Information System (EMIS - MoE Liberia, 2015b). The analysis suggests that, while at a national level no significant gender inequalities in enrolment are apparent, the regional inequalities, already pointed out above, are very significant. Notably, not only a school-age child was more likely to be enrolled if she was living in Montserrado county in 2014, the likelihood of her progressing was also vastly higher. Given the horizontal inequalities that underlined the Liberian civil conflict, this reality again reveals significant tensions regarding the redistribution dimension of education and peacebuilding. As discussed in FHI 360 (2015), education inequalities, be they based on gender, ethnicity, religion or social status, increase the likelihood of a violent conflict to start or recur.

Figure 5. Net Enrolment in Liberia, 2014
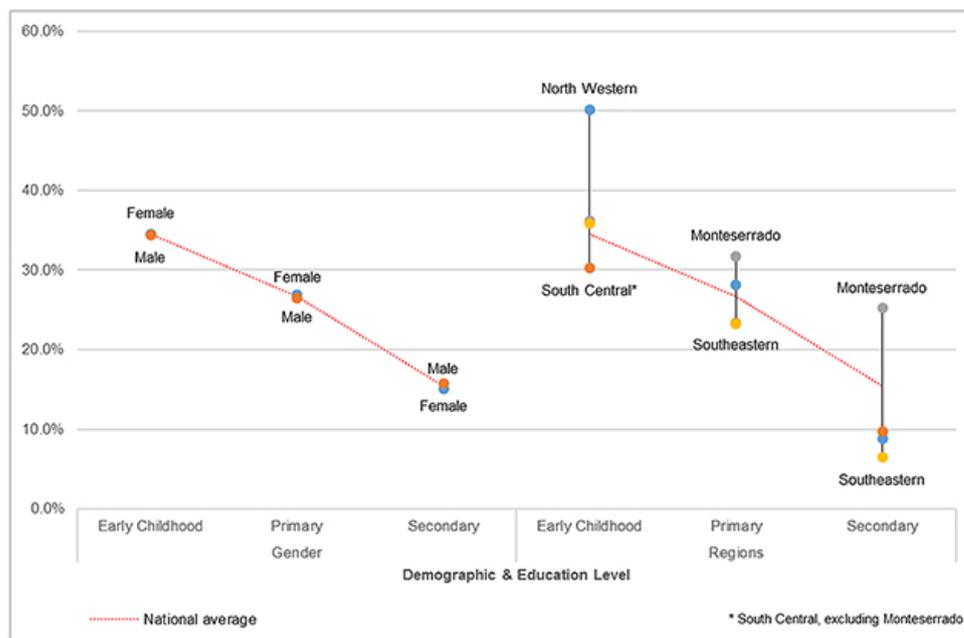
Source: author's calculations using EMIS Liberia

"Notably, not only a school-age child was more likely to be enrolled if she was living in Montserrado county in 2014, the likelihood of her progressing was also vastly higher. Given the horizontal inequalities that underlined the Liberian civil conflict, this reality again reveals significant tensions regarding the redistribution dimension of education and peacebuilding."

Particularly significant and with impacts on higher levels of school drop-out is the high prevalence of overage students in all levels of education (Davidson and Hobbs 2013; Stromquist et al., 2013). Seeking to test possible impacts of equal opportunities policies within the Liberian education system, Cuesta and Abras (2013, pp. 257) highlight that the main constraint to a policy that can efficiently induce substantial improvements in education opportunities among children in Liberia is the paucity of public resources devoted to education (US$12.2 million). Meanwhile, they also highlight that factors such as region, rural or urban location, economic status, sex of the child, sex and age of household head, education of household head (particularly influential), parental presence in the household, number of children in the household and presence of elderly and exposure to the conflict can be significant determinants of education opportunities.

"Seeking to test possible impacts of equal opportunities policies within the Liberian education system, Cuesta and Abras (2013, pp. 257) highlight that the main constraint to a policy that can efficiently induce substantial improvements in education opportunities among children in Liberia is the paucity of public resources devoted to education (US$12.2 million). "

Overall, the education statistics reveal clear signals of a system that is yet to respond to the challenges of offering redistribution opportunities to correct previously identified horizontal inequalities. These challenges have translated into one key foci of the PBEA research: teachers. An overview of challenges related to teaching in Liberia is presented below.

Teachers in Liberia

"In their study, Davidson and Hobbs (2013) describe a teaching cadre where many have insufficient formal education and lack basic skills, working in substandard infrastructure, a "minimum of resources" (Davidson and Hobbs 2013 pp. 284) and with little or no accountability."

Particularly relevant to the PBEA strategy in Liberia is their teaching body. As it would be expected, the regional supply of teachers in Liberia follows also the regional differences in the number of students accessing education. Montserrado and the other top 5 counties show, therefore as the ones with highest numbers of teachers.

Quantity cannot, however, be the only criteria in the analysis of teacher's contribution for student's education. There are equally relevant concerns in relation to quality. In their study, Davidson and Hobbs (2013) describe a teaching cadre where many have insufficient formal education and lack basic skills, working in substandard infrastructure, a "minimum of resources" (Davidson and Hobbs 2013 pp. 284) and with little or no accountability (Davidson and Hobbs 2013 pp. 292). In the key informant interviews conducted, we were informed that Liberia still lacks the training facilities for, and consequently the implementation of any B certificate teacher qualification programme. This is required to certify qualifications for secondary school teaching for those that, not graduating from schools of education may be technically albeit not pedagogically trained to teach. This includes those that may have had teaching experience within volunteering programmes, some of which did receive pedagogical training under those same programmes, though not officially recognized.

Concerns extend to the unbalanced gender composition of the teaching body in the country. In Monteserrado, which has a wider cadre of teachers than anywhere else in the country, female teachers account for less than 30% of the teaching body. However, in counties such as Lofa and Bong, the figures are far lower.

Table 6. Education performance indicators, Teachers

"In Monteserrado, which has a wider cadre of teachers than anywhere else in the country, female teachers account for less than 30% of the teaching body. However, in counties such as Lofa and Bong, the figures are far lower. "

County	Teachers (all levels)			% Female teachers	
	2013 (a)	2014 (b)	rank	2014 (b)	rank
Bomi	620	862	10	19.1%	6
Bong	2,341	2,200	5	17.5%	10
Gbarpolu	544	488	14	13.9%	12
Grand Bassa	741	755	11	18.2%	8
Grand Cape Mount	1,101	1,636	6	17.9%	9
Grand Gedeh	851	1,010	8	19.8%	5
Grand Kru	755	750	12	13.5%	14
Lofa	2,227	2,649	4	11.2%	15
Margibi	1,668	2,676	3	24.1%	4
Maryland	901	1,326	7	24.6%	3
Monteserrado	6,882	13,532	1	29.4%	1
Nimba	4,486	4,215	2	25.4%	2
River Cess	499	443	15	13.8%	13
River Gee	573	619	13	17.3%	11
Sinoe	777	896	9	19.1%	7
Liberia	25,606	34,057	-	23.5%	

Source: (a) EMIS Liberia 2013; (b) EMIS Liberia 2014

"According to a study by Stromquist et al. (2013), just 12% of primary school teachers are female, meaning that Liberia has the smallest percentage of female primary school teachers in the world… A fundamental starting point is of course the very low rate of secondary school completion by female students."

According to a study by Stromquist et al. (2013, pp 521), just 12% of primary school teachers are female, meaning that Liberia has the smallest percentage of female primary school teachers in the world. They attribute this situation to ingrained cultural norms that contravene policies endorsed at a national level and despite of the fact that Liberian female teachers are motivated by "the desire to work with children and adolescents and the notion of working with knowledge and sharing it with others", similar to teachers all over the world (Stromquist et al. 2013, pp 523).

Women find significant difficulties in being admitted to teacher training programs, particularly ones that accommodate childcare needs, among other challenges that a patriarchal Liberian society impose on them. Transport difficulties are also referred to as significant factors. A fundamental starting point is of course the very low rate of secondary school completion by female students. In addition, the research by Stromquist et al (2013) highlights that the teaching profession is not particularly cherished or sought after by men either. As a result, some teacher training programs in the country have few if any applicants. To this, the researchers add, the content of teachers' education fails in preparing them to address issues of gender and gender-based inequalities.

Consequently, there are evident limitations on the capacity and willingness of teachers to be positive actors in the education system's contribution to the construction of peace. It also reduces the group's agency as an influential social actor in situations where culturally ingrained gender roles and lack of appropriate knowledge are likely to preclude male teachers to provide the best support to female students, or to girls and women in their communities.

These realities render the Liberian education system vulnerable in its capacity to both address needs of redistribution and correction of gender inequalities. It also weakens its capacity to recognize women's realities and lowers the opportunities for having their voice represented. It has also been proven to correlate with a higher likelihood of violent conflict.[14]

Peacebuilding Education and Advocacy in Liberia

"Though partly driven by the inadequate access to education for children and limited job opportunities for youth (UNICEF, 2012 and PBEA Liberia, 2015), the Liberian conflict impacted well beyond the country's education system and the ensuing peacebuilding challenges involve many other factors."

Though partly driven by the inadequate access to education for children and limited job opportunities for youth (UNICEF, 2012 and PBEA Liberia, 2015), the Liberian conflict impacted well beyond the country's education system and the ensuing peacebuilding challenges involve many other factors. Poor governance and misuse of power and resources, lack of trust between government and citizens, discrimination, and lack of transparency and accountability were identified as underlying causes and dynamics of violent conflict.

Nevertheless, the role of education in peacebuilding cannot be overstressed. In the Liberian Strategic Road Map for National Healing, Reconciliation and

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14 In their study, FHI 360 (2015) found empirical evidence that suggests that gender imparity makes violent conflict more likely by a rate of 0.37.

"Yet the role of education in peacebuilding cannot be overstressed. In the Liberian Strategic Road Map for National Healing, Reconciliation and Peacebuilding (Ministry of Internal Affairs et al., 2012), there are many thematic components where the country's education system is explicitly called on to play a role or to have an implicit contribution to their success."

Peacebuilding (Ministry of Internal Affairs et al., 2012), there are many thematic components where the country's education system is explicitly called on to play a role or to have an implicit contribution to their success: Community-based Truth-telling, Atonement & Psychosocial Recovery; Memorialization; Political Dialogue; Women's Recovery and Empowerment; Children and Youth Recovery and Empowerment; Social Cohesion; Inclusive People's History; National Vision and Collective Identity; Transformative Education System.

Keenly aware of the potential role of education as a potential driver of conflict, UNICEF affirms it can have a significant, non-marginal, role in peacebuilding (Learning for Peace, "PBEA: Key Peacebuilding Concepts and Terminology"). Following Smith (2011) UNICEF's Peacebuilding, Education and Advocacy (PBEA) programme values the role education can have in conflict prevention, social transformation, civic engagement and economic progress. Seeking to address the multidimensionality of peacebuilding, PBEA seeks to involve governments, civil society and UN agencies, together with international and national partners. It adopts a conflict sensitive approach to education, one that, valuing a robust understanding of the interactions between interventions and context, seeks to avoid negative impacts and maximize positive impacts of conflict risk reduction.

In the Liberian context, PBEA was implemented by the following set of stakeholders:

Liberian Government	Technical and Financial Partners	NGOs
Primary partners: • Ministry of Education (MoE) • Ministry of Internal Affairs – Peacebuilding Office (MIA-PBO) • Ministry of Youth and Sports (MoYS) Secondary partners: • Ministry of Gender and Development (MoGD) • Governance Commission (GC)	• United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) • USAID • Peace Corps • Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) • Global Partnership for Education	• Save the Children • International Rescue Committee • Visions in Action • Right to Play • BRAC

"There are many challenges, be it in reaching more equitable access to education; seeking to overcome divisive historical narratives through the production of new text books; strengthening peacebuilding competencies in the classroom; and fostering the social, economic and political empowerment of girls, young women and adult men and women who have been physically and psychologically wounded by the war."

There are many challenges, be it in reaching more equitable access to education; seeking to overcome divisive historical narratives through the production of new text books; strengthening peacebuilding competencies in the classroom; and fostering the social, economic and political empowerment of girls, young women and adult men and women who have been physically and psychologically wounded by the war.

Among these, the roadmap component of a Transformative Education explicitly affirms quality education as "a conflict prevention strategy" committing to "mobilize Liberian schools and teachers as resources for healing, reconciliation and national unity" (Ministry of Internal Affairs et al., 2012, pp.64). Under this component, the Liberian Government and civil society actors must address regional inequalities in access to quality education, imprint reconciliation key messages into the school curriculum, address the specific needs of those among the Liberian youth that were deprived from education due to the war, promote local ownership of the educational system and foster teachers' capacity in the promotion of reconciliation and psychosocial recovery.

"In a deprived, post-conflict setting, the challenge to fully make use of education as a key healing, peacebuilding and conflict prevention strategy could hardly be bigger. The events in Liberia constituted a multiple correlate risk scenario, where biological hazards (such as the Ebola Virus Disease crisis), school-related gender inequalities, poverty and complex hazards such as conflict overlapped."

In a deprived, post-conflict setting, the challenge to fully make use of education as a key healing, peacebuilding and conflict prevention strategy could hardly be bigger. Key informants highlighted that PBEA was key in enabling the activities under the 'transformative education' thematic area, by covering funding gaps. he events in Liberia constituted a multiple correlate risk scenario, where biological hazards (such as the Ebola Virus Disease crisis), school-related gender inequalities, poverty and complex hazards such as conflict overlapped.

A notable response to these came from the deployment of trained national volunteers, originally engaged in conflict resolution and support to education, into health activists, sharing information and mitigating misunderstandings. A total of 300 National Volunteers (NVs) were trained and deployed in 12 counties: Bomi, Bong, Gbarpolu, Grand Bassa, Grand Cape Mount, Grand Gedeh, Lofa, Margibi, Maryland, Monteserrado, Nimba and Sinoe. In a project managed by the Ministry of Youth and Sports (MoYS), 241 NVs took teaching placements in 83 public schools.[15] Originally deployed prior to the Ebola outbreak, they would be redeployed, with a reviewed brief, to the same counties they had worked before. Another group of volunteers was promoted. Under the MIA-PBO, 75 Junior National Volunteers (JNVs) were trained and deployed to promote mediation, early warning conflict tracing and early response, and peace advocacy at community level. Each JNV, in their own communities, established Community Peace Committees (CPCs) of trained conflict mediators. They were also activated in the effort to fight the Ebola outbreak. This effort led youth volunteers reaching more than 5,200 families in 3 months.

In summarizing this section on the challenges of the education system in Liberia, what we can affirm is that while there have been sustained efforts to reform

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15 Of the remainder, 33 worked as clinical assistants in hospitals, 24 were youth centre managers and 2 were placed to handle land cases with the land commission.

the education system and redress inequalities prevalent across the country, the education system has not been prioritised sufficiently in terms of budget allocation, nor targeted sufficiently towards redressing the manifest inequalities that traverse the entire system, not only in access but also in representation and recognition. As a result of this, as we will see, when the Ebola outbreak appeared, the education system was, with very few exceptions, ill-prepared to act as a preventative factor in reducing and containing the outbreak.

The Ebola Crisis

Emerging from the forest region of Guinea in December 2013, from May 2014 the Ebola epidemic quickly accelerated and spread, particularly through the countries of Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia, reaching their urban areas and killing more than 3600 people in Liberia alone (Abramowitz et al., 2015). In September 2014, as shown in Table 7 below, it reached peak incidence in Monrovia. In November, 8 of the 15 counties were still reporting more than 10 new cases. Only in December 2014 did the outbreak show signs of clear reversal. In February 2015 new cases above 1 a day were only reported in Monrovia and 11 counties already reported no new cases. The epidemic pushed the country's health system beyond its capacity, bringing the country into intense additional stress and ultimately forcing school closure to be ordered by the Liberian Government.

In an update of the economic impact of the epidemic, the World Bank (2014) reports a reduction in more than half of the prospective economic growth in Liberia (from 6.8 per cent to 3.0 per cent), an impact estimated to amount to $250 million in 2014-15. This weakening of economic activity came with a relatively persistent reduction in employment, including self-employment, while the cost of living and particularly the cost of food was found to increase due to the crisis. While reducing since the end of the epidemic, these impacts continue to persist above pre-crisis levels at the time of writing. Mukpo (2015) found confirmation of the estimates, including reports of loss of income, increased difficulty in accessing health and, particularly among survivors, stigma and reduced employment opportunities. Beyond economic hardship, the effects of Ebola on survivors and those who had come into contact with the disease ran deeper, inducing psychological distress, as documented by Mohammed et al. (2015).

In an assessment conducted in December 2015 in Lofa, Nimba, and Monteserrado, the IRC (2014) reported decreased food consumption, lower school attendance and restrictions on children's freedom of movement, play and socialization due to the Ebola crisis. Ebola was reported to particularly affect not only children, but also youth and women. The death of parents and relatives, increased risk of child labour, sexual exploitation, abuse and early marriage. Changes in household roles, with girls eventually becoming the main income source of some households, eventually compromising their school attendance was also signalled by respondents.

"The education system has not been prioritised sufficiently in terms of budget allocation, nor targeted sufficiently towards redressing the manifest inequalities that traverse the entire system, not only in access but also in representation and recognition. As a result of this, as we will see, when the Ebola outbreak appeared, the education system was, with very few exceptions, ill-prepared to act as a preventative factor in reducing and containing the outbreak."

"Ebola was reported to particularly affect not only children, but also youth and women."

Table 7. Ebola incidence, new cases reported

County	2014												2015											
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
BOMI						2	21	42	35	13	20	1	1	1										
BONG							11	28	51	21	48	8			1									
GBARPOLU								1	2	6	11													
GRAND BASSA							3	13	7	4	26	25	2											
GRAND CAPE MOUNT								3	16	17	60	46	10	4										
GRAND GEDEH									1	1	1													
GRAND KRU									2	1	1	1												
LOFA			1	2	2	48	53	168	44	10	1													
MARGIBI			1			2	7	125	149	85	33	4	1	1					5					
MARYLAND								3	1															
MONTSERRADO					2	22	59	469	773	368	253	165	45	28	2				1				3	
NIMBA					2		5	50	47	11	1	4												
RIVER GEE									2	3	2	1												
RIVERCESS							4		4	1	1	16												
SINOE								1	3	9	3	7												

Source: Gradient constructed by author using WHO (2015) data. Note: Green = no new cases; values around median in yellow; higher values in red.

The World Bank (2014, pp.4) reported an acute hit on Liberia's fiscal health "by the sharp reduction in economic activity and lower tax compliance", while public expenditure was driven up by the effort to address the epidemic. Following the end of the epidemic, Kristen Himelein (2015) suggests some recovery in employment and the use of public services rebounding to pre-crisis levels. Yet while agriculture appears to be the first sector to recover, women are disproportionately represented in non-agricultural self-employment and were more impacted by the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) related job losses. Mulbah et al. (2015) indicate declining economic growth, widening socio-cultural divisions and the need to delay the senatorial elections given Ebola's negative impact on peacebuilding. In their analysis, a reversal of post-war progress made in Liberia was only prevented due to the urgency for public response, frequent communication to citizens and visibility, and the acknowledgement of the importance of community engagement.

The Ebola outbreak also highlighted the weakness of vertical cohesion between citizens and the state. Despite the reported frequency of communication by public officers, the reaction to the outbreak negatively affected Liberians' perceptions of their own government and public workers. Mukpo (2015) highlighted a negative public perception of both the performance and trustworthiness of government, with particular poor appreciation of the National Police, government officials and legislators. A very high percentage of respondents (81%) reported being 'angry' with the government for its slow and initially ineffective reaction to the outbreak.

Figure 6. Reported Ebola cases in 2014 and 2015
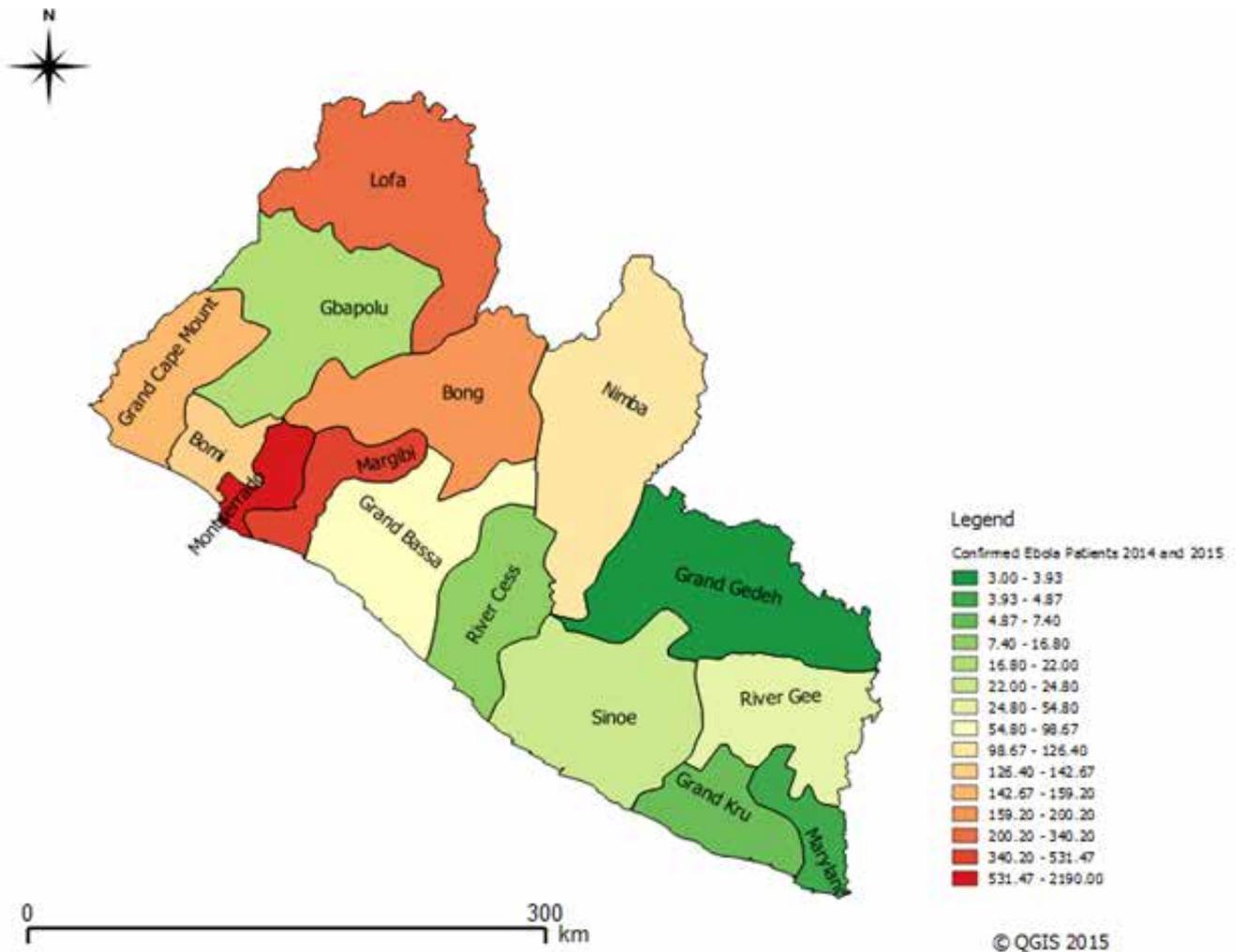
Source: Author's mapping, from WHO (2015)

"However, despite the discontent only one high profile incident of popular confrontation occurred, when the Monrovia West Point slum was quarantined. In contrast, horizontal cohesion, between different community groups, has been praised for its role in coordinating against the outbreak and preventing the worst-case scenario from occurring."

However, despite the discontent only one high profile incident of popular confrontation occurred, when the Monrovia West Point slum was quarantined. In contrast, horizontal cohesion, between different community groups, has been praised for its role in coordinating against the outbreak and preventing the worst-case scenario from occurring. Abramowitz et al. (2014) found, early in the wake of the Ebola outbreak, that communities were able to show signs of social learning about the disease even prior to receiving official and international information. However, rumours, on the one hand, and incorrect and misleading early official information, on the other, together with an historical distrust of government and public health messages delayed this social learning. The process of social consolidation of correct messages and the abandoning of non-factual information occurred, despite lower levels of education and human resources and in the face of conspiracy theories about government, international and health workers' ill intentions . Arguably the presence of those conspiracy theories speaks more to a "reasonable social response to ongoing failures to contain the epidemic" (Abramowitz et al., 2014:11).

"Mukpo (2015) reported perceptions of a poor performance by the international community, downplaying the risks in the beginning, being slow to react and acting indecisively when the severity of the crisis finally became evident."

The systemic limitations uncovered by EVD were not constrained to the Liberian public sector and economy. Mukpo (2015) reported perceptions of a poor performance by the international community, downplaying the risks in the beginning, being slow to react and acting indecisively when the severity of the crisis finally became evident. Added to these were awareness campaigns that, instead of emphasizing treatability, highlighted mortality, reducing the incentives for people to seek medical care. The situation in Liberia found parallels in what was experienced in neighbouring countries. In their analysis of neighbouring Sierra Leone, Novelli and Higgins, (2016, pp.2) highlighted further weaknesses in the international community's response. They noted how it failed, in particular, to give the necessary attention to the cultural context in the means used to inform the public or in key aspects of the intervention such as the funeral practices adopted.

Ebola prevention poster

Together with the reduction in economic activity reported by World Bank (2014), Mukpo (2015) and Allen et al. (2015) reported how the poor management of the crisis by the government led to an increased distrust by the public. Similar realities are reported by Rohwerder (2014) in Sierra Leone. Quarantines were particularly harsh for the elderly, the poor and those already afflicted with (chronic) disease or disability. To this, Rohwerder documented added risk of stigmatization of all affected by Ebola, including those that directly intervened in combating it (healthcare workers and burial teams). More widely, the "do not touch" policies weakened social cohesion, while personal stress and higher frustration translated into public violence and riots. Reports such as these were a common thread in interviews conducted in Grand Bassa:

> "When someone in one family contracted the virus, all in the family, even those that didn't get it were stigmatized. The volunteers needed to act on that and try to break the stigma: 'Don't stop speaking to your friend'",

in Bong:

> "Some students lost relatives to Ebola, one lost her mother. In the beginning, friends didn't want to come back to them. The trauma is affecting their performance. Gradually they are recovering and performance is picking up";

and in interviews with Ebola survivors in Monrovia:

> "When coming back no-one would touch me. I was forced to sleep in the street, for about a month. I was not allowed to stay at the house [she was living before] and didn't have money to pay for the rent on another."

Table 8: Incidence of Ebola and the School Year

County	2014 Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	2015 Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
BOMI						2	21	42	35	13	20	1	1	1										
BONG							11	28	51	21	48	8			1									
GBARPOLU								1	2	6	11													
GRAND BASSA							3	13	7	4	26	25	2											
GRAND CAPE MOUNT								3	16	17	60	46	10	4										
GRAND GEDEH									1	1	1													
GRAND KRU									2	1	1	1												
LOFA			1	2	2	48	53	168	44	10	1													
MARGIBI			1			2	7	125	149	85	33	4	1	1					5					
MARYLAND								3	1															
MONTSERRADO					2	22	59	469	773	368	253	165	45	28	2				1				3	
NIMBA						2	5	50	47	11	1	4												
RIVER GEE									2	3	2	1												
RIVERCESS							4	4	1	1	16													
SINOE								1	3	9	3	7												

School Year: 2013 - 2014 • • Condensed School Year • • 2015 - 2016

Source: gradient constructed by author using WHO (2015) data; calendar sourced from Liberian official information. Note: Green = no new cases; values around median in yellow; higher values in red.

An Ebola survivor in Banjor, Monrovia, described some of the forms of stigmatization that she felt after the quarantine: people in the community were afraid and would not touch her and her family; in the market, when buying food, she and other members of her household would be told not to hand but to throw their money and the purchased food would be thrown to them. Due to attitudes such as these, the interviewed Ebola survivor severed social relations with some community members, formerly regarded as friends; she did not talk to them for 6 months. This reveals a vulnerability in Liberian communities' capacity to recognize the specific stresses and losses of those that had direct contact with EVD and its victims. It was only solved through a conflict resolution dialogue, held at a religious centre in the community. Those friends went, apologized and asked for her to let "bygones be bygones". This community process of forgiveness was instrumental for normal social relations to be re-established.

At the same time, the need for an emergency reaction to the Ebola crisis led to a diversion of spending at the expense of infrastructural and social (health and education) expenditure, with potential lasting impacts on the country's peace dividends. The PBEA project was one such case. With an original mandate that did not address health dimensions, it was redirected to address the Ebola crisis itself through education and community engagement interventions.

Ebola and Education

A deeper look should be devoted to the effects of Ebola on Liberia's education system. With differentiated degrees of prevalence throughout the country, the Ebola crisis exposed the limitations of Liberia's public services, with potential detrimental effects on the already ailing trust between citizens and the Government. The regional differences in Ebola prevalence may also have impacted on the efforts to promote more regionally equitable access to education.

Schools in Liberia were ordered to close in July 2014 (Liberia Education Cluster, 2015b). At the time, only two counties were still unaffected by Ebola and the crisis in Lofa was nearing its worst level, as shown in Table 8, above. The rationale was to reduce the potential for the spread of Ebola. Schools, being spaces where students and the teaching community converge, were considered potential focal points of Ebola transmission. Seven months later when, according to a key informant from the Liberian Minister of Health, there was already clear evidence that the crisis was under control, the schools were allowed to reopen in what was called a "condensed school year". In their assessment, the Liberia Education Cluster (LEC) noted that, during school closure, most children interrupted their learning.

The various activities put in place to prepare for the reopening of schools included maintenance and repairs, along with Ebola prevention and awareness (radio education programming and the development of regional guidance as well as of national protocols). The LEC identified a particular willingness of community representatives to promote school cleaning initiatives and mobilize parents to send children to school. According to Liberia Education Cluster (2015a), while students appeared to prioritise revising the learning they had missed and accessing learning materials, school administration priorities were on textbooks, stationary and Ebola

"With an original mandate that did not address health dimensions, the PBEA project was redirected to address the Ebola crisis itself through education and community engagement interventions."

"Schools in Liberia were ordered to close in July 2014. At the time, only two counties were still unaffected by Ebola and the crisis in Lofa was nearing its worst level... Seven months later the schools were allowed to reopen in what was called a 'condensed school year.'"

"The mere display of Ebola-like symptoms (most shared with common diseases such as malaria) was likely to lead to Ebola suspicion and quarantine... the detrimental effects of the outbreak far extended those of the direct fatalities."

awareness activities, and not on pedagogical training for teachers. This suggests a lack of representation of students in Liberian school life, as their priorities did not seem to have been addressed. According to Liberia Education Cluster (2015b), Parents and Teachers Associations (PTAs) were particulary focused on having temperature checks in place in the morning before school starts (43 per cent considered it the first priority and 18 percent the second), and on schools having hand-washing facilities (33 per cent stated it as first priority and 53% as second). Only 13 per cent of PTAs considered teaching on Ebola at school either the first or second priority and only 10 percent considered it the third priority.

It is therefore important to understand what Ebola awareness means in practice. The strategies adopted mainly focused on practices such as regular hand washing and provision of information on Ebola symptoms in order to allow detection of symptoms in order to avoid contagion on school premises. Nevertheless, the same survey displays their relative ignorance: fever and vomiting, two very relevant Ebola symptoms were among the least referred to. Notably, also, it was not the school system that had been open during the first 5 months of the outbreak, but radio and community mobilizers that were most credited as sources of learning about Ebola by students and parents.

While some students and teachers died during the Ebola epidemic, many more had relatives that contracted Ebola and the mere display of Ebola-like symptoms (most shared with common diseases such as malaria) was likely to lead to Ebola suspicion and quarantine. Therefore, the detrimental effects of the outbreak far extended those of the direct fatalities. The "no-touch" and bar of access rules, particularly targeting those who had come into contact with the disease, but also affecting those who displayed Ebola-like symptoms, risked added stigma. In the interviews conducted with education administrators at school, county, district and national levels, there was no clear indication that either the teaching or student communities had been severely hit by death due to Ebola. On the other hand, there were many reports of stigmatization in the focus groups interviews.

"Out of this situation, a need becomes evident for an education and learning strategy that enables students and school bodies to learn about the biological characteristics of the disease and how these relate to the social practices with which they are familiar."

Out of this situation, a need becomes evident for an education and learning strategy that enables students and school bodies to learn about the biological characteristics of the disease and how these relate to the social practices with which they are familiar. This approach would allow communities to see their own culture recognized and represented, while also being able to question the best way to mitigate the risks of Ebola in relation to traditional social practices. Otherwise, a gap opens up between community activities that acknowledge and validate cultural practices, albeit adapted for protection,[9] and formal education that focuses solely on hygiene and sanitation practices for Ebola prevention. When questioned key informants stressed that while information on Ebola was more widely available in the school setting, they did not find better information on other diseases, such as cholera, suggesting that Liberia may not have improved its preparedness for other potential outbreaks of disease.

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9 At Catholic Sunday Mass, in a church in Monrovia after Liberia was Ebola free, the rite of communion now had an added step of hand sanitation before receiving the host from the priest.

Measures put in place by the Education Sector

As reviewed above, it took around six months for the Ebola epidemic to evolve from its first cases in the forests of Guinea to a state of emergency that required a full lock-down of Liberian schools. An Education Cluster, under the leadership of the Liberian Ministry of Education, with coordination support by UNICEF and Save the Children and collaboration of 30 education and WASH partners, sought to implement a response to the crisis in three different phases (Skovgaard, 2015), as per Table 9 below:

Table 9. Phases of Response to EVD in Education

Phase (Timing)	Main Focus	Main Activities	Coordination
Immediate Phase (August to December 2014)	Learning by Radio and social mobilization on Ebola prevention and awareness.	Schools were closed with no time line for when they would reopen.	MoE, with support from partners, including the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE).
Second Phase (January to February 2015)	Ensure a safe school opening.	Announcement of the reopening of schools. Safety protocols were developed and key school reopening activities were identified and put in place*	MoE and the Education Cluster.
Third Phase (February - April 2015)	Monitoring compliance with the Protocols and ensuring that children returned to school.	Monitoring.	MoE and the Education Cluster.

Source: extracted from Skovgaard (2015)

*These included training "of school personal in the Protocols, distribution of Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) kits; and social mobilization on the importance of sending children back to school" (Skovgaard 2015, pp. 5)

"The education sector's reaction to Ebola started in August 2014, six months after the first case was reported in Lofa county and at the peak stage of the crisis, representing a significant delay."

The education sector's reaction to Ebola started in August 2014, six months after the first case was reported in Lofa county and at the peak stage of the crisis, representing a significant delay. As Ebola was said to spread through human contact,[10] schools were identified as hotspots, "locations of serious risk of transmission" (Skovgaard 2015, pp. 5), and therefore closed as a public health security measure. The creation of procedures that would seek to secure an environment 'as sanitized as possible', informed the Protocols for Safe School Environments in the Ebola Outbreak in Liberia (MoE Liberia, 2015a). According to the Protocols, a suspect person - someone considered to have had contact with an Ebola patient and therefore a suspect of being a patient her/himself – included anyone who had direct physical contact with a patient, contact with a patient's fluids (blood, urine, vomit, faeces, sweat or saliva), touched his/her clothes or linens, slept in the same household as a patient, or attended a funeral. A suspect person was not allowed to go to school for 21 days from the date of reported contact (including attendance at a funeral).

For a school to reopen, it would need to perform the following operations:

- Monitoring of daily access to school with temperature checks and hand washing
- Procedures to deny access to school to anyone with:
  - High fever;
  - At least two symptoms common to Ebola (e.g. abnormal bleeding), but also to many other diseases (e.g. headache; red eyes; weakness; join and muscle pain; diarrhoea);
  - Contact with an Ebola patient or someone who died from Ebola in the past 21 days or someone who didn't respect the preventive measures;
- Processes in place to detect and address cases at school entrance and during school hours, namely by:
  - Referring cases to a nearby health facility;
  - If needed, using of a physical space, in school, to temporarily isolate suspect cases;
  - Establishing lines of communication between the school's Ebola Safety Committee and the County Health Team;
  - The cleaning of bodily fluids' spills;
  - Enacting of policies preventing the sharing of food and drinks and of "no-touch" policies whenever a student was to show symptoms of fever or other possible symptoms of Ebola.

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10 In fact, in its Frequently Asked Questions webpage, WHO is more precise: "People become infected with Ebola either through contact with infected animals (usually following butchering, cooking or eating) or through contact with the bodily fluids of infected humans. Most cases are caused by human to human transmission which occurs when blood or other bodily fluids or secretions (stool, urine, saliva, semen) of infected people enters a healthy person's body through broken skin or mucous membranes. Infection can also occur if the broken skin or the mucous membranes of a healthy person comes into contact with items or environments contaminated with bodily fluids from an infected person. These may include soiled clothing, bed linen, gloves, protective equipment and medical waste such as used hypodermic syringes." (WHO, http://www.who.int/csr/disease/ebola/faq-ebola/en/, accessed on 18/02/0216) (WHO, 2016).

"It is important, however, to recognize that an approach that focuses solely on minimizing health security risks is not sufficient. LEC recommendations appear to highlight the need to address issues of inequality/redistribution and a return to a reconciliation role for education."

In the last Ebola Response Phase according to the Liberia Education Cluster (2015b), the role of education would comprise of refreshing the training and knowledge on the Protocols, both for school personnel and PTA members, along with psychosocial support sessions, and distribution of hygiene kits. It is important, however, to recognize that an approach that focuses solely on minimizing health security risks is not sufficient. In light of the mitigation and eventual overcoming of the 2013-2015 Ebola Crisis, it is important to bear in mind the recommendations made by the Liberia Education Cluster (2015) as presented below:

Preparedness Recommendations for ECD-Affected Schools (proposed by Liberian Education Cluster pp.27):

- Explore the official Ebola statistics to see if secondary school aged children and youth were affected more than other age groups; if so, explore possible explanations as to why this is and plan programing/interventions accordingly.

- Prioritize interventions (psychosocial support, anti-stigma awareness, etc.) in schools that have had a higher rate of Ebola infection amongst the students, staff and their households.

- Address the hidden costs of education in public schools.

- Encourage school enrolment and attendance, particularly for girls, by developing and implementing a life skills program including topics like self-esteem, psychosocial well-being, protection and reproductive health.

- Considering the fear of contracting Ebola at school, ensure a high quality monitoring system for the implementation of the Protocols, involving communities.

- Address violence at school by:
    - Developing a reporting system on verbal and physical violence for teachers and students, linked to the Teachers' Code of Conduct
    - Including positive discipline and non-violent classroom management in teacher training,
    - Implementing other initiatives like a Violence/Harassment Free Week, a competition for the most innovative student initiatives to address violence/harassment/bullying at school, etc.

These recommendations appear to highlight not only the need to directly address the EVD crisis, as the previous measures established, but also the need to address issues of inequality/redistribution and a return to a reconciliation role for education.

Feedback provided by school agents in focus group and key informant interviews, highlighted the training given for psychosocial support. In particular, school principals stressed the very significant role of NVs, trained in conflict mediation and peace advocacy, as the focal points for many of the initiatives within schools. At the community level among those communities visited, that role was also assumed by

"The Ebola epidemic revealed various infrastructural limitations in Liberia and Sierra Leone, both countries that had in the recent past lived through internal conflicts and were in the process of post-conflict reconstruction."

JNVs and CPCs. This demonstrates a significant awareness of the need to recognize the communities, people and, in particular, students where the volunteers intervened, and to allow them to be represented (including among the volunteers). It further reveals that an instrument originally intended for reconciliation can also be highly effective in reaction to a disease outbreak.

Important lessons from the Ebola epidemic

The Ebola epidemic revealed various infrastructural limitations in Liberia and Sierra Leone, both countries that had in the recent past lived through internal conflicts and were in the process of post-conflict reconstruction.

Leach (2014) suggests that the ancestral social, economic and kinship relations between peoples of Liberia and its neighbors Sierra Leone and Guinea that linked these three countries in the emergence of the Ebola crisis are not bound to disappear. Moreover, the Ebola crisis uncovered dynamics of rural exclusion and rural-urban migration that made this disease, originally rural, have its most destructive impact in urban spaces, such as slums. Leach also highlights that such dynamics risked the construction of a narrative of blame that would attribute responsibility for the health crisis to rural practices and other environmental myths, sidelining the central problem of a weak and neglected health system.

Added to this, Chandler et al. (2015) found many unanswered questions regarding the biomedical interventions aiming to change people's behaviour and mitigate contagion risks. In particular, they observed a focus on using standard nationwide media to convey a mostly risk-preventive biomedical message that failed to communicate with socially established practices and overlooked their personal meanings and communitarian functions. This reveals a weakness in the recognition of the diverse values and cultural references among Liberians. The portrayal of such practices as irrational traditions may have done little to engage the population and, in fact, may have induced further stigmatization of those that had lost relatives to Ebola.

"Abramowitz et al. (2015) found that communities in urban Liberia were able to adopt multiple coping strategies for the challenges posed by the Ebola epidemic, while facing the absence of basic health, infrastructural and material support."

When engaging with Ebola in its aftermath, a peacebuilding approach to education not only needs to stimulate a necessary dialogue within the school community regarding healthy and sanitary practices, but must also ensure that wider social and communitarian practices that serve individual and collective needs are not overlooked or de-prioritized. This dialogue may, in fact, produce the best results in the prevention of future crises. Abramowitz et al. (2015) found that communities in urban Liberia were able to adopt multiple coping strategies for the challenges posed by the Ebola epidemic, while facing the absence of basic health, infrastructural and material support. In their study they assert that ethnographic evidence supports that local Ebola affected populations were able to establish governance processes themselves, enabling them to engage in "medical self-surveillance, self-management, and self-triage" (pp. 15). Instead of directing to them a set of uniform messages and procedures, a stronger post-epidemic strategy should seek to equip "local communities with the material and knowledge resources to respond to

Ebola and to help build a surveillance infrastructure". Such a strategy would enable fundamental aspects of recognition and representation to be acknowledged.

Such an approach cannot be considered sufficient, however, because it only relies on individual competencies, community resilience and social cohesion between citizens and groups. The failures of government and health systems, experienced by the Liberian people, also needs to be discussed and addressed, in order to strengthen vertical cohesion and the relationship between government and constituencies. Without all cohesion dimensions, peacebuilding efforts remain incomplete.

Effects of the Ebola Crisis on the Education System and its Community

The literature reviewed indicates a relatively low incidence of EDV infections and related deaths within the education community. Having sampled 351 of the total 5,181 officially registered private and public schools of pre-primary, primary and secondary levels, Skovgaard (2015) reported only 42 students to have contracted Ebola (of which 14 survived) and 97 to have had household members infected. In the same study, only 18 were reported to have been infected. In the interviews conducted in Grand Bassa and Bong counties for this study, no cases of Ebola were reported for either teachers or students. There were, however, reports of orphans of Ebola. Gbofeh High School reported 111 students (out of 1117) as affected by Ebola (orphans or having lost relatives, and traumatized).

The feedback collected in the interviews with education system stakeholders suggests that it was the spiking of the global death toll and the general collapse of the health system that led to the closing of schools from August 2014 to February 2015. This, of course, had effects in itself. Teachers were without work, with the exception of 5,884 teachers (from an original target of 11,140) (MoE Liberia 2016), that were involved in health awareness/social mobilization workshops. However, in total there are 34,057 teachers (MoE Liberia 2015b), of which 19,753 are on the payroll.[11]

As reported by the Ministry of Health itself, the EVD crisis revealed a chronically insufficient health system that was on the verge of collapsing. Before the Ebola crisis emerged, Liberia's health system was lacking the logistical means to provide an adequate response to a wide range of incidents of EVD infection. Worse still, it had not even developed protocols to respond to a disease of this type. Not just a health risk, these insufficiencies are a conflict and economic risk to a nation.

At the social level, the interviews conducted underlined that one of the most damaging weaknesses revealed by the EVD crisis was a wide mistrust of health workers and of health advice provided by public sources and NGO's, which weakened the early Ebola awareness efforts. A poor institutional reaction to

"While the literature reviewed suggests that the Ebola crisis did lead to the deaths of learners and teachers, reports collected indicate a relatively low incidence of EDV infections and related deaths within the education community."

"At the social level, the interviews conducted underlined that one of the most damaging weaknesses revealed by the EVD crisis was a wide mistrust of health workers and of health advice provided by public sources and NGO's, which weakened the early Ebola awareness efforts."

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11 Statistic provided by the representative of the Ministry of Education in the interview conducted.

the outbreak of Ebola in Lofa county that failed to provide clear and sufficient information to the wider Liberian population did not recognize their needs. This, in turn, reinforced a sense of misrepresentation and strengthened a culture of mistrust towards the government, public workers, and others working on health, education and social development (including NGOs and international organizations).

In the interviews and focus group discussions conducted, there was clear and frequent reference to a culture that presumes gain and exploitation of other people's problems to make money. This is illustrated in anecdotal references to claims such as: "you are eating the Ebola money", or "what is it there for me?". In many testimonies, only the deaths of relatives, neighbors and, in particular, health workers themselves, made people realize that the messages were true. At that time, many preventable deaths had already occurred. Not only higher awareness, but also fear had set upon the public consciousness, particularly in counties more affected by the epidemic. Some of the teachers interviewed, despite having received training, revealed that they mostly kept themselves at home, to avoid risk of contagion. A young volunteer reported:

> "By me there were people dying right next to the house, 5 people died. We were very afraid, particularly for the children. We put rope to ensure they did not pass. Many friends would not talk to me because I lived close to these people that died and there was no wall between our houses."

Fear and rumors extended to the safety of accessing the EVD health care provided. Another volunteer revealed:

> "People would then refuse to go to the hospital even if showing symptoms. They were afraid to get infected there – literally, the rumour was to be infected by shots received and not by contagion from other sick people there. Even someone with malaria would be afraid."

<blockquote>

"Early EVD responses fuelled popular fears. Many, if not most of those that died after being taken to Ebola Treatment Units (ETUs) were not returned to their families for what they would consider to be proper burial practices. In the beginning they were cremated, a practice that is not part of Liberian tradition (be it Christian, Muslim or other), again failing to recognize Liberian practices and beliefs."

</blockquote>

Early EVD responses fuelled these fears. Many, if not most of those that died after being taken to Ebola Treatment Units (ETUs) were not returned to their families for what they would consider to be proper burial practices. In the beginning they were cremated, a practice that is not part of Liberian tradition (be it Christian, Muslim or other), again failing to recognize Liberian practices and beliefs. Later, they were, in most cases, taken to a single graveyard in each district, which was still a less traumatic result for their surviving relatives, as they were then allowed to know where the bodies had been buried.The Ebola contagion followed established trade and migration routes, becoming urban in part due to the migration of affected populations to Monrovia. This, in turn, increased the pressure on the education system in these areas, particularly in the underserved slums. Most notably, however, the contagion and death count in West Point, the most populous slum in Monrovia and the densest territory in the country, which eventually was quarantined in its totality, are reflective of weaknesses in infrastructure and urban management, weaknesses that were not overcome through the reaction and emergency aid put in place by the Government, NGOs and international community.

Led by fear, but also by health recommendations, Liberians isolated themselves and chose not to gather in the market, church or other public spaces, including events such as health awareness or peacebuilding workshops. While the reclusion from economic and social-community spaces had detrimental effects on family incomes and on social cohesion, the reclusion from community level information sharing contributed to the delayed reaction to the disease.

<blockquote>

"EVD prevention rules stipulated a reduction in contact, gathering and sharing of food with those suspected of having contracted Ebola. Without knowledge of where people had been, all were suspected: even relatives, even spouses."

</blockquote>

The restriction of movement and suspension of economic activities was particularly harsh for those who were quarantined. This included Ebola survivors, anyone who had come into contact with Ebola patients, and those that were taken to ETUs under suspicion of Ebola (even if they were found to have a different disease). EVD prevention rules stipulated a reduction in contact, gathering and sharing of food with those suspected of having contracted Ebola. Without knowledge of where people had been, all were suspected: even relatives, even spouses.

The situation of those who had lost members of the household or their friends to Ebola was worse. A quarantine would be enforced upon them. After the quarantine, many experienced difficulties in trading in the market, some were refused housing, and friends would not approach or touch, and some broke contact altogether. Some family members, if they were not in the house when the family was taken to the ETU would not be allowed to return home during quarantine. These represented further failures in the need for recognition of specific situations and conditions. Friendships were strained, while conflicts occurred between families in simple day-to-day activities such as water collection, or due to the references by one villager of

ill people in someone else's house (as prescribed by EVD response protocols).

With regard to education, the Ebola response fuelled fears that, later on, were expressed by parents. Although only one or two schools were transformed into ETUs, the Ministry of Health's key informant communicated that many more were used as transition centres. Fear and mistrust manifested themselves when schools were reopened. The application of the Protocols, particularly the supply of great quantities of chlorine and the creation of the isolation room were understood by some parents as a threat – a sign that schools were not safe and that if one of their children was taken into isolation they might never see them again. These misconceptions were also reported by National Volunteers as examples of the realities they had to face in their social mobilization work. The reopening of schools was ultimately delayed due to pressures from the Ministry of Health and only happened at a stage when nearly half of the counties had been Ebola free for the previous two months.

The reopening of schools for a "condensed year" was reported to have caused discontent among some families. Parents had to pay full fees, despite the shortened year. Public education is free under Liberian law, yet a family has to pay 700 Liberian dollars per year per student in a high school (10th to 12th grade) for PTA "maintenance" and "activity" fees; while private education is not free, even in primary education grades. Given this situation, the Ministry of Education instructed that each school administration should use its own discretion on whether to promote students.[12] The exception was students in the 9th and 12th grade, whose promotion depends on a national exam, following West African Examination Council norms and procedures, that were formally not allowed to proceed. Promotions were dealt with differently by different schools, for example, in the same school district one public school did not promote while others did. There were also reports of students moving to private schools to be "promoted" after failing to meet criteria established by the public school. Furthermore, promoted students may now lack support on the curriculum that they missed. The interviews conducted in Bong county, however, suggest that school enrolment quickly recovered its pre-Ebola levels, particularly at the start of the regular school year 2015-2016.[13]

At the height of the crisis, resources had to be mobilized and diverted from education to health emergency response programmes. This delayed the investment needed for education. The PBEA project in Liberia was a clear example of this. Originally set up to reinforce the capacity of education to contribute to peacebuilding by reducing education inequality experienced in rural communities, the entire program became reoriented towards tackling Ebola.

"The application of the Protocols, particularly the supply of great quantities of chlorine and the creation of the isolation room were understood by some parents as a threat – a sign that schools were not safe and that if one of their children was taken into isolation they might never see them again."

12 On a first glance, this decision by the Liberian Government could be interpreted as promoting representation. It risks, however, to have been a tokenistic one and one that led to unequal treatment of students across the country.

13 At the time of field research, our sources in the Ministry of Education informed us that the EMIS statistics would become available at a time that would still enable its incorporation in this report. Unfortunately, that proved not to be the case.

Figure 8. PBEA Strategy

All components of the PBEA program were challenged by the onset of the Ebola crisis. The development and implementation of a conflict sensitive curriculum, to be led by the Ministry of Education and mainstreamed throughout all levels of education (including literacy, accelerated learning and community education streams) was significantly delayed, and ultimately failed to be implemented within the program's schedule. There was also a weakening of efforts to foster a more equitable provision of quality education between counties and along the urban/rural divide, while planned investments in the correction of the gender imbalance in the teaching community did not happen. Meanwhile the plans for peacebuilding awareness activities and workshops were negatively affected by the increasing aversion of people to converge in public gatherings, as well as the need to prioritise a different set of messages that were specifically related to the EVD crisis.

The promotion and acquisition of peacebuilding skills, through formal and informal peace education, was dually affected by the EVD emergency, with an arguably positive end result. On the one hand, resources that were originally devoted to the institutionalization of informal conflict resolution, mediation and peacebuilding mechanisms within schools and communities (such as peace clubs and community peacebuilding committees), had to be reassigned to Ebola prevention, tracing and psychosocial support to affected people and communities.

"As a process of informal education for peacebuilding, the training given to NVs and JNVs, now tried and tested through their interventions in extremely difficult community contexts, should be regarded as an effective strategy in Liberia."

On the other hand, the peacebuilding training offered to NVs and JNVs proved instrumental, not only in their capacity to conduct health awareness activities but also in what was very positively signalled as their attitudes and action in support of the Ebola response effort, conferring greater legitimacy upon their peacebuilding activities in the post-Ebola stage. The activities of NVs and JNVs as actors of reconciliation through recognizing community actors and allowing them to be represented in the CPCs, represented a positive application of a 4 Rs strategy. As a process of informal education for peacebuilding, the training given to NVs and JNVs, now tried and tested through their interventions in extremely difficult community contexts, should be regarded as an effective strategy in Liberia.

The conflict resolution activities (palaver management) led by NVs, JNVs and CPCs were also criticial due to tensions arising from the EVD crisis. These included issues of mistrust, strained relationships with neighbors and estranged friendships due to the "no touch" policy and quarantines, together with the stigma around Ebola survivors and those who had come into contact with Ebola victims without being infected, particularly at the community level but also at school. School principals interviewed highlighted the effective role of NVs in school environments in reducing the frequency and level of conflict between students, as well as providing examples to other teachers on how to deal with violent behaviour from students. Community development activities were also reported as important to social mobilization and strengthening the peacebuilding role and legitimacy of NVs, JNVs and CPCs. These constitute, therefore, examples of where recognition and reconciliation came together to contribute to social cohesion.

Measures Undertaken by the Education System and its Community

The education system and, in particular, the PBEA program in Liberia sought to address the challenges of Ebola response through four fronts:

- Health Awareness:
  Addressing issues of fear, rumour, lack of trust and stigma, trained teachers, National Volunteers (NVs), Junior National Volunteers (JNVs) and the Community Peacebuilding Committees (CPCs) they supported, used the peacebuilding skills obtained through training to reach the population. While all those actors received training and were intended to be mobilized, reports from the interviews with school principals, district and county education officers indicated that, in general, teachers only mobilized for a very short period (3 days to one week). This suggests a very weak mobilization of formal resources by the Ministry of Education. In contrast, the interventions by NVs, JNVs and community groups were focused on community engagement and involvement, and represented a more effective institutional response to the EVD crisis.

Figure 9. EVD Response - PBEA Contribution

- **Case Referral and Tracing:**

  This intervention entailed finding and referring potential Ebola cases and the tracing of contacts to the district health services, and was key to the circumscription and control of EVD contagion. This was one stream where, again, the intervention by NVs, JNVs and CPCs was mentioned by the interviewees as effective and valued by the communities.

- **Ebola Protocols:**

  While applied in public offices, international agencies, NGO's and private establishments, the Ebola protocols put in place in schools were also proposed to families through social mobilization initiatives, such as the offer of clean water supplies (buckets and chlorine tablets) for hand-washing. In schools, a key role was given to teachers and NVs. The learned practices, particularly hand-washing, were, in general, identified as the most effective in fighting Ebola.

- **Psychosocial support:**

  Linked to the work of case referral and tracing within communities and in schools, teachers, NVs, JNVs and CPCs were (and are) active in providing psychological support to Ebola survivors and orphans in the post-Ebola stage, as well as working at the community level for their acceptance. Again, the use of learned peacebuilding and psychosocial support skills was instrumental.

The application of resources to the fight against Ebola led to a relative divestment in the peacebuilding dimension of the PBEA project, which could be read as a

"The application of resources to the fight against Ebola led to a relative divestment in the peacebuilding role of education. However, the interventions adopted appear to have had highly constructive effects, particularly in increasing the effectiveness of future peacebuilding interventions."

divestment in the peacebuilding role of education. However, the interventions adopted appear to have had highly constructive effects, particularly in increasing the effectiveness of future peacebuilding interventions, not least those that could rely on the volunteers activated through the Ebola awareness activities. This is discussed in the section below.

Effects of the Ebola Crisis on the post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding role of education

As presented above, the strategy to strengthen the peacebuilding role of education, particularly within the PBEA program, was originally set in relation to four streams: Conflict Sensitive Curriculum, Peace Education, Conflict Resolution and Community Development. The re-prioritizing that resulted from the onset of the EVD epidemic led to a divergence from the original plan.

The original centralized biomedical messages failed to engage with the representation and recognition of knowledge at a community level. In particular, it failed to communicate with those referred as "custodians of tradition". The role of international institutions contributed in pushing for a narrative that proved to be, at times, blind to context, local culture, norms and social practices, and was initially at odds with the principle of "do no harm".

"Following the original centralized biomedical messages at the outset of the crisis, there was eventually a strategy reversal, which relied more on community level social mobilization and proved to be effective in curbing the incidence of the EVD epidemic."

There was eventually a strategy reversal, which relied more on community level social mobilization and proved to be effective in curbing the incidence of the EVD epidemic, leading to what was afterwards considered a successful and fast control of the disease. However, some corrections still needed to occur. For example, incidences of volunteers being sent by the government to communities where they hadn't previously collaborated, led to situations where they were received with distrust and put at risk. The PBEA programme sought to prevent this risk by working with community members and sending volunteers to communities where they were known and cared for.

Statistical evidence in Skovgaard (2015) and the interviews conducted suggest that formal education was not a significant source of knowledge or good practice on the prevention of risks related to Ebola. For example, while schools were open from March to June 2014, classes were not used as spaces for Ebola awareness. While teachers were involved through the Ministry of Education in an initiative on health awareness, there seems to be little evidence that they were significantly mobilized in the Ebola response effort. According to the reports collected through key informant interviews and focus group discussions at the county, district and community levels in Grand Bassa and Bong, teacher's interventions were short lived (up to one week) and were not necessarily remembered by the communities.[14] Some measures have been

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14 As a caveat, it is important to make notice that this research did not audit all communities in all counties of Liberia. It is also important to notice that some teachers, at an individual level, did in fact mobilize in their home communities, after moving there upon school closure.

"As the risk awareness fades, formal and informal education should keep the knowledge alive and, preferably extend to preventive actions regarding other highly infectious diseases."

put in place afterwards, including the introduction of Ebola-related content in the school curriculum. As the risk awareness fades, formal and informal education should keep the knowledge alive and, preferably extend to preventive actions regarding other highly infectious diseases. School can, and should be, a critical space for communicating knowledge on Ebola and other preventable diseases and the practices (including WASH) that may support that prevention.

On the positive side, the young people already mobilized in peacebuilding programs through informal education were instrumental in fostering community level knowledge and mobilization against the disease. Effective social mobilization and community development, health and peacebuilding awareness, case referral, tracing and psychosocial support activities were all due to the recalling of NVs, under the Ebola Response phase, to counties and communities they had worked in before, as well as the selection of JNVs to work in their own communities.

Sharing his experience at another community he was working at the time of the outbreak, a school principal in Bong county shared:

> "It was very good to have sent the NVs. They pushed the information forward. They were working very hard and as a team. Every week they had to meet a class or two and talk about Ebola. They would advise and council them."

While the reallocation of PBEA resources to the EVD response effort may have had some useful effects, there are signs that other measures put in place to fight the epidemic may have weakened the capacity of the education system to contribute to the building of peace in Liberia. In particular, the rules of the Ebola Protocols further affected those already hit by Ebola and may have contributed to their social, economic and psychological distress. Practices such as the banning of access (during 21 days) to those that lived in the household of an Ebola patient or took part of a funeral, would not only further the hurt and distress but, failing to promote recognition, might also foster frustration and grievances. By hitting those that had suffered and survived Ebola, and who therefore may have been physically, emotionally and economically debilitated, and at higher risk of exclusion, this practice further marginalised them, going against a logic of redistribution.

"While the reallocation of PBEA resources to the EVD response effort may have had some useful effects, there are signs that other measures put in place to fight the epidemic may have weakened the capacity of the education system to contribute to the building of peace in Liberia."

The Ebola Protocols also mandated a reduction in the number of students per class. Given the current constraints, the feedback received in key informant interviews and school, district and council levels was that such instruction was either not followed by schools or, where it was, demanded the rationing of enrolment in public education. This, in turn, pushed school age children and youth either to private schools (inducing added strain to family economies) or out of school altogether. The condensed school year, and particularly the promotion process, generated some grievances and may still result in added stresses on the system: lost curriculum for those that were promoted (as previously discussed) and the doubling of applicants to WAEC in 2016. These measures and unintended effects should be brought to attention when building future preparedness strategies to Ebola and other highly contagious diseases.

"An analysis of the Liberian State Budget for 2016 shows a clear lack of ownership and, potentially, of public commitment to education."

Beyond the EVD crisis, the PBEA implementation revealed serious structural weaknesses in the Liberian Education System. An analysis of the Liberian State Budget for 2016 shows a clear lack of ownership and, potentially, of public commitment to education. When looking at the Liberian State accounts, it becomes apparent that the country's investment in the education of its people is insufficient. The Government of Liberia's budget for education for the fiscal year 2015/16 was 83.9 Million USD (MoFDP, 2015). For the same fiscal year, the Government recorded a total aid commitment to education of 79.01 Million USD, resourced from international donors. In this way the education effort relies on continual support from international actors, and through their financial commitment they have become the key stakeholders in the entire process. This dependency creates the need for a yearly renegotiation of priorities in the education sector, while those that may arise from the Liberian Executive or its Parliament need still to be vetted by international donors.

In the interviews conducted, this situation was reflected in the concerns about the long-term lack of teachers in the country. For example, a comprehensive recruitment strategy that could also seek to correct the chronic under-representation of female teachers is currently blocked by queries over donor commitments to development aid. In particular, the Liberia Ministry of Education faces the mandate to resolve issues of "ghost teachers", be it due to fraudulent registration in the school rosters or due to high levels of teacher absenteeism. While a relevant concern, the apparent lack of an overall teacher recruitment strategy, including the absence of a certifying B-level teacher training institution in the country, is partly due to healthy criteria for donor aid accountability being turned into a stumbling block for addressing the lack of quality human resources in the country's education system.

Remedying practices put in place by schools include outsourcing through the use of NVs, under the Ministry of Youth and Sports (MoYS) and fully financed by UNICEF, as replacement teachers (in some cases securing an entire higher secondary level). However, this precarious arrangement is not sustainable. As the PBEA project ended in March 2016 (in the midst of the school year), so did the work of these NVs (in some cases shutting down the provision of a higher education level in the school). A principal of a high school in Bong County noted the following on the possibility of losing the NVs:

"They are already part of the regular work. Their absence would cause discontent. Liberia is post-war and post-Ebola: there is still lack of teachers (killed, left abroad, started working in NGOs...). In the absence of teachers, there was a need to hire NVs. The help of the NV is precious. To replace one teacher is a taxing effort. To replace four is very complicated."

There are some silver linings in the situation. The Ebola awareness work conducted by NVs and JNVs, albeit a diversion of resources from the original goals of Peacebuilding, did make important contributions that deserve notice. As referred to above, it took advantage of the previous peacebuilding work conducted in the same communities. It also benefited from tolerance and cultural awareness and conflict mediation skills acquired as part of NVs and JNVs' training as peacebuilders. Finally, it conferred

"While there is strong evidence that the shift of the Liberia PBEA programme towards a focus on the Ebola Crisis was the right decision at the time, there remains a huge amount of work needed in the education system for the sector to fulfil its promise and potential as an engine of peace and sustainable development."

added legitimacy to their peacebuilding work following the end of the Ebola crisis. This work therefore reinforced the recognition and reconciliation dimensions of a peacebuilding education system.

In summary, the training and activation of National Volunteers and Junior Volunteers may be reported as one of the successes of the PBEA project, and an effective mechanism for informal education for peace. Impacts were felt at individual, community and school/education system levels. However, the Liberian Education System still lacks the proper mechanisms to make these reported positive results sustainable. Namely, it lacks:

- A mechanism that streamlines the recruitment into schools of National Volunteers with strong evaluation both as teachers and peacebuilding agents.
- A mechanism that gives sustainability to the volunteering programme itself, as an informal education public structure that fosters active citizenship, social and regional cohesion and Peace.
- A robust teacher recruitment strategy that responds to the clear lack of human resources revealed in the country's statistics, namely providing successful volunteers the possibility of acquiring the B level teacher training certificate.

Finally, while there is strong evidence that the shift of the Liberia PBEA programme towards a focus on the Ebola Crisis was the right decision at the time, there remains a huge amount of work needed in the education system for the sector to fulfil its promise and potential as an engine of peace and sustainable development.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Education, Peacebuilding and the Ebola Crisis: Critical Reflections

Drawing together the findings of this short research project, we now want to reflect on the broader relationship between education, health and peacebuilding and the lessons we might draw from this analysis.

Firstly, what we can evidence is that the education system remains under-prioritised and riddled with inequalities across the economic, political and cultural domains. Issues of redistribution are paramount – and while recognised have not been adequately addressed. Girls, youth, urban-rural divides, and ethnic marginalisation traverse the system and require concerted effort to overcome. Similarly, these issues extend into the domains of recognition and representation, with the most marginalised communities feeling subject to misrecognition and discrimination and having little faith and say in the decisions that affect them, from school management to national government. In this sense, the process of national healing and reconciliation that began in the wake of the end of the civil war has failed to sufficiently reintegrate and reconcile the different constituencies that make up the Liberian nation state. As a result, there is an evident trust gap between citizens and the state that manifests itself in a general lack of faith in the government to tend to the basic needs of the people it represents. The education system – as a key social service, can be a powerful mechanism to bring people together, build national identity, promote reconciliation and provide people with hope for the future – but to realise this role requires political will and the resources to match it.
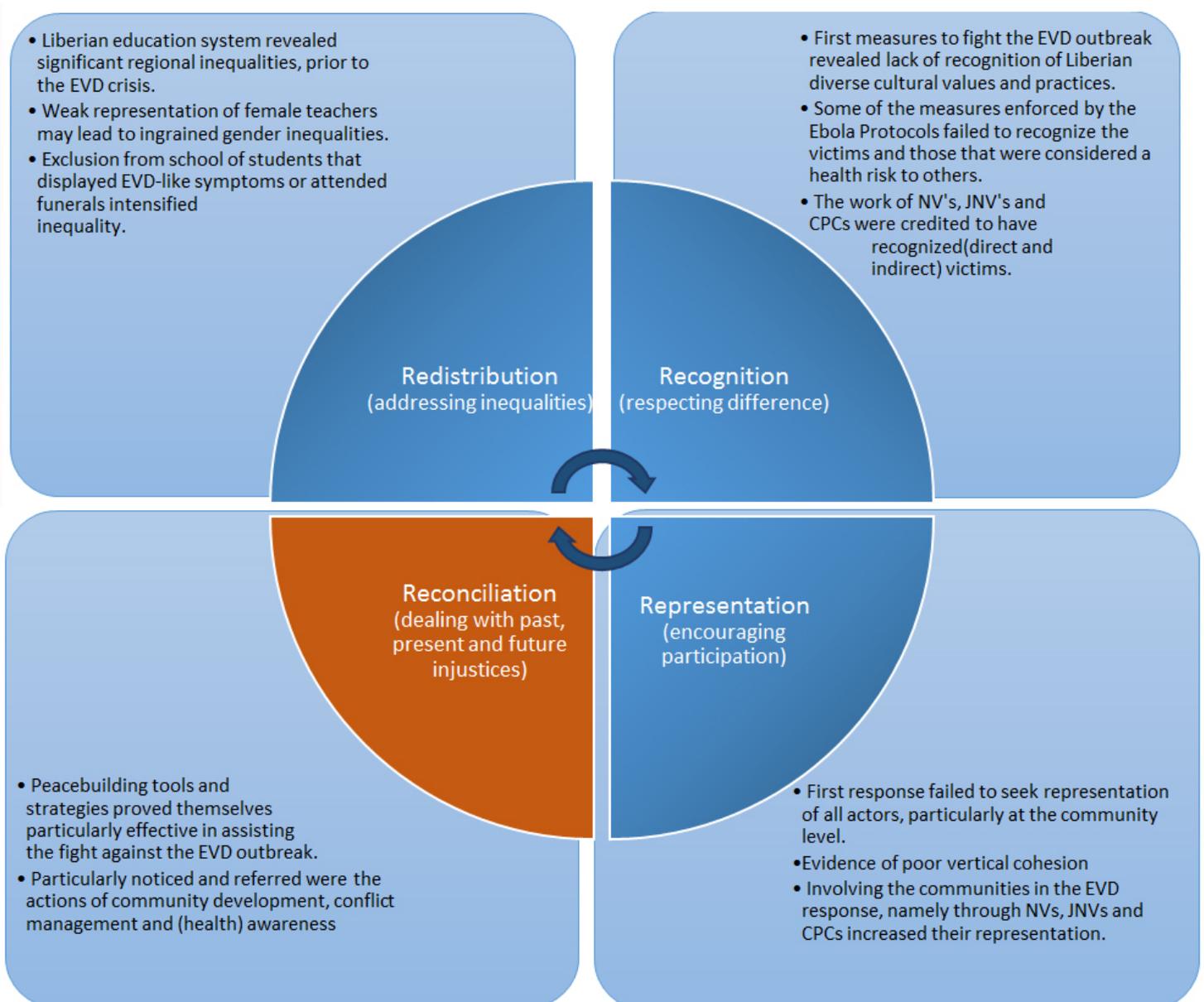
Secondly, failure to prioritise addressing the multiple dimensions of inequality in the education system in Liberia is a result of the over-emphasis on the part of the national and international peacebuilding community on security, democratic elections, and economic reforms at the expense of prioritising the basic needs of the citizens of Liberia to access quality basic health and education services.

Thirdly, when the Ebola outbreak emerged, the health system was woefully inadequate to address the challenges that the disease brought. Similarly, the education system, which might have acted as a national preventative factor in combatting the outbreak, became instead a risk factor, with poor hygiene and sanitation and lack of preparedness evident in the delayed response by the sector to the challenges that Ebola brought. There is evidence that Ebola spread more strongly in contexts of weak public services provision, be they remote rural areas or urban slums. The drivers of these weaknesses in public provision must, therefore, be objects of attention.

Fourthly, and linked to the earlier points, the Ebola crisis revealed a lack of governance mechanisms in place in both the health and education systems to deal adequately with the crisis, which reflects broader systemic governance issues in Liberia. The corrective actions put in place in response to the crisis, at the level of policy coordination, need still to prove their sustainability. Responses in both sectors

failed to connect health warnings and advice with local cultural and traditional practices, serving instead to stigmatise communities and traditional practices, which served to further widen the gap between citizens and the state. The EVD outbreak evidences, therefore, the intrinsic relations between biological hazards (such as Ebola) and social ones (such as conflict), and the need for a systemic and coordinated approach in addressing them. This means that peacebuilding, health and education actors need to cooperate to effectively prevent and address future outbreaks in fragile settings such as Liberia.

Figure 10.

- Liberian education system revealed significant regional inequalities, prior to the EVD crisis.
- Weak representation of female teachers may lead to ingrained gender inequalities.
- Exclusion from school of students that displayed EVD-like symptoms or attended funerals intensified inequality.

- First measures to fight the EVD outbreak revealed lack of recognition of Liberian diverse cultural values and practices.
- Some of the measures enforced by the Ebola Protocols failed to recognize the victims and those that were considered a health risk to others.
- The work of NV's, JNV's and CPCs were credited to have recognized (direct and indirect) victims.

Redistribution (addressing inequalities)

Recognition (respecting difference)

Reconciliation (dealing with past, present and future injustices)

Representation (encouraging participation)

- Peacebuilding tools and strategies proved themselves particularly effective in assisting the fight against the EVD outbreak.
- Particularly noticed and referred were the actions of community development, conflict management and (health) awareness

- First response failed to seek representation of all actors, particularly at the community level.
- Evidence of poor vertical cohesion
- Involving the communities in the EVD response, namely through NVs, JNVs and CPCs increased their representation.

Fifthly, and much more positively, there appears to have been a sharp learning process which took place in the midst of the crisis to address some of these misconceptions and challenges, with more bottom-up community processes emerging as key catalyst to redressing the effects of the outbreak and containing it. This revealed a capacity of mobilization at a community level that enabled a relatively quick response, after the strategy deployed was revised. The revised strategy, relying more on the community leaders and coordinating with the "custodians of tradition" achieved effective results. Learnings from the Ebola crisis suggest, therefore, that further integration is needed between health and sanitation practices that prevent new contagions and social and communitarian practices that assure symbolic, spiritual and psychological but also economic and social cohesion needs are met.

Sixthly, the role of the National Volunteers, looks now from the evidence presented to have been highly useful, which had and has multiple potential added value for the education system and for the broader peacebuilding process. Drawing upon youth as a resource for the future, rather than a security risk – as is so often the case in many post-conflict societies, the National and Junior Volunteers seemed to have played a really important role in raising awareness about the disease, providing community guidance and building trust between communities and the state. Harnessing the commitment and energy of young people to the public good, in raising awareness about the disease, providing community guidance and building trust between communities and the state. Harnessing the commitment and energy of young people to the public good, must surely be a strategy worth repeating, not least in a country where so many youth are marginalised.

Seventhly, the crisis also revealed the virtues of coordinated action between different government bodies. In the context of the PBEA conversion into the Ebola response effort, a strong coordination was revealed between the MoHSW, the MoE, the MIA-PBO, the MoYS and, to a lesser extent, the MoGD.

The quick and effective reactions to the two outbreaks that happened after Liberia was considered "Ebola free" suggest that there were important lessons learned that were acted upon. A higher awareness of the importance of hygiene and of trusting health advice from public actors appears to have, indeed, resulted from this crisis. However, it is clear that the motivation for hygiene is mostly Ebola related. The reduction of the perceived risk of new Ebola outbreaks, according to the stakeholders, education actors and communities interviewed has already led to relaxation of risk preventing practices, some of which are basic WASH that can lead to the prevention of other diseases. It is, therefore advisable that, beyond (biological) risk prevention, a better understanding of Ebola as a disease and of how it relates to social and communitarian practices becomes an object of (contextualized) formal and informal education.

Recommendations

Building on these learnings, some steps should be put in place:

- It wasn't only the health system that revealed weaknesses. Much still needs to be done in the education sector. In particular, Liberia needs to take a stronger ownership of the education of its population. Among the policies the Government of Liberia needs to take a lead and invest on is the provision of long term training for teachers and the establishment of a recruitment process that enables the entrance to the MoE's teaching staff of those that, enrolled as National Volunteers in education, show motivation and quality work (including creating the opportunities for adequate pedagogical training).

- The learnings on hygiene need to be reinforced, taking the link to health beyond Ebola prevention. A stronger coordination with the health service structures is advised. Schools also need to embody this learning by having proper Water and Sanitation facilities. The education system, through curriculum, formal and informal teaching spaces needs to provide better health information, not just on Ebola but in other diseases.

- The Ebola related health education should integrate, therefore, two added relevant dimensions: the recognition of the diverse communitarian and social practices, such as burial rituals, promoting their adaptation (instead of their substitution) towards health hazards prevention; maintain the awareness of Ebola as a present health risk, together with other preventable health hazards, such as cholera.

- The process of Education Transformation, including curriculum revision and the development of a Civic Education curriculum with Human Rights, Citizenship and Peacebuilding concepts cannot be suspended. Health awareness and citizenship are not incompatible, much to the contrary.

- The crisis revealed, on the one hand how poor and slow communication from the Government to the communities intensified distrust, and weakened both vertical and social cohesion, while, on the other hand it also revealed the virtues and future need for quick and effective information flows towards the communities. Decentralizing and giving authority to local administrations can have a positive impact, a far better impact than deciding everything centrally.

- This, however, requires a stronger, unbroken line of communication between all levels. Within the education system, the information needs to properly flow between Students, Parents and Teachers to and through the School Principals, the District Education Officers, the County Education Officers and the Ministry of Education Headquarters, both top-down and bottom-up. The strengthening of Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning mechanisms may assist in this.

- The channels of informal education, such as the radio and youth volunteering, need to be kept and strengthened. In particular, the volunteering programme, as an informal education strategy of peacebuilding and citizen formation, needs to be developed and strengthened.

- Sustain the benefits of the volunteering programmes (NVs, JNVs and CPCs), streamlining integration of those teaching volunteers of proven quality and institutionalizing those programmes, eventually within a Liberian Youth Volunteer Service, as an effective tool of informal civic youth education.

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Appendix 1: The Relationship between Education and Conflict

While there is a wide consensus on the detrimental effects of conflicts on the provision of education during conflict and also during the stages of peacebuilding and reconstruction, research has also uncovered other linkages, namely on the motivation by children, youth and their families to seek education. The effects of conflict on education, as reviewed below, are therefore not only direct, affecting the education systems through school destruction or loss of teachers to fatalities and forced displacement, but also indirect, by depriving families of income earners, resources and incentives to send their children and young ones to school, and long term effects on economic and social development. Research has also raised the awareness of a risk that cannot be overlooked: that education may itself be among the causes of violence and conflict, through the management of resources, though governance, through curriculum and through pedagogy and school climate. Some of this research is briefly reviewed below.

Effects of Conflict on Education

A first effect of conflict is, evidently, is its direct effects on children. Novelli and Lopes Cardozo (2008), referring to research conducted by Seitz (2004), K. Tomlinson and P. Benefield (2005), Bush and Saltarelli (2000) or Paulson and Rappleye (2007) illustrate these impacts: 6 million children seriously injured or disabled, 2 million children that lost their lives (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000, p. 8; Paulson and Rappleye, 2007, p. 342; Seitz, 2004, p. 21); half of the 104 million out-of-school children living in conflict affected regions (Tomlinson and Benefield, 2005, p. 1).

For the children that live though and survive a conflict, many are the channels through which it hinders the access to and the quality of education they can aspire to receive. Novelli and Lopes Cardozo (2008), on their review of critical directions of research on conflict and education start by highlighting how during and after conflict military spending often crowds-out expenditure in public services, such as education. But is is not only an issue of public expenditure priorities. The evidence of disruption of the provision of education is clear and striking: schools destroyed, either accidently or for political reasons, or occupied by armed actors (Seitz, 2004), access to school strongly hindered or simply blocked, migration or targeting of teachers, among others (Lai and Thyne, 2007 and Ichino and Winter-Ebmer, 2004, as referred by de Groot and Goksel, 2011). Carlton-Ford and Boop (2010), referring to Cranna (1994) highlight that war also disrupts education institutions themselves resulting in higher illiteracy.

However, the impacts of conflict, don't rest solely on provision. Conflict significantly impacts the willingness of families to send their children and youth to school. Davies (2003), reviewed by Novelli and Lopes Cardozo (2008), found that the danger to get to school, and the family's economic situation act as obstacles to education. Arrazola and De Hevia (2006) found that the increased difficulty in accessing education facilities, the reduction in financial assets to assist in the education effort and the need for children to contribute to the family's income through labour where also key channels that acted as obstacles and led to a lower education attainment. Seitz (2004) also reported that the loss of relatives, physical violence, rape or need to leave home directly affected children and prevented them attending school.

Chamarbagwala and Morán (2011), looking at Mayan communities in Guatemala highlighted too some of those channels. They added that decreased expectations of returns to education and loss of property (namely due to displacement) are also channels through which conflict induces a reduction in the likelihood of a child to progress in education. Justino and Verwimp (2006) suggested an even darker side to the promise of increases in human capital acquired through education. In their analysis of the Rwandan conflict, they found that higher education turned a person and her household into targets of violence. In practice higher education became a liability rather than an asset, destroying the perception of education as a route to economic benefit.

Conflict, does not affect education alone. Impacts on the provision of health services and the overall occurrence of added stresses, leading to lower child health also affect school attendance, inducing lower education attainments, as found by Verwimp et al. (2010) and Alderman et al. (2006). Starting from the established link between health and school results (namely grade completion, repetition and age of enrolment), they found negative impacts of conflict on access to food and drops in nutritional status, bringing down the efficacy of study. These, in turn, impacted expected returns of education and, as established in other studies already reviewed here, reduced education demand as future employment possibilities.

Other detrimental effects of conflict on education are forced displacement (Chamarbagwala and Morán, 2011, Raeymaekers, 2011 and SWAY, 2006) and the recruitment of school aged minors by the contending forces, as demonstrated by Blattman and Annan (2010).

Compounded together, impacts on the provision education and on the willingness of families to have their children and youth attend school lead to an inescapable reduction in education attainment. Carlton-Ford and Boop (2010) referring to FitzGerald et al. (2001) and Stewart et al. (2001) point out that school enrolments either decrease or increase less in countries afflicted by conflict than in others. Kondylis (2010) in her review, also brings about the findings of Blattman and Annan (2010) and Shemyakina (2011) in Uganda and Tajiskistan, suggesting the same effects. Akresh and de Walque (2008) find similar results from the genocide in Rwanda and Swee (2009) finds similar results in Bosnia. Finally, similar results have been found in Timor Leste by Justino et al. (2013). Noticeable also is the finding of Carlton-Ford and Boop (2010): that not only was literacy lower in most conflict afflicted countries before the conflict, it decreased faster during civil wars, with no clear evidence of recovery after the conflict.

If ever in doubt, evidence makes it clear that the experience of conflict hinders education not only by seriously weakening the education system but also by destroying resources, family support structures and incentives to have children and youth progress. Particularly relevant to this research is the evidence that conflict also weakens the health systems and children and youth's health, increasing their vulnerability to a biological emergency such as the Ebola crisis.

One cannot, however, overlook the risks that education systems and practices can themselves be a catalyst to violence and conflict. Redressing these negative effects can, and should, be part of the construction of peace, in conflict affected countries. The next section reviews some of the evidence.

Effects of Education on Conflict

Rodriguez and Sanchez (2009) bring about a relevant concern to our analysis: there is a dual link between the impact of conflict on education and the engagement of school drop-outs in the conflict itself. This, however, is but an example that suggests an active contribution of education systems on the likelihood of conflict. Novelli and Lopes Cardozo (2008) review recent research noting how education can, in fact, contribute to promote conflict (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000; Harber, 2004; (Davies, 2006, 2005, 2003) Davies, 2006, 2005, 2003; Smith, 2005). In line with Rodriguez and Sanchez (2009), they highlight how uneven access and provision of education can create or preserve privilege (documented to be historically one of the causes of the Sierra Leone conflict by Novelli and Higgins 2016). Referring UNDP (2005, p, 159), Novelli and Lopes Cardozo (2008) note how, in Sierra Leone, school exclusion as a result of poverty contributed to young people joining the rebel armies. They also review occurrences in which education was used as a weapon of cultural repression, or, through the production or doctoring of textbooks, education promoted intolerance. They review evidence from

Bush and Saltarelli (2000) on other processes through which an education system can enact violence: denial of education as a weapon of war; manipulation of history for political purpose; the manipulation of textbooks; the conveying of images asserting superiority of one group over another and segregated education. Referring to Davies' 'roots of conflict' (Davies, 2005, pp. 359–361) they highlight how education systems can "(re)produce economic and class relations through exclusion of (already) marginalised groups", "reproduce existing violent and 'masculine' gender relationships" and "transmit or reinforce certain 'essentialist' identities, based on ethnicity, religion, tribalism and nationalism" (Novelli and Lopes Cardozo, 2008, pp. 478).

On the other hand, Novelli and Lopes Cardozo (2008) also review how education can have a conflict dampening impact: by promoting educational opportunity; by promoting of linguistic tolerance and the nurturing of ethnic tolerance; or by 'disarming' the teaching of history (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000, p. 7). Recent work by Novelli and Smith (2011) and Novelli et al. (2015) has highlighted how education system governance, policy, and practice can promote peace and sustainable development through ensuring equitable distribution of resources (Redistribution), equitable inclusion of all groups in the education systems (Recognition), ensuring adequate participation in education decision-making, governance and management (Representation), and drawing on the education system to promote reconciliation between and within communities (Reconciliation) . This 4 R approach, has been developed by the UNICEF PBEA research consortium led by the Universities of Amsterdam, Sussex and Ulster and guides this research in Liberia. More broadly, The Peacebuilding, Education and Advocacy programme (PBEA) seeks to be an active contributor to maximising education's role in promoting peace and sustainable development.

Appendix 2: Key Informants

PBEA / EVD Response Partners	At County / Community Level
• Ministry of Education (MoE) • Ministry of Internal Affairs – Peacebuilding Office (MIA-PBO) • Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (MoHSW) • Ministry of Youth and Sports (MoYS) • Ministry of Gender and Development (MoGD) • UNICEF Liberia (PBEA Project) • International Rescue Committee • African Development Corps • Right to Play	• National Volunteers • Youth National Volunteers • School Principals, Vice-principals • PTA representative in St. John High School in Grand Bassa county • DEO and CEO (Bong) • District health workers • Peacebuilding Community Committees (Grand Bassa) • Ebola survivors in Banjor and West Point, Monrovia

The Research Consortium on Education and Peacebuilding

Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research (AISSR), University of Amsterdam

The AISSR Programme Group Governance and Inclusive Development (http://aissr.uva.nl/programmegroups/item/governance-and-inclusive-development.html) consists of an interdisciplinary team of researchers focusing on issues relating to global and local issues of governance and development. The Research Cluster Governance of Education, Development and Social Justice focuses on multilevel politics of education and development, with a specific focus on processes of peacebuilding in relation to socio-economic, political and cultural (in)justices. The research group since 2006 has maintained a particular research focus on education, conflict and peacebuilding, as part of its co-funded 'IS Academie' research project with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Centre for International Education, University of Sussex

The Centre for International Education (CIE) (www.sussex.ac.uk/education/cie) was founded in 1989 on the premise that education is a basic human right that lies at the heart of development processes aimed at social justice, equity, social and civic participation, improved wellbeing, health, economic growth and poverty reduction. It is recognised as one of the premiere research centres working on education and international development in Europe. The Centre has also secured a prestigious UK ESRC/DFID grant to carry out research on the Role of Teachers in Peacebuilding in Conflict Affected Contexts, which aligns directly with the research strategy of the PBEA programme and will form part of the broader research partnership.

UNESCO Centre at Ulster University

Established in 2002 the UNESCO Centre (www.unescocentre.ulster.ac.uk) at Ulster University provides specialist expertise in education, conflict and international development. It builds on a strong track record of research and policy analysis related to education and conflict in Northern Ireland. Over the past ten years the UNESCO Centre has increasingly used this expertise in international development contexts, working with DFID, GiZ, Norad, Save the Children, UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank, providing research on education and social cohesion, the role of education in reconciliation and analysis of aid to education in fragile and conflict affected situations.

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