Instructions for Students

Based on the information provided in this packet and your organizational assignment, work within your group to design a third party intervention to begin to address the conflict in Voinjama, Liberia.

Your group should designate a note taker and a spokesperson or spokespersons. After you complete the task of designing your organization's intervention strategy your spokesperson(s) will present your group's plans to the other organizations preparing intervention strategies.

Third Party Intervention

Your organization has made a decision to offer its services to facilitate the transformation and resolution of the conflict that erupted in Voinjama in February 2010 and whose lingering effects continue to be visible despite passage of time. Your task is to develop an intervention strategy. As your organization designs this intervention strategy, please consider the following questions:

- What kinds of interventions is your group best able to offer to the community in Voinjama?

- Does the conflict analysis summary give you sufficient information to begin designing your intervention? If not, what additional information would you need to gather prior to intervening? Who else in the town would you need to talk to?

- How would you determine what outcomes parties want out of the intervention? An apology? A decision? An agreement? An opportunity to tell their story? A change in the town/county's political and economic system? Something else?

- Given what you know about the conflict in Voinjama (parties' interests, core grievances, root causes) which parts of the problem would your organization be able to take on?

- Which parts of the conflict will your organization not be able to address through your intervention? What are the limitations of the type of intervention that your group can offer?

- Which actors/social groups in Voinjama would your organization work with in implementing your intervention?

Profile of Participating Organizations

Group 1: International Service Corps (ISC)

The ISC is a cooperative agency developed by the governments of the European Union and the United States. The stated mission of the agency is to to help promote a better understanding between the citizens of a globalized world through providing assistance for projects in developing countries. To this end, the agency has sent over 200,000 ISC volunteers to host countries across the globe. Today there are more than nine thousand ICS volunteers working in the field providing assistance on projects ranging from education to HIV/AIDS prevention, from agriculture to business. ISC volunteers must have completed an undergraduate degree. They serve for a two-year term and live and work in local communities, forging close ties with the people.

ISC volunteers have served in Liberia since 2008, following the end of the two civil wars. There are 20 ISC volunteers currently working in Liberia. These individuals have previous ISC service experience and have received special training to enable them to work in post-conflict environments. Programs currently operating in Liberia include: education (teaching English, math, and science in high schools and mentoring prospective high school teachers) and HIV/AIDS prevention (providing training for health care professionals).

Group 2: Quest For Understanding, Solidarity, and Transformation (QUEST)

QUEST is one of the largest and most prominent conflict resolution and peacebuilding NGOs in the world. Founded in 1985, QUEST's mission is to find culturally appropriate ways to create sustainable conflict transformation around the world. The organization seeks to accomplish these goals through a variety of programs including media (TV, radio, film) production, theater, sports training and coaching and, of course, mediation and facilitation. QUEST currently employs more than 500 people in countries throughout Africa, Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and North America.

QUEST has been working in Liberia since 1997, continuing to provide a variety of programs through periods of both violence and relative peace. Through its primary tools of media and community outreach, QUEST Liberia helps identify difficult issues and controversies as they emerge, and then facilitates community-level dialogues and assist communities in devising constructive solutions with the goal of reducing tensions. The central focus of these activities is to consolidate peace in Liberia through a strong foundation of community-level engagement and media coverage of these local efforts.

QUEST programs focus on four priority thematic areas: Accountability and Transparency, Leadership, Youth Engagement, and Identity/Ethnicity. All of QUEST's radio programs and outreach activities address one of these themes strengthening the overall results through this initiative coordination.

Group 3: Interfaith League of Lofa County (ILLC)

Established in the post-war period by local religious leaders and ordinary people of faith, ILLC is an ecumenical civic organization dedicated to grassroots interfaith initiatives in local communities in Lofa County. Its leaders and members work on a volunteer basis, and the organization has no outside source of income or resources. ILLC operations depend solely on the donations of time, effort, and resources provided by its members. In addition to hosting dialogues and public forums on matters of faith and pressing local issues, the ILLC has also worked to foster partnerships among denominations (including Muslims and Christians from various churches), and to implement educational and developmental projects. Some of these volunteer initiatives have included collecting books for local schools, assisting elderly residents in completing household repairs, and working together to ensure proper water sanitation. Through such cooperative efforts the League hopes to further solidify peaceful relations among the county's different faith groups, improve the quality of life in Lofa County, and to promote peaceful resolution of tensions that arise in the community.

Group 4: National Commission on Human Rights and Reconciliation of the Liberian Government (NCHRR)

The Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was created after the end of the civil war to promote national peace, security, unity and reconciliation The National Commission on Human Rights and Reconciliation is a bureau of the Liberian government, established on the recommendation of the TRC. The NCHRR's mandate is to both monitor and take action related to potential human rights violations in the country, and to promote and implement other recommendations of the TRC. It is, therefore, the branch of the Liberian government most explicitly responsible for carrying out the difficult task of reconciliation in the post-civil war environment. In the area of human rights, the NCHRR has the authority to investigate reported human rights violations and refer them to proper judicial channels. In the area of reconciliation, the Commission's mandate is quite broad, allowing it leeway in designing and implementing programs as long as they share the fundamental aim of promoting reconciliation among the Liberian people. The executive branch of the Liberian government appoints the agency's commissioners.

Conflict Assessment Report: Clashes in Voinjama, Liberia

In February 2010, in the small town of Konia, Lofa County, a 20-year old young woman, Korpo Kamara went missing. Within days of her disappearance her body was discovered. Evidence found on the scene indicated that she was murdered. Different versions of why she died and who had killed her began swirling within the community. These stories about her murder quickly turned into rumors that spread like wildfire across Lofa County thanks to the ubiquitous mobile phones.

That winter, the only radio station that normally operates in Lofa County, was off the air due to technical problems. In this region of Liberia, radio is the main source of news because of the lack of access to television and because high levels of illiteracy make newspapers of little value to most people. With the radio station not on the air, it was hard to counteract the fast-spreading rumors.

The rumors circulating about the young woman's death heightened communal tensions in Lofa County. On February 26, 2010 violent clashes erupted in the town of Voinjama, the capital of Lofa and the largest town in the county. Four people died in the clashes, many were wounded and there was significant property damage. The clashes ended only after the intervention of United Nations Peacekeeping troops and Liberian police special forces.

Shortly after the clashes an independent team arrived in Voinjama to conduct a conflict assessment. The assessment team found a complex set of grievances and communal tensions in the area, some emerging out of long-term relationships between social groups, others reflecting the consequence of 14 years of civil war and the economic, social and political devastation left in its wake.

The conflict assessment team conducted interviews with a broad spectrum of town residents, including religious leaders, tribal elders, local government officials, police officers, school teachers, youth leaders, market women, community activists, and UN peacekeepers. The questions the assessment team asked aimed at eliciting information about the identity of parties to the conflict, their interests and grievances. The questions also aimed at identifying the trigger events that contributed to the escalation of the February conflict as well as the root causes of the conflict.

The assessment team found that depending on the identity of the interviewee, the opinions about these factors among members of the Voinjama community differed. The team found that there were four distinct interpretations of the conflict.

1. The conflict was between religious communities and specifically between the Christian and the Muslim community.

2. The conflict was between two main ethnic groups in Voinjama, the Mandingo and the Loma.

3. The conflict was between groups who felt marginalized both politically and economically within the community and those who held most levers of economic and political power.

4. The conflict was the result of the large numbers of frustrated youth, many of them former civil war combatants, who are largely unemployed and have not been able to effectively adjust to the post-conflict period.

 The assessment team concluded that this diversity of views reflected the complexity of the conflict and would have to be incorporated into planning of future intervention strategies aimed at mitigating and resolving conflicts within this community.

Key Findings

Parties to the conflict

Youth, Tribal Elders, Religious Leaders, Local Government, Mandingo and Loma communities, Christian and Muslim communities.

Parties' Interests

Youth: Access to jobs, education, personal and community peace and security.

Mandingo: Access to justice, strong representation in local government, equal opportunities in access to economic resources and employment, government protection against violence, recognition as equal citizens.

Loma: Access to justice, strong representation in local government, access to employment opportunities, protection from government interference in community affairs, preservation of tradition.

Christians/Muslims: respect for and security of their religious community

All Parties: access to land, jobs, freedom of religion and security to worship, better infrastructure.

Parties' Grievances

Youth: Lack of employment and educational opportunities, inability to find their place in post-conflict Liberian society.

Elders: persistent violence in the community, lack of respect among the young for traditions and customs.

Mandingo: lack of political representation for the Mandingo in local government, unequal access to political and economic resources, discrimination in access to land, unfairly heavy tax burden when compared to the Loma community, lack of acceptance as true Liberians within the community.

Loma: discrimination in access to land, exploitation by the Mandingo who are not seen as real citizens of Liberia, lack of fair access to employment opportunities
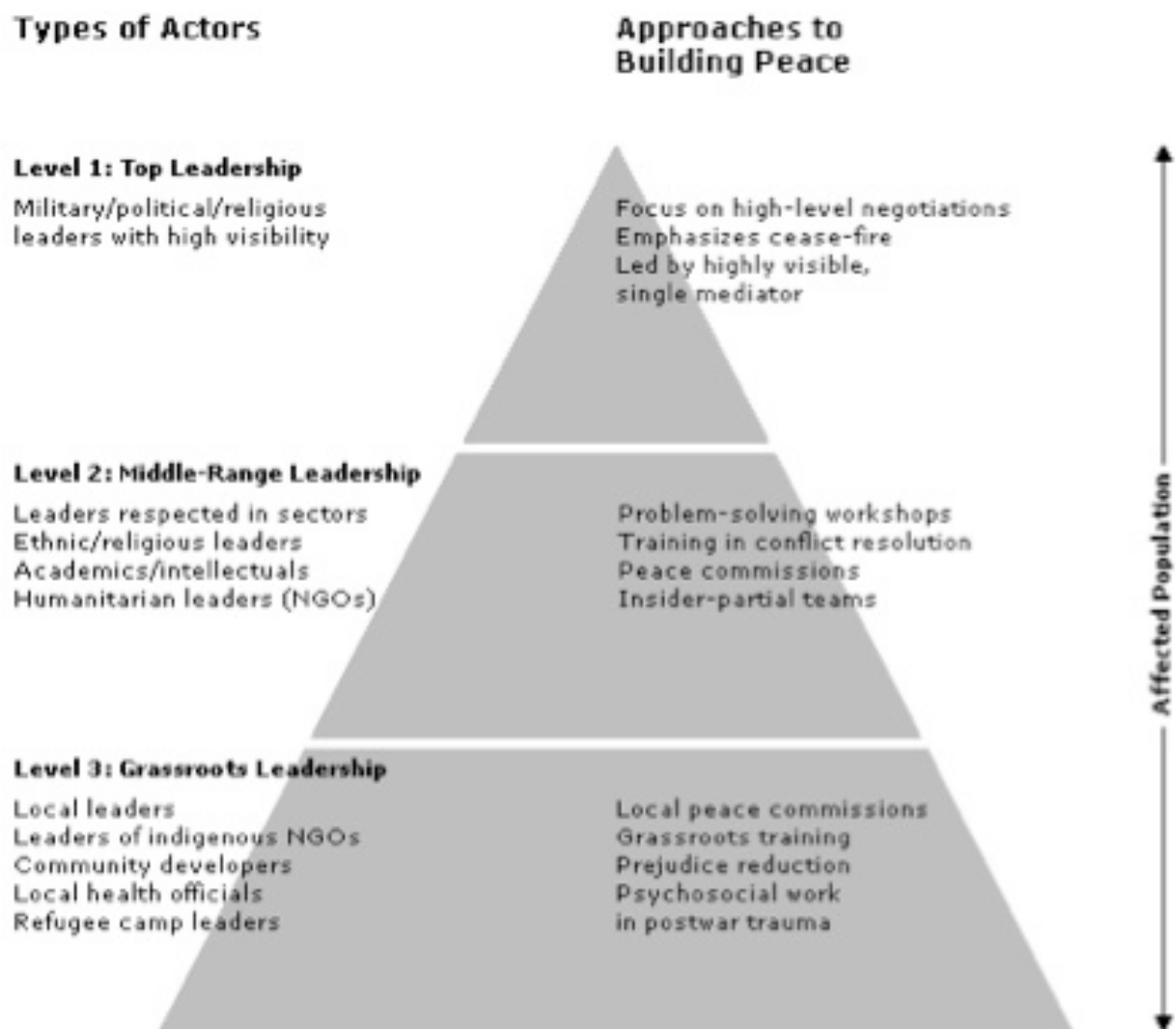
Christians/Muslims: Lack of respect by other religious communities

Trigger Events

Young woman's death, technical difficulties at the radio station, burning of churches/ mosques.

Root Causes of the Conflict

Lack of employment opportunities, lack of adequate infrastructure which hampers farmers' access to market, lack of educational opportunities, frustration with slow pace of progress with post-conflict reconstruction, historical animosity between the Loma and the Mandingo related to perceived unfair access to economic resources and political authority, lack of trust among different communities, lack of effective and transparent government, competing land ownership claims.

Types of Actors

Approaches to Building Peace

Level 1: Top Leadership

Military/political/religious leaders with high visibility

Focus on high-level negotiations
Emphasizes cease-fire
Led by highly visible,
single mediator

Level 2: Middle-Range Leadership

Leaders respected in sectors
Ethnic/religious leaders
Academics/intellectuals
Humanitarian leaders (NGOs)

Problem-solving workshops
Training in conflict resolution
Peace commissions
Insider-partial teams

Level 3: Grassroots Leadership

Local leaders
Leaders of indigenous NGOs
Community developers
Local health officials
Refugee camp leaders

Local peace commissions
Grassroots training
Prejudice reduction
Psychosocial work
in postwar trauma

Affected Population

Derived from John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997), 39.

About the Project

This Experiential Learning Activity (ELA) has been developed as part of the Undergraduate Experiential Learning Project (UELP), U.S. Department of Education, Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE)-funded initiative that aims to enhance Conflict Analysis and Resolution (CAR) pedagogy in order to improve undergraduate learning.

The CAR field is uniquely positioned to deliver educational experiences that help students make the crucial link between abstract theories and practical application through learning activities such as: conflict mapping, intervention design, role plays, and simulations. The ELAs developed as part of the UELP advance specific learning outcomes, including critical thinking, problem solving, and perspective taking.

Each ELA produced through the UELP has been designed either to augment existing course curricula or to be used as a stand-alone activity. Instructors are encouraged to adapt activities to meet the needs of their specific learning environments, including class size and course objectives.

All UELP project materials are available for public use and may be reproduced without permission. Please ensure that all printed materials display both the FIPSE and George Mason University logos as well as the project URL (http://scar.gmu.edu/experientiallearningproject/home).

As your partners in advancing undergraduate education, we are committed to improving the quality of the learning experience and encourage all feedback and recommendations to support that commitment. Additionally, we welcome stories that highlight moments of student insight that arise from participation in these activities. If you are interested in supporting the collection of data for ongoing research, please contact us through our webpage. ◼

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