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# Concerns of the International NGO Community Currently Working in Liberia

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## Remarks prepared by the Monitoring & Steering Group

### **The First Review of Liberia's Results Focused Transitional Framework (RFTF)**

*Co-Sponsored by:*  
The National Transitional Government of Liberia &  
The World Bank

World Bank Headquarters  
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The Monitoring & Steering Group (MSG)  
The MSG is a consortium of 35 INGOs currently at work in Liberia

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# Concerns of the International NGO Community

Address given by Nicky Smith, The IRC Liberia Country Director, on behalf of the MSG

## Introduction

On behalf of the International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) currently working in Liberia, I would like to thank the National Transitional Government of Liberia, the United Nations Mission in Liberia and the World Bank for the invitation to this forum.

After 14 years of devastating civil war in which all sides appear to have been guilty of committing atrocities against civilians—atrocities that include forced conscription, the widespread use of child combatants, rape and sexual violence, looting and banditry—Liberia appears to have turned the corner and the population is struggling to rebuild their country. International NGOs welcome both the Results Focused Transitional Framework and this ongoing review process. We hope that this review will identify areas in which significant progress has been made in Liberia, as well as highlight a number of areas that must be improved to ensure a successful and sustainable transition from near decades of violent conflict.

The IRC is honored to have been selected by the Monitoring & Steering Group (MSG), a consortium of more than thirty international NGOs currently at work in Liberia, to voice its concerns in this distinguished forum. Some members of this consortium are relatively new in country, whilst others have been operational in Liberia for more than a decade. Some of these members focus on providing emergency relief assistance and were active at the peak of the conflict; whilst others are more developmentally oriented and concentrate on community empowerment and capacity building. To date, members of the MSG are currently providing assistance to more than 2.2 million people across Liberia, have contributed more than \$85 million to the recovery process and provide employment to more than 3,800 Liberian nationals. While these members maintain their independence and impartiality, they also work in partnership with the United Nations as well as local NGOs. A recent review identified more than 140 working partnerships with local Liberian NGOs. One thing instantly recognizable: as Liberia makes the transition from relief to development, international NGOs continue to play a critical role in providing humanitarian relief as well as supporting the reconstruction efforts.

On behalf of the International NGOs in Liberia, I would like to once again thank the forum for the opportunity to provide feedback. A tremendous amount of work has been done in a remarkably short period of time. We have seen that in the review document. There is a sense of optimism for the future, but wisdom and experience dictate that there are also many challenges and potential pitfalls on the horizon. To make effective use of our brief time today, I don't want to talk about the successes of the process, but will focus rather on constructive ways to improve the impact of the work. I will begin by highlighting a number of ways that the process itself should be improved, and then identify a number of deficiencies regarding the reality of its implementation.

## Problems with the Process

The RFTF, by prioritizing and establishing a set of common results with benchmarks and indicators, is an effective, comprehensive and pioneering tool to focus reconstruction efforts. With any pioneering or groundbreaking technique, however, the process itself requires a number of adjustments in order to close the gaps or overcome certain obstacles to achieving the desired targets.

### **Communication**

First, the initial six months have revealed that to tighten the coordination, accuracy and impact of this Liberian-led process, communication must be greatly improved. This will be accomplished by holding the working groups more accountable to the process and creating an atmosphere whereby the international NGOs have a greater sense of ownership and a clearer understanding of the framework's methodology.

### **Concurrent Timelines**

Second, although the RFTF is limited to a two-year time period, there must be a way to develop concurrently longer-term strategies with realistic timelines and funding periods. This will facilitate a smooth transition to the next phase of reconstruction in the period following the elections in October 2005 and the conclusion of the RFTF.

### **Inaccurate Reporting**

My colleagues have also expressed the concern that due to poor understanding, constrained coordination and limited information flow, the activities reported in the RFTF review do not fully or accurately document the actual work done in country during the past six months.

### **Principles versus Pragmatism**

On a daily basis, international NGOs must carefully balance principles with pragmatism. Given the changing context of peacekeeping—the blurring of lines between military and humanitarian initiatives, the increasing politicization of aid and the realities of the integrated mission—this is even more of a reality. Appropriately, pragmatism is often given the upper hand; but in some circumstances, principles cannot be compromised. Many within the international NGO community believe that the tight two-year deadline to reconstruction and the overwhelming laundry list of “things to do” associated with the RFTF have necessitated that important steadfast principles be compromised.

## Problems with Implementation

Aside from the gaps within the process, there are a number of deficiencies made manifest by the reality of implementing the RFTF.

### **Root Causes**

The deployment of UN peacekeepers has brought about marked improvements in the human rights situation; however, the experience in Sierra Leone has taught us that troop deployment, the disarmament of combatants and successful elections will not be enough. It is critical to look at the deep-seated issues that gave rise to the conflict: endemic corruption, ineffective

rule of law, poverty and the inequitable distribution of resources. The goal-oriented process of the RFTF does not do enough to tackle these root causes. We must not assume a band-aid approach. The international community must facilitate efficient and effective Liberian-led institution and capacity building programs that clearly address the root causes of the conflict in both a participatory and democratic manner. Only by taking action to address these entrenched ills, can we enable the emergence of a more stable society based on the respect for rule of law. If these issues are not sufficiently addressed, Liberia could once again slide back into conflict.

### **Economic Recovery and Infrastructure**

The RFTF includes a comprehensive section on economic recovery, livelihood and infrastructure. These are all critical issues... yet, unfortunately, they are without adequate funding to date. Without economic recovery, the peace process will remain fragile. Liberia needs an infusion of foreign capital through private investment. This will never happen without significant improvements to existing infrastructure. In Liberia today, there is no electricity other than that provided by private generator, and no sewerage or transport system. This impacts not only public health but also the morale of the population. It deters foreign investment that has the potential to provide the much-needed jolt to the economy and increase employment opportunity for the population. Furthermore, the poor infrastructure hinders the quantity and quality of assistance provided by international NGOs outside of Monrovia.

Without an increase in meaningful economic opportunities, problems of prostitution and trafficking will further increase, as will the risk that young people are recruited into fighting forces in other West African countries. Additionally, the absence of job opportunities provides a disincentive for internally displaced populations and refugees to return home. Dependency on food aid and other handouts will continue. These destabilizing factors will negatively impact the electoral process.

### **Humanitarian Issues**

The entire Liberian population is a victim of this conflict. Reintegration and rehabilitation opportunities are required, not only for combatants, but also internally displaced people and refugees. Whilst the RFTF process focused on the reconstruction and recovery process, the Consolidated Appeal Process, or CAP, dealt with the humanitarian issues surrounding IDPs and refugees. Unfortunately, the CAP was pushed into the shadows and greater emphasis was placed on reconstruction. Humanitarian appeals became uninteresting and subsequently under-funded.

Owing to insecurity and the presence of combatants in areas outside of Monrovia during the spring, the prediction that massive numbers of displaced populations would spontaneously return to their homes was not realized. Today, their ability to return is hampered by limited employment opportunities and access to basic social services in their home communities. As a result 262,000 IDPs remain in overcrowded camps around Monrovia. This critical humanitarian situation has neither been included in the reporting process nor taken into account in the planning for reconstruction.

Until IDPs return home there will continue to be critical humanitarian demands, including providing basic food, shelter and medical care. Additional funding is required to allow the displaced persons to return safely and securely to their home communities and start rebuilding their lives. The IDPs should be afforded the same principles of protection as the

refugees and ex-combatants. The realization of their basic human rights shouldn't be subject to poor planning, political motivations or financial constraints.

### **DDRR process**

The high numbers of disarmed and demobilized combatants is a great achievement, but these impressive numbers only capture part of the story. Many key players in UNMIL perceived the DDRR process as a purely "military" exercise. As a result, lack of participation by other stakeholders has had a negative and potentially harmful impact on the process.

First, hard and fast principles for dealing with child combatants, such as those established by the Cape Town principles, were not appropriately disseminated amongst the policy makers and implementers and led to unclear approaches and disagreements. This has ultimately impacted protection for child combatants and inhibited access to the DDRR process by children associated with the fighting forces (CAFF). This has far reaching consequences for the future of every Liberian child.

Second, there was a lack of planning for Reintegration and Rehabilitation and too much emphasis on Disarmament and Demobilization. Collecting weapons and demobilizing combatants is only part of the solution. Experience has demonstrated that in the interest of rebuilding a healthy society, reintegration programs must be implemented from the very beginning and must involve an integrated community –based approach. Donor support and commitment to longer-term community reintegration is required to prevent recruitment and re-recruitment. Demobilized combatants, and child combatants in particular, must be presented with a viable alternative to military life. For example, many of the children who fought in the war hope to return to school; yet, often this is impossible. Education projects remain severely under funded by the international community. Schools in Liberia still lack the most basic infrastructure and supplies. Educational facilities are critical not only for developing intellectual capacity, but they provide a place for protection, a means of psychosocial support, and facilitate the reintegration of child combatants. Functioning schools are crucial to the restoration of social cohesion and normalization of all sectors of the conflict-affected population. It should be added that special measures should be made to ensure equal access to education for girls—including adolescent girls.

## **Conclusion**

I have outlined a number of problems that we, in the INGO community, have identified within the process and with respect to the implementation of the Results Focused Transitional Framework. We applaud this pioneering framework as well as the current review process in which we are engaged.

Given the key role Liberia plays to the overall stability—and instability—of the region of West Africa, governments must respond with a strategy of long-term assistance. The Monitoring and Steering Group, on behalf of the community of international NGOs operating in Liberia, urges those present to fulfill their country's pledges made last February and provide the much-needed assistance Liberia must have to move along the arduous road to recovery. The situation is urgent. To ensure a smooth and stable transition from years of conflict to a durable and sustainable peace, Liberia must have significant support and sustained attention.