



UNITED STATES AFRICA COMMAND DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE AND KNOWLEDGE DEVELOPMENT

SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH CENTER

Civilian and Enlisted Perspectives on the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL)

A Qualitative Research Study Report

October
2010



Photo of downtown Monrovia Courtesy of Keith Finan

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| Executive Summary | 3 |
| Study Description..... | 4 |
| Research Team..... | 4 |
| Objectives | 4 |
| Location | 5 |
| Background..... | 5 |
| Participant Responses | 5 |
| Purpose of the AFL..... | 5 |
| Expectations of the AFL | 6 |
| Role of the AFL | 7 |
| AFL Reform Process..... | 8 |
| Do People like the new AFL?..... | 10 |
| Human Rights and Rule of Law..... | 11 |
| Women in the AFL | 13 |
| Soldiers' Satisfaction | 15 |
| Key Messages for the U.S..... | 17 |
| The Future of the AFL | 18 |
| Concluding Points..... | 18 |
| References..... | 20 |
| Appendix I: Socio Cultural Research Advisory Team (SCRAT) Biographies..... | 22 |
| Appendix II: Methods..... | 23 |
| Appendix III: Demographics | 26 |

Executive Summary

At the request of the U.S. Marine Forces Africa (MARFORAF), The Intelligence and Knowledge Development (IKD) Directorate, Social Science Research Center (SSRC) implemented a qualitative research study in Liberia targeting civilian and enlisted soldiers' perspectives on the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL). The study included data drawn primarily from 40 participants. Nineteen of the participants completed semi-structured interviews and 21 participants contributed their perspectives during focus group discussions. To prepare for fieldwork, the SSRC also conducted informal interviews with 35 people to include Liberian scholars, military personnel, and Contractors familiar with the AFL reform.

Field work for this study took place from 11-30 June 2010 and included data collection in Bomi Grand Bassa, Grand Cape Mount and Margibi counties. This study represents the views of these participants only and should not be viewed as reflecting the viewpoint of all Liberians.

- Participants opined that the purpose of the the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) is to protect, respect and serve the Liberian people. All envision a force that protects, but also one that supports reconstruction and humanitarian activities in local communities.
- The reform of the AFL is widely viewed as a positive and successful endeavor, but some expressed reservations about the exclusion of former AFL members.
- AFL soldiers are viewed as a disciplined, educated and capable force. Soldiers recognize that civilians are proud of them. Civilians and soldiers expressed how important it is to rebuild trust between the army and the people of Liberia.
- Most participants understand the concepts of human rights and the rule of law. They indicated the importance of having an army that recognizes and respects these concepts. AFL members described how training in these two areas has changed their behavior.
- Participants support the inclusion of women in the AFL. Liberians in this study have become sensitized to the issue of gender equity. Many view women's inclusion in the AFL as a potential deterrent against acts of violence against women. Female AFL members are described as role models and leaders in their communities.
- Enlisted soldiers are proud of their accomplishments and they want more and continued hands on training from the U.S. in areas that will allow them to function as an independent army.



Source: Google Maps

- While AFL soldiers enjoy their role in the army, they complained about the need to have higher pay and base housing accommodations that would allow them to live with their families. At least half of the AFL soldiers who participated in this study cited salary and the housing situation as reasons why they might not stay in the AFL at the end of their current contracts.
- Participants view U.S. support in Liberia as essential to Liberia's reconstruction. They want continued support to improve the AFL and assistance with developing capacity to govern the country. Most expressed doubt that the Liberian government would be able to manage AFL reform without external support and assistance.

Study Description

Research Team

The fieldwork for this study was executed by a three person socio-cultural research advisory team (SCRAT) led by Ms. Liza Briggs, the SSRC Team Lead (West Africa). The team included a Research Assistant and a Focus Group Moderator. (See Appendix I for more on the SCRAT).

Objectives

This research study was developed in close collaboration with MARFORAF, the U.S Africa Command Office of Strategic Plans and Policy (SPP) and the U.S. Embassy Country Team in Liberia. The SCRAT followed established guidelines that included adherence to the principles of informed consent and confidentiality. Participation in this study was voluntary. The guidelines and protections were extended to both civilian and military participants. After a series of consultative discussions with MARFORAF, a research proposal and research questions were designed to explore several broad areas that pertain to the AFL. In developing the proposal and the questions, the emphasis was placed on capturing the perspectives of Liberian civilians and enlisted AFL members. A couple of AFL officers were interviewed for this study. Their perspective helped to triangulate and contextualize the perspective of the enlisted AFL members.

The study was intended to develop a deeper understanding around the following topical areas:

- (1). Ideas and expectations about the purpose and utility of the AFL and its members.
- (2). Perceptions about the meaning and importance of human rights, rule of law and the cultural implications that coincide with including women in the army.
- (3). Perceptions about U.S. involvement with the AFL.

A defining feature of this study is its primary focus on the opinions of civilians and army enlisted members. Similar studies in Liberia focus on stakeholders affiliated with more traditional positions of power and influence, i.e. Ministry of Defense, U.S. Contractors, Non Government Organization (NGO) leaders. This study is useful as a snapshot of how some Liberian civilians and some army personnel (primarily enlisted soldiers) view aspects of the AFL reform and its personnel.

Location

Initially, fieldwork was conducted from 11-30 June 2010 in Monrovia (Montserrado County). The location was later extended to include interviews with participants who reside in Bomi, Grand Bassa, Grand Cape Mount, and Margibi counties.

The inclusion of participants from additional counties helped capture the perspectives of Liberians who may not experience the connectedness and access to information that exists in Monrovia. See Appendix II for details on the methods supporting this study.



Source: AFRICOM

Background

In 2004, after a succession of civil wars spanning 14 years, comprehensive Security Sector Reform (SSR) was begun in Liberia. The SSR efforts targeting the Armed Forces Liberia (AFL) included an unprecedented drawdown of former army members and the vetting and training of a new force of approximately 2,000 soldiers. In 2010, the U.S. Marine Force Africa (MARFORAF) began mentoring and advising the AFL. This initiative and all of its corollary activities, named Operation Onward Liberty, represents a transition in responsibilities from a training effort managed by private military companies, DynCorp and Pacific Architects and Engineers (PAE), to a U.S. military effort. The hand off of AFL development from DynCorp and PAE to the U.S. military is a key juncture for considering stakeholder perspectives about the AFL and the AFL reform process. Stakeholder perspectives may provide insights that could impact the success of MARFORAF involvement with the AFL.

Participant Responses

Purpose of the AFL

According to the Liberian Comprehensive Peace Agreement (2003) the purpose and mission of the AFL is to safeguard national sovereignty and respond to extreme natural disasters. To date, this purpose and mission statement has not been supplanted by a national security strategy. Nevertheless, participants in this study have formulated ideas about the purpose of the AFL. The most frequently mentioned purpose was to serve, protect and defend the Liberian people. As one participant responded:

The AFL's purpose is to serve the country and protect its people and boundaries.

It should defend the State and make sure that the State has stability. (Number 2, M, 36, Businessman).

Another noted:

The purpose of a good army is to protect lives and property. (Focus group 1, Number 3, M, 42, Unemployed).

A few participants described the AFL's purpose in practical terms. It was described as a mechanism for employing people and molding the character of its members. As one focus group participant noted:

The AFL serves as a source of employment and discipline. (Focus group 1, Number 8, M, NR, Student).

Finally an AFL member opined:

The purpose [of the AFL] is to protect our civilian citizens and the lives of our people. Our country suffered so many years of civil war. We need to contribute to our nation's peace keeping. (Focus group 2, Number 6, M, NR, Private First Class).

Expectations of the AFL

Participants talked about what they expected from the new army. They were encouraged to envision what a model army and model soldiers would look like. Most comments focused on behavioral expectations. One person explained it this way:

Good soldiers will be proud and willing to sacrifice for the people. (Number 14, M, 38, Teacher).

Others talked about the need to have soldiers who are disciplined and honest. One participant commented:

A good soldier will not take bribes and he will not give his uniform to armed robbers. (Focus group 1, Number 6, F, 31, University Student).

The collective memory of Liberians is replete with vivid stories about acts of violence, crime, and fear meted out by various iterations of soldiers. In addition to expectations regarding specific behavior, participants commonly frame their expectations of the new AFL by offering references to and descriptions of the former AFL. One participant explained at length:

People from the former force pledged allegiance to individuals and not to the State and the people. Some pledged allegiance to the President. When Amos Sawyer came into power during the interim time, he had his own force. Before that Charles Taylor created his own army, the [Anti terrorist Unit] ATU. With all of that, we didn't have men of substance, values, and thought. These guys were under the influence of drugs and what

have you. They were death squads and personal guards. (Number 2, M, 36, Businessman).

Another participant offered an explanation that framed her expectations for the new AFL based on her past experiences:

If an invader comes in, the army should not join the invaders. When we had the war the army people were killing and harassing people. That's not what they were there for. (Number 9, F, 50, School Principal).

AFL soldiers are keenly aware of how the former AFL was perceived by the Liberian people. When talking about what people expect from them, they responded by talking about their commitment to practicing humility, deference, discipline and respect for the people. One AFL member commented:

People usually say that we are the first class citizens, but in my view, we are the lowest class of citizens because our purpose is to protect and serve our people and the country. (Focus Group 3, Number 6, F, 31, Private First Class).

Another soldier described the actions he takes to let people know he respects the law and eschews the idea that he is better than the people because of his status as a soldier.

People have the mindset that soldiers are rough. When soldiers came people would panic a bit. So, when I go to the bank I stand at the back of the line like everybody else. If I take a taxi, I pay for the ride. With the old AFL soldiers this didn't happen. They didn't wait and they didn't pay for taxis or if they paid the taxi man, they chose the amount that they wanted to pay. (He laughs). (Number 19, M, 32, AFL Officer).

A female soldier commented:

We have to come down to the level of the people and show them respect and discipline. We should also let them know that we are their friends. (Focus group III, Number 3, F, 38, Private First Class).

Another soldier talked about the importance of discipline in this way:

Discipline is the hallmark, whether someone is watching you or not. Even when you are visiting your friends and family you must always maintain your bearing. (Focus Group 2, Number 4, NR, Private First Class).

Role of the AFL

Participants (civilians and AFL soldiers) want the AFL to support humanitarian and community outreach efforts. One participant offered a detailed description of how the AFL could provide assistance:

It's very simple. They [the AFL] should be ambassadors between the government and the people. For example, sometimes they should do humanitarian work. On their days off, the medical unit can go to the villages and do outreach education. Also, they can cut logs and build bridges where there are none. I heard they were doing some of these things already. (Number 12, M, 64, Underemployed Farmer).

In addition to providing humanitarian and community assistance soldiers and a few civilians mentioned the need to have an army with the tactical skills needed to protect the country. As one participant explained:

They must know techniques to protect us, like how to shoot, tactics and other techniques. (Number 17, M, 51, Unemployed).

We asked AFL members specifically about the role they should play during peace time. Most agreed that during peace time they should support humanitarian efforts. A few mentioned that they should also engage in preparatory training that would prepare them for war. As one soldier opined:

In times of peace we will continue our training so as to prepare ourselves when war comes. (Focus group III, Number 6, F, NR, Private First Class).

AFL Reform Process

Participants were asked to discuss what they knew about the AFL reform and to describe the process undertaken to create the new AFL. All Liberians in this study were aware that the new AFL was established as the result of a vetting and selection process.

Participants indicated that they heard about the reform through a variety of media (newspapers, radio, Liberian tea houses and billboards). For those who lived in more rural settings, the AFL reform was primarily visible through outreach and recruitment activities that took place in their local communities. One person described the process and the actors in the process as follows:

First, they paid off the old soldiers so that they could retire, then they had a vetting process where they put up posters to allow selection of men and women. The recruits were trained by [Security Sector Reform] SSR. By that I am talking about security sector reform. The SSR is made up of expats from the U.S with some Liberians as well. (Number 4, M, 32, Student/Businessman).

One AFL officer recounted the role that a radio recruitment program played in her decision to join the AFL:

Before joining [the AFL] I was following [a program on] UNMIL radio and there was a program about this girl, Jackie, who was thinking about going into the army. I loved this program and Jackie was thinking very hard about joining the army and she was discussing her decision with her friends and her family and everything.

So one day I was in town and I saw a big billboard with Jackie saluting while standing in front of the Liberian flag. I stood in front of the billboard and did like this (she salutes). Then I asked my friends if I looked like Jackie and they said, yes. After that, I just decided to join. (Number 19, F, 32, AFL Officer).

Most civilian participants believe the AFL was reformed because the former AFL was comprised of uneducated, undisciplined and poorly trained soldiers who were violent toward civilians. AFL soldiers offered tempered, but similar rationale for the reform.

The old AFL was made up of warring factions and the old soldiers were not educated. They were men of war not men of dignity. Now we were able to restructure the army with educated men. (Number 2, M, 36, Businessman).

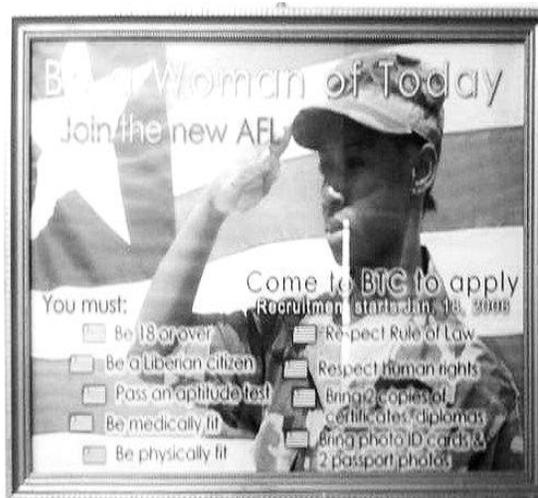


Photo of an AFL recruitment poster at the Edward Binyah Kesselly (EBK) barracks in Liberia.

Quite a few participants mentioned that the aim of the reform was to create a more ethnically and geographically balanced force. As one participant explained:

They did the reform so that the army would be geographically balanced and have all ethnic groups in place. This was to fix the imbalances so that their loyalty would be to the nation. (Number 10, M, 46, Teacher).

Another participant described how the merit system, which was used for recruitment and now for promotions, impacts the ethnic balance in the new army.

Under the new system, there is a merit system, so you must earn your place. This means no more tribalism. (Number 2, M, 36, Businessman).

Not everyone agreed that reform was justified. Some felt the reform was politicized and that good members of the former AFL were pushed aside resulting in the loss of institutional memory and other forms of knowledge capital. One comment highlighted this point of view:

The reform was done because of politics, but some of the former AFL soldiers were educated. The reform was done due to mistrust. (Number 1, M, 35, Student).

One woman, whose husband was a member of the former AFL, talked about the loss of experience that resulted from the reform.

Before, there used to be people in the army who knew the entire country. They had the maps in their heads. The new ones don't have these experiences. They should have kept

the old and added the new..... Those who are well trained were sidelined (Number 7, F, 47, Unemployed).

Do People like the new AFL?

Almost all participants had positive things to say about the new AFL members. One participant, who was not supportive of the way the AFL was reformed, offered this comment when asked how he generally felt about the new AFL members:

I respect them and I pray for them. (Number 1, M, 35, University Student).

AFL soldiers were widely praised for being educated, role models, and heroes. When asked why they liked the AFL members, participants offered examples of how AFL members had demonstrated discipline, respect and a willingness to help civilians.

For many, respect for the new AFL was connected to an affinity for the AFL connection to the U.S.. As one participant offered:

AFL is one of the best in Africa. Do you know what it means to be American trained? (Number 2, M, 36, Businessman).

People detailed how the AFL positively transformed the lives of soldiers.

I know one guy who joined. Before he was very hostile and he didn't know how to talk to people and now he has become somebody different. He is respectful. Maybe my child will join. (Number 13, F, 46, Water Vendor).

Another participant shared a similar sentiment about the AFL and its impact on young Liberians.

The army is fine. They are improved. They are taking children 18 years old, who are not doing anything and they are training them. (Number 11, F, 44, Shopkeeper).

Finally, one such participant noted:

The new AFL has a good appearance. They are fit. They received HIV test, training and they are educated at the high school level. (Number 16, F, 18, Student).

Although most acknowledge that the AFL is not often seen in the streets of cities and towns, some participants gave examples of activities that the AFL has done.

The AFL once cleaned the city. They helped us. (He points toward the street). They cleaned Benson and Broad Streets. (Number 4, M, 32, Student/Businessman).

Another described a positive experience with the AFL and compared it to a negative experience with the Liberian police.

We were demonstrating and the AFL soldiers came out and talked to us and they were trying to help us. But the police.... when we demonstrated they beat us. We stripped naked so that they would stop beating us! (She bursts into tears). (Number 13, F, 46, Water Vendor).

Human Rights and Rule of Law

An intended outcome of the reform was to have an army that understood the concept of human rights and respected the rule of law. We asked participants about both concepts. We wanted to know how they ascribed meaning to the terms. We also wanted to explore how soldiers describe these terms.

Human Rights

Both civilians and soldiers who participated in this study were able to articulate their notion of the concept and the importance of human rights. Many indicated that they have known about human rights for a few years through information they receive on radio programs and other media. A few had been exposed to the concept of human rights through community based programs. One participant spoke about it this way:

Well, with us and human rights, we are just getting used to the term, bit by bit. It [human rights] is turning things around for us in Africa. See when you want to beat your child for doing something wrong, then people say, "No. human rights!" On the other hand when we want to have the right to speak our minds then yes we also have human rights. As a citizen I think I should have my rights. (Number 7, F, 47, Unemployed).

Like with other matters discussed in this study, participants in this study often describe their perceptions of what they want now and in the future, in contrast to their past experiences. We mentioned to one participant that we heard that the AFL had been trained on human rights and he commented as follows:

Well, It must be true that DynCorp gave them this training because I don't see them beating people, I don't see guns and I don't see them fighting in the streets. (Number 1, M, 35, Student).

Participants clearly articulated the importance and value of human rights training, as it pertains to the AFL. One participant's comments summed up the collective opinions on this topic.

Well of course, this training is fine for the AFL. Look at the war that came. We didn't know why it came. They said it was to liberate us from suffering. The soldiers were fighting everyone. We didn't know the good ones from the bad ones. With human rights training, they can know who to fight for. It's very important. (Number 7, F, 47, Unemployed).

AFL soldiers confirmed that they have participated in a series of training components on human rights. An AFL officer commented on how much the training has influenced the way people view the AFL:

They call us the human rights army because of our training. (Number 18, M, 33, AFL Officer).

Some of the soldier's responses to questions about human rights focused on definitions of the concept, but more often soldiers talked about how training in human rights has affected them. One soldier said:

Human rights training has changed my utterances. This has even been noticed by some people in my community (Focus Group 3, Number 4, F, NR, Private First Class).

Another explained:

Learning about human rights helps me in so many ways, especially in dealing with my family and with others. (Focus Group 3, Number 2, F,28, Private First Class).

Rule of Law

Similar to human rights, the concept of rule of law was a key feature of the training that was provided for the new AFL. Rule of Law as a concept seemed more nebulous than human rights and most participants defined it by using practical examples to demonstrate what it means. As one participant said:

Simply put it means the law. (Number 13, F,46, Water Vendor).

All participants expressed the belief that Liberians and AFL soldiers need to understand and respect the rule of law. A few mentioned that they wanted civic education taught more consistently in schools and they want more promotion of the concepts in communities. One participant commented:

Rule of law means people must respect the constitution. If a man doesn't have a proper civic education then he thinks a gun is gospel! (Number 10, M, 46, Teacher).

Soldiers indicated that they had sessions on the concept of rule of law as part of their military training. One soldier talked about rule of law as follows:

There's nowhere in this world where a military man is not subject to civil laws. This is why when we get out there [in public] we are advised to behave ourselves. If you do anything stupid you can be arrested by the police and if the police find out that you are guilty, you will be sent to court and tried. This was lacking during the old army, but in this new army things are different. (Focus Group 2, Number 7, M, 33, Private First Class).

Women in the AFL

In 2006, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was elected the President of Liberia. This powerful symbol of possibility for women stood in contrast with the reality that during the civil war and even today sexual violence against women and girls was rampant.

When the AFL reform was initiated, President Johnson Sirleaf wanted 20 percent of the force to be female. Despite an aggressive campaign only five percent of the AFL members are women.

The SCRAT wanted to understand how people view the inclusion of women in the AFL. We asked about the positive and negative impacts of including women in the military. Although we did not tackle the issue directly, we wanted to learn more about the underlying issues that support the ongoing acts of violence against women. With few exceptions, participants in this study believe that having women in the AFL is important and valuable.

Many spoke about the inclusion of woman in terms of policies, designed by the current government, to create gender equity. As one participant noted:

Yes, women should be included in the AFL because global gender balance is important these days. (Number 1, M, 35, Student).

Another added:

We have gender equality-a 50/50 policy. Women are citizens and they have the right to choose what they want to do. (Number 4, M, 32, Student/Businessman).

Many participants talked about how having women in the AFL helped establish them as role models and positive contributors to society. One participant said:

With women in the army, men will look at them as partners. Having women [in the AFL] will help transform society. These women will give back and be role models for other women. (Number10, M, 46, Teacher).

One participant described how he felt about women in the army this way:

I read in the newspaper that some AFL women are now mechanics. One of the women, I know her, was a nobody and now she is a mechanic. Can you believe it? She's competing with men. (Number 12, M, 64, Underemployed Farmer).



Photo taken in Monrovia

A female soldier talking about serving in the AFL said:

It's good because it encourages us to bring pride to our nation. (Focus Group 3, Number 5, F, 32, Private First Class).

Another participant described the historical role that women played in protecting society.

Yes, women should be in the army. Women's sacrifices are the same as a man's. During the war, if a man was seen out in the streets here in Monrovia, he would be killed immediately so the women were the ones who would go out and get food. My own sister and my mother went out in the streets where there were real bullets to make ends meet. To me, women have always been soldiers and women have always been willing to be sacrificial lambs for us. They take risks to have children and everything, so I support them joining the army. (Number 2, M, 36, Businessman).

Another framed her comments as follows:

The AFL should not be centered on men, No! I witnessed people being tortured and raped. So because of that we want contributions from both genders. Both can stand up for the country. We need both to achieve our goal of having a peaceful State. (Number 5, M, 29, Student).

Some believe that having female soldiers and officers in the AFL can be a force in preventing atrocities like rape and gender based violence.

Women are mothers and they have feeling for human beings. If they are part of the army and something goes on, the woman will stand up to say what is right and what is wrong. (Number 17, M, 51, Unemployed).

A few participants noted that women were part of the former AFL, but they were stigmatized. One participant offered his perspective on the inclusion of women in the new AFL.

Women in the AFL, yes it's a good idea. In the past a woman was seen as an outcast if she joined the police or the army. It's important now because other women will see people joining and feel that it's important. This will erase the idea that these women are outcasts. (Number 14, M, 38, Teacher).

Military participants also made affirming comments about the inclusion of women in the AFL. Many mentioned that the army provided them with practical training, discipline and respect. One noted:

One of the major things we gain as women in the army is respect. Even the men themselves have more and more respect for us. (Focus Group III, Number 2, F, 28, Private First Class).

Finally a female member of the AFL discussed the positive comments that she received from members of her community.

People are proud of us. One older woman I know has children in college. She says to me, "after my daughter graduates, I will send her to the army so that she can be like you". (Number 18, F, 32, AFL Officer).

While most people who participated in this study, both male and female, support the inclusion of women in the new AFL, some described their concerns. One Muslim participant offered the following comment:

Looking at this country, our minds are not always developed like people from the outside. From an Islamic perspective, it is prohibited for a woman to do things that a man does. That would not be the way it is for women in the army. For example, the army uniforms are not suitable for a woman. (Focus Group I, Number 1, M, NR, Vendor/Manager).

Other concerns focused on the difficulty that a woman in the army might have with establishing and raising a family while being in the army. Some talked about how much they missed their family members. A few mentioned that men might be intimidated by the idea that his spouse was in the army. One soldier acknowledged how her decision to be in the army impacted her relationship:

My boyfriend left me for making up my mind to join the army. His reason was that I would be hostile to him. (Focus Group III, Number 3, F, 38, Private First Class).

Soldiers' Satisfaction

AFL soldiers, who were interviewed for this study, were generally very satisfied with their experiences in the AFL, but they mentioned low salaries, housing accommodations, and training as areas where they wanted to see improvements.

Nearly half of all of the soldiers in this study cited low salaries and poor housing accommodations as the reasons why they might not choose to re-enlist in the AFL at the end of their five year contracts.

It is commonly noted that low salaries are a source of frustration in all armies. In Liberia and in many countries in Africa, poor compensation for those who are supposed to serve the people, i.e. police officers, members of the armed forces, is a root cause for bribery, corruption, and the abuse of civilians. One civilian, whose husband served in the former AFL, offered a general cautionary word for the AFL members:

If you have a hunched back and another man with a hunched back dies it is good to go see how they buried him because how they treat him will tell you a lot about how they will treat you. (Number 7, F, 47, Unemployed).

Salary

Despite the generally positive reception of the reform that facilitated the creation of the new AFL and the willingness of Liberians to support the formation of the new AFL, the issue of compensation remains a source of dissatisfaction. One soldier's comment summed up the collective sentiment on this issue:

The salary of the army is very low. The army is being reformed, but the salary is not satisfactory. (Focus Group II, Number 4, M, NR, Private First Class).

Another added:

A good and improved salary is an important factor that will make me stay in the army. (Focus Group III, Number 3, F, 38, Private First Class).

Housing Accommodations

Soldiers expressed a high level of dissatisfaction with their housing situation. Nearly all mentioned the importance of having housing that would allow them to live with their families. One mentioned the size of one of the barracks as an area for improvement:

The barracks were made for only five hundred persons. The Americans need to help us. (Focus Group II, Number 2, M, 37, Private First Class).

Another talked about the status of the barracks and how it impacts her:

At the present moment the AFL has only one good barrack, which is the one that is in Bgarnga, Bony County. So right now I cannot see my children and other family members a lot. (Focus Group III, Number 4, F, NR, Private First Class).

Training

Soldiers in this study indicate that they have not been adequately prepared to function as a competent army. Many described how they often received examples of how to do things, but that they didn't get all of the materials, manuals and/or equipment needed to have the hands on understanding needed to perform tasks. One AFL member's comments characterized some of the frustration about training to date:

The Americans should not teach us things halfway. (Focus Group III, Number 3, F, 38, Private First Class).

Another commented:

We can't train because we don't have the ammunition for our weapons.

Most described their training as only scratching the surface. All want continued training.

Right now we are only trained in the barracks. We need field training experience. (Number 19, F, 32, AFL Officer)

Some soldiers in this study have received training from British and Chinese military representatives. Soldiers expressed doubt about the efficacy of having to integrate multiple training doctrines.

We go to training with different armies. One guy says we have to salute this way and another one says, no you have to salute that way. This makes for confusion. We need to have a Liberian way. (Focus group II, Number 7, M, 33, Private First Class).

One soldier's comments summarized the group's sentiment about the training that they have received. It also captures the collective perspective that soldiers in this study expressed about their desire to eventually have a Liberian army.

The want to be fishing for us all of our lives. They must teach us how to fish for ourselves. (Focus group II, Number 5, M, 31, Private First Class).

Key Messages for the U.S.

Nearly all Liberians in this study expressed gratitude to the U.S and other foreign governments, to a lesser degree, for the efforts to support Liberia. This gratitude was coupled with expressions of mistrust for Liberian government leadership. Most participants (civilians and AFL members) believe and expressed a degree of fear that if foreign intervention from the U.S and other countries is not maintained, corruption would undermine and eventually reverse the current reforms. A civilian described this idea as follows:

We want the U.S. to guide the AFL in training about basic laws, impart knowledge, assist them with materials like uniforms, food and other utensils and don't leave them. We need the Americans to monitor things and to see how things are going. Here in Liberia we have a "don't care" attitude and we are living in a time of trial and temptation. The elections are coming and we don't know what will happen. This support can help ease our people's fears and uncertainty, but I know that in the end Liberia is still our country. (Number 8, M, 28, Student).

A soldier shared the following message:

We need continued [U.S.] support for ten to fifteen years. They mustn't turn their backs on us. They must be here. Someone must be here to monitor our system because it is spoiled. We built a system based on corruption, and it cannot change overnight. We need time to develop the rule of law, and we need a mindset change....If the system that the Americans have built is not maintained, I will retire from the army. I pray that people will help us maintain the system. (Number 18, M, 33, AFL Officer).

A few people talked about the provision of opportunities for AFL soldiers. One participant's comments were indicative of the prevailing opinion:

We want the U.S. to motivate the AFL soldiers to stay in the army. It's not just about money, but there are career opportunities, scholarships and education. These things are just as important, if not more important, than money. If you have education you will do better things with the money. (Number 5, M, 29, Student).

A few participants mentioned issues that were not directly related to the AFL. One person commented:

We want good governance and employment. Many college graduates don't have jobs. (Number 4, M, 32, Student/Businessman).

Another said:

Help us rebuild. We need good education and health systems. (Number 10, M, 46, Teacher).

The Future of the AFL

During the course of this study, participants shared their ideas and perspectives about AFL reform and AFL soldiers. At the close of each interview and focus group meeting, we asked each person to give two to three words that captured what first came to mind when they thought about the future of the AFL. All comments are listed, however duplications were not entered.

Good, Excellent, Intelligent, Secure, Obedient, Improved, Committed, Sacrifice, Fear, Support, Empowerment, Geographically balanced, Encouragement, Productive, Trust, Unity, Peace, Professionalism, Bright, Fine, Better, Well equipped, Proud, Peaceful, Liberia's super heroes. (All participants).

Concluding Points

- As the U.S. continues to engage the Liberian army in mentoring activities, it is important that strategies are developed that help create an army that is technically capable, but also one that is relevant. In the case of Liberia, people have endured a long period of conflict. Their experiences with war and violence deeply impact their notions of what they want the security sector and its components to look like.
- The Liberian government has not approved a national security strategy. In the absence of a formal policy, Liberian citizens are likely to continue constructing key purposes for the AFL. These participants emphasized developing a trusted group of soldiers who can help rebuild the country. This needs to be included in the national dialogue on the AFL and its purpose.
- The participants in this study were largely satisfied with the AFL reform effort. They conveyed a high degree of hope for the AFL. This success and trust should be leveraged to bolster other security sector reform efforts. For example some of the more successful

aspects of the AFL reform lie in the vetting process and the use of a media i.e. billboards, town recruitment centers etc. to build knowledge and support for the reform.

- Study participants recognize and have internalized some of the ideas behind the campaign to achieve gender equity. The women who are in the AFL receive support for their participation in the AFL. This study did not engage participants at a level that would allow for a deeper exploration of the contradiction between the support for women in the army and the ongoing sexual and gender based violence that continues to plague Liberia. This is an area for further study.
- The AFL members in this study clearly recognize that they need more hands on training and equipment to be fully functional as an army. There needs to be flexibility in U.S sponsored engagements to include more than just mentoring. Additionally, the Liberian Ministry of Defense will need support to continue paying the AFL and responding to the concerns about adequate housing for the soldiers and their families.
- For these study participants, hope for the success of the AFL was high, reliance on help from foreign governments was high, but confidence and trust in the Liberian system was very low. Part of the reform strategy should support the pockets of positive inertia that exist in communities. The ideas generated in smaller towns and communities outside of Monrovia need to be included in the rebuilding efforts.
- The reform and MARFORAF's engagement with the AFL offer an opportunity for AFRICOM to employ its interagency structure to facilitate the type of partnerships that can resonate beyond traditional military engagements. Specifically, the collaborative efforts could focus on ways that the U.S. military can support and positively influence good governance, constitutional reform, infrastructure development, economic recovery and poverty reduction.

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Civilian and enlisted perspectives on the Liberian army • August 2010 • Page 20

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Appendix I: Socio Cultural Research Advisory Team (SCRAT) Biographies

Team Lead- Liberia

Ms. Liza E.A. Briggs is the SSRC Team Lead (West Africa) at the United States Africa Command. Her research and field experiences in Africa span 16 years. Prior to joining the SSRC, Ms. Briggs managed and conducted media and communication field research in 18 countries in Africa at ICF Macro. Prior to that she served as the Academic Operations Coordinator at The Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS). Ms. Briggs lived and worked in Gabon, Central Africa.

Ms. Briggs holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology from James Madison University, a Master of Arts degree in Education from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and is completing her dissertation in International Education Policy Studies at the University of Maryland – College Park. Her research interests include; family caring practices for children orphaned because of HIV/AIDS in Cote D'Ivoire and post development theory in the context Africa. She is a native English speaker and is proficient in French.

Focus Group Moderator- Liberia

Ms. Ndiaye Diagne is a Qualitative Research Manager for Research Marketing Services (RMS) International. She has extensive experience conducting qualitative and quantitative research in various countries. Prior to joining RMS, she spend six years at the marketing division at IPSOS in France where she conducted product research on behalf of clients such as Dannon, Nestle, Coca-Cola and Georgia Pacific.

Ms. Diagne holds a Bachelors degree from The French Business School ISC (Institut Supérieur du Commerce). She also holds a post graduate degree in Marketing and Communication. Ms. Diagne is a native French speaker. She is fluent in English and Wolof.

Research Assistant – Liberia

Mr. Gregory Morris is the Survey Field Coordinator for Research Marketing Services (RMS) International. In this capacity he coordinates logistics and exerts quality control over survey teams based in various counties in Liberia.

Mr. Morris is a junior at The United Methodist University in Monrovia, where he is completing a Bachelor of Science degree in Economics. He is a native English speaker.

Appendix II: Methods

The data collected in this qualitative study were drawn from a variety of sources. The choice of sources and the procedures that were followed reflect an interest in gathering data that convey nuanced understandings of the study topic, and narrative information that help the reader to understand the meanings behind the responses.

The general recruitment and screening criteria for participants in the semi structured interviews and focus groups were as follows:

| | Semi-Structured Interviews | Focus Group I Civilians | Focus Group II AFL Member | Focus Group III AFL Member |
|------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Gender | Female/Male | Female/Male | Male | Female |
| Age | 18- 65 years | 18- 65 years | Varied | Varied |
| Location | Varied | Varied | Varied | Varied |
| Education | Varied | Varied | High School or Equivalent | High School or Equivalent |
| Occupation | Varied | Varied | Army Private | Army Private |

Literature Review

The initial stages of the study included a review of relevant publications drawn from open source and classified sources to include journal articles, recent assessments, historical accounts, policy briefs and white papers. Specific attention was given to a review of recent works that focused on the reform of the army in Liberia. The literature review allowed for better contextualization of the subject, but also provided details about what type of studies have already been done on this topic. The review of the literature indicated that there were few published studies that focused on qualitative comments drawn from “everyday” Liberian people. Most published studies drew heavily from comments from stakeholders who hold positions of authority in their respective organizations.

After fieldwork and during the preparation of the draft report, additional literature was reviewed. The literature included papers that have only recently been published, but also included readings that covered topics and issues that arose during the data collection phase of the study.

Informational Interviews

Prior to undertaking fieldwork and during the fieldwork phase of the study the SCRAT Team Lead conducted approximately 35 informal discussions with U.S. military personnel, embassy personnel, academics and Liberian civilians. (Each interview was 30 minutes to two hours in duration). The interviewees were generated through referrals. As the study was being vetted through various offices at the U.S. Africa Command, The SCRAT team lead met with people who had recently visited Liberia for work. These informal meetings provided the context that shaped the study objectives. For example, after completing a few informational interviews it

became clear that if interviews were conducted only in Monrovia, the data would not reflect the views of Liberians who were less connected to the power center of the country.

Semi Structured Interviews

Interviews were conducted with 19 participants in five counties. (Each interview was 45 minutes to 1.5 hours in duration).

The locations for the semi structured interviews were randomly chosen using a county level map of Liberia. Only locations in the five counties were included in the pool for sampling. Once a county was selected, the Research Assistant sought referrals from people living in the county. Attention was given to recruiting participants from diverse ethnic, gender and religious backgrounds.

The SCRAT Research Assistant recruited participants for the semi-structured interviews through referrals from an established network of Liberian survey researchers who have experience conducting household survey research in Liberia. Members of this research network live in each of the counties and were able to provide the names and contact information for potential interview participants. After getting contact information, The SCRAT Research Assistant followed the following steps:

- Contacted potential participants and explained the study objectives and screened the contact to verify that the person met the criteria for inclusion in the study.
- If the screening criteria were met, the SCRAT Research Assistant would confirm that the person was interested in participating in the study and where applicable, schedule an appointment for the interview.
- On the day of the appointment the SCRAT Research Assistant would contact the participant to verify the time and location of the appointment.

Focus Groups

The SCRAT Focus Group Moderator conducted 3 focus groups which included a total of 21 people. The first focus group was comprised of civilian men and women. The second and third focus groups were comprised of AFL soldiers. Each focus group lasted approximately 2 hours in duration. See Appendix III for demographic information on the focus group participants.

Focus Group I: Civilians

The SCRAT Focus Group Moderator used data from household surveys to develop a pool of candidates drawn from a diverse sample of the residents residing in Montserrado County. The pool was developed to ensure gender, age and religious diversity. The SCRAT focus group Moderator traveled to the locations to solicit candidates for the groups. The solicitation process included: providing a summary of the purpose, screening the candidate's age and other relevant background and where acceptable, coordinating the logistics for the focus group meeting date.

Focus Group II and III: AFL Members

U.S. Embassy Country team members assisted in the recruitment process for the AFL soldiers. This included requesting permission from the Liberian Ministry of Defense for AFL participation, providing a list of AFL members who met the requirements for inclusion in the study and organizing the AFL participants so that the SCRAT could transport the soldiers to and from the focus group sessions. The SCRAT Team lead randomly selected soldiers from the list and notified the country team contact of the selectees. Two AFL officers were included in the interview pool. Their perspectives were used to triangulate the enlisted members perspectives and to provide specific context information for the study.

Appendix III: Demographics

| ID | Sex | Age | Occupation | Marital Status | Children/How Many | Languages Spoken | Ethnicity | Religious Affiliation |
|----|-----|-----|-------------------------------|----------------|-------------------|--|-----------|-----------------------|
| 1 | M | 35 | University Student | Single | None | English Mano | Mano | Christian |
| 2 | M | 36 | Businessman | Single | Yes/3 | English Gola | Gola | |
| 3 | F | 29 | Student/ Part-time Cashier | Single | Yes/3 | English | Saapo | |
| 4 | M | 32 | Student/ Businessman | Single | None | English Grebo French | Krahn | |
| 5 | M | 29 | University Student | Single | Yes/1 | English Bassa | Bassolian | |
| 6 | F | 23 | University Student | Single | Yes/1 | English | Kpelle | |
| 7 | F | 47 | Unemployed | Widowed | Yes/6 | English Lorma Kpelle Bassa Mandingo | Gola | Christian |
| 8 | M | 28 | University Student | Single | Yes/1 | English Mandingo | Mandingo | Muslim |
| 9 | F | 50 | Principal | Divorced | Yes/3 | English | Gola | |
| 10 | M | 46 | Teacher | Married | Yes/5 | English Mano Gio | Mano | |
| 11 | F | 44 | Shopkeeper | Married | Yes/7 | English Gola Vai | Gola | |
| 12 | M | 64 | Underemployed Farmer | Married | Yes/4 | English Bassa Grebo Kpelle Gola Vai | Sinoe | Muslim |

| | | | | | | | | |
|-----------|------------|------------|--|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------|-----------|
| 13 | F | 46 | Water Vendor | Widowed | Yes/7 | English Mano Gio | Mano | Christian |
| 14 | M | 38 | Teacher | Married | Yes/5 | English Vai Mende Gola | Vai | |
| 15 | M | 25 | Teacher/ Part-time UNDP Coordinator | Single | None | English Gola | Gola | |
| 16 | F | 18 | University Student | Single | None | English | Mano | |
| 17 | M | 51 | Unemployed | Married | Yes/5 | English Bassa Kru | Bassolian | |
| 18 | M | 33 | AFL Officer | Single | Yes/1 | English Loma | Loma | |
| 19 | F | 32 | AFL Officer | Single | Yes/2 | English Krahn | Krahn | |
| ID | Sex | Age | Occupation | Marital Status | Children/ How Many | Languages Spoken | Ethnicity | |
| FG01 01 | M | | Vendor/Manager | Married | Yes/2 | English | | Muslim |
| FG01 02 | F | 32 | Unemployed | Married | Yes/2 | English | | |
| FG01 03 | M | 42 | Unemployed | Married | Yes/? | English | | |
| FG01 04 | F | | Unemployed | Single | | English | | |
| FG01 05 | F | | University Student | Married | Yes/2 | English | | |
| FG01 06 | F | 31 | University Student | Single | | English | | |
| FG01 07 | F | | University Student | Single | Yes/1 | English | | |
| FG01 08 | M | | University Student | Single | | English | | |
| ID | Sex | Age | Occupation | Marital Status | Children/How Many | Languages Spoken | Ethnicity | |
| FG02 01 | M | 31 | Private First Class (PFC) | Single | No | English | | |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---------|-----|-----|---------------------------|----------------|--------------------|------------------|-----------|--|
| FG02 02 | M | 37 | Private First Class (PFC) | Married | Yes/3 | English | | |
| FG02 03 | M | | Private First Class (PFC) | Single | Yes/1 | English | | |
| FG02 04 | M | | Private First Class (PFC) | Married | | English | | |
| FG02 05 | M | 31 | Private First Class (PFC) | Single | Yes/1 | English | | |
| FG02 06 | M | | Private First Class (PFC) | | | English | | |
| FG02 07 | M | 33 | Private First Class (PFC) | | | English | | |
| ID | Sex | Age | Occupation | Marital Status | Children/ How Many | Languages Spoken | Ethnicity | |
| FG03 01 | F | | Private First Class (PFC) | | | English | | |
| FG03 02 | F | 28 | Private First Class (PFC) | Married | Yes/3 | English | | |
| FG03 03 | F | 38 | Private First Class (PFC) | Single | | English | | |
| FG03 04 | F | | Private First Class (PFC) | Single | Yes/4 | English | | |
| FG03 05 | F | 32 | Private First Class (PFC) | | | English | | |
| FG03 06 | F | 31 | Private First Class (PFC) | | Yes/3 | English | | |
| FG03 07 | F | | Private First Class (PFC) | | | English | | |