

# National Integration in Liberia: An Evolving Pursuit

by

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## Abstract

After over one hundred sixty years of independence the Liberian state was close to total collapse as a result of fourteen years of civil war. The state's failure and breakdown of central authority has had debilitating social, economic, and political consequences, such as; destruction of valuable infrastructure, internal and cross -border refugee problems, unemployment, hunger and violation of human rights. The challenge for a post-conflict state such as Liberia is the consolidation of democracy and the implementation of the necessary steps required to achieve sustainable development. Thus, this study suggests that a bottom-up communitarian approach appears to be plausible in an effort to attain national integration in a post-conflict- Liberia.

## Introduction

After over one hundred sixty years of independence the Liberian state was close to total collapse as a result of fourteen years of civil war. The state's failure and breakdown of central authority has had debilitating social, economic, and political consequences, such as; destruction of valuable infrastructure, internal and cross -border refugee problems, unemployment, hunger and violation of human rights. The challenge for a post-conflict state such as Liberia is the consolidation of democracy and the implementation of the necessary steps required to achieve sustainable development<sup>1</sup>

Thus, the quest for national integration in Liberia should be a development imperative in order to avert some of the inherent political and economic crisis that led to the near collapse of the state system. This paper also suggests that a partnership between local communities and the state could bring about national integration rather than a development model that is state centered that would require that informal institutions in Liberia play an integral role in the political and economic development of the post-conflict state.

Hence, I will also provide an abridged history of Liberia, followed by the methodology, a conceptual framework of the paper, a literature review, and an analysis of national integration in Liberia.

## **Historical Context**

The history of Liberia can be traced as far back as 1816 with the formation of the American Colonization Society (ACS).<sup>ii</sup> The primary objective of the organization was to promote and execute a plan for settling in Africa freed people of color residing in the United States.<sup>iii</sup> From 1818 to 1847 the American Colonization Society with the support of the United States government began the process of emigration and repatriation of free persons of African heritage back to Africa. The process began with the passage of the Congressional Anti-Slave Trade Act of 1819, when the president of American Colonization Society Bushrod Washington was granted permission by President James Monroe to execute the Congressional Act in Africa<sup>iv</sup>.

However, between 1822 and 1847 Liberia was under the colonial administrative control of the United States government, which apart from protecting Liberia from other neighboring European interests, it was also preoccupied with mounting opposition from the majority indigenous groups. Against this background, the settlers created their own ethnic identity, hence the Americo-Liberians.<sup>v</sup>

On achieving independence, the young republic of Liberia encountered several socio-economic problems; one of which was the hostility between the indigenous people and the Americo-Liberians. One of the causes of this hostility was the land tenure system and land ownership. Thus, opposition by indigenous groups who were the original land owners in Liberia became common. Another reason for this hostility was cultural misunderstanding. The settlers, because of their acquired Western values, had become acculturated in Western culture while their counterparts lived according to traditional African mores.<sup>vi</sup>

The Americo-Liberians viewed the culture of indigenous Liberians as primitive and saw themselves as a civilizing force. Accordingly, President Jenkins Roberts, an Americo-Liberian leader, stated that Americo-Liberians had a manifest destiny to bring civilization to the tribal heathen of the hinter land.”<sup>vii</sup> The hostility between Americo-Liberians and the indigenous groups led to several ethnic conflicts that were apparent in some of the inter-ethnic land conflict in Liberia when the first settlers arrival during the pre-independence period of the republic. According to Gus Liebenow, “The initial misunderstanding was over the traditional concept of land tenure, which was based upon use rather than ownership through purchase...”<sup>viii</sup> This was compounded by the subsequent failure of the settlers or the American Colonization Society to pay even the low prices agreed upon; by the seizure of land for alleged insults against the colonists or for nonpayment of debts; and by constant disputes over land boundaries.”<sup>ix</sup>

The land issue was subsequently complicated by the policies and practices in the use of native labor on farms owned by Liberian settlers. The native labor policies reinforced social inequities between Americo-Liberians and the indigenous groups. For instance, indigenous Liberians lacked basic amenities on farmlands, while Americo Liberians had the power to fine their indigenous employees. Also, the apprenticeship system under which indigenous youth were assigned to Americo Liberian families until they came of age was extensively abused and was at the root of a labor discord during the early period.<sup>x</sup>

However, these actions created a situation in Africa not unlike the very one against which the repatriated Americo Liberians themselves had rebelled against in America. The indigenous Africans were expected to give freely their labor for road construction and other public works; as well as their payment of taxes to an alien people. It is under these inhumane conditions that a conflict between the Americo Liberians and the indigenous Africans was further exacerbated. The Americo-Liberians were committed to Western culture and the capitalist system of labor exploitation. Consequently, they showed cultural hostility towards the indigenous inhabitants. Gus Liebenow addressed the manner in which this hostility was shown as follows:

*“The settlers’ arrogance was demonstrated in relations with the Vai, the Dei, and other indigenous with whom they were in intimate contact created a climate of hostility which still persists today. Ruling during the early period against nudity, wage differentials between settlers and tribal persons, the reluctance of the settler to marry or provide dowry for tribal women with whom the established informal liaisons, continuing efforts at conversion to Christianity, and the patterns of segregation that emerged in housing and education demonstrated the settlers contempt for the tribal persons and their culture”<sup>xi</sup>*

Although over the years many of the abuses have been curbed and even a certain amount of assimilation has taken place across the settler indigenous line, the prescribed form of integration was decidedly on Americo Liberian terms and conditional upon the acceptance by the indigenous person of various facets of the settler culture and not the reverse. The norms that were imposed by the Americo Liberians were modeled after those of the society of North America which had denied them full membership. It is against this background that this paper argues that national integration in Liberia is a political and economic imperative for nation building. Thus, the issue of national integration is even far more profound given the near collapse of the state as a result of the civil war and the post war challenge of nation building.

## **Methodology**

In an attempt to critically analyze the challenges of political and economic integration in Liberia we selected the exploratory method as our main research tool. An exploratory method could be dominated by an intensive analysis of the data and information available or even through valuable interviews.<sup>xii</sup>

This study resorted principally to a critical analysis of the data and information available as well as useful recorded speeches. We used primary and secondary data in our effort to analysis the problems of political and economic integration in Liberia. The limitation of an analysis of this type is the inability to observe these problems as an outside and inside observer. Therefore, one has to settle for available primary and secondary data.

The exploratory approach is an important and effective way of ferreting out information about the issues. It is a valuable and dependable tool of research because it can generate answers and results that approximate reality<sup>xiii</sup> In addition; the exploratory method provides many insights into complex social issues and furnishes answers as to how these complexities could be resolved. As Earl Babbie strongly contends, “Exploratory studies are valuable in social scientific research; they are essential because they yield new insights to topics that are of scholarly interest.”<sup>xiv</sup>

## **Theoretical Framework**

In an attempt to provide an adequate analysis of the challenges of national integration in Liberia, this paper also advances a political economy framework with a focus on class relations. The premise of this analysis is that class divisions and the attendant social cleavages compounded the problem of economic and political integration.

Identifying the class divisions in Liberia disproves the notion that African societies are classless and changeless. And the truth of the social system in Africa has been adequately analyzed by Samir Amin wherein he posits that “The fallacy of the changeless and classless social system in the functionalist premises of the social anthropology of Africa was once again challenged in the history of African political economy.”<sup>xv</sup> Thus, the Trans-Saharan trade enabled the whole world, including the Mediterranean, the Arab and the European to obtain gold from what was the principal producing area before the discovery of America: namely, upper Senegal and Ashanti. These trade relations contributed greatly to the emergence of class oriented structural formations in tropical Africa, and were in Amin’s view integrated at an early stage in the nascent capitalist system.<sup>xvi</sup> Clearly the Trans-Saharan trade, more than any other factor, produced socio-political conditions in Africa that fostered the development of social differentiations, the constitution of states and empires, and the progress of productive forces that led to improvements in the instruments of production, and the adaptation of techniques and products.<sup>xvii</sup>

A class analysis as advanced above provides the context in which one can better understand class relations in Liberia. Even before the adaptation of the Euro American culture by the indigenous Africans there existed was a strong caste system in Liberia. Historically, Liberia's social system was premised on a caste structure. Social groups were defined by two theoretically distinct, but in reality overlapping characteristics.<sup>xviii</sup> Very often the obvious but static caste distinction was based on skin color and ancestral origin. The caste system coincided with class difference defined by the relationship of each group to the means of production and the state.<sup>xix</sup>

The upper caste was occupied by the colonial agents and the other functionaries of the American Colonization Society, who governed Liberia at the time. The class base of this group was essentially petit bourgeois; many were lawyers and doctors. The middle class was composed of mulattoes, the lighter skinned African American, and they had relatively good education.<sup>xx</sup> The last and lowest class was two tiered, the upper tier was occupied by dark skinned African Americans who were predominantly self employed farmers and artisans. The lower tier was composed of a combination of the re-captives from the slave trade and those indigenes residing in areas that were under the jurisdiction of the Liberian colony. The members of this lower group were principally free laborers and indentured servants.<sup>xxi</sup>

Significantly, this social stratification led to intense hostility between the upper echelon and its intermediaries on the one hand, and the middle and lower class on the other. More importantly, by the common wealth period of 1839 – 1847, the American Colonization Society relinquished routine administration of the territory to a comprador class of merchant princes. This development affected the configuration of power in the caste system since the agents of the American Colonization Society were no longer resident in the territory.<sup>xxii</sup>

And even with the changes in the middle class stratum, the re-captives from the slave trade and the indigenes were kept in positions of the lower echelon of the class arrangement; and when independence was declared in 1847, the social structure remained basically the same, still filled with interclass antagonisms. The major antagonism was initially between the mulattoes and their external patrons and the subordinate groups. Later, the struggle pitted the expanded ruling alliance consisting of the dark skinned African Americans and some of the mulattoes, along with their foreign patrons against the subordinate groups, comprising the re-captives from the slave trade and indigenes.<sup>xxiii</sup>

The second major stage of Liberia's socio-economic evolution started in the mid 1920s, when Liberia was formally incorporated into the international economic order. This development was based on wage labor, which replaced the caste system. In other words, the emergent class system cut across the racial clusters of mulattoes, the dark skinned African Americans, the Congoes, and the indigenes. Irrespective of skin color and ethnic background, an individual's class position was now determined by his or her place in the productive process. Accordingly, George Kieh identified these three major classes in Liberia "(i) the ruling class, (ii) the petit bourgeois, (iii) and the subordinate class made up of workers and peasants."<sup>xxiv</sup> Furthermore, Kieh states the ruling class had two layers: upper and lower.

The upper class consisted of the owners of the levers of the economy; these are owners of the means of production. The members of this group resided in the United States and the Western European countries.<sup>xxv</sup> The second lower layer of the ruling class had two major constituencies, the bureaucratic and commercial sectors. The former was composed of the managers of the state machinery. Their principal functions were to maintain law and order.<sup>xxvi</sup> Significantly, the overall function of the local ruling class was to serve as the intermediary for the external and dominant wing of the ruling class (i.e., Indian and Lebanese).

The second class cluster was made up of the petit bourgeois, which included university professors, other academicians, artists, doctors, students, technocrats, and the intelligentsia. The members of this class did not own and control the major means of production and distribution.<sup>xxvii</sup> Instead, they marketed their skills to the ruling class as the basis of their livelihood with a potential to rise to the ruling class, particularly its local wing. At different times, the academicians and students have been known to rally around the oppressed lower class groups in their struggle. At the bottom of the class structure are the workers and peasantry; the workers sold their labor to the ruling class for survival, and thus, the economic system was dependent on them for its well being.<sup>xxviii</sup>

In light of the utility of the political economy framework for understanding the nature of class contradictions and how it inhibits national integration; the orientation is not far reaching in incorporating the informal structures in the analysis of nation building. Instead, it is often preoccupied with the role of the state as the primary instrument used to manage the economy in a way that it perpetuates the interests of the indigenous ruling elite and does of the advanced economies<sup>xxix</sup> Given the failure of the state in Liberia – which has resulted in the widespread loss of legitimate support on the part of the citizenry and sub-national forces, primarily semi-independent ethnic groups and paramount chiefs for the policies and programs of the states.<sup>xxx</sup> A development analysis on national integration is of great importance and it should include an appraisal of the state within a non-western, historical, contextual and conjectural perspective<sup>xxxi</sup> Thus, the communitarian approach would be employed in addition to the political economy orientation to address national integration in the post-conflict environment. This paper therefore suggests that decentralization of governance could lead to national integration.

## **Literature Review**

History has demonstrated that nation building is a complex process. The task to unite a people under a government and create an enabling environment in which their cultural, economic and political aspirations could be met is undoubtedly an enormous one. The task is even more profound when the communities are poly-ethnic - with distinguished customs, languages, and separate identities.<sup>xxxii</sup>

Given the rich literature and the emerging interest in national integration in post-colonial Africa, it is instructive to examine some of the contending analysis on national integration in Africa south of the Sahara and other developing areas such as India, because it provides a contextual understanding for the Liberia. Thus, Immanuel Wallerstein (1960) in his seminal work on *Ethnicity and National Integration* provides a conceptual framework on the intersection between ethnicity and ethnic loyalty and attendant impact on national integration. He suggests that “ethnicity is in some respects dysfunctional for national integration (a prime objective of nationalist movements)... It is also in some respects functional”<sup>xxxiii</sup> Wallerstein (1960) has thus identified four ways in which ethnicity enhances national integration. First, ethnicity diminishes the role of kingship; secondly it provides the basis for re-socialization; thirdly it keeps the social class fluid; and fourthly ethnicity serves as an outlet for political tension.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

Given the theoretical utility of national integration for the newly independent states in Africa south of the Sahara, Wallerstein (1960) provides an understanding of the intersection between ethnicity and national integration. However, the analysis did not provide a pragmatic approach for incorporating national integration in the polity of the emerging Africa south of the Sahara beyond the definitional clarification of ethnicity and national integration. Nonetheless, subsequent work by Wallerstein (1961) on the *Politics of Independence* in the newly independent states provided the platform on how states can further integrate. Wallerstein (1961) posits that the governments of these states cannot assume that they will gain the “residual loyalty” of its citizens. Instead he argues that integration can only become plausible when the citizens legitimize the state as the holder of force, authority, and the central locus of legislation and social decision<sup>xxxv</sup>

In an effort to better address the challenge of national integration it is important that an operational definition of the term be provided because the term “integration” is often loosely interpreted Thus, Weiner (1965) highlights the general usage of the term. In this regard he suggests that the term “integration” may refer to the following:

1. the process of bringing together culturally and socially the discrete groups into a single territorial unit and the establishment of national identity;
2. to the problem of establishing national central authority over subordinate political units or regions which may or may not coincide with distinct cultural or social groups;
3. the linking of government with the governed;
4. the minimum value and consensus necessary to maintain a social order; and
5. the capacity of people in a society to organize for some common purposes<sup>xxxvi</sup>

Given the rather loose interpretation of integration, Weiner (1965) concluded that national integration should therefore be examined along the line of territorial integration, value integration, elite-mass integration, and integrative behavior. The word “integration” he further suggests should be used only when one is referring to the generalized form of holding a system together<sup>xxxvii</sup>

In search for a conceptual framework for interpreting the political evolution of the new states Claude Ake (1966) advanced the theory of Charismatic Legitimation<sup>xxxviii</sup> Hence, a process by which loyalty for the new state is created through the personal influence of the charismatic leader. In the context of the new state, he argues that political integration entails changing the focus of the group from a traditional to a bureaucratic structure. In this regard, he highlighted how Nkrumah's charismatic leadership in Ghana drew upon his functional identity with the traditional chieftaincy<sup>xxxix</sup> That is, through the charismatic leadership of Nkrumah, Ghanaians of diverse origins discovered close and intimate solidarity.<sup>xl</sup> Also, Zolberg (1967) contended that national integration could better be understood when it is examined within the context of the interrelationship between the primordial and the secular institutions<sup>xli</sup> That is, "the notion that wholes are can consist of different parts"<sup>xlii</sup> Thus, he warned the national integration should not be simply advanced from the Western European and American notion of a pluralist society<sup>xliii</sup>

Similarly, in a study of the national integration process in India. Shakir (1982) refuted the Weberian framework of integration, "The notion that people pursue their interests in society by forming groups and selecting identifications that maximize their advantage in the competition for scarce jobs and economic resources and for political power"<sup>xliv</sup> Instead he suggests that national integration should be examined against the background of the inherent class divisions and the economic basis of the political power and the role of the dominant economic class as the ruling class and the manipulation of the system to create political, social and economic inequalities.<sup>xlv</sup>

However, the study of national integration appeared to have taken a paradigm shift from one that focused on the issue of nationalism in the early 1960s to one that primarily focused on "communitarian politics" in the 1980s. For instance, Larson (1984), in her examination of local national integration in Tunisia, concluded that the integration of local communities into national ones is a complex approach which will depend on several factors; but it will primarily depend on the extent of the ties between local and national communities.<sup>xlvi</sup> This integration, she suggests, can be actualized with explicit government policies and programs being directed towards local communities.<sup>xlvii</sup> Such was the case in Uganda in 1992 when the National Resistance Movement government (NRM) adopted what was considered as one of the most far-reaching local government reform programs in the developing world.<sup>xlviii</sup> The communitarian approach as adopted in Uganda was consistent with the widely accepted notion among development agencies such as the World Bank that local authorities are in a better position to implement development policies when compared to central government conditions because of their proximity to local communities. Thus, because local authorities are assumed to have an informational advantage with regard to local conditions and preferences they are likely to be efficient in the delivery of public services<sup>xlix</sup> In light of the proliferation of the communitarian approach in development literature, Midgley (1982), contrarily took a critical look at communitarian approach and suggests that its major weakness is its failure to deal with the realities of the modern world, particularly developing countries<sup>1</sup>

The communal dynamics for national integration was further examined by Hyden and Williams (1994) in their study of Nigeria and Tanzania.<sup>li</sup> Nigeria and Tanzania presents profound examples of how communitarian politics was integrated into the national agenda, though both countries faced different challenges as this effort was advanced. However, Nigeria's effort at national integration was hampered by the presence of authoritarian military regimes at one point or another in her political history.<sup>lii</sup> In the case of Tanzania, the attempt to create a super community which was designed to overcome limitations of ethnicity and religious differences was enhanced by the absence of a dominant ethnic community and the presence of a lingua franca in Swahili.<sup>liii</sup>

Other works on national integration have shifted from the community model and have advanced educational measures as the model for national integration. In this regard, Akpan (1990) suggests that a national education policy could foster national unity. The study further suggests that education agencies such as the Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC) and the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) should develop a student recruitment effort that will bring about diversity in university enrollment<sup>liv</sup> Davis and Kalu-Nwivu (2001) suggest, however, that educational measures such as the recruitment of faculty students and staff from diverse communities is limited in addressing the problem of national integration in Nigeria. This is because of cultural differences among ethnic groups and the nature of ethnic groups' contacts with Europeans in the pre-independence that period has created a regional educational axis of North and South. Thus, ethnic groups with close proximity to the Atlantic coast benefited earlier from European education vis- a vis ethnic groups in the northern part of the country<sup>lv</sup>

The literature on national integration in Liberia is equally rich. Unlike other parts of Africa, Liberia did not experience European colonialism; however, she experienced an internal form of colonialism. Dalton (1965)<sup>lvi</sup> and Lowenkopf (1972)<sup>lvii</sup> examined the extent of the political neglect of the Liberian hinterland and the attendant economic exploitation of the settler colonialists. Though these studies recognized the national integration efforts of President Tubman's "*Unification Policy*," nonetheless, these efforts did not go far enough in bringing about sustainable integration as a result of the Liberian class contradictions and the attendant social cleavages. In this regard, Akpan (1972)<sup>lviii</sup> and Hlophe (1973)<sup>lix</sup> provided an in-depth analysis of class contradictions in Liberia with a specific focus on the continued hegemonic relationship between Americo-Liberians and indigenous groups. However, Fraenkel (1966), in his work on the municipalities of the Kru coast of Liberia, examined the social changes in the coast and the inherent neglect of the coastal areas and the hinterland by the Liberian government. In light of the present political realty in Liberia, the next section suggests that nation building in a post-war environment such as Liberia is plausible if a communitarian approach is adopted because it is integrative and indigenous.

## **Liberia: A Communitarian Approach**

The fourteen year civil that ensued in Liberia after the invasion of Charles Taylor in December 1989 has left an indelible mark in the history of Liberia<sup>lx</sup>. The war has had a profound impact on the economy; it led to the complete destruction of physical infrastructure built over a century and half of enterprise and oligarchic rule, to the killing, maiming and displacement of more than 50 percent of the country's estimated pre-war population of 2.5 million people.<sup>lxi</sup> It is against this backdrop that this paper suggests that the quest for national integration in Liberia is an imperative for nation building in a failed state<sup>lxii</sup>.

In the case of Liberia, national integration has appeared elusive because of the centralized nature of governance that has institutionalized separatist policies such as the Liberia "native policy" in the 1840s and the "indirect rule" of the early 1900s. The "native policy" was advanced by the settler ruling class in an attempt to assimilate the indigenous groups into Western values through Christianization<sup>lxiii</sup>. The "indirect rule" was implemented by the settler ruling class for coercion. For instance, in 1908, soldiers of the Liberian Frontier Force, recruited mainly from the *Mende and Loma* ethnic groups were used as security forces at the district headquarters and to maintain law and order in the districts<sup>lxiv</sup>. By the same token, in 1916, the ruling class began the imposition of an annual hut-tax of one dollar for each hut occupied by an adult indigenous person.<sup>lxv</sup> The hut-tax invariably became a revenue stream for the Liberian government. For example, in 1922, the government of Liberia collected \$151,213.70 from the hut tax<sup>lxvi</sup>.

Thus, oppressive policies such as the native policy and the hut tax prompted the Tubman administration to institute the "*Open Door*" and "*Unification*" policies in the 1940s<sup>lxvii</sup>. The thrust of the "*Open Door*" policy was the creation of an enabling environment for foreign direct investment. The policy encouraged European and American mining and agriculture concessions to primarily engage in the extraction of natural resources<sup>lxviii</sup>. Incidentally, Liberia witnessed a rise in primary production, national income accounts and the development of public infrastructures such as roads<sup>lxix</sup> during the period the "*Open Door*" was instituted. Concomitantly, the American economic aid program led to about \$245 million in grants and loans in Liberia<sup>lxx</sup>.

The primary objective of the "*Unification Policy*" as instituted by the Tubman administration was to discourage the alienation of indigenous Liberians by the settler class and the attendant xenophobic attitudes toward these groups in an effort to achieve national integration<sup>lxxi</sup>. However, the extent to which integration was achieved by the Tubman administration is mixed.

On the one hand, the administration brought the dual political system of the counties and hinterland close to the “*Unification* process” and it encouraged mediation between the indigenous and non-indigenous groups. Furthermore, political suffrage was open to all Liberians regardless of cultural, religious or ethnic origin<sup>lxxii</sup> Although Americo-Liberians remained politically and economically dominant under Tubman’s administration, social cleavages between Americo-Liberians and the indigenous groups, appeared to have been supplanted by the division between the great concessionaires and the mass of the people. Also, new social class patterns emerged which featured the socio-economic disparity between wealthy merchants and senior government officials, both indigenous and Americo-Liberian.<sup>lxxiii</sup>

However, after fourteen years of civil unrest which began with the invasion of the country by Charles Taylor in 1989,<sup>lxxiv</sup> and the subsequent election of the current President Ellen Sireleaf, much of the attention has been drawn to the concept of nation building through demobilization, disarmament and reintegration (DDR)<sup>lxxv</sup>. It is vital that post-conflict states should disarm, demobilize, and reintegrate, in order to ensure lasting peace, improve the economy, rebuild vital state infrastructures, maintain national unity and guarantee equitable and inclusive representation of ethnic and other political minorities. However, it is also instructive to note that following the near collapse of the state, communal institutions and sub-national groups are in a better position to provide much needed economic and social services<sup>lxxvi</sup> for post-conflict development.

This paper suggest a community based approach for achieving national integration because the state as an outgrowth of the colonial experience has not been efficient in bringing about national unity. Instead it has encouraged social control, economic exploitation, and the alienation of local community ties from the political center<sup>lxxvii</sup> The communitarian approach takes into account that Africans have adopted social patterns that were developed outside of formal state structures. These patterns are comprised of broader agreements about basic norms of social organizations located at the level of community institutions. In this regard, the communitarian approach gives political action a centrifugal character and allocates authority from the hands of national leaders and places it in the informal means of association<sup>lxxviii</sup>

In the case of Liberia, Amos Sawyer’s study of *social capital*<sup>lxxix</sup> provides a useful understanding of how the communitarian approach could be employed to address governance in a post-conflict environment such as Liberia. He suggests that Liberia’s political structure has emerged as an over-centralized and predatory system that has become increasingly repressive.<sup>lxxx</sup> The over-centralized nature of the Liberian state parallels other post-independent states in sub-Saharan Africa. This is the case if one examines the relative expenditure or employee size of local governments vis a vis the rest of the public sector in Africa<sup>lxxxi</sup> In post-war Liberia the 2007-2008 budget, which was estimated at \$199,383,453, county administration expenditure was estimated at \$4,998,698. This is approximately 3 percent of total government expenditure<sup>lxxxii</sup> (Table 1 and 2. About here).

Given the centralized nature of the Liberian state, Amos Sawyer's study of *social capital* highlighted the utility of the *Poro* authority as a communitarian approach for attaining a pan-ethnic social order. *Poro* authority, he asserts:

has been the foundation pan-ethnic social institution embracing the collective social institution embracing the collective social and historical experiences of most Mel and Mande-speaking groups in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea<sup>lxxxiii</sup>

Thus, *Poro* authority was employed in the case of Liberia to resolve inter-ethnic conflicts between the Madingo's and the Loma's of Zorzor district. Both groups have historical ties and had lived in the same villages and towns in the area of Zorzo district on Liberia's border with Guinea before the founding of modern Liberia. Inter-ethnic conflicts that have ensued between these groups were effectively mediated by their communities and other non-governmental organizations.<sup>lxxxiv</sup> The conflict resolution capabilities of these sub-national groups often supplant state intervention on matters related to inter-ethnic conflict. Indeed, state intervention is often known to flare up such conflicts, thereby rendering state mediation and reconciliation ineffective.<sup>lxxxv</sup> Lessons learnt from the *Poro* authority suggests that community and indigenous institutions could provide a viable approach to national integration in a post-conflict environment such as Liberia. Whereas, a liberal democratic approach tends to re-invent and consolidate national levels legal and administrative structures, such as the court system and the civil service through capacity building-initiatives<sup>lxxxvi</sup>, reinforcing state centralization in a post conflict environment.

The pursuit of political integration cannot take place in a vacuum without economic integration. The communitarian approach offers an alternative framework from that of modernization. It rejects the orientation of equating socio economic transformation with a modernization process that tends to replicate the patterns of production, consumption, and institutions that prevailed in developed economies. Instead, the communitarian approach stresses the need for an African transformation values that incorporate present and future African realities in order to reverse the process of economic alienation.<sup>lxxxvii</sup>

In the case of Liberia, this paper suggests that economic development efforts by community organizations such as the Liberia Rural Women Association (LIWRA) provide a useful illustration of how self-reliant efforts by non-profit organizations should be incorporated into national development schemes. LIWRA is a not for profit, non-governmental, and non-partisan women organization founded on October 15, 1997, as part of the program celebrating World Food Day. LIWRA is an inclusive organization that has engaged women from 15 Liberian counties in community economic development efforts.<sup>lxxxviii</sup> The following are some of LIWRA community development efforts:

- In October 2002 LIWRA trained one hundred and fifty women in micro credit scheme;
- In May 2003 LIWRA trained fifty displaced women in Jaltono displaced camp in soap making; and
- LIWRA has acquired 125 acres of land in Grand Cape Mount County to engage in community farming, additional efforts are being made to acquire an additional one hundred and fifty acres of land in Todee for farming.<sup>lxxxix</sup>

The illustrated example of the Liberian Rural Women Association's efforts in community economic development schemes suggests that citizen participation in economic development initiatives should be given careful consideration as macroeconomic policies are developed<sup>xc</sup>

## Conclusion

The quest for national integration in Liberia is an evolving pursuit. The challenge under the current political dispensation is the development of bottom-up policies that will give deliberate consideration to the adoption of development policies that are communitarian in approach. As illustrated in this paper, African post-independence leaders appeared to have modeled the crude governance of the early colonial period rather than model of pre-colonial or the later colonial period when local governments were training ground for national democracy.<sup>xc</sup> Thus, in the case of post-conflict Liberia, the pursuit of national integration would need to involve local governments and sub-national groups. Therefore, in order to achieve national political and economic integration there must be a broader involvement from the citizenry. Along this line, Brinkerhoff and Ogbaharya suggests that "one of the tools that need to be included in the toolkit of sustainable peace building is the role of communal institutions".<sup>xcii</sup>

Similarly, Brahim Kaba (2002).<sup>xciii</sup> Provided that cautionary steps are equally relevant and pragmatic for attaining national integration in post-conflict Liberia. He asserts that the quality and strength of a country's human resources depend to a great extent on three essential factors:

- The extent to which the country's population is unified towards the attainment of specific goals for the purpose of peace and prosperity for all its members;
- How much "saved" capital resources ( in terms of both monetary and non-monetary resources) are allocated to the well being of the individuals composing the country's population, especially in the forms of the provision of proper health care, fundamental education, adequate training, employment, personal and collective sense of security, protecting their essential human rights.. as well as an appropriate protection and sound management of the environment.; and

- The system of social, political and economic management must be put in place to optimize the productive capacity of the unified elements of the population.<sup>xciv</sup> This factor is part of the system of governance and it permeates all areas of the society.<sup>xcv</sup>

Table 1  
Government Employment as a Percentage of Population 1997

Region	Total Govt	Central Govt	Local Govt	Teaching and Health
Africa	2.0	0.9	0.3	0.8
Asia	2.6	0.9	0.7	1.0
Eastern Europe & former USSR	6.9	1.0	0.8	5.1
Latin America & Caribbean	3.0	1.2	0.7	1.1
Middle East & North Africa	3.9	1.4	0.9	1.6
OECD	7.7	1.8	2.5	3.4
Total	4.7	1.2	1.1	2.4

Source: Dele Olowu. Local Institutional and Political Structures and Processes: Recent Experience in Africa” *Public Administration Development*, 23, (2003): 42

Table 2  
Local Government Expenditure as a Percentage of National Government Expenditure in Selected Countries

African countries	%	Asian Countries	%	Latin American Countries	%	OECD Countries	%
Ghana	4	India	49	Argentina	45	Argentina	49
Senegal	7	Indonesia	15	Brazil	38	Canada	60
Swaziland	2	Malaysia	14	Chile	9	France	19
Uganda	21	-	-	-	-	Germany	40
Zambia	3	-	-	-	-	Netherlands	28
Zimbabwe	8	-	-	-	-	Spain	34
Ethiopia	36	-	-	-	-	Sweden	34
Nigeria	26	-	-	-	-	UK	28
RSA	41	-	-	-	-	USA	44
Liberia	3	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source: Dele Olowu. Local Institutional and Political Structures and Processes: Recent Experience in Africa” *Public Administration Development*, 23, (2003): 42

## Notes

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<sup>ii</sup> Hannah Abedou Bowen Jones, “ The Africanization of the Republic of Liberia” *Liberian Studies Journal*, XXII,1(1997):8-21

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<sup>v</sup> Hanah Abedou Brown Jones, p.14

<sup>vi</sup> Christopher William. “End of an Epoch: The Tolbert Doe Transition in Liberia.” *Tran Africa Forum*. Vol.5 No.2 1988. p. 27

<sup>vii</sup> Gus Liebenow. *Liberia: The Evolution of Privilege*. Ithaca ; New York: Cornell University Press, 1969, p. 7

<sup>viii</sup> Gus Liebenow. *The Quest for Democracy* Indiana, Indiana University Press, 1987 47.

<sup>ix</sup> Ibid.

<sup>x</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>xii</sup> Babbie Earl. *The Practice of Social Research* Belmont, California, Woodsworth Publishing Company, 1979

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<sup>xiv</sup> Ibid, p. 86

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<sup>xx</sup> George Klay Kieh “Cause of Liberia’s Coup” *Tran Africa Forum*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (1989): p 38.

<sup>xxi</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xxii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xxiv</sup> George Klay Kieh “Causes of Liberia Coup” p 39

<sup>xxv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Ibid, p;40

<sup>xxviii</sup> Ibid, p;40

<sup>xxix</sup> Goran Hyden and Donlad C. Williams, “ A Community Model of African Politics: Illustrations from Nigeria and Tanzania” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol 36., No 1 ( January 1994):77

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<sup>xxx1</sup> Ibid; p.396

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<sup>xxxiv</sup> Ibid; p.134

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<sup>xxxviii</sup> Claude Ake, “Charismatic Legitimation and Political Integration” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 9, No. 1 (October 1966):1-13

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<sup>xlii</sup> Ibid; p.451

<sup>xliii</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>iii</sup> *Ibid.*;p.94

<sup>iiii</sup> *Ibid*; p.94

<sup>liv</sup> Philip Akpan, The Role of Higher Education in National Integration in Nigeria”, *Higher Education*, vol. 19. No. 3 (1990): 293-303

<sup>lv</sup> Thomas J. Davis and Azubike Kalu-Nwiwu, “Education, Ethnicity and National Integration in the History of Nigeria: Continuing Problems of Africa’s Colonial Legacy” *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol 86. No. 1 ( Winter 2001): 1-11

<sup>lvi</sup> George Dalton, Politics, and Economic Development in Liberia, *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 25, No. 4, ( December, 1965):569-591

<sup>lvii</sup> Martin Lowenkopf, Political Modernization in Liberia: A Conservative Model, *The Western Political Quarterly*. Vol. 25 No. 1 ( March, 1972): 94-108

<sup>lviii</sup> M.B Akpan, “Black Imperialism : Americo- Rule over the African Peoples of Liberia: 1841-1964” *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 7, No.2, (1973):217-236

<sup>lix</sup> Stephen Hlophe, “The Significance of Barth and Geertz Model of Ethnicity in the Analysis of Nationalism in Liberia”, *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2, (1973):237-256

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<sup>lxii</sup> Derick W. Brinkerhoff, “Rebuilding Governance in Failed States and Post Conflict Societies: Core Concepts and Cross Cutting Themes” *Public Administration and Development*, 23, 1. ( 2005): 41-52

The label “failed state” has employed in this study describe the extreme cases of state collapse, such as Somalia and Liberia.

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<sup>lxv</sup> Ibid; p. 230

<sup>lxvi</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>lxviii</sup> George Dalton, “Politics, and Economic Development in Liberia”, *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 25, No. 4, ( December, 1965):584

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<sup>lxxx</sup> Ibid; p.1

<sup>lxxxi</sup> Dele Olowu. Local Institutional and Political Structures and Processes: Recent Experience in Africa” *Public Administration Development*, 23, (2003): 41-52

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<sup>lxxxvii</sup> Adebayo Adedeji, “An Alternative for Africa” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol 5, No 4, (October, 1994): 199-132.

<sup>lxxxviii</sup> The Liberian Rural Women Association Brochure (UNDATED). The Liberian Rural Women Association was also a partner with North Carolina Central University in a USAID /UNCFSP International Development Partnership Grant that sought to address “ Democracy and Development in Liberia” 2006-2007

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<sup>xciv</sup> Ibid; p.2

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