

The Human Development Crisis in Liberia

George Klay Kieh, Jr.

Introduction

Since it gained “flag independence” in 1847, the Liberian State and its custodians have never made human development a priority. Although the various regimes---from Roberts to Taylor--- have given lip service to the importance of human development as the terra firma of national development, the rhetoric has never been translated into praxis. Accordingly, over the years, the country’s human development crisis has grown increasingly worse as life for the overwhelming majority of Liberians, in the Hobbesian parlance, became “...poor, nasty, brutish and short” (Hobbes, 1996: xii). The sordid state of human development in Liberia is vividly captured in the country’s human development report for 2006. According to the United Nations Development Program (2006:38), “Liberia’s human development index has, for some time, been at the bottom of the list of countries with the lowest human development indices.”

After two civil wars(1989-1997 and 1999-2003)and their cataclysmic consequences, the ushering in of a “new post-conflict order” under the leadership of a democratically government has raised hopes that Liberia’s perennial human development crisis would be seriously tackled as the epicenter of the peace-building project currently underway in the country. President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf has fueled the hopes by asserting her government’s commitment to remedy the country’s growing “human development deficit.” According to her:

At the core of [post-conflict human development in Liberia must be] an expansion of people’s choices and access to the most valued elements of a stable democratic society: greater access to knowledge, better nutrition and health services, more secure livelihood, protection from crime and physical violence; and a sense of inclusion in community activities (Johnson-Sirleaf, 2006:3)

Against this background, the purpose of this article is four-fold. First, the study will examine the taproots and the dynamics of Liberia’s human development crisis. Second, it will assess its consequences and implications for environmental sustainability and stability. Third, the article will evaluate the emerging

efforts of the new Johnson-Sirleaf regime in addressing the country's human development crisis. Fourth, the study will suggest ways in which Liberia's human development crisis can be addressed.

The Methodological Issues

Conceptualization

The study uses the conceptualization of human development provided by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). According to the UNDP (1990:2), "human development is a process of enlarging people's choices. The most critical ones are to lead a long and health live; to be educated and to enjoy a decent standard of living."

Data and Data Sources

The study uses secondary data. The data cover various areas: economic, environmental, political, social and security. With each category, there are specific data for each indicator.

The data were collected from various sources, including the annual human development report published by the United Nations Development Program; the recent human development report on Liberia published by the United Nations Development Program; various surveys about the economic and social conditions in Liberia published by the Liberian Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs; journal and newspaper articles; book chapters; monographs and books.

The Variable and Indicators

Human development is the only variable used in the study. Based on the conceptual framework, human development has three critical dimensions: long and healthy life; education and decent standard of living.

Several indicators are used to operationalize human development and to gauge its three critical dimensions: the rate of unemployment, the poverty rate, the extreme poverty rate, income inequality, life expectancy, adult literacy rate, population with access to health services, population with access to safe drinking water, population with access to acceptable sanitation, adult mortality rate, child mortality rate, maternal mortality rate and death rate. Both the individual and collective values of the various indicators provide the empirical referents that are used to gauge the state of human development in Liberia during particular time periods, and to discern the resultant trends and patterns. capture the essence of human development.

The Human Development Crisis: Taproot and Dimensions

The Taproot

The neo-colonial Liberian State is primarily responsible for the human development crisis the country has experienced since it gained independence. The nature, mission, character, values and policies of the neo-colonial construct have asphyxiated human development, since the founding of the state. Historically

and culturally, by its nature, the Liberian State is an alien creature fashioned based on the experiences of the repatriated African-Americans and the imperatives of neo-colonialism. The repatriated African-Americans, who founded the modern Liberian State, formulated the vision of a state based on their experiences as slaves in the American South. Having being subjected to the vagaries of plantation-based slavery, the repatriated African-Americans envisioned the creation of an independent Liberian State in which they would be the “masters” and their indigenous kin would be the “servants.” This vision was hoisted on a mythology that portrayed the repatriated African-Americans as “civilized” and the indigenes as “heathens, infidels and savages” (Mower cited in Boley, 1983:29). Subsequently, when Liberia was formally incorporated into the international capitalist system in the late 1920s, the nature of the state was transformed by the imperatives of colonialism. Essentially, the emergent neo-colonial state was re-fashioned based on the exigencies of global capitalism. So, in essence, the core of the nature of the Liberian State remained alien. The various regimes that have managed the Liberian State have made no effort to change the nature of the state, so that it can reflect the historical and cultural experiences of Liberia and Africa.

With an externally-imposed neo-colonial nature as its vortex, the mission of the Liberian State became twofold. First, the state’s major role was to create favorable conditions for the private accumulation of capital by metropolitan-based multinational corporations and other businesses. Second, the state provided an avenue for the local compradors---including the state managers---to accumulate wealth through an assortment of “rent seeking” behavior (Mbaku, 1994). So, like in other African neo-colonial formations, the Liberian compradors never had development---human and others---on the country’s national agenda (Ake, 1982).

Significantly, the fact that the neo-colonial Liberian State and its custodians have never had any interest in human development is reflected in the character of the state. Again, like other neo-colonial constructs, the Liberian State has a multidimensional character described variously as “absentee,” “criminalized,” “negligent,” “neo-patrimonial,” “prebendal,” “repressive,” “vampirish” and “warlordist.” As Agbese (2006:36) notes, “The typical African state is a composite of several tendencies of characteristics. The ascendancy of any particular tendency is a function of numerous conjunctural factors.” For example, the “absentee” and “negligent” characters of the neo-colonial Liberian were reflected in the fact that the state regularly collected taxes---including “development taxes”----but refused to attend to the basic human needs of the citizens. In other words, the Liberian State was always present when it was time to collect “rents” from the citizens, but was negligent and absent, when the citizens wanted their human development needs addressed. Characteristically, when the citizens protested, the Liberian State then shifted to its “repressive “ character by, inter alia, deploying the full battery of its instruments of violence. For example, on April 14, 1979, when the Liberian People held massive demonstrations throughout the country to protest the state’s agricultural policies, especially the plan to arbitrarily increase the price of

rice, the staple food, the state responded with maximum brute force. Consequently, thousands of Liberian were killed and maimed by the state security apparatus.

In terms of values, the overarching one was that the purpose of working in the state bureaucracy was not to perform public service, especially serving the human development needs of ordinary Liberians, but as a quick and relatively risk-free route to the private accumulation of capital through plunder and pillage. In other words, people did not seek employment in the public sector either as civil servants or politicians because they were primarily motivated by a sense of service. Instead, the guiding principle was the a job in the public service gave an office holder, depending on his or her station, the opportunity to accumulate wealth illegitimately by stealing directly from the public coffers and collecting “rents” in the forms of bribes from various individuals and groups, who conducted business with the state.

Fundamentally, the resultant public policies were designed to foster the private accumulation of capital by the custodians of the state and their external patrons. For example, political policies were intended to maintain “law and order,” since an atmosphere of conflict was inimical to the private accumulation process. For example, the Sedition Law (Republic of Liberia, 1978), the Emergency Powers Act (Republic of Liberia, 1979) and PRC Decree #88 –A (Republic of Liberia, 1984) were all designed by various Liberian governments to cow the population into submission, so that the private accumulation process would not be adversely affected. For example, the Sedition Law made it a crime to criticize an official of the Liberian Government (Republic of Liberia, 1978). The Emergency Powers Act, which was routinely passed by the National Legislature of Liberia during the Tolbert Era (1971-1980), in contravention of the constitution, gave the President of Liberia carte blanche authority to order the arrest and detention of anyone, who the President deemed was a “threat to national security.” Under such circumstance, the individual or individuals were held for indefinite periods without trial. Individually and collectively, these draconian laws insulated the members of the compradorial class and their patrons from public accountability for their failure to formulate and implement the requisite public policies that would have addressed the basic human needs of the Liberian People. In the economic sphere, the state’s policies were never designed to help create jobs and to foster domestic capital formation. Instead, the major preoccupation of officer holders was to attract foreign investors as a way of increasing the sources for the private accumulation of capital. For example, during the height of Liberia’s “Open Door Policy,” there was an influx of metropolitan-based multinational corporations into the various sectors of the country’s economy, especially the mining, rubber and forestry sector. While the boom in foreign investment precipitated phenomenal economic growth rates, the dividends from the boom did not improve the human development needs of the Liberian People. Clower et al (1966) referred to this phenomenon as “growth without development.”

Similarly, the country’s health policies were not designed to meet the needs of the Liberian People. For example, during the period 1986-1993, the government’s health expenditures accounted for a dismal 5%

of the respective national budgets (United Nations Children Fund, 1996). Hence, it was no surprise that only 35% of the Liberian Population had access to health services (Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs, 1984). This meant that 65% of the population, the majority of whom were primarily rural-based, had no access to health care. One of the consequences of state neglect was the vulnerability of the population to diseases, especially curable ones. Interestingly, the members of the Liberian compradorial class and their relatives received first-class health care in the United States and Europe, at the expense of the state. For example, during the Tubman regime (1944-1971), the President made annual “health trips” to Europe that usually lasted an average of a month. So, while the Liberian health infrastructure and services were poor and inadequate, the custodian of the state used the state’s financial resources to attend to they and their relatives’ private health needs.

Also, the state’ educational policies reflected the vagaries of neglect as evidenced by the inadequacy of schools; inadequate funding; the lack of instructional resources and low incentives for teachers---salaries and benefits. For instance, during the period 1986-1993, investment in public education accounted for a mere 11% of the national budgets (United Nations Children Fund, 1997). One of the major outcomes of the state’s negligent educational policy was the continuing rise in the country’s illiteracy rate. For example, by 1985, the literacy rate stood at a paltry 35 % (See Table 2). Again, while the compradors failed to invest in public education---from the primary to the tertiary level---, they used the resources of the state to send their children and other relatives to some of the best institutions in the United States and Europe.

Significantly, since the ascendancy of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf to the Liberian Presidency on January 16, 2006, the emerging trend suggests that the neo-colonial Liberian State will not be democratically reconstituted. This is because the Sirleaf regime has accepted the neo-colonial construct, which it inherited, in total. Clearly, the regime believes that nothing is wrong with the neo-colonial construct. Instead, what is needed is simply a “change of regime.” So, the regime is trying to institute some reforms in the public sector within the bowels of the neo-colonial Liberian State. Also, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, two imperialist international economic institutions, have re-established their suzerainty over the Liberian political economy. Based on the repository of empirical evidence based on the experiences of various third world countries, these Bretton Woods Institutions have gained notoriety for visiting socio-economic hardships on citizens through their neo-liberal package that has the “rolling back of the state” and an assault on the “social safety net” as the epicenter. Importantly, if the neo-colonial Liberian State is not democratically reconstituted, then it will remain the primary source of the human development crisis in Liberia. This is because its attributes---nature, mission, character, values and policies---will not address the human development needs of Liberians.

The Dimensions of the Crisis

The human development crisis that have engulfed Liberia since its founding is a multidimensional phenomenal. In this section, the focus will be on the examination of the economic and social dimensions of the crisis.

Table 1: Liberia: Economic Human Development Indicators, 1985&2005

Indicator	1985	2005
Extreme poverty rate (%) (Living on less than \$0.50/day)	12	52
Poverty rate (%) (Living on less than \$1.00/day)	-	76.2
Unemployment	-	85.0

Sources: United Nations Development Program, Liberia: Human Development Report, 2006, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p.1; and United Nations Development Program, Human Development Report, 1990, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p.132.

The economic dimensions

The economic dimensions of the human development crisis in Liberia are vividly captured by two major indicators: unemployment and poverty. The perennial high rate of unemployment reflected the unwillingness and incapacity of the Liberian State and its various regimes to make the state “productive” (Mbaku, 1999). That is, the state has been unable to formulate and implement the requisite policies that would create jobs and wealth so that the Liberian People can extricate themselves from the every tightening net of deprivation and abject poverty. As Table 1 shows, the rate of unemployment stood at 85% in 2005. The statistic is even higher when the phenomenon of the “working poor” is factored in. Among the 15% of the population that was employed in 2005, there was a group encompassing civil servants, with very low salaries----a base monthly salary of \$15.00 per month (National Transitional Government of Liberia, 2005). The base salary of \$15.00 was woefully inadequate for civil servants to meet their families’ basic human needs. For example, the price for a bag of rice (100lbs), the country’s staple food hovered between \$20-\$25. With a base monthly salary of \$15.00, the average civil servant could not afford to buy the staple food. Moreover, he or she could not cover the costs of other basic human needs such as health care, transportation and housing. Accordingly, although, these civil servants were employed, their human conditions were akin to those of the unemployed and destitute sectors of the Liberian Society. Another major aspect of the unemployment conundrum was the lumpen proletarianization of the sector of the “chronically unemployed,” consisting mainly of the youth. Those in this sector could not find gainful employment in the formal economy over protracted period of time. Exasperated by the resultant economic hardship, they resorted to criminal activities---robbery, counterfeiting, financial scams, and the sale of illegal drugs, among others. Interestingly, the precarious economic conditions of this sector coupled with the absence of political consciousness made it the most

dangerous tier of the Liberian Society. Accordingly, it was no surprise when this sector provided the bulk of the personnel for the various militias that fought in Liberia's two civil wars. With no stake in the Liberian political economy and spurred by the mirage of instant wealth from the loot and booty, the members of this sector were eager to fight in the country's two civil wars.

Historically, as a peripheral capitalist formation, Liberia has been divided into classes: ruling, petit bourgeois, working and peasantry. The ruling class had two tiers: The upper one was occupied by the owners of foreign capital---mining, rubber and timber companies---, who owned and controlled the major means of production and therefore the Liberian economy. The lower tier comprised state managers--- government officials---, local Liberian business people and foreign merchants---Lebanese, Indians and Syrians. The petit bourgeois class consisted of the intelligentsia and other skilled persons, who sold their skills and talents to the upper class in exchange for wages. The working class was small, and consisted primarily of workers in the mining, agricultural and forestry sectors. These workers provided a pool of cheap labor, especially for foreign-based multinational corporations. This was made possible through state repression: when the workers protested their exploitation, the state never hesitated to unleash the fury of its military and security apparatus ostensibly to "keep the workers in check and in line." The peasantry was composed of subsistent farmers, who produced mainly for consumption. Significantly, the class structure determined the distribution of income and wealth. The resultant reflected gross inequities. As Akpa (1981:387) argues, "In 1977, for instance, a mere 2 percent of the people (in Liberia) accounted for some 33percent of nation-wide wage income." This meant that the remaining 67% was distributed among 98% of the population. Similarly, the distribution of wealth underscored the economic inequities. For example, by 1980, 2% of the population accounted for 60% of the national wealth (Movement for Justice in Africa, 1980:2). About seventeen years thereafter, the skewed distribution of wealth in Liberia reached a high point as reflected in the Gini coefficient of 0.53(Peters and Shapouri, 1997:45). The inequities in both income and wealth led to abject poverty. For example, in 2005, the poverty rate stood at 76.2%. So, more than three-fourths of the population of Liberia lived on less than \$1.00 a day (Table 1). To make matter worse, 52% of the population was classified as suffering from extreme poverty (they lived on less than \$0.50 a day).

One of the major adverse effects of abject poverty was that thousands of Liberians could not afford to buy food. Specifically, some of them could not afford food at all; consequently, they went to bed hungry daily. Others could afford little amount of food, but not enough to support a health diet. Both the lack and the inadequacy of food caused malnutrition. For example in 1990, 34% of the population was undernourished (World Bank, 2006). In 2000, 26.5% of the children under the age of five were malnourished.

The social dimensions

As Table 2 indicates, the social conditions of the preponderant majority of the Liberian People were horrendous. In the area of education, the lack of the state's investment in public education led, inter alia,

to the majority of the people being unable to read and write in English, the country's official language. Although, the adult literacy rate experienced a modest increase of 3%, between 1985 and 2000, this did not set into motion a fundamental shift. The fact remained that in 2000, for example, 62% of the adult population was illiterate. This had several effects. Overall, Liberia lacked the pool of educated and skilled labor that was critical for its economic development. Also, the high rate of illiteracy made it impossible for investments to be made in capital intensive projects. In turn, this adversely affected indigenous technological development. Accordingly, the little technology that was available in the economy was provided by foreign-based multinational corporations within the narrow confines of their specific private investments. So, it did not have any "spill-over" into other sectors of the Liberian economy. Clearly, if the Liberian State had investment in public education, several Liberians would have become literate and skilled. Such a human resource pool could have been harnessed, among other things, to engage in research and development that could have helped transformed the country from a perennial export enclave of raw materials---iron ore, rubber and logs---to an economically competitive state with technological know-how and an industrial base. The other drawback occasioned by the high rate of illiteracy was that the majority of Liberians did not have the required skills set that were imperative for understanding the operations of the state. Accordingly, this worked to the advantage of the Liberian ruling class, because the informed citizen participation in the affairs of the body politic that was required to serve as a check on the abuses and excesses of the ruling class was quite minimal. In fact, the ruling class used this to engage in a "policy of divide and rule," by driving a wedge between the literate and illiterate segments of the Liberian population. One of the effective propaganda tools that the ruling class used was to portray literate, educated and politically active Liberians as "trouble makers," who were desirous of causing chaos, thereby disrupting the lives of illiterate and unskilled Liberians. Ultimately, this made it quite difficult for the literate and illiterate sectors of the society to forge the alliance that was exigent for keeping the ruling class in check.

In the area of health, the statistics contained in Table 2 present a vivid picture of the threats posed to the survival of the Liberian People by a negligent state. For example, in 1985, 39% of the population had access to health services. Although, the figure for 2000 showed an increase of over 30%, the statistic does not reflect the reason for the dramatic increase. The increase was caused by the massive influx of international humanitarian assistance to Liberia, beginning in 1990, with the outbreak of the country's first civil war. Health-based non-governmental organizations like Doctors without Borders took control of the country's public health sector and provided services to large segments of the population, who were neglected by the Liberian State over the years. In short, the increase was due to the "NGO effect," not state policy.

Also, the data for the health-related areas of access to acceptable sanitation and safe drinking water reflect the characteristic neglect of the Liberian State (see Table 2). In 2000, less than half of the Liberian Population had access to acceptable sanitation. Similarly, during the same period, only 26% of the

population had access to safe drinking water. Importantly, the confluence of limited access to health services, limited access to acceptable sanitation and the prevalence of unsafe drinking water made the majority of Liberians vulnerable to diseases, their associated illnesses and death. For instance, the life expectancy took a “nose dive” in 2000, from 55 years in 1985 to 47.7 years. Specifically, in 2000, adult mortality stood at a very high 537 per 1,000 persons. Also, child mortality was 132 per 1,000 children. As for maternal mortality, the figure was 578 per 100,000 women. The national death rate was 23.1% per 1,000 people.

Table 2: Liberia: Social Human Development Indicators, 1985 & 2000

Indicator	1985	2000
Adult literacy rate (%)	35	38
Adult mortality (probability of Dying between the ages of 15-59) per1000	-	537
Child mortality (probability of dying Under age 5years) per l, 000	-	196
Death rate (%) per 1,000 population	-	23.1
Life expectancy (years)	55	47.7
Maternal mortality rate (%) per 100,000	-	578
Population with access to acceptable sanitation (%)	-	45.0
Population with access to health services (%)	39	69.4
Population with access to safe drinking water (%)	44	26.0

Sources: United Nations Development Program, Liberia: Human Development Report, 2006, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 1; and Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs, Economic Surveys of Liberia, (Monrovia: Government Printing Office, 1984).

The Consequences of the Crisis

The perennial human development crisis in Liberia like a termite ate the fabric of the society. The consequences of the crisis were reflected in several areas. In the sphere of human capabilities, as the discussion in the preceding section shows, they were severely diminished. The cumulative effects of unemployment, abject poverty, limited access to health care, safe drinking water and acceptable sanitation made it impossible for the majority of Liberians to develop their full human potentials and lead healthy, long productive and creative lives.

Another outcome was the development of the “dependency syndrome.” Because the majority of Liberians were poor and therefore could not provide for their basic human needs, they became reliant on “handouts,” especially from the members of the ruling class. Interestingly, the members of the ruling

class, particularly, the state managers wing, was using the wealth that it had plundered and pillage from state resources to engage in pretentious “acts of humanitarianism.” Importantly, the emergent relationship made the majority of Liberians vulnerable to manipulation and reticent about the excesses of the members of the ruling class. Like in any patron-client relationship, the members of the ruling class made the dispensing of “handouts” to poverty-stricken Liberians the pro quid pro for the political support. Simply, if the poor masses did not support the interests of the ruling class, then the “handouts” were withheld as punishment. The resultant “politics of the belly,” to use Jean Francois-Bayart’s characterization, made the poor Liberian masses willing to sacrifice the push for the immediate and long-term betterment of their human development needs in exchange for an ad hoc approach that was based on the personal whims and caprices of the members of the ruling class. In effect, with the majority of the population hamstrung by the reliance on the “generosity” of the members of the ruling class for their survival, the human development crisis was prolonged.

A related consequence was the use of elections by the Liberian masses as “rent seeking opportunities” (Kieh, 2006). For instance, during the 1997 post-first civil war elections, Charles Taylor won the presidential election to large extent because he engaged in an extensive distribution of food and other material benefits to the voters throughout the country. Similarly, during the recent 2005 national elections, various presidential and legislative candidates gave voters food, money and other material benefits, in exchange for votes (Kith, 2006). In essence, given the human development crisis, the majority of Liberians viewed elections as “golden opportunities” to extract and collect “rents” from candidates. The major drawback with this trend is that elections in Liberia are not about competition over divergent policy trajectories and the attendant issues. Instead, elections are about the candidates from whom the electorate can collect “rents” in exchange for votes. The consequent danger is that the human development-deprived Liberians’ pre-occupation with short-term and immediate gratification could make them to elect public officials, whose performance could worsen the human development crisis. For example, the poor performance of the Taylor regime worsened the human development crisis (United Nations Development Program, 2006).

Also, the human development crisis contributed to Liberia’s two civil wars. As the Sustainable Development Institute (2006:1) observes, “Poverty was a contributing factor that led to violence that engulfed Liberia in 1990 that lasted for almost fourteen years.” Over time, like a degenerative disease, the sordid state of human development undermined the legitimacy of the Liberian State and its various governments. The horrendous performance of the Doe regime (1980-1989) simply exacerbated the human development crisis, and served as the proximate factor that occasioned the first civil war in 1989. In other words, the seeds for the war were planted beginning in 1847, and were nurtured by various regimes over more than a century. Although the ruling class had some success in keeping the majority of Liberians pliant through, among other things, the dispensing of “handouts,” the scope and depth of the human development crisis undermined the long-term viability of the “dependent relationship.” Moreover,

since the relationship that had developed between the members of the ruling class and those of the subaltern classes was an opportunistic one, it was therefore vulnerable to collapse in the face of a strong counter-current. Clearly, warlordism provided the counter-pressure, especially in view of the fact that it promised instant improvement in the human needs of the members of the subordinate classes, especially the lumpens and the hoi polli. Similarly, the poor performance of the Taylor regime, especially in the area of human development, occasioned the second civil war, beginning in 1999. Again, the fact that the human development crisis had gotten worse under the Taylor regime militated against the regime's efforts to re-establish the old "dependent relationship" between the ruling and subaltern classes. That is, despite the Taylor regime's dispensing of "handouts," the deepening human development crisis as part of the broader problem of state failure undercut the regime's efforts to induce stability through catering to the short-term human needs of the Liberian masses.

So, the protracted period of the human development crisis created a national sense of insecurity among Liberians. Clearly, the various regimes could not address the crisis and the resultant mass insecurity; hence, Liberians were willing to give professed "liberators" the opportunity, even through the use of violence. This orientation created the enabling environment in which the Charles Taylor-led National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) launched the war designed to oust the Doe regime from power; and the Liberians United for Reconstruction and Democracy (LURD) and later the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) launched the armed insurgencies intended to depose the Taylor regime. As Kofi Annan, the outgoing Secretary-General of the United Nations asserts, "Humanity cannot enjoy security without development or development without security and neither without the respect for human rights (Annan, 2005:151).

Significantly, the environment in Liberia has suffered greatly as a result of the human development crisis. This is because human development-deprived Liberians have inflicted various types of damages on the environment actions such as actions as pollution, hunting and the cutting of trees. The gravity of the problem has led Somah (2005:1) to characterize the Liberia as being on the "brink of irreversible environmental/ecological impotency." In the area of pollution, there are two major issues. First, the absence of public latrines and relevant sanitary facilities left residents with no options but to use ocean beaches and public surroundings to defecate (Koffa, 2004:1). Human and animal feces dangerously undermined water quality; all of which aggravated various chronic outbreaks of cholera, malaria, typhoid and other waterborne diseases that have turned Liberia into an inescapable "death trap" (Koffa, 2004:1). Second, the reliance by a substantial proportion of the population on traditional fuel such as wood and charcoal for energy contributed to air pollution. According to the United Nations Development Program (2006:1), in 2001, 98.5% of the population relied on the use of these pollution-causing sources of energy.

The inability of the preponderant majority of Liberians to find employment and provide for their food needs led to the indiscriminate hunting of animals. In some cases, the carcasses were sold; and the money

accrued was used to purchase items in efforts to address basic human needs. In other instances, the animals were strictly used to meet food needs. Despite the various uses, the fact of the matter was that indiscriminate hunting led to the decimation of various animal species, including those in the various national forests. This practice has created ecological imbalances in terms of various species of animals.

Another environmental consequence is that the cutting of trees has led to the depletion of various species of trees and the broader problem of deforestation and its associated adverse effects on the environment. The cutting of trees to make coal for sale became a “growth industry” throughout the country. Private individuals, stripped for money and pressed to fulfill their basic human needs launched an assault on the country’s forests. The burning of the trees to make coal contributed to air pollution. Because of the pervasiveness and duration of the activity, there are deep fissures on Liberia’s forest landscape. If nothing is done to end the practice, the country’s forests and their various species of trees would be depleted very soon.

The New Sirleaf Regime: Will The Crisis End?

Does the Sirleaf regime have a plan and the required political will to take the requisite steps that are needed to address and eventually end Liberia’s chronic human development crisis? Although the Sirleaf regime has been in power for at least a year, hence, it is difficult to attempt to find definitive answers to the aforementioned questions, the emerging policy directions can be examined as ways of gauging the regime’s approach to the country’s human development crisis. Against this background, three major issues will be examined: The issue of the reconstitution of the neo-colonial Liberia State, which was raised in the introductory section of the paper, the prospects for employment and efforts to address the problem of income inequities in the public sector. In her Inaugural Address delivered on January 16, 2006, and in subsequent policy pronouncements, President Sirleaf made no mention of her government’s plan to reconstitute the neo-colonial Liberian State. Thus, as has been argued, the neo-colonial Liberian State remains in tact; however, there have been personnel changes. Moreover, it is clear that the regime’s “reform agenda” will be pursued in the bowels of the neo-colonial state. The decision by the Sirleaf administration not to deconstruct, rethink and democratically reconstitute the Liberian State does not portend well for addressing the country’s human development crisis. This is because the very neo-colonial Liberian State that has collected taxes, but failed to provide basic social services; pandered to the interests of the ruling class; promoted gross inequities in wealth and income; suppressed dissent; and made the vast majority of Liberians to live on the margins cannot be the one to cater to the basic needs of the Liberian People. In short, the non-reconstitution of the state will hinder, hamper and obstruct any effort that is designed to address human development needs. This is because the Liberian State as the overarching framework sets the parameters within which all interactions take place, including the formulation and implementation of government policies. In short, an anti-people and anti-development neo-colonial construct will not show any sensitivity to the plight of Liberia’s subaltern classes.

In the area of job creation, the Sirleaf regime has embarked upon a campaign it calls “right sizing the public bureaucracy.” Essentially, the project involves the reduction of the government’s work force. Thus far, thousands of government workers have been laid off. As expected, this action by the Sirleaf regime has become very unpopular. The Foundation for Democracy and Human Rights (FODHR), a Liberian-based human rights organization, has described the retrenchment policy as part of the “high level of the inhumane economic system” the Sirleaf regime has retained (Dennis, 2006:1). Although, the idea of designing a small and efficient public sector is laudable, but the policy has several flaws. First, with a national unemployment rate of 85%, and virtually no jobs in the private sector, the retrenchment policy would worsen the unemployment situation. Second, the government is not giving the retrenched workers severance packages that they could use to either start a small business or as a “stop gap measure” while they seek employment elsewhere. Third, given the fact the retrenched workers have families, who are dependent upon them for their livelihood, the loss of income will occasion social and economic hardship for the affected workers and their families, thereby exacerbating the human development crisis.

The Sirleaf regime has instituted a new salary structure for the public sector. According to the National Budget of Liberia for 2006-2007, the salaries for the President of Liberia, the Vice President and Cabinet Ministers are \$6,000, \$5,000, and \$1,500 per month respectively, excluding allowances (Bureau of the Budget, 2006). On the other hand, the basic salary for a civil servant is \$26.00 per month, with no allowances (Bureau of the Budget, 2006). There are two major problems with the new pay structure. Fundamentally, there is a huge disparity between the basic salary of a civil servant and those of the President, Vice President and Cabinet Ministers: The President and civil servant (\$5,974); the Vice President and civil servant (\$4,974) and Cabinet Ministers and civil servant (\$1,474). Second, while the budget makes allotments for allowances for the President, Vice President and Cabinet Ministers, no such provisions are made for civil servants. So, when the allowances of these top governmental officials are factored into their respective salaries, the disparities between their salaries and those of civil servants would be even much greater. The overarching human development implications are twofold. The monthly salary of \$26.00 for a civil servant is not even enough to buy a 100 pounds bag of rice, the country’s staple food. Moreover, the civil servant would be unable to pay rent (if he or she does not have his or her own home) and meet the other basic human necessities of his or her family. In effect, with a monthly salary of \$26.00 for civil servants, they remain in the category of the “working poor.” This is because they have nominal employment. The other effect for human development is that the salaries of civil servants are nowhere near the basic minimum that is required for them to address the basic human needs of them and their families. If this problem is not addressed by the Sirleaf regime, the rate of poverty would remain high and the inequities in income and wealth would continue.

Beyond The Crisis: Some Prescriptions

The post-conflict peace-building project currently underway in Liberia will not succeed in establishing long-term peace, stability and security, until serious efforts are made by the Liberian State to address the

perennial human development crisis. In other words, the various reforms being undertaken in the public domain, including security sector reform would be meaningless against the backdrop of the continuation of the malaise of mass unemployment, poverty, high infant mortality, adult mortality, maternal mortality and death rates and limited access to health care, clean drinking water and acceptable sanitation. In short, the improvement of human development must be at the epicenter of the post-conflict peace-building enterprise. What are some of the steps that need to be taken in order to address the vexing human development conundrum in Liberia? At the vortex of the solutions to the human development crisis in Liberia must be the deconstruction, rethinking and democratic reconstruction of the neo-colonial Liberian State in its totality---nature, mission, character, values, structure, rules, processes and policies. This is critical because only a democratically reconstituted Liberian State can create the enabling environment in which state managers can formulate and implement a robust human development agenda that seeks to develop the capacities of Liberians so that they can lead meaningful, healthy, long and productive lives.

The next step would be the formulation and implementation of policies by state managers that are designed to help create employment based on decent wages that would enable Liberians to cater to they and their respective families basic needs; provide universal health coverage for all Liberians and the associated mass access to health care through the construction of health facilities throughout Liberia endowed with the requisite personnel, supplies and equipment; provide mass education through investment in public education; reduce poverty and the disparities in income and wealth. Individually and collectively, such policy measures, if implemented by the custodians of the Liberian State would address the country's perennial human development crisis, thereby enabling Liberians to develop their human capacities and live better lives. Ultimately, improvement in human development would militate against violent conflicts. This is because Liberians would become stakeholders with vested interests in the body politic. Hence, they would be opposed to the prosecution of any act of violence that would jeopardize their human security.

Finally, the democratic reconstitution of the Liberian State and the consequent formulation and pursuance of public policies that seek to improve human development would require two major ingredients. Liberia needs a leadership that, inter alia, understands the predicament of the country, especially its marginalized and vulnerable subaltern classes, and is fully committed to systemic transformation rather than mere reforms. Such a transformation anchored on the democratic reconstitution of the state would create the parameters that would constrain various governments to formulate and pursue pro-people development agendas. While it is somewhat early to make a definitive determination regarding whether the current Sirleaf regime would provide the requisite leadership needed to address the country's perennial human development problem, as was argued earlier, the emerging trends and patterns do not portend well. The other major ingredient is the importance of Liberia's subaltern classes building bonds of solidarity and pressuring the ruling class to invest public resources in their human development. Without mass

pressure, the ruling class in Liberia will continue its traditional pre-occupation with the use of the state as an arena for the private accumulation of wealth.

Conclusion

The article has attempted to address five major questions: 1) what are the nature and dynamics of Liberia's perennial human development crisis? 2) What is the taproot of the crisis? 3) What are the consequences of the crisis? 4) What steps are being taken by the new Liberian regime to address the crisis? 5) What are the major measures that must be employed by the Liberian State to address the crisis? On the first issue, the paper examined the economic and social dimensions of the crisis. The central finding is that the vast majority of Liberians have lived quite perilously as evidenced by, among other things, the high rate of unemployment, abject poverty and social malaise.

Concerning the major cause of the crisis, the study found that the neo-colonial Liberian State was the principal source of the crisis. Specifically, the article contends that the nature, mission, character and policies of the neo-colonial Liberian State have underscored the fact that the construct is intrinsically anti-human development as reflected in the various indices the seek to capture the horrendous conditions of the vast majority of Liberians.

In terms of the consequences of the crisis, the article examined its adverse impact on the development of human capacity; the vulnerability of the members of Liberia's subaltern classes; the contribution to the country's two civil wars and the crisis as one of the major causes of environmental degradation.

Regarding the performance of the new Sirleaf government in taking measures to address the crisis, the study found the following: the new regime has accepted the neo-colonial state as a "given;" hence, it has no plan to reconstitute it; while it is early too draw definite conclusions, the emerging trends and patterns as reflected in the new regime's policies on employment in the public sector and the wage structure in the state bureaucracy, do not suggest a commitment to addressing the human development crisis. This is because the two policies, which are at the heart of human development, would have net effect of worsening the human development crisis in Liberia.

With regards to the way forward, the article suggested three major measures. First, it is imperative that the neo-colonial Liberian State be democratically reconstituted as the sine qua non for addressing the human development crisis. Second and related, the democratic reconstitution of the neo-colonial Liberian State would enable state managers to formulate and implement public policies that would seek to improve human development. Third, the paper suggests that a people-centered leadership and subaltern classes that are committed to pressing the state to invest in human development projects and programs are important requirements.

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