

## LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA: THE CASE OF SACLEPEA, LIBERIA

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### ABSTRACT

In a case study of Saclepea, Liberia, this paper illustrates the role that an appropriately designed local economic development (LED) plan can play in a rural African community emerging from crisis. Through personal observation, interviews with local Saclepeans, and connections with NGOs active in the area, the authors study LED in Saclepea and arrive at the following primary conclusions: 1) This case demonstrates the need for the involvement and cooperation of many parties, including multilateral aid agencies, local, national, and foreign government agencies, international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and local non-profit organizations, businesses, and individuals; 2) clear understanding of the stage of assistance (relief, rehabilitation, development) helps to define the role of each entity and the appropriate goals for specific developmental efforts; and 3) the case of Saclepea confirms that local participation and involvement in development efforts are important factors in the sustainability and success of these efforts.

**Keywords:** Local Economic Development (LED), Planning, International Linkages, Intergovernmental Relations, Sustainable development, Local participation

### INTRODUCTION

The goal of this paper is to illustrate the critical role that an appropriately designed local economic development (LED) plan can play in the enhancement of the quality of life of a community, especially a community emerging from crisis. In a recent paper, Rogerson and Rogerson (2010, p. 475) identify a “clear need to capture and examine data on LED experiences from across the continent” of Africa. They also note the “imperative for pursuing LED approaches” in rural African regions and small towns (Rogerson and Rogerson, 2010, p. 474). This paper seeks to provide some of this needed evidence based on the experience, LED plans, and LED progress and sustainability in the relatively remote city of Saclepea in Liberia. Saclepea is a city of less than 20,000 people in Nimba County near the borders of Guinea and Côte d’Ivoire, about 375 kilometers from the Liberian capital of Monrovia. For a map of the area, see the Appendix.

In a recent book on LED assistance strategy, economists Corbett and Fikkert (2009), distinguish among three specific types of assistance: relief, rehabilitation, and development. Distinguishing characteristics of appropriate relief are *urgent* and *temporary*. Relief is aid provided in response to some form of crisis (war or natural disaster, for example). While dependency may be present when relief is given, it can be attributed to the externally imposed crisis. Recipients of relief can well imagine that they could be the donors in a future crisis, and dignity can thereby be preserved. The aid provided is *urgent* in that it may be essential to short-run survival.

As a community emerges from the immediate crisis, there is a need for rehabilitation. Rehabilitation is the restoration of the positive attributes of the community, which were present prior to the crisis. At this stage, Corbett and Fikkert (2009, p. 110) suggest, the aid should become more participatory. Rehabilitation is aid that repairs and restores but should be done in partnership with the recipient community. Rehabilitation is *working with*, not *doing for*.

In this framework, the process of development begins upon completion of rehabilitation efforts. Corbett and Fikkert (2009, p. 105) define development around the concept of relationships. Development is not brought to or done for, but rather it is also done in partnership with a community. They identify a key dynamic of development to be an empowering process that allows each individual involved to more fully achieve his or her potential.

In the context of LED in the United States, Lupton (2007, 2011), a LED practitioner, touches on themes similar to those of Corbett and Fikkert (2009). Lupton makes the distinction between *betterment* and *development*. He observes, “Betterment improves conditions; development strengthens capacity” (Lupton, 2007, p. 39). He further notes that efficiency in delivering aid is not the same as effectiveness of development. A program can be very efficient in providing food relief but have no long-run impact (development). Or, if implemented without appropriate regard for local markets and/or needs, intended aid may, in fact, cause harm to a recipient community. The problem is that *betterment*, or the *doing for* a target community, while improving conditions, is a one-way exchange with donors on one side and recipients on the other. This imbalance leads either to dependency, or to loss of dignity, or both. Lupton (2007) illustrates this with several examples of food, clothing, and holiday gift distribution programs. In each case the donor initially feels good; the recipient has received assistance and is better off, at least temporarily; but the positive aspects of this interaction are short-lived before souring. The donor becomes overwhelmed with the needs of and is repelled by the hoarding reaction of the recipients. The recipients suffer loss of dignity due to the dependency created by their receiver status and often come to have an undercurrent of resentment for the donors, regardless of how much benefit they are receiving. Betterment is temporary and therefore ineffective at leading to long-run and ongoing improvements in human conditions in the target community.

In Lupton’s (2007) view, development, on the other hand, strengthens capacity by creating healthy interdependency. This interdependency is the result of more balanced exchange, where value is given on both sides of the transaction. In short, Lupton (2007) posits that the role of *aid giver* is to create a mutually beneficial exchange (or market) where none existed before. This is the role of a private sector market in a well-developed economy.

In the orthodox economic theory perspective, markets arise, unaided by public sector intervention or non-profit organizations, to satisfy societal needs when certain standard preconditions are met. The need to intervene to foster markets where none exists implies that standard preconditions (infrastructure, supporting or protecting governmental institutions, etc.) are not present, or are too weak, or that there is some form of market failure (monopoly power, asymmetric information, physical or geographical barriers to trade, etc.) that prevents the natural (for profit) emergence of a market. Lupton’s (2007) analysis does not delve into these issues, but one would want to carefully identify the causes of market failure or missing preconditions prior to attempting intervention. Failure to do so could lead to an underestimation of the challenge at hand.

Corbett and Fikkert (2009, p. 115-9) further warn of the problems of paternalism specifically in resource, spiritual, knowledge, labor, and managerial forms. Paternalism poisons the relationships necessary for successful capacity building development. Rather than focus on what is missing in a community, Corbett and Fikkert (2009, p. 126) and Lupton (2011, p.

139, 177) advise starting with an understanding of the community assets. They describe this process as Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD).

The critical factors and participant roles of the LED process in Africa are nicely defined in Rogerson and Rogerson (2010). This paper is an attempt to apply the accepted definitions of LED to a specific African case. Additionally, this study aims to gain insight by applying the strategic LED assistance models of Corbett and Fikkert (2009) and Lupton (2007, 2011). Part of the challenge is that in a specific case there are no cleanly defined boundaries among the identified core features of LED and participant roles. Nevertheless, below is an attempt to disentangle these for the Liberian city of Saclepea to determine what can be learned and to illustrate how a development plan can be informed and improved with this analysis.

### **THE CRISIS: LIBERIAN CIVIL WARS AND THEIR IMPACT ON SACLEPEA**

From the drafting of the country's first constitution in 1847, through the 1970s, Liberia was a peaceful and relatively prosperous West African nation (Approved Revised Draft Constitution of the Republic of Liberia, n.d.; BBC, 2012). Liberia's GDP per capita in 1970 was greater than that of any of its neighboring countries and more than twice that of Ghana (Heston, Summers, & Aten, 2011). Saclepea, in northeastern Liberia, was no exception to the Liberian trend of prosperity. Historically, the Mano and Gio tribes resided in Saclepea; therefore, most of the town's land belonged to individuals and families of these tribes. But, by the end of the 1980s, before the war's destruction reached Saclepea, business in Saclepea was dominated by members of the Mandingo tribe. In fact, descendants of multiple tribes lived in Saclepea, and the tribes coexisted – even intermarried – peacefully (O. Toway, personal communication, September 20, 2011).

In 1980, however, the country was shaken when the Liberian presidency was forcefully taken from President William Tolbert in a coup led by Samuel Doe, a Liberian military leader, who became the first Liberian president not descended from freed American slaves, known as Americo-Liberians (BBC, 2012; Liberia: Coup at Dawn, 1980). Doe's take-over came after growing aggravation with corruption in Tolbert's regime and with Americo-Liberian leadership in general (Liberia: Coup at Dawn, 1980). Doe was officially elected president in 1985, but the election was fraudulent (WGBH Educational Foundation, 2002). His policies persecuted Liberians of certain ethnicities, particularly those from the Gio and Mano tribes of Nimba County (Uppsala Conflict Data Program, n.d.). In their effort to increase their economic and political power, the Mandingo tribe sided with Doe's Krahn tribe. Mano and Gio in Saclepea and throughout Nimba County became targets of discrimination and violence (O. Toway, personal communication, September 20, 2011). Thus, under Doe, political and ethnic tensions continued to increase in Saclepea and in all of Liberia (Uppsala Conflict Data Program, n.d.).

As a result of these growing tensions, Doe's regime became a target of political plots. First, in 1985, Thomas Quiwonkpa staged a failed coup and was quickly assassinated (Liberia Comrades Turned Enemies, 1985). Later, Charles Taylor, a former member of Doe's regime, organized an invasion of Liberia from across the Côte d'Ivoirian border in 1989 (Peace Direct, 2011). Taylor's army was primarily recruited from among Gio and Mano Liberians (Uppsala Conflict Data Program, n.d.). By 1990, Doe had been killed and his government toppled, but factions split off from each side of the Doe-Taylor conflict, and fighting among these splinter groups continued and escalated (Peace Direct, 2011). War became rampant in Liberia, with warriors fighting for various causes, usually related to tribal loyalties. A ceasefire was finally reached in 1996 (Peace Direct, 2011). The next year, Charles Taylor was elected president of Liberia in democratic elections overseen by the

United States (US), the United Nations (UN), the Organization of African Unity, and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) (History of Liberia, 2004).

Peace was short-lived. Political and tribal tension continued to grow, intensified by Taylor's controversial support for rebels in Sierra Leone's Civil War. In 1999, a second civil war began with an invasion of rebels fighting against Taylor's supporters. After four more years of widespread, brutal combat, Taylor resigned in 2003, bringing an end to the second civil war. UN peacekeepers moved into Liberia, setting the stage for the country's democratic election of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in 2005. (Peace Direct, 2011)

During the wars, schools, healthcare, electricity, and water/sanitation systems were destroyed throughout Nimba County, and formal sector jobs in the county became almost nonexistent (Nimba County Development Committee, 2008). Saclepea became a "ghost town" according to one observer. Mano and Gio fighters burned Mandingo businesses and homes, and they reclaimed land they had previously sold to members of other tribes. Only those who wielded weapons and joined the fighting were safe in the town. Others were forced to flee, many hiding for extended periods in the undeveloped bush of rural Nimba County (O. Toway, personal communication, September 20, 2011).

Liberia has enjoyed relative stability since the second war's end (Peace Direct, 2011). Liberians still work, however, to reconstruct their country after fourteen years (1989-2003) of devastating conflict (Uppsala Conflict Data Program, n.d.). Infrastructure was destroyed in Liberia's capital city of Monrovia and throughout rural Liberia. Many Liberian homes and businesses lost electricity in 1989 and still have not seen its return (Peace Direct, 2011). According to Penn World Table data, the country's GDP per capita when the wars ended in 2003 was less than 21 percent of its level at the time of the 1980 coup (Heston, Summers, & Aten, 2011).

In Saclepea, though great strides have been made in the areas of business and development, much work remains. Roads and railroads were destroyed by the wars, isolating Saclepea's economy and preventing the ability of Saclepean farmers and businesspeople to buy or sell outside the city. There are many unsettled land disputes flooding the judicial system after residents returned to find their land destroyed and/or occupied by members of other tribes. In addition, Saclepea was a rebel training ground for child soldiers, and the ramifications of child soldiering are still felt today, particularly in terms of decreased education and limited job opportunities for former child soldiers (O. Toway, personal communication, September 20-21, 2011). By one report, "Many of the young people have spent more time engaged in war than in school" (Nimba County Development Committee, 2008). Of grave concern are the short- and long-term effects of the trauma of war on the people of Saclepea. A random-sample study of Nimbaians in 2008 found evidence of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in 48.3% of participants (Galea, Rockers, Saydee, Macauley, Varpilah, & Kruk, 2010). Devastation of Saclepea's infrastructure, businesses, communities, and families led to widespread feelings of discouragement and/or hopelessness.

All told, at war's end, over 250,000 Liberians – more than ten percent of the country's pre-war population – had died, and one-third of the remaining population had sought refuge in other countries (Heston, Summers, & Aten, 2011; Peace Direct, 2011). Among those who left were many of Liberia's wealthiest, most educated, and most connected citizens. Those who stayed to see the end of both civil wars struggle to pick up the pieces.

## THE RESTORATION PERIOD

Using Corbett and Fikkert's (2009) and Lupton's (2011) three-stage response to crisis – relief, rehabilitation, development – one may identify an obvious beginning of the relief period after a single event crisis such as an earthquake, a tsunami, a bombing, etc. Relief is needed to restore order immediately following any such event, and once a semblance of stability is established, rehabilitation may begin. When a crisis occurs over an extended period of time, the boundary between relief and rehabilitation may not be easy to precisely identify.

For Saclepea, in the case of the Liberian civil conflict, relief was administered before the war's end and was the vehicle through which the end was brought about and peace was restored. Figuratively in the Corbett and Fikkert (2009) model and literally in this case, relief is administered to stop the bleeding caused by a crisis. It seems, then, that relief in Saclepea had run its course by the end of the war or very shortly thereafter. With peace came the need for rehabilitation.

Since the entire nation had been crippled by the war, most of the responsibility for the initiation of rehabilitation fell to international agencies and NGOs. Table 1 provides a brief overview of relief, rehabilitation, and development work that has begun and/or been completed in Saclepea, and the table identifies five categories of major entity types that are involved in the process: the Liberian national government, Saclepea's local government, intergovernmental organizations (e.g. the UN), international NGOs, and local NGOs/businesses. According to both Rogerson and Rogerson (2010) and Corbett and Fikkert (2009), the organizations in all of these categories must cooperate with specific focus on local development to build Saclepea's best chance for successful and sustainable development.

**Table 1: Recovery Tasks by Entity Type and Stage**

ENTITY TYPE	STAGE		
	Relief	Rehabilitation	Development
<b>National Government</b>	oversee disarmament	rebuild schools repair roads settle land disputes	improve healthcare
<b>Local Government</b>		settle land disputes	build infrastructure (electricity / plumbing)
<b>International NGO</b>		conduct reintegration programs rebuild schools and provide supplies improve healthcare	establish computer center provide savings / finance opportunities
<b>Intergovernmental (e.g. U.N.)</b>	oversee disarmament	conduct reintegration programs provide school supplies repair roads	
<b>Local NGO/Business</b>		revive local business	improve education address gender issues provide savings / finance opportunities establish postal service

## **RELIEF**

### *Disarmament*

Immediately before and after the official end of Liberia's civil conflict, the UN and other agencies moved into the country to aid in the disarmament process. Within two months of the signing of the peace agreement, the UN, in conjunction with several NGOs, developed an action plan for disarmament in Liberia. The action plan charged a Joint Implementation Unit (JIT) with carrying out a Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration (DDRR) program under the supervision of Liberia's National Commission on Disarmament, Demobilisation, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration (NCDDRR). The UN Mission In Liberia (UNMIL) was established and given overall command of DDRR. (UN Development Programme Liberia, 2003-2004)

The disarmament and demobilization program took place in three phases, each phase opening new disarmament centers progressively further from Monrovia. In all, disarmament centers were in eight locations throughout Liberia. At each location, weapons were voluntarily surrendered by men, women, and children – Liberians and non-Liberians – to be destroyed (Agència Catalana de Cooperació al Desenvolupament, n.d.). The closest disarmament location to Saclepea was the last location to open (on August 17, 2004) and was in Ganta, about 50 kilometers from Saclepea but relatively easily accessed by a direct road between the two cities (UN Development Programme Liberia, 2003-2004).

Disarmament phases officially began on December 7, 2003, and ended in November 2004. By official UNMIL count, 101,495 men, women, and children had been disarmed and demobilized by the end of the program (Agència Catalana de Cooperació al Desenvolupament, n.d.).

## **REHABILITATION**

### *Reintegration Programs*

After the successful peace agreement and disarmament, Liberians could begin the process of rehabilitating from the war's devastation. For former combatants, the first stages of rehabilitation were included as benefits of the DDRR programs offered by NCDDRR. This official reintegration program was designed to provide two-and-a-half years of aid before ex-combatants would be considered "normal" citizens of their communities. Former members of militant forces, regardless of age, were eligible for reintegration packages provided they first participated in the NCDDRR disarmament program. Three percent of reintegration program participants (1651 individuals) chose to settle in Nimba County (UN Development Programme Liberia, 2003-2004).

The goals of the programs were reconciliation in communities and social and economic reintegration into society. First, reconciliation and social reintegration: UNMIL went throughout the country with the message of peace; special emphasis was given to reintegrating those who had been refugees outside Liberia or displaced within Liberia; group counseling was provided to community members; and some ex-combatants were given aid to return directly into participation alongside other community members in education or business. Second, for economic assistance, aid recipients had several options: 1) 8 months of vocational training, apprenticeship, or publicly provided jobs; 2) 3 years of regular schooling; 3) a one-time allotment of agricultural products or aid in establishing an animal farm; and 4) for those who met further reliability requirements, micro-finance (UN Development Programme Liberia, 2003-2004).

Consistent with Rogerson and Rogerson's (2010) descriptions of local economic development in Africa, reintegration programs were designed to require involvement – both through funding and implementation – from various government and non-government, local and international organizations, coordinated through the Technical Coordination Committee and the Project Approval Committee. For example, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Handicap International, and other agencies with expertise in issues related to women, children, and/or disabled individuals were called on to assist with reintegration of those groups. The World Food Programme provided food allowances to new reintegration participants. Liberia's own public vocational college, Booker Washington Institute, contributed both training opportunities and program marketing (UN Development Programme Liberia, 2003-2004).

Liberia's DDR programs officially ended in April of 2009, having given opportunities for reintegration aid to 101,495 demobilized Liberians. Smaller, community-level programs continue to target the approximately 5000 ex-combatants who demobilized but had not participated in reintegration programs by 2009 (UN Security Council, 2009). In 2012, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) began a dedicated effort to return home and reintegrate the nearly 63,000 Liberians remaining as refugees outside the country (UNHCR, 2012).

### *Education*

Rebuilding education is critical to rehabilitating Liberia. In Saclepea, schools did not officially close during the war, but attendance was, at times, impossible. Saclepeans report having been chased away from school by armed fighters (O. Toway, personal communication, March 28, 2012). After the war's end, Liberia's national government and international NGOs (e.g. the Red Cross) moved into Saclepea to rebuild schools. UNHCR, USAID, and other international organizations contributed school supplies and support. Nevertheless, nearly six years passed after the war before Saclepean families began to send their children to school with any regularity for a couple of reasons: 1) many families remained fearful that the war was not really over, and 2) others felt education was useless in a society in which success and power could be attained through wielding weapons (O. Toway, personal communication, September 3, 2012).

Recognizing that Liberian education still is not fully restored to the state it would have been in without the war, the West African Examination Council (WAEC) administers a unique graduation test to Liberians, whose education standards are lower than other WAEC member countries (The West African Examinations Council, n.d.). Indeed, Saclepea's schools suffer from, among other issues, overcrowding and under- funding/staffing. The Peace Corps provides a few outside teachers for Saclepea's government school, but improvement of facilities, class sizes, and teacher quality will remain critical issues as Saclepea looks to sustain long-term development.

### *Road Repair*

Fourteen years of civil conflict left Liberian infrastructure in a state of devastating disrepair. The wars had destroyed roads in and around Saclepea as well as railroad tracks, which had carried goods to within a few kilometers of Saclepea. A chief concern for the rehabilitation of Saclepea was road condition, particularly between Saclepea and the larger cities of Ganta and Monrovia. Once a two or three hour drive, now a trip to Monrovia, if possible at all, would take a minimum of eight hours and could take days. In order to rehabilitate their post-war economy, Saclepeans needed to be able to do business in Monrovia, Liberia's port city. Moreover, even within the city, children were sometimes unable to attend school when

potholes filled with rainwater blocked their passage from home to school. Each county district, including Saclepea's, listed road repair as its top priority in the Nimba County Development Agenda (Nimba County Development Committee, 2008).

UNMIL's station in Saclepea helped with some of the road repair issues. The UN repaired roads they often used in their daily operations. Thus, the road between Saclepea and Ganta, where UNMIL has another station, was repaired relatively quickly, and some stretches of the road to Monrovia have also been made drivable. In 2010 a grassroots community effort convinced UNMIL to work together with community members to repair one of the worst potholes within Saclepea so children would not be kept from school during rainy season. This effort is exemplar of the motivation and cooperation required of local economic development described by Rogerson and Rogerson (2010). It also displays the importance of gauging community needs to prioritize projects, a necessity in rehabilitation and development according to Corbett and Fikkert (2009). More recently, UNMIL has begun repairs on roads south of Saclepea to other cities within Nimba County, such as Tappita. These repairs will allow Saclepean vendors to sell in markets in surrounding towns.

### *Settling Land Disputes*

After fourteen years of unrest, records of property rights had been destroyed, and the process of identifying land owners was often fuzzy at best. Nimba County has experienced the worst of Liberia's post-war land disputes. In particular, disputes have raged between the Mandingo tribe, who sided with Doe's administration in the war, and the Mano and Gio tribes, who sided with Taylor after they were targeted by Doe. When the Mandingos moved into Nimba long before the war, the native tribes welcomed them and lived together with them peacefully, but the formalities of granting official property rights were overlooked. Thus, when war caused a rift between the groups, land disputes erupted, sparking arson and further violence.

When violence over disputed land spiked in Nimba in 2006, President Sirleaf appointed the Special Presidential Nimba Land Disputes Commission to evaluate claims and report suggestions for resolution. That Commission's recommendations led to opening new areas for business to allow members of both parties to own and operate businesses in prominent areas rather than fight for space in existing business/market areas.

Disputes continued, and in 2008, a second Commission was appointed to evaluate claims, specifically including claims in Saclepea. This Commission's work involved 71,389,000 Liberian Dollars (LD) worth – approximately \$991, 514 USD worth – of land and promised “win-win” solutions in each case (Violence Again in Nimba Land Feud, 2012).

As of May 2012, many suggestions from the first Commission had not been implemented, and solutions promised by the second Commission had not been announced. But, by June, in accordance with findings and recommendations of the second Commission, monetary compensation had been provided to displaced parties of disputes in 75% of the Commission's coverage area, including in Saclepea. Violence is still a threat in the areas of Nimba that have not received promised compensation, and concerned citizens in Ganta have organized to petition for a speedy solution (Carter, 2012; Violence Again in Nimba Land Feud, 2012).

### *Healthcare*

Prior to Liberia's civil war, Saclepea had accessible, yet sometimes inadequate, healthcare. Access to healthcare deteriorated during the fourteen-year conflict. Not long after peace agreements were signed, the French organization Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF or Doctors Without Borders) began to help restore Saclepean healthcare to its pre-war

condition. MSF staffed the Saclepea Health Center on the outskirts of town from 2003 until 2009, when MSF deemed the Center prepared for the international organization's withdrawal (O. Toway, personal communication, May 25, 2012).

Funded by the Liberian government, the Center includes a public pharmacy and provides in-patient and outpatient care free of charge. It has now, in fact, surpassed the level of care provided in Saclepea before the civil war (O. Toway, personal communication, May 17, 2012). Thus, the Saclepea Comprehensive Health Center is a success story demonstrating ways of helping without hurting; MSF took charge of rehabilitation but involved local personnel so that by the end of MSF's stay in Saclepea, the Center was prepared to operate and continue growth without external involvement.

#### *Business/Market*

Business in Saclepea nearly vanished during the fourteen-year war. Only those who were willing to fight were able to have businesses. The only jobs available were soldiering jobs, and if a non-soldier were caught trying to buy or sell, his belongings would be stripped from him without cause or delay (O. Toway, personal communication, June 1, 2012).

After the war, Saclepea's businesses began to bounce back relatively quickly, spurred by international NGOs, who bought food and supplies locally when they moved into the region to aid the recovery. Saclepea's economy now revolves around its weekly market, which has outgrown its pre-war popularity and is now one of the largest outdoor markets in Liberia. The center of town features a small-scale daily market and a bustling business district of small shops open daily to sell items like furniture, flooring, cell phone charging services, cassette tapes, and snacks.

#### **DEVELOPMENT: ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

In order to best capture the progress of efforts to date in Saclepea, the analysis of the development stage has been separated into two parts. This section reviews the development accomplishments, and the following section reviews the remaining opportunities and needs.

#### *Education*

After rehabilitation efforts had rebuilt schools in Saclepea, local churches began to contribute to development of education beyond pre-war standards by establishing their own schools as a means of providing education but also of financially supporting the churches. Saclepea now has fourteen schools, the majority of which are privately funded.

Saclepea struggles to improve education quality; therefore, Atlanta-based non-profit West Africa Crossroads Corporation (WACC) funded teacher training in Saclepea in 2010. The training lasted for 20 eight-hour days and involved three classes of 40 teachers each, 75 percent of whom considered themselves Saclepeans. Making local involvement a priority, WACC provided only direction and funding (salaries for instructors and administrators, stipends for participants), and staffing and enrolling were left to Saclepea's District Education Officer (DEO).

Training was well received, with 100 percent positive feedback from teachers and administrators, but WACC board members were unhappy with administrative oversight. WACC had been told all trainers would come from the University of Liberia, but Saclepea's DEO appointed himself and a Saclepean principal to be trainers (and earn trainers' salaries). Moreover, WACC received information that the amount of time spent on administrative tasks, such as taking attendance, was more than necessary, and valuable instruction time was lost.

WACC has since shifted its focus toward computer-based learning with the establishment of the Saclepea Community Computer Center. WACC president Steve Skinner reports, “We don't believe it is feasible to bring the existing base of teachers up to competent levels of performance; hence, our focus on computers” (personal communication, June 26, 2012 & September 13, 2012).

#### *Saclepea Community Computer Center*

In January of 2011, the WACC, which was familiar with and committed to the Corbett and Fikkert (2009) assistance model, mentored Saclepeans through the process of opening a public, for-profit community computer center. The Saclepea Community Computer Center (SCCC) provides computer training courses as well as open computer and Internet access (with fee for time in use) to community members. SCCC's board members and employees all are Saclepean citizens, and by the end of 2011, SCCC had recorded “over 1000 hours of web browsing, 300 graduates of computer classes, [and] 5000 pages of printed documents and certificates” (West Africa Crossroads Corporation, 2011).

The SCCC is fully owned and operated by Saclepeans, and WACC intentionally limits its involvement to analyzing financial reports and providing advice when it is requested. WACC reports that the Center is making a profit and is financially stable. In fact, the SCCC board recently elected to build a new facility on donated land and construction has begun. The new building will replace the room SCCC currently rents (Sandy Skinner, personal communication, October 6, 2012).

#### *Women's Center*

Saclepea native Theresa Monmia founded the Saclepea Women's Center in 2008 to raise awareness of the plight of women and girls facing gender based violence (GBV). Located near the center of town, the Women's Center offers workshops and counseling for both victims and perpetrators of GBV.

A focus of the Women's Center efforts is to economically empower women, thereby allowing them the freedom to remove themselves from abusive relationships. The Center owns a large swamp in which they employ women to plant, cultivate, and harvest rice. Women then take part in cleaning and selling the rice in Saclepea's market, and they divide the profits among themselves. In 2010, the Center was awarded a contract from the World Food Programme to provide all the rice for school lunches in Saclepea and surrounding areas. The women also have recently begun to farm crops other than rice.

The Women's Center offers its members the opportunity to participate in a savings club to help them manage their money. Participants contribute monthly, and the money they save is invested in the Center's rice business. At the end of each year, women are given back their investment plus a portion of the rice profit, and they may choose to reinvest for the following year. The Saclepea Women's Center is making a positive and non-trivial impact on local economic development in Saclepea as it builds a strong core of economically independent women.

#### *Healthcare*

Saclepea now has two privately funded health clinics and one public clinic, each with its own pharmacy. A church in Saclepea started one of the private clinics, while the other was built by the founder of one of Saclepea's two non-profit orphanages, primarily to serve the orphanage.

Healthcare in Saclepea is supported not only by local and national organizations but also by international aid. Pharmacies are stocked by international NGOs who send overstocked or outdated drugs from other countries to Liberia. Moreover, Saclepea's public health center received a large shipment of hospital beds and other medical equipment from WACC in 2011 (West Africa Crossroads Corporation, 2011).

## **DEVELOPMENT: OPPORTUNITIES AND NEEDS**

While Saclepea has made much progress toward development, many further opportunities and needs remain. In 2008, Nimba County officials, with the help of the UN, prepared a county development plan. The plan states that "basic infrastructure including roads, schools, and health facilities remain in poor condition," and then establishes goals and a timeline for their improvement (Nimba County Development Committee, 2008). The following subsections discuss some of the stated needs as well as other observed areas for improvement.

### *Healthcare*

While Saclepea has better healthcare than surrounding villages, there remains significant room for improvement. Saclepea has three mid-sized health centers with pharmacies, but physicians' assistants or nurses generally treat patients because doctors are not often present in any of the centers (Medical Centers Risk Closure, 2010). The nearest facility with a surgical capacity is in Ganta, 50 kilometers away. In 2010 the publicly-funded Saclepea Health Center applied to the Liberian government to become a full-fledged hospital including an operating room, but the application was denied because funding was already being directed toward building a hospital in the city of Sanniquellie in Nimba, approximately 80 kilometers (by mostly-unpaved road) northeast of Saclepea.

### *Electricity/Plumbing*

Availability of electricity and indoor plumbing in Saclepea has been restored to its pre-war condition, yet still only wealthy community members are able to afford either. Most of Saclepea's homes do not have access to toilets with septic systems or running water for flushing or washing hands. Improving plumbing would improve sanitation and health.

Saclepea's industries lack the ability to operate with full efficiency because they do not have access to commercial electrical power. For example, both tailors and carpenters work almost exclusively with hand- or foot-powered machinery. Saclepea has no electrical grid; thus, even for those who can afford electricity, the only options are solar power or gasoline or diesel generators, none of which are considered financially feasible for most homes or businesses. This issue could be solved through electrification or through establishment of trade cooperatives for sharing the cost of generators and electric equipment. In fact, carpenters in Saclepea have demonstrated that such cooperatives are feasible at least in some trades by joining together to purchase electrically powered equipment and gas or diesel generators that are shared among the carpenters.

Hope is on the horizon for the electrification of Saclepea. Liberia's neighbor Côte d'Ivoire has an electric grid supplied by privately owned gas and hydroelectric generators, and Ivoirians export electricity throughout West Africa to countries including Benin, Togo, Burkina Faso, and Ghana (Electrical Power in Côte d'Ivoire, 2012). Liberia has begun to allow Côte d'Ivoire to extend its electric system across the border into Nimba County. Utility poles and power lines have been installed from the Ivoirian border to Ganta, and construction is continuing in the direction of Saclepea. It is not yet clear how

electricity will be made available to individuals and businesses once the appropriate infrastructure is in place (O. Toway, personal communication, June 1, 2012).

### *Savings/Finance*

Saclepea has no formal bank. Small loans are available through some businesses and organizations, but interest rates are extremely high. No long-term loans are offered, and the duration of available loans is so short the loans are often useless. Saclepeans who would start or expand businesses face these hurdles to financing capital. Corruption in the loan market exaggerates the hurdles. There is, therefore, a financing gap in Saclepea that could be filled by an organization – business or NGO – offering affordable and fair microcredit to would-be business owners.

A bank or other financial institution could also respond to a local market for savings opportunities. The success of the Women’s Center savings club is evidence not only that Saclepea has demand for savings plans but also that local opportunities exist for pooled savings to provide microfinance investment opportunities with interest earnings for the depositors.

### *Education*

One of the three stated goals of the Nimba County vision statement is that “all citizens of Nimba County will have access to education” (Nimba County Development Committee, 2008). As noted above, Saclepea has made strides to return its education system to pre-war standards, and by some measures, the current system has grown beyond the pre-war level, but the overall quality of educational opportunities available in Saclepea is so poor that it hampers development.

Young men and women in Saclepea want to learn. Even without attendance requirements, they crowd classrooms daily. But, textbooks are a rare find, and teachers without training in their subjects or in pedagogy are the norm. Many high school graduates are deficient in language and math skills, and they have little to recommend them for employment. The only public (and affordable) college is in Monrovia, and most high school graduates, if they can afford tuition, cannot afford moving and living expenses in the capital city. Fortunate students or graduates are taken as apprentices and taught a trade like carpentry, sewing, or commercial art. Others are offered positions as high school teachers, often becoming yet another inadequately trained educator.

A common observation among Saclepeans is that many high school graduates “roam around” or drive motorcycle taxis wishing for opportunities for higher education and/or training in a trade. Given better opportunities, more young Saclepeans could become contributors to the economic welfare of the city. Accordingly, Saclepea would benefit from regular teacher training, a trade school or technical college, or a four-year college in or near Saclepea.

### *Gender Issues*

Saclepea’s economy suffers from a striking absence of females in education and in the workforce. Many families are stuck in a cycle that devastates the culture and economy. 1) In middle school, girls become pregnant and begin to drop out of school to care for children. 2) Children become an economic burden, and mothers trade sex for economic security. 3) These economically trapped mothers have many children and cannot work to contribute to the local economy or to pull

themselves out of this cycle. 4) And finally, their young daughters know they are financial burdens to their mothers and begin very early to sell themselves to alleviate that burden, thereby perpetuating the cycle into the next generation.

Since Saclepea is without refrigeration, nursing mothers do not have the option of leaving their children with a caregiver. Thus, mothers of young children who would otherwise be able to work cannot leave home for extended periods. Almost half of Saclepea's labor force is incapacitated by unplanned, unwanted perpetual pregnancy. In addition, Saclepean men are adversely affected by this cycle when lacking an economic means of establishing self-esteem, they seek to bolster their self-image by their sexual conquests of and dominance over women.

While the Saclepea's Women's Center offers some hope of interrupting the cycle, faster progress could be made if more resources were dedicated to addressing gender issues in Saclepea. For example, night classes for young mothers might enable more women to continue education they have missed due to pregnancy and motherhood.

#### *Postal Service*

Saclepea is currently without a reliable means of shipping and receiving letters or packages from outside. The Saclepea market depends on sales of goods brought in from Monrovia and cities in surrounding countries, but individual sellers routinely make long, dangerous trips across unpaved, potholed roads to gather goods. Merchants would benefit from privately or publicly provided delivery service to minimize the overall number of hours spent on the roads.

### **CURRENT ASSESSMENT**

#### *Development Plan*

The Nimba County Development Agenda was drafted in 2008 for implementation through 2012, however many of the Agenda's goals have not yet been met. Still, with a couple of key exceptions – roads and education – Saclepea has progressed through both relief and rehabilitation and is on the cusp of significant development opportunities. Most current development efforts intentionally include local involvement; some even are spearheaded by local residents (e.g. church schools, the orphanage health center, and the Saclepea Women's Center).

In 2012, President Sirleaf appointed the Acting Superintendent of Nimba County, Hon. Teeko Tozay Yorlay, to be the Assistant Superintendent for Development of Nimba. In a press statement following his appointment, Yorlay thanked “the elders, women, paramount, clan and general town chiefs, statutory district superintendents, township and district commissioners, our development partners, international and local NGO's, Civil Society Organizations, as well as the general public” and Nimba's youth for past support of development in the county. He also called for the continued cooperation of “all [...] Nimbaians, development partners, local and international NGO's, the CSO's and CBO's to support us, collaborate with us and cooperate with us every step of the way” in a renewed development effort in the county (Yorlay, 2012).

If Yorlay is able to rally continued or increased involvement in Saclepea's development, the prospects for Saclepea are good. Table 2 summarizes progress that has been made, and the following section outlines recommended next steps.

*Recommended Next Steps for Development*

Next steps in continuing development in Saclepea are two-fold: steps that should be taken by national and international organizations and those that should be locally concentrated. The national government, with help as necessary from the UN or other international organizations, should focus on rebuilding Liberia’s infrastructure, particularly roads. Adequate transportation throughout the country is absolutely necessary if Saclepea is to have viable access to other local markets, advanced healthcare, higher education, etc., and thus reach its full development potential. As roads are reconstructed, special attention should be given to involving, empowering, and employing local governments and individuals to insure that the projects are ordered by greatest local impact.

**Table 2: Summary of Development Progress**

AREA OF ANALYSIS	Pre-war (1980)	End of Civil War (2003)	Current (2012)
	<i>GDP per capita</i> *: \$682	<i>GDP per capita</i> *: \$188	<i>2011 GDP per capita</i> *: \$273
<b>Schools</b>	adequate to meet Saclepea's demand and WAEC standards	effectively non-existent	14 schools but overcrowded and with undertrained teachers
<b>Roads</b>	adequately maintained (2-3 hours to Monrovia)	totally destroyed	some progress but major routes not yet repaired (8 hours to Monrovia)
<b>Land Disputes</b>	harmony among tribes	major concern and cause of post-war violence	2 commissions to settle disputes; implementation not completed; short-term results are positive
<b>Healthcare</b>	accessible, sometimes inadequate	deteriorated	rehabilitated with aid from MSF; now government funded and locally staffed; better than pre-war
<b>Business</b>	dominated by business-savvy Mandingo tribe	nearly vanished; businesses burned; only fighters could trade	growing; one of Liberia's largest weekly markets; daily market and successful daily shops
<b>Electricity / Plumbing</b>	only wealthiest could afford	completely destroyed	only wealthiest can afford; electrification soon to be available from Côte d'Ivoire
<b>Savings / Finance</b>	no banks; no formal savings or finance; limited availability of high-interest loans	limited financial support / micro-finance offered to former soldiers during reintegration	characterized by corruption; short-term, high-interest loans available; Women's Center offers savings
<b>Gender Issues</b>	traditional roles taught to young boys and girls; some polygamy; women generally uneducated; gender-based violence common	widespread gender-based violence; women uneducated and unemployed	many unwanted pregnancies; women undereducated, economically enslaved; Women's Center works against these trends

\*Liberia’s National GDP per capita in constant 2000 U.S. dollars (The World Bank, 2012)

Saclepeans should direct their focus toward improving education and providing sources of microfinance to local entrepreneurs. School attendance should be enforced, which will require that facilities are updated to accommodate demand. The DEO in Saclepea should work toward these improvements. Schools must commit to hiring qualified teachers and/or getting quality training for teachers currently in place. The presence of trained Peace Corps teachers in Saclepea may be exploited to provide mentorship and/or formal training to Saclepean teachers.

At first blush, Saclepea appears to have excess demand for finance (borrowing). Many Saclepeans are even willing to borrow from individuals or enterprises with terms that include very high interest rates and very short payback periods. Others would borrow and invest if the cost of financing were not so high. However, the Women's Center savings club provides evidence that locally pooled savings can provide a viable source for microfinance to the benefit of both the borrowers and the lenders. Reliable, trustworthy, and stable financial intermediation, more than lack of funds, is what is largely absent in Saclepea. Saclepeans would benefit from more, and more reliable, financial intermediation opportunities.

### **LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE SACLEPEA EXPERIENCE**

The above review of LED efforts in Saclepea leads to several maxims that may provide useful guidance in other LED efforts, particularly those that follow a crisis.

1) *The necessary precursor to the LED efforts in Saclepea was strong external intervention.*

It was necessary for UNMIL, in coordination with the Liberian national government, to insure the peace by completing the disarmament and beginning the soldier reintegration program before other rehabilitation and development efforts could gain a foothold. This was an essential precondition to all that followed.

2) *The more successful rehabilitation efforts in Saclepea required the participation by and coordination of many external and local parties.*

The rebuilding of the schools is a good example, as this required the participation of the Liberian national government, international NGOs such as the Red Cross, UNHCR, and USAID, among others.

3) *The greatest needs are addressed and hence the greatest impacts are realized when rehabilitation efforts are conducted with input from and participation by local residents.*

UNMIL's initial road rebuilding efforts were primarily oriented to UNMIL's needs for access to its other centers of operation and only marginally improved and impacted the residents of Saclepea. It was only after local residents approached UNMIL with a cooperative plan to fix local roads that the children of Saclepea were able to get to schools in bad weather.

4) *Successful transition from rehabilitation to LED has involved relinquishing control to local residents after they have been properly trained and prepared.*

Médecins Sans Frontières, an international NGO, re-established and directed the Saclepea Health Center immediately after the end of the war in 2003 and continued to run the Center until 2009. At that time, MSF deemed the Center capable of continuing without its assistance, with funding from the Liberian national government and operated by local personnel, which allowed MSF to withdraw without negative consequences.

*5) Successful LED efforts have either originated with or transitioned to local control.*

The Saclepea Women's Center was established at the initiative of a strong local leader and has been successful due to local interest and support and because of interdependent (market based) business relationships with some international NGOs. Alternatively, the Saclepea Community Computer Center was established first by WACC, an international NGO, but with the intentional involvement of local residents and with the plan of turning the project over to local leadership after it was established. Both of these LED efforts provide evidence of continuing success.

*6) Remaining rehabilitation issues in Saclepea will continue to threaten ongoing and future LED efforts until they are more fully resolved.*

The lingering need to fully resolve land disputes puts local business plans in limbo, at a minimum, and threatens new outbreaks of violence, in the worst case. This is one of the most serious issues for Saclepea and has the potential to overwhelm and completely derail other rehabilitation and LED efforts if it cannot be fully resolved. Resolution requires the participation of the national government and/or other outside parties; local parties, acting alone, cannot satisfactorily resolve land disputes.

In a similar, but less threatening vein, it will be difficult for LED efforts to successfully proceed in the absence of appropriate utility infrastructure. To some degree, the provision of utilities can proceed along with LED, but the continuing absence of adequate electrical service and sufficient water and sewer utility services will hamper all LED efforts and, particularly, any medium to large-scale industrialization.

## **CONCLUSION**

In the nearly ten years since the end of Liberia's civil war, the process of restoring Saclepea's community and local economy serves as a useful case study of LED in rural Africa. The discussion in this paper, summarized in Table 1, highlights how this case illustrates key themes from the LED literature.

Categorizing specific efforts and accomplishments into the stages of relief, rehabilitation, and development helps to define the appropriate roles of the various participants as well as clarify the optimal scope of the effort (Corbett and Fikkert, 2009). The case of Saclepea demonstrates the importance of collaboration among players from local government, local business, national government, international organizations, and NGOs as noted by both Corbett and Fikkert (2009) and Rogerson and Rogerson (2010). A few positive outcomes of particular note follow: the Women's Center has been built ground-up by local leaders; roads are being repaired through the national government's partnership with international organizations and some local participation; education is provided to Saclepean children with aid from NGOs, local business, and the national government; the Saclepea Community Computer Center was funded by an international NGO and operations were turned over to local businesspersons for whom it provides income and employment; and Saclepea's Health Center was rebuilt by a French NGO but is now staffed by locals and funded by the Liberian national government. These successes are threatened by the lingering land disputes, slow provision of basic infrastructure, and the still somewhat fragile peace. Were tensions among various tribal groups to erupt in violence, either in Saclepea or surrounding communities, ongoing LED efforts could quickly be thwarted. Nevertheless, the prospects for sustainable development in Saclepea are much brighter in 2012 than they were at the beginning of the peace in 2003; substantial progress has been made.

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# Appendix



Figure 1: Map of Liberia (World Food Programme, 2011)