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**THE LONG AND WINDING ROAD: EVALUATION OF SWEDISH
LONG-TERM DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION WITH LIBERIA**

Christoph Emminghaus, Simon Wallisch, Kou Meapeh Gbaintor-Johnson, Julian Klauke,
Anouchka Baldin, Tillman Hönig, John Pokoo, Johanna Schaefer-Kehnert

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to

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Foreword by EBA

Liberia is one of Sweden's first development cooperation partner countries. As early as 1962, Sweden signed an agreement with Liberia regarding the construction of a school for vocational training, but during the civil wars (1989–1996, 1999–2003), Swedish development assistance, including humanitarian aid, was rather limited.

Since 2003 Swedish official development assistance to Liberia has expanded almost yearly. The Swedish Embassy in Monrovia opened in 2010 and Sweden appointed an ambassador with full time presence in the country in 2013.

In this evaluation, Christoph Emminghaus and colleagues evaluate long term results, sustainability, relevance, coherence, and coordination of Sweden's development cooperation with Liberia. The purpose is also to generate lessons to inform future cooperation. The evaluation spans the period 2003 until 2021, with stronger focus on the last ten years.

We believe this report will be of use to Swedish policy makers, staff within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs at Sida and the Swedish Embassy in Liberia. We also hope the report will be of relevance for other development actors working in Liberia or in other countries in post-conflict situations. The study has been conducted with support from a reference group chaired by Helena Lindholm, who previously served as chair of EBA.

The authors are solely responsible for the content of the report.

Stockholm, March 2024



Torbjörn Becker, EBA chair



Helena Lindholm

Sammanfattning

EBA beställde under 2022 en utvärdering av utvecklingssamarbetet med Liberia. Syftet var tvåfaldigt:

- En fördjupad förståelse för relevansen, samstämmigheten¹ och de långsiktiga resultaten av svenskt utvecklingssamarbete med Liberia (2003–2020).
- Att summera de viktigaste lärdomarna för det framtida svenska utvecklingssamarbetet med Liberia och andra liknande samarbetsländer.

I utvärderingen ligger fokus på tre områden (fred och säkerhet, demokrati och mänskliga rättigheter samt inkluderande ekonomisk utveckling). Detta under en regional strategi (2004–2006) och två bilaterala strategier (2008–2015, 2016–2020). De viktigaste slutsatserna i utvärderingen presenteras nedan.

Sveriges strategier för Liberia

Sveriges engagemang i Liberia efter inbördeskrigen (1989–1996, 1999–2003) inleddes med en regional strategi från 2004 som fokuserade på återuppbyggnad, grundläggande tjänster och behov i den efterkrigssituation som då rådde. Strategierna därefter har varit avsiktligt breda för att möta landets många utvecklingsbehov. Denna bredd har haft både för- och nackdelar. Den har möjliggjort flexibilitet i genomförandet och att Sverige successivt kunnat svara på nya utmaningar. Samtidigt har detta inneburit en delvis fragmenterad biståndsportfölj. Ambassaden hade haft nytta av mer specifik vägledning i ett land där nästan alla utvecklingsinsatser är relevanta.

¹ Hur väl en insats passar ihop med andra utvecklingsinsatser i ett land, en sektor eller en institution.

En bred portfölj riskerar att bli mindre samstämmig och gör det svårare att åstadkomma synergier mellan insatser. Några projekt som har genomförts isolerat har begränsat möjligheten till långsiktig påverkan i denna utmanande miljö.

Strategierna har haft breda utvecklingsmål om bland annat kapacitet i den offentliga sektorn med förväntade resultat inom offentliga tjänster och demokratisk styrning. Dessa val var bristfälligt anpassade efter relationerna mellan stat och samhälle och den politiska dynamiken i Liberia. Även om en sådan inriktning kan ha positiva effekter i flera sektorer – och ger uttryck för ett ambitiöst engagemang – bidrog de enbart begränsat till påtagliga förbättringar ”på marken” för medborgarna i Liberia. De svenska ambitionerna för statlig kapacitetsuppbyggnad var inte anpassade efter Liberias långsiktiga budgetrestriktioner och begränsade absorptionsförmåga, trots att dessa faktorer hade identifierats som riskfaktorer för strategimplementering och hållbarhet i insatser. Det fanns också begränsade möjligheter att uppnå resultat inom dessa områden utan att först hantera grundläggande behov och utmaningar i det liberianska samhället.

Grundläggande utbildning är exempelvis ett nödvändigt villkor för nästan alla former av avancerade offentliga tjänster; för politiskt deltagande och personalförsörjning. Utbildning har varit starkt prioriterat i Liberias nationella utvecklingsplaner men har inte men inte prioriterats i motsvarande grad i de svenska strategierna, trots att området återkommande har rankats högt bland de utmaningar Liberia står inför. Detta åsidosättande har varit en omdiskuterad fråga bland de personer som intervjuats för utvärderingen.

I sammanfattning har de svenska strategierna möjliggjort kontinuerlig anpassning till Liberias skiftande behov, samtidigt som deras bredd och höga ambitionsnivå utgör förbättringsområden. Mer fokuserade strategier med tydliga antaganden om genomförbarhet och utvecklad politisk analys skulle leda till ett förbättrat utvecklingssamarbete där svenska och liberianska prioriteringar harmonierar. Samråden vid strategiernas förnyelse borde i högre

grad ha fokuserat på att anpassa Sveriges prioriteringar till liberianska behov och prioriteringar.

Konsten att sätta samman en biståndsportfölj

Den svenska ambassaden har på ett bra sätt implementerat strategierna till en insatsportfölj som väl speglar den svenska inriktningen och som svarar mot viktiga behov hos Liberias regering och medborgare. Sverige har integrerat ett jämställdhetsperspektiv i insatser och också i ökad grad inkluderat marginaliserade grupper i planering. Med ett par undantag har detta skapat en biståndsportfölj med samstämmiga insatser inom och mellan sektorer.

Sedan 2003 har olika trender påverkat portföljens sammansättning. Biståndets storlek, antalet sektorer och genomförande partners har ökat över tid. Portföljens sammansättning har skiftat fokus från postkonflikt med återuppbyggnad av grundläggande funktioner till statsbyggande, offentlig reform, ekonomisk utveckling och ett ökat engagemang genom det civila samhället. Mängden och typen av genomförandeorganisationer har förändrats. Även om Sverige fortsatt tenderar att arbeta med etablerade aktörer, som FN-organ och andra stora internationella organisationer, har deras betydelse minskat något i takt med att fler partners i landet har vuxit fram. Sammantaget uppvisar portföljen en samstämmighet inom och mellan tematiska områden. Sida har framgångsrikt skapat sammanhållna grupper av projekt med potentiella synergier. Detta gäller särskilt inom områdena fred och säkerhet och demokrati och mänskliga rättigheter. Även om de enskilda insatserna har vuxit fram genom ambassadens strategiimplementering har samstämmigheten snarare utvecklats organiskt än som ett resultat av strategisk planering, och detta är något som kan utvecklas. Projekten inom inkluderande ekonomisk utveckling förefaller också ha genomförts mer som enskilda projekt och varit mindre samstämmiga.

Kritiken i utvärderingen om bristande strategisk vägledning återspeglas i att en förvisso väl implementerad projektportfölj har fokuserat på centrala institutioner på bekostnad av konkreta lokala lösningar. Några områden har dock haft starka länkar mellan lokal och nationell nivå, exempelvis marknadssystemutveckling och jämställdhet.

Vad har åstadkommits på nästan 20 år?

De långsiktiga effekterna av det svenska samarbetet med Liberia 2003 till 2021 har varierat mellan sektorer och insatser. Liberia har gått från blodigt inbördeskrig till en förhållandevis fredlig demokrati och det finns belägg för att Sverige bidragit till den positiva utvecklingen. De fredliga valet 2023 och den efterföljande övergången i presidentskap understryker detta. Men med tanke på biståndsvolymerna och den tid som gått sedan krigsslutet har framstegen också varit mer begränsade än väntat. Efter valet av Ellen Johnson Sirleaf till president (2005) fanns det också en uppfattning bland givare att Liberia nu skulle bli ett skolboksexempel på utveckling. Ändå kvarstår idag fattigdomen, statens kapacitet är låg och varken landets regering eller givarsamfund har kunnat hitta effektiva lösningar på situationen. I linje med det har kortsiktiga resultat från svenska insatser inte alltid kunnat omsättas i långsiktigt bärkraftiga effekter.

Inom området **konflikt, fred och säkerhet** har Liberia inte sett någon återgång till rikstäckande våldsamt konflikt men staten är samtidigt inte effektiv i att säkerställa rättssäkerhet på lokal nivå. Tillgång till rättskipning och (lokal) tillämpning av rättsstatsprinciper beror av en komplicerad dynamik som påverkar rättssamhället negativt.

Inte desto mindre dras i utvärderingen slutsatsen att Sverige har gett viktiga bidrag till rätts- och säkerhetssektorn. Arbetet med lokalsamhället inom formell och informell rättvisa har varit förhållandevis framgångsrikt. Däremot har det övergripande

institutionella förändringsarbetet kännetecknats av bristande bärkraft i den kapacitet och infrastruktur som byggts upp, exempelvis vid inrättandet av regionala säkerhetscentra. Ett positivt undantag är etableringen av en domstol för könsbaserat våld, även om det finns fortsatt stora utmaningar för offer att få tillgång till rättskipning.

Inom **demokrati och mänskliga rättigheter** vill Liberias befolkning otvetydigt ha demokratisk samhällsstyrning, men tilliten till samhällets institutioner är låg och utsattheten för korruption hög. Sverige har stöttat centrala regeringsfunktioner, som stöd till fria val, offentligfinansiell styrning och reformer inom markrättigheter och decentralisering. Dessa reformer bör betraktas som riskfyllda med potentiellt hög avkastning då de är starkt beroende av den komplicerade politiska dynamiken i landet för att lyckas. Reformerna har antagits i lag men genomförandet går långsamt och de har hittills inte gett konkreta resultat för Liberias befolkning.

Sveriges angreppssätt inom jämställdhetsområdet manifesteras genom ett lokalt projektfinansierat engagemang tillsammans med kärnstöd till UNFPA och UN Women. Sammantaget har detta framgångsrikt bidragit till en förändrad diskussion och dynamik om genus och jämställdhet i Liberia.

Avseende **inkluderande ekonomisk utveckling** har den övergripande ekonomiska situationen, som befolkningen uppfattar den, inte förbättrats nämnvärt, även om gradvisa förbättringar i många ekonomiska indikatorer kan noteras. Sverige har försökt främja ekonomisk utveckling genom att finansiera anläggande av mindre vägar (matarvägar och mindre grusvägar) och på så sätt underlätta landsbygdsbefolkningens tillgång till marknader och tjänster. Man har även genomfört insatser för att stärka bönder, ungdomar och andra gruppers möjlighet att bygga och utveckla företag.

Ett lite nyare angreppssätt finns i den så kallade marknadssystemsansatsen (Markets Systems Development Approach) som fokuserar på värdekedjor, exempelvis för kakao, och försöker åtgärda olika marknadsmisslyckanden. Metoden är lovande med sin holistiska systembaserade ansats men den riskerar att exkludera de allra fattigaste som ofta inte deltar på samma villkor i värdekedjorna. Sverige har även stöttat renovering av 900 kilometer matarväg i Liberia men dessas långsiktiga underhåll har inte säkerställts.

Bärkraften i uppnådda projektresultat skiftar alltså starkt. För enskilda personer i målgrupperna och i arbetet med att förändra normer har tillvägagångssätten varit framgångsrika, till exempel inom arbetet med jämställdhet eller kapacitetsuppbyggnad hos personal. På institutionell nivå återstår dock många utmaningar. Den Liberianska regeringens svårighet att tillhandahålla medel för att underhålla infrastruktur och personal är ett betydande hinder för bärkraftiga resultat. Personalomsättningen är ofta hög efter att givare har lämnat en sektor eller verksamhet och det finns en risk att kortsiktigt uppnådda resultat börjar avta eller försämrats. De svenska biståndsaktörerna har varit sena i att systematiskt beakta frågan om bärkraft.

Ett välkoordinerat bistånd?

Samordningen mellan givare och regering har varit utmanande i Liberia. Liberias regering har både begränsad kapacitet och vilja att hålla givargemensamma dialoger. I avsaknad av institutionaliserad samverkan har samordningens kvalitet växlat över tid då den beror av enskilda aktörers engagemang. Liberias höga biståndsberoende innebär en givarstyrning där regeringen tvingas acceptera projekt även om de inte alltid sammanfaller med landets huvudsakliga intressen. Mängden metoder, prioriteringar och intressen hos givarna ökar komplexiteten och ger en bild av bristande samstämmighet, som delvis beror på svag statlig samordning och strategisk styrning.

Givarsamordningen sker i hög grad genom Cooperating Partners Group (CPG). Sverige ses som en drivkraft för mer samordning och strategisk dialog mellan givare och regering och utövar stort inflytande i landet. Den svenska ambassaden har, i synnerhet sedan dess permanentande 2010, blivit alltmer uppskattad för sin stödjande och närvarande roll i att underlätta utbyten mellan parter. Ambassaden skulle dock mer proaktivt kunnat främja synergier mellan projekten.

Några särskilt viktiga lärdomar

- De långsiktiga effekterna av det svenska biståndet till Liberia mellan 2003 och 2021 har varit ojämna, biståndet har till viss del bidragit till fred och demokratisk övergång, men bara begränsade framsteg har åstadkommit i att motverka fattigdom och svag statlig kapacitet.
- Sverige har stort inflytande i Liberia, både genom direkta relationer med regeringen och genom givarsamfundet. Detta beror på Sveriges stora bistånd, på över 1 procent av Liberias BNP årligen, men också på att Sverige uppfattas som en konstruktiv partner med ett långsiktigt engagemang.
- Ett långsiktigt engagemang är avgörande för att nå framgång, särskilt inom områden som rättsstatens principer, jämställdhet, decentralisering och landreform. Många av de viktigaste framstegen (till exempel jordrättsreformen) är till stor del resultatet av årtionden av svenskt engagemang i frågan.
- Även om behoven är stora i alla sektorer i Liberia så borde såväl Sverige som andra givare ha lagt större vikt vid utbildningssektorn. Insatser där hade kunde bidra till större total effekt och mer direkta förbättringar för medborgarna i Liberia.
- Orealistiska antaganden om genomförbarhet bland givare och för lite fokus på bärkraft har begränsat de långsiktiga effekterna av samarbetet mellan Liberia och dess givare, inklusive Sverige.

- Sveriges insatser för att stärka statliga institutioner har resulterat i förhållandevis begränsad kapacitet med svag bärkraft.
- En mer samstämmig planering och implementering av kluster av relaterade insatser kan öka effekten av det svenska biståndet. Det kräver dock mer systematiskt arbete än idag med att sätta samman portföljen.

För att biståndsinsatser ska vara effektiva och bärkraftiga måste de i högre grad matcha faktiska behov och prioriteringar hos målgrupper och institutioner i Liberia.

Rekommendationer

- En övergripande rekommendation är att det behövs mer fokuserade strategier med tydligare vägledning inom specifika teman utifrån vilka ambassaden sedan kan utforma en samstämmig effektiv insatsportfölj. Området inkluderande ekonomisk utveckling kan göras mer samstämmigt såväl internt som med övriga områden under strategin.
- Det finns potentiella målkonflikter i insatsportföljen, särskilt mellan miljö och klimat och ekonomisk utveckling. Sverige vill stödja naturskydd och regnskogar samtidigt som man vill professionalisera exportindustrin i jordbruket (vilket är en central drivkraft bakom avskogning i Liberias grannländer). En medveten utformning av insatser i skärningspunkten mellan miljö och ekonomisk utveckling kan mildra sådana risker. Sverige bör också kritiskt följa utvecklingen när stora skogsområden nu används för koldioxidkompensation, med negativa konsekvenser för markrätten.
- Sverige bör kritiskt analysera och stärka särskilt utvalda reformprocesser för att bidra till bärkraftiga resultat och försöka ta ställning till om och hur eventuella ytterligare reformer kan stödjas effektivt.

- Ambassaden behöver ta fram strategier för snabbare identifiering av ineffektiva metoder och insatser, för snabbare lärande och bättre resultat. Det kan uppnås genom förbättrat arbete med baslinjemätningar och uppföljning, fler utvärderingar på portfölj- och underportföljnivå samt integrerad följeutvärdering eller riktade forskningsstudier.
- När Sverige fokuserar mer på system- och marknadsbaserade ansatser är det inkluderande perspektivet viktigt för att de mest utsatta inte samtidigt ska exkluderas.
- Sveriges engagemang för civilsamhället i Liberia bör fortsätta men med vaksamhet för risken att skapa givarberoende.

Det är mycket viktigt att Sverige upprätthåller ett medvetet och analytiskt förhållningssätt som erkänner den invecklade dynamik som formar Liberia: spänningar mellan centrum och periferi, landsbygd och stad, att se socioekonomisk ojämlikhet och den yngre befolkningens avgörande roll. Att utforma biståndet för att undvika att insatser oavsiktligt förvärrar spänningar och skillnader mellan grupper och att aktivt inrikta sig på en del av grundorsakerna till fattigdom och konflikt kommer alltjämt vara avgörande för bidraget till en bärkraftig utveckling i landet.

Summary

In 2022, EBA commissioned this evaluation on the long-term development cooperation (DC) between Liberia and Sweden. The aim of this study was twofold:

1. To gain an in-depth understanding of the relevance, coherence, and long-term results of Swedish DC with Liberia (2003–2021)
2. To generate lessons to inform future Swedish DC with Liberia as well as with other partner countries.

The evaluation focuses on Swedish DC in three thematic areas and under the main guiding strategies, one regional (2004–2006) and two bilateral (2008–2015, 2016–2020). The main findings of the evaluation are presented below.

Formulating fitting strategies for Liberia

The 2004 regional strategy, which launched the post-conflict engagement, focused on immediate reconstruction of basic services and post-war relief. Subsequent bilateral strategies were deliberately broad to address the many facets of Liberia's development needs. This breadth had its trade-offs. It allowed for high flexibility in implementation and the ability to respond to emerging challenges. However, it also resulted in a somewhat fragmented portfolio. The Embassy would have benefited from more specific guidance in a country context where nearly all development work is considered relevant. A broad portfolio risks reducing internal coherence and makes it more difficult to actively realise synergies between interventions. Some projects tended to operate in isolation, limiting their potential for sustainable impact in a difficult context. The strategies prescribed a significant focus on overarching development and focussed strongly on institutions and state capabilities. For example, the Swedish strategies expected visible results in areas such as public service delivery, governance reform and democratic institutions. However, the strategic approach was not rooted in a

more holistic analysis of state-society relations and political dynamics at play. While the focus on institutional capabilities can have strong multiplier effects in other sectors and represents a high level of commitment, it posed an imbalance and did not ultimately provide a lot of tangible improvements for citizens. Swedish ambitions for state capacity building did not match Liberia's long-term budgetary constraints and current absorptive capacity, even though Liberia's resource mobilisation and capacity is identified as a risk factor for strategy implementation and sustainability of contributions. Furthermore, the feasibility of achieving results in these areas without addressing more basic needs at the same time was not entirely plausible. For example, basic education can be seen as a necessary foundation for more advanced public service delivery (to enable citizens to participate, and to find suitable personnel for state institutions). Education was a high priority in Liberia's national development plans but has not been emphasised in Swedish strategies, although it often ranked highest among the issues facing the country and was also not significantly focussed on by other donors. This omission has been a point of contention between different stakeholders.

In summary, while Sweden's DC strategies have responded and evolved to Liberia's changing landscape, their broad scope, and high ambitions present clear areas for improvement. A more focused strategy with refined feasibility assumptions and political analysis could improve future cooperation and align both Swedish and Liberian priorities better. The overall strategy consultation processes should also have been more focused on aligning Sweden's own funding priorities with Liberian needs and priorities.

Crafting a relevant and coherent portfolio

The Embassy successfully translated different strategies into a portfolio that respected the strategic guidelines and met the needs of both the government and Liberian citizens. Sweden has successfully mainstreamed a gender perspective in interventions and has included

more marginalised groups in programming. The portfolio shows a high degree of coherence within and between thematic areas over time, with notable exceptions.

Several trends have affected the portfolio since 2003: The financial volume as well as the diversity in terms of sectors and implementing partners has steadily increased. The portfolio has shifted over time from a focus on post-conflict reconstruction of basic services and post-war relief to a more pronounced emphasis on general state-building and reform, on economic development and more engagement with civil society. The range of implementing partners has also changed, although there is a tendency to work with established partners: UN agencies and other international organisations have been Sweden's main partners. However, their importance has declined over time as more diverse partners have become available.

Overall, the portfolio is coherent within and across thematic areas. The Embassy has been particularly successful in several policy areas in creating groupings of projects that fit together well and are synergistic in their approach, particularly within Peace & Security and Democracy & Human Rights. The individual projects in these coherent project clusters have been developed according to the Swedish strategies by embassy programming, but the clusters' coherence emerged organically rather than strategic and could be further strengthened, as evidenced by the fact that no institutionalised links, coordination platforms or synergies for such clusters were established. The embassy also has not always been entirely successful in finding the appropriate timing, fit, and sequencing of different engagements. In the case of the inclusive economic development engagement, projects appear to be somewhat more isolated.

The critique of the evaluation regarding the strategic guidance was also reflected in the well-operationalised portfolio, which therefore tended to focus on higher-level institutions at the expense of developing more tangible and local solutions, although several areas

show a strong link from the local level all the way to the national, e.g. in market systems development or gender.

What was achieved in (almost) 20 years?

The impact of Swedish cooperation with Liberia from 2003 to 2021 has been mixed. Liberia has moved from civil war to a relatively peaceful democracy, and there is good evidence that Sweden has contributed significantly to this development. The peaceful elections of 2023 and the subsequent transfer of power for the presidency underline these developments. But, considering the amount of donor money spent and the time that has elapsed, overall progress has been more limited than anticipated: After the 2005 election of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, there was a widespread notion among donors that Liberia could now serve as a textbook example of development. Yet, the poverty remains, and overall state capacity is low, as neither the government nor the donor community has been able to develop an effective approach to address it. In line with this trend, tangible and visible results from individual Swedish development cooperation projects have sometimes not been translated into overarching impacts.

In the area of **conflict, peace and security**, Liberia has not experienced a return to nationwide violent conflict, but its democratic, security and justice systems are not currently effective in ensuring the (local) rule of law. Access to justice and rule of law are marked by complex dynamics that negatively affect justice delivery. Nevertheless, the evaluation found that Sweden has made some important contributions to the security and justice system. Whereas work with communities on formal and informal justice has been quite successful, institutional changes have been characterised by low sustainability of the capacity and infrastructure created, for example the establishment of regional security centres. A slightly more positive exception is the establishment of the so-called “Court E” for sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) cases, although here

too, significant challenges remain for victims of SGBV to access justice.

In **democracy and human rights**, Liberians prioritise democracy as form of government but have low trust in institutions and are affected by high corruption. Sweden supported key government functions – ranging from elections to finance managements as well as key reforms in land rights and decentralisation. The latter can be considered as “high risk high reward” endeavours as they depend on various political dynamics to succeed. They reflect the overall institution-focussed state building approach prescribed in the strategic guidance. Both reforms have been passed into law, but implementation is slow and has yet to create more tangible impact on populations. The Swedish approach on gender equality is exemplified by bottom-up engagements with communities in project-type funding, flanked by core support to UNFPA or UN Women, which has been very successful in contributing to changing discussions and dynamics around gender in Liberia.

In **inclusive economic development**, the overall economic situation as perceived by the population has not improved significantly although a gradual improvement of many economic indicators must be noted. Sweden has tried to promote inclusive economic development, for example by targeting feeder road infrastructure to connect rural populations to services and markets, and through various interventions to empower farmers, youth, and other groups to build businesses. A more recent development is market systems approaches, which look at entire value chains, such as cocoa, and aim to address market failures. These approaches are more promising because of their holistic, systems-based approach, but they risk leaving behind the poorest people who are unable to participate in market systems due to financial, educational, or infrastructural constraints. Sweden also supported the rehabilitation of 900 km of feeder roads, but their long-term maintenance is not assured.

The overall **sustainability** of project results was mixed: At the level of individual beneficiaries and in terms of changing norms, Swedish approaches have been successful, for example in terms of gender norms or staff capacity building. At the institutional level, several challenges remain. The government's inability to provide funds to maintain infrastructure and staff is a major obstacle to sustainable impact. Staff retention is low after donors have left a sector. There is often a risk that the results achieved will either stall or be reversed. Overall, the Swedish approach has started too late to consider sustainability more systematically and has struggled to move from relief and peacebuilding to longer-term development cooperation.

Strategic aid coordination?

Coordination between donors and government is challenging, mainly because the Liberian government has little capacity and willingness to convene donors. In the absence of institutionalised exchanges, the quality of coordination has fluctuated over time as it is largely driven by individual agency rather than institutionalised processes. Liberia's high aid dependency means the government is compelled to accept all projects, even if these don't always coincide with the government's main interests. The multiplicity of modalities, priorities and interests of different donors adds to the complexity and overall paints a picture of incoherence due to lack of coordination and strategic management by the government. Donor coordination takes place largely through the Cooperating Partners Group (CPG). Sweden is seen as a driving force for more coordination and a more strategic dialogue between donors and the government and exerts a high amount of influence in Liberia. Within the Swedish portfolio, the Embassy has become more and more appreciated for its supportive and accessible role in facilitating exchanges between implementing partners, especially after a permanent embassy was opened in 2010. The embassy however could be more proactive in promoting synergies between its own projects going forward.

Lessons learned

- The impact of Swedish aid to Liberia between 2003 and 2021 has been mixed, contributing to peace and democratic transition, but with limited progress in breaking the cycle of poverty and weak state capacity. The impact on communities and individuals has been high where targeted.
- Sweden has a significant influence in Liberia, both through direct relations with the government and within the international donor community. This is partly due to its large contribution, over 1% of Liberia's GDP annually, but also because Sweden is perceived as a constructive and reliable partner with a long-term commitment.
- Long-term engagement is crucial for achieving meaningful progress, especially in areas such as the rule of law, gender equality, decentralisation, and land reform. Many of the most important achievements (e.g. the Land Rights Act) are to a significant extent the result of decades of Swedish engagement.
- Although there is a high level of need in all sectors in Liberia, there was a missed opportunity for Sweden, but also other donors, to focus more on the education sector, which could have contributed to a greater overall impact and likely yielded more direct improvements for citizens.
- Unrealistic feasibility assumptions among donors, and a lack of focus on sustainability have hindered the long-term impact of cooperation between Liberia and its donors, including Sweden.
- The focus on strengthening state institutions has resulted in limited and unsustainable capacity, while potentially missing opportunities to directly empower more communities.
- Coherent grouping, planning, and implementation of related projects in individual policy areas can increase impact, suggesting the value of a more systematic approach to portfolio generation in future engagements.

- For initiatives to be effective and sustainable, they must resonate with the actual needs and priorities of the target groups and institutions in Liberia.

The **overarching recommendations** are to make the strategies more focused and to strengthen the guidance. This could be done within thematic areas for coherent project clusters where the embassy then has freedom and guidance to develop an effective portfolio. These clusters represent different areas of activity and cooperation between Sweden and Liberia. Inclusive economic development for example could be more coherent and better aligned with the other thematic areas. There are also contradiction risks in the portfolio, especially between the area of environment and climate and economic development: On the one hand, Sweden wants to support the preservation of the natural environment and Liberia's rainforests, while at the same time trying to professionalise the agricultural export industry, which is a major driver of deforestation in neighbouring countries, for example. An explicit design of projects at the intersection of environment and economic growth – beyond mere pursuit of “sustainable agriculture” - can mitigate some of these risks. Likewise, Sweden should critically accompany Liberian developments which set large swaths of Liberian forest up for carbon offsets, with negative implication to land rights.²

Finally, Sweden should opt to critically analyse and then reinforce selected reform processes to ensure sustainable results and critically reflect on whether and how additional reforms can be supported more effectively.

Recommendations for the Embassy include adopting a more strategic approach to portfolio building and better facilitating exchange and synergies between projects implemented by different partners. In addition, the Embassy should aim to adopt strategies that allow for quicker identification of ineffective practices (“fail

² Recently Liberia was set to concede 10% of its territory to Emirati company Blue Carbon for carbon credit production (<https://www.ft.com/content/f9bead69-7401-44fe-8db9-1c4063ae958c>).

faster”), thus enabling faster learning for better impact. This could be achieved by improving initial baselines and monitoring, conducting (sub)portfolio, or on-going evaluations, and incorporating targeted research. In moving towards more systemic and market-based approaches, the inclusive approach of Swedish engagement should remain fundamental and leave no one behind. Civil society engagement should continue, but with caution against the risk of creating donor dependency.

Finally, it remains paramount for Swedish development cooperation in Liberia to maintain a vigilant and mindful approach that recognises the complex dynamics that shape Liberia’s socio-political landscape. This includes recognising centre-periphery tensions, rural-urban disparities, socio-economic inequalities, and the critical role of the youth population. Tailoring interventions to avoid inadvertently exacerbating existing tensions and disparities and to actively address some of these root causes of poverty and conflict will continue to be key to sustainable development in the country.

1. Evaluation questions and design

This evaluation serves both the purpose of accountability and of learning. Firstly, it assesses the quality and results of Swedish DC with Liberia in the period since the end of the civil war (2003–2021).³ Secondly, the evaluation generates lessons learnt to inform future Swedish DC with Liberia and other partner countries.

The evaluation sought to answer five main questions.

1. Has Sweden formulated appropriate strategies for Liberia in terms of realism, feasibility, development constraints and opportunities at various periods in time?
2. Has Sweden supported a relevant and coherent portfolio of activities considering the Swedish and Liberian country strategies, policies, priorities, and needs over time?
3. Has Swedish development cooperation with Liberia contributed to sustainable results in terms of peace and security, democracy and human rights, and inclusive economic development? If so, in what way and how?
4. Has Sida coordinated its initiatives effectively with other Swedish and international actors in Liberia to enable synergies, safeguard collaboration, minimise unjustified overlaps and strengthen the combined result where appropriate?
5. What lessons can inform Swedish development cooperation with Liberia ahead?

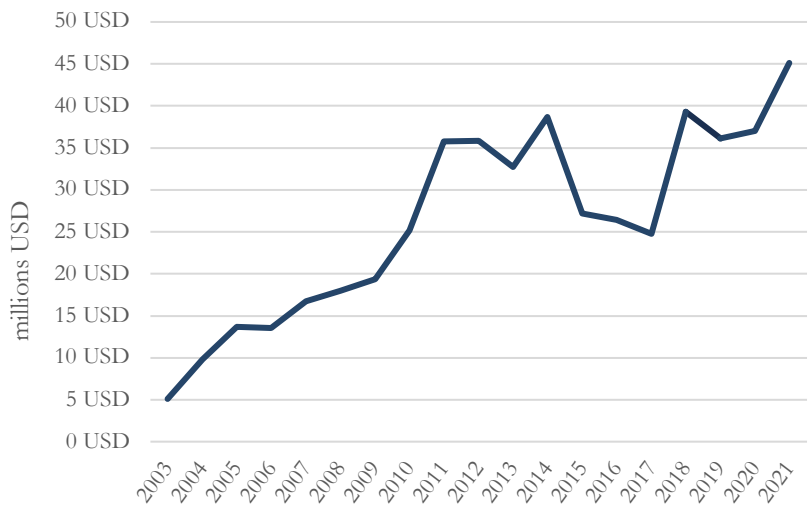
Appropriateness and results of Swedish efforts to strengthen gender equality are included as a cross-cutting issue throughout the evaluation.

Sweden has a long history of DC with Liberia starting in 1962. However, only after the end of the last civil war in 2003, Sweden's engagement with Liberia grew to substantial size. Since 2003 Swedish

³ The evaluation timeframe technically ends at the end of 2020 because the corresponding strategy period ends there.

aid to Liberia has been growing, with a few exceptions, notably during the period 2012–2017(Figure 1).

Figure 1: Swedish Official Development Assistance to Liberia (USD) (2003–2021)



Source: The International Aid Transparency Initiative

In that period, Swedish DC with Liberia has been guided by three core strategies: 2004–2006 Regional Strategy West Africa, 2008–2013 (extended to 2015) Bilateral Liberia Strategy, 2016–2020 Bilateral Liberia Strategy.⁴ Swedish activities in Liberia gradually shifted from humanitarian aid into DC (see chapter 'Formulating fitting strategies'), but they have generally focussed on three key strategic areas: Peace and security, democracy and human rights, and inclusive economic development. These and their project portfolios,

⁴ The current strategy, 2021 to 2025, (<https://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/d093554024e74a43b78c1800a759da7e/strategi-for-liberia-2021-2025.pdf>) is not part of this evaluation as its implementation is still ongoing, thus not lending it to a final assessment. It becomes relevant to this evaluation to the extent that it can explain the impact and implications of previous work.

which cover the largest volume of Swedish DC over the last twenty years, were the focus of the evaluation.

As such, the evaluation object is rather broad and characterised by a large portfolio of interventions, and a high diversity of issues addressed, aid modalities, and implementing partners. Additionally, the portfolio has changed constantly over the almost twenty years. These complexities were considered when designing the evaluation.

The development of the evaluation design was based on Stern et al.'s (Stern et al., 2012) approach to identifying the most appropriate design based on 1) the evaluation questions, 2) the evaluation object's attributes, and 3) the best available (combination of) evaluation designs to enable causal inference. Additionally, to further increase the appropriateness of its approach, the evaluation team combined different (aspects of) evaluation approaches and methods (Hargreaves, 2021). Based on the above considerations, the evaluation team put a theory-based approach at the centre of its design and structured its data collection into various modules that enabled both a broad analysis across the whole portfolio and deep dives into individual interventions. A theory-based approach is suitable for complex interventions in dynamic environments. Its key tool is a theory of change, which illustrates the assumed causal relationships between the resources invested, services rendered, short- to medium-term effects, and long-term effects of an intervention. For each of the three strategy periods, an overarching theory of change (see appendix 2) was developed together with current and former heads of development cooperation at the embassy. In validating results and assumed causal chains, the evaluation can examine whether intended changes have occurred and to what extent the intervention has contributed to these changes.

The evaluation's objectives, key results, and recommendations have been shaped with the participation of key stakeholders from within Swedish DC. Given the post-conflict context, conflict sensitivity, do no harm and gender-sensitivity were ensured (see appendix 1).

Data collection and analysis were mainly structured around three core modules: 1) portfolio and strategy analysis, 2) contribution analysis, and 3) coherence analysis. The modules were designed to enable a mixed-method approach and triangulation across methods, data, and researchers.

The portfolio and strategy analysis aimed to provide a systematic overview of the funded projects and to identify commonalities and differences across the portfolio. It collected data on the appropriateness and suitability of the strategies, on cross-cutting and common issues, on risks faced in the implementation of projects, and on the extent of results achievement. To this end, the evaluation team produced an overview of the portfolio, conducted an online survey with implementing partners, a cross-sectional analysis of project documents for 66 additional projects, and examined strategies and strategic areas through document- and interview-based analyses.

The contribution analysis was inspired by Johan Mayne's six-step concept (Mayne, 2011) but adapted to focus on central causal chains. It followed a three-step process: After developing the three theories of change based on strategy documents and initial interviews (step 1), key assumed links between overarching strategic objectives, strategic areas, and their corresponding portfolios were identified (step 2).⁵ These were chosen based on their centrality to the causal claims of the theory of change. Case studies were then selected that would allow for a validation of these key hypotheses (step 3). Drawing on information from interviews, documents, and field visits, hypothesized links were tested against actual project results. Additionally, positive, and negative influencing factors on these causal links were identified.⁶

⁵ List of chosen key results hypotheses can be found in appendix 1.

⁶ List of data sources can be found in appendix 1.

The coherence analysis mainly focussed on the internal coherence within the Swedish portfolio (both vertically and horizontally).⁷ It aimed to answer the question whether projects within the Swedish portfolio have been complementary and further analysed whether appropriate mechanisms of coordination existed within Swedish development cooperation. Externally, it considered coherence with the Liberian government and other donors. To this end, the evaluation team conducted interviews and added relevant questions to the online survey with implementing partners.

Case studies were used to complement strategy-level analyses and to validate and specify overarching findings with details from project implementation. Case study selection was based on criteria that balanced representativeness for the portfolio with usefulness for the evaluation objectives. Case studies do not necessarily represent single projects but elements of one or multiple projects that are most relevant to the portfolio and its key results hypotheses. Criteria for case study selection were representativeness regarding issues addressed, aid modalities and implementing partners, coverage of evaluated timeframe, relevance for key results hypotheses, added value, and feasibility.⁸

In all three modules, interviews were conducted with various stakeholders involved in the projects. The participants were categorized into four groups: Beneficiaries, Implementing Partners, Other Actors, and Project Officers:

- Beneficiaries (16 interviews): Interviews were conducted with beneficiaries from case study projects. We asked beneficiaries

⁷ According to the OECD-DAC definition for coherence, vertical coherence relates to the coherence between local, regional and national, as well as within institutions or sectors. Horizontal coherence relates to the intersecting coherence between different sectors, e.g. in the water-energy-food nexus. We included an additional aspect of “coherence over time” to adapt to the long-term perspective of the evaluation.

⁸ Details on selection criteria, process, and results can be found in appendix 1.

not only about the project they were involved in, but also inquired about developments in other areas.

- Implementing Partners (26 interviews): Interviews with representatives from implementing partners for case studies, e.g. The Carter Center, Kvinna till Kvinna, Mercy Corps, Lantmäteriet or Swansea University.
- Political partners (4 interviews). Interviews with high-level Liberian government officials, including two ministers, e.g. in the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Public Works and Ministry of the Interior.
- Other Actors (11 interviews): Representatives from Liberian civil society, other donors, and UNMIL
- Project Officers (22 interviews): Interviews were conducted with current and former ambassadors, heads of development and project officers from the Swedish Embassy, Sida and FBA.

About one third of all interviews were conducted as group interviews with more than one interviewee. Appendix 3 offers a more detailed account of all interviews.

While the described combination of (elements from) different evaluation designs and methods can compensate for many limitations of its individual aspects, the evaluation faced several challenges and important limitations remain:

The chosen theory-based approach allows for an analysis of the contribution of Swedish DC to observed changes in Liberia. It traces if and how a certain intervention has had an influence on an observed change. To this end, it considers alternative explanations, other influencing factors, and the counterfactual situation. In interviews and other analyses, the evaluation team sought to understand what would have happened without Swedish DC engagement. However, initially planned quasi-experimental elements to the evaluation design, that would have enabled the validation of these counterfactuals and the attribution of changes to Swedish DC for some causal links, could not be implemented due to lacking

granularity of secondary data or the unreliable distinction between treatment and comparison group. The evaluation therefore relies heavily on interview data that can be biased by social desirability and positivity bias (see below), likely leading to an overestimation of Swedish contributions.

Furthermore, the analysis of causal linkages between Swedish interventions and observed changes on a national level face overarching challenges akin to country evaluations. Based on its design, the evaluation cannot attribute changes to Swedish interventions or speak to the size of the contribution to a certain development. Additionally, a country's social, economic, and political development is characterised by complex, non-linear, and emergent dynamics. In such contexts, the origin(s), and cause(s) of observed developments (or at least their relevance to such developments) can generally not be identified with certainty. This challenge is further exacerbated in this evaluation by its broad focus on the whole portfolio and long period. This focus meant that available resources for detailed data collection had to be divided among the selected parts of the portfolio, thus further limiting the collection of detailed data necessary for tracing the (size of the) actual contribution of Swedish aid to observed changes.

Many challenges were related to the long evaluation timeframe. As a result, data quality is much better for more recent years due to variations in (available) documentation, interview partners and survey participants. More recent years of Swedish DC in Liberia are increasingly characterised by strong documentation, full access to details on the Swedish portfolio through IATI or OpenAid data, good availability of interview and survey participants, and reliable memory, especially for the 2015–2020 period. The further into the past, the more data gaps appear, standardization of document decreases, and interview and survey participants are unavailable or have trouble remembering important details from (more than) ten years ago. Additionally, in using secondary data from macro-economic indexes, Afrobarometer or other sources, many of these sources have changed their approach to data collection or calculation

over time, including their observed variables. The evaluation team attempted to fill in gaps through triangulation and its mixed-method approach, but the available qualitative data for the earlier years remains limited. As a result, the report puts a greater emphasis on the more recent years. The most recent strategy period, out of scope for the evaluation, is included in some areas where it becomes relevant to see what came of previous Swedish work and especially which developments in certain project clusters occurred over time.

Other general challenges akin to evaluations were present in this assignment, in particular:

- **Social desirability:** The evaluation team gained access to beneficiaries through the Swedish embassy and implementing partners. This can result in a biased selection and heighten respondents' motivation to focus on positive aspects. Additionally, interview partners did not always correctly differentiate between the donor and the independent evaluation team. Interviews were sometimes used to ask for more funding, despite clear disclaimers from the evaluation team. The evaluation team tried to counter these biases by speaking to a broad range of interview partners and by focussing on concrete results and less on the respondents' perspective. The diversity of thematic areas and timeframes allowed the evaluation team to ask cross-cutting questions and thus validate results achieved elsewhere. However, it remained difficult to discern social desirability bias and actual results in some cases.
- **Positivity bias:** Using qualitative methods and employing a contribution analysis runs the risk of overestimating effects by only seeking confirmatory evidence of the project's underlying results theory. The evaluation team used internal team reflections and a process of systematically considering alternative explanations and seeking evidence for them to counteract these biases.
- **Geographic bias and limited time for local data collection:** Due to logistical reasons and limited time in-country, field visits

were restricted to more accessible regions (Montserrado, Margibi, Bong, Nimba). The evaluation team spent one week travelling to counties, and one week in Monrovia from April 23 to May 5, 2023.

- **Anecdotal evidence:** Since few in-depths interviews with beneficiaries and project staff could be conducted, especially for earlier years, there is a risk of only capturing idiosyncratic cases and failing to observe systematic change. Triangulation, i.e. complementing interview results with secondary data analysis involving larger surveys, was used to minimise this risk.
- **Small survey sample size:** Out of 66 contacted organisations, only 27 responses could be generated in the survey of implementing partners, mostly because staff fluctuation meant that knowledge bearers were not available anymore (see appendix 1 and 4 for more details on the survey). This affects the precision of the results of the data analysis since potential outliers have disproportionate weight. Complementing the survey with information from interviews was used to minimise this risk.

2. Liberia – Background and context

Liberia, positioned on the Gulf of Guinea, is a relatively small country, with a total area of 111,370 km². The climate is equatorial with a distinct wet and dry season. Most of Liberia is covered by forests, shifting into savannah in the far north of the country. Liberia has three direct national borders with Guinea, Ivory Coast and Sierra Leone (Britannica, 2023). The nation's society comprises diverse ethnic groups, languages, and traditions. While English is the official language, there are more than 20 indigenous languages used daily (IRC, 2009). The ethnic diversity of Liberia mirrors its complex history. Major ethnic groups include the Kpelle, Bassa, Gio, and Mano, among others. In terms of religion, Christianity holds the majority, embraced by 85.6% of the populace, followed by Islam, practiced by 12.2% of the population.

With a gross domestic product (GDP) per capita of 754.5 US\$ Liberia ranks as one of the countries with the lowest GDP in the world (World Bank, 2022). Historically reliant on exports of rubber, timber, and minerals, the nation's economy suffered from the disruptions caused by the civil conflict. This resulted in a strained economic structure, coupled with external debt burdens and governance inefficiencies, contributing to Liberia being considered by the United Nations as one of the least developed countries in the world with an HDI of 0.481 and ranking 178 out of 191 countries in total in 2022 (UNDP, 2022). The country's poor infrastructure and complex geography means that large parts of the country are not well-accessible during the rainy season, which poses a significant economic and political constraint.

The country's population, which amounts to 5,302,681 inhabitants (2022), is a patchwork of identities, shaped by a history that traces back to its founding. The modern state of Liberia was shaped by the transatlantic slave trade. In the early 19th century, the American Colonization Society planed the repatriation of freeborn black Americans, freed slaves of African descent as well as Africans freed

from captured slave ships (“Congo people”) to the territory, which is now known as Liberia. In 1847, Liberia became an independent state under Americo-Liberian rule. However, the settling elites were at odds with the indigenous people over territory and trade routes. For these reasons, Liberia’s complex founding history has been shaped by conflict and disunity (TRC, 2009).

Liberia suffered from two civil wars that resulted in the estimated death toll of 150,000 to 250,000 as well as the displacement of over 50% of Liberia’s population. The First Liberian Civil War lasted from 1989 to 1997, and the Second One from 1999 to 2003 (Center for Justice and Accountability, 2023). The civil wars came with severe human rights abuses by all conflict parties, which included the killings of civilians, torture, rape, sexual violence, summary executions, the forced recruiting of child soldiers, extortion, looting of the national economy as well as the destruction of cultural property (Center for Justice and Accountability, 2023). The Liberian Conflict can be described as a conflict in which a series of local conflicts became nationalised (Bøås & Utas, 2014). Notably, the post-First Civil War peacebuilding process failed to properly foster the necessary transitional measures - Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration, and to reform the security sector. Combined with the unwillingness of Charles Taylor’s regime to address the underlying causes of the first civil war (human rights violations, economic and social inequalities), these factors led to the onset of the second Liberian Civil War (Kieh, 2009).

The conflict came to an end with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in August 2003 by all conflict parties and the international community as guarantors. In this regard, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia (TRC) was established with its mandate seeking “to promote national peace, security, unity and reconciliation” (TRC, 2009). While ethnic division is recognized as a key proximate driver of conflict in Liberia (Herbert 2014), the emergence of civil wars typically entails a multifaceted range of factors (Kieh, 2009). As a result, ethnic division is just one of the factors, alongside elite abuse of power, corruption, poverty, and

economic disparities: Moreover, the TRC asserts that the root cause of conflict can be traced to the historical decision to establish Liberia as a nation divided between indigenous people and settlers, coupled with the implementation of coercive measures to uphold the dominance of the settlers (Herbert, 2014; TRC, 2009).

The post-civil war transitional period was aided by a UN peacekeeping mission, the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) (United Nations Peacekeeping, 2016), which was significant in shaping Liberia's post-war landscape. The mission played a critical role in disarming various armed factions, allowing for the transition from conflict to relative stability. UNMIL's support for democratic processes, such as the conduct of transparent elections, paved the way for the peaceful transfer of power. Some scholars assess that UNMIL had positive effects on the establishment of the rule of law, though others come to differing conclusions (Blair, 2019). At the same time, the state's capacity to deliver services to citizens and uphold the rule of law by itself remained limited. Furthermore, Liberia is marked by a very high dependency on foreign aid, with donors' total contributions exceeding the state budget for many years.

Under these circumstances, Liberia was able to hold elections in 2005, where Ellen Johnson Sirleaf became the 24th president of Liberia after winning against her competitor George Weah. The inauguration of Sirleaf marks a historically significant point because it is the first time a woman had been elected head of state in Africa. Despite challenges in the post-peacebuilding process, Sirleaf was able to mobilise foreign and domestic resources that aided the economic development of the country. In 2010, Liberia secured a nearly \$5 billion debt relief from the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, African Development Bank, and other creditors, which equalled 90% of Liberia's total foreign debt and represented 15% of its GDP (Africa Renewal, 2018).

The positive economic developments, however, were met with a health crisis. In 2014, the Ebola epidemic struck Liberia and had far-

reaching and devastating effects on both economy and society. The outbreak strained the already fragile healthcare system, leading to an overwhelming number of cases and fatalities. The epidemic had profound socio-economic consequences (CDC, 2019).

In the wake of these challenges, the departure of UNMIL in 2018 marked a significant juncture in Liberia's history. While the mission's exit signalled progress, it also presented challenges. Liberia had to stand on its own feet in terms of security and governance. In January of the same year, George Weah was also inaugurated as the new President of Liberia, taking over the office from Sirleaf and marking the first democratic transfer of power in more than 70 years. In sum, the country's experiences, including elections and efforts to strengthen institutions, highlighted both the progress made and the work that lay ahead in ensuring sustained stability and development (Africa Renewal, 2018).

The COVID-19 pandemic introduced a new set of challenges to Liberia, affecting both its economy and society. The nation implemented measures to curb the spread of the virus, including lockdowns and travel restrictions. While these measures helped to contain the virus' transmission, they also had adverse effects on the economy. The vulnerability of the informal economy exacerbated the situation for those who relied on daily wages for their livelihoods (United Nations Liberia, 2020).

The following chapters provide the findings of our evaluation. Starting out with the Swedish strategies for Liberia and how they were developed, we then focus on the coherence and relevance of the portfolio that emerged out of the strategies. This culminates in an analysis of what has been achieved in terms of results, sustainability, and impacts, followed by a discussion of the coordination between donors as well as Sweden and the Liberian government.

3. Formulating appropriate strategies

Strategies are the principal guidelines to Swedish DC. Developed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and implemented by Sida, they provide guardrails, foci, and strategic orientation. Between 2003 and 2021, Swedish DC in Liberia was defined by three central strategies.

Overall, Swedish strategies have responded to key changes and shifting priorities in the Liberian context but were marked by a significant breadth as well as a focus on higher level and institution-building approaches that came with challenges. The following analyses these aspects more closely.

The Swedish strategies in Liberia

After focussing on humanitarian aid during the civil war, Sweden continued to support Liberia as part of its West Africa regional strategy 2004–2006. In line with the fragile, post-war context, it emphasised continuing the humanitarian engagement, while preparing the transition to development and reconstruction support (Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2004). With the aim of contributing to improved living standards of the poor, Sweden focused on three areas: conflict prevention and management, economic cooperation and interaction, common infrastructure, and natural resources (Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2004).

Concerns about a recurrence of violence remained high, so the principal focus shifted to conflict prevention for the first bilateral strategy (2008–2015). The cooperation areas were selected for their potential impact in addressing root causes of conflict. “Consolidated economic growth and employment” was chosen to remove low economic development as a central conflict driver (Int_1, Project Officer; Int_2, Project Officer; Int_27, Project Officer). The Swedish government recognised that peace in the region depended on tangible economic benefits for the population, job creation, and adequate income for the people (Swedish Ministry of Foreign

Affairs, 2008b). The strategy also foresaw engagement on income-generating employment in agriculture and labour-intensive industries as well as business and trade activities. The “Democracy, participation and the rule of law” cooperation area was selected to tackle a lack of democratic governance, rule of law and accountability, strong centralisation, and high corruption levels as central development issues and key drivers of conflict (Int_1, Project Officer; Int_27, Project Officer).

Additionally, the strategy reflected the momentum created by the election of President Sirleaf in 2006 who showed increased interest in opening up to international cooperation and enhancing DC (Int_27, Project Officer; Int_55, Project Officer; Int_71, Project Officer). The strategy puts a strong emphasis on state building, with a focus on institution-building, decentralisation and participation in political processes (Int_41, Project Officer; Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2008b). It recognised that popular participation represented a fundamental precondition for peace and long-term stability, which required trust in the state and state system to increase people’s ability and willingness to participate in political decision-making processes.

A similar rationale of preventing a relapse into conflict shaped the 2016–2020 strategy. Looking back at the implementation, the strategy suggested to continue Sweden’s engagement on democratic governance and state institutions with limited capacity to deliver social services, limited transparency, and weak formal accountability mechanisms (Int_1, Project Officer; Int_2, Project Officer; Int_27, Project Officer; Int_41, Project Officer; Int_76, Project Officer; Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013). The cooperation area “Democracy and Human Rights” therefore focused on strengthening democracy, gender equality, and human rights. In comparison to the previous strategy, engagement was broadened beyond state and institution building and a stronger emphasis was put on strengthening civil society (Int_41, Project Officer). Economic development was also continued as a cooperation area, where the emphasis shifted towards inclusive and sustainable

economic development. The strategy aimed to respond to economic inequalities, which posed a risk of contributing to a relapse into conflict (Int_1, Project Officer; Int_27, Project Officer; Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013). Finally, the 2016–2020 strategy added a more explicit focus on safeguarding human security and freedom from violence through the cooperation area “Peace and Security”, which was previously mainstreamed as a cross-cutting theme under “Democracy and Human Rights”. It included security sector and justice reform and the strengthening of women’s role in peacebuilding (Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016a). The change was made to support human security and violence reduction as important drivers of conflict in Liberia more visibly and explicitly. On the other hand, embassy staff would have preferred for it to remain cross-cutting because it “links to everything” (Int_8, Project Officer).

The strategies recognised the interdependence of various issues and stated that only an integrated approach to development in Liberia would create tangible results. Therefore, they offered guidance for a broad portfolio, but towards a common goal. Across all strategies, the connection between development and peace was emphasised and cooperation areas were seen as interrelated. The different areas were meant to reinforce each other. Economic development was seen as a prerequisite for peace and, conversely, peace as a fundament for prosperity. Good governance, rule of law, democracy and human rights were similarly identified as bases for peacebuilding and for inclusive economic development (Int_1, Project Officer; Int_2, Project Officer; Int_27, Project Officer; Int_55, Project Officer; Int_74, Project Officer; Int_76, Project Officer).

At the same time, the integrated approach to addressing root causes of conflict also led to very broad strategies. This provided flexibility in implementation, but also obstacles towards leveraging synergies and producing lasting impact. In general, the wording and framing of the three Swedish strategies are very broad and the interventions covered vastly different aspects. This breadth served to address the interconnected web of conflict drivers (such as economic

development and state reform), but it included many assumptions about impact-level connections without closer operationalisation. To many interview partners, this breadth and flexibility were preconditions to achieving results and crafting a relevant, potentially high-impact portfolio (Int_2, Project Officer; Int_27, Project Officer; Int_55, Project Officer; Int_76, Project Officer). At the same time, addressing multiple issues simultaneously requires a spread-out portfolio which reduces coherence and synergies. It can lead to standalone projects that are not sufficiently embedded. Some interview partners believe that more focused strategies and, thus, Swedish engagement, would have ensured more transformative and lasting changes in fewer but carefully selected areas (Int_2, Project Officer; Int_25, Project Officer; Int_27, Project Officer; Int_31, Other Actor; Int_77, Project Officer).

Ultimately, the Swedish focus on conflict prevention and the breadth of the strategies are results of an attempt to balance different priorities, linked together by the ultimate goals of addressing the roots of conflict and poverty reduction.

Strategic fit to national frameworks and priorities

The Swedish focus on the prevention of conflict was based on an analysis of the needs of the context and priorities of the Liberian government. As Liberia emerged from a civil war, reconstruction, peacebuilding, and the removal of conflict drivers were key for stability, peace, and development. As such Sweden's portfolio aligned with the priorities highlighted in Liberia's central guiding strategies, namely Liberia's Agenda for Transformation (2013, "Steps Towards Liberia Rising 2030") of President Sirleaf, and the

Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development (PAPD) (2018–2023) of the Weah government.⁹

Liberia's Agenda for Transformation, announced in 2013, aimed to achieve Middle Income Status by 2030 by focussing on five pillars of development:

- Peace, Justice, Security and Rule of Law
- Economic Transformation
- Human Development
- Governance and Public Institutions
- Cross-Cutting Issues (such as Gender, Child Protection)

The Swedish strategy thus aligned well with the first, second, and fourth pillar. The general emphasis of Swedish DC on gender equality additionally aligned with the respective parts under the fifth pillar. This alignment goes beyond the selection of priority areas and extends into the focus within these areas. For example, both Sweden and Liberia aimed to focus on security and justice reforms and the strengthening of related capacities such as the prison, police, security, and justice system (Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2008a; Republic of Liberia, 2013). Similarly, Sweden's goal to strengthen institutional capacities, decentralisation, and political participation was in alignment with Liberia's strategy towards Governance and Public Institutions. It foresaw a recasting of the relationship between government and citizens, strengthening localised service provision for the population, engaging citizens to build responsive democratic institutions, and strengthening institutions, particularly those overseeing and promoting government transparency and accountability (Republic of Liberia, 2013; Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2008a).

⁹ Before 2013, no relevant documents on Liberian priorities and strategies were available.

In 2018, the PAPD replaced the Agenda for Transformation as the key national development strategy. It formulates the following four pillars:

- Power to the People
- The Economy and Jobs
- Sustaining the Peace
- Governance and Transparency

The three cooperation areas of the Swedish bilateral strategy and their respective foci again align well with these priorities. Sustaining the Peace was identified as a central pillar for national development, aiming to end fragility and to address the root causes of conflict, through increasing civic trust and coexistence, decreasing violent tendencies, ensuring access to justice, rule of law and human rights, improving citizens' satisfaction with the judicial system and the rule of law, as well as improving the security service delivery (Republic of Liberia, 2018).

However, the Swedish strategy also omits key Liberian priority areas, a decision which has been questioned by many interview partners. Both national development plans identify health and education as key sectors for development in Liberia. Pillar III in the Agenda for Transformation and Pillar I in the PAPD put explicit emphasis on the reform and strengthening of these two sectors. Some partners argue that the Swedish focus on issues surrounding conflict has reduced Swedish focus on more tangible sustainable development results (Int_2, Project Officer). Through the high flexibility of its strategy, Sweden supported some projects on education (focusing on technical and vocational education and training (TVET)) and health (especially SRHR as part of its human rights focus) (Int_27, Project Officer). However, the importance and funding given to them do not correspond with the identified needs in Liberia. Sweden also acknowledges this as the first bilateral strategy explicitly mentions the education sector as requiring "extensive external support" and being "one of the three top priority issues" in the consultation

process. Basic education levels in the country remained low; in 2017, almost half the population aged 15 and above was illiterate (World Bank, 2023). The choice to not prioritise these areas has been questioned by many interview partners (Int_2, Project Officer; Int_3, Project Officer; Int_8, Project Officer; Int_27, Project Officer; Int_31, Other Actor; Int_40, Project Officer; Int_74, Project Officer; Int_75, Project Officer; Int_77, Project Officer; Int_78, Other Actor; Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2008b). Sweden's decision was partly based on the assumption that these sectors were receiving sufficient donor support, particularly by USAID (Int_77, Project Officer). This argument is only partially valid as other donors were also involved in the Sweden's cooperation areas and needs especially in education significantly surpassed donor support (Int_8, Project Officer). For instance, in 2017, only 31 projects were conducted in the education sector for a total funding of \$116,292,955 whereas in "the economic growth" sector, 187 projects were conducted (for a total funding of \$1,178,037,183) and in the health sector 295 projects were conducted (for a total funding of \$483,571,444) (USAID, 2017).

Instead of including education, Swedish strategies expected visible achievements in areas such as state service delivery, democratic governance, rule of law and institutions. Results in these areas can have strong multiplier effects into other sectors and thus present high-visibility engagements. However, the feasibility of achieving results in these areas, without addressing root causes and effects of under-development, is not entirely plausible (Int_79, Project Officer). Education especially can be seen as a necessary foundation for achieving long-term results in other areas such as economic development, poverty reduction (Int_2, Project Officer; Int_81, Other Actor), political participation (Int_41, Project Officer), or even TVET (Int_25, Project Officer).

Finding the right balance in state building

Swedish strategies thus had a disproportionate focus on higher-level institutional development and state building goals without an adequate recognition of context and preconditions for lasting impacts in these areas. Swedish strategies focussed strongly on the capabilities of the state, and inadequately considered other aspects of state building. The OECD defined state building in fragile context as an “endogenous process to enhance capacity, institutions and legitimacy of the state driven by state-society relations” (OECD, 2008). It entails the components of (1) political settlement, (2) capabilities and responsiveness of the state, and (3) social expectations and perceptions, i.e. the ability for citizens to articulate demands that are heard. While Swedish assistance undoubtedly focussed on important features regarding state capabilities, such as supporting minimum administrative capacity or democratic processes and institutions, the other aspects relevant for state building were inadequately considered, which ultimately limited progress in the institutional efforts: *“State building efforts need to be attuned to all three dimensions (...) focusing only on one – state capabilities, for instance – without paying due attention to others – such as how power holders are to be held to account for how public resources are spent – external and internal actors risk at best ineffective and at worst harmful outcomes.”* (OECD, 2011). Only over time did Sweden increasingly manage to link state capabilities to societal dimensions, meaningfully combining the work, especially since the 2016–2020 strategy. However, Sweden (like other donors) struggled to manoeuvre the complex political dynamics which ultimately shape the success of interventions. The strategies were not built on adequate analyses of the power dynamics which determine the effect of institutions and policies (cf. Khan, 2088; Behuria et al. 2017). In short: Politics matter for inclusive development, but donors often focus on the technical (Hickey et al., 2016).

Furthermore, Swedish ambitions in state capacity building did not adequately correspond to long-term Liberian budget constraints and

current absorption capacity, even though Liberian resource mobilisation and capacity is mentioned as a risk factor for the implementation of the strategies and the sustainability of contributions. In the 2008–2015 bilateral strategy, Swedish engagement in democracy and institution building included policy areas and institutions of decentralisation, security sector, justice, financial budgeting, and audit control as well as the aspiration to work in all regions – and Sweden was just one donor. Due to limited Liberian institutional, financial, and human capacity, it was unrealistic to expect such a broad scope to achieve tangible and sustainable results (Int_25, Project Officer). As the results chapter will discuss, the strategic approach in this regard has limited the success of interventions on the ground in areas where Sweden worked on reform and institutions.

Striking the balance between Swedish and Liberian priorities

Development cooperation strategies naturally attempt to find a common ground between the donor's policy objectives and the priorities and needs of the recipient country. Consequentially, the strategies have been shaped significantly by Swedish foreign policy objectives. Core priorities for Sweden included human rights, democracy, rule of law, peace, security, and gender equality, particular in areas such as the Horn of Africa, Liberia, Mali, and the Great Lakes region (Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016). The choice to focus on “Peace and Security” in Liberia, and the strong emphasis on gender equality and addressing sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), reflect these strategic goals, which are outlined in their National Action Plan for the UN Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security 2016–2020, and their advocacy for women's involvement in peace processes.

On the other hand, it is important to link own priorities to a comprehensive analysis and consultation regarding the local context,

needs and priorities. To this end, the development of the 2008–2015 bilateral strategy was highly participatory and is seen to have fostered national ownership. Consultations for this strategy were extensive and took place through exercises involving the UN, the government, and units down to the village level, to ensure input from various stakeholders (Int_25, Project Officer; Int_59, Project Officer). The development of the second bilateral strategy (2016–2020), however, was conducted mostly within the Swedish system and was based on conducting analyses, needs assessments and only limited discussions with government partners. Broader consultations, not only with government but also with CSOs, beyond existing relationships, could have been made in a more systematic manner to encourage more structural engagement. It may also have been beneficial to consult a larger range of actors to test the validity of conducted analysis and get a better insight into power constellations in relation to development cooperation (Int_41, Project Officer).

Ultimately however, even with a very good contextual analysis and efforts to build on local insights, some actors attested that final editing work at the Swedish ministry of foreign affairs level tended to dilute some of the inputs that had emanated from the ground in Liberia, which therefore had too little weight in final decisions on the strategy (Int_8, Project Officer; Int_59, Project Officer). While Swedish DC naturally must reflect Swedish interests and priorities, only a comprehensive alignment exercise with Liberian contexts, needs and priorities will allow the desired changes to unfold. For the practical implementation of strategies, the alignment with “actual” government priorities and practical realities on the ground will be of a much higher relevance to the success of development cooperation than the mere formal alignment with national development plans.

4. Crafting a relevant and coherent portfolio

This chapter looks at how Sweden has translated the strategy into a portfolio, how the portfolio related to the needs and priorities of the Liberian government and its citizens over time, and how coherent it has been in doing so.

The analysis clearly confirms that the embassy has been successful in translating the strategies into a portfolio that honours the strategic guidance, addresses key needs of the government and Liberian citizens, with a generally high level of coherence within and between the thematic areas over time. A key omission of the Swedish strategies and portfolio relate to important needs and priorities in education. Also, Sweden has not always been successful in finding the appropriate timing and sequencing of engagements. Overall, there is a pragmatic approach to portfolio building in which the embassy deliberates openly with potential partners. This approach is commendable but should be mindful of creating (negative) path dependencies due to the tendency to work with longstanding partners.

Attaining projects and aligning them with a strategy

The country strategy is operationalised by Sida and the Swedish embassy following an established process. When a new country strategy has been finalised, the Swedish government submits it to Sida. Sida and the Swedish embassy in Liberia then have full autonomy to translate it into an appropriate portfolio, using the available funding envelope. The head of cooperation at the embassy in Monrovia is responsible for this process and oversees the implementing work of the project officers for the different thematic areas (Int_55, Project Officer; Int_77, Project Officer). The

operationalisation of the strategy by the Swedish embassy involves aligning the existing portfolio to the new strategy where possible and developing new initiatives in the spirit of the strategy. There is a formal process in place to check strategy alignment as step zero of deliberations regarding new projects (Int_3, Project Officer; Int_40, Project Officer).

This basic setup and division of tasks has been in place throughout the timeframe of the evaluation. However, it has undergone some changes. Most notably, the process was more informal in the period before 2010. There was no embassy in the country before December 2010, and most of the portfolio was managed from Sweden by a country director.

The Swedish embassy pursues a process of deliberation and co-creation, which allows for a high degree of influence on project development. Proposals for new projects and initiatives are developed in different ways: Firstly, a potential or established partner may present the embassy with an informal proposal. The embassy does not have strict requirements to the format and contents, which constitutes a low-entry barrier (Int_25, Project Officer). The potential partner and embassy then deliberate the specifics of a potential funding agreement. Secondly, an existing activity may be extended or scaled-up, possibly with amendments to incorporate lessons learned. Thirdly, the embassy may seek out a partner to conduct a project the embassy deems worth pursuing (Int_3, Project Officer; Int_40, Project Officer). Unlike other donors, Sweden does not rely on public calls for proposals but rather delves into deliberations with potential partners (Int_3, Project Officer; Int_43, Other Actor; Int_74, Project Officer). Deliberation and engagement are often continued during project implementation, but, legally, the embassy cannot compel partners to engage beyond meetings related to annual reports, annual plan and annual budget, at least with UN partners (Int_8, Project Officer). Therefore, alignment between portfolio and strategy is highest during the inception of projects and then shifts to annual review meetings.

The overall process poses clear benefits and a close alignment. It makes sense in the Liberian context. The open deliberation and availability of the embassy for adjustments and suggestions is highly valued (Survey). However, it also comes with risks of creating (negative) path dependencies through a potential over-reliance on established partnerships and continuing to invest in approaches and projects that provide comparatively lower progress at the expense of exploring new opportunities. At the same time, continuous engagement with trusted partners over a longer time is also highly beneficial, as we will discuss below. However, mechanisms must be in place to regularly reflect whether the approach, partner and progress are still adequate. As we will discuss in the recommendations, the embassy and implementing partners could implement a range of measures to “fail faster” and create a more solid foundation for decision making. A more balanced approach to project selection could also be to pursue a minor shift towards publicly inviting for proposals more often before entering a deliberation process.

While the embassy has regularly consulted with a broad range of stakeholders on selected policy areas, e.g. in the work on decentralisation (Int_40, Project Officer), it does have a slight tendency of working with established partners, such as the UN organisations or certain Swedish NGOs, although a diversification over time can be noted, which makes sense given the increased financial and thematic scope. In the evaluated timeframe, the project portfolio comprises 125 projects that have been conducted by 61 partners, whereby 25% of the projects (or 30% of the total funding amount during the 2003-2021 timeframe) have been implemented by UN partners alone.¹⁰ The UN share of projects declined from 80% (2004-2006), to 24% (2008-2015) to 22%. Until 2010, when most of the portfolio was managed from Sweden, Sida had no

¹⁰ Includes UNFPA, UNDP, UNWOMEN, etc.; not included in this group are World Bank, IMF and IFC, which together made up 0% (2004–2006), 16% (2008–2015) and 5% (2016–2020) of projects respectively.

established partners in the country and the UN system's share of projects was thus very high (Int_77, Project Officer).

The Swedish portfolio and priorities and needs

Looking at the portfolio, seven major trends can be observed:

- **The volume of Swedish DC in Liberia has been steadily increasing.** When Liberia was still included under the regional strategy for West Africa, the portfolio foresaw an annual budget of 30,000,000 SEK for activities in Liberia. With the first bilateral strategy, funds were increased to 100,000,000 SEK (2009), 150,000,000 SEK (2010) and 200,000,000 (2010–2015). The last strategy then foresaw an annual budget of 270,000,000 SEK.¹¹
- **The portfolio has been getting increasingly diverse in terms of sectors and implementing partners.** When following the regional strategy, Swedish DC only collaborated with UN bodies and international or regional organisations. However, as the process moved forward, the set of implementing partners widened to local organisation, development finance and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), along with Swedish NGOs, consultancies, and local companies. Similarly, at first Swedish DC operated in three sectors only (Reconstruction and Rehabilitation, Government and Civil Society, Education). In the 2008–2015 strategy, Sweden

¹¹ This does not correspond directly to the amounts stipulated in the strategies, because available data assigns the total volume of a project to its start year, instead of tracking granularly in which year project funds have been disbursed. This also leads to spikes at the beginning of a strategy period (when many projects are being commissioned) and apparently low spending at the end of a strategy period (when projects are still being implemented but only few new projects are being commissioned). Additionally, in some cases, follow-on phases of projects are assigned to the start year of the first phase, so that funds are accounted for years in advance.

extended its engagement to seven sectors, and in the second bilateral strategy period (2016–2020) to a total of 16 sectors.¹²

- **The portfolio has shifted its focus from post-conflict reconstruction of basic services and post-war relief over general state-building and -reform and economic development towards engaging civil society.** In the Swedish portfolio a reflection of the shifting foci of the Swedish strategies can be found. The funded projects in the three sectors under the regional strategy focussed on immediate post-conflict reconstruction, on providing meals in primary schools, on reintegration of ex-combatants and on the holding of open and fair elections. Under the second strategy, the portfolio continues to focus on conflict-related issues (conflict prevention, peacebuilding, participation in peacekeeping operations, and reconstruction) but adds an emphasis on state and security reforms, including public sector policy and public finance management (strengthening security sector institutions, strengthening Liberian institutions, and decentralisation for more local political participation). Additionally, impulses towards inclusive economic development (agriculture value chain, infrastructure, TVET, trade regulations) are included. Projects related to promoting democratic participation with a focus on human rights, media, and the free flow of information, as well as the strengthening of civil society, are included in the latest strategy. During the third strategy period, gender-related issues such as SGBV and women's rights become a separate focus, making up approximately 23% of the government and civil society sector portfolio.
- **The set of implementing partners has shifted.** Throughout the evaluated timeframe the importance of UN institutions and other international organisations as Sweden's central implementing partners has decreased over time. In line with the

¹² Sectors reported via IATI in creditor reporting system (CRS) typology, using only the highest aggregate (two-digit overarching sector codes).

second strategy, Sweden began to work more directly with the government, with a focus on infrastructure as part of inclusive economic development. Sweden also broadened its involvement to include development finance institutions supporting public financial management reform, as well as international and local NGOs working directly with government agencies. During the last strategy period, implementing partners were included who focused more on working with civil society, including specialised Swedish NGOs, such as Kvinna till Kvinna and Forum Syd.

- **Swedish Development Cooperation's involvement in counties corresponds to their population size, but not necessarily their relative needs.** Swedish projects have been implemented in counties in accordance with the population residing in these areas. However, interventions specific to certain counties are less frequent in remote areas. Montserrado, Bong, and Nimba counties have received most activities. These three counties also have the largest populations, with Montserrado having over 1 million residents. Projects classified as "countrywide" typically have a relatively even distribution of interventions across counties. However, county-specific projects show more significant disparities, with remote areas receiving fewer interventions overall. The size of a population is not a sufficient indicator of its significance, as remote counties are typically more disadvantaged in terms of economic prospects, political participation, and government provision of services.
- **Funding modalities show strong continuity across the evaluated timeframe.** The Swedish portfolio holds mainly project-type interventions and contributions to specific-purpose programmes and funds managed by implementing partners. This basic set up has not changed significantly during the evaluated timeframe.
- **From 2003 to 2020, ODA flows have played a significant role in contributing to Liberia's GDP,** with an average of 18% from 2003 to 2010 and an increase to an average of 19% from 2011 to 2020. Sweden has been a major contributor, averaging

more than 1% of Liberia's GDP each year, with notable spikes in 2010 (2.1%) and 2012 (1.79%). When comparing donors' contributions to Liberian government expenditure, it is evident that donors have often exceeded government spending in earlier years (2003-2010), by 2 to 13%. However, between 2011–2020, the total of government expenditure amounted to an average of 33% of Liberia's GDP, which is higher than the donors' contributions of 19% for the same period (OECD. Stat, 2023; World Bank, 2023; ALFRED, 2023).

The portfolio and Liberian government priorities

Since the Swedish portfolio is carefully aligned with the strategies, the analysis above of the strategies' alignment with government priorities can be extended to the portfolio. Generally, the portfolio is well aligned with the Government of Liberia's (GoL) priorities and approaches, but Sweden's choices within the broad range of Liberian priorities led to the omission of the education sector and a focus on state capabilities at the expense of a broader analysis of political and societal aspects.

Overall, the portfolio aligned well with the priorities and approaches in Liberia's national development plans (Republic of Liberia, 2008, 2013, 2018). Alignment of the portfolio went beyond strategic priorities and focus areas and included an alignment of approaches as well. In 2013 and 2018 national development plans, the Liberian government foresaw large-scale reforms and capacity strengthening of public institutions (such as professionalisation of security sector, judicial reform, decentralisation, transparency), legal reform (such as land reform, business environment and regulatory framework), strengthening civil society, and investments in infrastructure and business development. Over the evaluated period, the Swedish project portfolio included interventions with all these approaches and worked both on a governmental and a grassroots level. As

shown, the Swedish portfolio only slowly began engaging with civil society as a secondary avenue of delivery and the initial balance between building state capacity and local links (such as civil society accountability functions, community work, self-governance, tangible citizen benefits) was too limited. Interviewees note that Sweden initially was disproportionately focused on national-level institution building, UN organisations, and government actors (Int_41, Project Officer). This meant an overreliance on the potential high impact of top-level reforms, a potential overburdening of government capacities and an underappreciation of direct benefits to the population through grassroots developments.

To the Liberian government however, human capacity development through basic and higher education (including TVET) was key for economic prosperity. As discussed in the strategy chapter, going beyond the strategic priorities, Sweden has provided some support to TVET activities. However, general education has received little attention. In the evaluated timeframe, a total of ten projects have been implemented in the educational sector. Initially, these projects accounted for a high, albeit decreasing share of total volume of funds: starting at 27.7% (2004–2006), and then quickly reducing to 12.4% (2008–2015), and 6.5% (2016–2020). A closer look at the funded projects reveals that most of the projects in that sector were not primarily geared towards improving basic education. During 2004–2006, Sweden funded the World Food Programme to secure meals for primary school children and during 2016–2020, it focused on TVET and a programme, which aimed to promote youth's business skills, prepare them for the labour market and connect to economic opportunities.

The long-standing emphasis on gender equality of Swedish DC and the increased focus on gender and gender-related issues (such as SGBV) during the last strategy period is aligned with current priorities of the Liberian government. In Liberia, women's empowerment featured prominently in the PAPD and the current government is communicating support of women's rights and economic empowerment, with President Weah campaigning as

“Feminist in-chief” (Executive Mansion Liberia, 2018). Fittingly, about 10% of the total portfolio of the last strategy period was geared towards women’s empowerment and ending SGBV, notwithstanding other effects through gender-sensible and gender-targeted programming.

Beyond alignment on paper, alignment on actual government priorities also depended on the relationship with, and the strategic capacity and behaviour of the incumbent government. In this regard, Swedish DC has encountered different situations over the evaluated timeframe. During the 2008–2015 strategy, the administration under president Sirleaf mostly acted as a constructive partner to the international donors and partners with clear interests and priorities. This allowed for goal-oriented consultations and coordination. It had a focus on getting services to the people but was not able or willing to pass significant legislation to that end which made progress planning difficult for international partners. In contrast, the Weah government has been enacting key legislation (e.g. land rights, local governance act), albeit with a demonstrably weaker focus on pursuing timely implementation and often confronting international partners with unclear priorities and interests (Int_33, Implementing Partner). Both governments’ ability to develop strategic priorities, to operationalise goals into plans, and to ensure proper implementation and follow through were restricted by overall limited state and administrative capacity (cf. Keijzer et al., 2019).

The Swedish portfolio and the needs and perceptions of Liberia’s population

With regards to the needs of the population, similar conclusions can be drawn. Swedish DC has not always been successful at addressing the key dilemma of timing and sequencing of interventions and how projects relate to long-term changes and short-term needs.

In data from the Afrobarometer, between 2008 and 2021, the Liberian population consistently identifies basic needs and services such as infrastructure and roads, food, water supply, health, education, and electricity among the most important problems facing the country that the government should address (see fig. 1). Especially health, education, and infrastructure are identified as key and growing priorities. Issues related to economic development, such as management of the economy and unemployment, are also among the key priorities of the population.

Here, a key dilemma of Swedish DC appears on timing and sequencing of interventions: On the one hand, Swedish cooperation aim to address these needs by reforming and increase the capacity of the state and of civil society. Its long-term goal is to transform Liberia into a peaceful, democratic state that can independently serve these basic needs and provide basic services. Data shows that trust in government and in its ability to improve the living standards of the poor have decreased since 2008 while perception of corruption has increased (see fig 4 & 5). Thus, a focus on reforming and capacitating the state and civil society is aligned with citizen's need. Considering experiences with slow delivery and challenges in reforming government institutions, the Swedish shift to civil society support (see below) is an appropriate adjustment when trying to address citizens' needs.

Figure 2: Offices of CSOs and NGOs in Liberia



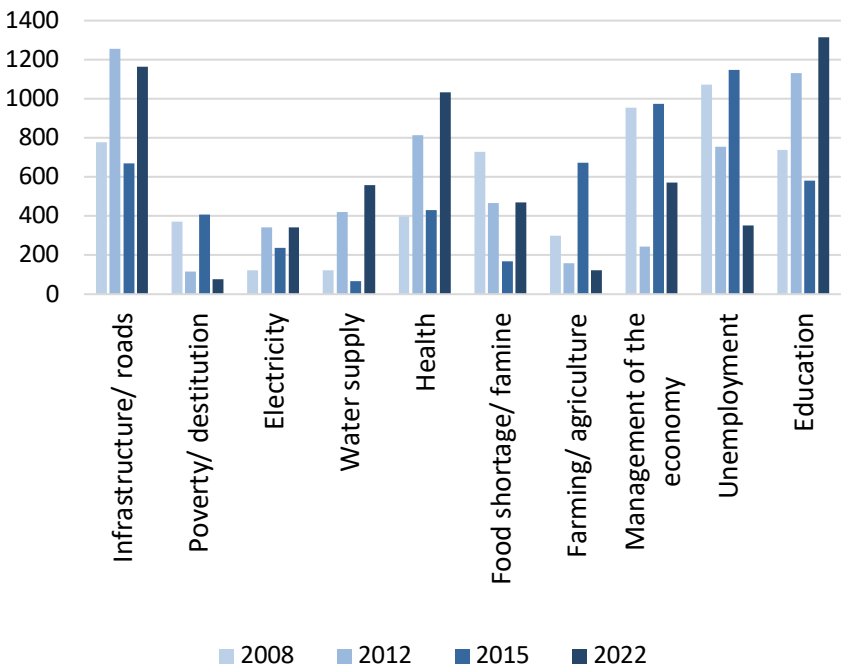
Source. The Authors. Various NGO headquarters. CENTAL, the Liberian chapter of Transparency International in Monrovia (top left), the ActionAid Liberia offices in Monrovia and the ForumCIV vehicle pool at their Liberia headquarters in Gbarnga.

On the other hand, once post-conflict relief was ended, only few projects focused on providing direct, immediate benefits to the population. Health, education, water supply, and electricity received little direct attention by Swedish DC. Additionally, while Sweden supported the improvement of infrastructure with 18.7% of its total development funding of the evaluated timeframe, the principal feeder roads project lacked connections with other projects and faces severe sustainability risks (see results chapter).

In this regard the initial focus of Swedish DC on post-conflict reconstruction of basic services and on providing direct benefits to the population was aligned with the subjective and manifest needs of the Liberian population. However, in the following years, focus shifted significantly onto state institutions and long-term transformations. A more balanced portfolio that would have integrated long-term reform and capacity strengthening processes while also addressing immediate basic needs and providing direct

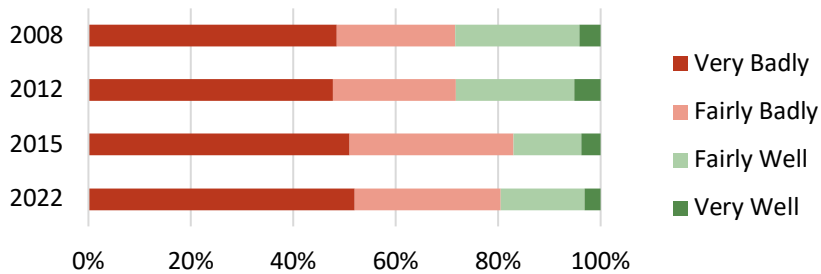
benefits to the population may have provided a better fit to the needs of the population. While state institutions are of high importance for development, their capacitation and build up does not happen in a vacuum and must be seen as embedded in local context, society, and capacities. It is in this interplay that the focus was too strong on the institution building, rather than a broader approach.

Figure 3: Most important problems facing Liberia (weighted sum, top ten responses)



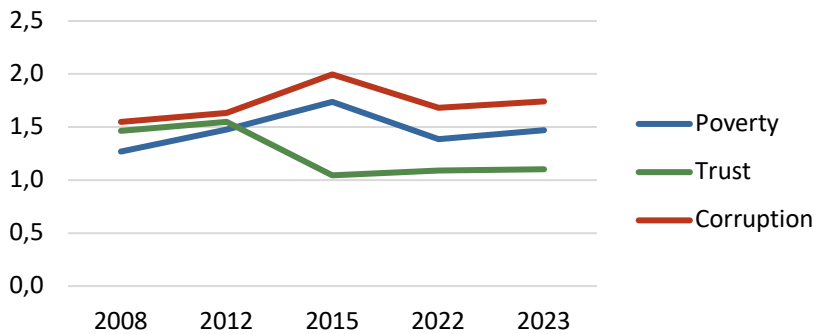
Source: Afrobarometer 2008-2023 for Liberia; Calculation by authors. Respondents were asked to identify the three most important problems facing the country. Responses are assigned weights (1st priority = 3, 2nd priority = 2, 3rd priority = 1) before being summed up across respondents.

Figure 4: Perception of the government’s ability to improve the living standards of the poor (2008–2022)



Source: Afrobarometer 2008–2023 for Liberia

Figure 5: Development of poverty index, trust in political system and perception of corruption (2008–2023)



Source: Afrobarometer 2008–2023 for Liberia; Calculation by authors. Each line represents the average over relevant variables on a 5-point scale (0–4). Poverty index measures reported frequency of respondent’s basic needs unfulfilled (food, water, medical care, cooking fuel, cash income). Trust and corruption indices measure perception regarding different political entities and institutions (e.g. president, parliament, police, tax officials, judicial system).

In the areas of democratic participation, peace, human rights, judicial reform, including its engagement for gender equality and against SGBV, an integration of long-term perspectives and the addressing of immediate needs has partially occurred. Violence, crime, gender equality, and SGBV are not the most important priorities of the population according to Afrobarometer results. However, they are

still relevant areas of investment for several reasons: Societal scars of the civil war persist and (state) capacity to resolve conflicts is insufficient in case of increased unrest (Int_1, Project Officer; Int_7, Political Partner; Int_55, Project Officer; Int_56, Project Officer; Int_58, Project Officer; Int_75, Project Officer). Weak justice institutions, corruption, disputes about land rights, dissatisfaction with democracy, the ruling powers, and the development of the country are seen as (growing) risk factors towards volatility and conflict. Marginalised groups, such as the lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender/queer/intersexual community (LGBTQI*) are stigmatised and the prevalence of gender-based violence is still high (Int_16, Beneficiaries; Int_18, Beneficiaries; Int_38, Beneficiaries; Int_60, Other Actor). Under the bilateral strategies, Swedish engagement for a strong democracy, improved access to justice, and a strengthened social contract amounts to 17.9% (2008-2015) and 29% (2015-2020) of Swedish ODA (IATI sector aggregates). Both address immediate needs (e.g. through the reduction of conflict and access to justice for cases of SGBV) and are also understood as a vehicle for the long-term provision of basic services and the fulfilment of basic needs, especially for marginalised groups.

Coherence of the Swedish portfolio

The portfolio overall is coherent within and between the thematic areas. The embassy was successful in creating groupings of projects which fit together and that are synergistic in their approach, especially within Peace & Security and Democracy & Human Rights. For the engagement on Inclusive Economic Development, projects seem a bit more standalone.

A coherent grouping of projects entails two dimensions.¹³ The first is coherence over time, meaning long-term engagement and how projects build upon each other over time. The second dimension is vertical coherence, addressing how parallel projects coherently engage with different institutions, partners, and levels of government on one overarching issue. When both dimensions are combined, coherence can be seen as especially high which is also a success factor for various reasons.

Coherence over time usually comes with three positive factors. First, it means that there has been a long-term engagement, which is necessary for many of the complex processes in development cooperation to unfold. Secondly, it means that the embassy has likely institutionalised sectoral knowledge and has a higher expertise in judging actors, dynamics and needs in the sector, even beyond staffing cycles. And third, it means that Swedish work is seen externally and by partners as a long-term and credible commitment. With these benefits, some risks must also be managed, most notably a continuous reflection on what works and what should be done differently. With changing circumstances, it can make sense to halt the engagement despite a high coherence over time because it is not viable anymore.

Vertical coherence is another important aspect of coherence for this evaluation. The first Swedish strategies in Liberia tended to prescribe more national-level institution building and omitted a more comprehensive state-building approach. A vertically coherent approach avoids these risks in several ways: First, it can ensure alignment and reinforce learning between national level work and local initiatives. A focus weighing too much on national institutions means that citizens' needs and priorities might not be reflected properly and that there is no tangible change and benefit visible for

¹³ We follow the OECD DAC definition of vertical and horizontal coherence but added the aspect of the coherence over time (how projects build coherently upon each other over time) as an analytical lens to reflect the 20-year scope of the evaluation.

people in the short term. Likewise, a focus weighing too much on the local level can never address national-level institutional inhibitors. Another aspect relevant for vertical coherence is that of capacity building – oftentimes, there is a disparity when capacity is built at one level, but not on another. It quickly leads to frustration when capacitated actors are facing challenges up- or downstream to do their work. For example, empowered citizens who face a dysfunctional state; or capacitated administration who faces untrained local implementors.

Engaging comprehensively over time, and vertically in a distinct area is thus likely to yield higher impacts. A closer look at three thematic areas and the case studies can illustrate these aspects.

Relevance and coherence in the thematic areas

Peace and security

In the evaluated timeframe, Swedish DC engagement in peace and security has responded to changing realities and needs with minor exceptions.

Swedish DC focused on strengthening rule of law by enhancing security (measures), preventing (local) conflict, and increasing judiciary accountability. Its goal was to foster democratic conflict management by augmenting the social contract and respecting human rights. To this end, Swedish DC supported the improvement and reform of the security and judicial system, and activities to enhance access to the judicial system. They also conducted activities to enhance access to justice, with a particular focus on ensuring the security and safety of women. This included measures to prevent and reduce SGBV and empower women to take up leadership roles in dispute resolution. This area is also linked to inclusive economic development, as improved living conditions are expected to reduce

conflict around scarce resources, which in turn contributes to the peaceful coexistence and the democratic management of conflict.

Changes in focus and implementing partners of the entire portfolio are reflected in peace and conflict. In this way, efforts have been made to adapt to changing political priorities and social needs. Following Liberia's emergence from civil war, Sweden initiated engagement through projects on weapons control and reintegration of ex-combatants as part of post-war reconstruction and state and security reform. Projects on re-establishing government institutions, services, and elections were aimed at paving the way towards lasting peace (Int_43, Other Actor; Int_76, Project Officer; Int_77, Project Officer). During the second strategy period, less immediate issues were introduced such as projects on security sector reform, local peace support, and reform and support to the justice system. These undertakings were significant, accounting for roughly a third of the Swedish portfolio. During the third strategy period, projects focused on immediate benefits to the local target population. Examples include projects on access to security services, to justice, to roads and to other basic services. These were seen to either reduce grievances and inequality or allow the resolution of smaller conflicts to prevent their development into major crises. Parallely, funding was initially provided to UN bodies (in particular UNDP) who were the logical partners for (physical) institution building and capacity development (Int_65, Project Officer). As local capacity increased and the focus shifted towards local peacebuilding, a larger share of funds was awarded to Swedish, Liberian, and international CSOs, namely Kvinna till Kvinna, International Alert, The Carter Center, or ZOA who were better suited to implement these projects and enabled more local capacity development (Int_41, Project Officer; Int_55, Project Officer).

Relevance and coherence within peacebuilding has benefited from the fact that Sweden has chaired the UN Peacebuilding Commission's Country Configuration for Liberia since 2012. As a result, the Swedish DC could align itself with the configuration's

ideas while providing important information from its DC in Liberia to high-level political discussion (Int_27, Project Officer).

However, there are discrepancies between the Swedish-funded projects and local needs that affect their relevance. One area of concern is reconciliation. Results of the Swedish-supported Truth and Reconciliation Commission and corresponding report are not facing enough political will for implementation (Int_55, Project Officer, Int_58, Project Officer). Following the 2008–2015 strategy, the Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA) has been tasked with supporting the reconciliation process in line with the strategy. Interviewees view further reconciliation efforts as crucial for long-term stability and peace. However, due to a lack of political will in the Liberian system, the FBA and Swedish DC have not been able to further support this issue, despite apparent needs (Int_58, Project Officer; Int_75, Project Officer).

The justice system is another area of concern. A comprehensive Rule of law and access to justice study by IDLO identified five intersecting crises in the justice system, which still impact justice delivery in Liberia, namely a crisis of confidence in security institutions, a budgeting crisis for justice institutions, a rural-urban divide crisis, a poverty crisis which excludes the poorest from the justice system, and an ownership crisis related to donors' activities (Gürler et al., 2022).

While the physical infrastructure of the justice system (such as buildings, vehicles, equipment) has seen some improvements, some interviewees asserted that an intensified and sustained emphasis on further infrastructure enhancements and the development of human capacity is crucial. This is as important as improving access to justice, whereas the IDLO-report derives more nuanced implications for the five identified crises, most notably related to programming much closer to address citizens' tangible needs with concrete improvements (Gürler et al., 2022; Int_45, Political Partner).

Generally, Swedish support throughout the three strategy periods is coherent, with projects building on each other over time and

supported each other in related policy areas. Initially, Swedish DC prioritized the physical capacity of the justice system by (re-) constructing courts and other security and justice infrastructure that had been lacking previously and further deteriorated due to the war. As soon as physical capacity had been established, Swedish cooperation involved trainings and other capacity development measures for personnel in the formal justice system. During the last evaluated 2016–2020 strategic cycle, Swedish DC supported access to justice because many incidents were not brought to the courts for adjudication even though capacity had increased. Swedish DC expanded its scope to go beyond formal justice by integrating formal and customary judicial processes. The statutory claim to a monopoly on the legitimate practice of justice by the formal justice system alone is not reflected in practice in Liberia (Graef, 2015). Especially for minor offenses and disputes, customary justice mechanisms, which are facilitated by elders, and which are guided by traditional communal norms, are recognised and institutionalised as a part of the overall justice delivery system in Liberia. Nonetheless, the two systems encounter challenges in working together harmoniously and, in certain incidents, produce inconsistent results. Liberians must negotiate a “confusing legally dualistic system that offers starkly different choices in terms of the costs and quality of justice provided”, although the mandate of the justice sector has reportedly narrowed over time, creating a justice vacuum in rural areas (Gürler et al., 2022; Sandefur & Siddiqi, 2013).

Sweden has therefore supported Liberian ideas to establish alternative dispute resolution as a tool for 1) cases that cannot be resolved by customary judicial processes but would overwhelm the formal justice system and for 2) cases that produce contradictory results between the formal and customary judicial processes. Local partners regard this approach as an adequate way of combating issues in this dual justice system (Int_7, Political Partner; Int_16, Beneficiaries). Sweden also acknowledged the prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence and the lack of (opportunities to pursue) justice for survivors of such offenses. During the 2016–2020 strategy

cycle, legal reforms were supported concerning, e.g. preliminary examinations, and specialised courts (so-called Court E). Additionally, awareness was created amongst the local population (Int_7, Political Partner; Int_16, Beneficiaries).

Overall, Swedish DC in the field of peace and conflict has demonstrated strong relevance and coherence. It has constructed clusters of initiatives that comprehensively address relevant issues and build on each other, particularly in the justice system. Recent learnings, however, point to challenges within projects limiting their relevance for citizens because of a national scope and an unwarranted focus on international framework rather than local context, which will be discussed more closely in the results chapter (Gürler et al., 2022).

Democracy and human rights

Swedish engagement in democracy and human rights constitutes a core part of the portfolio and has been aimed at building democratic governance, upholding human rights and strengthening the social contract. This engagement included a range of activities such as sexual and reproductive health and rights, women's political participation, election reform & observation, public financial management, decentralization, land reform and justice sector improvements.

Afrobarometer data shows that over 80% of Liberians consistently prefer democracy over other forms of government. In 2015, 30% of Liberians said Liberia was a democracy with major problems and 34% said it was a democracy with minor problems. At the same time, trust in key institutions (president, police, courts, parliament, officials) has remained low and corruption is still seen as high (Afrobarometer, 2023).

As discussed above, the overall Swedish approach, has been rather state-centric and focused on long-term reform, especially under the first bilateral strategy of 2008: building institutions, so that they can

meet people's needs. Working on this was important, but much such work was initially not readily visible to the broader population. Consequentially, tangible change for citizens remains low and can be seen in a context with rising dissatisfaction with democracy in Liberia, although participation in and acceptance of elections are high, as evidenced by the 2023 elections (Afrobarometer, 2023). Furthermore, government institutions in Liberia are very centralized. Many do not have functioning branches outside the capital. People living outside of Monrovia, or outside the more accessible central counties were benefitting even less from these interventions.

To balance this, the 2016–2020 strategy explicitly evolved to involve local civil society more directly and with an explicit link to democratic institutions and accountability. Sweden had indirectly supported Liberian civil society already, mainly channelled through international NGOs. The pivot in the 2016 strategy however acknowledges the necessity of both top-down and bottom-up methods in the same policy spaces to effect lasting change, especially considering the centralization of government institutions in Monrovia and the need for greater transparency and local representation throughout the country. Collaboration with CSOs is suitable to amend some of the issues that arose from the previous focus because, they (1) contribute to accountability and transparency regarding government activities, (2) are more locally represented and community based. This gives a combination/complementarity of top-down and bottom-up approaches. Sweden's most recent¹⁴ and direct support to Liberian watchdog CSOs, like CENTAL and NAYMOTE, indicates this move towards the localisation agenda and a stronger local ownership, aiming to complement the state-centric approach with grassroots initiatives. Other CSOs have for a longer time been utilised for norms-based work in the realms of gender or to raise awareness and provide support regarding citizen's rights, e.g. in land reform. The promotion of civil society, including women's organisations, transparency watchdogs, and environmental

¹⁴ Established in the current bilateral strategy which is not part of the evaluation timeframe.

CSOs, became a crucial aspect of the portfolio (Int_41, Project Officer; Int_53, Other Actor; Int_67, Implementing Partner). Interviewees maintain that the present portfolio strikes a balance between bolstering the state and empowering civil society, while some CSOs request increased strategic assistance due to mostly inept state institutions (Int_44, Implementing Partner; Int_46, Other Actor; Int_53, Other Actor).

Similarly, coherence is high when a policy area is addressed with a long-term perspective and through different complementary avenues and partners. We use the examples of land rights to illustrate this in the interplay of support to state institutions and civil society.

The issue of land is highly complex and was identified soon after the war as a significant factor that may lead to potential future conflicts. The war uprooted numerous individuals. Discontent related to land issues and exploitation of rural labour during the war disenfranchised and mobilised the youth, who made up the majority of fighters (Richards, 2005; Unruh, 2009). Consequently, the Liberian Government established the Liberian Land Commission after multiple fact-finding missions and UNMIL's support. It comprises government and civil society representatives and aims to address potential land conflicts. Between 2011 and 2013, Sweden supported its secretariat and offered capacity building for members via the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT) from 2011 to 2013. After undergoing a consultation process with communities, a land rights act was presented to the legislature in 2014. Despite numerous delays, substantial pressure from civil society, and change in government, the Weah Government eventually passed the highly progressive land rights act in 2018 (Int_42, Implementing Partner; Int_44, Implementing Partner; Int_50, Other Actor; Int_56, Project Officer; Republic of Liberia Land Rights Act, 2018). Sweden then initiated a process with The Swedish Cadastral and Land Registration Authority (Lantmäteriet) to facilitate capacity building for inclusive land administration and management (2018-2023) to bolster support of the Liberian Land Authority (LLA), established in 2016. At the same time, Sweden

launched a new land rights programme in partnership with ForumCiv, designed to strengthen civil society and ensure the implementation of the Land Rights Act, enabling communities to establish formal land rights.

This example underlines two aspects.

Firstly, Sweden took a coherent and long-term approach to land rights. The continued support for the land commission and later the LLA was essential initiating and ensuring implementation. Secondly, supporting civil society and state institutions through different projects contributed to coherence in the land rights sector. Civil society members of the land commission, who work for CSOs involved in land rights were instrumental in advocating to the government for the passing of the land rights act (Int_44, Implementing Partner; Int_50, Other Actor; Int_56, Project Officer). Additionally, Sweden engaged with the Liberian government on the political level. This strategy became even more deliberate when Sweden transitioned to supporting ForumCiv in capacitating Liberian CSO and Lantmäteriet to facilitate the implementation of the land rights act at the LLA. In this project, Lantmäteriet invited a delegation comprising land authority staff and civil society representatives to Sweden to ensure informed and integrated participation of civil society into the process of capacitating the LLA. Sweden thus adopted an approach that was vertically coherent by operating on the state and legal level (Land Commission and Land Authority), while also supporting civil society capacity and oversight from the bottom through support to CSOs on land rights. Furthermore, the long-term engagement and results building upon each other points to a high coherence over time as well.

Inclusive economic development

The third thematic area is inclusive economic development. Here, Swedish support shows a high degree of relevance and coherence,

particularly in the areas of employment promotion and market system development. Its support for infrastructure has addressed relevant needs but is not embedded in a grouping of supporting projects. With the first bilateral strategy (2008), inclusive economic development became an explicit objective for the first time.

The Swedish cooperation's inclusive economic development space was founded on the premise that the economic plight of the general public poses a risk to peace and progress. As such, poverty alleviation is both a goal and a strategy to ensure advancement in other areas. Swedish support primarily targets physical road infrastructure development in the form of feeder roads that connect settlements to main road links. The ultimate purpose of this support is to enhance access to markets and services for rural populations. Furthermore, Sweden aided in market development and integration at varying levels. This included support for accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) and partnerships with communities, particularly in agriculture and small businesses. These efforts aimed to enhance living standards and mitigate poverty.

Sweden's engagement in promoting inclusive economic development is generally relevant. Liberia has faced significant economic challenges over the last two decades, including widespread devastation and poverty in the aftermath of the war, as well as setbacks from the 2014–2015 Ebola epidemic. The end of the UNMIL mission in 2018 also had a significant impact on the economy as many jobs were dependent on the mission (Int_78, Other Actor). In this context, the emphasis on inclusive economic development by Sweden, which aims to benefit the wider population, is particularly pertinent in tackling poverty and conflict. The Liberian economy is largely reliant on natural resources concessions, resulting in concentrated wealth among a few individuals. Therefore, Liberian citizens frequently point out insufficient economic administration, elevated unemployment rates, and substandard infrastructure as primary priorities that the government should address (Afrobarometer, 2023).

The various phases of Sweden's engagement in road work addressed pertinent requirements and were consistently coherent over time, with each one building on the results of the previous phase. The focus on roads match citizens' demands, was explicitly requested by Liberia and emphasised during President Sirleaf's visit to Sweden in November 2007 and her speech at the parliament (Int_59, Project Officer). The focus of the Liberian-Swedish Feeder Road Project (LSFRP) was to reconstruct and develop roads. Beginning in 2009, the infrastructure sector's capacity was low due to the absence of contractors and manuals. The project collaborated with international consultants to train contractors and the Ministry of Public Works to effectively rehabilitate roads. As the project progressed, the Ministry of Public Works gradually assumed greater responsibility and knowledge, and Liberian contractors were employed more frequently. The involvement of foreign consultants was gradually curtailed to focus solely on quality assurance roles. Simultaneously, the state's capacity for maintenance was strengthened, although with limited success as described in the results chapter (Int_48, Political Partner; Int_67, Implementing Partner).

The project also lacked horizontal coherence with related projects. It can be assumed that enhanced infrastructure facilitates market and trade development by connecting producers to markets and improving access to essential services through increased travel. No evidence was found to suggest that road rehabilitation and improved infrastructure were explicitly considered and integrated into other projects within the Swedish portfolio. For example, there were no explicit efforts to conduct agricultural development projects in areas where road rehabilitation was taking place. During the current phase of LSFRP, the GROW project and LSFRP have started discussing the construction of village access roads in locations crucial for GROW-affiliated agriculture. However, this development only occurred after the assessment period. As a result, the LSFRP is not being utilised to maximise synergies and coherence with other initiatives.

Similarly, under vertical coherence, there have been no initiatives aimed at enhancing road rehabilitation and construction under LSFRP, or additional projects. Sweden has not provided support to the Liberian Road Authority, the Road Fund, the Ministry of Transport, or the reform, development, or implementation of relevant policies (such as axle load limits & weighbridges), which are essential aspects of transport infrastructure maintenance and funding in Liberia. Other donors' activities as part of a larger effort did not alleviate challenges in LSFRP.

The LSFRP obtained the largest portion of the budget among Swedish DC's single project in Liberia, at 18.7% over various phases, illustrating its significance to the portfolio and the elevated expenses related to infrastructure projects. However, Swedish DC has not established coherent groupings of activities, unlike the other two cooperation areas, which could strengthen each other over time and across different levels through various means of delivery.

Since at least 2012, Sweden has adopted globally recognised methods of promoting employment by tackling both labour supply (job skills, small grants, and training) and demand (developing sectors and markets). Moreover, it facilitated Liberia's increased integration into the global marketplace via its accession to the WTO. Sweden also supported the development of agricultural practices, business skills, and vocational aptitude by providing capacity-building initiatives, followed in some cases by grants to small businesses. The project specifically targeted youth, farmers, cooperatives, and small businesses while maintaining a strong emphasis on gender inclusivity. Moreover, Sweden worked on enhancing market systems through the GROW project, for instance, by improving agricultural value chains.

The GROW project provides a prime example of a self-contained, significant, and coherent initiative employing a market system approach. Adam Smith International initiated GROW in 2012, and later, it was managed by UNIDO. The programme involves stakeholders within multiple agricultural value chains (e.g. cocoa) to

tackle the root causes of inefficiencies within specific sectors of the agricultural market system. This leads to vertical integration through a single project. GROW directly collaborates with farmers and cooperatives at a local level and collaborates with agricultural input companies that can supply tools or seeds. Additionally, it establishes connections with international firms and buyers, particularly within the premium cocoa industry. GROW also interacts with the government and manage to lobby for duty waivers on agricultural inputs (Int_38, Implementing Partner). This as a good example of vertical coherence, showing how local challenges are alleviated by targeted changes at the local level.

This extensive involvement of multiple stakeholders on different levels within a single value chain results in reduced coordination requirements between projects because it happens all within a single project. Additionally, it permits a more intentional and nuanced approach to engagement, focusing on individual value chains rather than complete sectors. However, this strategy places the entire burden of responsibility on a single implementing partner, which may pose a risk.

The portfolio of Swedish projects in Liberia has, as demonstrated in this chapter, been largely coherent and relevant over time, albeit with some areas for improvement. We have discussed factors that contribute to continual coherence, particularly through vertical integration in specified domains. The subsequent issue, however, is whether the projects and activities of the portfolio yielded sustainable results, fostered ownership, and generated enduring effects in mitigating poverty, thus strengthening the social contract, and thereby addressing the roots of conflict.

5. What was achieved 2003–2021?

In the following, we will examine the results and impacts that Sweden has made towards Liberia over the past 20 years. We will explore the factors that have influenced the results in the three thematic areas. We will then demonstrate with examples from the portfolio, document analyses, secondary data, and case studies how these factors have affected the results in the thematic areas. Lastly, we will analyse sustainability.

Overall, according to our portfolio-wide analysis of project documents, projects funded by Sweden had satisfactory results, but the analysis of risk registers shows that these results were often endangered by risks of low ownership, capacity gaps and unsustained funding.¹⁵ The situation in the country has remained very difficult in all areas of intervention. Many relevant social, political, and economic metrics remain at a very low level. This can be partly explained by external factors. However, it also becomes clear, that the outcomes and impacts of donor-led interventions have not brought about the desired transformative changes, especially in economic development and state institutions. The most significant overall success is the continued peace and core democratic processes, to which Sweden contributed.

Numerous underlying factors potentially impacted the outcomes of Swedish interventions. Factors affecting interventions are timing, feasibility, project coherence, programme coherence, Swedish (and other donor's) reform focus with its political dynamics, and sustainability. Moreover, external factors such as Ebola, Covid-19, government changes, and UNMIL's departure significantly influenced interventions.

¹⁵ Note that documents and standard aspects comparable across projects (such as risk registers) were not available for the entire timeframe and the analysis thus focussed on projects from the 2015–2020 strategic period.

In the subsequent sections, we will analyse the situation in Liberia in each of the three cooperation areas over the past 20 years and gauge the effects of Swedish contribution considering these developments.

Peace and security

Since the end of the civil war, Liberia has been at peace and remained without major outbreaks of violence (ACLED, 2023). To many of our informants this development is considered a key success of national and international engagement in the country.

Over the last few years, Liberia has seen a deterioration of key indicators of democratic conflict management. According to insights from our interviews and data from the Afrobarometer, trust in democratic institutions (such as the presidency or the parliament) and perception of accountability for breaking the law have been declining and the perception of corruption within the security and justice institutions has increased (Afrobarometer, 2023). Similarly, and because of a lack of democratic conflict management, Liberia has seen an increase in local unrest and other violent events. Since 2012, data shows increasing numbers of incidents, in the forms of riots, protests and other violence involving civilians (ACLED, 2023). Many events can be traced back to four key drivers:

- **Dissatisfaction with the government and economic situation:** Since the civil war, two periods stand out as displaying the highest number of incidents of unrest. In 2014, the effects of the Ebola epidemic and the associated countermeasures (such as quarantines) led to protests, riots, and clashes between police and other government forces and the population. In 2019 and 2020, the economic crisis led to mass protests, primarily in Monrovia but also in other parts of the country. It is important to note that protests are also a sign of democratic expression and not necessarily a sign of a deteriorating security situation.
- **Lack of trust in or access to the judicial system:** In several cases, protests and/or violence erupted against people suspected

of witchcraft or crimes. When these suspicions had either not been attended to by the local justice system or trust in the (fairness of the) judicial process was low, groups of residents formed to bring suspects to their own justice. As an example, in a few cases, protests formed in front of police stations or prisons to demand the handovers of a suspected criminal to the protesters as they did not believe that the justice system would administer appropriate punishment. Access to justice is hereby especially limited in rural parts of the country.

- **Unresolved societal disputes:** Violent events were also centred around unresolved societal disputes, such as land rights. In several cases, conflict around legitimate ownership of an area led to physical altercations.
- **Political divisions:** While Liberia has not seen outbreaks of election-related violence comparable to other countries of the region, electoral campaigns remain a source of conflict. The view that politics leads to conflict has been increasing (Afrobarometer). This view is contrasted by the successful electoral process and transition of power in 2023.

Due to the lack of systematic and reliable data, it is not possible to describe the development of SGBV in Liberia in recent years. However, available data and findings from our interviews indicate an improvement but still a high prevalence SGBV cases (Int_8, Project Officer; Int_38, Beneficiaries; Int_60, Other Actor). According to the most recent survey by the Liberian Ministry of Health, half of the female population aged 15-49 have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by their intimate partner, and 34.8% have experienced such violence in the past 12 months (LISGIS, 2021).

In summary, while there has been no return to nationwide violent conflict, Liberia's democratic, security, and judicial system currently do not adequately ensure the (local) rule of law. At the same time, trust in the democratic and judicial system appears to be deteriorating, leading to unrest and other forms of violence, despite the overall success of electoral processes. Women are particularly

affected. There is a significant urban-rural divide between Monrovia and the rural areas.

Swedish contributions to peace and security

Despite the deteriorating situation on a societal level, the evaluation found important contributions by Sweden to the security and justice system, but their impacts and sustainability are sometimes limited for various reasons that relate to both the overarching approach and concrete implementation.

Firstly, Swedish DC worked to increase capacity of security and judicial institutions and CSOs both in terms of physical buildings and in terms of their staff. Sweden co-supported the construction of five regional security hubs for courts and police, the setting up and outfitting of regional justice and security institutions, the training of legal and security professionals, and the work of related CSOs. As an example, in the UNDP-OHCHR Rule of Law Joint Programme, Sweden supported one cohort of a qualification scheme for 60 associate magistrates and their deployment, together with 16 other legal professionals (prosecutors, case liaison officers, victim support officers, public defenders) to remote areas of the country. Together with other donors (Germany, USAID) who qualified another 180, this accounts for a large majority of associate magistrates in the country. In other projects, Sweden supported the construction of four magistrate courts and provided financial resources for their upkeep.

In response to a low presence of security forces in the rural areas, Swedish DC supported the establishment of regional security hubs that combined key security and justice institutions in one area and were meant to increase local police presence and facilitate access to justice. On the national level, Sweden supported the amendment of laws to reform the justice sector and particular procedural regulations.

Secondly, through the “Access to Justice” Project with the Carter Center, Sweden contributed to the Alternative Dispute Resolution policy which recognises the customary justice system as a suitable form of resolving minor disputes. The customary justice system has a long tradition in Liberia and operates at low cost for the government and the local population. It enjoys high acceptance, especially in rural areas. Strengthening the customary justice system has high potential of alleviating the burden of high case numbers in the formal justice system (see more below). The project also supported the revision of procedural regulations aimed at reducing the prison population, and to increase efficiency of the court system. The reforms include a change to longer terms, which allows judges to finalise cases more efficiently before a break must be called, thus reducing case backlog (Int_30, Implementing Partner). Additionally, automatic detention of suspects, which was the norm for all cases, has been defined as a last resort, which resulted in less stress on prison capacities that, however, remain overcrowded (Int_30, Implementing Partner; Int_45, Political Partner).

Thirdly, Sweden not only supported the recognition of the customary justice system but also the integration of both legal systems. In the past, through its support to the Carter Center, Sweden has contributed to definitions of use cases for each system, which led to the specification that any criminal cases belong to the formal system while civil cases can be adjudicated in the customary system. It has contributed to the formulation of a law that is expected to be passed, which will ensure the recognition of the results of a customary process in proceedings within the formal legal system. To date, decisions in the customary system are not always recognised by the formal courts. These reforms increase clarity in the legal system, thus facilitating access to both forms of justice. Additionally, to further increase access, the Carter Center trained 12 community justice advisors that handled 120 communities with support of Sweden. These advisors act as first point of contact in the legal system for the population. These community justice advisors have garnered wide-spread acceptance from the population and handled

over 31.000 cases, thus reducing the burden on staff in the justice system and helping to integrate the two legal systems in the country.

Lastly, Sweden supported education activities of the local population on legal proceedings, the formal legal system, and the combination of formal and customary judicial system. The “Access to Justice” projects implemented workshops and radio programmes to educate beneficiaries, including traditional leaders, on which disputes to solve in the customary system and which to take to the formal system. Additionally, they learnt basics of the law and empowered them to take cases to court. An evaluation of the project showed a stark increase in popular knowledge and usage of customary justice and its role in the judicial process (The Khana Group, 2022).

The Swedish engagement in the justice sector has produced important results for the sector, especially due to its high coherence, but tangible benefits and access to justice remains limited for most Liberians, especially in rural areas. The effects are generally hampered by a lack of resources for day-to-day upkeep and activities. Counties are not paid according to the official budget in the justice and security sector which results in restricted resources for police and judicial work and a shortage of staff, creating a limited presence of security forces, and a backlog of cases (Int_30, Implementing Partner; Int_60, Other Actor). One member of court attests that they often use their own resources to pay for witness transportation or visits to a crime scene in court hearings (Int_16, Beneficiaries). Communities are thus still unable to afford the cost of legal proceedings (Int_16, Beneficiaries). Courts face a substantial case backlog as a result of limited case capacity (financial & personnel), which leads to numerous cases being dismissed owing to an inability to try them within the statutory limitation regulations (Int_16, Beneficiaries; Int_30, Implementing Partner). Prison capacity has not increased in line with the growth of the Liberian population size, which has led some interviewees to express concern over a potential human rights issue as a result of overcrowding (Int_7, Political Partner; Int_30, Implementing Partner). The increased awareness of the legal system within the population has led to rising expectations

and demands towards the legal system which, currently, cannot be met with sufficient capacities.

The evaluation found supported justice institutions and infrastructure to be deteriorating as the government is unable to finance their upkeep. One interviewee from the Liberian Government said that a lead time of 5 years before exit was necessary to allow the GoL to prepare financial budgets for a takeover of activities (Int_7, Political Partner), whereas the IDLO rule of law study also points to failures in donor programming (see below). The Bong County security hub in Gbarnga was largely abandoned and in deteriorating condition as the evaluators visited, and police officers were deployed in a different county to manage worker unrest in concession areas:

“Fatigue set in after the government took over in 2014 – since then, people stationed here barely eat twice a day, sometimes not at all. (...) On paper, we should have 100 officers and 32 administrative staff stationed here, in reality it is less than 50. Many officers are deployed in the mine concession areas because of tensions there. (...) We are responsible for Nimba, Lofah and Bong counties” (Int_15, Beneficiaries – local manager).

“The Bong regional security hub, established in 2010, does not perform the security and justice decentralization and integration function intended by its United Nations architects. It offers no discernible decentralization of national authority and has failed to constitute itself as a one-stop hub for local services. Rather, in effect, it has been relegated to a regional internal stability base that, despite being staffed, cannot perform even this function because of logistical issues and poor conditions of service.” (Gürler et al., 2022 – IDLO rule of law study).

Whereas the government of Liberia is certainly responsible for some failures, the design of donor interventions, including Swedish ones, also suffered from a number of misconceptions, including a focus on higher-level institutions and goals rather than a focus on citizens, an inadequate appreciation of local incentive structures and power dynamics and a focus on technical aspects at the neglect of political ones (Gürler et al., 2022). These findings make some of our critique

regarding the Swedish strategic framework more tangible, e.g. when it comes to a disproportionate focus on institutions in the Swedish state building approach (see strategy chapter). On the other hand, the approach towards the customary justice system and SGBV that combined legal reform, engagement with the state, and a strong community focus proved more sustainable than the workstreams that focused only on capacitating state institutions and infrastructure.

Overall, this means that while individual interventions have achieved their results, the overarching approach did not adequately consider the many sectoral challenges and only achieved limited impacts.

Gender and justice

A special focus of Swedish DC in peace and security was put on gender equality and the prevention and reduction of SGBV. Sweden has been providing core funding to the United Nations Populations Fund (UNFPA) and UN Women, next to a range of other projects. Two key contributions stand out:

Firstly, through multiple projects with UNDP and UN Women capacity and (legal) processes surrounding SGBV cases have been strengthened. Sweden supported the improvement of referral pathways for victims of SGBV. In many cases, this included the design and establishment of these pathways, defining which local institution held which responsibilities and should refer to which other institution for other support. It also included the establishment of specialised SGBV units in the local police and the instituting of specialised courts (so-called Court E). Before the establishment of the referral pathways and specialised institutions, women often did not receive proper care, and their cases were not taken seriously or were stuck in the backlog of court cases. When a case was not taken up in the formal legal system, the customary system did not offer an alternative as the victim would have to directly face the perpetrator during the process. Now, as interview partners unanimously attest, while the referral pathways are sometimes only partially functional,

the SGBV units and Courts E are in use and a relatively high number of cases have already been prosecuted compared to other court institutions – although significant challenges to access the court remain (Int_30, Implementing Partner; Int_45, Political Partner; Int_60, Other Actors). The IDLO Rule of law report also mentions the Court E working relatively better, but also found allegations of corruption where offenders could pay their way out if they can raise 100 to 150 thousand Liberian dollars (Gürler et al., 2022).

Secondly Sweden also supported awareness raising activities to increase impact of the newly established referral pathways and institutions, which are now much more widely known to citizens, although knowledge how exactly the justice process regarding GBV works was highly variable in rural areas (Ibid.). Through the Joint Rule of Law Programme, it educated legal and security professionals, and local leaders on gender equality and the situation of SGBV in the country, on the legal situation, and on the possibilities to respond, including the proper legal pathways. A key initiative that received Swedish backing are the Peace Huts, local women-led initiatives to provide women- and girl-friendly spaces, to support local conflict resolution and the prevention and prosecution of SGBV cases. As a result, some interview partners see a shift in gender norms, including an increasing number of women in leadership positions (Int_18, Beneficiaries; Int_60, Other Actor; Int_67, Implementing Partner). An increased awareness of issues around rape and other forms of SGBV, and an increased number of women in leadership positions as a result of Swedish support was also noted (Int_18, Beneficiaries). These factors, together with the referral pathways, have increased the number of SGBV cases being reported to the legal authorities. The engagement in the justice sector is flanked by various community projects, e.g. in Monrovia's West Point district, where Kvinna till Kvinna has supported a local women's organisation. In a focus group, members reported:

“The situation of sexual violence has changed with intervention from the West Point organisation. When something happens now, the perpetrator gets challenged. We are able to better monitor the communities and identify cases.

SGBV cases have reduced because there are more women organisations, and they are working with the government. At police stations, it used to be treated the same as other cases. Now there is a special station at the police station for these cases.” (Int_28, Implementing Partner – focus group interview with women’s organisation and members).

“Liberia is a justice patchwork where the pathways and process followed by GBV survivors and perpetrators after an accusation differ greatly depending on where they are and the nature of the case. There are clear (and oft-noted) differences between urban and rural areas. (...) our research indicates that particularly in rural Liberia, there are clear differences from community to community” (Gürler et al., 2022 – Rule of Law and Access to Justice study).

These examples can serve as a testament for the success of linking locally rooted projects with more overarching activities, which stands in contrast to results of some of the work in the justice sector as discussed above.

Democracy and human rights

Swedish engagement in democracy and human rights was driven by the intent to improve democratic governance and human rights, to, ultimately, strengthen the social contract and address the roots of conflict. In this area, we focus on three case studies to assess Swedish contributions. The case studies on land reform and decentralisation exemplify the opportunities and risks when engaging in flagship government reform using different modalities. The example of community work in SRHR is an example of the more bottom-up and community-focussed approaches.

Land reform: long term engagement with political risks

The 2003 peace settlement acknowledged the necessity of land reform as a cornerstone to address the roots of conflict after the

1989 to 2003 civil wars. Since then, governmental bodies like the Governance Commission (2006) and the Land Commission (2009) have been mandated to address the issue. This culminated in the 2013 Land Rights Policy, followed by the 2016 Land Authority Act and the 2018 Land Rights Act. The land commission, consulting with civil society and other experts, came up with a land rights policy and land administration policy (Int_42, Implementing Partner). Swedish core support and capacity building for the land commission via the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT) proved successful in producing the relevant policies and inputs for the political process. The LLA itself receives support from Lantmäteriet, which works with the LLA on various topics, ranging from organisational aspects to gender to the customary land formalisation process (Int_50, Other Actor; Int_70, Implementing Partner). At the same time, a variety of CSOs works with communities on the land formalisation process.

The Land Rights Act of 2018 legally acknowledges the land rights of Liberians, especially in rural areas and on community lands, where tenure has traditionally been shared among community members. Previously, lands not held privately were considered government property, including community lands, which were not legally recognised as community owned. The 2018 act aims to empower communities with a greater say in land investment negotiations, aiming to mitigate land disputes and foster a stable future for the population (Brown, 2017; Republic of Liberia Land Rights Act, 2018), and was hailed as one of the most progressive in Africa for its recognition of customary land rights and women's right to land (Int_42, Project Officer; Rösch, 2019). To obtain rights to customary land, communities must form committees with equal representation of women, men, and youth. There are several steps of formalising the land, ending with a final confirmatory survey by the Land authority which is followed by the community obtaining their deeds (Int_46, Other Actor). Implementation of this final step is still pending, meaning that the progress made in terms of legislation, capacity building, awareness raising, and institution building has not

significantly translated into changed land tenure. One interviewed expert doubted that more than ten communities have formalised their deed in four years, with over 200 waiting for confirmatory surveys (Ibid.) According to the Liberian Land Authority this is due to a lack of funding to conduct surveys (Int_42, Implementing Partner; Int_70, Implementing Partner).

Continuous Swedish engagement has been instrumental in bringing land reform forward, from consultations, policy development, capacitating civil society, and state institutions to sensitive political aspects. Even though the projects came with challenges and shortcomings (Agwanda, 2016; Int_46, Other Actor; Int_50, Other Actor; Int_70, Implementing Partner) the progress, e.g. in passed legislation, are significant successes.

However, at all times results were and still are at risk: The work of the land commission was at risk because the land rights act remained in parliament for five years. Current financial constraints and political aspects limit the implementation of the land rights act in formalising community land. The avenue of supporting NGOs has helped to alleviate these risks by putting pressure on the government and LLA, but the NGOs have varying levels of expertise in land reform and apply different methodologies to the land formalisation process, thereby adding to confusion and complexity (Int_50, Other Actor). Interviewees also agreed that shifts in land tenure touch upon complex power dynamics which helps to explain some of the difficulties in moving the process forward (Int_41, Project Officer; Int_46, Other Actor).

“There is no work here on formalising land. It would be great if the land right was implemented, and everybody knows their demarcation; you plant some corner stones; but not doing it anyone can come and build something. With farm extension we see conflicts arising.” (Int_20, Beneficiaries – a farming cooperative member in Nimba interviewed for a case study in the economic development area).

“We do not know about a land reform process. The land authority is not active here.” (Int_19, Beneficiaries – a farming cooperative member in

Nimba interviewed for a case study in the economic development area).

In summary, Swedish efforts since 2009 have been successful in supporting the passage of key legislation and establishing the land authority. They have however not (yet) contributed to actual and significant shifts in land tenure and formalisation. This means if land issues cannot be resolved and related conflicts can't be addressed formally, the goal of addressing the roots of conflict in this area remains unachieved. Through supporting and capacitating the land commission via UN-HABITAT, supporting civil society through ForumCiv, and by bringing in the Swedish Land Authority, Sida has shaped the land rights space using different modalities for more than a decade. This was marked by high coherence and mutual reinforcements (e.g. when Lantmäteriet involved civil society in their fact-finding mission).

“Lantmäteriet operates respectful of the people, respectful of the country and gets things done. They told us ‘Why don’t you come to Sweden, tell us what you need, and we’ll develop a proposal’ – and when I was there the LLA didn’t push their agenda, but the proposal was developed with us, they were literally asking us what our challenges were. (...) I can’t imagine what the LLA would look like if it weren’t for Lantmäteriet.” (Int_50, Other actors – A civil society representative working on land rights, who was consulted during Lantmäteriet’s fact finding mission).

Overall, the Swedish decision to support key governance reform can be described as a “high risk high reward” strategy as it depends on a multitude of (political) factors for success, requires engagement at various levels and a long-term engagement. The capacities and funding of the Land authority are a significant sustainability risk, similar to the engagement in the justice sector. Likewise, tangible citizen benefits are still outstanding, again pointing to a general imbalance of the overall approach. Furthermore, the political nature and power dynamics could be more explicitly considered to alleviate some of the challenges and root initiatives in more sober expectations.

Decentralisation: the devil in the detail

Similar dynamics unfold in the realm of decentralisation. President Johnson's call in 2009 to "bring the government to the people" sparked political and donor activity to this end (Int_29, Political Partner). Like land rights, political decentralisation touches upon core power dynamics, so it took several years to pass legislation. The Local Government Act was signed and enacted by President Weah in 2018. It stipulates that Liberia shall remain a unitary state, but with a decentralised system of local government and administration. The principal focus of the devolution of power and authority shall be the county level (Liberia Ministry of Internal Affairs, 2020). Like land reform, Swedish decentralisation support encompassed several angles, from advocacy to pass decentralisation reform (achieved 2018), to supporting the creation of structures and service decentralisation of ministries, agencies, and commissions (MAC). It was implemented mostly in a standalone fashion by UNDP through the Liberia Decentralisation Support Programme (LDSP).

Decentralisation can be separated into service decentralisation as well as political and fiscal decentralisation. Support to service decentralisation has been somewhat successful. Individual MACs increasingly provide services in fifteen so-called county service centres (CSC). This initiative has facilitated increased interaction among citizens and between the government and its populace, potentially fostering improved social cohesion. This development could play a role in reinforcing the social contract, as it is generally observed that citizens may be more inclined to fulfil their civic responsibilities when they perceive tangible efforts by the government to address their needs. Services like marriage certificates, birth certificates, business or vehicle registrations are usually in place, with availability of services varying significantly between centres (LDSP documents, field visits). Before 2016, all service applications could only be conducted in Monrovia. Even today, decentralisation sometimes just means that travel to Monrovia is done by CSC employees on behalf of citizens because the power

of signature still rests in Monrovia (Int_9, Beneficiary; Int_40, Project Officer). When prompted, beneficiaries interviewed for other case studies in Margibi, Bong, and Nimba counties stated they were able to conduct some services locally, e.g. business registration, but still had to travel to Monrovia for others (Int_19, Beneficiaries; Int_21, Beneficiaries).

Figure 6: Services Available at Margibi county service center



Source: The Authors. Overview of services at the Margibi county service center in Kakata. Some of the services are not available. For example, #5 and #20 are taken up by the Land Authority and not offered by the CSC; The centre is open 8–16, Monday to Friday.

As with other projects, a key challenge to this change is sustainability. Without an appropriate exit strategy of gradual handover to the government, the shift at the end of the project was rather abrupt (Int_40, Project Officer). When the project concluded, the running costs for the CSC were not adequately taken over by the respective government agencies and a significant reduction in service provision and deterioration of equipment was the result (Int_9, Beneficiary; Int_40, Project Officer). Staff is paid by the individual MACs, with payments coming irregularly, leaving employees without a steady income. Operating costs of the centres should be covered by the revenue the CSC generates: 40% of revenue generated should remain with the local government who can use it to fund CSC operations. However, control of the account lies with the county superintendent,

a political appointee, and appropriations seem insufficient (Int_9, Beneficiary). These developments compelled donors to move back into supporting CSCs by punctually alleviating pressures, i.e. by procuring solar panels or Wi-Fi. This also shows that service decentralisation ultimately depends on fiscal and political decentralisation. Additionally, the example shows how institutional change is exceedingly difficult as results can reverse easily as the government is not able to sustainably maintain what has been created.

Whereas service decentralisation does not imply significant power shifts, fiscal and political decentralisation do. The legal hurdles have been passed in form of the Local Government Act of 2018, and the Revenue Sharing Act of 2022. The former not only introduced the CSC, but also new political structures and mandates on the county and town levels, most notably through the establishment of so-called county councils, which can pass regulations and approve budgets as well as the county development plan. Each council is to be made up of three chiefs, one representative from a women's organisation, two from a youth organisation, two from CSOs and one from people with disabilities. Where there are two for one group, one must be a woman (Int_14, Implementing Partner; Naymote, 2020). The more recent fiscal decentralisation means that 60% of locally collected tax goes to the national, and 40% to the local government. Its implementation is currently ongoing (Int_29, Political Partner). Interview partners are hopeful that this reform can bring much-needed revenue to local administration (Int_32, Implementing Partner).

These developments show – similarly to the engagement in land rights – how long-term engagement can contribute to key changes and tangible results for citizens, most notably in the form of service provision. At the same time, the fiscal and political decentralisation is still underway today and significant caveats are threatening progress. One interviewee put it as follows:

“Reform processes are painfully slow, they need sustained investment and consistent engagement, if you go halfway and stop, you lose everything.” (Int_32, Implementing Partner)

Given the financial constraints that the CSC face for providing services, Sweden (and Ireland) has since identified fiscal decentralisation as the main impediment to progress and focus on it. However, the focus on this one topic within the wider reform arena comes with certain risks. As we established above, reform is best supported by a set of mutually reinforcing projects on various levels. If political decentralisation is not supported, partners and civil society see a risk that the new institution of county council does not achieve its intended effects. The law is not clear on the election or selection of the council members from the various groups. Without capacitation they are likely co-opted by ruling appointees rather than representing the interest of the wider community and holding the superintendent accountable. Another important component is community awareness and citizen education on their rights regarding decentralisation and devolution, which had also been supported under LDSP-II (Int_14, Implementing Partner; Int_32, Implementing Partner). Given these circumstances, focussing merely on fiscal decentralisation does not represent a holistic approach and risks progress achieved under previous strategy periods.

Despite the large setbacks in service decentralisation and slow proceedings in the other two, overall progress on decentralisation has been significant, most notably by establishing key institutions and legislation. It would however be overly optimistic to assume that the implementation will progress at pace without additional reform support. If a law dictates that services, fiscal revenue, and political responsibility must be available on the local level and citizens are educated about it in awareness campaigns, but experience a very different situation, then ultimately the social contract is likely weakened rather than strengthened. Since the 2008 Afrobarometer survey for Liberia, none of the metrics related to the perception of democracy, governance, and corruption have notably improved in

subsequent survey results (Afrobarometer, 2023). The example of decentralisation shows many of the same issues relating to sustainability and political dynamics that arise in the land rights topic and the rule of law sectors. Results could likely be strengthened through coherent supporting projects, especially community engagement and a strict re-focus on tangible citizen benefits, to bring the process to a more satisfactory close.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights: the bottom-up approach

In recent years, Liberia has witnessed a series of shifts in gender dynamics and health, painting an improved, but still mixed picture of progress. Overall, Liberia's HDI for women and girls was 0.447 lagging behind that of men and boys, which was 0.513 in 2021. On the Gender Inequality Index (GII) Liberia has a value of 0.648, ranking it 164 out of 170 countries in 2021 (UNDP 2021/2022 HDR Report). In the area of SRHR, contraception use among married or in-union women has seen a gradual increase, from 11% in 2007 to 23.9% by 2019–2020, but the unmet need for family planning remains relatively high, at 33.4% in 2019–2020 (LISGIS, 2021). The data suggests an increasing acceptance and utilisation of modern contraception methods yet underscores the persistent gaps in accessibility and awareness. Another related indicator, fertility rate, which represents the average number of children a woman in the age group 15–49 would have, has seen a decline over the years, moving from 5.2 in 2007 to 4.2 by 2019–2020. In terms of household autonomy, data from 2021 indicates that 89% of employed married women who earned in cash had a say in how their earnings were used, either individually or jointly with their husbands, marking a significant rise from the 76% reported in 2007 (LISGIS, 2021). A concerning trend emerges when examining partner physical violence against women. The percentage of women reporting such violence in the Demographic and Health Survey has witnessed an alarming increase, from 28.5% in 2007 to 45.6% in 2019–20 (LISGIS, 2021).

While Liberia was home to the first female President in Africa, women currently hold only 11 of the 103 seats in the national parliament (10.7%, the average in West Africa is 16.3%). Furthermore, it is estimated that 4-6% of local leaders are women (UN Women Liberia, 2021). What these measures do not grasp is a dynamic in shifting norms and attitudes regarding women's rights and empowerment, which were widely attested by interviewees on different levels. The current government is communicating support of women's rights and economic empowerment.

Whereas women at least formally have secured equal rights, the LGBTQI* community in Liberia remains in a precarious position, largely marginalised and facing legal and societal barriers. Homosexuality is currently criminalised. These legal restrictions further exacerbate the vulnerabilities experienced by the LGBTQI* community, often resulting in limited access to health services, employment opportunities, and social services. Despite international pressure to revise laws concerning homosexuality, there has been little movement on policy fronts (Currier & Cruz, 2020).

As introduced above, Sweden has supported a wide range of projects in the spaces of women's rights, SGBV, and women's political participation. The ActionAid Just and Equal Communities (JEC) project serves as a good example of the Swedish approach in these spaces. JEC took a holistic approach, both in terms of final target group (women, girls, boys, LGBTQI*, sex workers, the disabled), and by not just engaging with direct target groups, but with the wider community, including traditional duty bearers and institutions. Central to this initiative is its respectful and non-judgmental engagement. The evolving gender dynamics in Liberia underscore the necessity of this approach. Historically, gender roles have been rigidly defined, often leading to the suppression of women's rights. However, recent developments signal shifts towards a more equitable society where women can assert their rights and participate more fully in decision-making processes within the family and community. This signals better opportunities for women.

Simultaneously, it bears the risk of unintentionally increasing violence:

“Gender didn’t mean anything in the past, men could force women to do anything, and they could not stand in the way. Now a woman has rights and pulls out of things she does not want. The man needs their consent for certain things. This leads to more femicides”. (Int_18, Beneficiaries).

Action Aid’s work in JEC began by creating spaces (girls forums and boys forums) to discuss issues and derive advocacy actions in 45 communities in four counties. Over time, this process achieved changes in the general perception and opened spaces to discuss and address other issues like female genital mutilation (FGM). According to interviews and documents, teenage pregnancies were reduced, and girl school retention increased in intervention areas. The forums were later transformed into community-based organisations (CBOs) that were capacitated in the next phase and who undertook work themselves creating community-awareness. Motivation, empowerment and initiative among the interviewed beneficiaries seemed high (Int_11, Beneficiaries; Int_21, Beneficiaries). The work with the LGBTQI* community was successful and led to the establishment of networks and organisations, such as a pride network. The project also engaged with sex workers and worked with police to address risks for sex workers. Rural beneficiaries of the project who were in boys’ or girls’ forums did also voice their acceptance of LGBTQI* community and their refusal to stigmatise these groups (Ibid.). In the LGBTQI* space, ActionAid used to have to do a security analysis before engagements, whereas now there a low but existing level of acceptance, and the communities have created their own support networks (Int_51, Implementing Partner).

This project stands as a positive example of a project-type intervention with a community-focused approach. It was successful thanks to two success factors: Firstly, ActionAid possessed strong experience, community acceptance, and local networks. Having been active in the space for a long time allowed them to conceptualise and

successfully implement the project with communities, including work with local NGOs.

“Action Aid Liberia's work around transforming discriminatory gender and social norms clashed with local norms, but strong trust from the community and better skills in community mobilisation and leading grassroots social change enabled progress to be achieved.” (Embassy of Sweden, Department for Liberia and Sierra Leone, 2017).

Secondly, the project aligned and benefitted from the longstanding engagement of other actors, which overall have contributed to shifting norms around gender in Liberia. Many of these initiatives were supported by Sweden as well, for example via Swedish NGOs, UN Women or UNFPA (Int_4, Implementing Partner; Int_5, Other Actor; Int_8, Project Officer; Int_31, Other Actor).

The sustainability of these engagements is generally assessed as quite high by the involved stakeholders (Ibid.), especially on the community level. It opened spaces, e.g. for ActionAid to discuss even more contentious issues, ranging from FGM to discussing the rape of boys and engaging proactively with men. At the same time, results have begun to impact national debates with lawmakers debating affirmative action or banning FGM (Int_4, Implementing Partner). There is a wide consensus among interviewees that Sweden has been quite successful in its work to change gender norms and address women's rights, even though considerable obstacles remain. This stands in contrast to the engagements in government reform, which can provide more long-reaching reforms but at a higher cost and sustainability risk. The link to institutional level changes, such as the establishment of Court E or provisions in the county council to include women, has yielded the highest impacts.

Inclusive economic development

The inclusive economic development space in Swedish cooperation was born out of the recognition that improvements in peace,

security, democracy, and human rights will always be at risk if the economic situation of large swaths of the population remains difficult. Swedish support aimed at enhancing physical road infrastructure with the ultimate intent to improve access to markets and services for rural populations. Next to this, Sweden supported market development and integration at various levels to improve living standards, create jobs and reduce poverty.

In terms of measurable changes, GDP has increased in most years in high single digit percentages. Electricity access has slowly risen to around 30% of the population (but only 8% of the rural population) – in 2008 electricity access in Liberia was only 1,3% of the population (World Bank, 2023). Other indicators remain low or only progress at a slow pace, including sanitation, social metrics, and education. Infrastructure deficiencies and unemployment are ranked as prominent impediments for the country by the population (Afrobarometer, c.f. Relevance chapter). Liberia's economy is still marked by high inequality and high informality. An estimated 85% of the workforce is active in the informal sector, including subsistence agriculture (Bertelsmann Foundation, 2022). Consequentially, the tax base is low, and the government relies on income deriving from Liberia's role in shipping as a flag of convenience and on concession agreements with international firms, most importantly in the mining sector (ArcelorMittal, 2023).

The Swedish approach put a focus on the aspect of inclusive economic development for the wider population as a guiding principle, which is illustrated by the following case studies: The feeder roads project focuses on feeder roads for villages rather than main infrastructure links. The PROSPECTS project started by targeting “ordinary” citizens to start their own businesses through grants, and the markets and value chains project (“GROW”) seeks to improve conditions for small scale farmers and cooperatives by seeking to increase opportunities and remove impediments in selected value chains.

Next to these examples, Sweden also supported Liberian WTO accession (completed 2016) and together with the International Finance Cooperation (IFC) worked on the business environment relating to business registration, free port processes, and more (Int_25, Project Officer). Like it is the case in the portfolio in Democracy and Human rights, different levels and actors are engaged, although individual projects are more standalone.

Feeder roads and their maintenance

The LSFRP has been among the flagship projects of Swedish cooperation since 2009 and has received the largest financial share of any contribution at over 60 million USD in three phases and various support projects. It can serve as an example to highlight the difficulties surrounding sustainability even when supporting an issue for over ten years.

The LSFRP aims to connect communities and villages to the functioning road network. Over 900km of feeder roads have been built at gravel standard in Lofa, Bong, Nimba and the south-eastern counties Grand Gedeh, Grand Kru, Maryland and River Gee. Sweden has undeniably contributed significantly to tangible results in creating construction standards, training staff and contractors, and especially in the physical infrastructure, which prompted partners to label the project as a Swedish “flagship” (LSFRP II Project documents). However, the socio-economic impacts of the feeder roads are more ambiguous. Embassy documents note the improved access to services and markets and rural economic opportunities from road construction. This is confirmed by interviews, evaluations, and mid-term studies, although results differ depending on the location. Notably, the roads are credited to contribute to democratisation as voting has become easier through them (Int_25, Project Officer). However, the selection of locations and assumptions regarding the use of the roads were not optimal (Int_3,

Project Officer).¹⁶ At per kilometre costs around 40.000 – 50.000 USD, a daily traffic of five or six vehicles can be considered “hardly a good bang for the buck” (Int_57, Implementing Partner). Feeder roads are rarely used by cars and mostly by motorbike or on foot. The assumptions about traffic picking up due to the road likely missed a sounder economic analysis of the rural population. Furthermore, feeder roads can only be used by their direct residents. People living just a few hundred meters away already face significant obstacles, e.g., for bringing goods to the road (Int_69, Implementing Partner). One evaluation notes that the focus of the first two phases was too much on mobility (how far to go in a certain time) rather than accessibility (what can be reached in a certain time) (Brewing et al., 2021). This means that the impacts which were realised came at a comparatively high cost for communities and did not benefit them as much as an alternative approach would have.

Sustainability of these roads is key to their impact. The most recent mid-term evaluation states that additional time needs to pass for the full impact of the roads to be realised. These impacts will thus only emerge if maintenance is carried out as planned (Brewing et al., 2021). While gravel roads are easier to build and maintain than tarmac roads, they need more frequent maintenance to remain intact. If no regular maintenance is conducted, road conditions are likely to deteriorate, possibly up to a full reverse to the status quo ante depending on location and construction mode.

¹⁶ The evaluation team did not obtain documents specifying the selection process. Each phase had a county focus, but selection beyond that remained unclear to the team.

Figure 7: Road sections of feeder roads in Bong county, Liberia



Source: The Authors. Different sections of the Nengbein – Yelekorlee feeder road in Bong county in the morning of April 29, 2023. According to residents, the road has been rehabilitated in 2013 and maintained since. The condition of the road was good. Smaller patchworks are done by the community. The road is accessible in the rain season. (Int_39, Beneficiaries). Pictures taken between approx. 7°10'04.0"N 9°05'09.6"W and 7°11'25.9"N 9°01'54.1"W.

The feeder roads monitoring consultant reports for the first and second phase show that the issue of maintenance has been an issue throughout, as the following excerpts show:

“The second report pointed out the need for the ministry to establish a maintenance strategy as an exit strategy for the Swedish funding and urged the [Ministry of Public Works] (MPW) to coordinate the development partners in the sector to seek synergies and alliances to avoid overlap and duplication”. (Monitoring report summary, 2010).

“The twelfth report observed that there had not been any advancement on the maintenance transition strategy and that there has to be an interaction and “buy-in” from Ministry of Finance (MOF) for it to be effective. Again, it concluded that MPW and counties maintenance organisations are weak and would need a considerable makeover if the increase in maintenance shall be effectively applied;

hence there was a need to work out an organisational set-up including resources.” (Monitoring report summary, 2015).

“The project design made unrealistic assumptions about the level of support that would be forthcoming for road maintenance.” (2021 Mid-Term Evaluation of phase 3, which started 2017).

Although maintenance has been a known issue, assumptions about it were still unrealistic in the third phase. To a large extent, maintenance under GoL’s responsibility is not carried out because dedicated funds from the road fund are also used for other purposes (Int_47, Political Partner; Int_66, Implementing Partner). Capacity building of staff and contractors was successful but staff retention on the government side is low and rent-seeking behaviour was reported for MPW staff given their low base income (Int_57, Implementing Partner; Int_66, Implementing Partner).

The feeder road project bears the risk of a sunk cost fallacy.¹⁷ Sweden is investing significantly in road maintenance to maintain results of previous phases, as only further investment seems to be able to sustain effects. Unlike decentralisation or land rights, where successes in legislation serve as a (rather) stable groundwork on which progress can be built at any pace, roads must be maintained regularly to prevent an almost complete reversal. Only recently, under the current strategy, a more community-driven approach to maintenance was developed by LSFRP as the implementation focus shifted to creating village access roads (Int_47, Political Partner; Int_57, Implementing Partner; Int_69, Implementing Partner). Nonetheless, it is highly unrealistic to assume that the GoL will be able to provide routine maintenance funding for the entirety of the Liberian road network in the future given, for example, that the road fund is not adequately budgeted (Int_54, Other Actor; Int_66, Implementing Partner; Int_69, Implementing Partner). The example shows how Swedish DC decided to double down on an approach

¹⁷ Sunk cost fallacy – the idea that a company or organization is more likely to continue with a project if they have already invested a lot of money, time, or effort in it, even when continuing is not the best thing to do.

despite unclear sustainability. Other donors decided to leave the space earlier (Int_57, Implementing Partner).

Jobs, markets and value chains: GROW and PROSPECTS

Throughout the portfolio, there are various approaches in addressing economic development. They all focus on different skills, jobs, as well as income generation (employment, entrepreneurship), and different groups, most notably youth or farmers. The case study examples of PROSPECTS and GROW stand for two approaches, which can exemplify the contributions of Swedish support.

PROSPECTS, implemented by Mercy Corps, is a long-running project in the portfolio of various distinct phases, currently in the fourth phase. Overall, PROSPECTS has aimed to improve economic opportunities for young people by providing training, employment information, business skills training, grants to start micro-enterprises, as well as financial and business advisory support. After a one-year start phase, the second phase (2014–2017) had a three-pronged approach of a psychosocial sub-programme for youth and the main component of the entrepreneurship programme with grants, among others. In Prospects III (2017–2020), the entrepreneurship programme continued. People were invited to trainings, after which they could apply for grants. While this model and some specific targeting helped the program to achieve its goal of at least 50% female participants and a high number of participants with disabilities, most participants were more educated, older and from wealthier backgrounds (Bodhi Global Analysis, 2021).

The small business grants were effective and have a sustainable long-run impact for beneficiaries, who were able to expand their businesses and benefit from stable incomes, sometimes years after receiving the one-off grant. They were able to send children to school or support other family members. The evaluators spoke to beneficiaries in Gbarnga and Ganta who received grants in 2017,

2018 and 2021. A beneficiary of the latest cohort estimated that around 50% of the recent grant recipients have had success in their micro business (Int_13, Beneficiaries; Int_17, Beneficiaries; Int_21, Beneficiaries).

“Some are doing very good, there is a lady with a beauty salon and another with a charging booth. Others did not get so far and the business broke down from mismanagement or personal circumstances. Mercy Corps checked in on us frequently. (...) My animal feed business allows me to send all my children to better schools, pay for food and save for my business. I want to get my own grinding mill within the next two years, and I am saving for it. (...) A loan would be possible but I’m afraid to take loans because interest rates can change and suppress you.” (Int_21, Beneficiaries – a Ganta businessman).

Generally, PROSPECTS in its various phases focussed on labour supply and skills, whereas labour demand remained low and market failures omnipresent. PROSPECTS successfully addressed the issue of basic business skills and seed capital for micro entrepreneurs. There is no alternative access to finance (e.g. from the commercial banking sector) for these micro-entrepreneurs, which limits their growth and expansion opportunities (Ibid.). The approach, born out of a relief logic, was useful at the time and context of introduction given the capacities, resources, and experiences of involved actors. PROSPECTS phase III (2017–2020) already aimed to address market failures but still took more of a charity-approach as opposed to a market-facilitation approach (Bodhi Global Analysis, 2021). A key reason may lie within Mercy Corps which has been active in Liberia since 2002 and struggled to shift from relief to development. Ebola also contributed to this, as it brought immediate relief back to the front (Int_48, Implementing Partner).

In response to a rising realisation that market failures were a key factor hindering economic development, between 2009 and 2012 the Swedish embassy began to focus on a then relatively new approach of Market Systems Development (Int_73, Project Officer). It was chosen to support selected value chains and empower and incentivise actors to drive local economic change and development.

Emphasis was put on the agricultural sector as it posed the greatest transformative potential but could not move past subsistence with many market challenges. For example, due to low quality and quantity, Liberian cocoa farmers could only sell cocoa on the international bulk market without any value added. As such, there were no incentives to improve the quality or processing of the cocoa (Int_2, Project Officer; Int_73, Project Officer; Int_74, Project Officer). To implement this new approach, the embassy worked with Adam Smith International, a consultancy firm based in London, to implement the so-called GROW project. It aimed to set up and develop markets and value chains in cocoa, rubber, palm oil, vegetables and agro processing. The initial period was very difficult for various reasons, ranging from poor management by Adam Smith International to finding national staff. Implementation of the new approach also proved difficult due to contextual factors such as a low number of private sector players, high price volatility and monopsony.¹⁸ Furthermore, the agricultural space was crowded with NGOs who sometimes distorted markets through subsidies or other direct interventions (Embassy of Sweden, 2022; Int_73, Project Officer). The 2014-2016 Ebola crisis was another setback. Renewed and more focussed work began after lessons from a 2017 mid-term evaluation, with a focus on cocoa and vegetable value chains.

In terms of results, at the individual farm level, GROW's Good Agricultural Practice and business trainings show impact: Farmers are more productive and better organised in cooperatives, using basic management and accounting techniques. Documents and interviews confirm that the gender perspective was incorporated throughout. At the same time, the impact shows limits for farmers with a lack of basic education. The trainings were flanked by working on the system both in terms of agricultural inputs, as well as processing and marketing. The most important long-run impact is GROW's contribution to secure a duty waiver on agricultural inputs which significantly and sustainably reduced import prices for seeds,

¹⁸ Monopsony - a situation in a market with one buyer for goods or services offered by several sellers; in this case the sellers are the farmers.

agrochemicals and fertilizers, tools, and equipment that farmers need. In addition, a higher share of Liberian cocoa is now graded premium cocoa and the government aligns with GROW on positioning Liberia as a niche premium cocoa market (Int_19, Beneficiaries; Int_20, Beneficiaries; Int_37, Implementing Partner). The interviewed cooperatives still face significant barriers in access to finance, the inability to certify their products and infrastructural barriers such as high transportation costs (Ibid.). However, the sustainability prospects are good: Changing the system by, for example, establishing an agro-input industry in the country or providing training promises to still be effective even after the closure of the programme. The design of working on the system reflects a general trend in development as well as the Swedish portfolio. Nonetheless, the embassy was not entirely satisfied with what has been achieved in GROW over nine years. The implementation partner was switched to the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) due to procurement rules that did not allow a continuation. The Liberian MSD project was here thereto the only one in the Sida portfolio of MSD worldwide that was implemented by a private firm (Ruffer et al., 2018).

Whereas GROW was the first MSDA project in Liberia, PROSPECTS has also shifted towards this approach, working with systems rather than individuals in the current strategy. While an earlier switch would have provided better impacts and sustainability, there were good reasons for caution. Most notably, the MSDA concept had not been previously piloted in Liberia and capacities were lacking. Implementing complex measures is very difficult in the Liberian context, which makes simpler measures, while less impactful, the safer option. Additionally, the Mercy Corps team would not have been able to implement it earlier due to a lack of experience and qualified staff, but also because the situation in the country would not really allow for it:

“In a donor-driven economy, people are more in tune with hand-out support; a new programme without handouts at all has been challenging; finding partners to

work with us has been challenging, we got some good partners, which took more time than we thought.” (Int_48, Implementing Partner).

Figure 8: GROW project: various cooperative’s seedling plots and storage



Source: The Authors. Cooperatives bring together groups of farmers who can then jointly market their produce. The bottom pictures show cocoa storage and seedlings grown at the cooperative headquarters. Another cooperative (pictured above) said it received training from GROW on organic farming practices, but also received training from IFAD on conventional farming (Int_20, Beneficiaries).

This highlights the factor of timing and context for the feasibility of relatively new approaches. While more effective in principle, they might have a higher lead time and a higher risk of staff capacity gaps. Given the situation in Liberia, there is also a risk that the market systems approach leaves the most vulnerable people behind through social, economic, or physical barriers: Even the comparatively simple grant provisioning approach in PROSPECTS disproportionately benefitted advantaged individuals (Bodhi Global Analysis, 2021). Furthermore, in a market systems development approach, there can still be a need for supporting the very basic needs to unlock farmers' and other actors' ability to participate in the very market systems that the programmes target (Butterworth, 2015; Norell et al., 2017).

As such, there was unused potential to leverage synergies by interlinking different approaches within the same space, combining short-term approaches to remove obstacles (e.g. grants, basic trainings) with more comprehensive market systems development. This approach could have embedded the grant and youth empowerment approach of PROSPECTS into more labour demand-side activities and value chain improvements as done by GROW. Similarly, the feeder roads project now working on village access roads could be incorporated geographically into the ecosystem, as accessibility of farms is a significant limiting factor (Int_69, Implementing Partner).

The examples in the three thematic areas show repeatedly how certain factors, such as project coherence, a significant focus on state institutions, the timing of interventions and political dynamics have shaped the results of the Swedish portfolio over time – positively and negatively. The issue of sustainability stood out in all case studies as a principal inhibitor to transformative impacts and warrants a closer look.

Overarching trends of sustainability

Sustainability is often a risk for development interventions and DC in general (König & Thema, 2011). To conceptualise sustainability for this evaluation, we discern several categories, which we will discuss individually. These categories are (1) the sustainability of individual capacities and changed norms, (2) financial and institutional sustainability, and (3) the challenges posed by changing political landscapes and external factors.

Generally, Sweden's initiatives have been successful in supporting capacities and changing norms at the level of individual beneficiaries. For instance, many beneficiaries of Mercy Corps' PROSPECTS project who received small business grants were able to maintain their businesses, even years after receiving the one-off grant.

Similarly, a director at the MPW originally started his work as an intern for the bridge consultant in the feeder roads project in 2011 (Int_47, Political Partner). Another person started at the land commission in an administrative assistant role, later obtained a degree funded by Sweden and subsequently joined the Land authority, where they now hold a leading position (Int_42, Implementing Partner). In the justice sector, many of the community justice advisors continue their work despite the project having ended and there being no financial incentive (Int_26, Implementing Partner).

Finally, next to qualifications, norms, too, have been sustainably affected, both on the individual level but also in the wider society, as many interviewees confirmed. This is illustrated by beneficiaries in the Just and Equal Communities project where a significant number have seen transformational personal changes, as evidenced by this interview quote:

"When I interact with officials or legislators, they ask me if I am university educated, but I am not, I just learned to inform myself and I am now able to impact lives with it. We are not paid, but you can say we are paid in empowerment." (Int_11, Beneficiaries).

The overall institutional and financial challenges to sustainability are the second aspect and closely relate to the overarching approach of (not only) Swedish DC in Liberia. There are numerous examples of initiatives and projects which collapsed or discontinued because of a lack of funding and/or staff, both within the portfolio of Sweden and its partners in the respective initiatives. The GoL regularly failed to ensure adequate funding after exit, or government support could not be secured already during the duration of a project, as was the case e.g., in service decentralisation. Even when continuity is aimed for, retaining qualified staff is a significant challenge for government entities. Often, individuals, particularly those trained in specialised fields, can pursue better opportunities elsewhere. This "brain drain" can undermine the long-term impact of capacity-building. In some cases, the relevant staff at least remains in the sector, e.g., switching from government to consultancy or NGO. In some cases, staff members seek opportunities elsewhere as their qualifications and capabilities grow. The discrepancy between the government's base salary and the substantially higher allowances provided by donor projects, motivate many to explore alternative employment options after a project ends (Int_66, Implementing Partner). The number of political appointees is also a sustainability risk, as personnel in some 4,000 positions appointed by the president can be exchanged, e.g., after an election entailing further replacements down the line. Accumulated experience thus systematically erodes at regular intervals (Bertelsmann Foundation, 2022).

In decentralisation or the road sector, Sweden's and other donors' support was again required after the intended exit for maintenance or operations, which raises questions about the sustainability of such initiatives (Int_55, Project Officer). There are various dynamics credited for these issues. While corruption and patrimonial dynamics surely play their role in the government not providing continued funding or support, a too-little-too-late focus on sustainability, as well as possibly too high expectations vis-à-vis the available resources and differing priorities between donors and GoL are of relevance as well. One must also consider that donors are active in

different spaces, all requiring budget, capacities, and government resources to maintain what has been achieved. As such, sustainability is an issue that must be addressed on the highest levels of coordination between donors and the government. One way could be to move into sectoral or general budget support to stabilise Liberia's ability to provide services. However, donors disagree on whether Liberia would have the capacity to absorb such funds. Some say given the high levels of corruption and mismanagement it would lead to significant accountability risks, whereas others say it is a good way to implement a more professional management of funds and generate impact by strengthening government's service delivery. Some, like USAID also use results-based finance where reimbursement occurs after achieving certain outcomes (Int_34, Other Actor; Int_43, Other Actor; Int_52, Other Actor). As for the Swedish role, it is important to recognise the different phases of Swedish engagement in post-war Liberia: Initially, the focus was on humanitarian aid and immediate relief, followed by peace- and state building with a focus on state capabilities.

Later, the focus shifted to DC, where the question of sustainability takes a more central role. Due to the predominant emphasis that has been put on short-term relief, Sweden's attention to sustainability of projects in Liberia has been too limited in the transition from relief to peacebuilding to development, lacking a robust conceptual dialogue with its partners and the government on this issue. Only in the last five years, sustainability has increasingly become a more significant part of the discourse and influences portfolio development (Int_2, Project Officer).

Finally, sustainability of achieved results was also affected – positively and negatively – by aspects far beyond the control of any intervention, most notably the downturns caused by Ebola and Covid where Sweden responded flexibly and quickly adapted funds and projects in dialogue with implementing partners to address the crises. However, the originally planned interventions could not continue as planned and many activities were paused or discontinued altogether.

In conclusion, there have been some lasting and overarching impacts, which Sweden contributed to – most notably the peaceful situation and democratic transitions after the civil war as well as changes in norms relating to gender. Some very clear results in passing legislation have also been achieved but are yet to translate into more tangible results for citizens vis-à-vis addressing the roots of conflict and poverty. Overall, the sustainability of projects remains low and is highest on the level of individuals with institutional level changes often deflagrating again without additional donor support. The efforts to improve the state's administrative capacity to deliver especially have been very difficult to maintain. This again points to a very technical and institution-focussed understanding of development cooperation that possibly leaves out consideration of political dynamics and does not ultimately yield tangible citizen benefits.

6. Strategic coordination?

The topic of coordination can be separated into three interlinked areas: Firstly, coordination with other donors. Secondly, coordination with the Liberian government, and thirdly, coordination between interventions as facilitated by the Swedish embassy.

Affecting all three areas, the Swedish embassy was closed during the war and only reopened in 2010, two years into the first bilateral strategy (Int_82, Project Officer). This means that significant parts of the initial bilateral portfolio were initiated and managed from Stockholm with nearly no staff in the country.

For the first two aspects in particular, the evaluation found it difficult to identify overarching trends in coordination. The quality of coordination has fluctuated considerably over the years. This may be partly due to the unavailability of sources for the earlier periods, but also due to coordination processes in Liberia, which operate with very little institutionalised exchange, are not coherently led by the government, and are therefore largely driven by individuals, both on the donor side and on the Liberian government side. While it is normal for individuals to shape coordination, the degree of variation in depth and quality highlights the lack of institutionalised processes or requirements for participation in coordination forums.

Despite this, there is evidence of an overall positive image of Sweden regarding coordination, at least for the more recent years up and including today. Due to the important role as one of the largest donors in the country, Sweden has a high convening power and is seen as engaging in constructive dialogue and improving coordination where possible (Int_2, Project Officer; Int_6, Implementing Partner; Int_35, Other Actor; Int_44, Other Actor).

Figure 9: The Swedish embassy in Monrovia



Source: The Authors. The Swedish embassy shares the oceanside compound in Monrovia's with the British and the Irish embassy.

Coordination between donors

The main platform in which donors coordinate is the Cooperating Partners Group (CPG), with two rotating chairs, one bilateral and one multilateral. The nature of coordination in this body historically was mostly about sharing information and discussing issues of mutual interest. During Covid, coordination focussed only on the pandemic and other initiatives discontinued. Another example of debates in the CPG was the harmonisation of per-diems paid to government staff for donor-funded activities, to avoid incentives for donor hopping due to higher per diems paid (cf. Tostensen 2018). Sweden has been chairing the CPG in 2020/2021 and was credited

with taking the CPG to a more strategic level, discussing jointly how to engage with the government and finding a shared view on what works and what does not work in development cooperation Liberia. To this end, a Sweden-led donor consortium commissioned a joint study on the “Drivers of Development” (Int_32, Other Actor; Int_55, Other Actor). The last two heads of DC at the Swedish embassy are credited with pushing for better coordination mechanisms (Int_32, Other Actor; Int_33, Implementing Partner).

Next to this high-level forum, there are also other working groups on certain thematic issues, convened by different donors or government counterparts. For example, UNDP and the Ministry of Internal Affairs chair a monthly committee on decentralisation (where donors must sometimes push for these meetings to happen), and the EU is coordinating Team Europe efforts. Individual Liberian ministries show different levels of convening and coordination capacity. Within individual interventions or spaces, coordination between co-financing donors is described as working well, for example between Ireland and Sweden (Int_53, Other Actor).

While the Swedish side historically and currently mentioned donor coordination as an issue in Liberia, other donors don’t see the matter as pressing because “the needs are so big we can all spend all our money and not get into each other’s business” (Int_44, Other Actor). However, several aspects have been observed which show that indeed, coordination is necessary, and lack thereof leads to overlaps, and frictions. For example, Sweden considered pulling out of Public Finance Management because several actors became more active there. Likewise, there are some dissensions as the World Bank recently increased budgets for governance and gender, which Sweden is quite active in. Other donors were then unable to adjust their programming in time, reducing alignment and increasing the need for cooperation (Int_2, Project Officer). Some of these overlaps also become apparent on the project level – for example, a farmer cooperative targeted by GROW received trainings on organic agriculture from GROW, but also received trainings from IFAD on

conventional farming, leading to confusion and mixed messages (Int_20, Beneficiaries).

The donor landscape is relatively small, and among the bilateral donors, the US and Sweden are among the most influential. This makes Sweden an important country for many to engage with. As a result, it has become easier for Swedes in general to access and collaborate with others, considering its strong position alongside the US. The institutional set up in which the Head of Development Cooperation at the Swedish embassy also serves as the deputy head of mission allows for a more political and strategic engagement with the government on DC (Int_2, Project Officer; Int_59, Project Officer).

Coordination with the government

In Liberia, the role of the government in coordination is low. In countries with a stronger national government, the governments often convene and coordinates donors according to their interests and the needs in the country. In Liberia, the coordination space is left more open and thus subject to initiative of individual donors or individual state representatives from among the many MACs in the Liberian government. The main thematic reference point is the PAPD, which also contains a national implementation and coordination framework and implementation governance (Republic of Liberia, 2018). Its governance structure, however, mostly exists on paper and meetings are not convened as described. Similar challenges are known also from the previous Johnson government (Keijzer et al., 2019).

The coordination with and by the government has already been mentioned above as challenging. All interviewed donors mentioned challenges to coordination regarding the Weah government. In light of the very high aid dependency of Liberia, the need for coordination between government and donors becomes self-evident. Official ODA flows in the evaluation period were often higher than the

entire state budget. Naturally, this created difficulties. Even if the government had higher capacities, the large diversity of donor priorities and expectations cannot but overwhelm the administrative capacity of the Liberian government. The critical resource gaps however mean that the government chooses to accept all assistance, as the 2018 study on ownership notes on their Liberia case study:

“Given the socioeconomic situation and the state’s limited capacity to raise domestic resources, the gap between needs and available budget is considerable. One consequence is that the government is not in a position to reject offers from its external partners, and instead follows an implicit strategy of resource maximisation. (...) The government faces a wide range of donor priorities in terms of areas and cooperation practices. (...) The Liberian government would have preferred a much leaner development agenda but was not in a position to enforce it.” (Keijzer et al., 2019)

Issues such as this point to systemic challenges in donor-government relationships. They are compounded by changes in government. Donors were not prepared for the transition of power from the Johnson to the Weah administration. The high number of appointees means that a change in government automatically means a replacement of a significant number of government partners, which clashes with ambitions of donors in multi-year reform and capacity building. One interviewee claim that donors in their strategic dialogues on development cooperation in Liberia should have included not only the government, but also hear a wider coalition including opposition parties for a longer-term consensus given the large sums that are to be utilised for long-term processes. As the Johnson administration and donors did reforms, the main opposition was not involved or informed and as such were not able or willing to pick up in 2018 where the previous government had left off (Int_42, Project Officer).

The government’s capacities to coordinate remain low: Coordination among the government departments is weak, cabinet members and other policymakers are often abroad, and donors struggle to identify issues where the government proactively demands their inputs and

resources. Steering committee meetings are often held because of a donor requirement, not on the initiative of the GoL (Int_27, Project Officer; Int_35, Other Actor; Int_44, Other Actor). Embassy staff and other donors noticed a lack of interest and engagement from the current government and attempted to focus more on the topics where real interest exists, with the aim to have them serve as an entry point to discuss other issues. For example, historically, engagement in infrastructure in the feeder roads programme created a lot of political entry points for Sweden due to the importance of the project to Liberian counterparts (Int_25, Project Officer).

In some ministries, such as the ministry of finance, the coordination is stronger than in others largely due to personal efforts of individuals. In the past, coordination sometimes abruptly improved or deteriorated as staff left (Int_57, Project Officer). There is no unified approach amongst donors to address these overarching issues with the government. Whereas some donors advocate for a more confrontational approach and conditionality, others (including Sweden) see the better way forward in continued dialogue and attempting to strengthen ownership on the Liberian side (Int_2, Project Officer; Int_27, Project Officer; Int_35, Other Actor; Int_53, Other Actor).

Coordination between Swedish activities

The first years of engagement were almost exclusively within the UN system without a Swedish embassy in place. Most of the initial bilateral implementing partners were traditional partners of Sida in other countries. Due to the inaccessibility of interview partners from this time, it is hard to derive conclusions on the quality of coordination. Interviewees mentioned challenges of managing the portfolio from Stockholm until 2010, which can explain why Sweden relied extensively on partners they already knew from elsewhere.

As the portfolio became broader, with the first bilateral strategy, and local and international Sida staff at the embassy grew, there are some

positive and some critical aspects to reflect upon. For the more recent timeframe, coordination facilitated by embassy is described as very positive overall. Sida is seen by implementing partners as a co-creative partner and enabler. The embassy is described as flexible and always open to discussions, actively convening stakeholders, regularly meeting and exchanging with the implementing partners on projects and facilitating meetings on different topics on different levels (interviews, implementing partner survey). This allows the embassy to exert a level of influence and support to implementing partners which is highly appreciated.

On the other hand, the coordination between projects on the project level shows unused potential. Positive synergies in the portfolio arise from systemically addressing similar policy areas (as described in the coherence chapter) rather than from proactively leveraging synergies on the project level. Despite an often-coherent portfolio and closely related projects in related areas, the evaluation team has found little evidence of strategically facilitated coordination and synergy creation on the side of the embassy, which some implementing partners and evaluations also noted (Int_62, Implementing Partner; Int_63, Implementing Partner; Moran et al., 2021). Criticism also arose regarding the coordination between Sida and FBA. Some interview partners saw a lack of cooperation and coherence between these two actors (Int_27, Project Officer; Int_79, Project Officer). To some, the FBA portfolio remained too separate from the rest of Swedish DC which resulted in missed opportunities. They see structural differences as a key factor. Although Sida manages most of Swedish DC's budget, FBA receives a separate budget and subsequently manages it separately. Additionally, the two institutions differ in their approach. Sida works exclusively through partners, while FBA employs and seconds its own staff. Thirdly, different locations make communications more cumbersome. FBA has one officer in the country but is headquartered in Sweden and manages its budgets and projects from there. Sida, on the other hand, is present in country. Some interviewees saw this difference in location as a hindering factor to more effective cooperation and synergies (Int_27, Project

Officer; Int_79, Project Officer). The institutional counterparts of the FBA officers in the embassy are the Sida project officers, but as an implementing agency, the coordination need would rather be with Sida's implementing partners, who like FBA are implementing projects directly (Int_66, Project Officer). The current ambassador is credited with significantly improving the coordination between Sida and FBA, which highlights how also within Swedish DC in Liberia, coordination quality seems to a significant extent determined by individualised rather than institutionalised processes (Int_59, Project Officer). This finding is also confirmed by a recent evaluation of FBA, which confirms that dynamic interaction with key partners is often "ad hoc and born out of individual agency and initiative" (Svensson et al., 2021).

In conclusion, Swedish coordination efforts are quite strong in recent years, at least from the 2015–2020 strategy period up until today, but overall coordination in Liberia remains difficult due to lacking donor coordination as well as the government's low convening power. The differing interests, funding logics and thematic trends that donors pursue contributes to these challenges. These discussions reflect the more recent situation and are not indicative of the whole period of study, for which a more detailed assessment of coordination could not be assessed beyond what is described above. However, the change of power after the successful 2023 elections means the question on how to engage with the government and its MACs will have to be re-negotiated and formed with the new government of Liberia.

7. Lessons learned and recommendations

This chapter provides key and overarching lessons learned from the evaluation, followed by recommendations for both the political steering and strategy formulation of Swedish aid as well as more actionable recommendations for the embassy level.

Lessons learned

The impacts of Swedish cooperation with Liberia from 2003 to 2021 have been mixed. Liberia has transitioned from civil war to a relatively peaceful democracy and there is ample evidence that Sweden contributed to this development in various ways, from supporting key legislation, the peace process and democratic governance, all the way to building roads and contributing to changing gender norms. Considering the amount of donor money spent and the time that has elapsed, however, progress has been significantly limited by various factors: Donors' expectations and approaches have not always adequately adapted and learned from the Liberian context. External factors like Ebola, Covid and macroeconomic changes are also important. And finally, the Liberian government has not been able to truly focus on citizen's needs. Combined, these factors mean that poverty remains widespread, overall state capacity remains low, and neither the government nor the donor community have been able to develop an effective approach to counteract the cycle of deterioration. Tangible and visible results from individual Swedish DC projects have changed norms and laws, provided infrastructure and trainings, but have often not translated into overarching impacts.

Sweden exercises a high influence in Liberia compared to other countries. First of all, Sweden is among the largest, of the few donors, in a rather small country. Sweden consistently contributed

more than 1% of annual GDP and steadily increased its absolute financial commitments. As such, Sweden is seen as a longstanding and committed partner which is providing significant contributions, second only to the United States. Because of this, Swedish influence on the Liberian government is relatively high, also because Sweden has served key government priorities and is seen as communicating constructively, which likely made partners more receptive. Additionally, Sweden also yields significant influence among the community of donors. While Liberia might be a mid-sized country in the overall Swedish DC portfolio in Africa, it consequently comes with high influence for less money. Sweden has been an important partner in Liberia's democratisation and peace efforts and is regarded as a principal steward of democracy, human rights, and gender equality in Liberia by civil society, political partners, and other donors.

There are no short-cuts to long-term engagement. Progress takes time. As the evaluation has shown, processes unfold over long time and are subject to external events and shifting dynamics. Especially in key reform processes, this must be expected and is ultimately the only path to success. The examples of rule of law, gender, decentralisation, and land reform show how important the long-term engagement has been in achieving progress, and how important it is to ultimately realise the desired impacts, e.g. in land rights or decentralisation.

The focus on state institutions has had ambivalent consequences. Sweden has been instrumental in facilitating some of the core democratic processes, e.g. in their support to elections and election observation, as recently evidenced by the 2023 presidential election. These efforts have been instrumental in the democratic transition. On the one hand, other institutions and legislation were supported and are lasting, but with a low capacity and low sustainability. Tangible changes for citizens of Liberia coming out of these activities were often more indirect, time-delayed or did not materialise at all. In situations where the state is very weak or absent, communities play an important role providing basic

services, mediating conflicts, and mobilizing citizens for collective action. Overall, the Swedish approach in support to state building Liberia has been quite institution-centric, technocratic, and probably missed opportunities to empower and support communities directly, with some notable exceptions, e.g. the Swedish work on gender. A higher focus on local solutions and tangible improvements for Liberians, as well as a more thorough analysis of political dynamics could have yielded better feasibility assumptions and adapted approaches.

Everything is relevant – but potentials differ. In the Liberian context, nearly all activities can be considered relevant because the needs are high in almost all sectors. Given the breadth of the Swedish bilateral strategies, the questions of what to pursue and at the expense of what becomes even more important. Most importantly, there was a missed opportunity to engage more in the education sector, which, especially in the earlier years, likely would have had a bigger impact than some of the other policy areas that were pursued. Education is a major factor hindering progress, e.g., when it comes to the capacity levels of partner and government staff, when it comes to the susceptibility of target groups to community work, economic empowerment activities or political participation. Furthermore, education is a sector where tangible improvements become relevant for citizens relatively quickly, as compared to some of the other sectors pursued. At the same time, education remains highly relevant given the huge amount of youths in the country and is also a key priority of the president-elect.

Achieving sustainability and managing expectations. When Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf was elected in Liberia as Africa's first female president, donors swiftly rallied to support Liberia and expectations were sky-high. However, assumptions regarding what was possible and feasible in Liberia were often not realistic. Transformative results that set the country on track for positive peace and prosperity were not achieved despite an overall good cooperation between the GoL and donors. Reasons are multi-fold: Firstly, assumptions regarding "what works" were often too high and deterministic.

Embedded in discussions and trends at the time, certain approaches were pursued which at the time seemed impactful and innovative. Not many were transformative, and, in hindsight, more could have been done sooner to – for example – approach economic development from a systems perspective. Furthermore, some of the basic assumptions linking various thematic areas together were very general and likely lacked a closer scrutiny or operationalisation regarding their feasibility. Interventions were always closely fit to strategic plans and national frameworks, but when local priorities, context and constraints are not reflected at least to the same degree, it limits the success. Overall, sustainability considerations were often lacking. The late transition in Sweden’s perspective on Liberia from post-conflict relief to peacebuilding to development led to low incorporation of sustainability considerations which has also affected the impact of Swedish interventions.

Coherence is key. As the report has shown, there are examples of projects that meaningfully build on and relate to one another over time and by addressing different levels. This “ecosystem” approach is commendable in the difficult Liberian context as projects are supporting each other and change can be achieved on mutually dependent areas. There are notable exceptions, most prominently the Feeder Roads project, which was not embedded in a wider project grouping. Generally, coherent project groupings in the portfolio seemed to have emerged organically rather than strategically. Going forward, it could be beneficial to explore a more systematic ecosystem approach. The more concrete the work to be achieved is (e.g. reform, infrastructure, ...), the more tangibly aligned projects should be for mutual support. The more overarching the work to be achieved is (changing norms), the broader the projects can be because they benefit from broader engagement also without direct connection. The latter has been successful in the gender space, not only with direct projects but also through core support to UN women or UNFPA, which is a good example of a coherent combination of modalities in one space. A similar broad approach in

infrastructure in contrast would likely not yield similar results because success depends on more tangible factors.

Swedish initiatives must “resonate” to unfold positive dynamic change. For example, programs related to gender or justice resonated well because they met the actual needs and interests of the target groups and a general openness of the Liberian system. These initiatives were picked up and amplified by those involved, generating more significant, lasting impact. In contrast, efforts like gender-responsive budgeting did not have the same effect with public administration bodies. This was mainly because these initiatives were not in tune with the immediate priorities or perceived short-term needs of these organizations. Even if the PAPD calls for gender-responsive budgeting, this doesn't automatically make such an approach resonate with the institutions that are supposed to implement it. When there is a lack of resonance, the initiative fails to gain traction and its impact is diminished. Understanding resonance when thinking about ownership can help at the project level but also for identifying approaches and themes to DC that are more likely to succeed in Liberia.

Recommendations

This chapter outlines suggested actions and areas of improvement based on the evaluation results, as well as feedback and insights provided by various stakeholders during the evaluation process. Recommendations are structured into the overarching political aspects, followed by more operational recommendations to the embassy and Sida.

Overarching recommendations.

- **Focus the strategic guidance.** The strategies for Liberia have been very broad, leaving a lot of room for flexibility to the embassy. Given the constraints and needs Liberia faces and the limited donor budgets, the evaluation team recommends focussing new strategies in their thematic breadth and ambition following a more extensive consultation with counterparts and incorporation of strategic learnings from Liberia, e.g. from the Drivers of Development Study which donors have recently commissioned jointly. This does not necessarily mean to drop areas altogether, but to give more guidance within each area and in which Sweden can unfold a portfolio more effectively.
- **Manage thematic area synergies and contradiction risks more proactively.** The realm of inclusive economic development has the potential to be more coherently set up and aligned with other thematic areas. There are significant synergy potentials between projects which should be more actively pursued. Likewise, there are contradiction risks between overarching goals, most notably in the realm of human rights, economic development, and environmental preservation. For example, Sweden aims support the preservation of the natural environment and rainforests of Liberia, but at the same times works to professionalise the agricultural export industry, which is a main driver of deforestation, e.g. in neighbouring countries. An explicit setup of projects (beyond supporting sustainable

agricultural practices) at the intersection could mitigate these risks. Likewise, the issue of land rights and land use is closely linked to both environmental and economic aspects.

- **Place a renewed focus on existing reform processes and carefully consider whether to pursue new ones.** Sweden has supported certain (political and legal) reform processes, which are at risk of not unfolding their impacts. Given the long-term investment Sweden has made to these sectors, it makes sense to reinforce selected reforms in a targeted way after a careful analysis, most notably regarding land rights and decentralisation. The range of instruments to this end could be widened, including directly funding the government for a clearly defined task, e.g., the land formalisation process, or sectoral budget support. For this, there should be a dialogue about the avoidance of sunk costs and maximisations of impacts based on past experiences. Where additional reforms are supported (e.g. potentially in the rule of law sector), the significant cost and time investment that comes with potential success, including implementation must be considered at the beginning. It is better to engage significantly and coherently in few reform processes than to engage only a bit in many.

Steering and portfolio

- **Link implementation partners more strategically.** While the embassy has a very strong focus on the Swedish strategy, it should adopt a more strategic approach in portfolio building and better facilitate the exchange and synergies between implementing partners' projects. To maximize the impact of development interventions, the embassy should more actively promote collaboration and information sharing among implementing partners, especially when implementing partners operate in overlapping thematic and geographic areas. Implementing partners in the survey and interviews wished for more coordination and exploration of synergies with other

Swedish-funded projects. A resource-efficient way for the embassy to pursue this is to initiate joint sectoral or geographical exchange and reflection meetings with implementing partners and other relevant stakeholders, which could also be organised by an implementing partner at the embassy's invitation.

- **Improve the understanding of how (sub)-portfolios work together and actively improve linkages.** There seems to be a gap between individual projects and their management for impact, and how the “big picture” ensemble of the Swedish (sub)portfolio in thematic areas or sectors works jointly towards developmental outcomes. To amend this, the evaluation team recommends several aspects:¹⁹
 - The development of a results framework for certain thematic clusters of the strategy could better link individual contributions to overarching goals and help the embassy find “missing pieces” in their support. The strategies provide an overall guidance, but the goals formulated, e.g. for the 2016-2020 strategy are sometimes on different levels that build upon each other. In the strategy operationalisation they could be clustered and sequenced into a more coherent framework to guide implementation.
 - Strategic Evaluations at the sub-portfolio or sectoral level. Unlike individual project evaluations, which serve to provide learning to implementing partners and accountability to the embassy, portfolio-level evaluations offer a broader perspective that allows for a comprehensive understanding of how different projects within a thematic area or sub-portfolio interact and contribute to overarching objectives. The evaluation of the Swedish Rule of Law portfolio or the IDLO rule of law report serves as a good example of the benefits of this approach. To improve their use even more,

¹⁹ The team did not conduct an analysis of embassy processes; therefore, the mentioned aspects do not include internal processes and ways of working and might omit some already existing procedures.

they could be designed with a stronger focus on learning and participation of implementing partners on various levels. Their focus should be less on accountability and more about identifying concrete improvements.

- Accompanying portfolio evaluations. While strategic evaluations are invaluable in providing learnings from past work, the embassy could pilot accompanying portfolio evaluations to ensure lessons learned and evaluation results feed into current processes. A service provider could implement a monitoring evaluation and learning framework for a specific portfolio grouping and implement it. This would facilitate learning, coordination and relieve the embassy's workload to some extent. One example could be the Swedish support to the rule of law or its support to land rights due to the diversity of actors and projects involved for a common goal. Other examples could be the Swedish work on gender, the intersection of environment and economic development, or other nexuses.
- **Fail fast(er).** The embassy should seek to strengthen the sustainability-link in its interventions and facilitate learning more broadly. The question is how to identify pragmatic solutions that provide direct sustainable benefits to the population faster than before? For example, an innovation like the village access roads could probably have been discovered and implemented sooner. To achieve this, several avenues can be explored, both for implementing partners and the embassy.
 - Overarching guidance. The strategic frameworks can ensure a better orientation on alignment for implementing partners and serve as a basis for discussion.
 - Strengthen public proposals. A change in project selection could also be to pursue a minor shift towards publicly inviting for proposals more often before entering a deliberation process to expand the scope of potential partners and approaches.

- “Liberia Development Learning Labs”. Alternatively, the embassy could invite various stakeholders, e.g. in the form of a design thinking process to come up with novel approaches and ways of implementation for specific Liberian challenges which are then awarded project funding for a pilot.
- Strengthening baselines & monitoring. Implementing partners should strengthen their own results frameworks, monitoring systems and baselines. This can take different forms depending on the project. For larger projects, it could make sense for the embassy to contract monitoring independently, as was done with Feeder Roads project. A more solid foundation for impact assessment and evaluation can be established this way. This approach strengthens assumptions regarding sustainability and empowers the implementing partners to adjust their implementation and helps the embassy in identifying projects that may not be on a sustainable trajectory.
- Appropriate methodologies. Not every intervention’s success can be easily measured with standard indicators and quantification-pitfalls should be avoided. For market systems approaches, it could instead make sense to conduct economic impact analyses to obtain insights into the economic viability and sustainability of results. Likewise, appropriate methodologies also means that what is measured corresponds to the capacity of the implementing partner – for local implementing partners, relatively simpler frameworks on measuring success should be pursued, whereas others can be expected to have more advanced methodologies and standards.
- Practical research. Research that is focused on practical applications and scientific projects directly attached to development cooperation can enhance learning and lead to overall enhancements in the effectiveness of development

aid, like the Embassy has recently done with the Swansea University project on the Feeder Roads.

- **Adopt a systems approach but leave no one behind.** Shifting the focus to systems approaches as piloted in market systems development approach offers opportunities of more sustainable impact. At the same time, gender-sensitive inclusive practices should remain fundamentals of Swedish engagement, ensuring that these considerations are integrated into the fabric of initiatives. Maintaining a dedicated focus on gender and marginalized groups within systems-oriented projects is essential to uphold principles of equity and ensure that the benefits of development reach everyone. Relying on more “handout”-based work can be necessary to allow beneficiaries to participate in market systems interventions. A linking of training & grant-schemes with market-systems development approaches (essentially combining the approaches of GROW and PROSPECTS) might be a template worth pursuing.

Engagement & coordination in Liberia

- **Renew political analysis.** In the past, donors have struggled managing transformations of power due to the large number of appointees changing. Sweden should take time to understand the new government’s priorities and needs and adjust accordingly to avoid dead-ends in activities, approaches, and coordination. Sweden is recognised as an important reliable player by people across the political spectrum in Liberia. It should therefore continuously utilise their convening role to facilitate broad(er) political engagement, also across party lines and with civil society. It might be prudent to conduct a political settlement

analysis to update the understanding of power structures and its implications for Swedish programming.²⁰

- **Sustain multi-level engagement with both civil society and state institutions** – this should remain a key approach in Liberia. The engagement goes beyond promoting state accountability alone; it also serves as a valuable conduit for capacity-building activities and ensure a level playing field.
- **Manage and expand civil society partnerships** – While it's essential to continue Swedish engagement with Liberian civil society, it's also vital to recognize and address the potential pitfalls associated with such engagement. The embassy should remain mindful of the risk of creating dependencies on external donors. To mitigate this risk, they should keep pursuing and extend proactive measures to promote the ownership, independence, and funding diversity of supported civil society organizations.

In relation to democratic governance, Sweden plays a pivotal role in fostering a sustainable and diverse civil society landscape in Liberia, promoting accountability and local ownership of development initiatives. Transparency NGOs like NAYMOTE are frequently cited in media, e.g. for their campaign promise monitors. The civil society approach is currently focussed significantly on NGOs and could be even broader. The embassy could investigate the role of academia, business associations, churches and (social) media (the embassy already supports investigative journalism), including Liberian social media influencers.

- **Continue to align with other donors on a shared strategic understanding.** This is paramount for effective DC in Liberia. Closer alignment promotes a unified approach, minimizes duplication, and maximizes the collective impact of donor

²⁰ The term political settlement analysis here refers to the term as used by ESID (as developed by Sam Hickey and Tim Kelsall at ODI / University of Manchester). <https://www.effective-states.org/>

interventions. Several of the above recommendations regarding the portfolio and thematic areas can be implemented jointly with partners. Sweden is uniquely positioned for this work together with peers.

- **Remain mindful and vigilant.** It remains paramount for Swedish DC in Liberia to maintain a vigilant and mindful approach, acknowledging the intricate dynamics that shape the country's socio-political landscape. This includes recognizing centre-periphery tensions, rural-urban disparities, socio-economic inequalities, and the vital role of the youth population. These dynamics are key risk factors in the country falling back into conflict. Tailoring interventions to prevent inadvertently exacerbating these existing tensions and disparities and to actively alleviate some of these root causes will be key to sustainable development in the country. Such an approach thus goes beyond fostering social cohesion and supports the pursuit of sustainable peace and development in the country.

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Appendix 1 – Evaluation design, methodology

This appendix serves to provide a more detailed account of the evaluation design and methodology. As described above, the development of the evaluation design was based on Stern et al.'s (Stern et al., 2012) approach to identifying the most appropriate design based on 1) the evaluation questions, 2) the evaluation object's attributes, and 3) the best available (combination of) evaluation designs to enable causal inference.

The evaluation team began by formulating and systematising the core questions to be answered by the evaluation. In categorizing the questions, the team followed the OECD-DAC criteria for evaluations, in particular relevance, coherence, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability. The evaluation of a country portfolio over a long time, raises stronger questions about higher-level results and their long-term effect, therefore effectiveness, impact, and sustainability were seen as closely linked. Efficiency was not included as it was not one of the key knowledge interests of EBA. In addition to the OECD-DAC definition, we included “coherence over time” as an extra dimension under the coherence criteria. It refers to internal coherence of the Swedish portfolio across the evaluated time frame and aims to analyse whether Swedish engagement did not only produce coherent portfolios at any given moment but also showed a reasonable progression (as opposed to erratic strategy and portfolio changes). As a second addition, we added “quality of strategy” to capture the influence of the (quality of the) strategy on the Swedish portfolio.

The following table comprises the five core evaluation criteria, questions, and sub-questions.

Table Ap 1-1: Evaluation criteria, questions and sub-questions.

Quality of Strategy	
Has Sweden formulated appropriate strategies for Liberia in terms of realism, feasibility, development constraints and opportunities at various periods in time?	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What have the objectives of the Swedish development cooperation with Liberia been?2. What has been the analysis and rationale behind the formulation of content and objectives of the different strategies between 2003 and 2021?3. To what extent have strategic objectives evolved over this period of time? How can these changes be explained and to what extent were they adequate?4. To what extent have the strategies developed by Sweden for development cooperation with Liberia between 2003 and 2021 adequately considered development constraints and opportunities in the country and been the most appropriate strategies in this regard?5. What are the core feasibility assumptions and constraints that the strategies developed by Sweden for development cooperation with Liberia between 2003 and 2021 make implicitly or explicitly and to what extent do they reflect the realities in Liberia?
Relevance and Conceptual Coherence	
Has Sweden supported a relevant and coherent portfolio of activities considering the Swedish and Liberian country strategies, policies, priorities, and needs over time?	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. To what extent have the selected strategic areas, sectors of intervention, and initiatives of Sweden's portfolio in Liberia aligned with Sweden's strategies and priorities between 2003 and 2021?2. To what extent have the selected strategic areas (Peace and Security, Democracy and Human Rights, Inclusive Economic Development), sectors of intervention, and initiatives of Sweden's portfolio in Liberia been aligned with the strategies and policies of the Liberian government between 2003 and 2021?

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. To what extent have the selected strategic areas, sectors of intervention, and initiatives of Sweden's portfolio in Liberia been aligned with the needs of the target populations and the broader Liberian society between 2003 and 2021? 4. To what extent could alternative strategic areas, sectors of intervention, and initiatives have been selected for Sweden's portfolio in Liberia to increase the relevance of Sweden's cooperation with the country between 2003 and 2021? 5. To what extent has gender equality, as a cross-cutting issue, been considered in Sweden's portfolio between 2003 and 2021, including in interventions in which gender equality was not a primary objective?
Results and Impact	
Has Swedish development cooperation with Liberia contributed to sustainable results in terms of peace and security, democracy and human rights, and inclusive economic development? If so, in what way and how?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How successful have Sweden's initiatives been in achieving their intended objectives between 2003 and 2021? Which factors of success and failure could be identified with regards to the achievement of objectives? 2. To what extent and in what ways have Sweden's initiatives in Liberia contributed to peace and security, democracy and human rights, and inclusive economic development between 2003 and 2021? 3. To what extent have Sweden's interventions in Liberia led to (positive or negative) unintended results, between 2003 and 2021? How have Sweden's interventions reacted to them? 4. To what extent have external factors or framework conditions impacted Sweden's achievement of results (positively or negatively)? 5. To what extent have Sweden's initiatives responded to changes in the environment over time?

	6. To what extent can the achieved results be assessed as sustainable beyond the duration of the specific interventions? To what extent were measures and strategies conceived and implemented by Sweden's initiatives to ensure the sustainability of the results?
Procedural Coherence/Coordination	
Has Sida coordinated its initiatives effectively with other Swedish and international actors in Liberia to enable synergies, safeguard collaboration, minimise unjustified overlaps and strengthen the combined result where appropriate?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To what extent have Sida's initiatives in Liberia, in their design and implementation, been coordinated with other Swedish and international actors' initiatives? To what extent has coordination in Liberia faced challenges and where do improvement potentials exist? 2. To what extent have coordination efforts been sufficient and effective? 3. To what extent have unjustified overlaps/duplications been prevented between Sida's initiatives and other Swedish and international actors' initiatives in Liberia, between 2003 and 2021, leading to a risk of low additionality or dead weight? 4. To what extent have synergies been leveraged between Sida's initiatives and other Swedish and international actors' initiatives between 2003 and 2021? 5. To what extent have coordination and synergies between Sida and other Swedish and international actors been effective in strengthening combined results between 2003 and 2021?
Lessons Learnt	
What lessons can inform Swedish development cooperation with Liberia ahead?	1. What lessons learnt can be drawn from Sweden's initiatives in Liberia between 2003 and 2021 which could inform future interventions in the country and elsewhere?

Source: The Authors

The above evaluation questions cover a broad range of knowledge interests that operate on different levels (strategic, portfolio, project) and focus on various aspects of the intervention (e.g. process and results).

Additionally, the evaluation was confronted with a highly complex evaluation object (i.e. complete sectors of a country and developments within them). Within a complex system, such as a country or individual sectors, effects are often based on multiple, interlinked causes and subject to non-linear and emergent dynamics. Linking observed changes on a national level to a particular intervention is thus challenging. In such environments, observing changes in the intended direction of an intervention is not enough to assume causation. Similarly, no changes or changes in the opposite direction of an intervention's goals do not mean that the intervention didn't contribute. In response to this challenge, the evaluation design had to combine two approaches:

First, a detailed tracing of effects of Swedish interventions based on intended causal pathways. By validating these pathways and following them from project results to higher-level results, contribution to these can be made plausible. This works particularly well in case studies where, for example, the usage of built capacity can be traced.

Second, a multi-layered set of validations based on multiple data sources and methods can allow for more generalisation. By synthesizing findings from multiple levels (e.g. project vs. portfolio level) and different data sources, including other evaluations and surveys, the findings from the detailed tracing of causal pathways can be further validated and generalised thus allowing for more overarching findings regarding Swedish contribution to higher-level impacts.

This approach does not, however, allow attribution or any estimation of the size of the contribution (see limitations in the chapter "Evaluation objectives, approach, and methodology").

Therefore, the evaluation comprised three modules that enabled analyses of all evaluation questions and combined a broad analysis across the whole portfolio, its three strategic areas and deep dives into individual interventions (through case studies). A theory-based approach using contribution analyses sat at the centre of its design, further complemented by portfolio and strategy analyses and coherence analyses (see “Evaluation objectives, approach, and methodology”). The figure below provides an overview over the evaluation’s design, methodology and how they related to the strategic areas.

A central element of any theory-based approach is the theory of change. For this evaluation, three theories of change were formulated together with former and current heads of DC from the embassy and visualised, each covering one of the strategy periods.

The theories of change were subsequently used to:

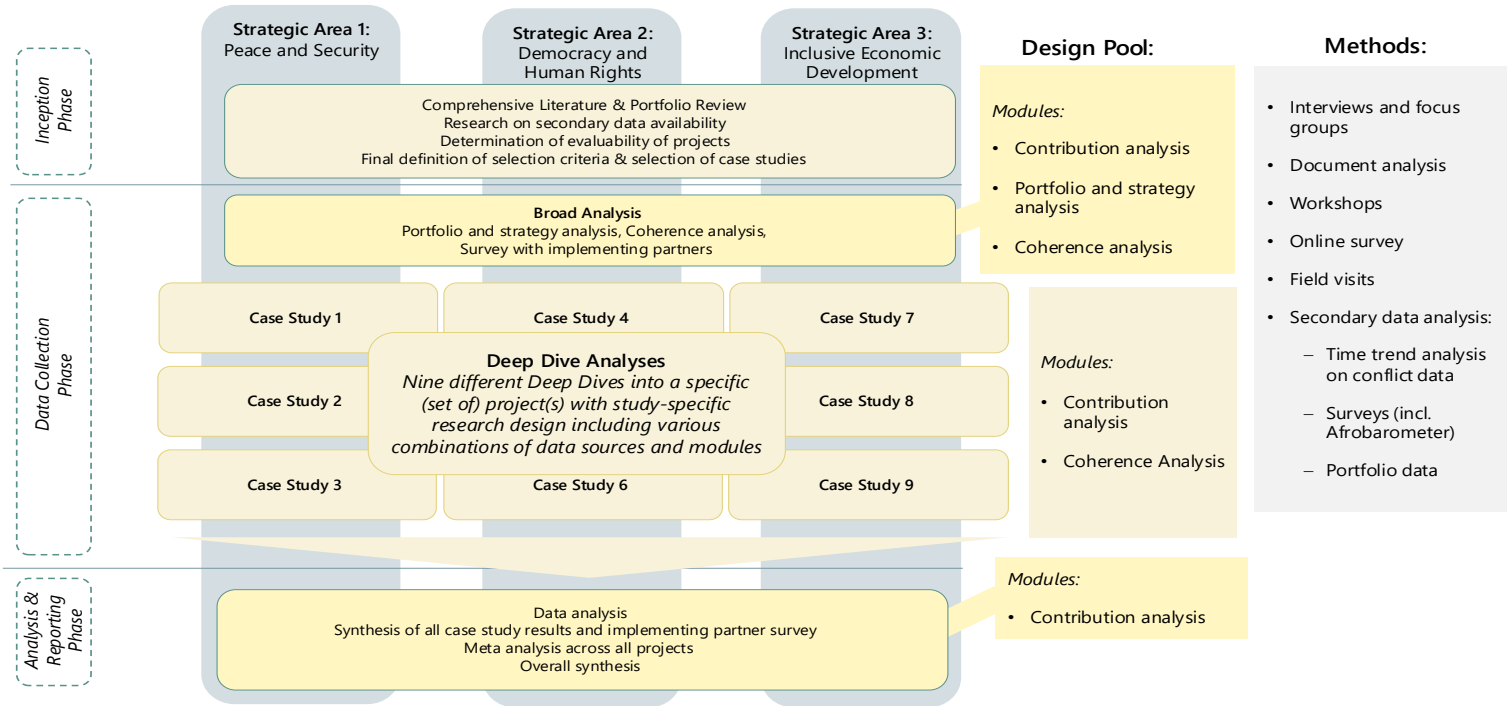
- Reach a common understanding of Swedish development cooperation with Liberia between 2003–2021
- Identify a selection of key results hypotheses that the analysis focussed on
- Inform the selection of case studies for in-depth investigation
- Provide the (theory) basis for the evaluation of results, in particular the ‘in what way’ / ‘how’
- Support the analysis of strategic areas by making explicit the links between objectives within an area and across areas
- Support the portfolio analysis by demonstrating how activity fields of projects (were meant to) relate to the objectives of Swedish development cooperation.

They thus served both procedural, evaluatory functions (in the case study selection or in forming the basis for particular analyses) as well as serving as a basis for conversation and discussion (e.g. in reaching

a common understanding of Swedish development cooperation with Liberia between 2003 and 2021 or in discussing potential results with beneficiaries and project partners).

Unsurprising for a country evaluation, the complexity of the theories of change, especially when combined, was very high. Therefore, key result hypotheses that represent central causal pathways were identified. These were used in the evaluation to guide case study selection and to focus results and impact analyses (in primary and secondary data collection and analysis) towards key causal claims.

Figure 1-1: Overview of evaluation design



Source: The Authors

These key results hypotheses were:

- If judicial and security institutions are supported, then formal legal systems and access to justice are improved, which contributes to strengthening (local) rule of law, resulting in a strengthened social contract in the democracy and greater respect for human rights.
- If traditional judicial and security institutions are supported, then traditional (local) legal systems and access to justice are improved, which contributes to strengthening (local) rule of law, resulting in a strengthened social contract and greater respect for human rights.
- If support to election, reform and decentralisation processes in public administration is provided, then the capacities in public administration are strengthened, a contribution to democratic governance and greater respect for human rights is made.
- If civil society, especially women rights' organisations, are supported, then the capacities of civil society to promote accountability and respect for human rights are strengthened, and as a result a contribution is made to greater respect for human rights.
- If civil society, especially women rights' organisations, are supported, then (local) participation (of women) in political processes is increased, and as a result it contributes to gender equality.
- If support to infrastructure and efficient transport networks is provided, then access to markets is improved, which improves access to basic services, particularly for marginalised groups.
- If support to infrastructure and efficient transport networks is provided, then business opportunities are improved, giving poor people better opportunities and tools to improve their living conditions and ultimately contributing to inclusive and sustainable economic development and poverty reduction.

- If support to market development and integration is provided, Liberia's integration into value chains is improved and productivity increases, which leads to better opportunities for people to improve their living standards and poverty reduction.
- Better opportunities and tools to enable poor people to improve their living conditions result in a reduction of violent activities and conflict, and vice versa.

Beyond their use at the strategic level, these key results hypotheses were also used in the case studies to consider individual contributions. However, since the theories of change operate at the level of the whole portfolio and strategy, they are quite vague and the gaps between two causal steps can be quite large. As a result, when evaluating results of specific contributions in case studies, the relevant results hypotheses were refined into more detail. This is to make sure that we have a sufficiently concrete theory basis for the case study to be evaluable. The refined impact chains were then used in discussing potential and actual results of a given intervention/case study with involved project personnel.

The nine case studies

Case studies were used in this evaluation to provide a deep dive into particularly relevant projects of Sweden's development cooperation. Case studies were chosen in a way that the whole set of all case studies delivers a good representation of the entire portfolio in terms of themes, time horizons, aid modalities, etc. (see below). The focus was thereby on using these deep dives to learn more about Sweden's engagement and the links with their strategies at large. The case studies are not an end in itself but rather a means to gain insight into the whole portfolio. Therefore, the focus and implementation of the case studies was different from a typical evaluation of an individual project. In particular:

- In light of the evaluation questions, the substantive focus was put on relevance, coherence and coordination, (long-term) results as well as the role of gender as a cross-cutting issues. Therefore, case study selection and questions in interviews and the online survey focused on these subject questions.
- A particular focus was put on understanding the projects in their wider context, in particular the links with the whole portfolio and strategies and with the Liberian (political) environment. Therefore, in the selection of interviewees, a greater weight was put on policymakers and stakeholders in the wider environment. In addition, portfolio-wide interviews were carried out.
- The aim was to learn about the portfolio from the case studies. Therefore, the “unit of analysis” differed: some case studies represented only specific elements of project(s) that were most relevant to the portfolio and the key results hypotheses. Some also covered strings of predecessor and follow-on projects to cover early periods of the portfolio. This way, the team sought to balance the inclusion of more recent or ongoing projects by linking them to previous work.
- Where (recent) evaluations for individual projects existed, the case studies were designed to be complementary. Therefore, the focus of interviews was more on understanding the substantive questions in relation to the wider portfolio as opposed to just the project itself. Longer-term results were assessed where evaluations on short- or medium-term results already existed.

The following criteria were used to select case studies:

Issues addressed: The case studies were selected to cover all three strategic areas and to achieve thematic breadth within each area as well. Projects with both explicit as well as implicit gender focus were included.

- **Key results hypotheses:** The selection ensured to cover the entire central results hypotheses from the three TOCs.

- **Feasibility:** Only case studies that allowed for local data collection and triangulation through secondary data were chosen.
- **Evaluated timeframe:** The selection was meant to cover the entire evaluated timeframe.
- **Added value:** Case studies were chosen that did not duplicate existing Swedish evaluations.
- **Aid modalities and implementing partners:** The selection was meant to cover different aid modalities and implementing partners to represent the breadth of Swedish DC in Liberia.

The selection process followed a five-step process:

1. **Pre-selection:** To ensure representativeness of the portfolio, the evaluation team excluded small projects with volumes < 500k USD (unless there were exceptional reasons to keep them).
2. **Information collection:** The evaluation team collected information on each project from documents and in interviews with responsible programme officers at the Embassy.
3. **Selection workshop:** The evaluation team held a selection workshop and made a short list by assessing each project against the selection criteria.
4. **Selection from short list:** The selection of nine case studies from the short list was made by discussing in detail the criteria and trade-offs between them from the short list.
5. **Validation:** The final selection was validated with the Head of Development Cooperation at the Embassy.

Three members of the evaluation team spent 2 weeks in Liberia and conducted data collection with Liberian counterparts and the Swedish embassy. Starting with a day in Monrovia for initial embassy interviews, the team set out to Margibi, Bong and Nimba counties. The second week was spent in Monrovia talking to beneficiaries, political partners, civil society organisations and implementing partners like the UN. Additional interviews with international actors

or former staff were conducted remotely before and after the field mission.

The embassy and various implementing partners provided contact details, which the evaluation team used to structure the two weeks in advance. Additional beneficiary interviews and site visits were conducted spontaneously based on local recommendations and availabilities, e.g. the Gbarnga Security Hub visit and meeting additional beneficiaries of GROW. The evaluation team also visited roads rehabilitated under LSFRP and interviewed people living alongside. The team conducted interviews together, but also split up to maximise the number of interviewees. For most interviews, several team members took notes digitally and simultaneously, ensuring a high certitude of what was said. About a third of the 79 interviews were group interviews with multiple individuals.

Additionally, our study of 66 other projects’ documents, findings from other evaluations and third-party reports, as well as interviews with other donors show that the case studies we have chosen unearthed similar challenges and can thus serve as a representative sample of the successes and challenges in Swedish cooperation with Liberia.

The following case studies were chosen:

Table Ap 1-2 - CS1 – Peace and Security – Access to Justice

Title/Sida aid code(s)	Timeline & Budget	Brief description	Data collection
<u>The Carter Center Access to Justice (phase 1)</u>	Phase 1: 2013-2017 USD 7,584,597	The project provides support for legal advisers, capacity building of traditional leaders and local structures,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document analysis • Interviews with implementing partners (Carter Center, LEON), embassy staff
Activity-ID: SE-0-SE-6-5209006701-LBR-15130	Phase 2: 2017-2023 USD 1,884,603	support for short and long-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus groups or interviews with

<u>The Carter</u> <u>Center Access to</u> <u>Justice 2 and</u> <u>LEON</u> (phase 2) Activity-ID: SE-0-SE-6-10051A0101-LBR-15220	term national observation (with the Liberia Election Observation Network, short: LEON), and policy support to harmonize the various legal systems and support for local dispute settlement mechanisms.	beneficiaries of the programme (local traditional leaders, community justice advisors, court magistrates) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visits of project sites in Gbarnga (Bong) and Ganta (Nimba)
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Source: The Authors

Table Ap 1-3 - CS2 – Peace and Security – Rule of Law Joint Programme

Title/Sida aid code(s)	Timeline & Budget	Brief description	Data collection
<u>UNDP/OHCHR</u> <u>Rule of Law Joint</u> <u>Programme</u> Activity-ID: SE-0-SE-6-5124004201-LBR-15130	2016-2021 USD 7,861,275	The programme strengthens key formal justice and security institutions by providing infrastructure and equipment while also building capacity through training to key personnel in the sector (judges, police officers, justice actors). The	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document analysis • Interviews with implementing partners (UNDP, OHCHR), embassy staff, policy partners. • Interviews with beneficiaries of the programme (national court administration, regional security hub administration,

	programme also supports at grassroots level through supporting NGOs in the justice sector and the provision of legal aid.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> lawyers, national police) • Visits of project sites (court-E, security hub) Gbarnga
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Source: The Authors

Table Ap 1-4 - CS3 – Peace and Security – Women’s Rights and Empowerment

Title/Sida aid code(s)	Timeline & Budget	Brief description	Data collection
<u>Kvinna til Kvinna - Enhancing Women's Rights and Empowerment</u>	2011-2017 USD 8,259,878	The project carries out capacity development of local partner organisations (CSOs) and sub grants to them to implement activities that empower women and promote women’s rights. A focus of activities is on women’s participation in decision making and peace building, prevention of gender-based violence, women’s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document analysis • Interviews with implementing partners (KtK), embassy staff • Group interview with cooperating CSOs and beneficiaries in Monrovia
Activity-ID: SE-0-SE-6-5124002801-LBR-15170	2016-2022 USD 554,717		

	economic empowerment and increased institutional networking, advocacy and thematic capacity of women's rights organisations.
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Source: The Authors

Table Ap 1-5 - CS4 – Land rights support

Title/Sida aid code(s)	Timeline & Budget	Brief description	Data collection
<u>Project 1: Core Support to Land Commission</u> SE-0-SE-6-5209002301-LBR-31130	2011-2018 Core Support to Land Commission: 2011-2013 USD 2,311,533	The Land commission projects provided core support to the Liberian Land Commission mainly to strengthen its secretariat's capacity for implementation of its action plan and strategy for reform on land issues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document analysis • Interviews with implementing partners (UN-HABITAT, Landmäteriet), embassy staff
<u>Project 2: UN HABITAT Support to Liberian Land Commission II</u> Activity-ID: SE-0-SE-6-5209002301-LBR-31130	Support to Land Commission: 2013-2018 USD 2,279,473 Fact Finding Mission to Liberia		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visits of Land Authority in Monrovia, interviews with involved personnel • Interviews with further stakeholders including Swedish CSO ForumSyd, Liberian civil society land rights experts
<u>Project 3: Lantmäteriet Fact Finding Mission to Liberia</u> Activity-ID : SE-0-SE-6-11993A0101-LBR-43031	2018 USD 32,098 Capacity Development in Land Administration	The Lantmäteriet project provides capacity development to the Liberian Land Authority.	

<u>Project 4:</u> <u>Lantmäteriet</u> <u>Capacity</u> <u>Development in</u> <u>Land</u> Administration Activity-ID: SE- 0-SE-6- 11699A0101- LBR-43031	2019-2024 USD 2,090,499	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross-referenced in interviews with rural beneficiaries of other projects & traditional leaders
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Source: The Authors. *The project documents from the first phase SE-0-SE-6-5209002301 were not available

Table Ap 1-6 - CS5 – Democracy and Human Rights - Decentralisation support

Title/Sida aid code(s)	Timeline & Budget	Brief description	Data collection
<u>UNDP - Liberia</u> <u>Decentralization</u> <u>Support Program</u> Activity-ID: SE-0-SE-6-5209003601-LBR-15112 Note: the case study design originally included two additional projects on community-based recovery and county support teams by UNDP. Data collection showed that they were not linked to	2015 – 2020 USD 5,338,522	The original case study approach assumed a connection between a community-based recovery and development programme (CBRD), County Support teams (CST) and more recently, County Service Centers (CSC). The Liberia Decentralisation support programme included works on implementing National Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document analysis • Interviews with implementing partners (UNDP), embassy staff • Interviews with political partners (ministry of Interior) • Visit of County Service Center in Kakata • Cross-referencing with business owners and beneficiaries of other projects regarding service decentralisation

Decentralisation support as previously assumed and as such were not included after all. No documents and interview partners were available.		on Decentralisation and Local Governance (NPDLG) launched in 2012, providing a framework for decentralisation of decision making and establishing county service centers for service delivery.
They are: Project 1: UNDP-GRC Liberia	Project 1: 2005-2006	
Activity-ID: SE-0-SE-6-7400281701-LBR-15110	Project 2: 2009-2012	
Project 2: UNDP CBRD, CST Liberia		
Activity-ID: SE-0-SE-6-5209000202-LBR-15110		

Source: The Authors

Table Ap 1-7 - CS6 – Democracy and Human Rights - Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

Title/Sida aid code(s)	Timeline & Budget	Brief description	Data collection
<u>Action Aid - Sexual & Reproductive Rights</u>	2019-2024 USD 2,749,606	The project aims to enhance the protection and rights of women,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document analysis

Activity-ID: SE-0-SE-6-5209006401-LBR-15160	girls and other groups facing discrimination in 45 communities in four counties in Liberia. The project addresses issues relating to sexual and reproductive health and rights including female genital mutilation and discrimination of sexual minorities, including respect for the human rights of LGBTI.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews with implementing partners (Action Aid), embassy staff • Focus groups or interviews with collaborating CSOs in Liberia • Visits of project sites in Monrovia (Montserrado) and Banga (Bong) • Treatment-control group comparison with DHS data
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Source: The Authors

Table Ap 1-8 - CS7 – Inclusive Economic Development – Markets/Value Chains

Title/Sida aid code(s)	Timeline & Budget	Brief description	Data collection
<u>Markets & Value Chains in Agriculture (now GROW) Liberia</u> Activity-ID: SE-0-SE-6-5209001101-LBR-31120	2012-2023 USD 25,882,254	The programme is a market system development programme that engages with actors along the agricultural value chain (in particular, cooperatives and governments) to address underlying causes of underperformance in the agricultural market system. It	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document analysis • Interviews with implementing partners (UNIDO), embassy staff • Visits of project sites in Bong and Nimba • Interviews or focus groups with

	aims to improve market conditions for farmers by improving transparency and information in the market, distribution networks, access to finance, price distortions, etc.	smallholders, and cooperatives as final beneficiaries
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Source: The Authors

Table Ap 1-9 - CS8* - Inclusive Economic Development - PROSPECTS

Title/Sida aid code(s)	Timeline & Budget	Brief description	Data collection
Project 1: <u>Support to PROSPECTS II, Mercy Corps</u>	Prospects 1: 2013-2014 USD 2,149,481	The project aims to improve economic opportunities for young people by providing on-the-job training, access to employment information, business skills training, grants to start micro-enterprises, as well as financial and business advisory support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document analysis • Interviews with implementing partners (Mercy Corps local and international team), embassy staff. • Interviews with beneficiaries. • Visits of businesses in Gbarnga (Bong) and Ganta (Nimba)
Activity-ID: SE-0-SE-6-5209006501-LBR-11231	Prospects 2: 2014-2017 USD 6,268,313		
Project 2: <u>Support to Prospects 3, Mercy Corps</u>	Prospects 3: 2017-2021 USD 5,497,250		
Activity-ID: SE-0-SE-6-10046A0101-LBR-11231			

Source: The Authors. *No documents were available on PROSPECTS 1

**Table Ap 1-10 -CS9* - Inclusive Economic Development -
Liberian-Swedish Feeder Road Project**

Title/Sida aid code(s)	Timeline & Budget	Brief description	Data collection
Project 1: <u>Liberian</u> <u>Swedish Feeder Roads Project</u> <u>phase 3</u>	Phase 1: 2009-2012 USD unclear	The project connects communities of small-scale farmers to the functioning road network and helps meet the service delivery, agricultural diversification and inclusive growth objectives set out in the current Economic Stabilisation and Recovery Plan (ESRP).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document analysis • Interviews with implementing partners (MPW), embassy staff and World Bank as implementer of the similar Infrastructure Trust Fund
Activity-ID: SE-0-SE-6-5209007401-LBR-21020	Phase 2: 2012-2016 USD 13.2m		
Project 2: <u>Support to LSFRP II</u> -	Phase 3: 2017-2024 USD 22.6m		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews with implementing national and international consultants, and Swansea university researcher
Activity-ID: SE-0-SE-6-5209001901-LBR-21020	The total budget could not be accurately assessed.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit of feeder roads in Nimba and Bong county • Interviews with roadside villagers
Project 2: <u>LSFRP II</u> -			
Activity-ID: SE-0-SE-6-52090019			
Auxiliary: Consultant for evaluation of feeder roads in Liberia SE-0-SE-6-51240036			
Auxiliary: Monitoring LSFRP II			
Activity-ID: SE-0-SE-6-51240001			

Source: The Authors. * No Documents were available for the first phase.

The following table gives an overview over the fit of the case studies to the selection criteria.

Table Ap 1-11 -Overview: the fit of case studies to selection criteria:

Issues addressed	The selection covers the portfolio broadly. All strategic areas are covered and thematic breadth within each area is given. Within results area 1, a focus is on formal institutions (case study 2), traditional institutions (case study 1) and SGBV (case study 3). Within results area 2, foci lie on land issues (case study 4), governance and decentralisation (case study 5) and SRHR (case study 6). Within results area 3, the selection covers agricultural value chains (case study 7), (youth) employment promotion (case study 8) and infrastructure (case study 9). Both projects with explicit gender focus and implicit focus are covered.
Feasibility	Secondary data sources on people's perception of (local) governance and institutions (Afrobarometer) and (sexual) health (DHS) can be used for triangulation. Involved people and particularly final beneficiaries are accessible for interviews in the case studies.
Key results hypotheses	The results hypotheses can all be addressed by the selection and their thematic coverage.
Evaluated timeframe	Only 5 projects were implemented under the first regional strategy (2004-2008). Of those, only the UNDP CBRD project could be included as later projects built upon it – de facto, however, this connection did not realise in data collection and the case had to be reduced. Where appropriate, a focus is on consecutive projects to cover the early period of the portfolio.
Added value	Available data can be used in the case studies and additional analyses on results are only carried out where no such analyses exist already.
Aid modalities and implementing partners	Different aid modalities and different types of implementing partners are part of the case studies.

Source: The Authors.

Data sources

In the case studies and the broad strategic analysis, the following primary data collection methods were used:

- Interviews with staff of Swedish government actors (Sida, Embassy), project partners & consultants, and beneficiaries in case studies and portfolio-wide for coherence analysis
- Interviews with politicians and policymakers in Liberia (case studies and beyond)
- Interviews with UN and EU representatives and other bilateral donors as well as thematic experts
- Online survey with implementing partners (albeit with challenges in data quality, see below)

The following secondary data points were used:

- Monitoring/ results data from projects, taken from results reporting (conclusions on performance, completion memos)

Available project documents and evaluations relevant for each case study:

- Liberia government strategies
- Grey literature, such as donor reports, country analyses, policy documents
- Selected media sources
- Secondary household data:
 - Afrobarometer: This contains relevant outcome data on perceptions around (local) government, institutions, dispute resolution, etc.
 - Demographic & Health Survey: This data source contains relevant outcome data on SGBV, women's empowerment, rights, etc.

- Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project Data: This data source contains granular data on incidents of violence and unrest.

Online Survey

The online survey aimed to gather the perspective of a broad range of implementing partners on the evaluation questions, in particular on the appropriateness of Swedish strategies and portfolio, on results achievement, and on coordination. After development and internal quality control, the survey was sent to 66 implementing partners (see table below). After three weeks and several reminders, a total of 27 valid responses were recorded. Within the 27 responses, many questions have been left blank, leading to small sample sizes for most questions. The low response rate was likely due to the following reasons:

- For many partners, the embassy did not have (current) contact details. Through online research by the evaluation team, some additional e-mail addresses could be identified. However, in many cases these were general organisation-wide inboxes and thus not personal email addresses of the people involved in the projects.
- Additionally, even where contact details existed, these mainly comprised current employees and staff of current projects. Due to the usual high turnover in the sector, their knowledge of past projects was generally limited. An applied snowball approach to find more staff from relevant time periods was only partially successful as many staff had left their previous organisation.

Therefore, results from the survey were only used to inform findings, not to confirm them.

Table Ap 1-12 - Implementing partners targeted by the survey

Name:
Accountability Lab Liberia-Peace
ACF/Action Contre la Faim, France
Act Svenska Kyrkan
ActionAid International
Adam Smith International Ltd
AIFO/Associazione Italiana Amici di Raoul Follereau
Caritas Liberia
CENTAL/Center for Transparency and Accountability in Liberia
CI/Conservation International
Devfin Advisers AB
DKT International
DRC
ECOWAS/Economic Community of West African States
FAO/Food and Agriculture Organization
FBA/Folke Bernadotte Academy
FCG Swedish Development AB
ForumCiv (f d Forum Syd)
HD Centre
IBRD/International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
IDLO/International Development Law Organization
IFC/International Finance Corporation
ILC/International Land Coalition
IMF/International Monetary Fund
International Alert
Internationella Insamlingsstiftelsen för Mark och Skogsrättigheter
IRC-UK
KIT Health & Education
Kvinna till Kvinna
Lantmäteriet
LDA/Liberia Dujar Association
LRDC/Liberia Reconstruction and Development Company
Mercy Corps Europe
MSB/Myndigheten för samhällsskydd och beredskap

MSF/Médecins Sans Frontières
NDI/National Democratic Institute for International Affairs
NEFCO/Nordic Environment Finance Corporation
NIRAS Sweden AB
Nordic Consulting Group – NCG Sweden AB
NRC
ODI
OHCHR/Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
Oxfam
Plan Liberia
Plan Sweden
PMU Interlife
RFSU/Riksförbundet för sexuell upplysning
Rights and Resources Institute Inc
Save the Children
SDI/Slum Shack Dwellers International
Search for Common Ground
Skatteverket
SMC/Swedish Mission Council
Swedish Red Cross
The AECF/Africa Enterprise Challenge Fund
The Carter Center Inc
The World Bank
U4
UNDP/United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA/United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF/United Nations Children's Fund
UNIDO/United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNWOMEN/United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the
Empowerment of Women
WFP/World Food Programme
World Wide Web Foundation
WTO/World Trade Organization
ZOA

Source: The Authors

Conflict and gender sensitivity

Liberia is a post-conflict country and Sweden's portfolio of development cooperation includes many conflict-related projects. To this end:

- The evaluation team was trained on trauma-sensitive methods.
- The approach followed the do-no-harm principle, considered potential consequences of evaluation interviews (e.g. retraumatising when evoking certain issues) and ensured that adverse consequences were avoided.
- The evaluation team carefully considered the type and formulation of questions and emphasis on the voluntary nature of interviews.

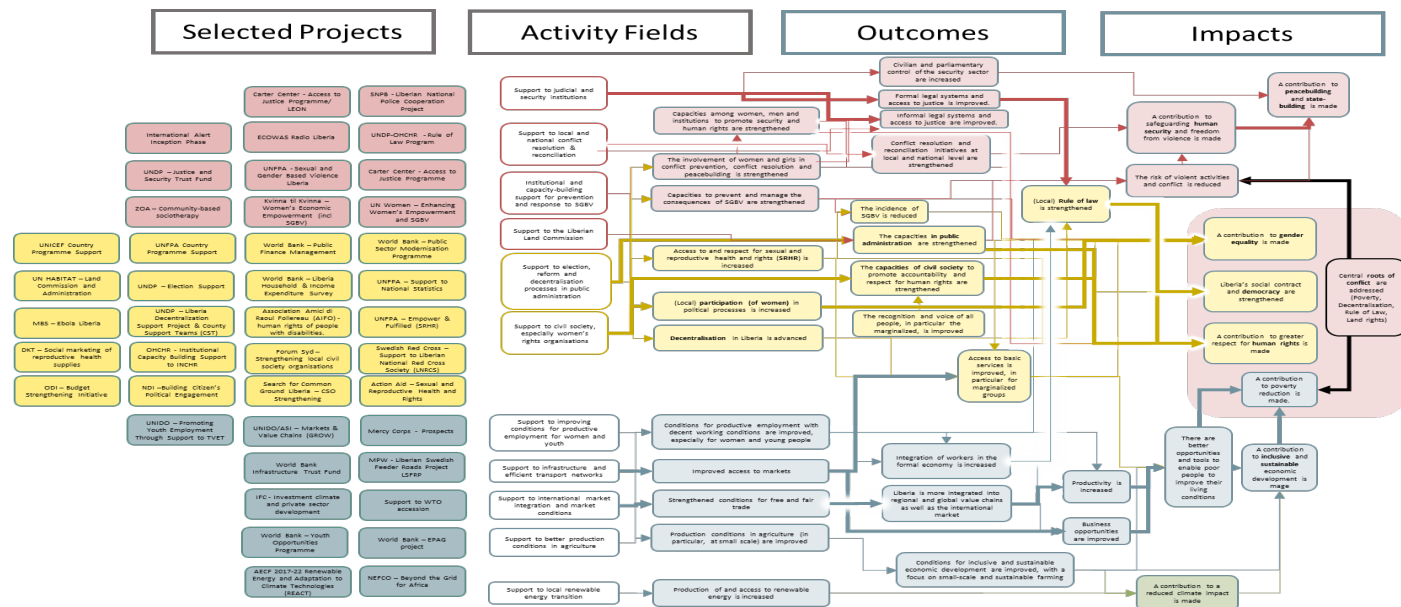
The following aspects constituted the evaluation team's gender-sensitive evaluation approach:

Gender plays an important role in the evaluation, both as a cross-cutting issue to be evaluated (as object of the evaluation), as well as in our methodological approach (gender-sensitivity):

- The evaluation team was mixed gender and consulted on all important products with Syspons gender experts.
- The evaluation team made sure to have fair representation of all genders as our interview partners.
- In interviews (in particular on sensitive topics such as SRHR and SGBV), gender dynamics were considered and an appropriate approach was taken (e.g. selection and formulation of questions, emphasising voluntary nature of responding to questions, etc.)
- Data was disaggregated by gender wherever useful for the analysis.

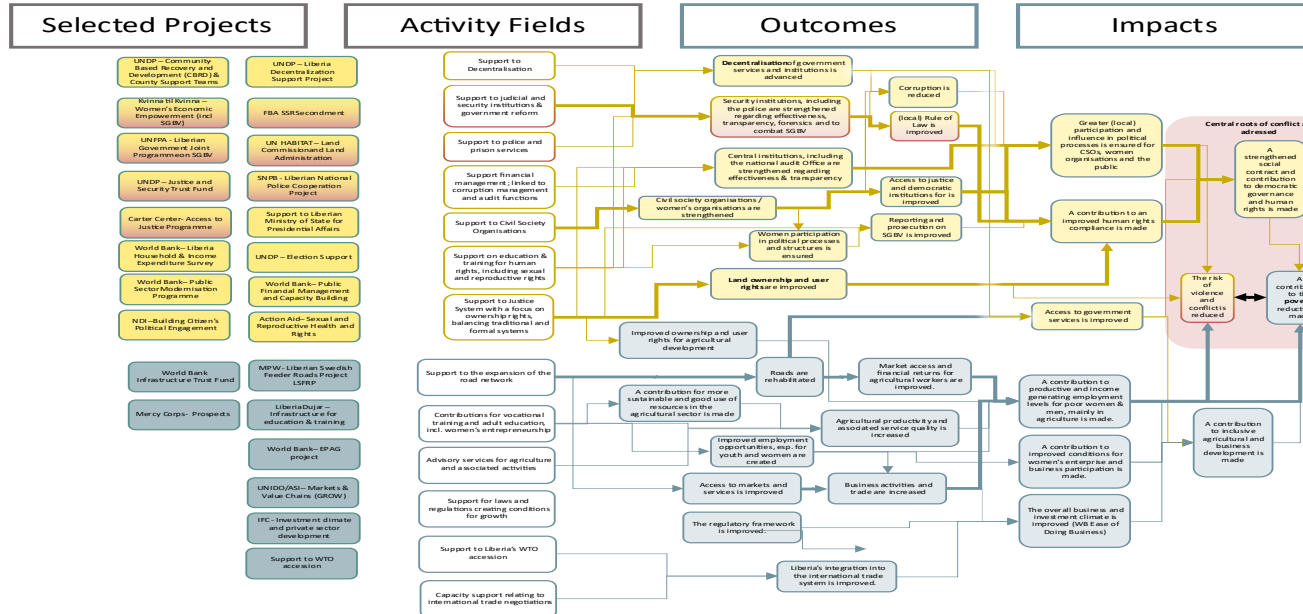
Appendix 2 – Theories of Change

Figure Ap 2-1 – Theory of Change - 2016 – 2020 strategy



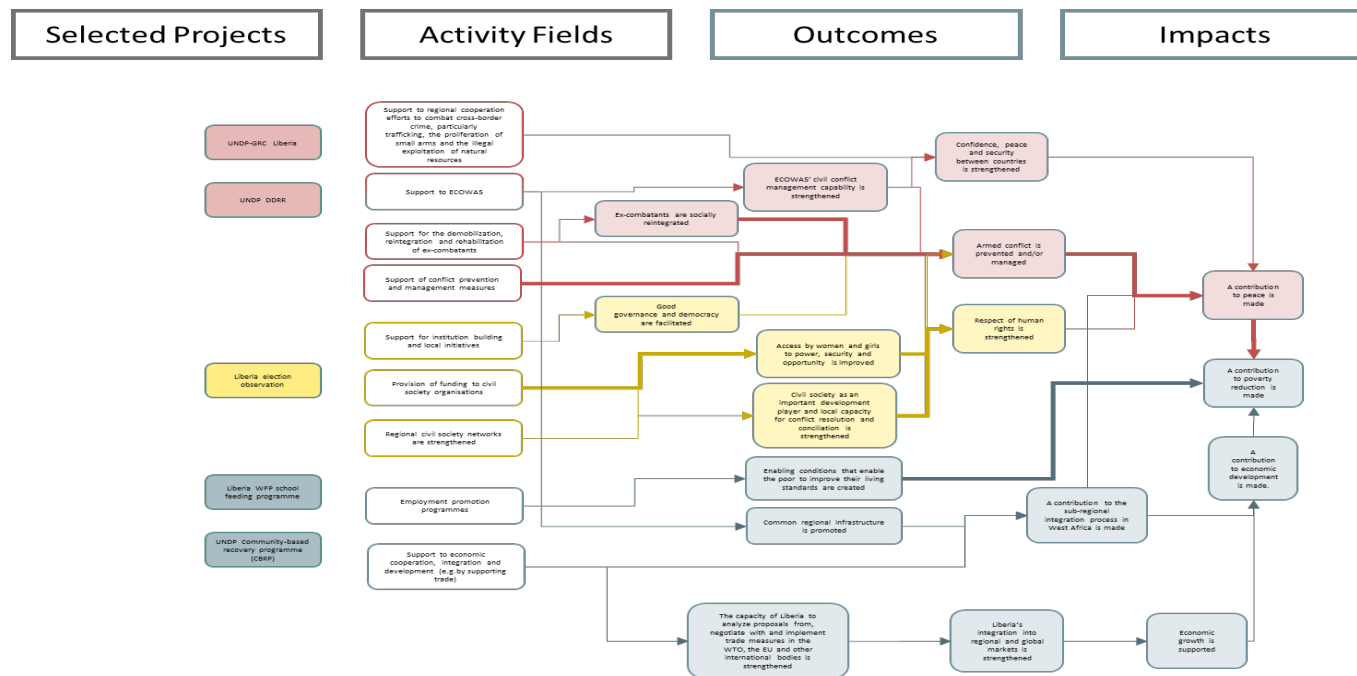
Source: The Authors

Figure Ap 2-2 – Theory of Change - 2008 – 2013 strategy (extended to 2015)



Source: The Authors

Figure Ap 2-3 – Theory of Change - 2004 – 2006 (regional) strategy – Liberia



Source: The Authors

Appendix 3 – Interviewee list

Text Reference	Type of Interview	Detail
Int_1	Project Officer	Embassy of Sweden
Int_2	Project Officer	Swedish head of DC in Liberia
Int_3	Project Officer	Embassy of Sweden
Int_4	Implementing Partner	UNFPA
Int_5	Other Actors	UN WOMEN
Int_6	Implementing Partner	UNDP
Int_7	Political Partner	Ministry of Justice Government of Liberia
Int_8	Project Officer	Embassy of Sweden
Int_9	Beneficiary	County Service Center Coordinator, Decentralisation Support
Int_10	Beneficiaries	Cooperative Manager, Markets & Value Chains Beneficiary
Int_11	Beneficiaries	CBO member, Action Aid
Int_12	Beneficiaries	Judiciary, RoL Joint Programme
Int_13	Beneficiaries	Mercy Corps Prospects Grant Beneficiary
Int_14	Implementing Partner	Forum Civ
Int_15	Beneficiaries	Bong County Security Hub
Int_16	Beneficiaries	Bong County Attorney
Int_17	Beneficiaries	Mercy Corps Prospects Beneficiary
Int_18	Beneficiaries	Traditional Leaders, Access to Justice
Int_19	Beneficiaries	Cooperative, Markets & Value Chains Beneficiary
Int_20	Beneficiaries	Cooperative, Markets & Value Chains Beneficiary
Int_21	Beneficiaries	Mercy Corps Prospects Beneficiary
Int_22	Implementing Partner	Former County Dispute Resolution Manager, Access to Justice

Int_23	Beneficiaries	Community Justice Advisor, Access to Justice
Int_24	Beneficiaries	CBO member, Action Aid
Int_25	Project Officer	Embassy of Sweden
Int_26	Implementing Partner	Former Carter Center
Int_27	Project Officer	Embassy of Sweden
Int_28	Implementing Partner	West Point Women Development Organization (WPWHDO), KtK Partner
Int_29	Political Partner	Ministry of the Interior, Government of Liberia
Int_30	Implementing Partner	UNDP RoL Joint Programme
Int_31	Other Actor	UNFPA
Int_32	Implementing Partner	UNDP Decentralisation
Int_33	Implementing Partner	UNFPA
Int_34	Other Actor	EU delegation
Int_35	Implementing Partner	Carter Center
Int_36	Implementing Partner	Kvinna-til-Kvinna
Int_37	Implementing Partner	UNIDO Markets & Value Chains
Int_38	Beneficiaries	Women NGO Secretariat of Liberia (WONGOSOL)
Int_39	Beneficiaries	Nengbein-Yelekorlee Road, Feeder Roads Beneficiaries
Int_40	Project Officer	Embassy of Sweden
Int_41	Project Officer	Embassy of Sweden
Int_42	Implementing Partner	Liberia Land Authority
Int_43	Other Actor	USAID Liberia
Int_44	Implementing Partner	Institute For Research and Democratic Development
Int_45	Political Partner	Liberian Supreme Court RoL Joint Programme
Int_46	Other Actor	Liberian Civil Society Organisation
Int_47	Political Partner	Ministry of Public Works
Int_48	Implementing Partner	Mercy Corps
Int_49	Implementing Partner	Liberian National Police

Int_50	Other Actor	Liberian Civil Society Organisation
Int_51	Implementing Partner	ActionAid Liberia
Int_52	Other Actor	Embassy of Ireland
Int_53	Other Actor	Liberian Civil Society Organisation
Int_54	Other Actor	Former World Bank Director
Int_55	Project Officer	Swedish head of DC in Liberia
Int_56	Project Officer	Swedish head of DC in Liberia
Int_57	Implementing Partner	Swansea University/FCG Sweden
Int_58	Project Officer	FBA
Int_59	Project Officer	Embassy of Sweden
Int_60	Other Actor	UN WOMEN
Int_61	Implementing Partner	UNIDO Vienna
Int_62	Implementing Partner	Kvinna-til-Kvinna
Int_63	Project Officer	Embassy of Sweden
Int_64	Implementing Partner	Mercy Corps
Int_65	Project Officer	Embassy of Sweden
Int_66	Implementing Partner	Feeder Roads
Int_67	Implementing Partner	Liberian Civil Society Organisation (Carter Center Partner)
Int_68	Implementing Partner	Liberian Civil Society Organisation (Carter Center Partner)
Int_69	Implementing Partner	Swansea University
Int_70	Implementing Partner	Lantmäteriet
Int_71	Project Officer	Embassy of Sweden
Int_72	Project Officer	Sida
Int_73	Project Officer	Sida
Int_74	Project Officer	Swedish head of DC in Liberia
Int_75	Project Officer	Embassy of Sweden
Int_76	Project Officer	Swedish head of DC in Liberia
Int_77	Other Actor	UNMIL
Int_78	Project Officer	Sida
Int_79	Project Officer	Sida

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This evaluation investigates the long-term results, sustainability, relevance, coherence and coordination of Swedish long-term development cooperation with Liberia. It also summarises the most important lessons for future development cooperation. We believe it will be of use to policy makers, Sida, the Swedish Embassy in Liberia as well as to other development actors.

Denna utvärdering undersöker de långsiktiga resultaten, hållbarheten, relevansen, samstämmigheten och samordningen i svenskt utvecklings-samarbetet med Liberia. Den sammanfattar också de viktigaste lärdomarna inför framtida samarbeten. Vi tror att rapporten kommer att vara av värde för Sida, svenska ambassaden i Liberia samt för andra utvecklingsaktörer och beslutsfattare.