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**"Whether Rich or Poor, I Have
the Same Rights as a Human Being"**

**A Report on a Series of 13 Focus Groups
Conducted in Liberia by The Carter Center**

May 10 to May 25, 1998

This research project was conducted under a grant from the
United States Agency for International Development.

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Preface

The Carter Center's involvement in Liberia dates to 1990, when Liberian and other leaders in the region invited the Center to assist in efforts to facilitate a peaceful resolution of Liberia's brutal civil war. The war began on December 24, 1989, when Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) launched a rebellion against Samuel Doe's authoritarian regime. Between 1991 and 1996, President Carter and Carter Center staff made numerous trips to the region and met with leaders of the various interim governments, faction leaders, members of Liberian civil society, and others, in attempts to forge a workable peace agreement. In 1992, the Center opened a field office in Monrovia to support its efforts, including both high-level involvement of President Carter, as well as grassroots work to promote community development and peace-building dialogue among Liberians. The office was temporarily closed in late 1992 when NPFL troops launched surprise attacks on forces guarding Monrovia. The office reopened in March 1993 and remained in operation until fighting in Monrovia again forced its closure in April 1996.

In August 1996, after many failed attempts at peace, the Abuja Peace Accord was signed under the auspices of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The Abuja Accord called for elections in 1997, and opened the door for The Carter Center to implement a multifaceted project including both election observation and assessment, and human rights monitoring and training. After several delays in the electoral process, elections were finally held on July 19, 1997, and Charles Taylor won the presidency with over 75 percent of the vote.

The Carter Center observer delegation, which was led by former President Jimmy Carter, former President Nicephore Soglo of Benin, and former U.S. Senator Paul Simon, concluded that while there were some problems, particularly with the registration list, inequitable access to the media and financial resources, and inadequate voter education, these problems were not sufficiently serious to have altered the people's opportunity to select their leaders. More broadly, the Center concluded that the elections needed to be assessed in the context of the larger peace process, and the common fears of many Liberians that the war would resume if Charles Taylor were not elected. While a final assessment of whether the 1997 elections served as the beginning of a democratic era will have to wait the future, the new order has created an opportunity for rival groups to play their roles as political forces within a legal and constitutional framework.

Now over a year since the elections, Liberia has a legitimate elected government, a small but active human rights community, and the basic elements of a free press. Hundreds of thousands of refugees and internally displaced people are also returning to their homes and villages throughout the countryside.

As Liberia has moved slowly and sometimes painfully toward peace and stability, The Carter Center has attempted to re-examine its programming and the larger role of the Center and the international community in Liberia. Although the Center's previous work on conflict resolution, election mediation, and human rights necessitated a focus on the Liberian elite in Monrovia, the Center has resolved to broaden the impact of its future programs and to ensure that our work has greater relevance to ordinary men, women and children throughout Liberia.

The focus group study described in this working paper represents one aspect of the Center's continuing effort to adapt and improve our programs in Liberia. The study was done by Brent Preston, an independent public opinion research consultant, who organized and implemented a series of thirteen focus groups with ordinary Liberians throughout the country between May 10 and May 25, 1998. The discussions were designed to assess the attitudes of ordinary Liberians on human rights, economic and community development, access to information, the security forces and local leadership.

The study and its findings, particularly concerning Liberians' sense of isolation and powerlessness, helped the Center focus our sights in some important new directions. As a result, the Center plans to work with a number of Liberian human rights organizations to try to improve local capacity for monitoring human rights and for seeking redress for human rights abuses, and to strengthen our efforts in rural Liberia. In addition, the Center is planning several programs to support the development of independent media.

The research described in this report was funded under a grant from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES). While the primary purpose of the study was to assist The Carter Center in developing future programs, the information gathered should be of interest to all those working for a better future in Liberia. In this context, it is our hope that the findings of the focus group study reported in this Working Paper will help bring the voices of ordinary Liberians into the debate over Liberia's future and will help ensure that the international community plays a constructive role in promoting the rights of all Liberians.

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I INTRODUCTION

The Carter Center conducted a series of 13 focus group discussions throughout Liberia from May 10 to May 25, 1998. The research project described in this report was designed and supervised by Brent Preston, an independent public opinion research consultant, and Carter Center staff in Liberia and Atlanta. The focus groups were designed to assess the attitudes and opinions of ordinary Liberians on human rights, development priorities, the security forces, access to information and local leadership. The discussions were designed to address the following specific questions:

- What are the most significant problems faced by ordinary Liberians, and what are people's highest priorities?
- To what extent do Liberians understand concepts such as human rights and the rule of law, and what do Liberians perceive to be their most important rights?
- Do Liberians believe that their human rights are abused, and if so, who is responsible for the abuse of their rights?
- Who are the most important leaders in Liberian communities, and to what extent do people believe that they can influence the political process in Liberia?
- What are the most important sources of information for ordinary Liberians, and how do people wish to receive information on human rights, democracy and political development in the future?

A focus group is a semi-structured discussion on specific topics with a group of six to 12 participants, led by an experienced moderator. Focus group research is internationally recognized as a reliable means of collecting qualitative data, and focus groups have been an important tool in marketing, social science and political research for several decades. Focus groups are increasingly used in Africa in the fields of political development and program design because they are relatively inexpensive and easily understood and accepted in African societies that place emphasis on oral communication and consensus within communities. Focus groups also enjoy several advantages over conventional qualitative surveys in Africa because they do not require complex random sampling processes to select participants and they allow for a more thoughtful examination of western terms and concepts that are often difficult to translate.

The Carter Center recruited and trained ten moderators to conduct the discussions. The 13 discussions were conducted in a total of eight languages in seven counties. Participants were selected on the basis of age, level of education, language, experience during the war (displaced or non-displaced) and employment status. Every effort was made to assemble homogenous groups with participants of similar age, language and

social status. Separate groups were held with men and women in rural areas. Please see section IV at the end of this report for a full description of the project methodology.

This report was written by research consultant Brent Preston, and contains an Executive Summary of the major findings, as well as a detailed analysis of the focus group data. The quotes included in this report are drawn directly from the verbatim transcripts of the discussions, and represent the common perceptions or opinions of the participants, except where otherwise stated.

II EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Carter Center conducted 13 focus group discussions throughout Liberia with a total of 124 participants between May 10 and May 25, 1998. This focus group research project was designed through a consultative process with Liberian human rights NGOs, senior officials of the Government of Liberia, elected representatives, US government officials resident in Liberia and members of international organizations. The discussions were designed to assess the attitudes of ordinary Liberians on human rights, economic and community development, access to information, the security forces and local leadership.

The vast majority of those who took part in the discussions participated actively and had much to say on the topics introduced by the moderators. Opinions varied between groups, but there was a high degree of consensus within each discussion, and the data reveal several major themes common to all groups, regardless of the age, gender, ethnic background or level of education of the participants.

A. MAJOR FINDINGS

- Participants believe that the war is over and that Liberia is moving toward a period of peace, reconciliation and rebuilding, but many participants are living under extremely difficult conditions and lack the basic necessities of life.
- Participants are primarily concerned with rebuilding their communities, educating their children and meeting the basic needs of their families.
- The current government enjoys a high degree of legitimacy among participants from all parts of the country, and participants are happy to have an elected president and a unified nation.
- Participants in all parts of the country understand that they have certain basic, inalienable rights, and they expect the government to ensure that these rights are protected.
- Participants have a broad definition of human rights, including the right to life, freedom of movement, freedom of expression, the right to education and employment, and the right to pursue economic opportunities.
- For many participants, the concept of human rights is closely linked to the existence of human rights organizations and effective means of seeking redress for human rights abuses.
- Participants in areas outside of Monrovia have a profound sense of isolation, and participants in all areas feel powerless in the face of human rights abuses.

- Participants believe that lack of communication and outside scrutiny allows human rights abuses to continue. Participants do not believe that they have the ability to influence elected officials or government leaders, despite a strong desire to do so.
- The radio is seen as the most important source of information by most participants. Rural participants have a very strong desire for improved access to the radio and for more radio stations to broadcast in their areas. Having radio stations broadcast to and report on rural areas is seen by many participants as an effective way to improve the human rights climate in their areas.
- Participants in many parts of the country continue to live in a state of fear and do not believe that their basic rights are protected. Participants in other areas now feel that they enjoy basic rights and freedoms and are no longer harassed or intimidated by others.
- Participants say their rights are abused by a wide range of individuals and organizations, including the security forces, private corporations, ordinary citizens, criminals, ex-combatants and even NGOs. Participants do not think of human rights simply in terms of government abuse and excess.
- Fear of abuse leads many participants to restrict their activities and stifles free expression and movement. Participants also state that fear of extortion, theft and corruption prevents them from pursuing economic opportunities and discourages entrepreneurial initiative.
- Participants in many areas are fearful of the security forces and are unhappy with the performance of the army and police since the war. In other areas participants have positive views of the security forces. Urban participants are harshly critical of the security forces and believe that the police are corrupt, incompetent and the perpetrators of violent crime.
- Participants see corruption as pervasive, unfair and extremely destructive, and believe that the security forces, government officials, elected representatives and NGO workers are often corrupt and subject to manipulation by wealthy individuals.
- The courts are perceived to be especially corrupt and ineffective, and participants go to great lengths to avoid dealings with the formal legal system.
- Chiefs are by far the most important local leaders for rural participants. Rural communities are well organized, and local leaders such as chiefs, elders, youth leaders, and women leaders have a high degree of legitimacy in the eyes of most participants.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings listed above suggest several recommendations:

- Local and international human rights organizations should focus their efforts on helping to monitor, document and publicize human rights abuses, seek redress for those whose rights are abused and ensure abusers are held accountable, rather than seeking simply to provide human rights education.
- Local human rights organizations should work to establish a presence in rural areas and to provide practical assistance, advice and guidance to those whose rights are abused. All political actors in Liberia should recognize the importance of chiefs and village-based systems of authority in rural areas and utilize such community structures to improve communication with rural Liberians.
- Efforts should be made to ensure that independent radio stations are able to extend their broadcast range beyond Monrovia and central Liberia, and that media workers are able to report on all parts of the country. Efforts should also be made to help Liberians overcome the economic constraints on access to radio broadcasts.
- The government should take urgent action to restrain those members of the security forces who abuse the rights of Liberian citizens. The government should conduct a high-profile national restructuring and training exercise for all branches of the security forces, and should recognize that Liberians want and expect the international community to be involved in such an exercise. The international community should in turn support a restructuring and training exercise.
- Local and international human rights organizations should recognize that the government security forces are not the only abusers of human rights in Liberia and should work to ensure that all abusers of human rights are held accountable for their actions. The actions of logging companies in the south-east of the country should be singled out for special scrutiny and those found to be breaking the law should be prosecuted publicly and vigorously.
- The negative economic effects of human rights abuses should be recognized, and steps should be taken to ensure that all Liberians are able to pursue economic and community development activities in an atmosphere free of harassment and extortion.
- Urgent action should be taken to rid the justice system of corruption, especially among Magistrates and Justices of the Peace. Human rights organizations should not look solely to the courts for redress for human rights abuses, given the extreme reluctance of many Liberians to involve themselves with the formal legal system. Alternative means of seeking redress, such as media advocacy, negotiation for restitution and the promotion of reconciliation, should be examined. International

organizations should examine the possibility of strengthening and improving the traditional justice system, rather than working only with the formal justice system.

- Steps should be taken to reduce the gulf between elected representatives, government officials and ordinary citizens, and elected representatives should be aware of the fact that their constituents want and expect direct communication with their Senators and Representatives. The current system of proportional representation should be critically examined in light of the strong desire to directly elect individual representatives in the future.

III DETAILED FINDINGS

A. INTRODUCTION

Participants in all parts of the country believe that the war is over and look forward to a period of peace, reconstruction and development. In many discussions, the participants were extremely reluctant to discuss the possibility of a return to war and preferred to talk about their determination to develop their communities and prepare their children for the future. A large proportion of the participants were recently-returned refugees, and these participants are very happy to be back in Liberia. After the horrors of the war and the degradation of being a refugee, participants are hoping for a stable and prosperous future.

When you suffered and cut your wood to make fire to cook something for you and the family, the Ivorian would swear to you that you should put the wood down. ... They would always say "Put the wood down, you did not bring wood with you from Liberia" in French. ... Some of these worries made us to look very old. We are not that old, but the hard times have made us to look old. Now we have come home, to our own town. I am very, very happy. ... It is sweet to be in your own country, and now I am in my own country. Thanks be to God.

Female Participant, Grand Gedeh

Participants are also proud of Liberia's electoral process and are happy to have an elected president and government. The current government enjoys a high degree of legitimacy and participants in all parts of the country are glad that Liberia is now a unified nation.

B. QUALITY OF LIFE

Many participants are living under extremely difficult conditions and lack the basic necessities of life. Both rural and urban participants complain of severe hardship, and do not think that their situation has improved significantly since the end of the war. As one participant said "*The war is over, but here in Maryland we are fighting a war of hunger and struggling to find employment.*" Some of the major problems mentioned by rural participants include lack of food and safe drinking water, lack of access to education, poor roads and lack of transportation, lack of health facilities and drugs, lack of employment opportunities, inflation, and lack of farming implements and seed rice. Urban participants complain of unemployment, lack of educational opportunities and the drastic erosion of real wages over the last decade. A large proportion of the female participants were widowed during the war, and many are caring for large numbers of orphaned children.

Few participants are strongly optimistic in the face of such pressing problems. There is widespread resignation to the fact that Liberia's problems will not be solved overnight, and many look to NGOs and the international community for assistance. Participants

hope that the government will also come to their aid, but expectations of the government are surprisingly low.

We have fallen on the ground, and I believe that for some of us to get up and stand it will be in our graves. Our only hope is for assistance to help us stand, especially external assistance, because assistance from the government is not forthcoming. ... Although our hearts are aching, when you think about it, the government is facing great problems.

Male Participant, Gbanga

The cautious optimism and hope for a better future seen in some of the rural groups is not reflected by the urban participants. Many urban participants feel helpless in the face of unemployment and a declining standard of living, and some are extremely pessimistic.

We have become destitute in our own homes. For me, I do not have a family anymore because I have reached the stage where I cannot even sustain myself. I cannot afford to pay my rent, I cannot afford to pay my transportation to work. ... This has made me to lose my family. They are scattered here and there. I live alone. As old as I am, I must get my own water, do everything on my own.

Male Participant, Monrovia Mixed Group

Despite severe hardship and a desire for assistance from NGOs and the government, participants have a strong desire for self-sufficiency and do not wish to remain dependent on aid. Participants place an extremely high value on education and see formal schooling as the key to ensuring a better future for themselves and their children. A young participant in Gbanga said *“What we really want in this town is a school. ... For one to advance in life, you must first learn something.”* while a woman in Lofa echoed the sentiment of many participants when she said *“Our children are what we worry about now. For us we are blind (illiterate), but our children must learn.”* In Nimba, one participant said simply *“School brings freedom.”*

Participants usually blame the war, rather than the government, for the many problems they now face, with one notable exception. The problems associated with the two currencies in Liberia are a major concern, and a source of much criticism of the government. In almost every group, participants complained bitterly of unfair exchange rates and the increasing mutilation of JJ banknotes. There is a strong perception that the government can and should impose a standardized exchange rate between JJ and Liberty banknotes immediately, and should find a permanent solution to the currency problem as soon as possible. As one woman in Maryland said *“This currency business is giving us hard time in Liberia.”*

C. HUMAN RIGHTS

The primary objective of this study was to explore popular perceptions of human rights and to determine what rights and freedoms Liberians feel they are entitled to. During the consultations conducted as part of the design phase of this study, several of those interviewed expressed the opinion that Liberians, especially those who live in rural areas, are largely ignorant of their rights, and that public education is a necessary first step in improving the human rights climate in the country. The results of the focus groups do not support this belief. Participants in all parts of the country understand that they have certain basic rights and freedoms, and that these rights are inalienable. Many participants recognize the English term “human rights,” and there are several widely-recognized vernacular translations for the terms “rights” and “human rights.” The right to life, freedom of movement, freedom of speech and the right to pursue economic activities were the rights most frequently mentioned during the discussions.

I believe that my most important human right is freedom of expression, to the extent of even criticizing the government if it is not doing the right thing. To speak your guts and to be at peace with your conscience.

Male Participant, Gbanga

Without freedom we can't travel anywhere, we cannot travel as we wish from place to place. We need free movement because we feel it is the right of any citizen to go wherever he decides.

Male Participant, Maryland

Human Rights means that in the morning I can go on my farm and break wood without anyone stopping me. I can go anywhere in this country and no one will stop me. I can go in the bush and find food and no one will stop me.

Female Participant, Lofa

Broad Definition of Human Rights

Participants have a broad definition of human rights that includes the basic rights and freedoms mentioned above, as well as the right to education, the right to employment and fair wages, and the right to receive relief items from the government, NGOs and the international community. Participants do not make strong distinctions between the economic, political and human rights problems they face, and correspondingly see human rights as a set of conditions under which they would be able to lead independent, unmolested and relatively prosperous lives.

All human beings have rights. The right to go to school, the right to live, the right to seek medical attention, the right to move about freely. Whether rich or poor, I have the same rights as a human being.

Male Participant, Monrovia

Since I returned, there is no job. We have the right to work and get money. Right now you can not work to get money. There are no job facilities, so our rights have been abused.

Male Participant, Grand Gedeh

Human Rights, Human Rights Organizations, and Redress for Abuses

For many participants, the concept of human rights is closely linked to the existence of human rights organizations and effective means of seeking redress when their rights are violated. This correlation was clearly revealed when participants were asked to define the term “human rights” as an introduction to the human rights portion of the discussion. For some, the definitions of the terms “human rights” and “human rights organizations” are virtually one in the same.

What I know about human rights is that human rights is responsible for the rights of all people in Liberia. If someone is taking advantage of you or threatening your life, human rights people will talk on your behalf.

Female Participant, Grand Gedeh

For others, having advocates to defend their rights and receiving redress when their rights are violated are important components of their understanding of human rights in general.

The thing they call human rights, for example, when you do a bad thing to me and it hurts me, I go to the government and report it and get best (receive redress). Then my rights come to me.

Male Participant, Lofa

I understand human rights to mean that every man has the same rights. Now, if someone infringes on your rights, people will be there to defend you. That is human rights.

Male Participant, Nimba

Human Rights and Short-Wave Radio

The association of human rights with human rights organizations and advocates seems to have been strongly influenced by the radio, especially international short-wave stations such as the BBC and VOA. Many participants talk about hearing interviews with human rights activists and hearing about human rights violations in other African countries. A male participant in Nimba said “Usually when you listen to the radio, you hear about the violation of human rights. When a new government takes office, the government is suspicious, so they jail you, even though you did not commit any crime.” For rural participants who do not have access to independent Liberian radio stations, perceptions of human rights have been shaped more by individuals, organizations and events outside of Liberia than by those within the country.

Women's Rights

The focus group discussions show that most participants know their rights and recognize when they have been violated, with one notable exception: the area of women's rights. Both male and female participants in rural areas believe that men have more rights than women, and that this situation will not and should not change in the foreseeable future. This exchange between a group of women in Nimba is typical:

Moderator *Do men and women have the same rights in your village?*

Participant 1 *No.*

P2 *We ask the men for approval.*

P3 *God made women to respect men and look up to them. Men have more power.*

Many participants mentioned the bible as part of their justification of the suppression of women by men. A participant in Grand Gedeh summed up the attitude of many male participants by saying *"From the beginning, when Adam and Eve were in the garden, God told the man that he is the boss man for women. So we still continue that."*

Despite the fact that most believe that women have less rights than men, participants make an interesting distinction between the rights of women in the home and their rights in the job market or political arena. Both male and female participants believe that women should be able to go to school, seek higher education, occupy senior positions in companies and the government and seek high elected office. However, rural men say that even an educated, employed women should be under the control of her husband when in the home.

When a woman learns and knows a particular job, she should be given the opportunity to do such a job. She has the right to do any job, but when she is at home she is under her husband. If she want's to be above you, bend her down and knock her on the back and tell her not to do so.

Male Participant, Gbanga

Urban participants state that men and women should enjoy equal rights both in society and within marriages. Participants, including some in rural areas, contrast what they see as rural, traditional and backward attitudes with the modern, desirable relationship between the sexes in urban areas. There is a feeling among urban participants that women have made great strides in Monrovia, and that equality between men and women is an inevitable consequence of the evolution and modernization of Liberian society in general.

D. ISOLATION

Participants in areas outside of Monrovia have a profound sense of isolation, and feel cut off from the rest of the country. The lack of communication facilities and postal service, lack of access to radio broadcasts, extremely poor road conditions and the absence or extreme expense of transportation all contribute to this feeling of isolation. Participants in all parts of the country feel powerless in the face of human rights abuses.

We don't even have a radio in this town. When we hear the sound of an airplane we feel happy just because we hear a sound. ... We don't have a radio, nothing to bring news to us. We don't know what is going on in Monrovia.

Female Participant, Grand Gedeh

At night I am afraid because at night, anytime someone can burst into your home and kill you. And nothing comes of it. So we are living in fear. We don't have no power.

Male Participant, Monrovia Mixed Group

Isolation and Human Rights Abuses

These feelings of isolation and powerlessness are mutually reinforcing and lead participants to believe that they are unable to defend themselves against human rights abuses. There is a strong feeling among rural participants that those who might be able to help defend their rights are unaware of the abuses that participants endure, yet communication and transportation problems prevent the participants from telling people outside their communities what is going on. The abusers of human rights subsequently go unpunished and develop a feeling of impunity, and continue to abuse the rights of others. This cycle is described in the following excerpt from a discussion with a group of men in Lofa:

M *Oldman, you have not said anything. When they say "humans rights," what comes in your heart?*

P1 *Human rights, human rights is like the way we seated the government of Taylor. He shouldn't think that since he is the President, when he does wrong that we are not able to tell him. Or when someone does something wrong that he (the President) knows to be wrong, he should not think he is President, and instead of apologizing, his people apologize to him, and you who is not wrong they take your rights and give them to the other person and say he is right.*

M *Are they doing that in this town?*

P2 *Yes, in (the major town in the area) as well as other places. ... Whatever comes,*

they (NGOs) send it to (the major town) and we don't get it: food, dishes, cutlasses, cloth, soap. Whatever they want they use, and what they send to us is small.

M *Is that so?*

Group *Yes.*

M *What is causing them to do that?*

P2 *The thing that make them to do that is because they have the power. That is why they are doing it.*

M *You don't have power?*

P2 *Power is not with me where I stand because their hands are bigger than mine.*

M *Power is not with any of you here?*

P3 *They are bigger than us.*

M *Power is not with you to tell the people that what they are doing is wrong?*

P2 *We have the power to tell them, but still they do not hear.*

M *How do you tell them?*

P2 *We have taken the report to (the major town) many times.*

M *Apart from (the major town).*

P2 *We have not taken their report anywhere else because (the major town) is our headquarters.*

M *When you tell them and they don't do anything about it, what do you do?*

P3 *We are not able to jump over that place because to leave (the major town) and go to Voinjama or Monrovia cost \$500.00. Sometimes they say \$1,000.00 and when I was coming with my child they said another \$1,000.00. This is why a thing like this, when you take the report to (the major town) and they don't settle it, car pay is not there for you to go to Monrovia. For some of us, we are not able to go to any court. I am able to talk to Taylor's face. I can talk to the superintendent's face, the district commissioner or the chief justice, because we have seen these things happening (human rights abuses), but the strength is not with us for us to walk and go to these people.*

M What kind of strength do you people want?

P2 We want you to give us the help so that when things happen to make us angry we can take the complaint either to Voinjama or Monrovia, because we do not have any money to take us there. If you are able to help us so that immediately when something happens we can take the complaint. It is hard because we here, we have just returned from Guinea.

Isolation, Development, and Political Participation

It is important to note that participants feel their isolation creates problems not only in the area of human rights, but also hinders the economic development of their communities and prevents them from influencing the political process. Government leaders and elected representatives are seen as distant, aloof and unconcerned with the participants' problems. Participants have a well-developed understanding of the major problems they face and the assistance they need to overcome these problems, and they have a strong desire to communicate with their elected representatives and government leaders, but feel powerless to do so. The disconnect between the participants and those who wield economic and political power in Liberia is illustrated by these common perceptions of Senators and Representatives.

The Senator! We never hear from him. We hear his name, but whether he is a giant or a dwarf, I don't know. I have never seen him.

Male Participant, Nimba

We do not even know our Representative here. He has never come to address us. ... We don't know the Senator. We don't know the Senior Senator or the Junior Senator.

Male Participant, Grand Gedeh

A small but significant number of participants attribute the lack of communication and interaction between elected representatives and the people to the proportional representation system under which Senators and Representatives were elected. These participants believe that their elected representatives owe their positions and their allegiance to their party leaders, rather than to the electorate.

Right now, the Senator and Representative that represent us are not the people we wanted to select. Their interest is tied to the people who put them there rather than the people they are supposed to be representing.

Male Participant, Monrovia Mixed Group

I am not satisfied with this proportional representation system. ... Right now, the people who are over us do not come around here at all. ... Let the candidate's names be written down during the next election. I will vote for the person who will bring development to my town.

Male Participant, Gbanga

E. ACCESS TO INFORMATION

The radio is seen as the most important source of information by most participants. Rural participants do not feel that they have sufficient access to information, but most are able to receive information from the radio at least sporadically. Many rural participants complain that economic constraints, especially the cost of batteries, prevent them from hearing radio broadcasts much of the time, and that the independent stations in Monrovia do not have sufficiently powerful broadcast signals to reach their areas. The following exchange among a group of men in Nimba is typical of the ways in which participants talk about the radio:

- M *We have discussed many important topics today - leadership, development, human rights, among other things. How do you learn about these issues?*
- P1 *How do we hear about them?*
- M *Yes. How do you get your information?*
- P1 *Usually through radio programs.*
- M *What stations specifically?*
- P1 *Radio Totota (Radio Liberia)*
- P2 *BBC also*
- P3 *VOA as well.*
- M *Do you have many radios in this town?*
- P2 *No*
- P3 *The cost of a radio is so high that some of us can't afford it. Even those who have a radio are faced with battery problems. A pair of batteries is 15 dollars, and three cups of rice is the same price. Who will starve himself for batteries?*
- M *Do you listen to any station based in Monrovia?*
- P1 *Yes, Radio Veritas.*

M *Is the reception clear?*

All *No!*

Radio Liberia (commonly referred to as Radio Totota, Radio Gbanga or Kiss FM, the station owned by President Taylor) is the only station that participants in all groups claim they can receive clearly. Participants in Bong and Nimba said they also receive Radio Veritas. In all other rural groups, participants claimed that they could not receive any independent radio stations. Opinions on the quality of information broadcast on Radio Liberia are varied. Some participants are happy with the station, but those in Grand Gedeh and Monrovia say Radio Liberia carries only “propaganda” and that it “says only good things about the government.”

The Radio and Human Rights

Participants see a direct connection between access to radio broadcasts and respect for human rights. Having radio stations broadcast to and report on rural areas is seen by many participants as an effective means of improving the human rights climate in the areas in which they live. Participants believe that by having radio reporters working in their areas, they will be able to publicize human rights abuses and make abusers more accountable for their actions. With access to independent radio stations, participants will also be able to follow events in other parts of the country, and will be assured that news from their area is broadcast to all of Liberia. Radio, in other words, is the method of choice for breaking the participants’ pervasive sense of isolation and reducing their feeling of vulnerability and powerlessness.

One way the government can improve this situation (insecurity and abuse of human rights) is installing good radio stations from Monrovia in this area. I know there are more than four radio stations in Monrovia, even though I have not been there since before the war. ... If the radio stations can effectively function throughout the whole country, then anything that goes wrong in any corner of the country will get to Monrovia fast.

Male Participant, Grand Gedeh

We are just like a chicken under a pot. Such a chicken does not know daylight. There are some issues that ache our hearts, so we want newsmen and journalists to be coming here to solicit our views on issues. For us to tell them how we want things to be. We want it put on the radio for the world to hear, but it is difficult. We are suffering in this respect.

Male Participant, Gbanga

Newspapers

Urban participants say that newspapers are also an important source of information, and that they read several newspapers daily. Accuracy, impartiality and timeliness of reporting are seen as the most important attributes of a good newspaper. Newspapers are

not a significant source of information for rural participants, who say that they see newspapers only sporadically, and that they are always weeks out of date.

F. HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES

Questions about human rights abuses and security elicited very different responses in different parts of the country. Some participants, especially in Grand Gedeh and Maryland counties and in the city of Monrovia, continue to live in a state of fear and feel that their rights are not adequately protected.

We returned with high hopes of enjoying freedom from the harassment and intimidation experienced during the war and while we were in exile, but we continue to face harassment and intimidation, even more than before.

Male Participant, Maryland

You find a lot of kids when you are riding in taxis, they kind of interview you. You know very well that the person is only wanting to find out some information so that they can take it (to the security forces).

Female Participant, Monrovia Mixed Group

Other participants, particularly in Nimba, Gbanga and Cape Mount counties, feel that the human rights climate has improved dramatically since the elections and that their rights are now respected. A male participant in Gbanga remarked that even holding a discussion with a group of people was dangerous in the past, but is now commonplace: *"We are happy now that we can sit like this without being accused of saying something bad about the government. We could not sit like this during the war."* The following excerpt from a discussion with a group of women in Nimba shows that some participants who suffered terrible abuse during the war now feel very secure and unmolested:

- P1 *My friend talked about freedom before, and we are free now. See my knee. You see two knots are on it, look at the other one - nothing. The NPFL soldier broke my leg. They went into my house and stole my things, and when I talked about it, they beat me and almost killed me. I could not walk for three months. That is why we say that we are now free. The hardship (other problems mentioned earlier) here is not a sickness, we are used to it, but before we never had any rights.*
- P2 *Our big sons, when they came to town, the soldiers caught them. But since we voted it is not happening again.*
- M *When your boys were caught, what did the soldiers do with them?*
- P2 *They caught them and forced them to join the army.*

- P3 *When you cooked your food and you were bringing it to town, they would take the food from you and carry it, including your pot. We are free now.*
- P4 *Today I am wearing a lappa (wrapper dress) but before we never used to wear it. What we wore was short jean trousers so that we could run. We are free now.*
- P5 *For me it is the same thing that everyone is saying. When we left our farms and came to town, the soldiers were all over the place. It was very hard for us, but now things are fine. For the hardship, we were born with it.*
- P6 *For me, during this war, I did not go out of this country. I ran to the bush, and the soldiers followed us there and we had to look for another hiding place. Nowadays the soldiers call you sister and ask you kindly for water.*
- M *What about when you are going to sell in the market?*
- P6 *Right now we go free, no one bothers us.*
- P2 *No soldier will touch our market goods, but before you either paid money or they would take your goods from you.*

Abusers of Human Rights

Human rights organizations and activists often concentrate their efforts on reducing incidents of abuse by governments and members of government security forces, but participants who feel that their rights are routinely abused do not talk only of the government, police or army. Participants identify a long list of abusers, including the security forces, private corporations, ordinary citizens, people of other ethnic groups, criminals, combatants and even NGOs.

They have one logging company in town here. They call it GAS. They don't take Krahn boys. All their security are armed with AK. So we are afraid to even get among them to work. When we see AK we are afraid.

Male Participant, Grand Gedeh

The ex-combatants abuse our rights. We are afraid of them because of the way they behave. Our abusers are the little soldiers in Zwedru.

Female Participant, Grand Gedeh

Hard-headed soldiers! They are only there to make things bad. They are not good people. They take our money from us and our food. We don't have much, but the little we have is taken away by the soldiers.

Female Participant, Lofa

My father has a house near ELWA junction. After April 6, I left for Ghana, and then went to Nigeria. Since I returned, I have never entered my father's area, because every day the people in the area are harassing my father because he is Krahn. Every day and night.

Male Participant, Monrovia

There is no respect for human rights here in (this town) because our right to work and earn money to sustain ourselves and our families has been abused by the few NGOs and logging companies operating here. We have no access to jobs because these institutions hire employees directly from Monrovia and the Ivory Coast.

Male Participant, Maryland

The security forces were the most commonly mentioned violators of human rights, but other groups were important in certain parts of the country. Logging companies were mentioned as flagrant abusers in all four groups in Maryland and Grand Gedeh. Complaints ranged from the unwillingness of the companies to hire local people to claims that the companies employ heavily-armed private security forces composed primarily of Ivorians. One participant even claimed that a logging company had murdered his brother, and that the local police were unwilling to do anything about it.

Corruption, the Courts, and Inequality

There is a strong sentiment among participants that pervasive corruption and inequality in Liberia leads to the abuse of the rights of the poor. Participants often feel that the wealthy and influential enjoy rights that ordinary Liberians do not, and that the political and justice systems can be easily manipulated by those with money.

A person with money will always prevail against a poor person. ... As a poor person, even when you are right, the case will be twisted and your hands will also be twisted, and your rights will be taken away. ... And if you complain, the rich people will take their beer and drink it themselves and tell you to forget about it.

Male Participant, Gbanga

The big people deny small people the right to talk when they want to speak. They say "Don't talk. You are small so you cannot talk." That is not human rights. No one should pass the other.

Male Participant, Lofa

Participants are especially critical of the formal justice system. Most participants have had some contact with either the Magistrate or Justice of the Peace in their areas, and for most the experience was extremely unpleasant. Members of the judiciary are perceived to be corrupt, inefficient, devious and subject to manipulation, and participants go to great lengths to avoid dealing with the courts. Participants say that they prefer resolving their disputes through the traditional justice system, where chiefs dispense justice

quickly, efficiently and fairly. The following exchange, from a discussion with a group of men in Nimba is typical of attitudes toward the formal legal system:

M *What is the role of the justice of the peace or the magistrate in your areas?*

(loud laughter).

P1 *They are very bad. Bond fees in minor cases are \$500.00 and the cost of court is \$500.00. Messenger fees are \$150.00.*

P2 *They enslave us. Their (monetary) gain is their interest, and not justice.*

P3 *After they collect their fees, they forget about the merit of the case.*

P4 *Even when you are not guilty, your money is not refunded.*

P5 *Besides, the judges are good at receiving bribes from influential figures to frustrate the common man in his case.*

P6 *We only have a Magistrate in this area, but he is a mercenary.*

M *Why are you so unhappy with the judges?*

P6 *They have neglected their professional duty and are in pursuit of money.*

Fear of Abuse

Participants in all parts of the country realize that insecurity and human rights abuse has a negative impact on community and economic development and national reconciliation. Even when their own rights are not abused, the fear of abuse leads many participants to restrict their activities and stifles free expression and movement.

The logging company security, common logging company security, those mosquito police, they are having AK. We do not have the right to go there (in the forest), so we sit down in the village (stay in the village without working). So we prefer sitting down, but we were not sitting in the village before. We used to work and bring our people something here. But now because of this intimidation, we decide to sit down with our poor people and do nothing.

Male Participant, Grand Gedeh

Urban participants in particular say that they refrain from being openly critical of the government, stay in their houses after dark and avoid walking in areas like Capitol Hill and Congo Town where security personnel are concentrated. Participants in all parts of the country make a direct association between lack of respect for human rights and a lack of economic development. Participants state that fear of extortion, theft and corruption prevents them from pursuing economic opportunities and stifles entrepreneurial initiative. One young male participant in Monrovia told of a particularly discouraging incident:

P *One of my friends encouraged me and said "Let's do rubber business." We went to Guthrie (a large rubber plantation). It is located in Bomi County. I spent US\$1,200.00 and I bought my rubber. On my way coming to town, the police seized the whole truck. They seized my truck. I used my last US\$200.00 and went to the station to bribe the police so they could release my truck. They ate my money, carried the rubber and sold it. So today, I don't see any good thing in Liberia.*

M *When did that happened?*

P *In December.*

M *Where?*

P *In Monrovia here.*

M *Right in Monrovia? In what part of Monrovia did they seize the truck?*

P *Right here in Duala Market after we penetrated all the security check points.*

M *You think where they carry the rubber?*

P *They carried the rubber to the station. Police Headquarters. National Police Headquarters. It was parked there. Everybody saw it.*

M *Later it disappeared?*

P *Later it disappeared. They carried it. Now, now I up and down. I don't know where to get money from. ... I wish I could go to Ghana and stay there. It will be all right for me.*

G. THE SECURITY FORCES

Perceptions of the security forces varied from group to group. In some areas, participants are happy with the performance of the security forces since the election and feel that the army and police have stopped harassing ordinary citizens.

The police here are not causing any problem, and it is good for the police to be in the town. Sometimes bad people can be among us and when they do bad, the police catch them.

Female Participant, Cape Mount

In other areas, participants are fearful of the security forces and are extremely unhappy with their performance since the war. Both the army and police are seen by many as incompetent, corrupt, abusive, undisciplined, unprofessional and unaccountable.

The soldiers on the road to Guinea take our things from us and they also come to our houses and take our food.

Female Participant, Lofa

In the street the police can take people's things. The police in this town do it all the time, because the policeman is in the government, so you can't do anything.

Female Participant, Maryland

Now we have policemen working the street with rifles in their hands. They go to the market and take the market people's things.

Male Participant, Grand Gedeh

Many participants are especially critical of the ex-combatants who they now see serving in the security forces. Participants often mentioned seeing individuals who had brutalized them during the war suddenly appear in their community in a police or army uniform.

It is important to note that in some areas participants have positive views of the police and negative views of the army, and in other areas the opposite is true. The data suggest that the personalities and actions of individual members of the security forces have a significant impact on the attitudes of the participants in the areas in which they work.

Urban Participants and the Security Forces

It would be difficult to understate the level of dissatisfaction with the performance of the security forces revealed during the Monrovia discussions. Urban participants are harshly critical of the security forces and say that the police, army and Special Security Service (SSS) routinely violate their rights. Urban participants talk of constant petty harassment at roadblocks, random acts of intimidation, incessant questioning, extortion and theft by members of the security forces. Several participants in Monrovia feel that they are living in a "police state" and virtually all are living in a state of constant fear.

If I hear the police are coming, I will not stand (will not stay). I am afraid that when they get here, the first thing they will want is the glasses on my face. ... The army is the same because the people who come on TDY go out with their arms and do a lot of bad things. The Military Police, instead of advising them, they join them and do the same thing.

Male Participant, Monrovia

There is also a widespread perception that police officers not only fail to prevent violent crime in Monrovia, but that they actually commit violent crimes themselves and collaborate with criminals.

Most of the police we see on the street at night are those that were the top fighters before. So instead of preventing crimes, they are collaborating with criminals. They know these criminals very well and sometimes they even send them to go do crime.

Female Participant, Monrovia Mixed Group

Training and Restructuring of the Security Forces

Participants in all parts of the country are adamant that members of the security forces should undergo rigorous training programs and that the security forces must be restructured if Liberia's human rights climate is to be improved. Many participants are highly critical of the actions of ex-combatants who are now members of the police and army, but participants never suggested that ex-combatants should be excluded from the security forces entirely. Instead, ex-combatants should be trained to act in a professional, courteous and effective manner.

Soldiers in the past were highly respected because of they way they treated people. But today's soldiers are rebel soldiers, so they act like they did when they were rebels. Today's soldiers are rebel soldiers, so we don't want them. If they must be enlisted, they should be trained. They need serious training.

Male Participant, Maryland

Participants also say that the international community should be involved in any retraining or restructuring exercise. Participants in Monrovia believe passionately that ECOMOG should remain in the country and play a leading role in restructuring the security forces.

The international community, you listen over the air (on the radio), they say ECOMOG should remain in Liberia here. It is better for ECOMOG to stay in Liberia to restructure our security, retrain those boys.

Male Participant, Monrovia

Where I see a little hope is if the international community continues to apply pressure on the government to have the security forces restructured by the international community and ECOMOG. ... It will work now because the government is crying for aid from the international community.

Male Participant, Monrovia Mixed Group

H. LOCAL LEADERSHIP

Chiefs are by far the most important leaders for rural participants. Participants say that chiefs solve disputes, prevent conflicts and ensure harmony in the village. A male participant in Nimba gave a typical response when speaking of the role of the chief in his village: *“When we have problems we go to the Sub-Chief, and if no solution onward to the Clan Chief. He is good, the Clan Chief, at settling disputes and conflicts.”*

Participants also talk about a number of other organizational structures within their villages, including councils of elders, development committees, youth committees and leadership and dispute resolution structures that cater specifically to women. The overall picture that emerges from the discussions is of villages that are well organized, with many residents participating actively in local civic life under the direction of local leaders, especially chiefs, who enjoy a great deal of legitimacy in the eyes of their fellow community members.

Many participants are aware of upcoming local elections, and some understand that these elections have been postponed several times. Participants say they will vote and are eager to participate in the elections, but few believe that local elections will be very competitive or drastically alter the current leadership structure in their areas. Urban participants are cynical about the power and usefulness of local government structures and do not think local elections will lead to improvements in their living conditions or quality of life.

Participants in both rural and urban areas say they make every effort to solve disputes and make decisions at the local level, without involving the police or government officials. Participants say that resolving disputes within the community is faster, less expensive and less subject to manipulation than attempting to involve outside officials.

We residents here, we met and decided that because of the effects of the war, we should live here as brothers and sisters and avoid taking matters that could be resolved in the community to high places.

Maryland Men

This tendency is both a result of and contributes to the sense of isolation among participants that is discussed earlier in this report. Well-organized but insular communities may be able to manage many of their affairs on their own, but they are ill-equipped to deal with matters that require recourse to government officials or the courts, and do not feel able to influence the larger political process in Liberia.

IV METHODOLOGY

The Carter Center conducted a self-contained series of 13 focus groups over a period of two weeks in May of 1998. The focus group study was designed and managed by Brent Preston, an independent public opinion research consultant based in Toronto, Canada. Mr. Preston has designed similar focus group studies in Malawi, Namibia, South Africa and Canada.

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A focus group is a semi-structured discussion on specific topics with six to 12 participants, led by an experienced moderator. The moderator uses a discussion guide to ensure the conversation covers the topics of interest to the researcher, but the participants are encouraged to answer questions in their own words and to discuss issues with each other. Focus groups are a form of qualitative research, so they do not produce statistical data and they are not predictive: unlike quantitative surveys, focus groups can not be used to make predictions for a larger population. Focus groups can, however, allow researchers to explore questions or attitudes that are poorly understood and help determine not only what participants think, but why they think the things they do, how passionate they hold their beliefs and how group interaction shapes and influences their attitudes.

The research methodology for this study was created through a process of consultation with Carter Center staff members and a wide range of individuals and organizations in Liberia. The consultant worked with Carter Center Liberia Director Gillian Flies and Carter Center staff members in Atlanta to develop a draft of the discussion guide and to determine the tentative locations and composition of the groups. Discussion locations were selected on the basis of population distribution, language, experience during the war, and proximity to Monrovia. Budget and time constraints forced all discussions to be held in locations accessible by four-wheel-drive vehicle. The draft guide and list of discussion locations was then circulated to human rights NGOs, senior Liberian government officials, members of the legislature, USAID and US Embassy officials and representatives of international NGOs and donor organizations. The consultant then met with these individuals to solicit comments and suggestions. The consultative process had a major impact on the content of the discussion guide and the final locations of the discussion groups.

The Carter Center approached Luvina Ash-Thompson, Dean of the University of Liberia School of Law, to assist in the identification and recruiting of moderators. The consultant met with a large group of senior law students at the university to explain the project and to determine the language skills of the students. The consultant and Carter Center staff members then interviewed interested students individually and invited ten students to

participant in a training session. Moderators were selected on the basis of language skills, past experience, educational background and their performance during the interviews.

All moderators underwent an intensive two-day training program. The program introduced the basic concepts of focus group research, moderating techniques and small group interaction, and included an exhaustive review of the discussion guide and the research objectives. As part of the training program, the moderators conducted trial discussions with groups of participants at the VOA displaced persons camp outside of Monrovia. These trial discussions gave the moderators the opportunity to practice what they had learned and to overcome the usual anxiety associated with moderating a focus group for the first time.

The consultant and the Carter Center determined the characteristics of the participants to be included in each discussion as the final step in preparations to conduct the focus groups. Participants were selected on the basis of gender, age, language, employment status, level of education and experience during the war (displaced or non-displaced). Efforts were made to recruit groups of homogeneous strangers, meaning the participants shared similar characteristics, such as age and social status, but did not know each other well. Separate discussions were held with men and women in rural areas, with female moderators leading discussions with female participants and male moderators leading the men's groups. Two mixed groups were conducted in Monrovia with both men and women, and one discussion was held with a group of urban men.

Carter Center staff members Curtis Majekodunmi and F. Zxynglen Miller supervised the recruiting of participants. Mr. Majekodunmi or Mr. Miller traveled to the pre-determined discussion location at least a day ahead of the research team. When they arrived in the village, the Carter Center staff member would greet the chief, explain the purpose of their visit and ask for assistance in recruiting participants. The recruiters would then interview prospective participants to ensure that they fit the criteria for the discussion, then ask the participants to assemble at an appropriate time to participate in the focus group. In all locations, the chiefs, participants and community members were helpful, courteous and enthusiastic about the research.

The moderators and the consultant met with each group of participants at the appointed time and conducted the discussion. Most discussions were held in school buildings, palava huts or outside under the shade of a tree. Two of the urban groups were held at the Carter Center offices. The moderator would carefully explain the purpose of the group to the participants, but would not reveal that the discussion would concentrate on human rights. The discussion guide was designed to be very unstructured at the outset to allow participants to indicate their real priorities without being influenced by a detailed description of the topics to be discussed. The entire discussion would then be tape recorded. Participants were encouraged to speak in the language in which they felt most comfortable. All of the rural groups were held primarily in the local vernacular language, with some participants preferring to make some statements in English.

After returning to Monrovia, the moderators were responsible for translating and writing a verbatim transcript in English of the discussions they had moderated. The transcripts were then typed at the Carter Center offices under the supervision of Gertrude Koroma. The 13 discussions produced almost 400 pages of typewritten transcripts. The moderators participated in a final debriefing session after all the discussions were completed in order to share and discuss their impressions of the focus groups. The consultant used the information from this session and the transcripts to conduct the analysis of the data and to write this report.

APPENDICES

**CARTER CENTER
1998 FOCUS GROUP LOCATIONS AND PARTICIPANTS**

DATE	LOCATION	GENDER	LANGUAGE
10 May 1998	Grand Gedeh	Women	Krahn
10 May 1998	Grand Gedeh	Men	Krahn
12 May 1998	Maryland	Women	Grebo
12 May 1998	Maryland	Men	Grebo
16 May 1998	Lofa	Women	Lorma
16 May 1998	Lofa	Men	Lorma
17 May 1998	Nimba	Women	Gio
17 May 1998	Nimba	Men	Mano
20 May 1998	Gbanga	Men	Kpelle
21 May 1998	Cape Mount	Women	Vai
19 May 1998	Monrovia	Mixed (youth)	English
23 May 1998	Monrovia	Men (unemployed)	English
25 May 1998	Monrovia	Mixed (adult, educated)	English

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

The Carter Center Liberia

May, 1998

1. INTRODUCTION

- A. Introduce yourself
- B. Explain what a focus group is:

A discussion.

No right or wrong answers, just your ideas and opinions.

Be honest and say what you think.

Feel free to disagree with people: I want you to tell me your own opinions, even if they are different from other people in the group.

Everyone should participate in the discussion because everyone's opinions and ideas are important.

- C. Explain that we have come to learn from the participants and find out about how people all over Liberia are living. Explain that we work in Monrovia and it is not always easy to find out what is going on in other parts of the country.

- D. Explain that the tape recorder is there so we can listen to it later and take notes.

- E. Have participants introduce themselves and record answers.

- 1. Name
- 2. Home Village
- 3. Age

2. DISCUSSION OPENER (10 minutes)

Ask each participant to tell the group a little bit about their family. Try to make this section as informal as possible, but make sure each participant speaks before proceeding to the next section.

3. OUTLOOK AND PRIORITIES (25 minutes)

Begin the substantial discussion by saying "We have come today from Monrovia to learn from you and to find out more about your lives. I think the best way to start is for you to tell us about your community/village. Can you describe your community/village for us?"

PROBE:

What is the best thing about living here?

What are the biggest problems you face in your community/village?

What do you think will happen in your community/village in the future?

How do you think your problems can be solved.

Ask how many members of the groups were refugees or IDPs, then ask:

Why have you come back to this place?

What things have made coming home easier or harder for you?

4. LOCAL LEADERSHIP (15 minutes)

Say “Now I want to talk about something a little different. I want to ask you about the people who are the leaders in this area. Who are the most important leaders in your area?”

PROBE

When participants mention important leaders, ask what their responsibilities are and why they are important.

Who do you turn to for help when you have a problem?

When there are disputes in this area, who are the best people to help solve them?

Probe for leaders not mentioned by the participants:

Chiefs	Superintendent/District Commissioner
Zoes	Mayor
NGO leaders	Senator/Representative
Religious leaders	

5. WORD ASSOCIATION (15 minutes)

Explain to the group: “I want us to play a word game. I will say a word, and you tell me what comes to mind when I say that word. For example, if I say “children” you might

say “Children make you happy” or “Children are the future so parents should work hard to prepare them for life.” Do not worry if you do not know some of the words I say.

Freedom
Security
Police
Army
Government

6. HUMAN RIGHTS (25 minutes)

Say “I have asked you about a lot of different words, but there is one term in particular that I would like to talk more about. That term is Human Rights. What do you think about when you hear the term Human Rights?” Encourage the participants to talk about their own experiences of human rights abuses and their perception of the human rights climate in their area.

PROBE

What are your most important rights?

Is there anything that makes you afraid? Are there any people or groups that you are afraid of?

Is there tension between different groups of people in this area? (e.g. ethnic, displaced people/non-displaced, former adversaries in the war etc.)

Do men and women have the same rights?

Remember to ask for examples

Ask: Who are the abusers?

What can you do/do you do when your rights are abused?

What can be done to make things better?

7. ACCESS TO INFORMATION (15 minutes)

“We have talked about a lot of issues today: development, human rights, leadership etc. Where do you hear about these issues? How do you hear about what is going on in Liberia?”

PROBE

Radio (probe stations/programs)
Newspapers
Local leaders

Government
NGOs (local and national)

Are you able to make your views known?

What is the best way to teach people about human rights or other issues?

8. CLOSE OF DISCUSSION

Thank the participants.

Explain that we will write a report on the information they have given us and give it to government and NGO leaders.

Ask if there is anything else anyone wants to say.