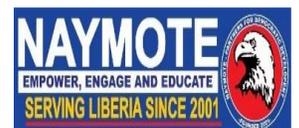




# BONG COUNTY RECONCILIATION VISION 2022 AND ACTION PLAN

S. Aaron Weah-Weah, III



## Executive Summary

This five-year reconciliation vision and a county action plan is intended complement efforts geared toward achieving peaceful co-existence, enhancing reconciliation as well as promoting development and growth in Bong County. This document builds on previous reconciliation efforts in county and encapsulates a detailed strategy to achieve county level reconciliation, sustain peace and promote the adequate management of the county's resources for the betterment of the county and its residents through inclusive and citizens' led initiatives. The five-year reconciliation and county action plan was developed through a broad grassroots' consultation across 5 districts in Bong County. During these consultations, key stakeholders who participated in the dialogues were Local Government Authorities (LGA) officials, representatives of line Ministries and Agencies: Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, Ministry of Information, Culture Affairs and Tourism, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Education as well as County Service Centers' (CSC) Coordinators, Superintendent Office, Commissioners, Paramount Chiefs, Town Chiefs, Clan Chiefs, Religious Leaders, Representatives from Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Youth, Students and Women Groups, Media Practitioners, County Business Association (CBA) who participated in series of activities including district level dialogues, townhall meetings, community meetings and a county plenary.

The methodology used to during the development of the document saw the establishment of the Technical Working Group (TWG), which was comprised of a membership of seven headed by the County Superintendent or a representative from his/her office, two Religious Leaders (Christian and Muslim Communities), Youth and Women Representatives. The TWG in consultation with NAYMOTE's County Coordinator planned, organized and conducted all of the consultations for the information gathering exercises, which led to the development of this document.

To achieve the five-year reconciliation vision and a county action plan six main strategic objectives were developed as stated below:

1. To promote peaceful co-existence and mutual understanding amongst residents of Bong County irrespective of their religious, social, economic and political affiliation and/or status;
2. To promote accountability and transparency in the management of the county resources for the betterment of the county and all its residents;
3. To ensure that county resources are well-managed, equally distributed and decentralized across all regions of the county;
4. To increase gender mainstreaming in the development and implementation of county level policies for adequate representation of all sectors of society;
5. To strengthen and/or institute laws and policies that seek to address conflict arising from traditional land use, land ownership/entitlement, sales of land, etc.
6. To increase county residents' benefits of basic social services including, education, food subsidies, healthcare, jobs and job training, community management, running water, electricity, police and fire service, policy research and lobbying etc.

To realize county level reconciliation, the need to adequately achieve all six strategic objectives cannot be overemphasized. These strategic objectives seek to place the county on the right trajectory in terms of achieving reconciliation and endeavor to address fundamental causes of factors hindering reconciliation at the county level.

## Forward

The Bong County Five-Year Reconciliation Vision and Action Plan (2018-2022) is an essential document developed through a participatory process. The document carries the needs and aspirations of the people of Bong County and it's geared toward the attainment of reconciliation and sustainable peace in the county. The participatory decision-making and the public consensus building methodology used directly captured the views of the stakeholders and residents across the county.

It is my ardent hope that this five-year county reconciliation vision and action plan (2018-2022) will be linked to national instruments and frameworks like the National Reconciliation Roadmap, Peacebuilding Plan, Agenda for Transformation, County Development Agenda, etc. to provide the foundation for the development of a national policy on achieving national reconciliation in Liberia.

It is upon this backdrop that I pledge my commitment and support to ensuring that mechanisms for sustained peace in Bong County are explored. I am proud that the lessons learned from the process of developing this Five Year Peace and Reconciliation Framework (2018-2022) can be replicated by other counties in Liberia.

Finally, this document does not replace previous efforts rather it reinforces previous interventions bringing to bare grassroots and local voices. It is a tool to guide reconciliatory efforts by focusing on the strategic objectives for the adequate management of the process.

I therefore call upon all local and national stakeholders as well as international partners to embrace this document and apply the County Reconciliation Vision and Action Plan (CRVAP) in the development and implementation of state programs geared toward achieving national reconciliation.

Hon. Esther Walker  
Superintendent  
Bong County

## Acknowledgement

Naymote Partners for Democratic Development is primarily grateful to the peace loving and resilient people of Bong County, especially the participants and key stakeholders who despite their differences and other obligations were very committed to the process of developing the County Reconciliation Vision and Five-Year Action Plan.

The institution also appreciates the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) for providing this timely and very important support to our organization to be able to carry out this historic intervention in the history of Bong County. This support has gone a long way in achieving reconciliation in the county you see subsequent section in this document.

The pivotal role played by Hon. Anthony B. Sheriff, Development Superintendent, Bong County, cannot go unnoticed. Hon. Sheriff's leadership and technical support provided a foundation for the intervention, which led to this successful outcome of the project. Naymote remains grateful for your demonstrated transformational leadership.

We recognize the role of our experience and dynamic facilitator, Atty. Oscar Bloh, who expeditiously facilitated all the meetings and dialogues and stimulated the participants to speak to their issues as was required to be able to develop this document. Without your experience and foresightedness we would have encountered a very difficult journey.

Naymote expresses gratitude to all the members of the Technical Working Group (TWG), who were instrumental and benevolent in planning and organizing all the meetings and dialogues of this intervention. Without you our journey would have been long and uneventful.

Last but not the least, we are internally grateful to our hard working staff at Naymote, especially Mr. Moses Bailey, Bong County Coordinator, and all those who contributed one way or another to make this project a success story. To you we say, a "Big Thank You".

## **List of Acronyms & Abbreviations**

<b>NAYMOTE</b>	<b>National Youth Movement for Transparent Elections</b>
<b>UNMIL</b>	<b>United Nations Missions in Liberia</b>
<b>DDC</b>	<b>District Development Council</b>
<b>TWG</b>	<b>Technical Working Group</b>
<b>CSO</b>	<b>Civil Society Organizations</b>
<b>CA</b>	<b>County Authority</b>
<b>CDA</b>	<b>County Development Agenda</b>
<b>GOL</b>	<b>Government of Liberia</b>
<b>MIA</b>	<b>Ministry of Internal Affairs</b>
<b>SAIL</b>	<b>Survivor Aid International of Liberia</b>
<b>CDSC</b>	<b>County Development Steering Committee</b>
<b>CSC</b>	<b>County Service Center</b>
<b>CBA</b>	<b>County Business Association</b>
<b>NPP</b>	<b>National Peace Building Plan</b>
<b>AT</b>	<b>Agenda for Transformation</b>
<b>SCORE</b>	<b>Social Cohesion and Reconciliation Index</b>

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the Liberia civil war in 2003, and the holding of the first democratic election in 2005, which ushered in Africa and Liberia's first female president; reconciliation has been one of the many challenges faced by the post war nation. Liberia's former president Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf during her last annual address to the sixth session of the 53th National Legislature of the Republic of Liberia, January 23, 2017, admitted that despite several achievements made under her leadership during the course of 11 years, corruption and national reconciliation have been some of the many challenges that her government was unable to adequately address. The statement by the former Liberian president clearly demonstrated that the need to enhance efforts geared toward achieving national reconciliation cannot be overemphasized.

*“Let me say, straight out, two areas have continued to pose major challenges for our administration: corruption and reconciliation.”*

*“Our country’s long struggle for national reconciliation has its genesis in history. A coup d’état and years of civil conflict exacerbated longstanding divides that have left deep wounds. The methods and motivations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission have not helped us to find a way forward to achieve the desired results for reconciliation. Nevertheless, we must continue implementation of the 207 recommendations in the Report, the majority of which have already been implemented. We are a small country, with relationships that cross the divide, and this has enabled us to remain united as a nation. Never must we forget that in union we are strong, and our success is assured. Therefore, we must all do more – I must do more – to heal these wounds, and do so this year, by implementing the Strategic Roadmap which has been formulated for this purpose. I believe that it will serve our nation well to take lessons from the experience of other countries by emphasizing restorative rather than retributive justice<sup>1</sup>.”- **Former President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf***

As stated above, the significance of this project, which facilitated the development of this Reconciliation Vision and Action Plan for Bong County cannot be overemphasized. This effort actually feeds into ongoing national reconciliations efforts across the country. What is unique about this project is that it promotes grassroots approach, which enhances local ownership and commitment. Through the project, local residents and key stakeholders in the county have identified challenges hindering reconciliation and development as well as jointly develop a vision and an action plan to address those challenges identified.

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<sup>1</sup> [ANNUAL MESSAGE To the Sixth Session of the 53rd National Legislature of the Republic of Liberia](http://www.emansion.gov.lr/doc/ANNUAL.pdf)  
:http://www.emansion.gov.lr/doc/ANNUAL.pdf

## 1.1 Historical Background

Bong County is one of the four counties that was established when Liberia was divided into 15 political sub-divisions in 1964. The county along with Lofa, Nimba and Grand Gedeh were founded through an enactment by the National Legislature. The county is the third largest in term of population and area in Liberia.

Bong County's capital is Gbarnga and it has nine districts namely, Suakoko District, Salala District, Kokoyah District, Zota District, Panta District, Kpai District, Jorquelleh District, Foamah District and Sanoyea District. Other major towns in the county include Totota, Salala, Suakoko, Belefanaï, Foquelleh, Palala, Zoweinta, Botota, Samay, Gbalatuah, Gbenequelleh, Gbecohn, Bellemue, Weinsue, Sanoyea, Gbarnga-Sheaquelleh, Gbatala, Bong Mines, Zaimayei, Bellemu, etc. The

Formally, the Central Province, the county name was derived from Mount Bong and it is located about 200 km NE of Monrovia. It is bordered by Lofa County on Northwest, Gbarpolu County on the West, Margibi County on the Southwest, Grand Bassa County on the South and South-East, and Nimba County on the East and the North-East. As a Province, the county last commissioner was the late Hon. Samuel B. Cooper and its first superintendent, Hon. James Y. Gbarbea. The County Health Team survey estimated the county's population at 520,000. Prior to the Liberian Civil War, Bong County was second to Montserrado County in terms of investment attracting people and businesses from different parts of the country.

Over the years, the county has been a home to many investments and development initiatives of national important including: Bong Mining Company (BMC) Bong County Agriculture Development Project (BCADP) Central Agriculture Research Institute (CARI) Phebe Hospital and School of Nursing Rubber Corporation of Liberia (RCI) Liberia Telecommunication Corporation (LTC) Liberia Electricity Corporation (LEC) Cuttington University College (CUC).

The county is dominated by two religious groups namely, Christian and Muslims with Christians in the majority. Over the years the two groups have managed to coexist in the county. The County is also dominated by the Kpelleh 98%, Bassa 0.25%, Gio 0.02%, Kru 0.02%, Mano 0.03% and Lorma 0.02%. There are other tribal groups residing the county but in significantly low.

Bong County was greatly affected by the civil conflict. The county was occupied by several militias groups over the fourteen years. Many of groups perpetrated human rights abuses against residents of the county including women and children. Youth were recruited as child soldiers and given drugs to carry out devilish acts. The county has also had its shares of reconciliation challenges as revealed further in the documents. Issues around political discrimination, mismanagement of county resources and development projects are amongst the issues that have spurred division and segregation in the county. For this and many other factors not mentioned above, the importance of this reconciliatory intervention cannot be overstated.

## 1.2 Situation Analysis

Liberia's long walk to national reconciliation is not without several hurdles. However, many of the current challenges faced by Liberia, which are hindering national reconciliation across the country emanate from the assumption that reconciliation is an event rather than an inclusive process; over intellectualizing and academicizing of the process of reconciliation as opposed to initiating grassroots solutions to address factors hindering reconciliation; and failure to inculcate a holistic and inclusive approach led by the local residents instead of marginalizing the people who are the custodians of peace etc.

The Strategic Roadmap for National Healing, Peacebuilding and Reconciliation (2012, p.2) states that “[...], efforts on national peacebuilding and reconciliation stalled due to the lack of coherent strategy and coordination framework” and therefore focuses on coherence of institutions, structures, mechanisms and human resources to support national healing and reconciliation. Nevertheless, in the history of Liberia, reconciliation and resolution are not new phenomena. Unfortunately, an in-depth analysis of those processes is missing, which hampers meaningful lessons learned and evaluation to inform future processes, projects and mechanisms<sup>2</sup>.

Despite numerous efforts in Liberia to achieve national reconciliation, like the National Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which was recommended by the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) signed in 2003 at the end of the Liberian Civil War. The TRC, which was established by an Act on June 10, 2005, conducted a process which left behind mixed feelings and contested opinions.

The Liberian government and her partners have undertaken and continue to undertake several initiatives and developed documents geared towards achieving national reconciliation. Some of the products of these efforts include; the National Reconciliation Roadmap, Peacebuilding Plan, County Development Agenda, Agenda for Transformation, SCORE, National Policy of Reconciliation, and National Conflict Mapping Exercise, etc.

While it is true that there have been many efforts to reconcile Liberia through many national interventions led by the government as well as her international and local partners, the reconciliation process in Liberia presents a significant disconnect between policy and implementation. Many of the challenges of reconciliation emanate from the local levels. Thus, any strategy that excludes the local residents thereby failing to ensure a critical mass of the public support and political buy-in for the reconciliation process is destined to be a fiasco.

Bong County happens to be one of the counties affected greatly by the Civil War coupled with social, political, economic, religious, and cultural cleavages and hindrances that are posing

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<sup>2</sup> Liberia between Reconciliation Commission and Roadmap – Steps Forward in a Halted Process?: [http://kofiannaninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Public-Policy-Brief-Liberia\\_between\\_Reconciliation\\_Commissio.pdf](http://kofiannaninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Public-Policy-Brief-Liberia_between_Reconciliation_Commissio.pdf)

critical challenges to achieving reconciliation at the county level. If national reconciliation is to be achieved, we must adopt a citizens' approach solution.

The next section illustrates the grassroots methodology and approach used to gather information needed to develop the county reconciliation vision and action plan.

## **2.0 INFORMATION GATHERING EXERCISE**

The section summarizes the process through which all meta-information was collected and compiled for this document. It further gives the detailed account of the consultations, district level dialogues, townhall and community meetings held with stakeholders and citizens of Bong County as well as information on the participants and key stakeholders who participated in the discussions that led to the development of the County Reconciliation Vision and Action Plan.

As suggested in preceding sections of the document, previous efforts to achieve reconciliation in Bong County and across other counties in Liberia have been largely top to bottom approach. As stated earlier, this approach largely excluded grassroots active participation leaving them to be mere participants and spectators of the process.

To shift the dynamics and ratify the missteps that have plagued reconciliation efforts in county, NAYMOTE implored a citizens' approach whereby local residents were the key organizers, discussants, and drafters of the county reconciliation vision and action plan.

To acquire the information needed for the development of the county reconciliation vision and action plan. NAYMOTE conducted project briefing meetings, district level dialogues, townhall meetings, community meetings, and county level plenary.

### **2.1 Community Entry/Project Briefing Meetings**

In an effort to promote local ownership of the process and increase citizens' understanding of what is at stake and what the county stands to gain as the result of the project, NAYMOTE organize and conducted a project briefing meeting in the county. The meeting brought together local authority officials headed by the County Superintendent, the County Inspector, traditional leaders (paramount, town and clan chiefs), religious leaders, youth and women leaders, media practitioners, and CSO leaders as well as officials from line Ministries. During the Project briefing meeting, in consultation with the participants of the meetings, a Technical Working Committee (TWG) was established. The Technical Working Group (TWG) comprised of a membership of five headed by the County Superintendent or a representative from his/her office, two Religious Leaders (Christian and Muslim Communities), Youth and Women Representatives. The TWG in consultation with NAYMOTE's County Coordinator planned, organized and conducted all of the consultations, dialogues and meetings for the information gathering exercises, which led to the development of the County Reconciliation Vision and Action Plan. *Please see chart below for Members of TWG of Bong County*

## MEMBERS OF THE TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP (Bong County)

No	Name	Institution	Position
1.	Hon. Anthony B. Sherriff	Ministry of Internal Affairs	Development Superintendent, Bong County
2.	Mrs. Dorothy Toomen	Executive Member	DEN-L
3.	Mr. Clarence Jackson	Journalist	Radio Gbarnga FM
4.	Mrs. Marline Jarwoe	Gender Advocate	CJPS
5.	Mr. Abullai Fofanah	Religious Leader	Muslim Community
6.	Rev. Jacob Sameway	Christian Leader	Bong Christian Association
7.	Mr. Jimmy Kollie	Traditional Leader	Native Superintendent

## 2.2 Community Meetings

In an effort to mobilize the community dwellers and preselect districts within the county that were known for conflict, TWG along with NAYMOTE County Coordinator planned and conducted 2 community meetings across the county. During these meetings, like the project briefing meeting, local authority officials headed by the County Superintendent, the County Inspector, traditional leaders (paramount, town and clan chiefs), religious leaders, youth and women leaders, media practitioners, and CSO leaders as well as officials from line Ministries were in attendance. Participants brainstorm and identified 4 districts within the county, which were targeted under the intervention for the district level dialogues.

The districts identified during the community meetings for the district level dialogues were district # 1, 3, 4 and 6. According to the participants during these meetings, the selected districts were known as hot spots and conflict sensitive areas within the county and as such it was very prudent that they were targeted when trying to reconcile the county. Please note that participants from other districts were also invited.

## 2.3 District Dialogues

In order to access the necessary information needed for the development of the county reconciliation vision and action plan, 4 district level dialogues were conducted across 5 districts in the county. During each dialogue, 40 stakeholders, including commissioners, chiefs, representatives from the teachers association, National Elections Commission (NEC), superintendent's office, members of the Technical Working Group (TWG), political institution leaders, , Ministry of internal Affairs, Civil Society Organizations, Community Based Organizations, school authorities, teachers, community leaders; among others participated in the dialogue.

The dialogues provided stakeholders broad knowledge about the essence of reconciliation and benefits of reconciling. Participants reflected and discussed the history and sources of conflicts in their district and county, mapped conflict: current trends, sources and actors of conflicts in the district and county, consequences of the conflicts (political, social, and economic), explored local

mechanisms for reconciliation (actors and on-going reconciliation efforts) as well as developed their District Action Plan for Reconciliation.

*“Our county can never develop if we are divided. The only way Bong County will develop if we unite and forget about the past. Thanks to NAYMOTE and UNMIL for supporting this reconciliation work” - Mary Larteh, Paramount Chief.*

From the discussions, several issues were highlighted by community residents as sources of conflict in the past that are still affecting various districts across the county. Some issues raised included: corruption and greediness, bad leadership, misinformation and hatred, power greed, generational gap, broken culture-disconnect between educated and uneducated, tribal and religious identity crisis, slavery, loyalty and tolerance etc.

## **2.4 Town Hall Meetings**

The TWG organized a town hall meeting where key stakeholders and participants who attended previous dialogues and meetings were invited. During the town hall meeting, the facilitator presented the list of issues that have been identified by the participants during the district level dialogues as factors hindering reconciliation and unity in the county. The meeting provided participants the opportunity to ascertain the issues presented by the facilitator, make corrections where necessary, and additional comments as the discussion was further broaden due to the fact the issues were being placed in categories.

At the town hall meeting, participants were placed in three groups, that is, youth, women and local authority officials/traditional leaders. Members of each group were asked to discuss the issues presented as factors hindering reconciliation in the county and recommend possible actions to address those challenges. It was during the townhall meeting that the recommendation and action plan were developed and presented during plenary.

The town hall meeting was very unique and contributed immensely to the development of the county reconciliation vision and action plan. Stakeholders though guided by a facilitator, were able yet to recommend local solutions to local challenges that have stalled reconciliation process in the past. Amazingly, some of the recommendations and action plan suggested are already being implemented in the county without the support of any national institution. For example, a committee that was setup during the district dialogue in Larkayta to look into conflict arising from political differences after the elections has already started engaging individuals involved. The committee has invited them to a meeting to amicably resolve their differences in the interest of the county. This is a clear indication that when grassroots citizens are involved in these initiatives, they take ownership of the process thereby making it successful and result oriented.

## **2.5 County Levels Plenary**

This was the validation stage following all the dialogues and meetings. During the County Plenary, the TWG invited key stakeholders who participated in the community and townhall meetings, and the district level dialogues. The Superintendent, County Inspector,

Commissioners, traditional leaders (Paramount, town and clan chiefs), CSOs and media actors, youth and women group leaders, religious leaders from the Christian and Muslim communities, representatives from the disabled communities as well as local residents who had taken keen interest the reconciliation efforts of the county were attendance. At the plenary meeting the facilitator presented the information gathered during the meetings and dialogues to be validated by the citizens of the county through their sanctioned representative and leadership.

During first session of the plenary, the facilitator presented the issues as identified across the county that were hindering and stalling reconciliation in the county. The presentation was thoroughly reviewed to reflect the views of the county while in some instances addition, subtraction and clarity were made to the issues identified.

During all the discussions, the facilitator used participatory decision making techniques to ensure that everyone's views were taken into account and that the discussion exhausted the stages in participatory decision making, which included Divergent Thinking where participants freely disagreed on issues and expressed new ideas; the brainstorming stage, where the issues were narrow down and placed into categories and group based on similarities and subject matter; and lastly, the Convergent Thinking, where issues were summarized into key points and sorted in categories.

As you will see in the next section of the document, all issues identified and agreed upon as factors stalling reconciliation in the county were captured as presented by the people of the county. They also presented solutions (recommendation and an action plan), which if implemented will go a long way in reconciling the county and promoting growth and development all of which are geared toward achieving to the Vision 2022 of the county.

During this intervention, it was revealed that Bong County has several issues that are hindering reconciliation at the county levels. For example, participants identified disunity amongst their political leaders, mismanagement of the County Social Development Funds (CSDF), over-centralization of the county development projects amongst other things as major factors hindering reconciliation at the county levels.

Following series of engagements and dialogues, which will be discussed in the document later, the below matrix highlights issues identified as factors hindering reconciliation in the county and its effects on the county as well.

### 3.0 SUMMARY OF ISSUES IDENTIFIED AS SOURCES OF CONFLICT AND ITS IMPACT ON THE BONG COUNTY

	ISSUES RAISED BONG COUNTY	EFFECTS ON THE COUNTY
	<p>-Lack of accountability and limited participation of citizens in the Management of the County/Social Development Funds.</p> <p>-Land Conflicts (Inter and intra-communal)</p> <p>-Political marginalization and division (Upper versus Lower)</p> <p>-Inflammatory/hate messages, attack during political campaign, Inter-Generational tension</p> <p>-Leaderships at county and district level are not representative of diversity of communities (tribal issues Kpelle and Mandingos)</p> <p>-Division among residents of upper and lower Bong County, Mandingoes and Kpelle speaking groups.</p> <p>-Political conflict (disunity among lawmakers, young leaders and county leadership during elections), especially women and youth excluded from decision making processes.</p>	<p>-Mistrust, lack of accountability and transparency on county's projects</p> <p>-Increasing disunity, conflict and violence in the county.</p> <p>-Communities divided as a result of the election leading to conflict</p> <p>-Increasing discrimination and marginalization of certain groups in the county</p> <p>-Undermine the development and the mismanage the county development funds,</p> <p>-Delay in holding county sitting to decide development projects, increase in unfinished projects.</p>

### 4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS TO ISSUES IDENTIFIED

Following a brainstorming session, which led to the identification of issues hindering reconciliation in the Bong County, participant during the County Plenary were placed into three groups (Women, Youth and Local Authorities/traditional leaders) where they jointly developed recommendations to address identified as stated above in the matrix. Recommendations emanating from the groups session are highlighted below in the matrix.

#### BONG COUNTY PLENARY DIALOGUE

#### BONG COUNTY PLENARY ISSUES

SECTOR	SECTOR FEEDBACK ON ISSUES IDENTIFIED
Women	<p><b><u>Proper management of the County Social Development Fund</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There should be District Development Council (DDC) meetings before the County Setting, where district priority projects are</li> </ul>

	<p>presented at the County Setting.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delegates for the county sitting should be selected at the DDC meetings.</li> <li>• Development Projects should be developed from the DDC meetings.</li> <li>• To address the issues of incomplete projects, the new government and administration should prioritized unfinished projects in the county.</li> <li>• There should be a strong monitoring and evaluation team to ensure effective development projects implementation.</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Addressing the issue of Political Marginalization</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All appointed positions should be based on qualification, experience and not on religion, political or tribal affiliation in the County.</li> <li>• There should be regular annual County Conference on Peace and Reconciliation.</li> </ul>
Youth	<p><b><u>Addressing Land Conflict</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Land Rights Act (LRA) be passed into law by the Legislature which will help address some of the challenges in the county and avoid conflict in the County.</li> <li>• There should be increased awareness on Land Rights/Ownership to address the multiple sale of land and educate citizens on how to acquire land in the County, who can sell land, where and how.</li> <li>• .Land deed registration should be done through the County Service Center.</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Political Reconciliation</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political actors should be willing to reconcile themselves, put the county first, be accessible and responsive to the needs of the people who voted them.</li> <li>• There should be quarterly Legislative Caucus meeting and other elected officials meeting in the County to jointly develop programs for the benefit for the county as well as jointly monitor development projects in the county (resolved projects).</li> <li>• Traditional leaders should be non-partisans and stay out of politics. They should take the lead to reconcile the political leaders and citizens of the county.</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Tension Between Youth And Elders</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There should be yearly peace and reconciliation jamboree bringing citizens from the districts together with their lawmakers, chiefs, traditional leaders and young people to participate in events that will promote unity, peace and reconciliation.</li> <li>• There should a yearly Community Service Program (CSP), where young people will go back home to serve their communities and get the blessings from the elders. Hold discussions with traditional leaders to learn more about their communities, towns, villages, districts and counties as well as learning about their great ancestors.</li> </ul>

	<p><b><u>Authority Of Traditional Leader Undermined</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traditional leaders should stay away from politics and restore our traditional values and norms.</li> <li>• Traditional leaders should lead annual peace and reconciliation conference in an impartial manner.</li> <li>• Traditional leaders should help to address some of the Land Conflicts and serve as elders of the County helping to promote unity and development in the county.</li> </ul>
<p>Local Authorities, elders, chiefs and traditional leaders</p>	<p><b><u>Land Conflict</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Passage of the Land Right Act, allow the people to own their land and make decisions,</li> <li>• Create awareness to stop double sale of land and encourage land owners to register their land deeds at the County Service Center.</li> <li>• Prosecute those who are involved/engaged in the double sales of land.</li> <li>• Those buying land should double check and get the local leaders involved before paying for the land.</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Political Reconciliation</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Passage of the Local Government Act to give power to the people, the right to elect their leaders.</li> <li>• Elected officials and county leadership should work together to promote unity, peace and reconciliation after the elections for the development of the County,</li> <li>• Development in the county should be share across the county (decentralized) upper and lower regions.</li> <li>• Local government appointment should be inclusive of all not only those who supported the ruling party.</li> <li>• Promote the respect for human rights and the rule of law.</li> <li>• Set up ‘Peace and Reconciliation Committee’.</li> <li>• Holding annual Peace and Reconciliation Jamboree.</li> <li>• Educate citizens on the county’s history, flag, past leaders of the county and need to exhibit patriotism.</li> <li>• Establish a radio program called ‘County Reconciliation Platform’ etc</li> </ul> <p><b>Tension between Youth &amp; Elders</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Young people should respect traditional norms, values and cultures.</li> <li>• Young people should stop taking money from their political</li> </ul>

	<p>Godfather and using the media to divide the county by attacking elders who disagreed with their political Godfathers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elders should serve as guidance to the younger generation.</li> <li>• Too much human rights responsible for the young people disrespecting the older people.</li> </ul> <p><b>Authority Of Traditional Leaders Undermined</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There should be regular coordinating meeting between Central Administration, Local Authority and Traditional leaders to discuss the county development agenda and feedback on how projects were selected and the status of ongoing projects.</li> <li>• Traditional leaders and local authorities should be elected and supported.</li> <li>• Let there a clear roles and responsibilities of local and traditional leaders within the local government structures.</li> <li>• Let Chiefs be placed on payroll for their services to the county/country.</li> </ul>
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**5.0 BONG COUNTY RECONCILIATION VISION AND ACTION PLAN**

In Liberia over the years, the main question of reconciliation has been premised on how villainies in society, especially from the genesis of the nation have been resolved and currently being resolved to adequately handle them and engender changes that fix marginalization, injustice, and other factors that provoke disunity, ramify and acrimoniousness<sup>2</sup>.

Previous efforts of reconciliation/resolution in Liberia highlight the establishment of the recent counties and their subsequent inclusion into the National Legislature. This demonstrates the country’s national effort to combat exclusion and marginalization. Another major effort was the Unification Policy from 1964 and the Open Door Policy, which can also be considered as efforts to solicit greater participation of the people in the political life of the country and access to social and economic opportunities for groups marginalized in the past<sup>2</sup>.

*“Nevertheless, events of 1975-79(the rise of political pluralism) and the decades following showed clearly that efforts made to create an inclusive, nondiscriminatory nation still lacked essential basics for a truly coherent state.”- Liberia between Reconciliation Commission and Roadmap – Steps Forward in a Halted Process?*

While previous reconciliation efforts have excluded grassroots’ ownership of the process thereby using citizens as mere participants, the ardent need to initiate a process whereby locals will lead all reconciliation efforts supported by the government and her partners cannot be over emphasized. The outcome of this project clearly illustrates the willingness of the people to part take in these processes that provide local solution to local problems and the residents of Bong County are no exception to this truism.

It is within this context that the people of Bong County in consultation with their local authorities and key stakeholders of the county following several consultations, dialogues, and town hall and community meetings held across five districts and a county plenary have suggested the following vision and strategic objectives for the county reconciliation vision and five years action plan.

### **5.1 Bong County Reconciliation Vision 2022**

- Equal opportunities and basic social services are provided for all citizens of Bong County irrespective of age, gender, religion, social, economic status and/or political affiliation.
- All citizens of Bong County demonstrate an appreciation of the county's culture, tradition and history thereby promoting a sense of patriotism.
- The county is reconciled, peaceful and united in all its undertakings and citizens are the front drivers of the social, economic and political spheres of the county.
- County resources, proceeds generated, and social benefits are fairly distributed across the county; and adequately managed in a way that local leadership are accountable to the people and development projects/initiatives are decided by the people of the county.

## 5.2 County Action Plan/Strategy Matrix

### COUNTY ACTION PLAN/STRAGY FOR INCLUSIVE AND PARTICIAPTORY RECONCILIATION IN BONG COUNTY

<b>Bong County Reconciliation Vision 2022</b>						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equal opportunities and basic social services are provided for all citizens of Bong County irrespective of age, gender, religion, social, economic status and/or political affiliation.</li> <li>• All citizens of Bong County demonstrate an appreciation of the county’s culture, tradition and history thereby promoting a sense of patriotism.</li> <li>• The county is reconciled, peaceful and united in all its undertakings and citizens are the front drivers of the social, economic and political spheres of the county.</li> <li>• County resources, proceeds generated, and social benefits are fairly distributed across the county; and adequately managed in a way that local leadership are accountable to the people and development projects/initiatives are decided by the people of the county.</li> </ul>						
<b>Drivers of conflict</b>	<b>Effects</b>	<b>Actions/Strategies to mitigate drivers of conflict</b>	<b>Responsible Party</b>	<b>Indicators of success</b>	<b>Means of Verification</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
Lack of accountability and limited citizens’ participation in the decision-making process in the management of the County Social/ Development Funds	<p>Development interventions are not sustainable</p> <p>Lack of trust in government institutions.</p>	<p>CSOs and citizens advocate for a change in the current budget law that gives undue authority and influence to the lawmakers in the management of the CSDF.</p> <p>Change the manner and form by which delegates to the County Sitting are recruited.</p>	<p>County Authority</p> <p>Line Ministries</p> <p>TWG</p> <p>CSO Council</p> <p>Traditional Leaders</p> <p>Religious Leaders</p> <p>Youth &amp; Women</p> <p>Group Leaders</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Budget law is changed that gives more authority to the local county authorities.</li> <li>▪ Delegates to the County Sitting are selected in a more participatory and inclusive</li> </ul>	<p>Copy of the revised budget law.</p> <p>Feedback from citizens.</p>	

				manner.		
Land Conflicts (double land sales, poor documentation of land deeds, limited understanding of land policies and weak enforcement of the Criminal Conveyance Act.	Undermining social cohesion and peaceful co-existence.	Citizens advocate their lawmakers for the passage of the draft land rights bill.  Create awareness of the existence of the Criminal Conveyance Act on double land scale.	County Authority Line Ministries TWG CSO Council Traditional Leaders Religious Leaders Youth & Women Group Leaders	Passage of the Land Rights Bill into law.  Number of actions taken by the Liberia Land Authority in the enforcement of the Criminal Conveyance Act.	Copy of the Land Rights Act.  Media reports Report from the LLA	
Division among citizens and community members due to the election results.	Social cohesion is low and this could undermine the county's development programs	County authorities, traditional leaders, women groups and opinion leaders organizing reconciliation dialogues among the winners and losers of those who participated in the 2017 legislative elections.	County Authority Line Ministries TWG CSO Council Traditional Leaders Religious Leaders Youth & Women Group Leaders	Number of reconciliation dialogues held.  Number of commitments made by losers and winners to work together in the interest of the county	Reports of dialogues held  Reports of joint actions taken to support the county's development agenda	
Inter-generational tension	Disrespect for positive cultural values by young people	Organize community meetings between youth and elders	County Authority Line Ministries TWG CSO Council Traditional Leaders	Number of meetings held	Reports of meetings	

			Religious Leaders Youth & Women Group Leaders			
Limited access to information on governance and development processes	This limits citizens' participation and create the environment for rumors	County authorities should organize quarterly meetings to provide information to citizens on progress made in the county development process	County Authority Line Ministries TWG CSO Council Traditional Leaders Religious Leaders Youth & Women Group Leaders	Number of meetings held with participants disaggregated by location and gender.	Reports from meetings held.  Media reports	
Limited access by young people to livelihood opportunities	Disenchantment and psychological effect on the growth and development of young people.	County development projects should also include agriculture to attract young people.	County Authority Line Ministries TWG CSO Council Traditional Leaders Religious Leaders Youth & Women Group Leaders	Number of young people involved in agriculture activities for livelihood.	Survey conducted.	
Harmful traditional practices against women	Violation of the rights of women and young people	Create awareness on the new Domestic Violence Act in communities	County Authority Line Ministries TWG CSO Council Traditional Leaders Religious Leaders Youth & Women Group Leaders	Number of awareness actions including radio show and meetings	Media log and reports from meetings	

## LESSONS LEARNT & BEST PRACTICES

Reconciliation is a very delicate matter and must be treated as such. Earlier in this document, we presented a thesis that despite numerous efforts to achieve reconciliation in Liberia, these efforts have been stalled over and over again due to the fact that the strategies and approaches used in the past have been the top to bottom approach; thereby leaving out the true custodians of the process “The People”.

Based on our experience and findings throughout the development process of this document and revision of previous efforts seeking reconciliation, we have recognized the following as lessons learned and best practices that need to be replicated taking into consideration the context in other parts of the country.

First and foremost, all reconciliation efforts **MUST** be led by those seeking to be reconciled. The people **MUST** be a part of the strategy and approach to achieving reconciliation as well as having the people involved and updated on every planning, organization and conduct of any event designed to achieve reconciliation.

Secondly, all efforts seeking to achieve reconciliation **MUST** endeavor to solicit local solutions to local problems-always giving preference to what the people say they need to be reconciled. Listening more as a facilitator of the process, and empowering the people to get the work done is an asset that cannot be overlooked. Reconciliation at the local level cannot be achieved by imploring national solutions to local problems. Irrespective of the fact that the local reconciliation efforts must be linked to national efforts, the effort **MUST** be led from the grassroots level to the national level. We are cognizant of the fact that national reconciliation conferences, national peace dialogues, etc. have achieved far too little than expected. Consequently, the need to adopt a grassroots (bottom to top) approach as adopted through the development of this county reconciliation vision and strategy/action plan cannot be overstated. Local ownership of reconciliation efforts promote sustainability and long term gains even beyond the project duration as demonstrated throughout this intervention.

Lastly, reconciliation is a process and should not be treated as an event. It takes time to achieve healing after one is hurt. Also, parties involved **MUST** be willing to reconcile and that can be demonstrated by the level of commitment of local actors during the process. As painful as it may seem, if parties who are involved in a reconciliation process are not willing to be reconciled, the facilitator of the process **MUST** return to the basic. That is, caucusing with parties involved to explain why reconciliation is important and outline some of the negative impacts it is having and continue to have on them and their constituency. Fortunately, this was not the case in Bong County as the citizens were committed and took ownership of the process.

## **CHALLENGES**

While it is true that the intervention was very successful and achieved the desired outcome, it was not without hurdles. Through regular monitoring, we were able to identify prevailing challenges and resolve them before they escalated.

One of the challenges we experienced was the over crowdedness at the dialogues and meetings even though they were planned for at most 45 stakeholders. Transportation reimbursement became a major issue as the institution had to use extra resources to accommodate the additional participants who attended the events.

Initially, getting to some local authority officials was difficult but with the involvement of the County Superintendent we were able to have every major stakeholder on board and participating.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

One of the problems with achieving reconciliation in Liberia is that we stop at the talking and the development of documents. Implementation has always been the problem because perhaps the people did not have ownership of the process and they had little or no interest to see it implemented.

The case of this County Reconciliation Vision 2022 and Action Plan was developed by the people and for the people. Our single most significant recommendation will be that the governments, CSOs as well as national and international partners seeking to achieve reconciliation in Bong County MUST ensure that all the strategic objectives, which are linked to the reconciliation vision in this document are achieved by implementing the actions or strategies to mitigate the drivers of conflict as outlined in the document.

Approved:

Eddie D. Jarwolo  
Executive Director/NAYMOTE

I, Esther Walker, Superintendent, Bong County, do hereby affix my signature to this document this 22<sup>th</sup> day of February A.D. 2018 in the City of Kakata, Bong County.

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