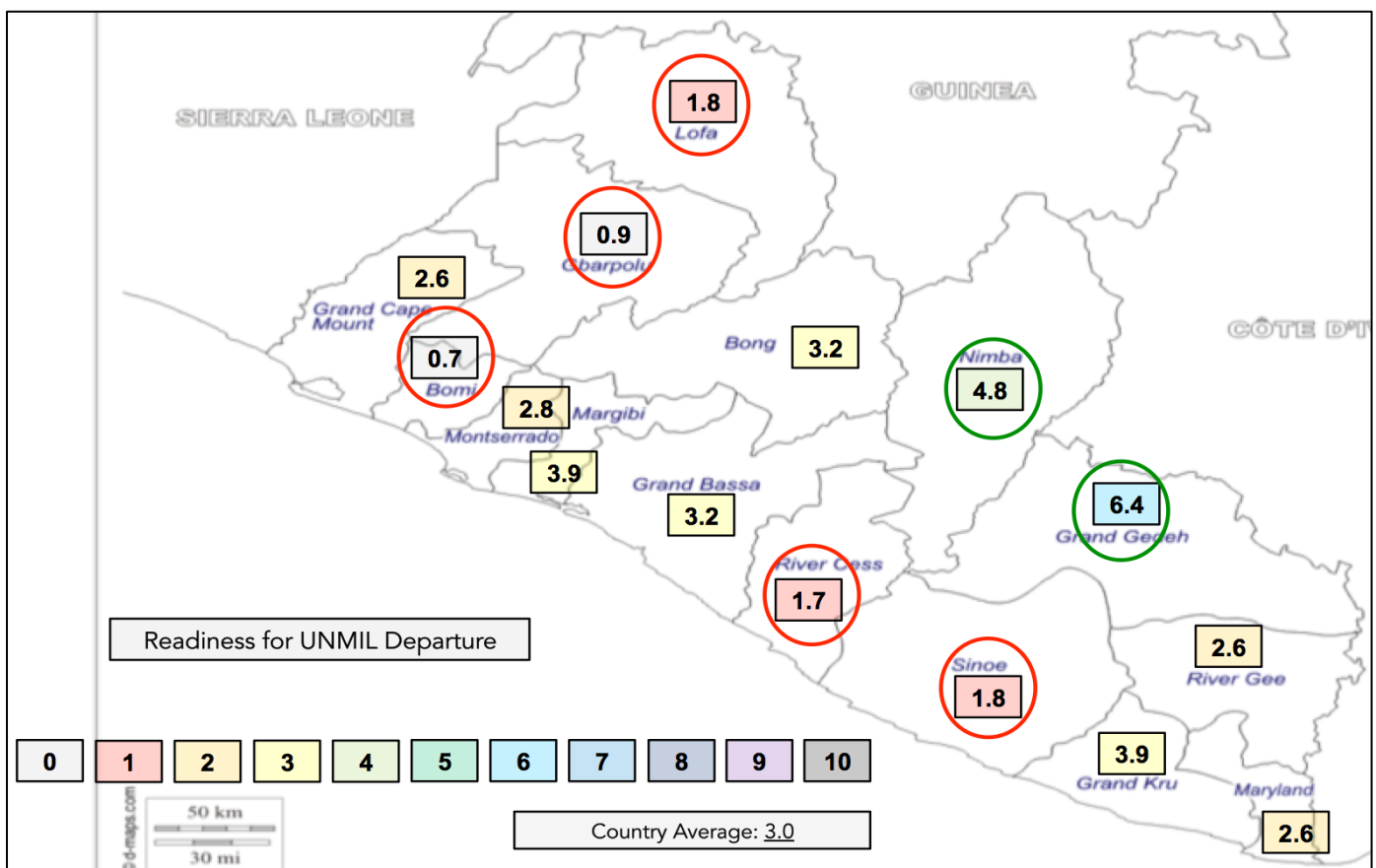


SCORE LIBERIA DRAFT POLICY BRIEF

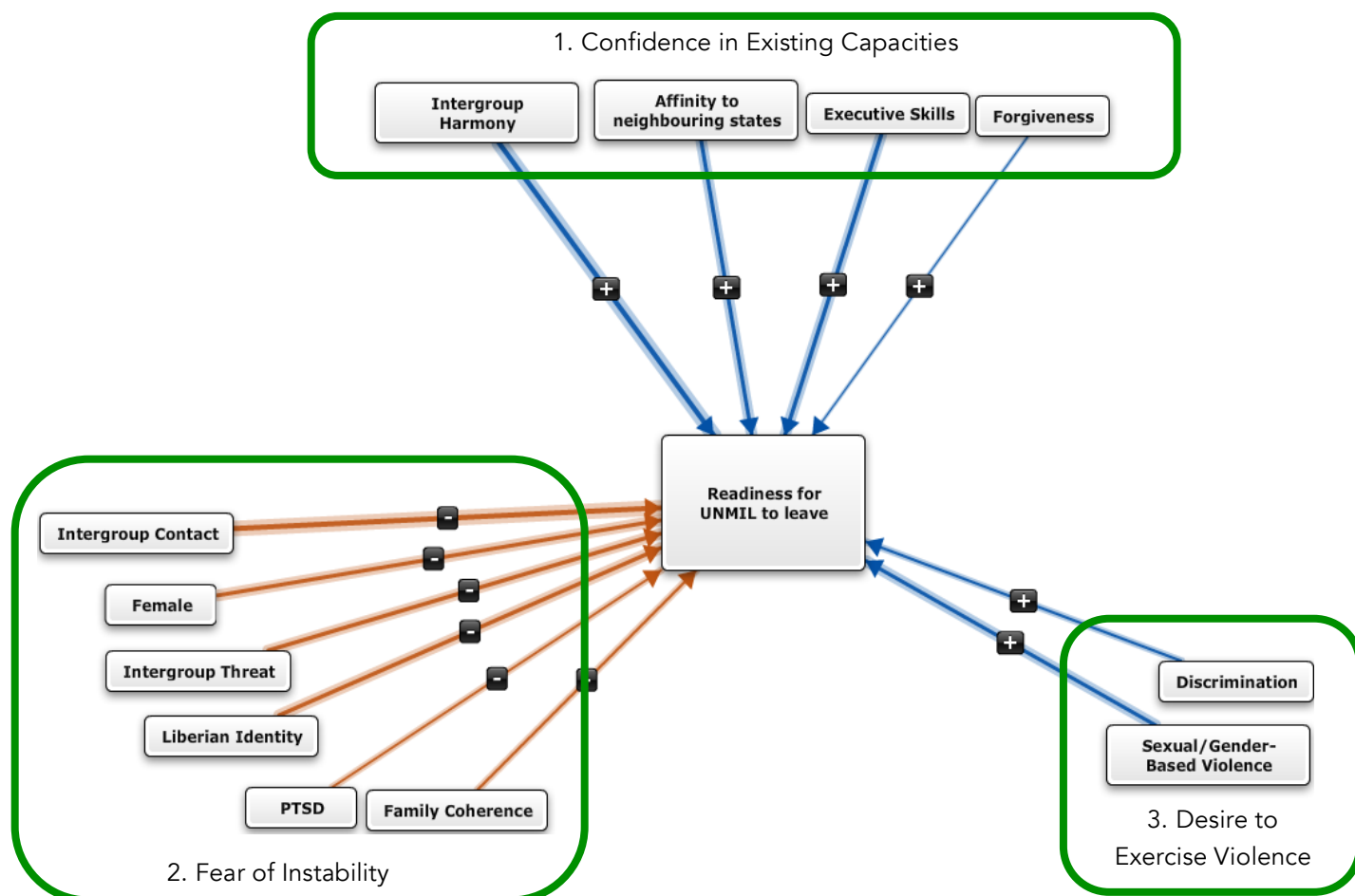
Improving the Readiness for UNMIL's Departure

SCORE Liberia was launched in April 2016. Following the qualitative calibration of the methodology to the Liberian context, the quantitative fieldwork was completed in January 2017. The underlying objectives of the research are to understand the dimensions and indicators, and to collect empirical data relevant to the nature of social cohesion and coexistence in Liberia. SCORE can help identify hotspots, diagnose risks and understand the predictors of violence, which is of utmost importance at this current juncture, with the upcoming presidential elections. Further, considering the on-going draw down of UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), which is to be completed in spring of 2018, one of the key outcomes of interest was to assess the readiness for UNMIL's departure in the country. SCORE findings reveal high levels of diversity across different counties in readiness for UNMIL's departure in Liberia. As it can be seen from the heat map below, the average score for sense of readiness for UNMIL's departure across Liberia on a 10 point scale is 3.0, where 0 means no readiness and 10 means strong readiness. In other words, people are expressing the need for UNMIL presence, which relates directly to perception that UNMIL is a significant actor for provision of security and acts as deterrence for potential conflict and violence. Hence UNMIL's departure before improving readiness would create high levels of anxiety and insecurity in Liberia¹.



¹ The respondents were asked to assess whether "The time has come for UNMIL to depart" or "It is not yet time for UNMIL to depart"; and whether "The presence of UNMIL is still required to guarantee peace and security" or "Liberian institutions are now adequate to guarantee peace and security".

While readiness for UNMIL's departure is generally low across the country and there are no explicit regional trends, Bomi and Gbarpolu (circled in red) stand out as acutely concerned about this issue; and Grand Gedeh and Nimba stand out as counties that experience higher levels of readiness. There is no doubt that countrywide efforts to improve readiness and feelings of security are needed, but more targeted and tailored strategies to address specific needs at the county and group level can prove more effective. On the country level, SCORE predictive analysis identified three main groups of indicators that predict readiness for UNMIL's departure. The thickness and the colour of the arrows in predictive model illustrated below indicate the strength of the relationship (i.e. thicker the arrow, the stronger the relationship) and the nature of the relationship (i.e. **blue** arrows positively contribute to "readiness" and **orange** arrows impede "readiness").



1- Confidence in existing capacities: Greater confidence in existing capacities that relates to faith people have in themselves and their relationship with other groups, neighbouring states and the past, translates into greater readiness for UNMIL's departure. In descending order of relationship strength, indicators that contribute to readiness in this group are as follows:

1.1 Intergroup harmony, which includes indicators such as intergroup trust, intergroup proximity and positive feelings, relates to level of peaceful coexistence and perception towards intergroup relations. Thus, perceived intergroup harmony reduces the need for UNMIL presence as an actor that mitigates potential conflict. While the overall assessment of intergroup harmony across the country is strong, at the county level River Cess and River Gee can be identified as an area of concern where intergroup trust and positive feelings trend lower than the country average².

² Country average for intergroup harmony is 7.0, people express positive feelings and intergroup trust. At the county level, Sinoe and Maryland are trending notably higher than the country average.

1.2 Affinity to neighbouring states reinforces the feeling of regional stability and belonging, and hence reduces the need for UNMIL presence as a security provider. Overall, positive feelings towards neighbouring states across the country are very strong, but regional security and good diplomatic relations with neighbouring countries can help improve readiness for UNMIL's departure.

1.3 Executive skills, which relate to the ability to envision and plan for the future, reduces need for UNMIL presence, as it allows people to imagine the future of Liberia without the UN in a positive way. Overall, we can observe strong executive skills across the country³.

1.4 Forgiveness, as opposed to revenge is an indicator that assesses the extent people have moved on and forgiven those responsible for the violence and violations experienced during the conflict. Strong sense of forgiveness translates into less anxiety about UNMIL's departure and more confidence in Liberian society and institutions. Once again, while the levels of forgiveness across the country are strong, at the county level, Lofa, Sinoe and Grand Cape Mount can be identified as areas of concern⁴.

- 2- Fear of Instability, rooted in insecurities and past traumas drives the perception that UNMIL plays a stabilising role, and hence significantly undermines readiness for UNMIL's departure. SCORE shows that women in general and those individuals with PTSD⁵ in particular, are experiencing heightened sense of insecurity and anxiety about the potential security vacuum that may be created with UNMIL draw-down. Similarly, Liberian identity strength and strong family bonds have an inverse relationship with readiness; while those with stronger sense of Liberian identity may perceive deeper inter-group divisions, those with strong family coherence experience intensified fear of instability and conflict. As such, they express lower levels of readiness and see UNMIL's presence as a factor that mitigates disunion and risk of conflict.

Further, intergroup contact and intergroup threat are two indicators that relate to "fear of instability" and have a strong negative relationship with readiness. Although the general assumption prescribes intergroup contact as a strong factor that contributes to positive intergroup relations, the quality of intergroup contact matters. SCORE findings reveal that intergroup contact is undermining readiness for UNMIL's departure in Liberia. In other words, unless intergroup contact is rendered meaningful based on constructive and open dialogue, it can result in intergroup friction and (perceived) structural inequality. Further, perceived intergroup threat⁶ is another strong indicator that thwarts readiness, as those individuals and groups that feel threatened and insecure express a greater need for UNMIL's presence. The findings show that Belle and Bassa ethnic groups express heightened sense of intergroup threat from other groups.

- 3- Desire to exercise violence: Lastly, SCORE predictive analysis shows that those individuals and groups, who endorse sexual and gender-based violence (S/GBV) and who share discriminatory attitudes towards certain groups (e.g. ethnic and religious groups) express higher levels of readiness. This stems from the view that UNMIL's presence acts as a deterrent for the tendency to exercise violence and discrimination. While River Cess, Grand Gedeh, Sinoe and Grand Cape Mount can be identified as counties where endorsement of S/GBV, such as sexual assault and domestic violence against women,

³ Country average for executive skills is 7.4, with Nimba, Sinoe, Grand Kru and Monserrado trending significantly higher than the average; and River Gee, Maryland and Grand Cape Mount trending lower.

⁴ Country average for forgiveness is 8.0, with Sinoe and Maryland trending higher than the average.

⁵ Post-traumatic stress disorder is an anxiety problem that develops in some people after extremely traumatic events, such as combat, crime, an accident or natural disaster. Country average for PTSD is 1.3, meaning approximately 1 out of 10 people in Liberia has PTSD. At the county level, Bomi, Nimba, Gbarpolu and River Cess can be identified as areas of concern where individuals suffering from PTSD are notably higher.

⁶ The extent to which individuals consider their own group's way of life to be potentially threatened by adversarial groups.

is the highest⁷, SCORE identified a need for reconciliation across different ethnic groups that should be focused on improving relationships with Mandingos and Gios.

To summarise, we can see a group that expresses readiness for UNMIL’s departure because they have confidence in their capacity of sustaining stability and security in the country. They have high levels of forgiveness, positive intergroup feelings, solid executive skills and strong affinity to the neighbouring counties, which translates into a sense of stability and security. We can also observe a group that expresses high levels of insecurity and low levels of readiness about UNMIL’s departure due their fear of instability. This second group that includes women, individuals with PTSD, those who feel intergroup friction and tension, and those with a strong Liberian identity and family coherence feel more vulnerable. Lastly, there is a group that expresses readiness based on more vindictive attitudes. They perceive UNMIL as deterrence and an obstacle to their violent and discriminatory tendencies.

Policy Recommendations

Improving readiness for UNMIL’s departure should focus on policies and interventions that emphasize developing existing capacities to ensure that UNMIL draw back does not create a security vacuum, which could lead to tension and instability, while simultaneously addressing fears and insecurities of groups that feel dependency on UNMIL as a security provider. It is also critical for civil society to play leading role in the transitional phase. Implementation of the plan transition designed by the UNMIL Security Unity and the Liberian Security Sector is critical for reassuring people about personal security and general wellbeing. To ensure effective and efficient allocation of efforts and resources, these policies and interventions should focus on areas where there the likelihood of impact is the highest. The predictive model illustrated above can help identify policy entry points that can be matched with county level analysis to tailor efforts to where the need is strongest.

In the short and medium term, SCORE predictive analysis reveals that efforts directed at improving intergroup relations, quality of intergroup contact and forgiveness could significantly contribute to readiness. These efforts would also create a positive impact in addressing violent and discriminatory tendencies as well as perceived intergroup threat. Additionally, providing support for PTSD victims and strengthening security provisions focused on S/GBV to address the insecurity and anxiety women feel would have a positive impact on strengthening readiness. On the other hand, policies aimed at developing executive skills and positive feelings towards neighboring states should be incorporated into long-term programming and strategies.

Policy Entry Points	Recommendations
Support for PTSD victims	People with PTSD can experience other mental health problems such as depression or anxiety, or develop alcoholism or drug abuse as a way of coping. As a first step, identifying and diagnosing individuals and groups that are suffering from PTSD and awareness raising among communities to develop internal community support mechanisms could prove useful. Further investigating the needs of PTSD victims in Bomi, Nimba, Gbarpolu and River Cess is crucial for developing targeted support and counselling policies.

⁷ Country average for endorsement for S/GBV is 1.8, meaning approximately 2 out of 10 people endorse violence against women (not incidents of violence), with River Cess, Grand Gedeh, Sinoe and Grand Cape Mount trending significantly higher than the average; and Bomi, Gbarpolu, Grand Bassa and Grand Kru trending lower.

Address S/GBV	Improving legislation and provision of security against domestic and S/GBV needs a holistic approach. Addressing stigma around S/GBV through dialogue, awareness raising efforts and training of security professionals is crucial. Counselling services and legal advice for victims as well as couple's therapy along with capacity building activities for health professionals and police officers particularly in River Cess, Grand Gedeh, Sinoe and Grand Cape Mount could prove effective in addressing insecurity and anxiety women feel about UNMIL's departure.
Enhance intergroup relations	Investing in dialogue and healing processes would address perceptions of intergroup threat, discriminatory attitudes and hence improve intergroup relations and harmony. Further, promoting inclusive and participatory dialogue would also improve the quality of contact to reduce negative stereotypes and prevent contact translating into intergroup friction. Thus, there is a need for broader reconciliation efforts that aim at improving intergroup relationships with Mandingos and Gios, as well as with Muslims; with more intensified reconciliation efforts tailored for River Cess and River Gee, and a specific focus on healing processes to improve forgiveness in Grand Cape Mount and Sinoe.
Develop executive skills	Executive skills are critical for learning and development, and include working memory (The ability to hold information in mind and use it); inhibitory control (The ability to master thoughts and impulses to resist temptations, distractions, and habits); and cognitive flexibility (The capacity to adjust to changing demands, priorities, or perspectives). Although people are not born with these skills, every individual has the potential to develop them. When children have opportunities to develop executive skills, individuals and society experience lifelong benefits. They enable positive behavior and allow individuals to make healthy life choices. Thus, it is important to incorporate age-appropriate activities, games and exercises into education, starting from kindergarten level to adolescence. Improving educational approaches focused on executive skill development particularly in River Gee, Maryland, Grand Cape Mount, Grand Bassa, Lofa, Grand Gedeh, Gbarpolu and Margibi by using international best practices such as the guide published by Harvard University could prove to be a good starting point ⁸ .

About the SCORE Index: The SCORE Index was originally developed by SeeD in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) with funding from USAID. The tool supports policy decisions for national and international stakeholders and is particularly suited for post-conflict, multi-ethnic societies that now face peacebuilding and state-building challenges. By examining social cohesion and reconciliation, the SCORE Index aims to identify and analyse the factors that underpin peace in a society - as needed in order to better inform and evaluate intervention programs. Thus far, versions of the SCORE Index have been implemented in Cyprus (2013, 2014 and 2015), Bosnia and Herzegovina (2013), Nepal (2014), Ukraine (2015-ongoing), Liberia (2017), and Moldova (2017-ongoing).

About SeeD: SeeD is a peacebuilding think tank, originally with a regional scope, that uses participatory research to support international organizations, local policymakers, stakeholders, and peace practitioners to develop, implement and monitor targeted efforts towards social cohesion and reconciliation. SeeD specializes in the development of innovative quantitative methodologies, such as Participatory Polling and the SCORE Index, which seek to understand the underlying social dynamics of conflict and its transformation for use in peacebuilding

⁸ Centre on the Developing Child, Harvard University resources: <http://46y5eh11fhgw3ve3ytpwxt9r.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Enhancing-and-Practicing-Executive-Function-Skills-with-Children-from-Infancy-to-Adolescence-1.pdf>

contexts.



More information can be found at SCORE Online Platform: www.scoreforpeace.org.

The SCORE Index in Liberia has been implemented in partnership between SeeD, UNMIL and UNDP. The fieldwork was conducted by Search for Common Ground (project manager: Aaron Weah, Director of Liberia Country Office) with invaluable support from Anu Kulkarni (Stanford University) and David Backer (University of Maryland) as collaborators in the design of the survey and questionnaire. University of Liberia also provided USIP funding supported for the project.