

Introduction as a
republic, it has been



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Introduction – Facts on Liberia

Liberia is a country located on the shores North Atlantic Ocean in West Africa. Covering an area of 43, 000 sq. miles and having a population of around 3. 49 million people, its capital city is Monrovia, which has a population of 1. 01 million. In addition, the country’s annual economic growth rate as at 2008 was 2.

1%. Unlike most African countries, Liberia was never officially colonized; it became a republic in 1847, having been established by slaves who had been sent to the country from the US after being set free. Liberia therefore regards the United States of America as its pseudo-colonialist.

There are 16 indigenous tribes in Liberia with the most dominant group being the Kpelle accounting for about 20% of the population. There are also “descendants of freed slaves that arrived in Liberia after 1820, who make up less than 5% of the population” (US Department of State, 2010). The population of Liberia is predominantly Christian (85%) with Muslims forming

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a sizeable percentage, 12% (US Department of State, 2010). Moreover, the official language of Liberia is English. Liberia's mainly depends on agriculture, with rubber being its cash crop.

For many years, Liberia was among the stable countries in Africa until the onset of the civil war, which ravaged the country and brought it onto its knees. The country is now trying to recover from the devastating war, with political reforms being put in place. Liberia held its first democratic elections in November 2005, with Ellen Johnson Sirleaf emerging victorious to rule the nation and become the pioneer African woman to head country democratically elected.

History of the Liberian civil war

Since the inception of Liberia as a republic, it has been ruled mainly by the Americo-liberians. This is despite the fact that they account for less than 5% of the population. This group created legislation, which ensured that they remain in power. They ensured that the members of indigenous communities could not be allowed to vote until 1946 when the law was repealed.

However, the domination of the americo-liberians continued until “ 1980 when a group from the indigenous Krahn tribe, led by Samuel Doe, staged a military coup against the government” that was led by William Tolbert, an Americo-liberians (Insight on Conflict, 2010).

In a surprise turn of events, Doe put to death William Tolbert and many other officials of his government who were mainly americo-liberians and aided in the formation of Peoples Redemption Council (PRC), a party of the indigenous Liberians. This party ousted the True Whig Party, which had been

in leadership since the inception of the republic (US department of state). However, Doe's subsequent rule was characterized by very cruel oppression of political opponents and general nepotism towards his ethnic tribe of Krahn. The favoritism of the Krahn tribe created ethnic tensions between them and other ethnic groups. Doe continued to rule the country until its invasion from Ivory Coast by Charles Taylor, former minister in Doe's government. By early 1990, Taylor controlled much of Liberia but Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) prevented him from seizing Monrovia. In fact, the power struggle between Taylor and Doe created a very bloody civil war (US department of state, 2010).

ECOWAS facilitated a peace agreement, which led to the formation of a five-man transition government, leading to disarmament and eventually elections on 19th July 1997 (US department of state, 2010). Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Party won the elections by collecting 75%; however, democracy led to increased ethnic tensions in the groups, which were loyal to the opponents of Charles Taylor. At the same time, Taylor's support for a rebel faction involved in the Sierra Leone civil war, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), led to regional tensions. This later led to renewed violence in Liberia. The second civil war was ignited by conflict between the Liberians for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) group and the local community; however, the government could do little to quell the situation as a result of sanctions, a situation that accelerated the spread to the strife in the country killing dozens of citizens. This culminated in the eventual resignation of Taylor in 2003 after he had lost control of about two thirds of Liberia leading to the arrival of peacekeepers to quell the heavy fighting in the capital

Monrovia. Taylor was thereafter put to trial in Sierra Leone due to his support of the RUF, which was involved in the Sierra Leone civil war (Insight on conflict, 2010).

Among the root causes of the first civil war in Liberia was ethnicity between the tribes of Liberia. This problem was first cultivated by the americo-liberians who founded the state of Liberia. They denied the indigenous tribes the right to vote in elections and put in place other legislations, which generally oppressed the indigenous Liberians.

This was despite the fact that they were not indigenously Liberians and accounted for a very small percentage of the total Liberian population

Literature review

Many different scholars have studied the civil war in Liberia and proposed different causes of the conflict. One such explanation of the Liberian civil war is the ethnic theory. The country was divided into the americo-liberians and 16 indigenous groups. The people who controlled the country both politically and economically were the americo-liberians; and each of the groups had its own institutions, cultures, and values, as well as motives. The americo-liberians wanted total political and economic control of the country despite the fact that they formed less than 5% of the total population of the country. In addition, the americo-liberians dominated the political and economic aspects of Liberia from 1847-1980.

However, they were succeeded by another ethnic community, the Krahn, which dominated the country from 1980-1999. Moreover, each of the groups that was in power tried to benefit only people from the same ethnic group

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(Kieh, 2008, p18). Another explanation of the causes of civil war in Liberia is known as the settler state theory. This theory classifies the Liberian community into two groups: the settlers and the indigenous group. The settlers, the americo-liberians, came from abroad and their main agenda was to establish domination in the country where they settled. The settlers saw themselves as superior to the indigenous group.

They tried to make the indigenous group conform to their cultures and termed the cultures of the indigenous group as backward. After the indigenous groups accepted the cultures of the settlers, they formulated laws to help them acquire land and have general domination over the indigenous group. The settlers also gradually become autonomous from the mother nation, and then established systems to advance their general agenda (Kieh, 2008 p25). Both these theories have been used to explain the causes of Liberian civil war. However, these theories are not correct; one important point to note is that in both cases, the theories explain that the civil war is caused by general inequality in the Liberian society with some groups of people being superior to others. The levels of inequalities between the americo-liberians and the indigenous communities are very high in Liberia.

Indeed, the americo-liberians control a large part of the social, economic, and political spheres of the Liberian society.

Possible solutions

Many countries in Africa have had civil wars including Angola, Congo-Kinshasa, Congo-Brazzaville, Sierra Leone, and Ivory Coast, with Angola

having had the longest civil war in Africa (Handelman, 2010). However, depending on how a country tackles the challenges posed by civil war, it may be the springboard for a nation's path to prosperity. Many countries have emerged even stronger after being on the brink of total collapse due to civil war. For instance, the American civil war helped America to become even stronger politically and economically. Immediately after the war, measures were taken to ensure equality of blacks who were considered inferior to the whites.

This was through the enactment of various legislations by the state, with the thirteenth amendment to the constitution (1865) abolishing slavery. The congress then passed legislation to ensure that the blacks had more freedom (the civil Rights Act). This gave the blacks the freedom to enter into contracts, own property and bear witness in court, as well as giving the blacks more economic and political freedom. These and other legislations allowed the states that had left the Union to come back to the union, the result of which was consolidation of peace and prosperity of the United States of America. To reduce the probabilities of occurrence of civil war the government must be able to fully tackle the underlying problems that led to the civil war so that there may be long-term prosperity. In Liberia, the greatest problem has mainly been lack of ethnic equality and fair distribution of resources. These are the main factors that led to the first and second Liberian civil wars. However, the government must first tackle the immediate problems that the country faces due to the prolonged civil war.

Disarmament of the youth should be among the priorities of the government. The government must also devise means of integrating these youths into the

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community to avoid recurrent violence; for instance, the youth must be taught how to coexist peacefully with other members of the community (Youth in Humanitarian Crises, 2010). The government must also create ways of rebuilding the infrastructure, which was destroyed by the war. These include transport and communication systems, electricity, and improvement in security. However, the most important measure to guarantee prosperity would be the enactment of legislation, which gives economic and political freedom to the population. This would ensure peace and therefore help in attracting foreign investors into the country, thereby helping in job creation and reduction of other problems caused by the war (Radelet, 2007, p 8). The government must also ensure that there is peace and security, in addition to revitalization of the economic activity. Primarily, the majority of Liberians are dependent on agriculture for their income, with rubber being the main cash crop.

Therefore, the government should move in quickly to restore the agricultural production in the country through subsidies and other viable agricultural policies. This will not only enhance food supply in the country, but also create jobs for ex-fighters, refugees, and youth. The opening up of the economy through the reduction of barriers to trade will lead attraction of investments in manufacturing and services industries. This will create jobs for both skilled and unskilled people while at the same time enhancing exports, thereby enabling the government get the much-needed foreign exchange. Finally, the government should strengthen the governance and establish the rule of law in the country, strive to create an efficient civil service and eradicate corruption and impunity. The government should also

strengthen the judiciary and parliament so that the two may act as foundation for the rule of law (Radelet, 2007, p 9).

Conclusion

Most third world countries have at one time of their existence either had a civil conflict or are still in a state of civil war. Therefore, civil war presents a major setback for most third world countries in achieving economic and political prosperity. These countries must therefore be able to understand the reasons of civil war in order to avoid them at any cost. Since most third world countries have had the experience of civil war at one time of their existence, how they tackle their post civil war problems determines so much about their future path to prosperity. This will also apply to Liberia, a country that is currently recovering from the pangs of civil war that had significant and adverse effect on its socio-economic and political environments.

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