

State fragility in Liberia – expectations, limitations and constraints



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Ellen the icon – “ought to be there”

- The preferred candidate of the international community
 - The first female president in Africa
 - The one everybody wanted to have their picture taken with
 - Huge expectations
 - See as capable, and eager to turn things around for the better in Liberia

What Ellen inherited – “what is there”

- A broken country
 - 14 years of civil war
 - Almost every single piece of institution and infrastructure broken and bent
 - Corruption and mismanagement everywhere
- A fragmented and polarised country
 - Citizenship (particularly the Mandingo issue)
 - Land rights
 - Trade rights
 - Youth versus elders
 - Gender
 - Level of education
 - Urban versus the hinterlands

The realities on the ground: The background for Ellen's election – the CPA

- Mainly an agreement between three armed actors
 - GoL, MODEL and LURD
- Some actors – e.g. MODEL and LURD – strong militarily, weak politically
 - Elections would marginalised them
 - the transitional government was therefore one last chance to get something from their war against Taylor
 - Create an environment ripe for corruption and theft, but unavoidable
 - This was the background for GEMAP

The NTGL

- Not much different from previous power-sharing arrangements
 - A highly competitive patrimonial circus where various elites were locked into struggles over state resources
 - A total corruption of not only the state, but all corners of society – it had become the order of things – an iterated social practice that creates an informal institutional structure, not easily broken or bent

Ellen's game?

- In the end she won the election, but her party (UP) did not do particularly well
- No clear majority, rules through ad-hoc alliances, the most permanent being those with former Taylor men and women.
 - She needed them in 2005 and she will need them in 2011
 - Withdrawn her promise not to stand for election more than one time. She is seeking re-election

Achievements or franchising?

- SSR is the responsibility of DynCorp (army) and UNPOL (the national police)
- Corruption is GEMAP
- What is left
 - An underfunded Governance Commission
 - A TRC-process that has become a liability for Ellen
 - And a land rights commission that is crucial, but still has not started to work properly
 - There is peace, but also increasingly discontent

Ellen's Liberia: the making of a choiceless democracy?

- Important state functions has become an external responsibility, e.g. GEMAP and SSR
- Regime security or human security
- A fragile neighbourhood
 - Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire
 - Narcopolitics e.g. Guinea-Bissau and elsewhere in the region
 - Unsolved problems in the hinterland – citizenship issues and the Mandingo

Not a question of rebuilding Liberia

- Currently rebuilding something that was broken before the war started
- The international community is preparing to leave the country
- What is needed is a more pragmatic approach that draws a wider spectrum of political parties and interests into an open discussion about Liberia's many unhealed wounds (patrimonialism, land rights, citizenship, SSR etc), and not this half-hearted trustee-approach that we have seen so far in Liberia