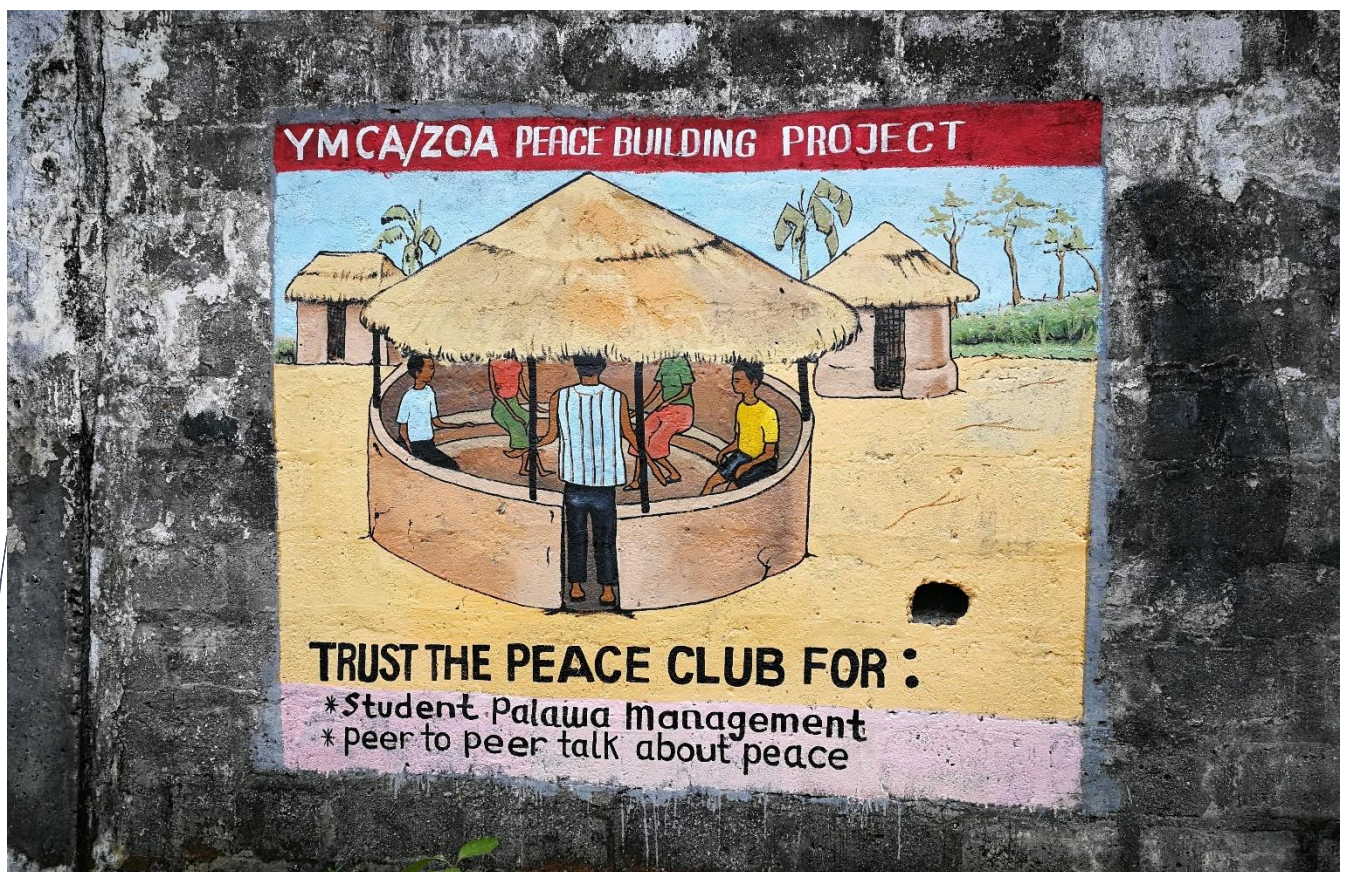Utrecht University

Who owns development?

A case study on the role of local ownership in the sustainability of peacebuilding projects in Liberia

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Acknowledgements

Abstract

As the mandates of many INGO's come to an end in Liberia, the question rises if local actors are able to take control over the peacebuilding process themselves again. This study tries to find out what role local ownership plays in the sustainability of peacebuilding project in Liberia, whilst also looking at the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It strives to do so by conducting a case study on a peacebuilding project that is implemented by a partnership between a donor, INGO and local NGO. The research methods consist of a policy analysis on the representation of local ownership; followed by a survey measuring participation and psychological ownership of project beneficiaries; and finalized with interviews with project staff to reflect on the role of local ownership in the wider peacebuilding sector in Liberia.

The policy analysis showed that beneficiaries should preferable experience high levels of participation in all project phases. The survey however showed that although participation levels of project beneficiaries were low throughout most project phases, they still experience high levels of ownership. This is possible because the power of participation for beneficiaries actually lays in their freedom and power to determine the content of a project, rather than being involved in all the organisational activities that are necessary to implement a project.

This study further found that in order to increase chances of project sustainability in Liberia, partnerships should focus on capacity building that focusses on capacitating local organisations to comply to donor regulations so that they are able to secure direct funding from donors. In partnerships, donors have a big role in allowing for more local ownership by promoting flexibility and decreasing their strict accountability regulations. Although most implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on Liberian peacebuilding are still unknown, is has shown that projects with more local ownership an less external support are more easily sustained.

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List of abbreviations

CBS	Community-based Sociotherapy
CLF	Community Leadership Forum
CTF	Civic Trust Workshop
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
HDI	Human Development Index
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
ODA	Official Development Aid
PRCD	Peacebuilding and Reconciliation through Community Dialogues
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association

1. Introduction

''We are here for people who have lost everything due to wars or natural disasters. Together, we can come to their aid in emergencies. After that, we are faithful and help them rebuild their lives – until they are ready to help themselves again.'' (ZOA International, 2020)

This is a quote from the homepage of ZOA, an INGO working in post-conflict and post-disaster countries. One of these countries is Liberia, in West Africa, where ZOA has been working since the end of the Second Liberian Civil War in 2003. One of the project ZOA is currently implementing in Liberia is Peacebuilding and Reconciliation through Community Dialogues (PRCD). This project is implemented in partnership with an international donor and local partner NGO, respectively Sida and YMCA Liberia. Such a partnership construction with an international donor, INGO and local NGO is common in peacebuilding in the Global South, and the above quote is a typical example of the way in which INGO's envision the role of local actors in their projects. The idea is that through their participation, locals will be able to take ownership over the development process which will lead to more sustainable outcomes.

In emergency situations INGO's usually start with relief-oriented work like food distribution and providing shelter for displaced persons, which is often times focussed on short term results. As the quote shows, this is ideally done *''together''* with those locals for whom the project provides aid; its beneficiaries. After this first period of emergency relief work, projects become more recovery and development oriented in which there is often more focus on long-term sustainable results (Marcussen, 1996). In this phase, INGO's are mainly there to support and facilitate locals to *''help them rebuild their lives''*. The development process becomes more locally driven with external support where needed, in order to let local actors take more ownership over it. Eventually, the mandates of INGO's come to an end and time comes for them to phase out their operations in a country. This should happen when locals are able to take control over the development process themselves again (Von Billerbeck, 2015), which also becomes clear from the last part of the quote, in which ZOA mentions that they aim to continue their work *''- until they are ready to help themselves again''*. So ideally, through participation, locals are able to take ownership over the development process which enables them to sustain it when INGO's phase out.

Although the way in which local ownership is put forward in the above quote is a typical example of how it's portrait in visions and project proposals of development actors, this is often not how the reality looks like. There is a big discrepancy between policy and practice when it comes to the role of local ownership in peacebuilding projects (Von Billerbeck, 2015). Many INGO's that came to Liberia in the aftermath of the civil wars and the Ebola crisis, have phased out and left the country (Paczynska, 2016).

Although the international community have in the past largely praised Liberia as a success story (Gilfoy, 2015), the country has had serious development issues in recent years including the impact of the Ebola epidemic (De La Fuente, Jacoby, & Lawin, 2019; Amnesty International, 2018). On the UN Human Development Index, Liberia is currently ranked 176th out of the 189 countries on the list (UNDP, 2019), and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the country's development is still largely unknown.

ZOA has been working in Liberia since 2003 and after all those years its mandate is also coming to an end, as it plans to phase out all operations by 2023. This raises the question to what extent development project in Liberia are sustainable, and if local actors are able to take over control of the development process again. This research will focus on the role of local ownership for the sustainability of peacebuilding projects in Liberia, and takes the PRCD project of SIDA, ZOA and YMCA as its case study. Through means of policy analysis, survey and interview, this study tries to answer the following research question:

What role does local ownership play in the sustainability of peacebuilding projects in Liberia and how is this impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic?

This study distinguishes two different versions of sustainability; sustainable impact and project sustainability. Sustainable impact is concerned with the lasting change a project creates for its beneficiaries, for example behaviour change or generating new skills. Project sustainability on the other hand is sustaining project activities beyond its official project cycle.

1.1 Scientific relevance

There has been quite some research on the importance of local ownership in sustainable peacebuilding, often concerning the legitimacy, effectiveness and sustainable impact of the projects (King, Samii & Snilstveit, 2010; Von Billerbeck, 2015). In organisational studies, local ownership is also studied in relation to project sustainability; the extend to which a project is sustained over the long-term (Avey et al., 2009). Because this kind of research is lacking in the peacebuilding sector while it's seen as a key challenge, this research will largely focus on project sustainability (Aga et al., 2018). Also, in its relation with ownership and sustainability, this study aims to operationalise participation in all its complexity by taking into account who participates, different levels of participation, and different project phases. Finally, despite the fact that the discrepancy between policy and practice of local ownership is well known, this is not often studies by looking at the policy and practice within one specific case study project.

1.2 Development relevance

Finding ways to combine both international and national resources to maximize the possibilities for sustaining development projects, is one of the biggest challenges of contemporary peacebuilding (Donais, 2009). Therefore, studying the balance between external support and local ownership is of great developmental relevance. Since it is rather common for INGO's to phase out development projects in post-conflict countries after several years, there are many questions about the legacy these projects leave behind. Finding out what role local ownership plays in the sustainability of these projects, is crucial for successful phase-out strategies (Donais, 2009). Also through this case study, Sida, ZOA and YMCA will get a clearer picture on how they play a role in promoting local ownership and sustainability in their project.

2. Theoretical Framework

This theoretical framework will provide a summary of relevant academic work on the role of local ownership in the sustainability of peacebuilding projects.

2.1 Sustainability

Within the international field of peacebuilding, the overarching challenge is that of sustainability (Samuels, 2005). Sustainability and sustainable development are terms that are very popular both within and outside of the academic world, but what they actually mean is not always completely clear (Lyons et al., 2001). Therefore, this research will make a distinction between three different concepts of sustainability, namely environmental sustainability, sustainable impact, and project sustainability. In the ideal situation, all three conceptions of sustainability should be combined to reach true sustainable development. The present-day most popular conception of sustainability is that of environmental sustainability and although its importance is not to be diminished (Lyons et al., 2001), it goes beyond the scope of this research.

Sustainability in terms of impact means that a development project has a positive impact on its beneficiaries or target group for a longer period of time (Aga et al., 2018). An intervention has a sustainable impact in peacebuilding, if it successfully addresses the root causes for conflict and changes governance systems so that conflicts can be resolved without conflict (Samuels, 2005).

The third conception of sustainability, which is often overlooked in development work, is project sustainability. Project sustainability is the longer-term continuation of project activities with minimum outside assistance (Humphries et al., 2011). What often happens, especially in post-conflict countries, is that project activities stop when the initiator, often an INGO, withdraws (Aga et al., 2018). This would be a pity if a project has the potential to be sustained and to continue having a sustainable impact on its beneficiaries (Lyons et al., 2001). To promote project sustainability, meaningful institutions should be created that can sustain projects after the outside actors leave (Samuels, 2005). Also, development actors that are going to phase-out their operations, should come up with a sustainable phase-out strategy (Batti, 2014). Because of the specific context in which ZOA, who is also responsible for arranging the funding for the project, is going to phase-out its operations in Liberia, this research will also focus on this concept of project sustainability.

The central concept of this theoretical framework relating to sustainability is local ownership, which is subdivided into the concepts of psychological ownership and participation.

2.2 Local ownership

In the field of international development, the term local ownership is widely used by donors, governments, NGO's and other developmental actors. However, these actors rarely explicitly explaine what they mean by local ownership. In academic literature you also see that the concepts is operationalised in different ways (Bojicic-Dzelilovic & Martin, 2018). This study argues that local ownership is best operationalized by the combination of the concepts psychological ownership and participation.

Psychological ownership

Psychological ownership has been studied in development studies (Aga et al., 2018) but also in management studies, in which it is part of positive organisational behaviour theory (Avey et al., 2009). Psychological ownership means that ''people feel ownership for things that they create, shape or produce'' (Aga et al., 2018), and refers to ''that state in which individuals feel as though the target of ownership (material or immaterial in nature) or a piece of it is theirs" (Pierce et al., 2001). This feeling is purely psychological and doesn't necessarily have to be related to any official or formal ownership over this target (Olckers & De Plessis, 2012).

Avey et al. (2009) make a distinction between five domains that form two different versions of psychological ownership, with one being more constructive and promotion-based and the other being more defensive and prevention-based. The four domains belonging to the constructive version of ownership are self-efficacy, accountability, sense of belonging and self-identity, while the domain that matches the defensive version is territoriality. This distinction between the two versions of ownership is based on regulatory focus theory, which proposes that individuals have two self-regulation systems, promotion and prevention, and neither of the two is necessarily more desirable over the other (Avey et al., 2009).

Psychological ownership can enhance project sustainability, even in the case of small scale, short term outside funded projects (Fearon et al., 2009). Besides having positive emotional and attitudinal effects, psychological ownership also has important behavioural effects on the target. This is because people create a sense of responsibility to make decisions that are in the long-term interest of the target, either to protect or to improve it (Avey et al., 2009). This sense of responsibility that comes with psychological ownership triggers people to invest their energy and time into sustaining the project (Aga et al, 2018). It is not only important that project beneficiaries experience high levels of psychological ownership, enabling actors such as local authorities are also important since these have the power to obstruct or support projects. Civil society actors on the other hand are also important as

they can represent the voice of the people and serve as a counterweight to the local authorities (Mobekk, 2010).

There are various views on the emergence and transferability of psychological ownership in the development context. A communitarian view suggests that it can only emerge when local actors design, manage and implement the peacebuilding process themselves. On the other hand, the liberal view argues that it can be created by local actors taking ownership over a predetermined vision of peacebuilding, for example by an INGO. In the context of INGO's phasing out their operations in post-conflict countries, this liberal transferrable perspective of ownership is often used to stress to promotion of creating a sense of ownership by local actors so that they can sustain the project (Donais, 2009). Avey et al. (2009) argue that psychological ownership emerges in various ways. If one has better knowledge of a project and is familiar with its initiation, design and implementation methods, the person will have a stronger feeling of ownership over the project. Also, once a person invest in the project, either financially but also in terms of time, energy, skills, ideas or values, his or her feeling of ownership towards the project grows. Finally, it can emerge by developing a perceived level of control over the project (Aga et al., 2018). Psychological ownership and its relation to sustainability is seen as something very important, since it is seen as a feeling that can be developed, invested in and managed (Avey et al., 2009).

The fact that psychological ownership emerges via coming to know the target intimately, self-investing in the target, and exercising control over the target (Aga et al., 2018), shows the way that it is linked to the concept of participation.

Participation

In development work, the idea around local ownership is that locals should have a big say in the development process and have some sort of self-determination, as opposed to outsiders running the whole process. Some see participation as a watered down version of local ownership, but when participation is being analysed in all its complexity, it provides a good translation for local ownership (Richmond, 2012). In academic literature, participation of local actors is often described as an important aspect of sustainable development. It is popular in both the academic world as in the development work field and its popularity started with the realisation that many top-down development projects had failed as they didn't meet the local needs (Donais, 2009).

Local actors should largely be in charge of development solutions since they are the ones who will have to live with and sustain these solutions in the long run (Lemay-Hébert & Kappler, 2016). The discussion about local participation in the peacebuilding sector revolves around the relationship between insiders and outsiders in which, just like with psychological ownership, there are two perspectives: liberal and

communitarian. The liberal perspective argues that peace can be built by outsiders through good governance. The communitarian perspective on the other hand proposes that peacebuilding can only be done by local actors who themselves identify, develop, and make use of resources to build a peaceful society (Donais, 2009), thereby more emphasizing the importance of the participation of local actors.

While participation might sound like a straightforward concept, it's actually rather complex and highly politicized (Arnstein, 1969). Participation has an exclusive nature, and revolves around questions like who is able and allowed to participate; in which part of the process; and on what level? Depending on these factors, local participation and ownership can have different impact in terms of sustainable development.

Who participates?

Different groups of actors can be distinguished in terms of their participation in development projects. Some scholars make a distinction between direct beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries (Hideg, Michela, & Ferris, 2011), while others distinguish official or state actors and (civil) societal actors (Lyons et al., 2001). It's important to take into account the exclusionary nature of participation by not just looking at who participates, but also at who is able and allowed to participate (Von Billerbeck, 2015).

The success of participation lays in the redistribution of power and therefore it's important that a variety of actors is involved (Arnstein, 1969). Too often, women are excluded in the peacebuilding process, while their participation is essential for the success of interventions (Douglas, 2015). Also, participation of local authorities and NGO's is essential since those actors can create an enabling environment and should eventually be the ones taking over the development process (Marcussen, 1996).

In which phase?

A project consists of various phases which together form the project life cycle. Figure 1 shows Baum's project cycle, which is used to show the different project phases in the international development field. It must be noted that a project cycle is dynamic and doesn't strictly follow the arrows of Figure 1, every project has its own specific project cycle depending on its context.

Figure 1. Baum's project cycle (adapted from Baum, 1978).
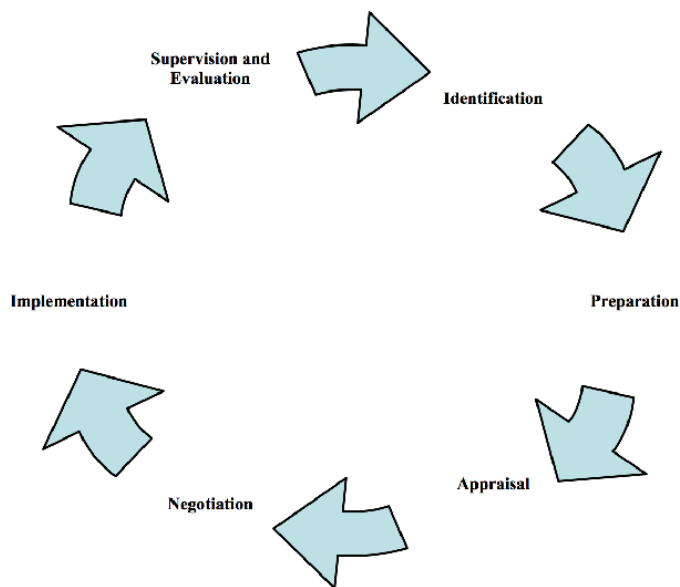
The phase of the project in which local actors are able and allowed to participate could vary from directly at the design phase of a project, to the implementation of the project, or only as the project is coming towards its end. Some scholars argue that to ensure project sustainability, participation of local actors is especially important in the early phases of projects, like the needs assessment and design phase (Marcussen, 1996). However, Donais (2009) emphasizes its role in the final phases of the project, as higher levels of local ownership in the phase-out period increases the chance of a sustainable transition.

At what level?

To better understand the concept of participation, it's useful to distinguish different levels of participation. This can be done in various ways. Arnstein (1969) was one of the first to come up with a ladder of participation, in which different levels of participation can be identified from low local ownership to high local ownership. It can be used as a tool to show the extent to which citizens have power to determine the program of a project and it includes the following levels respectively from lower to higher: manipulation; therapy; informing; consultation; placation; partnership; delegated power; and citizen control. Hideg et al. (2011) make a distinction between instrumental voice

Figure 2. Ladder of Citizens Participation (Arnstein, 1969).
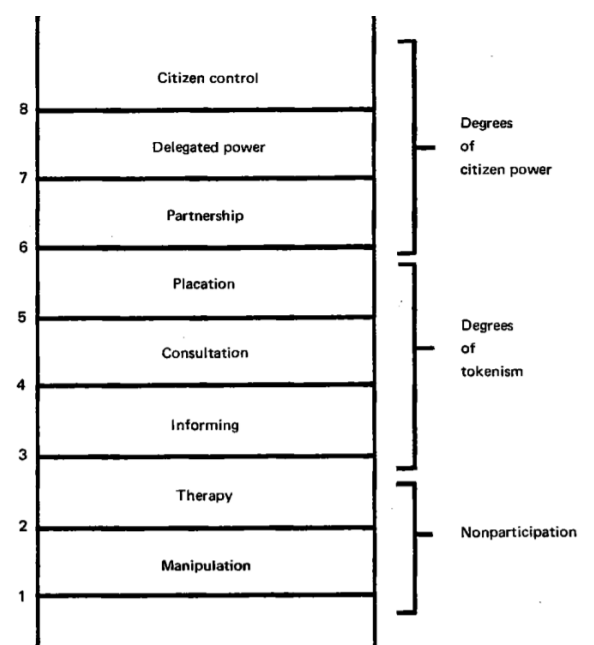
and non-instrumental voice in which instrumental voice refers to degree of influence over the outcomes of the decision making, whereas non-instrumental voice refers to the ability to express an opinion without necessarily having any influence over the outcome. Donais (2009), actually uses the term local ownership to describe higher levels of participation, or the extent to which local actors control are able to govern their own affairs. These and other ways to describe different participation levels of local actors, are all concerned with the level of agency local actors have to influence their own future (Lyons et al., 2001). While many studies are concerned with levels of participation, another aspect of participation which is not often taken into account is the extent to which actors are satisfied with their participation. One of the few that stressed the importance of looking at the level of participation satisfaction over the absolute level of participation, is Connor (1988).

Relation participation and psychological ownership

An important way in which local participation is linked to sustainability is through the promotion of psychological ownership. If local actors are consulted throughout all phases of a project, this project will be more accepted and viewed as their own and therefore more likely to be sustained (Olukotun, 2008). Also, Hideg et al. (2011) found that psychological ownership is promoted by the level of control over an outcome, similar to participation levels, and that higher levels of the two lead to intentions to sustain a certain policy.

The study of Aga et al. (2018) shows that psychological ownership has a mediating role in the relationship between local participation and project sustainability. Local participation and psychological ownership are thus seen as important factors leading towards sustainable impact and project sustainability in peacebuilding. Their relevance for INGO's is especially high because both factors can be encouraged and enhanced (Kelly et al., 2017). INGO's can do this by moving away from regulating, controlling and implementing themselves, and give more agency to local actors by taking up a role as facilitator and making a switch from top-down towards more a more bottom-up structure (Warner, 2001). Local people should not just be regarded as beneficiaries or target groups, but rather as partners and owners in the development process, Uphoff (1992) argues.

Local ownership and sustainability

Local ownership is strongly related to sustainability (Von Billerbeck, 2015), specifically in post-conflict countries in which it is crucial for sustaining peace and enhancing legitimacy (Mac Ginty, 2015). International actors can assist in this process, but if they interfere too much it will undermine the self-determination of locals which is necessary for the creation of sustainable institutions. If all the decision are made by outsiders, the local sociocultural context could be partially ignored (Pollard & Sakellariou, 2008). Peacebuilding efforts with a high degree of local ownership are considered more sustainable in

the long-term (Wong, 2013), and therefore in a good balance between local and international agency should be established in which self-determination of locals is prioritizes (De Coning, 2016).

It must be noted that it's important not to romanticise local ownership as the holy grail for sustainable peacebuilding; local actors can sometimes also provoke or sustain violence and exclusion (Mac Ginty, 2015). It seems more realistic to try to find a right balance between external drive and local ownership, and focus also on the way in which the two work together towards sustainable peace (Donais, 2009).

So, by analysing who is (not) participating, at which phase of the process and at what level, a clear picture can be provided of the level of local ownership in the development process.

2.3 Contextual factors

In this part of the theoretical framework, the most relevant factors that influence local ownership and sustainability will be discussed, with attention to the specific context of the PRCD project in Liberia.

NGO's in international development

Because of their specific nature, NGO's are supposed to have the capacity to: reach the poorest and most remote people; operate on low costs; be innovated, experimental, adaptive and flexible; strengthen local institutions; empower marginal groups; and promote local participation by implementing projects in close collaboration with local beneficiaries (Marcussen, 1996). Also, NGO's are value driven organisations that prioritize the needs of the most vulnerable and poor (Musaka, 1999). NGO's often use participatory approaches in their projects and therefore local participation of beneficiaries has an important role in their work (Donais, 2009).

A weakness however is that they often operate in isolation and without much collaboration with other (non-governmental) organisations, while this is crucial for truly sustainable development. There is a lack of sharing information and experience between NGO's that are working in the same region and in the same field. Better networking is a way to reach beyond the often isolated projects and have a bigger impact (Warner, 2001). Development projects are often implemented by a partnership of a donor, INGO and local NGO (Olawoore & Kamruzzaman, 2019).

INGO's in post-conflict countries

A lack of local participation and ownership in development projects in post-conflict countries can partially be ascribed to the fact that in the eyes of some INGO's, these countries are seen as ill, dysfunctional and unable the manage their own development. Local actors are therefore seen either with suspicion or pity, and their participation is neglected. Another reason for a lack of local participation, especially with peacebuilding initiatives, is the fact that there is no guarantee that locals have the same objectives are the INGO. Local perspectives are seen as obstacles instead of potential

sources for sustainable development which results in a lack of local participation on the higher levels, such as in the decision-making process (Donais, 2009). There are however also cases in which local ownership does play a big role in development projects in post-conflict countries. In neighbouring Sierra-Leone, INGO's have made a shift towards a more facilitating role in which there is more space for local ownership (Pollard & Sakellariou, 2008). Important actors that should be included in development projects in African countries are youth and women since they are to a great extent marginalized in society and face severe inequalities (Woods, 2011).

Donor relations

Most NGO's are largely depending on funding from donor organisations. NGOs have to find some sort of balance between normative goals of the organisation and strategic survival of mobilizing resources, and this influences their policy behaviour (Batti, 2014; Gent et al., 2015).

There are two models in NGO-donor relations; the demand-led model and the supply-led model. The demand-led model is seen as the most preferred one by NGO's, as it prioritises the demands in development work and therefore the needs of local beneficiaries. This model allows for power-sharing between the donor an NGO and promotes local ownership and sustainability of the results. It encourages the empowerment of marginalised groups, flexibility of operations and a long-term perspective. The accountability of NGO's in this model is mainly downward toward local beneficiaries. The supply-led model on the other hand is more of a one-way model in which donors are the dominant power. Donors set the objectives for development work, and NGO's are supposed to adapt to these donor regulations in order to secure funding from them. Following this model, NGO's become mere implementers of donor agendas and align their own policy to that of the donor. NGO's risk losing their own identity and the accountability of their work shifts from the beneficiaries to the donor (AbouAssi, 2013). This supply-led model is the dominant model in the field of international development, and this has implications on the policy choices of NGO's as they have to react to shifts of donor priorities. AbouAssi (2013) uses a traditional African proverb to explain this situation: ''If you have your hands in another man's pocket, you must move when he moves''. For NGO's to try to move their relationship with donors towards more of a demand-led model, it's crucial to build reputation stability. When a NGO has already proved its competence, donors are more likely to support them with long-term and more flexible funding. In this way, NGO's can work towards their goals without having to focus too much on the donor policies (Gent et al., 2015).

The study of Agyemang et al. (2017) shows that the attitudes of NGO staff are not always negative towards donor regulations. Being closely assessed is not seen as a bad thing and the use of indicators to measure project impact is seen as a tool to improve the effectiveness of development projects.

However, static indicators should be complemented with 'richer' information in forms of stories from the field and together these can form a balance which as a whole has a positive influence on development work.

Local partners

Traditionally, INGO's have been implementing development projects in the Global South themselves. However, the emergence of local NGO's in many countries in the Global South local NGO's has changed the roles of INGO's. Many have started partnerships with local NGO's and shifted their role from implementing to facilitating (Musaka, 1999). Local NGO's are imbedded in the communities in which the development work takes place and they have more local knowledge which enhances their legitimacy. To promote local ownership, INGO's should focus on capacity building of local NGO's. Often a project begins by doing a needs assessment, but too often it misses a capacity assessment. If a capacity assessment is done on forehand, INGO's can tailor their support based on the capacities that are already available in the region. Focussing on the capacities of local organisations and help build their capacities where needed, increases the self-reliance of these organisations on the long term. For good partnership it is crucial to allow local partners to lead instead of treating them as implementing contractors (Hayman, 2013).

While local NGO's in the Global South have been growing in numbers and capacity (Lewis & Sobhan, 1999), there is still not much local ownership in most cases as INGO's and donors are largely in control of the development process (Libal & Harding, 2011). The partnership is often based on dependency, as local NGO's struggle for the (financial) support from INGO's and donors (Cohen, 2014). INGO's could support local NGO's with capacity building where necessary, but for this to happen there needs to be mutual understanding between the outsiders and insiders and a certain level of trust (Kajimbwa, 2006).

Expatriates and local staff

When looking at development actors in the Global South, outsiders and insiders are also represented as expatriates and local staff within development organisations. In principle, the use of expatriates is justifiable when certain skills are not locally available. However, not finding the right local skills could also mean that the local capacity assessment and recruitment process are failing, rather than the local skills actually are not available. Another reason for the use of expatriates has to do with donor preferences as donors might be more willing to fund projects in that are led by expatriates. This use of expatriates may be useful for donor accountability, but it doesn't stimulate local ownership (Musaka, 1999). Another issue is that power differences can create a large distance between local staff and expatriates, which hinders the possibilities for true partnership and capacity building within an organisation (McWha, 2011). These power relations between locals and expatriated mirror the power

relations between donors and INGOs and local NGOs. One typical example of these relations is remote control aid. Expatriates are often not allowed to go into these remote and sometimes dangerous areas and therefore locals are implementing the projects in these areas. Whereas some expatriates see this as a good example of promoting local ownership, in reality it says more about the power relations between expatriates and locals. Most often, these locals that implement these projects don't have much decision-making power (van Voorst, 2019).

Relief versus development

NGO's that are traditionally relief oriented, tend to have a rather top down structure, in which there is not much room for local participation (Marcussen, 1996). This involves short-term planning without much attention to long-term sustainability of the project and its impact (Musaka, 1999). When there is less need for emergency relief projects and there is a growing number of local NGO's and other actors getting involved in the development sector, INGO's have to make a transition towards longer-term development oriented work. Especially once INGO's have been working in a country in the Global South for a longer period, they have to adjust to the changing local realities. When INGO's want to make this transition, there needs to be a shift from working on the ground as an implementor and controller towards becoming a catalysator and facilitator (Warner, 2001). However, in reality this is often lacking (Lewis & Sobhan, 1999).

Phasing-out

Increasing the potential for project sustainability might be most relevant when projects are phasing-out. The logical endpoint of any development project, especially in peacebuilding, is handing over the responsibility to local actors. The more these actors are able to claim authorship and ownership over these projects, the higher the chance of a sustainable transition (Donais, 2009). There is evidence indicating that NGOs have problems with phasing-out sustainably, and therefore it's important that a good phase-out strategy is drawn up when designing a project (Batti, 2014). Altahir (2013) argues that local NGO's are among the most important actors to take over the development process when INGO's are phasing out. Capacity building programmes and partnerships with local NGO's, in which gradual steps are included to hand over the management and implementation of projects, could enhance project sustainability. Kleemeier (2000) found that when the outside actor has left, especially bigger projects seem to fail. Smaller projects have higher chances of being sustained by local actors because they often feel more ownership over these projects and there is less need for top-down decision making, which allows for higher levels of local participation throughout the project.

Rhetoric versus reality

Despite the fact that there is a lot of evidence that development actors are poorly promoting local ownership and sustainability, many NGO's and donors still describe them as one of the most important pillars of their work. However, statements about local participation and ownership often remain vague and activities to enhance it are mostly symbolic, as promises are rarely truly put into practice (Donais, 2009). In theory, local participation is all about inclusion, but in practice participation is rather a matter of exclusion. Who is included and excluded, in which part of the process, and on what level, is all carefully aligned with the priorities and goals of the organisation (Von Billerbeck, 2015).

2.4 Conceptual Framework

The basic assumed relation from the theoretical framework is that local ownership leads to sustainable peacebuilding. By breaking down the concept of local ownership into local participation and psychological ownership, and the concept of sustainable peacebuilding into sustainable impact and project sustainability, this relation is best visualised by the following figure.

Figure 3. Conceptual model (author's own).
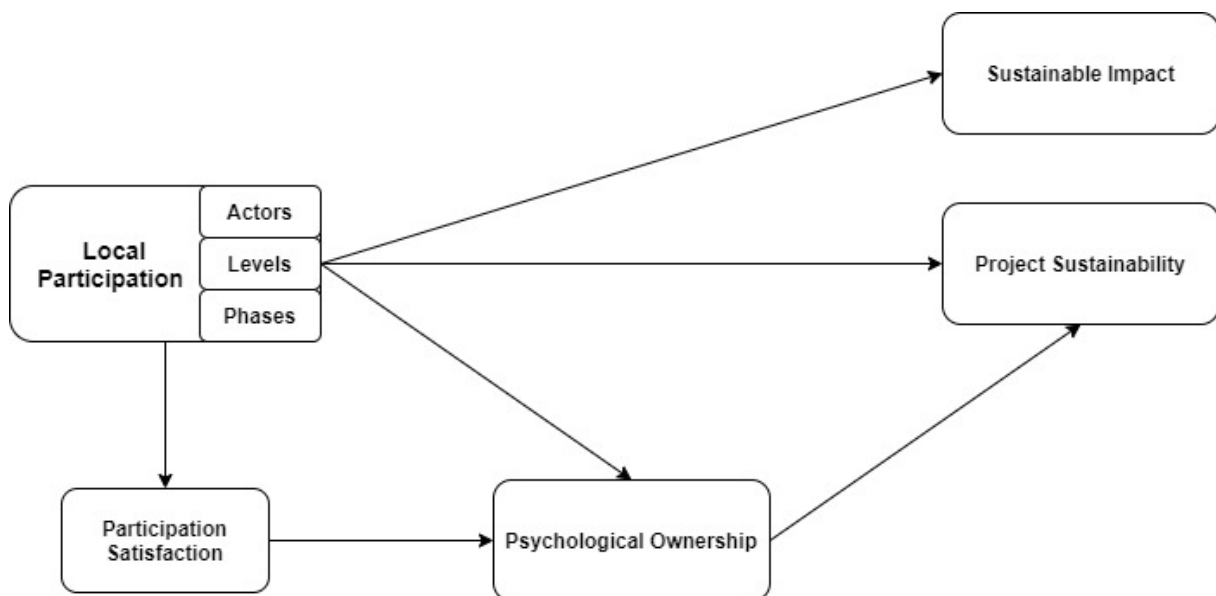
3. Research questions

The main research question is as follows:

What role does local ownership play in the sustainability of peacebuilding projects in Liberia and how is this impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic?

Sub questions:

1. *How are the concepts of local ownership and sustainability represented in the policies of different development partners?*
2. *To what extent do project beneficiaries have ownership over the project in which they participate?*
3. *How is ownership distributed amongst the three partner organisations and what does this mean for the sustainability of this project?*
4. *To what extent are there discrepancies between policy and practice with regards to local ownership and sustainability and how can these be explained?*
5. *What are the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on local ownership and sustainable peacebuilding in Liberia?*

4. Regional context

In this section, attention will be paid to the regional context of his research, starting with some geographical information about Liberia, after which some relevant aspects of its history, the current situation and the case study project will be addressed.

4.1 Geography

Liberia is situated in West Africa along the Atlantic Ocean, sharing borders with Sierra Leone on the west, Guinea on the north, and Ivory Coast on the east. With a surface of 111.369 square kilometres it's close to three times larger than the Netherlands, and with that it can be considered a relatively small country for African standards. The country is subdivided into 15 counties, of which the capital, Monrovia, is located in Montserrado county (CIA, 2020).

4.2 Historical background

Liberia was established as an independent state in 1847, after liberated slaves from the United States first settled there in 1822 (Government of Liberia, 2012). These settlers introduced a western political and social structure and introduced English as the national language. While some say that Liberia is the only African country that has never been colonized, others argue that it's actually these Americo-Liberian settlers who colonialized Liberia and ruled over its indigenous population until 1980, when Samuel Doe came to rule the country as the first indigenous president. The relationship between the Americo-Liberians and the many ethnic groups already living in Liberia looked a lot like European colonialism, as indigenous groups, which consisted of 95% of the population, were excluded from any political or governmental engagement (PeacebuildingData, 2010).

Civil wars

In the First Liberian Civil War, lasting from 1989 to 1997, the regime of Samuel Doe was challenged by Charles Taylor (Hegre et al., 2009). During this time the country split into different military groups, mostly based on ethnicity. Charles Taylor, but later also other military groups, made use of child soldiers who were often young boys who lost their parents in the war. While boys were mainly

recruited as child soldiers, many young girls were raped and forced to sexual servitude by the fighters (PeacebuildingData, 2010).

The First Liberian Civil War came to an end in 1997 when Charles Taylor was elected as president. Taylor's authoritarian regime failed to tackle the social and economic problems in the country, and human rights violations and scapegoating of ethnic groups were among the main reasons why Liberia headed into its second civil war in 1999 (Kieh Jr, 2009; Freedom House, 2020). The peace accords that were signed in 2003 eventually brought an end to the Second Liberian Civil War and with that an end to 14 years of violence (Paczynska, 2016).

The two civil wars still have their impact on the country. Over the course of the two civil wars, out of a population of 3.8 million, more than 250.000 people were killed and around two million became either internally displaced or refugees in neighbouring countries (Paczynska, 2016). Women suffered a lot as those who were not murdered, experienced or witnessed horrible acts of sexual brutality and torture. During the course of the two wars, over 80% of Liberian women have been sexually assaulted, while many of them also lost their homes and their children who were recruited as child soldiers (Ouellet, 2013). Besides the incredibly high human costs, Liberia's economy was reduced by an astonishing 90% and the wars also destroyed much of the country's social, political and governance systems (Paczynska, 2016). A striking example is the fact that before the wars, in 1989, there were 800 practicing doctors in the country, while by the end of the wars, in 2003, this number had been reduced to just 50. Many of the Liberia's brightest people had left the country during war times (Sirleaf, 2011).

Reconstruction

After two civil wars, the country was up for a major challenge of rebuilding all that had been destroyed. Many INGO's came to provide emergency aid in the first few years, and some stayed to expand their operations to more long-term recovery and development projects. In 2005, after two years of a transitional government, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf was elected as the new president of Liberia (Paczynska, 2016). Since her election as the first female president of an African country, the opportunities for women have significantly improved in all sectors compared to the pre-civil war period in which women were largely marginalized (Woods, 2011). In order to rebuild the country she pushed a policy of liberalisation and democratization with large scale support from Western governments and institutions like the IMF and the World Bank (Paczynska, 2016).

At the centre of the reconstruction programme was the Poverty Reduction Strategy, which focussed largely on attracting FDI and ODA in order to boost the economy, create employment, and finance their ambitious reconstruction programme. These were to be the source from which the country could promote equitable development. When FDI and ODA began to flow into the country, growing

production, exports and government revenues led to growing GDP. Between 2010 and 2013, Liberia was one of the world's fastest growing economies. However, the attraction of FDI aggravated the very issues it was supposed to alleviate, including poverty, displacement, environmental degradation and food security, as most FDI was concerned with large scale land concessions. The very people that were depending on these lands for their livelihoods were not included in the negotiation process of the deals, not consulted about the deals, and often displaced from their land with little or no compensation. So, while the government was attracting large amounts of FDI, the livelihoods of many rural Liberians were deprived as displacement, tensions over land issues, food insecurity and poverty increased (Paczynska, 2016). The Liberian government has in hindsight also acknowledged that their Poverty Reduction Strategy has not worked out the way they had envisioned it. In a new major strategic policy report, Liberia Rising, the post-war policy is being labelled as crisis management, in which symptoms were being addressed rather than the root causes of underdevelopment in Liberia. The country's economy can best be described as one characterized by high dependency on FDI and ODA, which needs to be changed (Government of Liberia, 2012).

Overall, women and religion have played fundamental roles in Liberia's reconstruction process (Ouellet, 2013). Development priorities that locals, especially women peace leaders, put forward such as peaceful coexistence, local healing and economic justice, where largely overlooked by international donors who saw more urgency in setting up trials for war criminals (Duckworth, 2016). While the importance of local ownership has been at the centre of the international development discourse, the international community seemed to prefer their own interpretations of what was needed than to listen to the ideas and initiatives of the Liberian people (de Carvalho et al., 2019).

Ebola

While the Liberian economy was still growing significantly and the government was busy with implementing the new vision Liberia Rising, an Ebola epidemic broke out in 2014 (World Health Organization, 2019a). In Guinea, Sierra-Leone and Liberia, a total of 11.310 people died from Ebola between 2014 and 2016, of which around 5000 in Liberia (World Health Organization, 2019b).

The Ebola crisis got a lot of global attention and thereby Liberia became an aid hotspot from the international community (Connolly et al., 2015). The vast majority of the financial aid went to international organisations and staff working in the region rather than local ones (Shepler, 2017). Because of the urgent nature of international disaster aid, there is hardly any opportunity for participation of local actors in the process. During the Ebola crisis in Liberia this was no different, as important local actors were bypassed in order to make rapid decisions and actions possible. The participation on local actors could have been crucial, as these are able to spread knowledge in their

communities and help international actors understand the way in which local habits and rituals can play a role in combating the virus (Bøås & Tom, 2016).

The Ebola crisis was not just a health emergency, but also a development issue and peacebuilding challenge. In the 90-day state of emergency, schools closed, people were urged to stay at home and there were no social gatherings (Connolly et al., 2015). Also, many non-medical international development workers left the region during the epidemic (Jaffe, 2015). Because of the sudden and immediate attention for the Ebola situation and the health sector, other sectors were neglected. As a result, the peacebuilding process in Liberia came to a halt (Connolly et al., 2015). While estimations vary, Huber et al. (2018) estimate that on top of the human losses, the social and economic burden of the Ebola epidemic has eventually passed 50 billion dollars. So due to the Ebola crisis, the country has become even more dependent on the aid of INGO's in the development process.

The Ebola crisis also exposed structurally overlooked problems in the country's development, including the short term focus in the sector in which there is little room for local ownership (Flessa & Marx, 2016). One of the lessons that can be learned from this period, is that development aid should increasingly be implemented with local actors and through local systems (Shepler, 2017).

4.3 Current state of Liberia

Demography

Liberia's population has grown from around 2 million in the first half of the 1990s to around five million today, and most recent figures show a growth rate of 2.5% in 2018. Of the total population, some 1.5 million live in the urban area of greater Monrovia (World Bank, 2020a). Most Liberians not living in greater Monrovia live in a rather rural setting, as the second biggest city Gbarnga has only around 50.000 inhabitants. Liberia has a very young population, with more than 60% being under the age of 25 and a median age of 17.8 years (CIA, 2020). Due to its history of settlers, Liberia is one of the most Christian countries of Africa (Government of Liberia, 2012), with a Christian majority of 85% and an Islamic minority of 12%. There are many ethnic groups in Liberia, and their distribution shows strong variation across the different counties (PeacebuildingData, 2020). Because different ethnic groups live very clustered, most communities are relatively homogeneous ethnically speaking (Fearon, Humphreys, & Weinstein, 2009). The only exception is the region of greater Monrovia, in which there is a more representative distributions of ethnicities (PeacebuildingData, 2020). Liberia also has a large group that can be considered a mix of local and foreign; repats. These are people that fled the war or had their education abroad and came back to live and work in Liberia (de Carvalho et al., 2019).

Liberia is one of the least developed countries of the world, and currently ranks 176th out of 185 countries on the HDI (UNDP, 2019). The life expectancy is 63 years (World Bank, 2020a), and 76.2% of

the population is living on less than $1 (USD) per day. Access to healthcare services is extremely low and there are high levels of infant mortality and malnutrition (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2019). Poverty is unevenly divided in Liberia both in terms of geography and gender, as there is significantly more poverty in rural areas and amongst women (PeacebuildingData, 2010).

Politics and economy

After Ellen Sirleaf-Johnson finished her second presidential term in 2017, former footballer George Weah was elected into office. So far, he has not been able to achieve much in terms of combating youth unemployment, poverty and corruption, which were among his main campaign topics (NRC, 2020). Liberia is still one of the poorest nations in this world, and while the economy was still recovering from the impact of the Ebola crisis, it is currently facing another recession. Both FDI and ODA have been drastically decreasing over the past years. In 2010, Liberia was receiving 2065 million USD in FDI and 1416 million USD in ODA, while in 2018 this was decreased to 112 million USD in FDI and 622 million USD in ODA (World Bank, 2020a).

Education

School enrolment levels in Liberia have been steadily rising during the post-war era, until they started declining in 2014 due to the Ebola crisis. Despite the Ebola crisis being over, enrolment levels continue to decline (The World Bank, 2019). There is a clear gender divide in school enrolment levels, as more boys enjoy educational opportunities compared to girls. Primary education levels are relatively high, with 89,8% for females and 97,7% for males, but secondary education levels are a lot lower with 31.8% for females and 40.6% for males. Tertiary education levels are extremely low with only 9% for females and 14.3% for males (United Nations Statistics Division, 2020). Due to this imbalance of educational enrolment, men are significantly more likely to be literate and educated than women (PeacebuildingData, 2010).

Peace and stability

In terms of war violence, Libera is doing well and has been quite stable since the end of the war. The peace in Liberia represents the absence of violence, or negative peace, rather than truly peaceful coexistence, social cohesion and trust, or positive peace. There hasn't been justice for victim of the war, as no one who has committed human rights violations and war crimes has yet been prosecuted in the country (Amnesty International, 2018), while the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has recommended to create a war times court over 10 years ago (Human Rights Watch, 2019). Many of the root causes of the war including corruption, land ownership disputes, youth unemployment and ethnic tensions, are still persistent in Liberia (Paczynska, 2016).

Corruption in public services is widespread, and a survey by Catholic Relief Services (2016) shows that 85% of respondents identified this as the most potential conflict trigger. From 2018 to 2019, Liberia's score on the Corruption Perceptions Index has dropped from 32/100 to 28/100, leading to their current rank on the 137th place (Transparency International, 2020). There is a lack of trust in the government, and civil society organizations therefore play a key role in the peace process (International Peace Institute, 2019). Some Liberian development workers have argued that the system is so corrupt that funding the government directly would simply not work (de Carvalho et al., 2019). However, as many local organisations also lack capabilities, Liberia has been largely depending on external actors in the peacebuilding process (Gizelis, & Joseph, 2016).

With the economy being in a recession, youth unemployment still is a concern for many Liberians. This is mainly because during the course of the war, most children were either not able to go to school, or were fighting as child soldiers. Therefore, with the current economic recession, high level of unemployment of these vulnerable youth are a major threat to the peacebuilding process. Throughout the Liberian society as a whole, the position of women is still not equal to that of men, despite having more women in public offices during the 12 years of Johnson Sirleaf's presidency (Catholic Relief Services, 2016). The concerns about peace and security are aggravated by the withdraw of the peacekeeping forces of the UNMIL in March 2018, who were deployed in the country since the end of the war in 2003 (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2019).

COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic struck the world in early 2020 and although its long term impact on peacebuilding is still unknown, various challenges have already emerged (Eufemia et al., 2020). Social cohesion in many countries is put at risks because of restrictions on social interactions (Tanabe, 2020). Traditionally, peacebuilding work relies on face to face contact, and many project include group sessions with community members. These types of project activities are often impossible due to social distancing restrictions, especially in lock-down situations (Alberti & Clark, 2020). Many staff have to work from home where they face poor internet and electricity networks, and field visits are largely restricted (De Coning, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that peacebuilding efforts that largely rely on external support are unsustainable as they create dependency in communities (Alberti & Clark, 2020).

In response to the changing needs of the pandemic, some development organisations have adapted their programming, while others have reallocated funds to COVID-19 response programming. This means that while some projects continue under different circumstances, others are paused or stopped completely. All of this requires a flexible and adaptive position of development organisations and their donors. On the longer term, the impact that the pandemic will have on the economy of countries

around the world could lead to a decline in funding for development work, including peacebuilding projects (Alberti & Clark, 2020).

Liberia being the fragile country it is, is very vulnerable for the effects of the pandemic. The World Bank (2020b), expects poverty to increase because of rising food prices and declining incomes. A COVID-19 Community Resilience and Conflict Sensitivity Monitoring assessment, carried out by the Liberian Peacebuilding Office, showed that conflict drivers have increased due to the pandemic. Due to the closure of schools during the lock-down period, criminal activities and sexual and gender-based violence have increased. Also, leadership and power issues have emerged and if these are not addressed quickly this would put the fragile peace in Liberia at risk (Mulbah, 2020).

4.4 Case study

Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency

Sida is Sweden's official government agency for development cooperation and is the donor in the PRCD project. In Liberia, Sida works through the Swedish Ambassy in Monrovia, where ZOA and YMCA also have their offices. Sida's purpose statement reads: *''We create conditions for the poorest and most vulnerable to shape their existence and future''*, and they have strong advocacy on gender equality and sustainability (Sida, 2020).

ZOA Liberia

ZOA Liberia is a sub organisation of ZOA-international, a Christian INGO with its headquarter based in the Netherlands. Founded in 1976 to help the vulnerable population of South-Vietnam, ZOA has grown to become a large organisation that currently works in 16 countries in the Global South (ZOA International, 2020), as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Countries in which ZOA currently operates (ZOA International, 2020).

ZOA works in countries that are affected by war or natural disasters, and as the quote in the introduction shows, their work is focussed on relief and recovery for vulnerable people, until they are ready to help themselves again. In its work ZOA strives to reach out to all people in need, irrespective of their religion, race, ethnicity or gender. For their projects, ZOA depends largely on funding from private donors, companies, trusts foundations and institutional donors. Important donors are the Dutch, American, Australian, Swedish and British governments, the EU and different UN agencies. ZOA tries to share knowledge and experiences with other NGO's where possible, and is involved in multiple national, international and local partnerships and networks (ZOA International, 2020).

It has been active in Liberia since 2003, after the peace accords were signed. As an organisation that focusses on relief and recovery, ZOA usually doesn't work in a country for such a long period. Liberia's slow path of development with harsh setbacks including the Ebola epidemic, has ensured ZOA to keep on working in the country for so long. However, ZOA is scheduled to leave Liberia in 2023, which means that in the coming years, many of its projects are being phased-out. In Liberia ZOA has projects in the following sectors: Food security and Livelihoods; Peacebuilding; WASH; and Education (ZOA International, 2020).

YMCA Liberia

YMCA Liberia has been founded in 1881 as a Christian organisation that strives for community development by focussing mainly on the empowerment of Liberian youth (YMCA Liberia, n.d.d). Before the civil wars, YMCA Liberia was known for its sports and recreational activities and leadership development. During the wars, their programming grew to emergency assistance, school feeding, and rehabilitation of ex-combatants and child soldiers, among others (YMCA Liberia, n.d.c). As a result of this expanded programming, YMCA grew as an organisation and outreached many parts of the country. Nowadays, YMCA Liberia has one national headquarter in Monrovia, and six active branched throughout the country. With over a century of experience in youth development, its community and national presence, connections, and networks are strong, making YMCA well known to all relevant development actors (YMCA Liberia, n.d.d).

Peacebuilding and Reconciliation through Community Dialogues

This research focusses on the peacebuilding project: *Peacebuilding and Reconciliation through Community Dialogues: Strengthening Social Cohesion and Civic Trust in Five Counties, Liberia. 2017 – 2020* (PRCD). The project is initiated by ZOA in partnership with YMCA Liberia, and funded by Sida through the Swedish Embassy in Monrovia. Its main objective is to create strengthened social cohesion and civic trust within and between communities and between population and local government in five counties. Between 2017 and 2020, a gender balanced group of 11.552 people will be direct

beneficiaries and 63.524 indirect beneficiaries. The project consists of four sub-projects all serving the same overall objective (ZOA, 2017).

Community-based Sociotherapy (CBS) is a group-based methodology that has been proven to foster profound reconciliation and healing from accumulated and unaddressed grievances and trauma in post conflict settings. In this approach, the victims, offenders and the community as a whole are the key stakeholders. In a safe setting, victims and offenders recognize and acknowledge the wrongs committed and experienced and together commit to play an active role in rebuilding trust and positive social cohesion and inclusion (ZOA, 2017).

The second sub-project is the establishment of 40 Peace Clubs in schools all around the country. The Peace Clubs are there to help to solve conflicts between students, advise students who have a conflict with a teacher, organize cleaning campaigns in the school and outside, share peace messages during morning devotion, organize sports tournaments in the school and between schools etc. Members are also active outside school on individual basis, as they help friends and family members to solve their conflicts. The respective school administrations will also be given training in order to institutionalize the promotion of a culture of peace in the education system (ZOA, 2017).

To further reinforce the promotion of positive dialogue and peacebuilding, the peacebuilding project also involves the establishment of a Community Leaders Forum (CLF) in each project location, to be held bi-annually. At the CLF, local authority officials, leaders of civil society, NGOs and interest groups in the community meet to discuss issues in the community. This activity is also intended to ensure the issues that emerge from the CBS sessions and peace clubs are raised in a mixed forum of influential figures. Also bi-annually, Civic Trust Workshops (CTW) will be held in which key officials at county level along with senior management from civil society organisations will be trained in peacebuilding, conflict reduction and building civic trust between communities and government. CBS participants as well as representatives from the Peace Clubs and CLF will also participate in these workshops (ZOA, 2017).

The various projects are integrated with one another by letting participants from the CBS, Peace Clubs and CLF join the CTW project. However, while implementing these projects, it was observed hat the CLF and CTW projects were overlapping both in terms of topics as in participants. Therefore, it was decided to merge these two projects into one, leaving the PRCD project with three subprojects (ZOA, 2020).

5. Methodology

5.1 Operationalization of variables

The main concepts for this research are psychological ownership and participation. There have been various studies to psychological ownership in which it has been operationalized and its validity was tested. Psychological ownership can be subdivided into two versions: a more constructive, promotion-based and a more defensive, prevention-based version. The constructive ownership consists of self-efficacy, accountability, sense of belonging and self-identity. The preventive ownership is described as territoriality. Together, those five domains are the operationalisation of psychological ownership (Avey et al., 2009). For participation, the operationalisation is based on a combination of academic work which is discussed in the theoretical framework. This study operationalises participation by looking at three factors: who participates; in which phases of the project; and on what level? This study fucuses specifically on those actors that participate in the PRCD project. The operationalisation of project phases and participation levels was firstly derived from academic work and thereafter discussed and adapted with ZOA staff in order to make sure it would match the perceptions of these concepts by project participants and other involved actors in the project. The following phases were distinguished: Needs assessment; baseline; action planning; activity; monitoring and evaluation. In terms of participation levels, this research will make a distinction between five levels: not involved, informed, consulted, implementing, decision-making. This results in the participation scheme of Table 1.

Table 1. Participation scheme with levels and phases

	Needs assessment	Baseline	Action planning	Activity phase	Monitoring & Evaluation
Decision-making					
Implementing					
Consulted					
Informed					
Not involved					

5.2 Methods, techniques and sampling strategies

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the fieldwork period of this research was shortened to a five week period instead of a fourteen week period, during which no hard data collection was done. The research was continued from the Netherlands, while being supported by a supervisor from ZOA for practicalities. A mixed-methods approach is used that includes policy analysis, a survey and interviews. Different qualitative methods are used to ensure triangulation which enhances the reliability of the

collected data. This results in a higher validity because different dimensions of the research topic are studied via multiple methods (Hennink et al., 2010). The study population of this research is defined as 'different actors, both local and international, involved in peacebuilding projects in Liberia'. This study takes the PRCD project in Liberia as its case study and for participant recruitment focusses on the various actors involved in the project; Swedish donor agency Sida, INGO ZOA, local NGO YMCA Liberia, and the direct project beneficiaries.

Field work period

Although no data collection was conducted during the five weeks, the fieldwork period can still be considered valuable to this research for several reasons. First of all, as I was working daily in the peacebuilding office of ZOA, I got to hear and learn a lot about what was going on in the project. Additionally, I visited several project sites in different parts of the country were I was able to speak to direct and indirect beneficiaries, as with YMCA Field Officers working on the project. We discussed various issues in the communities, and their views on the project. During these five weeks, I got to understand the project beyond just having read the project proposal and reports. Also, by residing in the country, working at the ZOA office and visiting project sites, I got to understand the context in which this project is situated. This all has been of great value in adapting the research plan and in understanding how the research topic is situation in its local context. Also, because of my presence in Liberia where I was able to work alongside and speak with people involved in the PRCD project, continuing my research from the Netherlands was made easier as a certain level of trust or rapport was already build.

Policy analysis

By conducting a policy analysis on documents from Sida, ZOA and YMCA Liberia, the following sub-question is addressed: *How are the concepts of local ownership and sustainability represented in the policies of different development partners?* The policy documents of the three organisations are not one on one comparable, since they don't have the exact same policy documents. However, by gathering an extensive amount of relevant policy documents from each organisation, these documents in totality can be compared to those of the other organisations. YMCA for example doesn't have a partnership policy, but the topic is discussed in various other policy documents like the strategic plan. Therefore, a topic like partnership can still be included in the policy analysis. For all organisations, documents like project proposals, annual strategy, mission and vision statements, and guiding principles were selected to be included in the analysis. In total twenty policy documents were included in this analysis, of which a list is included in Appendix I. Sida has an open database in which all of these documents are accessible, and I was also provided with access to all relevant ZOA documents. Getting

access to policy documents from YMCA Liberia was more difficult, as their website had been offline for months and requesting documents via mail didn't prove successful. Eventually, I was provided access to all relevant documents by the help of ZOA and YMCA staff members. The coding framework that can be seen in Table 2 was used.

Table 2. Coding framework policy analysis

Category	Description	Example
Development principles	Principles that form the base of development policy. E.g. gender equality.	*''We are prepared when necessary to stand alone, even when facing opposition, for Swedish priorities and universal norms such as gender equality, environment and climate, international humanitarian rights, human rights and the principle of all people's equal value, as well as pursuing questions involving the decreasing democratic space and anti-corruption.''* (Sida, 2019b)
Perspectives	Via who's perspective a certain policy is being looked at. E.g. a global, EU or local perspective.	*"The perspective of poor people on development involve poor women's, men's and children's situations, needs, circumstances and priorities being used as the basis for poverty reduction and the promotion of equitable and sustainable development.''* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Sweden, 2016)
Ownership	Who owns the development process, or has the feeling that it's theirs, e.g. decision-making or initiating.	*''The facilitator will ask probing questions but the content of these forums will be based on the participants at the CLF.''* (ZOA, 2017)
Participation	Includes who participates, at what level, and in which part of the process.	*"A "Participation Revolution": listen more to and include beneficiaries that are affected.''* (ZOA, n.d.)
Ways of working	The way in which certain policy is to be executed , and the role various actors have in the field of development and peacebuilding specifically.	*"Donor have an important role in improving the environment for CSOs. Given the influence that donors are able to exert on individual CSOs and the civil society sector as a whole donor behaviour is an important component of the enabling environment.''* (Sida, 2019a)
Partnership	Includes everything that has got to do with partnership, donorship and cooperation between different development actors.	*"It is important that Sweden's contributions are coordinated with other traditional and non-traditional donors and actors. Good coordination can contribute to experience exchanges, coordination of reporting and reporting requirements, and follow-up.''* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Sweden, 2017)
Sustainability	Development impact that lasts, e.g. project sustainability.	*"Solutions for poverty and sustainability demand a multidisciplinary approach. We need to continuously adapt and improve*

		solutions and to ensure quality in our choices based on learning, experience, analysis and evidence.'' (Sida, 2019b)
Phase out	All information on how projects that are being executed, will be phased out when the official project period is coming to an end.	''Partnerships may expand beyond project duration and include programme level strategic collaboration between ZOA and the local partner.'' (ZOA, 2018a)
Obstacles	Obstacles in development work, that are to do with ownership and participation and partnership. E.g. donor restrictions.	''The lack of civic trust can lead to short term thinking and a lack of ambition for development by local authorities, rather than the building of trust through working together constructively.'' (ZOA, 2017)

Survey

A survey is conducted to answer the sub-question: *To what extend do project beneficiaries have ownership over the project in which they participate?* In total, 122 people participated in the survey of whom most are project beneficiaries and some YMCA and ZOA staff. The survey mainly consist of operationalised concepts from the theoretical framework, combined with other relevant questions to the topic. It includes a participation scheme with levels and phases, similar to Table 1. The full survey design can be found in Appendix II. Three ZOA staff members provided support by giving feedback on the initial survey design and by helping conduct surveys among project beneficiaries. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic related restrictions, the designed as an online survey. ZOA and YMCA survey participants were recruited via email, and were able to conducted the survey online. An equal amount of beneficiaries was randomly selected per subproject of the PRCD project, to ensure a representative group, and these were approached to fill in the survey via telephone. These telephone surveys were conducted by the three ZOA staff and project participants had room to explain their answers where they felt the need. To ensure this valuable information was included in the research, short open unstructured interviews were held with the three ZOA staff members that conducted these surveys.

In-depth interviews

After having finalized both the policy analysis and the survey analysis, interviews were conducted with ZOA and YMCA staff to get an understanding of their views on the role of local ownership in the sustainability of peacebuilding, and in the PRCD project in specific. The interviews mainly try to answer the following two sub questions of this research: *How is ownership distributed amongst the three partner organisations and what does this mean for the sustainability of this project?; To what extent are there discrepancies between policy and practice with regards to local ownership and sustainability and how can these be explained?; What are the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on local*

ownership and sustainable peacebuilding in Liberia? Answering these questions will be the last step in becoming able to answer the main research question. The interviews are semi-structured to leave room for flexibility so that unexpected input that is spontaneously brought up, can also be discussed. Due to the fact that most interviews are mainly with people in Liberia and due to social restrictions regarding COVID-19, they are conducted via Microsoft Teams and other online communication platforms. Out of the ten interviews that were conducted in total, five were with ZOA Liberia staff, one with ZOA Liberia staff that recently stopped, one with ZOA Netherlands staff, and three with YMCA staff.

5.3 Co-creation

''Co-creation is about building up equal knowledge-producing relations with the host organization and other local partners that might be interested in your research, so that both parties benefit from your research – not just in terms of reading the results but going through the whole process.''

In the starting phase of the research, I have had various meetings with staff members from both the host organisation ZOA, and their local partner organisation YMCA Liberia to discuss what would be interesting and relevant for them to focus my research on. Also we discussed what methodological choices to make, since they are very aware of the local context and the risks that certain research methods might have in this context.

During my time in Liberia, ZOA and YMCA staff have supported me with visits to project sites and getting in touch with various actors that are involved in the project. The staff were gatekeepers that made it easier to get in contact with these project actors, and introduced me to them and showed me around. Also, since I was working from the ZOA office in Monrovia, I discussed most research related issues with people there. In that way, I have had a lot of valuable input from ZOA and YMCA staff members that have helped me with understanding the project and forming my research plan.

Returning to the Netherlands due to the COVID-19 pandemic, increased the co-creation between me and ZOA staff. The daily contact was no longer there, but three ZOA staff took time to support the research by conducting surveys with project beneficiaries, and two interviews with YMCA project officers. Their input for relevant survey and interview questions was also very helpful in designing them. When the thesis is completed, it will be shared with ZOA as well as the most relevant findings for them in the form of a presentation or short recommendation report.

5.4 Positionality

To do research in a different socio-cultural context means that one must be aware of their positionality. There are several topics that should be taken into account while doing research in Liberia. First of all,

the vast majority of Liberians is religious, with approximately 85% being Christian, and 12% Islamic (CIA, 2020). A researcher should be aware of the religious customs, for example concerning shaking hands or wearing specific clothes. Also, the fact that my host organization ZOA is a Christian organisation should be taken into account. I tried to go along with customs were it felt respectful. I for example always attended the Monday morning sessions at ZOA, during which sections from the Bible were discussed alongside with practical project updates from each team.

Secondly, I had to be aware of the importance of respect and hierarchy in Liberian society. People in higher positions are often addressed as chief, boss and sir. Being respectful is crucial in order to build report with the participants. This resulted in the fact that I always wore long pants and long sleeves, even in hot weather. Also, when being introduced to new people, especially those in higher positions, I have learned to not take the word. In those situations, it's most respectful to let the person who has brought you there do the talking and introducing, before you enter the conversation yourself.

Furthermore, it has to be mentioned that I've grown up in a peaceful society and have never experienced any violence or war. Almost everyone in Liberia has been affected by the civil wars in the country, either by the death of family members and friends, or by being forced to flee from their homes. This is something that I always tried to keep in mind when discussing issues relating to peacebuilding.

A final important aspect concerning positionality is that during my research, I've always tried to make clear that my position is neutral and that I am not working for ZOA, but as I'm an independent researcher from Utrecht University. This was especially important in my contact with YMCA staff and project beneficiaries.

5.5 Research limitations

There are a few possible limitations to this research that need to be addressed. First of all, as an outsider with a different socio-cultural background it might be difficult to ensure that the questions in surveys and interviews are culturally appropriate. This is ethically important, but also to make sure that the questions are understood in the right way. By discussing the initial design with ZOA staff and making adaptations based on their feedback, I strived to minimize this risks.

Secondly, with the interviews there was a slight language barrier between me and the Liberians. Although English is the official language in Liberia, it is quite different from American or British English. For an outsider, Liberian English is quite hard to fully understand, especially the different rural dialects. Luckily my five weeks in Liberia have helped me to understand much of it and the people I interviewed didn't speak with difficult dialects. Two interviews were conducted with YMCA project officers working

in the field, and I was unable to do this online with them. Therefore, a ZOA staff members conducted those for me, after which I was provided with the audio files. These two interviews were most difficult to fully grasp, but where needed I was able to contact the ZOA interviewer for some clarifications. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were done online. This makes it more difficult to have some informal conversation with the interviewees before starting, and therefore building rapport becomes harder. This could have resulted in people feeling less room to fully speak open about certain critical subjects. Also, it's harder in online interviews to recognize body language. This was amplified by the fact that some of the interviews were conducted with only sound, as the internet connection was not strong enough to also support a video connection. This might have lead to misinterpretation of some parts of the interviews.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the survey was also done online and ZOA staff members conducted the surveys with project beneficiaries by phone. The issue here is positionality, because the fact that ZOA staff members have conducted these surveys could have an impact on how open and honest beneficiaries have responded to the survey questions. This is especially a risk in Liberian society, as many Liberians are very much accustomed to NGO's working in their communities. The issue that arises from this is that some people will just try to say exactly what they think the NGO's want to hear in order to gain maximum benefits from it. This means for example that people easily praise a project but stress that more money is needed to sustain it. To minimize this risks of confirmation bias, staff members explained the beneficiaries that this research is not done by ZOA, that their responses are anonymized and that they are free to be as critical as they truly are.

5.6 Ethical review

The participant recruitment for the majority of the interviews was done by myself, privately by email. However, the interviews with two project officers and the surveys with project beneficiaries were conducted by ZOA staff and not by myself due to the COVID-19 situation. The convenience of this is that they have good connections with these people, and can easily get in touch with them. On the other hand however, these people might have felt some pressure to participate, because ZOA is the leading organisation in this project in which they all have a certain role. I discussed with the ZOA staff that they would emphasize that people are free to choose whether they wanted to participate or not and that the research was not conducted by ZOA itself.

Informed consent was secured by asking interviewees whether or not they consent with recording the interview in order to transcribe it and use the information for research purposes. Similarly, before starting the survey, participants were asked to consent with this as well. This was done in both the interviews and survey after first explaining the research and the purpose of the interview and survey.

This research on local ownership and sustainability in peacebuilding doesn't include particularly sensitive topics and the sharing of findings will therefore not be of great concern. However, confidential information on participants will not be shared with ZOA, YMCA or others. Where needed, information is made confidential so that it will not be possible to track down a specific participant's identity. This is why the result section that is based on the interviews, has no references to whom these statements have made, even when including certain quotes. Since the research topic is not particularly sensitive, the sharing of findings is not a huge ethical concern. However, because the findings will be shared with ZOA, specific responses of interviewees and survey respondents must be confidential.

One conflict of interest that challenged this research, is that between academic and organisational interest. On the one hand, there is the academic interest of the researcher to graduate from Utrecht University, while on the other hand there is the organisations interest of ZOA to learn certain things about their project. Often, these two interests are actually very similar, and I tried as much as possible to keep both in mind in order to increase the possible impact of the research. I made sure that the academic interest is at the base of the research, and where possible the organisational interest of ZOA was taken into account. One way of dealing with this is separately writing a thesis paper for Utrecht University and a smaller recommendation report for the host organisation ZOA. Also, by focussing on co-creation, the research will be beneficial for both purposes.

6. Policy analysis

This chapter will go into the policies of Sida, ZOA and YMCA Liberia concerning local ownership, participation and sustainability. Through this policy analysis, the following sub question of the research will be answered:

> ➢ *How are the concepts of local ownership and sustainability represented in the policies of different development partners?*

The analysis will go into topics that relate to local ownership and sustainability and the discussion will provide a comparison of the policies of the three organisations combined with its relations with the theoretical framework. To answer this research question, the policy documents have been analysed on the hand of thematic categories that can be found in the descriptive table below (**Table..**). These categories were deductively selected from the theoretical framework as well as inductively through reading and pre-analysing the texts, and served as a guideline for the analysis.

Looking at the quantitative coding scheme in Table 3, it's interesting to see that ownership is relatively often discussed in policies from Sida compared to ZOA, while to opposite can be said about participation. Furthermore, both Sida and ZOA discuss topics on partnership, donorship and cooperation quite extensively compared to YMCA. YMCA's policies go more into the perspectives in development work. Finally, when looking at the categories of phase out and sustainability, it's striking that these are much more often discussed in ZOA's policies compared to the policies of Sida and YMCA.

Table 3. Quantitative coding scheme

Category	Sida	ZOA	YMCA	Total
Development principles	28	11	28	67
Obstacles in development	13	11	17	41
Ownership	33	11	17	61
Participation	17	42	16	75
Partnership	60	51	18	129
Perspectives	2	17	18	37
Phase out	0	14	0	14
Sustainability	13	30	5	48
Ways of working	59	43	22	124
Total	225	230	141	596

It must be noted that the categories are not mutually exclusive, as they sometimes overlap and parts of the text can fit multiple categories. This policy analysis will be primarily qualitative in its nature and therefore these quantitative findings mostly serve as an overview and an introduction to the qualitative analysis that follows here.

6.1 Sida

The reason for Sida to be active in international development is that it feels the responsibility to support those in need. This duty primarily lays by national governments but when those are not able or willing to do so, Sida argues that actors with the right capacity have to take over this responsibility (Sida, 2019a). This principle is referred to as the humanitarian imperative (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Sweden, 2017). Local ownership plays an important role in Sida's policies, as they argue that local people should be seen as resources and therefore must be put at the centre of humanitarian aid (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Sweden, 2017). Local ownership is especially important in peace processes (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Sweden, 2018a), and in their Liberia Strategy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Sweden, 2016), Liberian ownership is also put forward as the cornerstone of the cooperation. Participation is not prominently discussed, but it's mostly explained as the right of local people to be involved in the decision-making process. Issues relating to sustainability remain somewhat vague, while the concepts of project sustainability and psychological ownership are not mentioned at all.

Inclusiveness

For Sida, one of the most important principles relating to ownership is that of inclusiveness. It ensures that no one is left behind and is represented in the organisation's vision statement: ''Every persons' right and opportunity to live a decent life'' (Sida, 2019b). Specifically the most vulnerable, marginalised and poor people in society are the ones for whom Sida wants to create conditions to shape their own existence and future (Sida, 2019a). Amongst these people are often women, girls and LGBTI persons and therefore gender equality plays an important role in Sida's work (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Sweden, 2018b, 2016). It's crucial that these groups participate, so that they have influence over the outcome of the development process. Sida uses both the rights perspective and the perspective of the poor to ensure that *'all people are able to enjoy their rights irrespective of sex, age, disability, ethnic origin, religion and other belief, sexual orientation, transsexual identity or expression''* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Sweden, 2016, 2019) and that *''the situation, needs, conditions and priorities of poor women, men and children are to be the starting point for combating poverty and for promoting equitable and sustainable development''* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Sweden, 2016, 2019).

Donor-dependency

Sida acknowledges that one of the largest threats to sustainable development has to do with donor regulations. Development work is often supply driven, as donors set the playing field for NGO's who are all competing for the same funds (Sida, 2019a). Sida argues that development work should become more demand driven, with donors no longer being the primary actors setting the rules (Sida, 2019a). This can be done by making more long-term commitments in combination with more flexible and core funding which allows NGO's to more freely do their work, focus on their priorities and be flexible and adaptive to changing local contexts (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Sweden, 2018b; Sida, 2019b). This is especially important for sustainable peace (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Sweden, 2018a) and allows NGO's to become more result-oriented, forward looking, and learning from experience (Sida, 2019b; Ministry of Foreign Affairs Sweden, 2019). Since local actors are locally embedded, know the context and are there to stay, it should lead to more effective and sustainable development outcomes (Sida, 2019a). To support this demand driven way of working, Sida strives for meaningful partnerships with a focus on capacity building (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Sweden, 2019).

Partnership and capacity building

As an official Swedish governmental organisation, Sida not only advocates universal norms and international human rights standards (Sida, 2019a, 2019b), but also Swedish priorities (Sida, 2019b, 2020). Partner organisations are selected based on the extent to which their principles and ways of working align with Sida's priorities and perspectives (Sida, 2019a). On the global scale, Sida feels the responsibility to take a leading role in influencing other development actors through sharing ''experience, knowledge, instruments, methods and analyses''. It was also a major player in designing the Grand Bargain agreement, which was negotiated between the world's largest humanitarian donors and organisations. The agreement aims at making development aid more effective, transparent and inclusive, and it highlights the importance of localisation in partnership and participation of local beneficiaries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Sweden, 2017). Sida argues that development solution must be ''locally-owned and driven by those actors that are locally embedded in the actual development context to be relevant and sustainable'' (Sida, 2019b), and therefore focuses on promoting local ownership through capacity building of their partners. By improving possibilities to work through the systems of local actors, capacity building ensures more lasting results that go beyond project-funding periods (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Sweden, 2019).

6.2 ZOA

In ZOA's policies, ownership, participation and sustainability are all discussed in a more practical way. ZOA recognized the link between ownership and participation, as it argues that valuable participation

of project beneficiaries throughout different phases of a project will enhance their ownership and therefore the realisation of dignified lives. Also, by giving beneficiaries a voice and letting them actively participate within the projects, they are able to improve their self-reliance (ZOA, 2019). ZOA is also one of the organisations that singed the Grand Bargain agreement, promoting local ownership through localisation and a participation revolution (ZOA, n.d.).

Inclusiveness

The principle of inclusiveness is also central in ZOA's work and this is represented in their main quote ''Every Life Matters''. ZOA aims to help the most vulnerable people in society by giving them a voice. Because of systemic discrimination, women and girls are among these vulnerable people and therefore gender equality is essential in its work (ZOA, 2018a, n.d.). Throughout its projects a gender balance of beneficiaries is strived for, although that's not always possible in practice. In the CLFs and CTWs for example, the majority of participants are men. This is a logical consequence of the fact that there are more men in leadership positions. ZOA acknowledges that it's key to address this issue, after which a more gender balanced group of project beneficiaries will automatically follow (ZOA, 2020).

Trust

In Liberia, a major societal issue is that due to the shared history of violence there are extremely low levels of trust between the population and authorities. This is a big obstacle for sustainable development in the country, as it leads to short term thinking and a lack of collaboration between different actors. ZOA wants to rebuild trust in society by letting different actors participate in the same project. By including official authorities, community leaders, community members and others, the quality and frequency of communication between those actors will improve which will contribute to lasting change in the capacity to resolve conflicts (ZOA, 2017).

Practical policy

In its policies, ZOA discusses issues relating to local ownership in a quite practical manner. In terms of participation, ZOA tries to involve local actors in several ways. Before the start of a project, key local people participate in so called 'Project Inception Meetings'. Together with them, the methodology, project objectives, goals and outcomes are set up. These key people are important, because their participation in setting up the project can create an enabling environment for the project and stimulates community members to join (ZOA, 2017). It can be hard to get people to start participating in a project and not to drop-out. Therefore, it's very common in Liberia for participant to receive so called sitting fees for their time. ZOA however doesn't do this, as they target people who are intrinsically motivated to participate. In order to stimulate participation, in some projects ZOA therefore makes use of testimonies of former participates whose lives have been impacted by the

project (ZOA, 2017). ZOA also tries to integrate the various peacebuilding projects, for example by letting Peace Club and CBS participants join the CLFs and CTWs, which should lead to increased sustainable impact (ZOA, 2017, 2020). Finally, by increasingly focussing on complaints and feedback from project participants, minor tweaks can be continuously made to improve the project. In that way, adaptations make throughout the project can contribute to long-term sustainability (ZOA, n.d.).

Local ownership plays an important role in the methodology of several projects. Within the CBS part of the peacebuilding project for example, project beneficiaries themselves come up with issues ad decide what the most appropriate actions are to achieve social cohesion, intergroup harmony and reconciliation (ZOA, 2017). In its more than 15 years of working in Liberia, ZOA has seen how local ownership is essential to come to sustainable results. When there is a lack of local ownership in development work, it can create a dependency syndrome which decreases the change of a project being sustained by local actors after official project-cycle. This was the case for a previous Peace Clubs project, especially in areas where there was high external support. Therefore, ZOA wants to let key people participate and take ownership in their projects. In the new Peace Club project, school administrators and principles are therefore involved (ZOA, 2020).

Partnership and capacity building

It's a trend that development organisations are expected more and more to partner up in order to implement larger-scale multisectoral projects. ZOA also goes along with this trend and has been joining multiple consortia in recent times. Joining forces in partnership gives organisations a stronger voice, and has the advantage of sharing knowledge and resources (ZOA, 2020). In projects, ZOA often partners up with local NGO's but also with governmental organisations as they have the power to obstruct or facilitate project activities. Collaborating with local actors is key to be able to reach out to the most vulnerable people and understanding the context in which they're living. ZOA moreover values local organisations because they are important for the *''sustainability of achievements, for legitimacy of specific actions, efficiency and access to insecure areas''* (ZOA, 2019).

In selecting a suitable local organisation to start a partnership, ZOA doesn't only look at strong partners with high capacities but also gives smaller, motivated actors the chance. Because of the importance of local actors, ZOA aims to support their local partners in capacity building so that they can become stronger and more self-reliant organisations (ZOA, 2018a).

Starting partnerships with local actors and support them with capacity building is especially important because local actors will stay while ZOA will eventually phases out its projects and leave the country (ZOA, 2018a). ZOA relies on the partnership approach with capacity building for its sustainable phase out strategy, as methodologies like CBS will be embedded in local partner organisations like YMCA so

that they can carry on activities when ZOA leaves (ZOA, 2019). During the phase out period, ZOA goes through a transition period in which activities are handed over to local institutions. In the end, local partners such as YMCA are supposed to continue activities with their gained knowledge and skills (ZOA, 2018b).

Balancing roles

Throughout the policy documents it becomes clear that ZOA has to balance various roles and responsibilities and this could have implications on local ownership and sustainability. First of all, ZOA works with a hybrid operations model in which it's implementing both directly as through local partners. As signee of the Grand Bargain agreement in which localisation is a spearpoint, ZOA will have to increasingly work through local partners, which typically allows for more local ownership (ZOA, 2018a, n.d.).

Also, ZOA operates under a dual mandate in which it is doing both relief and recovery work. Relief work is often the first concern in conflict and disaster situations, and primarily addresses short-term needs. In its recovery programmes, ZOA aims to adopt a longer-term perspective in which it focused more on capacity building and institutional reform (ZOA 2018a, n.d.). Sometimes sustainable long-term programming conflicts with humanitarian emergency needs, and in that case ZOA will prioritize the humanitarian principles of emergency relief programming (ZOA, n.d.).

Finally, while its main focus is the needs of its beneficiaries, ZOA also has to make sure that they and their local partners follow donor regulations as part of donor accountability (ZOA, 2018a). In their final project proposal, it's for example emphasized that the project objectives are in line with Sida's Strategy for Development Cooperation for Liberia. ZOA further emphasizes that the project contributes to reaching goals of Sida like *''strengthened conflict resolution and reconciliation initiatives at local and national level''* and *''a more inclusive society, with focus on increased participation of women in political processes''* (ZOA, 2019). ZOA acknowledges that donor-dependency is a big issue in the sector, but ranks Sida as a rather flexible donor that is open to learning (ZOA, 2019). In order to not become too dependent on one donor, ZOA tries to have divers donors for different project (ZOA, n.d.).

6.3 YMCA

In YMCA's policies, the concept of local ownership is not often used literally. However, some topics that are very much linked to the concept are discussed quite intensively, such as dependency and self-determination. Participation is discussed in a quite practical way and refers mostly to the project beneficiaries, while issues on local ownership are mostly refer to its own organisation.

For YMCA, the end goal of development work is to ensure that conflicts and other development issues can eventually be resolved by community members themselves, without any external intervention (YMCA Liberia, n.d.d). This is seen as quite a challenge in Liberia, as there is a high dependency syndrome among some Liberian communities, especially those affected by Ebola and the civil war. Because of the many development projects in these communities, community members have become so used to these that they rather expect to receive aid than to pay or work for services themselves (YMCA Liberia, n.d.c). Here, YMCA shows that a lack of local ownership leads to low chances of project sustainability.

Inclusiveness

In Liberian society, youth are excluded from economic and social opportunities (YMCA Liberia, n.d.c) and therefore they are very vulnerable. YMCA focusses their work particularly on this group because children are seen as the pillars, cornerstones and foundations for building a vibrant future in a peaceful and prosperous country. By protecting young people's rights, increasing their self-confidence to take control over their own lives, and teaching them to communicate effectively with peers and adults, YMCA makes it possible for children and young people to blossom and improve their lives (YMCA Liberia, 2014). Since Liberia has a traditional patriarchal society, women have a lower status than man and have less decision-making power. Therefore, YMCA not only tries to improve the livelihoods of Liberian youth, but sees gender equality as a major consideration as well (YMCA Liberia, n.d.c). YMCA embraces the differences that people have, and acknowledges the range of backgrounds of their stakeholders in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, culture and religion. These differences are to be recognized, celebrated and utilised; not to be erased (YMCA Liberia, n.d.b). YMCA wants its beneficiaries to be able to participate in the development process, because it affects their own future. Within its projects, different groups of local actors engage with each other and participate on equal levels (YMCA Liberia, n.d.b).

Participation as a means and a goal

Within YMCA's projects, local participation is seen as a means to achieve development goals. Better participation in peacebuilding projects for instance leads to positive engagement with local authorities which in turn has lead to the peaceful resolution of conflicts. Especially participation in the decision-making process is seen as a precondition for success (African Union Commission, 2015). When marginalised groups are being involved in this process, they become aware and take responsibility over their choices (YMCA Liberia, 2014). Also, by continuous monitoring and evaluation of their programming together will staff and beneficiaries, YMCA can revise programming and policy wherever it's necessary to achieve the mission (YMCA Liberia, 2014, n.d.c). In other projects, by training young

girls to build confidence and skills in advocacy, YMCA tries to increase female participation in advocacy (YMCA Liberia n.d.d). Here, participation is more a goal in itself.

Enabling environment

YMCA's main vision is to empower young people through self-actualisation and it has chosen the motorcycle to visualise this. The motorcycles has emerged as the leading means for transportation in Liberia, and also as a major source of income for unskilled youth. YMCA empowers youth through organisational development, the front wheel which

Figure 6. Empowering youth through self-actualisation (YMCA Liberia, n.d.c).

gives direction, and through the driving power of the back wheel; resource mobilisation. By making use of support from YMCA, youth themselves drive the motorcycle. In this way, YMCA tries to create an enabling environment in which young people can take ownership and shape their own future (YMCA Liberia, n.d.c).

As an organisation, YMCA sees itself as a youth movement in which young people are supported by more experienced people to carry out its mission. This is also the way the national headquarter works together with their local branches. Local branches have a lot of ownership in their work and are supported by YMCA headquarters to effectively deliver services to local communities (YMCA Liberia, n.d.c).

Partnership

Although there is no specific policy on partnership or cooperation with other development actors, this is discussed throughout the other policy documents. By cooperating, coordinating and communicating with important stakeholders in the development field, a shared vision with shared priorities is set so that interventions are delivered to the right people and for the right cause (YMCA Liberia, n.d.c). Gender equality and child rights are ideals that are highly valued by YMCA and partnerships are based on these factors as well (YMCA Liberia, 2014, n.d.b). Partners should be committed to these ideals and if needed, YMCA is willing to provide assistance with trainings on these topics (YMCA Liberia, n.d.b). On the other hand, partners are also engaged in reviewing YMCA policies and systems, so there should be mutual learning between partners (YMCA Liberia, n.d.c). YMCA Liberia also has projects in partnership with USAID, Bread for the World Germany, YMCA of Greater Toronto, the World Bank, Y Care International, and Slums Dwellers International (YMCA Liberia, n.d.d). YMCA also works together with the government of Liberia in order to get grip on the many peacebuilding challenges the country has to deal with (YMCA Liberia, n.d.c).

Donor-dependency

As mentioned, in policy documents of YMCA the concept of local ownership is not discussed very directly. However, in its Vision 2031 (YMCA Liberia, n.d.c) issues relating to local ownership do get a lot of attention. In this vision, the objective to strengthen the organisation's capacity is put forward as a way to become less dependent on external funding. YMCA wants to become more reliant on its own resources, and with that increase its own ownership in the development process (YMCA Liberia, n.d.c). Securing enough funding is an issue, as there are not enough resources to meet all program demands. It's hard to secure funding as the NGO environment in Liberia is highly competitive, and some funding opportunities come with tough conditionalities, leaving little room for ownership. As part of becoming more self-sustaining, YMCA wants to reduce its dependency on donor funding from 85% today to below 50% in 2031. In that way, the organisation will be able to continue its interventions in addressing the root causses of injustice, exclusion and poverty, regardless of the funding climate in Liberia (YMCA Liberia, n.d.c). This call for more independence, and therefore ownership, also comes forward in the Pan African vision of Agenda 2063, which stresses that development in Africa should be based on self-reliance and self-determination of the African people. The Agenda 2063 also makes clear that development in African countries should be owned by African actors and done with an African perspective rather than a Western one (African Union Commission, 2015).

YMCA stresses its own capacities and reputation by for example stating that ''With over a century of experience in youth development, its community and national presence, connections and networks are strong, making YMCA well known to all relevant community, country and national development actors'' (YMCA Liberia, n.d.d). Also, in both their impact report (YMCA Liberia, n.d.d) and capacity statement to ZOA YMCA Liberia, n.d.a), YMCA emphasizes the track record of past performances and skills per sector.

6.4 Discussion

There are quite some interesting findings when comparing how local ownership is represented in the policies of the three development partners. As signees of the Grand Bargain agreement in which localisation is one of the spearpoints, both Sida and ZOA recognize the importance of local ownership in development work. By arguing that locals should be put at the centre, local actors are not just regarded as beneficiaries or target groups but rather as partners and owners in the development process (Uphoff, 1992). While Sida's policies use the term local ownership quite much, it doesn't become very clear what the term means and how it should take place on the ground. This fits in the picture that many development actors remain vague about what they mean when discussing the

concept (Bojicic-Dzelilovic & Martin, 2018). Sida does emphasize the connection of local ownership and sustainability, as it argues that development solutions must be locally owned and driven to be relevant and sustainable.

There are some clear differences, for instance the fact that project sustainability is only directly discussed in the policies of ZOA and somewhat more implicitly by YMCA. Also, the policies of ZOA and YMCA are more practical and therefore focussed on participation rather than ownership. Ownership and participation for Sida and ZOA is concentrated on local actors in general and beneficiaries in specific, while YMCA reflects ownership on itself as an organisation and participation on its beneficiaries.

What all three organisations have in common, is that meaningful participation is seen as active participation in which beneficiaries are involved in the decision making process. Instead of differentiating various participation levels like Arnstein (1969), they rather make a distinction between instrumental voice and non-instrumental voice in which instrumental voice refers to degree of influence over the outcomes of the decision making, whereas non-instrumental voice refers to the ability to express an opinion without necessarily having any influence over the outcome (Hideg et al., 2011). Also, all three organisations argue that participation of beneficiaries is needed throughout all project phases. In that way, the project will probably become more accepted and viewed as their own, and therefore more likely to be sustained (Olukotun, 2008).

Inclusiveness

What becomes clear from the policy analysis, is that inclusiveness is a guiding principles that determines the work of all three organisations. They strive for the participation of the most vulnerable, excluded, marginalized an poor people in society so that they can take ownership in the development process. They specifically prioritize gender equality, as girls, women and LGTBI persons are recognized to be amongst the most vulnerable and excluded people in society. This group is often excluded in the peacebuilding process, while their participation is essential for the success of interventions (Douglas, 2015). In African countries, this marginalised position is also shared by youth (Woods, 2011). With its focus on youth, YMCA seems to have altered this principles of inclusiveness to the specific context of Liberian society.

Within their projects, creating an enabling environment is the way in which the organisations want local beneficiaries to take ownership in shaping their own future. For that to happen, not only the most marginalized and vulnerable people should participate, but also key actors. Also, especially ZOA and YMCA focus on getting a range of different actors to participate in their peacebuilding projects. Something that is not explicitly mentioned but seems to play an important role, is that this could

change existing power dynamics. Letting community members and their leaders engage with one another in the project in which they have equal power, existing power structures can be challenged. This redistribution of power is also what Arnstein (1969) has emphasized as the success factor of participation. An important way in which ZOA wants to increase the ownership of beneficiaries in its projects, is through improved complaints and feedback systems. With that minor tweaks can be made continuously throughout the project, contributing to long-term sustainability.

When there is a lack of local ownership in development work, it can create a dependency syndrome which decreases the change of project sustainability. To promote project sustainability, key actors should participate in a project.

Donor dependency

A major issue that obstructs local ownership is donor dependency, which especially comes forward in the policies of Sida and YMCA. The dominant funding model in the international development field is a supply-led one (AbouAssi, 2013), in which partnership is often based on dependency with local NGO's struggling to get financial support from INGO's and donors (Cohen, 2014).The risk of such a supply-led model is that (local) NGO's become merely implementers of donor agenda's, as they are mainly accountable towards these donors (AbouAssi, 2013). This doesn't allow for much local ownership and as a result the local sociocultural context could be partially ignored (Pollard & Sakellariou, 2008). Sida recognizes this issue and therefore wants to take a leading role in changing this supply-led model into a more demand-led model which allows for more local ownership. As part of this, Sida wants to increasingly focus on flexible funding, localisation and a local participation.

In the policies of YMCA, the topic of donor dependency also plays an important role and linked to the wish to become a strong and resilient NGO that is self-sustaining. Decreasing donor dependency will increase YMCA's ownership and self-determination in its programming. A way in which YMCA tries to achieve this, is by building reputation stability because when a NGO has already proved its competence, donors are more likely to support them with long-term and flexible funding (Gent et al., 2015).

Capacity building

A way to promote both local ownership and project sustainability is through capacity building of local organisations, since these are ones embedded in the local context and will be looked upon sustaining interventions in the long run (Lemay-Hébert & Kappler, 2016).

Sida claims that development that is based on the principle of local ownership should focus on local capacity building since that lays the foundation for working through countries' own systems which will

bring lasting results that go beyond project-funding periods. ZOA takes the same standpoint and argues that capacity building is especially important because local actors will stay while ZOA will eventually phase out. In selecting a suitable local organisation to start a partnership, ZOA doesn't only look at strong partners with high capacities but also gives smaller, motivated actors the chance. In that way, ZOA gives smaller and less developed local organisations the opportunity to become stronger and more resilient. Focussing on the capacities of local actors and help build their capacities where needed, increases their ownership and self-reliance on the long term (Hayman, 2013). Although YMCA doesn't explicitly discuss capacity building in their policies, they do indicate that it's willing to provide partners assistance with trainings when necessary.

Interestingly, while all of the organisations indicate to be willing to assist their partners with trainings or capacity building, non of them emphasize the need for their own capacity to be build by their partners. When giving assistance is directed to the own organisation, it's more framed as mutual learning instead of capacity building.

Project sustainability and phasing out

Project sustainability is often overlooked in development work (Humphries et al., 2011) and this also seems to be true when analysing the policies of Sida, ZOA and YMCA. There is vey little attention for the issue of phasing out projects in a sustainable way, while there is evidence that many NGO's have problems with this.

In Sida's policies, the topic of sustainability remains a bit vague and mainly has to do with the impact of projects on it's beneficiaries, rather than project sustainability. ZOA does argue that a key aspect of sustainability is phasing out, and since ZOA is starting to phase out its programming in Liberia it's crucial that this is done in a responsible and sustainable way. Its phase out strategy focusses on the partnership approach, making sure that methodologies are embedded in local partners so that they can carry on the project activities when ZOA leaves. While being part of ZOA's partnership approach, YMCA's policies have only little attention for project sustainability or the issue of phasing out projects. For YMCA, project sustainability seems to be not so much about sustaining project activities itself for a longer period of time, but rather about making beneficiaries self-resistant and able to solve development issues without external help.

7. Survey

To get a better understanding of local ownership in the PRCD project, a survey was developed that was distributed among project beneficiaries and project staff from both ZOA and YMCA. The survey focusses on the operationalised concepts of local ownership; participation and psychological ownership. In addition, other relevant concepts and topics are addressed that were either derived from the theoretical framework or from discussions with various actors during my time in Liberia. The initial survey design was discussed with three ZOA staff who later also took part in conducting the surveys. Their feedback and suggestions were taken into account when developing the final design. Also, as they conducted the surveys via telephone, they gave the room to respondents to explain their thoughts and answers. The three ZOA staff made notes while conducting the surveys and afterwards I had online meetings with them to discuss their preliminary findings and notes. Throughout this following section, their preliminary findings and notes will serve to enrichen the quantitative information that this survey has brought forward.

7.1 Survey participants

Out of the 122 people participating in this survey, 108 are project participants, eight are YMCA staff and six are ZOA staff. Out of the 108 project participants, there is a balanced distribution of participant of the various sub projects: CBS, CLF, CTW, and Peace Club students and mentors. Since the amount of both YMCA and ZOA staff members in this survey is limited, comparison between the three groups should be done with caution.

This group of survey participants was quite gender balanced, with 53 males and 58 females. Interesting is the fact that 10 people choose neither male or female at the question about gender, but indicated the third option 'other'. A logical explanation was not found for that. The average age of respondents is 36 years, but the CLF and CTW participants are notably older with an average of 44 years and Peace Club students younger with an average of 20 years. The amount of years people are involved is quite stable between the three categories; less than one year, between one and two years; and more than two years. As Figure 7 shows, the majority of people (60.7%) is involved less than five hours a week.

Figure 7. Participation in hours per week (SPSS).
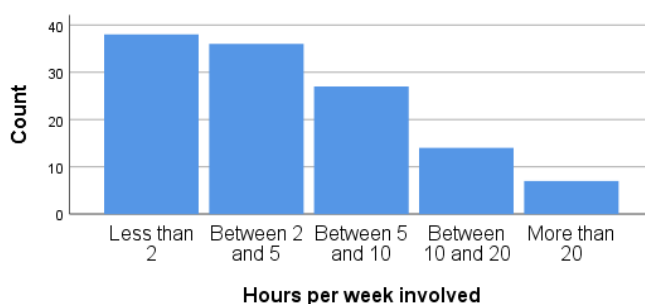
To all ZOA and YMCA staff was asked to evaluate the cooperation between the two organisations, scoring it a 8.0 and 9.1 out of 10 respectively. Although the difference found is not significant because of the limited amount of cases, it would be interesting to find out if ZOA staff are truly less satisfied with the cooperation and why. The evaluation of the project was high on average, with staff members scoring it a 8.4 and project participants a 9.4.

7.2 Participation

Participation was measured by looking at the level of participation in each project phase. An overall participation score was also developed by calculating the average participation level throughout the whole project life cycle. When looking at this overall participation score, all score relatively low, with ZOA 2.3; YMCA staff 2.2 and project participants 1.8 on a scale from 1 to 5. This low score is explained by the fact that most respondents were only involved in a few of the project phases, and also because most YMCA staff and project participants indicated not to be involved in the highest level of participation: decision making.

ZOA staff indicated to have decision making power, but most were only participating in the activity phase and the monitoring and evaluation phase. In contrast, YMCA staff interestingly indicated to have no decision making power in any of the project phases. Out of the project participants, almost no one was involved in the needs assessment and the baseline phase. The majority was only involved in the activity phase of the project, and some indicated to be involved in the action planning phase and the monitoring and evaluation phase. Most project participants indicated to be participating at the implementation level, and only few indicated to have decision making power.

Although participation levels can be considered relatively low, satisfaction with overall participation level throughout the project is high, as 84.4% of respondents indicate to be extremely satisfied. Here, there are no striking differences found between different groups of participants.

There is a clear relation between satisfaction with overall participation level and the evaluation of the project. Those that are more satisfied with their overall participation level, evaluate the project higher. People who indicated to be 'somewhat satisfied' evaluated the project with 8.5 on average, while people who indicated to be 'extremely satisfied' evaluated the project with 9.4 on average.

Most project participants indicated to be very satisfied with their overall participation level because they saw the positive impact of the project. To know that they had a part in that success, made them to be satisfied with their overall role and participation. Another factor that plays a role is that respondents made clear that they felt very included by ZOA and YMCA in the project. Some of the ones

that were less satisfied with their overall participation, explained that this was also due to the fact that they were disappointed that their involvement came to a stop because of the corona crisis.

7.3 Psychological ownership

Psychological ownership was measured by indicating the extent to which someone agrees with certain statements or not. The statements measure five domains: territoriality, self-efficacy, accountability, sense of belonging and self-identity. The first domain, territoriality, indicates the level of defensive prevention-based psychological ownership, while the four other domains form the more constructive promotion-based version of psychological ownership. Psychological ownership was measured on a scale with 1 being the lowest and 3 the highest score.

When looking at the constructive promotion-based psychological ownership, ZOA staff, YMCA staff as well as project participants score 2.9 on average. One of the reasons that people score high on the promotion-based ownership is because people feel that their own behaviour has changed through the project. Therefore they see the project's success to also be their own success.

Overall, the scores of the defensive prevention-based version are much lower, but there are noticeable differences between groups. Whereas ZOA staff score really low with an average of 1.1, project participants and YMCA staff score a bit higher with average scores of 1.7 and 2.0 respectively. Out of all project participants, CTW participants seem to score the highest when it comes to this prevention-based psychological ownership. One interesting finding is that the longer people have been involved in the project, the higher they score on prevention-based ownership. A reason why prevention-based ownership is much lower might be because of the nature of this project. One of the questions that measures this form of ownership was about whether or not the respondents would tell a project staff if they thought someone was doing something wrong. In the PRCD project, people learn to resolve conflicts as much as possible without seeking for external help, for example by going to the police or other authorities. Therefore, many argues that they would first try to work out the issue before reporting it, especially with minor incidents. This however doesn't explain why people that are longer involved score higher in this prevention-based ownership.

7.4 Sustainability

Almost all respondents totally agreed with the statement that it's important that the project should be sustained after its officially planned ending. Many respondents argued that because of the great impact the project has on their lives, they find it important that the project will be sustained. However, most also indicate that they accept that the project will come to an end. However, the skills they have developed during the project will be sustained and the project participants will continue to implement

what they've learned after the project is gone. The network of improved relationships between various community actors is largely built, and can be used when the project stops.

7.5 Awareness of the funding partner's name

One of the things that didn't came forward from the literature, but from a suggestion of a ZOA staff member, was to ask the survey participants about their awareness of the name of the project funder. The idea behind this was that there might actually be a link between the level of psychological ownership, and whether of not someone is aware of the funding partner's name. Someone scoring high on psychological ownership, might be very much focussed on the content of the project and his/her own role in it, while not caring about more external things he or she doesn't have to do with, such as who is the official funding partner of the project.

Table 4. Awareness of the funding partner's name, per type of actor

		Aware of name funding partner		
		No	Yes	Total
Type of actor	ZOA staff	0	4	4
	YMCA staff	0	10	10
	Project participant	30	77	107
Total		30	91	121

As can be seen in Table 4, all ZOA and YMCA staff indicate to be aware of the name of the funding partner, while out of 107 project participants, 30 indicated that they didn't. There was a clear relation found between the duration of involvement and the awareness of the name of the funding partner. Those who were involved for a longer period of time, had higher chances of indicating they did know the funding partner's name. The same goes for the amount of hours someone is involved per week.

For the constructive promotion-based psychological ownership, no differences were found when comparing people indicating to be aware of the name of the funding partner to those that indicate not to be aware. However, for the defensive prevention-based version of psychological ownership there is a difference; those who indicate not to be aware score very low (1.1), while those who indicate to be aware of the name score higher (1.9).

For those that indicated to be aware of the funding partner's name, came another question with an opportunity to fill in that name and this brought some interesting results. Out of the 77 project participants that indicated to be aware of the funding partner's name, only 24 people wrote down Sida, while 26 wrote down ZOA and some others YMCA, a combination of ZOA and YMCA together, or something else. For people indicating the name of the project funder is Sida, ZOA or YMCA, the

average prevention-based ownership score is 1.3, 2.1 and 2.8 respectively. This shows that higher levels of defensive prevention-based ownership are linked to more localised ideas about who the funding partner is.

One of the possible explanation of many people indicating that YMCA is the project funder is the fact that YMCA has been involved in peacebuilding work in some communities before this specific project started with ZOA and Sida. Also, YMCA and ZOA staff are much more visible in the communities compared to Sida.

7.6 Project objectives

95% of the respondents indicated to be aware of the objectives of the project, after which they also had a chance to fill in what they thought the objectives were. Interestingly, but maybe not to much surprise, most did not match the official objective of the peacebuilding project: ''Strengthened social cohesion and civic trust within and between communities and between population and local government in five counties''. Many of the project participants formulated objectives that were in line with the objectives of their sub-projects. A few examples of answers from different project participants clearly show this:

- ''For people to know their rights, for the community to be peaceful and for togetherness.'' (Civil Trust Workshop)
- ''Peacebuilding among community people and their leaders.'' (Community Leadership Forum)
- ''To learn how to talk to teachers, schoolmates.'' (Peace Club student)
- ''Teaching students about peace and how to solve conflicts in schools also in our communities.'' (Peace Club mentor)
- ''To help control your anger, to help how to settle disputes.'' (CBS)

So apparently, most project participants have a rather localised perspective on the project and are mainly focussed on their sub project rather than the larger peacebuilding project of which they are a part of.

7.7 COVID-19

The survey was being conducted in July 2020, while Liberia had also been facing restrictions relating to the COVID-19 pandemic for several months. Also this peacebuilding project had been on hold during these months, and many respondents asked about the continuation of it. They indicated to miss the project, and where exited for it to continue. Most respondents however did understand that the priorities of ZOA and other organisations were now aimed at battling the pandemic, rather than on the continuation of projects like this. Even though the project was on a hold, some respondents indicated

that they continued to implement what they had learned in order to resolve conflict in their communities.

7.8 Discussion

Olukotun (2008) argues that if local actors participate throughout all project phases, they will have higher levels of psychological ownership. This survey has shown that although participation levels are low in most project phases and only few project participants indicate to have decision-making power in this project, they still experience high levels of psychological ownership. Also the evaluation of the project, and the importance of sustaining it are very high despite low overall participation levels, so respondents seem to be very positive about the project.

This suggests that only looking at participation levels in different phases of a project, might not be sufficient when trying to explain psychological ownership. The third main aspect of participation, who participates, might be more important. In this project, is seems that a variety of different actors participates in the projects, from school students to teachers, and from involved community members to official authority leaders. The fact that so many different actors are all involved, and that they are all treated on an equal level, might be of great importance. This creates a power redistribution in which everyone has equal power, compared to the unequal power balance between the actors in everyday live. This fits the views of Arnstein (1969), who suggested that the success of participation lays in the redistribution of power. Also, rather than looking at participation as the determining factor for psychological ownership, satisfaction with the overall participation throughout the project might be a better predictor, as suggested by Connor (1988).

Unfortunately however, maybe because of the high levels and a lack of variance of both satisfaction with participation and of psychological ownership levels, a statistical relation wasn't found.

8. Views of NGO staff

This chapter will go into the views of YMCA and ZOA staff members on the role of local ownership in the sustainability of peacebuilding projects in Liberia and the implications off the COVID-19 pandemic. By reflecting both on the peacebuilding sector (in Liberia) as a whole, and on the PRCD case study project in specific, insights on both are discussed throughout this chapter. By discussion the policy analysis and survey results in the interviews, this chapter and its discussion bring together the main insights of this research.

8.1 The funding system

The one who is in charge of the money is the one with most power, and in that way the funding system keeps the hierarchy in check in which donors decide on the rules of the game. When it comes to initiating projects, this is for example largely influenced by a call for proposals by donors. Proposals are often times designed based on the sectors and topics in which donors decide to fund. This is partially based on the local needs that donors identify, but without much local ownership or considering whether their visions and regulations are practically applicable and acceptable in the local context.

A major issue undermining local ownership is the strict compliance regulations that come with funding. EU funds are for example only available for organisations that take office in an EU country; direct funding to organisations in the Global South is therefore impossible. For smaller, local organisations it is often very difficult, if not impossible, to comply to strict donor regulations. A striking example of how this undermines local ownership in Liberia was explained by a former ZOA staff member. There was a donor grand put out designed to empower civil society in the southeast of Liberia and the organisation that received the fund had to work with 10 to 15 local implementing partners. Eventually, out of all these local partners only one had its headquarters in the southeast, while the rest were located in Liberia's capital Monrovia. This is because primarily those located in Monrovia were able to check all the boxes for compliance regulations while those in the southeast didn't. Here it becomes clear how the funding system can undermine the main purpose with this grand; empowering civil society in the southeast. The staff member added: *''This shows that financial contracts will always beat social contracts, and that's were participation loses. Donor compliance will go before local participation. Even though everyone puts in the ethical terms and conditions in the contract, eventually it becomes impossible to fulfil them often. In practice, as an NGO you can more easily get away with doing more rubbish programming than you can do with more rubbish accounting.''*

The funding system is very competitive, which means that NGO's have to compete for the same funds in order to mobilize resources for development projects. This can lead to unfair reporting, as many organisations mainly report how well they are doing while not showing where things go wrong,

because that might result in decreased funding and reputational damage. When discussing this issue, another ZOA staff member indicated that *''Because this undermines local ownership in a way that local participation is limited in decision making, most donor projects are abandoned after completion in most countries, Liberia being no exception''.* However, international and local NGO's should also look to themselves and take responsibility to truly focus on their purpose without putting all the blame on this constraining funding system. NGO's have to make sure they balance accountability both towards their donor and their beneficiaries, so that social contracts don't suffer under financial contracts. Development work could be improved if they are more honest on what goes wrong and what can be learned and improved.

Another issue of this competitive funding system lays in the Call for Proposals. Donors put out such a call, after which multiple NGO's send project proposals, and the donor in turn decides which NGO gets the fund. A proposal includes a needs assessment, which the NGO itself has to carry out and pay, before knowing whether or not they will secure the funding. This results in rapid and small scall needs assessment in which there is no time for proper surveys and consultations because these are very expensive and time consuming. This allows for very little participation and ownership of local actors in the needs assessment phase of a project, which is also seen in the survey results of the PRCD project. While there is agreement on the fact that there should be more local participation during needs assessments, one staff members nuances this by saying that NGO's often have great expertise in the sectors in which they propose a project, and oftentimes local civil society organisations are consulted during a needs assessment. In that way, a relatively good needs assessment can be carried out without much local participation. However, it is crucial that both the donor and the NGO are flexible because in that way the project can be finetuned and adapted when it becomes clear that certain aspects do not fit the local needs.

Reducing compliance regulations and allowing for more flexibility are put forward as ways in which donors could promote more local ownership in development work. In that way, development organisations are more able to adapt their work to the local context. The local situation in region A is different than that in region B, and the situation can also change during the course of a project.

Although the dominant model of international development work is still donor-driven, most YMCA and ZOA staff members do see a shift towards more room for flexibility and local ownership. However, such a shift is going on a very slow pace, as large changes in this sectors always go. New pathways or trends in development work, such as increased focus on local ownership and sustainability, come from a global push of major international development actors. An example is the Grand Bargain, in which localisation of development work is one of the major topics. These kind of issues are pushed to the

global agenda from below by civil society, but eventually major actors on a global level decide how these issues should be framed, and come up with agreements such as the Grand Bargain. So there is some interplay between local and global development actors, but eventually it's the major global ones that decide on the course and the smaller more local ones that will eventually follow. The Grand Bargain especially emphasizes that development work should increasingly be implemented by local organisations instead of INGO's. This transition is also visible in Liberia, as the Liberian government wants INGO's to increasingly work through local implementing partners. Another way is to directly fund local organisations instead of funding INGO's to work though local partners. This does happen sometimes, but is a bit more difficult as donor rather have some larger funding contracts with big INGO's than many smaller contracts with local organisations. Donors are also risk adverse and working through professional INGO's brings them more security, although it doesn't allow for much local ownership. In Liberia, direct funding to local organisations or to local authorities doesn't happen much, as corruption is a major issue in the country. Therefore, donors rather fund INGO's and let them find the right implementing partners.

8.2 Partnership and cooperation

This PRCD project is a partnership in which Sida is the donor who has funded ZOA for this project, how has in turn partnered up with YMCA as a local implementing partner. As the previous section made clear, the way in which partners cooperate with each other largely depends on the role that the donor takes. In the case of this project, Sida is considered a relatively flexible donor. Sida is one of the organisations that was involved in developing the Grand Bargain agreement, and localisation therefore plays an important role in Sida's work. The flexibility of Sida is a sign that they trust that ZOA and YMCA have the right expertise to successfully implement this project. They are given room to make their own decisions and come up with suggestions to improve the project. Sida very much encourages mutual learning, dialogue and free flow of information. What should be noted is that the flexibility of Sida and the fact that they give ownership to ZOA and YMCA doesn't mean that they are uninvolved or indifferent on the outcome of the project. As a matter of fact, Sida is a very robust organisation that wants to see results. However, it recognizes that the best way to reach objectives is through local ownership and being adaptive so that challenges in a project can be conquered, and that calls for flexibility.

ZOA has a dual mandate which means that it both implements directly as well as through local partners. Directly implementing has the advantage of keeping short lines of contact within a project, but ZOA increasingly works through local partners, as the Grand Bargain also encourages. An important reason to work through implementing partners is that they know the local context, have presence in certain areas and therefore have a good reputation among various local actors. Over the years, ZOA

has built a good reputation in many parts of Liberia because of its long presence since the end of the civil wars. Within ZOA Liberia, and also in the other country offices of ZOA, they try to work with as much local staff as possible. Only when certain skills are not present within a country, expats from the Netherlands and other countries are employed.

ZOA and YMCA have been working together now for several years on this project, and both the survey and the interviews show that their staff members are content with the cooperation. The interviews did make clear that there were more struggles in the beginning of the partnership. If you want to truly work together on a project, without strict hierarchy, you must find one communal way or working. This is quite challenging for two organisations with an own distinct way of working, but over time, with the help of coordination meetings, this has been accomplished.

The cooperation is going well because there is a lot of information sharing between the two organisations. This is made possible because YMCA and ZOA are both located in Monrovia, and the fact that the Project Manager of YMCA is working at the ZOA office for three days a week. Implementation never goes precisely the way it's planned, so continues communication is key. One thing YMCA staff very much appreciate in this partnership is that ZOA provides them with opportunities for capacity building.

In the survey YMCA staff indicated to be mainly implementing without experiencing much decision making power, while ZOA staff did experience decision making power. The interviews provided some more insights on the different roles of the organisations in the decision making process. One ZOA employee argued that it's not good that YMCA staff don't experience much decision making power, but it's a slow process and hopefully this will increase over time, especially now that the project is going to come to an end. One way in which ZOA tries to increase YMCA's ownership in decision making power is by handling over some tasks and responsibilities to YMCA over time. While there is hierarchy in decision making, everyone seems generally content with the level of independent decision making they have. The decision making power of each organisation and each employee, is based on the memorandum of understanding and job descriptions, which is mutually agreed upon. A YMCA project officer explained: ''*Everybody is working together, but also independently. So no one side is micromanaging the other. Everyone has the liberty to bring in own expertise''.* Since YMCA has expertise in Peace Clubs and Community Leadership Forums, it takes the lead in these part of the project, while ZOA has does the same for CBS. In general, YMCA's project officers are mainly responsible for the day to day arrangements of program activities in the field. When issues arise in the field that ask for small adaptations of the project, this is discussed with ZOA. In Monrovia, ZOA takes the lead in decisions on programmatic changes, which is done in cooperation with YMCA's project

manager. YMCA staff is not often in touch with Sida as ZOA is responsible for the contact with the donor. Sida is not involved with daily or weekly project activities, but is in close communication with ZOA when issues need to be discussed. Everyone has different responsibilities and roles, and with that comes different decision making power. Although one organisation takes the lead and has the final say in certain decisions, these are as much as possible made together based on shared input.

One issue that was raised by one of the YMCA project officers is that during the beginning phase of the project, he felt like he had to little decision making power when it came to appointing facilitators of the CBS. ZOA took the lead in this process, while YMCA project officers were going to be responsible for the day to day management of these facilitators. As he explained: ''*This resulted in less ownership for the project officers and a more difficult relationship with facilitators. Especially because these facilitators were to be working under the project officers, but were selected by ZOA, and it took time before these relations were clear to the facilitators again''.* The project officers were consulted during this process, but feel like they should have been involved more. However, overall both YMCA and ZOA staff are content with the cooperation and their independent decision making power. The open communication between the organisations and the fact that suggestions can always be made on issues that arise, makes staff feel like decisions are made together.

8.3 Capacity building

With the localisation shift in the field of international development, it is likely that INGO's will increasingly work with local partners. By working together with local partners, their capacities can be strengthened, which increases their ability to work independently in the future. In that way, development work can be sustained when INGO's stop their operations in a certain area, as local organisations are capacitated to continue this work. Capacity building was an important topic that came out of the policy analysis, mainly for Sida and ZOA, but also for YMCA to some extent. Interestingly, all organisations discussed capacity building in an external way of providing it, while non really made the impression that they themselves needed to be capacitated. From the interviews, it became clear that capacity building is something that mainly takes place from the INGO to the local partner. Donors are risks adverse and therefore partner up with INGO's that are already fully capacitated. INGO's on the other hand often also look at how they can positively impact local organisations. Therefore, they will more likely partner with an organisation that has certain skills but could also still learn from the INGO. Capacity building is also a key aspect of the partnership in the PRCD project and ZOA wishes that by embedding certain methodologies in YMCA, they will eventually be able to take more ownership and sustain some of the projects after ZOA leaves. In an ideal situation, ZOA would eventually make itself redundant through capacity building.

There are two different types of capacity building; one is more focussed on programmatic support for implementing project activities and the other is more institutional support in order to increase strengthen compliance. In Liberia, many local NGO's possess the right programmatic qualities to implement project activities, but the main issue is that they are unable able to access funding for such projects. Funding usually gets its way to local NGO's through partnerships with INGO's because local NGO's are unable to comply to the strict compliance regulations of risk adverse international donors. capacity building in Liberia should therefore primarily focus on institutional support to increase compliance, so that these local NGO's are able to secure their own direct funding when partnerships with INGO's come to an end.

In the PRCD project this can also be seen. This is also the case in the PRCD project. There has been some programmatic capacity building support, for example on gender mainstreaming and on the CBS methodology. However, capacity building of YMCA is mostly focussed on administrative and financial issues, so that YMCA will be able to conform to all the compliance regulations of international donors. YMCA's project manager illustrated this by saying: ''*The capacity building is important for local organisations like YMCA to be able to take over. The most important aspect of capacity building is that of accountability. But accountability is not just a financial regulation aspect. It also reflects how are we accountable to our beneficiaries. How can we ensure that beneficiaries are protected?*''

In the PRCD project, capacity building was mainly provided by ZOA to YMCA. However, Sida did have influence on what type of capacity building should take place. Since gender mainstreaming is an important topic for Sida, ZOA provided YMCA staff with training on that topic. There was also space for YMCA project officers to request trainings on certain issues, such as report writing. Capacity building is often seen as training that one organisation provides to another in order to transfer certain skills. This is to some extent the case, but a lot of it is rather working side by side and mutual learning on the job. Having discussions, explaining things and hopping in someone's office for a quick question; these are actually very essential aspects of partnership that increases the capacity of people and organisations. The fact that YMCA's project manager works in the ZOA office three days a week is a great example of how this can be facilitated. Also, slowly handling over responsibilities of tasks to YMCA is a part of the ongoing capacity building process. While there is no direct YMCA to ZOA capacity building training, ZOA still learns from them because of knowledge of the local context and their expertise in Peace Clubs and CLFs. You could also argue that YMCA is capacity building beneficiaries, for example by training school mentors to be able to run peace clubs in their schools. So capacity building is not just providing a training, but it should also include mutual learning that fluently happens between partners throughout the course of a project.

So to what extent have INGO's like ZOA been able to make themselves redundant over the past years? Since the end of the civil wars, many civil society organisations have emerged in Liberia that have been working with INGO's. Just like for ZOA, the mandate of many of these INGO's is ending or have already ended. Particularly in peacebuilding, there is a lot of local knowledge that these civil society organisations posses. For many of them however, it's still difficult to apply for direct funding from international donors and there are also little funding opportunities within Liberia. With the end of the PRCD project in the near future, both ZOA and YMCA staff are confident that YMCA has the capacity to continue this project on their own, both in terms of implementing project activities and being able to comply to donor regulations. One ZOA staff indicated that YMCA staff in Liberia is actually just as qualified as ZOA staff in Liberia, if not more. Over the years, YMCA has also build a strong reputation with many international donors and recently they've recently received a direct fund from USAID. In this project YMCA is the lead organisation and ZOA is sub-granted for technical support. This shows that it's possible for local organisations to get direct funding, even though YMCA staff did stress that this might not have been possible without ZOA being the sub-grantee. This is a positive step for YMCA to be able to sustain project activities when ZOA phases out and leaves Liberia.

8.4 Sustainability and phase out

Over the years, Liberia has developed into a relatively stable country in terms of peace. There are still many issues relating to positive peace such as lack of trust and social cohesion, but there is no large fear for full scale conflict. Peacebuilding in Liberia has been moving more towards the field of human rights, with growing attention for issues like gender based violence and human rights violations. NGO's that have come to Liberia after the civil war and in response to the Ebola crisis have largely left or are planning to phase out, as their mandate has come to an end. Since ZOA's mandate is on relief and recovery, and the Liberian context is moving more and more towards development, its mandate in Liberia is also coming to an end in 2023. That means that ZOA is now in its phase out period in which its focussing a lot on reviewing the sustainability of its projects. How effective are projects in reaching their objectives and why are some projects sustained in village A, but not in village B? These are things ZOA wants to look into during this phase out period, so that successful projects might be sustained when ZOA leaves.

Sustainability in peacebuilding is two-sided. First and foremost, a project should have a sustainable impact on its beneficiaries. That can be reached by the creation of skills or behaviour change that lasts. In that way, beneficiaries are able to keep on using what they've learned and prevent and solve issues on their own. Secondly, there is project sustainability, or the continuation of project activities. In order to keep delivering a sustainable impact, project activities could be sustained after the project's official life cycle. The survey has shown that most beneficiaries also feel the need for the project to be

sustained and many of them have also indicated that it would be great if the project could be implemented in other communities and counties where the project has not yet taken place. The interviews made clear that project sustainability is often a wish and a goal, but there are struggles in realising it. Lack of project sustainability is a very common issue in Liberia and there is visible prove all around to verify. A ZOA staff member illustrated this by saying: ''*For instance, all across the country there are abandoned completed projects which were intended to benefit the citizens including school buildings, clinics, hand pumps, pit-latrines, market buildings among others''*.

When a project officially ends, the (financial) support of donor and INGO stops. Project sustainability therefore depends on the willingness and ability of local actors to sustain project activities. If there is no willingness amongst local actors to sustain a project, there is a chance that the project was not having a sustainable impact in the first place and therefore sustaining it is not desirable.

Ideally, project beneficiaries are the ones sustaining project activities themselves. Through participation the and ownership, the willingness and ability of the beneficiaries to sustain project activities can be promoted. When looking at the PRCD project, there is quite some confidence that the the CLF and Peace Club components will be sustained by local beneficiaries. This is because they seem to be both willing and able to sustain the project activities. For the CLF, the ideas and structures are rolled out and in place, and beneficiaries indicate that they want to continue activities. In terms of ability, the project activities are not very resource costly, but it's most likely that the CLF will be sustained on a smaller scale; either with smaller groups, or with less frequent meetings.

Many Peace Clubs have been starting to think about phase out strategies and each school has come up with its own plan. Some schools have plans to include a small peace club fee, while others have plans to organise periodic events to raise money for the peace clubs. Also, many schools have similar clubs, such as hygiene clubs and sports clubs, so the club structure is already present at the schools.

When project sustainability is difficult because beneficiaries are unable to sustain the activities, the involvement of key actors can play an important role, but this can come with other tensions. In order to increase the chances for project sustainability of the Peace Clubs, the project has put effort in getting key school actors involved: school administrators and principals. However, recently one of the peace clubs used their activity money to paint the principal's office. As this money is there for peace and conflict resolution initiatives, it raised the eyebrows of some ZOA staff. While improving local participation of key actors and with that the chance of project sustainability, in some cases it could lead to tensions with the original project objectives. This also shows that project sustainability is not something that is either successfully achieved or not. It can be the case that some activities are sustained in some shape or form, while others are not.

For the CBS component of the project, ensuring project sustainability is a bit more challenging, despite beneficiaries indicated that they would like to see the project be sustained. This is because the project activities are more time and resource intensive. Because of the long sessions, there are already struggles with the retention rates which will only become more challenging. Also, there are trained facilitators that are able to continue project activities, but they have quite an intensive role so it's more likely that they will look for other paid jobs when there is no longer funding from the project. These people are not able to put in so much time for free. One of the YMCA staff members also explained what could have been done to increase the chance of facilitators continuing their tasks after the project: ''*Chances might have been higher if throughout the project, we would have made clear that this project and the small money they get was just a motivation to start and for the support from ZOA and YMCA, and that we wish that eventually they would continue without that support. That was not the case. There was no room for voluntary contributions during the project''*.

In such situations where there is the wish to sustain project activities, but beneficiaries are unable to do so because of a lack of resources, the ideal situation is that local NGO's who were involved in implementing the project are able to sustain it. In Liberia, this is often not the case, as many projects are not sustained because during partnerships there is to little attention for a sustainable phase out strategy. A sustainable phase out strategy should capacitate local NGO's to continue implement development projects when INGO's phase out. To ensure that local partner NGO's are capacitated to continue implementing project activities, they need to be given ownership during the project. As mentioned before, donors and INGO's play an important role in facilitating this in their partnership with local NGO's. More importantly however, is the capacity of local NGO's to secure their own funding. As explained before, this can be promoted through capacity building that focusses on the complying to donor regulations.

For this PRCD project, ZOA's sustainable phase out plan is focussed on capacity building of YMCA so that they can eventually take over project activities. All staff members are convinced that if YMCA is able to secure funding, they are able to continue all project activities because YMCA has the experience and expertise to do so.

8.5 Power of participation

The survey has shown that in the PRCD project, beneficiaries experience low levels of participation throughout most project phases. The activity phase was the one in which they scored highest, followed by the monitoring and evaluation phase. In these two phases, most beneficiaries indicated to be implementing, while some indicated to be in decision making control. Despite relatively low levels of

participation throughout most parts of the project, beneficiaries experience high levels of psychological ownership.

This was explained in the interviews by the argument that the power of participation for beneficiaries doesn't lay in their participation in all phases of the project. Here, it's important to distinguish between different project activities. In a project, on the one hand there are all sorts of organisational things that need to be done in order to successfully implement a project. In these activities, participation of beneficiaries is not necessary on a high level as long as the local needs are taken into account, for example by the consultation of some key local actors. If you for example do a needs assessment in local communities, nobody will say that their community needs CBS because it is a methodology that is relatively unknown. However, based on the local needs that are identifies together with key local actors, CBS could be a good methodology to implement. The development actors are responsible for these activities, so that they create an enabling environment for the beneficiaries.

For beneficiaries, the power of participation lays in the freedom to take ownership in the content of the project activities. In the different sub projects of PRCD, the methodologies are very much predetermined but the beneficiaries are free to come up with their own issues ideas and solutions. This is what promotes the high levels of psychological ownership that the beneficiaries experience.

Inclusiveness and democratic decision-making are crucial aspects of the success of participation in peacebuilding. In the PRCD project, a very divers group of community members participate, including school principals, students, religious leaders, women's groups leaders and local authorities. A major issue in Liberian society is the lack of trust between people, and especially between community members and their leaders. This project makes these people come together and get to know each other in a different setting. For example, by working together for 15 weeks in a CBS cycle, various community members get to know each other, trust increases and power structures are changed. Community members used to draw a line between themselves and their leaders and saw them as difficult to connect to. This has changes due to the project, and levels of trust and interactions between community members and leaders have increased. As one described it: ''*Inclusiveness of different actors in project implementation in a participatory manner is key to the success of any project and leads to improvement in relationships at various levels which significantly affects the power dynamics and changes a lot of things for the greater good of the project''.* The open and inclusive nature of this project promotes higher levels of ownership, because everybody can bring something to the project.

During project activities of Peace Clubs, CLFs and CBS, there is also has a very democratic way of decision making within the groups. All beneficiaries participate in discussing issues and thinking about solution, but eventually there are only a few that will be involved in following up those solutions and

resolving issues. The one that eventually execute these decisions in the community do this on behalf of the other as well and therefore they do feel ownership over these decisions even though they don't enforce them themselves. This also likely explains the fact that most beneficiaries indicate to be implementing in the activity phase, while only some indicated to have decision making power. Beneficiaries are satisfied with their overall participation level because they look mainly at the process and at the results and feel like they are part of it.

8.6 Open systems approach

International development used to work based on a closed system approach, in which development issues are looked at thematically without much attention to linkages with other issues. However, in reality development work is taking place in much more complicated environments in which there are issues overlapping and in relation to each other. In a closed system approach, development work is often top-down with one size fits all programming. The local context of an area and of a certain person is important to take into account in development work and is also constantly changing. This asks for an open systems approach in which the changing local context is taken into account. As one of the project staff members put it: ''*There is no longer a top-down one size fits all sort of solution. It depends per person, that's why local participation and ownership is increasingly important''.*

In an open system it's more difficult to measure the impact of an intervention because not only the intervention itself has impact on the outcome, but many other contextual factors do too. Static quantitative measures will not provide the whole picture. What makes it even more difficult is the fact that peacebuilding is very dynamic and concepts are also very context depending. Somebody might feel safe today, but not tomorrow. Timing of measurement and reasons behind these measurements are therefore important. This asks for additional qualitative measurements in which contextual factors can be integrated. Because local contexts continuously change, flexibility is needed to that programming can be adaptive. This asks for good accountability and feedback systems and an increasingly important role for monitoring and evaluation. ZOA and YMCA have been improving this in their programming, and want to continue in doing so. Also increasingly integrate different projects with each other is a goal, by for example integrating CBS on schools and in CLF groups.

8.7 COVID-19

As everywhere in the world, COVID-19 has impact on Liberian society and the development work that is taking place. One small but clear example is that the field period of this study was abruptly ended because of the worsening COVID-19 situation in March 2020.

Many voluntary and temporary expatriates have left Liberia in the beginning of the COVID-pandemic. As ZOA works mainly with local staff and full time expatriates, this was no issue for them. However,

restrictions on program activities were severe, especially during the emergency period the Liberian government announced in March. Due to travel restrictions, ZOA staff could not visit many project sites. Combined with restrictions on social gatherings this meant that some projects had to be put on hold, while others continued with some adaptations. In order to keep the PRCD project running, remote support and the role of YMCA and local facilitators became more important. This shows that projects that are less depending on external support and in which there is more local participation and ownership, have less troubles to be sustained in such a crisis. During the first phase of the pandemic, especially essential support such as food security and livelihood project were continued because ZOA has to commit to its mandate of a relief organisations. Most developmental projects, such as the PRCD, where put on hold and have been restarted after restrictions have reduced. With some restrictions still continuing, it's important that projects are adapted conform the regulations and fitting to the changing local needs. The flexible position of donors made it possible for ZOA to do this. Some project activities were continued with smaller groups, hygiene regulations and other adaptations.

On a more positive note, it seems that COVID-19 has not impacted Liberia as hard as many other countries and after an initial lockdown period the country is now almost back to normal in terms of daily life. Also, because of the restrictions on travel and social gatherings, digital data collection and money transfers have become more common and improved a lot. ZOA has also been doing COVID-19 response projects instead of some peacebuilding activities. For this, networks and structures of projects, for example from the CLF, were used to spread messages for COVID. Not only networks and structures, but also locally embedded skills were still used during the period of COVID restrictions. Many beneficiaries of the PRCD project told ZOA and YMCA staff members that they continued to prevent and resolve conflicts in their communities, even without project activities taking place.

For peacebuilding in Liberia, the COVID pandemic destroy some of the progress that has been made over the years. As one interviewee explained: ''*Regularity is important in the healing process in peacebuilding. You get used to sharing things, building trust, and then COVID-19 broke that apart''*. Besides the issue of a lack of regularity in project activities, levels of trust between community members and their local authorities also worsened during the COVID pandemic. People were promised food, water, electricity and stimulus packages by the authorities, but this was mostly not provided. Just like during the Ebola period, the COVID situation is a setback for various development issues as a lot of gains have gone down the drain. This is a big challenge that shows the need for continuation of the peacebuilding projects such as the PRCD project, so that Liberian society can further build trust and social cohesion in their communities. Although the real impact of the COVID pandemic on peacebuilding in Liberia will probably only be seen after a year or longer, it's clear that the needs are increasing while the financial possibilities are not. This forces the sector to find ways to make their

work more efficient, for instance by increasingly promote local participation and ownership so that Liberian communities become more self-reliant.

8.9 Discussion

This discussion puts the findings of this chapter into perspective with the current theoretical debate on the role of local ownership in the sustainability of peacebuilding projects. As the interviews also discuss the policy analysis and survey findings, this discussion brings together insights of all research methods.

Some scholars argue that to promote psychological ownership, it's important that beneficiaries have decision making power throughout all project phases. This study however shows that there is some more nuance to this notion. For beneficiaries, it's not very important to be involved in all the organisational activities that are needed to implement a project as long as the local needs are taken into account, for example by consulting local CSO's and key actors in the community. In terms of project phases and levels, it seems that beneficiaries should primarily have high levels of participation and ownership in the activity phase of a project. In this phase, it's important that they are free to come up with their own issues, ideas and solutions in the project. The power of beneficiary participation further lays in inclusive programming, with various actors working together on issues in their communities. Together with democratic decision making, this heads to increased trust and changing power structures, similar to Arnstein's (1969) ideas on participation.

In line with what Aga et al. (2018) argue, the interviews made clear that most donor projects in Liberia are abandoned after completion in Liberia. An important factor in this is that there is to little room for local ownership in many project. A major issues undermining the participation and ownership of local beneficiaries but also of local organisations, is the strict supply-led funding model in the field of international development (AbouAssi, 2013). The funding system is very competitive and as Batti (2014) has also argued, this results in NGO's adapting to donor priorities.

Because of this system possibilities for local participation in needs assessments are very limited, as the survey results of the PRCD project also show. In order to promote local ownership, development organisations should be more adaptive to the complex context in which their work takes place and reducing compliance regulations and allowing for more flexibility are put forward as ways to do this. Although slow, there is a sector wide shift of which the Grand Bargain is a good example. It's important however that INGO's and local NGO's don't only to look at the role of donors, but also at their own role. Von Billerbeck (2015) argues that there is a big discrepancy between rhetoric and reality when it comes to local ownership in development work. Part is that seems to be caused by from this

competitive funding system, as it sometimes leads to false reporting in order to tick all the right boxes that donors want.

Project sustainability can further be promoted by involving key actors in a project. This is consistent with a study from Mobekk (2010) in which local authorities are put forward as key actors. The issue however is that these key actors might not have the same objectives as the project originally had intended (Mac Ginty, 2015). This shows that local ownership should also not be romanticised as the holy grail for sustainable peacebuilding. It must also be noted that high levels of participation and psychological ownership among project beneficiaries is often times not enough to sustain a project. Sometimes projects are too big or to much depending on external resources to be sustained by its beneficiaries. in such cases, local NGO's might be able to sustain the project.

For local NGO's to be able to do so, it's important that they have high levels of ownership over projects. In that way, they are more likely to be able to sustain it on their own when the external support from the donor and INGO stop. The survey results showing that YMCA staff don't experience much decision making power are therefore somewhat troubling. In the interviews however they did indicate that YMCA overall has enough ownership in the project. A way in which local NGO's' can take more ownership over a project, is by handling over tasks and responsibilities over time.

Altahir (2013) argues that local NGO's are among the most important actors to sustain project activities when INGO's are phasing out. The interviews showed that to ensure that local NGO's are fully capable of sustaining project activities, donors and INGO's can further focus on capacity building during partnerships. Interestingly, this study found that there are two version of capacity building. One is more focussed on programmatic support for implementing project activities and the other is more institutional support in order to strengthen donor compliance. In Liberia, many local NGO's possess the right programmatic qualities to implement project activities, but the main issue is that they can't comply to donor regulations and therefore are unable to access funding. This study further emphasizes that capacity building is not only training that one organisation provides to another. It rather happens fluently throughout the whole project, by open communication and mutual learning. Over the years, YMCA has build a strong reputation with international donors which is crucial to secure direct funding (Gent et al., 2015). The fact that it has recently receive a direct fund from USAID, is proof of the shift that is happening in the funding system. YMCA seems to be capacitated to continue all project activities after ZOA leaves, if they are able to secure funding.

The COVID-19 pandemic has displayed that crisis situations ask for a flexible stance of development actors. It has also shown that projects with less external support and more local ownership are more easily sustained during a crisis. During the Ebola crisis, as with most international disaster aid, local

actors were largely bypassed in the process while their participation could have been crucial (Bøås & Tom, 2016). In the case of the PRCD project, local actors and structures of the peacebuilding project are used in the COVID response. Also beneficiaries indicated to keep on using skills and structures to solve conflicts in their communities without project activities. In that sense, a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic can be seen as a sustainability test of a project. The Ebola crisis exposed structurally overlooked problems in the country's development (Flessa & Marx, 2016), and the COVID pandemic will most likely too. During the initial phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, aid shifted towards COVID-19 response and other sectors were somewhat neglected. This is similar to what happened during the Ebola crisis (Connolly et al., 2015), and also project activities of the PRCD project were put on hold. This is an issue because regularity is very important for the healing process in peacebuilding. It has resulted in lower levels of trust between the communities and authorities which demonstrates that peacebuilding activities should be sustained.

9. Conclusion

This research was carried out to explore the way in which local ownership plays a role in the sustainability of peacebuilding projects in Liberia, with specific attention to the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic. It strived to do so via a case study on the PRCD peacebuilding project in Liberia, implemented by a partnership between an international donor, international NGO and local NGO; respectively Sida, ZOA and YMCA Liberia. A mixed methods approach was used which included a policy analysis of the three partner organisations, a survey with project staff and beneficiaries, and interviews with project staff.

Peacebuilding work takes place in an increasingly complex and changing context in which local needs change and differ per person. This calls for increasingly adaptive programming with room for local participation and ownership. Both project beneficiaries and local NGO's should take ownership in the peacebuilding process, as they know the local context and are the ones that will have to live with and sustain the project. In Liberia, it is very common that projects completely stop when INGO phase out their operations. This lack of project sustainability is a big issue and has a lot to do with the supply-led funding system that allows for little local ownership in the development process. Promoting local ownership and flexibility ensures that local needs are taken into account and a make projects adaptive to emerging challenged on the way, which leads to more sustainable outcomes. As the development field is still dominantly supply driven, donors have an important role in promoting local ownership and sustainability. In order to promote local participation and ownership, donors should allow for more flexibility and reduce strict donor compliance regulations.

This study has shown that it's not necessary that project beneficiaries have decision making power throughout all project phases in order to feel ownership over a project. in peacebuilding, the power of participation primarily lays in the way in which beneficiaries are able to participate in the content of a project. The inclusive nature of a project, in which different local actors are free to come up with there own issues, ideas and solution and experience democratic decision making, leads to high feelings of ownership among beneficiaries.

When a project officially comes to an end, it would be desirable if its beneficiaries are willing and able to sustain the project activities. This can be promoted by allowing beneficiaries to participate in a meaningful way, so that their voices are heard and they create a feeling of ownership over the project. However, this study has shown that the organisational part of a project is sometimes too resource and time intensive for beneficiaries to sustain. This emphasizes the importance of participation of key actors during projects as they might be more able to facilitate activities when projects officially phase out. Another way to promote project sustainability, especially when beneficiaries are unable to sustain

project activities themselves, is through local NGO's. These organisations will only be able to do so if they have the capacity to implement the project activities and are able to secure funding from a donor.

The ability of local NGO's to sustain project activities can be promoted by capacity building during partnerships with INGO's. This study found that there are two forms of capacity building. On the one hand there is capacity building that focusses on capacitating an organisation to implement development projects. On the other hand there is capacity building that focusses on capacitating an organisation to comply to donor regulations. In Liberia, there are many local NGO's that are very well capable of implementing peacebuilding projects. The issue is however, that they are often unable to get direct funding from international donors because they can't comply to all the regulations. Therefore, capacity building in Liberia should primarily be focussed on making sure that local partners are able to conform to all the compliance regulations of international donors. In that way, local NGO's can sustain projects independently after their INGO partner phases out.

In Liberia, many peacebuilding projects were put on hold during the initial phase of the COVID-19 pandemic which has lead to decreased levels of trust between communities and authorities. Although the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is yet to be fully known, it has shown that projects with less external support and more local ownership are more easily sustained during a crisis. Also, in crisis situation like this, a flexible and adaptive attitude of development actors make is possible to utilize local actors and structures for crisis response activities.

10.   Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research several recommendations can be made, both academically and practically.

10.1 Academic recommendations

It's recommended to further study the link between participation and psychological ownership both with quantitative and qualitative methods. Through statistical testing, the causal relation could be studied, while qualitative research could focus on how local beneficiaries experience psychological ownership and what role different aspects of their participation play in this process. In terms of project sustainability, it would be interesting to see qualitative studies that look into projects that were not sustained after their official project cycle and what role local participation and ownership have played in this. Also, studying the role of key actors in project sustainability and the pros and cons of their involvement would be recommended. Furthermore, as this study has shown that the promotion of local ownership and project sustainability largely depends on the partnership between different development partners, further research could study the power relations between development partners. Finally, it would be interesting to study how a global push for a different way of working, such as the Grand Bargain, influences the policies and practices of development actors working in the field.

10.2 Development recommendations

As the field of international development is still very much donor-driven, donors have a big role in facilitating a shift towards more adaptive programming in which there is more room for local ownership. Also, partnerships between development organisations should increasingly focus on learning from each other and making each other stronger. An important role for INGO's working in Liberia is strengthening the capacity of local partners so that they can become more self-reliant in delivering their work. Finally, because many projects are not sustained in Liberia after their official project cycle finishes, it's recommended that development actors include sustainability plans and phase out strategies in their project proposals.

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12.   Appendices

Appendix I: List of included policy documents for policy analysis, per organisation

	Sida
1.	*Guiding Principles for Sida's Engagement with and Support to Civil Society.*
2.	*Strategy for Sweden's development cooperation with Liberia 2016–2020*
3.	*Operational Plan 2020-2022*
4.	*Sida's vision*
5.	*Strategy for capacity development, partnership and methods that support the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development*
6.	*Strategy for Sustainable Peace 2017-2022*
7.	*Strategy for Sweden's development cooperation for global gender equality and women's and girls' rights 2018-2022*
8.	*Strategy for Sweden's humanitarian aid provided through the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) 2017–2020*
	ZOA
1.	*ZOA strategic plan 2019-2022*
2.	*ZOA Policy for partnering with local NGOs*
3.	*Country strategy annual plan 2020 Liberia*
4.	*Peacebuilding and Reconciliation through Community Dialogues: Strengthening Social Cohesion and Civic Trust in Five Counties, Liberia. 2017-2020. ZOA Proposal to Swedish Development Cooperation*
5.	*Peacebuilding and Reconciliation through Community Dialogues: Strengthening Social Cohesion and Civic Trust in Five Counties, Liberia. Progress Report- Year two*
6.	*Phase Out Plan (POP) Update 2019-2023*
	YMCA Liberia
1.	*YMCA Liberia Impact Report 2019*
2.	*Agenda 2063 The Africa We Want*
3.	*Our GAME PLAN to achieve Vision 2031*
4.	*GENDER AND CULTURE INCLUSION GUIDELINE 2018-2022*
5.	*CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE PROTECTION POLICY*
6.	*Capability Statement*

Utrecht University. Study on 'Peacebuilding and Reconciliation through Community Dialogues' project Liberia

This survey is about ZOA and YMCA's 'Peacebuilding and Reconciliation through Community Dialogues' (PRCD) project. It is part of a larger study on the perceptions of different actors in the peacebuilding sector on the role of participation and ownership in sustainability of peacebuilding projects. This study is conducted by Stefan Vergouwe, Master student of International Development Studies at Utrecht University, the Netherlands, in cooperation with ZOA Liberia. Your participation would be much appreciated, but is voluntary and does not lead to any compensation or other benefits. If you do agree to participate, your answers will be anonymous. The results will be compiled in a report that will be published by Utrecht University, and shared with ZOA and YMCA. The survey should take about 20 minutes. At any point, you can decide that you no longer want to participate.

Thank you for participating in this survey.

Please try to answer as many of the questions as possible, and keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers. If you have any questions about the survey, feel free to contact Stefan Vergouwe via email: s.vergouwe@students.uu.nl

Please indicate to which group of actors you belong:

◯ ZOA Liberia staff

◯ YMCA Liberia staff

◯ Project participants

What type of project participant are you?

Multiple types possible

- ☐ Community Based Sociotherapy (CBS) participant
- ☐ Community Leadership Forum participant
- ☐ Civil Trust Workshop participant
- ☐ Peace Club mentor
- ☐ Peace Club participant
- ☐ Other

In which of the following project locations are you active?

Multiple locations possible

- ☐ Monrovia
- ☐ Unification Town
- ☐ Ganta
- ☐ Kakata
- ☐ Robertsport
- ☐ Sinje
- ☐ Yekepa
- ☐ Zorzor

Since how long have you been involved in this peacebuilding project?

- ○ Less than one year
- ○ Between one and two years
- ○ Longer than two years

On average, how many hours per week are you involved in this peacebuilding project?

- ○ Less than 2
- ○ Between 2 and 5
- ○ Between 5 and 10
- ○ Between 10 and 20
- ○ More than 20 hours

How would you value this project?

With 0 being the lowest and 10 the highest

0   10

Please indicate your level of participation in each phase of the project:

Brief explanation for this question: There are various phases that a project goes through and each has its own specific activities. The phases below are in general in chronological order, however they can sometimes also overlap. The 'Monitoring and Evaluation phase' for instance often overlaps with the implementation phase. Also, projects can be redisigned after critical evaluation, going from phase 5 to phase 2 --- The levels of participation indicate the extend to which you have been involved in the project. You can either be: not involved - informed about the decisions that are made - consulted about what should be decided - implementing decisions that have been made - making desicions about what will happen in the project. Please choose the one participation level that best fits.

	Not involved	Informed	Consulted	Implementing	Decision-making
Needs assessment phase	◯	◯	■	◯	◯
Project design phase	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Baseline phase	◯	◯	■	◯	◯
Action planning phase	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Activity phase	◯	◯	■	◯	◯
Monitoring and Evaluation phase	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

To what extend are you satisfied with your overall level of participation throughout the project?

◯ Extremely satisfied

◯ Somewhat satisfied

◯ Neutral

◯ Somewhat dissatisfied

◯ Extremely dissatisfied

Please indicate to what extend you agree with the following statements:	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Don't know/other
I feel I need to protect my ideas from being used by others in this project.	○	○	○	○
I feel that people I work with in this project should not invade my workspace.	○	○	■	○
I am confident I can make a positive difference in this project.	○	○	○	○
If I thought something was done wrong in this project, I would challenge anyone responsible for it.	○	○	○	○
I would not hesitate to tell other people involved in the project, if I saw something that was done wrong	○	○	■	○
I feel I belong in this project.	○	○	○	○
I am totally comfortable being in this project.	○	○	○	○
I feel this project's success is my success.	○	○	○	○
I feel being a member in this project helps define who I am.	○	○	○	○
I find it important that all project targets and goals are reached.	○	○	○	○
I find it important that this peacebuilding project is being sustained after the project's officially planned ending (December 2020).	○	○	○	○

How do you value the cooperation between ZOA and YMCA on this project?

With 0 being the lowest and 10 the highest

| | | | | | | | | | | |

0   10

Are you aware of the project objectives?

◯ Yes

◯ No

Please briefly explain the project objectives:

Are you aware of the name of the funding partner of this project?

◯ Yes

◯ No

Please give the name of funding partner of this project:

What is your age?

To which gender do you mostly identify?

◯ Male

◯ Female

◯ Other

You have come to the end of this survey. Thank you for participating. If you have are any remarks or suggestions you would like to share, please do so here:

Introduction	
	Greetings and time for informal conversation
	Thank you for making some time for this interview.
	Explain research: Start: many NGO's working in post-conflict countries leave after a few years. Issue: is it sustainable? Often in literature and other sources, the participation and ownership of locals is linked to this! My main research question is: What role does local ownership play for the sustainability of peacebuilding projects in Liberia, specifically during the COVID-19 pandemic? Peacebuilding and Reconciliation through Community Dialogues in Liberia Sida – ZOA – YMCA – project beneficiaries Survey: looking at local ownership by measuring participation levels of project participants through different stages of the project. Policy analysis: comparing policies of Sida ZOA and YMCA on topics related to local ownership and sustainability
	My interpretation of local ownership and sustainability. Local ownership = the extent to which local have control over their own future. Operationalised this by looking at participation: who participates? In which phases? On what level? (informed, consulted, implementing, decision making) Sustainability: 1. Sustainability of impact: creating behavioural change. People no longer escalate violence, but through a project have learned how to peacefully resolve conflict. 2. Sustainability of intervention: to what extend is an intervention sustained after the official project-life-cycle
	Goal of the interview: to discuss your views on topics that relate to local ownership and sustainability. Both relating to the PRCD project, and the peacebuilding sector in Liberia in general. Set-up: - Talk about your role at ZOA and your views on local ownership and sustainability - Discuss some topics relating to local ownership and sustainability: power dynamics – aid-dependency – partnership and capacity building – donorregulations - Implications of COVID-19 on local ownership - Discuss policy analysis findings - Discuss survey findings
	Any questions from your side?
	May I record this meeting so that I can transcribe is afterwards? I'll be the only one that has access to the recording, while I'll use so that I can transcribe and analyse this interview. The analysed information that will be used in the thesis will be anonymized.
Basic questions	
	What is your current role at ZOA/YMCA? probes: how long; what do you enjoy; cooperation with colleagues; day to day work
	To what extend are you involved in the Peacebuilding project of ZOA, Sida and YMCA? probes: cooperation; role;

	How is the cooperation with YMCA?
	In what way does ZOA/YMCA support local ownership in their projects? probes: why; examples; good practices; possible improvements
	What are strengths of local ownership / participation? probes: examples; this project versus others
	What can be weakness of local ownership/participation? probes: how; why; peacebuilding specific;
	In what way could local participation lead to sustainable development? probes: sustainable impact; project sustainability; phase out
MAIN TOPICS	
ZOA's roles	ZOA is both implementing its own projects, while also working through local partners. Why? What are the implications of this on local ownership and sustainability?
	Which part of the project is implemented by ZOA, and which part by YMCA?
	ZOA is doing both relief and recovery work. How does the way of working affect local ownership and sustainability? probes: transition
Funding regulations	What role do donors have in the development field?
	How does ZOA balance its accountability towards donors and beneficiaries? probes: problematic; dependency;
	To what extend are there differences in flexibility of donors? probes: in general versus Sida
	In what way can donors support more local ownership? probes: examples; good and bad practices
Partnership & capacity building	Both Sida and ZOA talk a lot about capacity building. In what way is capacity building taking place? probes: direction of capacity building; examples;
	What is the goal behind capacity building? probes: local ownership; sustainability
Phasing out	What happens when an INGO like ZOA phases out? probes: sustainability; local partners; dependency
	Should NGO project be sustained after its project-life-cycle? probes: why (not); how; expectations for this project; role local participation and ownership
	What are your personal plans when ZOA leaves?
Dependency syndrome	Could a lack of involvement of local people in development projects, lead to aid-dependency syndrome? probes: implications on sustainability; how to change
Multisector approach	First more sectoral approach in development world, now more integrated multisector approach. Why is this shift happening? probes: effectiveness; sustainability; local needs; open versus closed system
Inclusiveness / power dynamics	What is the power of participatory approaches in development work? Probe: peacebuilding specific?

	In what way could inclusive participation of different actors, lead to changing power dynamics?
COVID-19	How has the COVID-19 situation impacted peacebuilding in Liberia? probes: the PRCD project; local ownership
	How has it impacted peacebuilding projects in Liberia?
	To what extent is local participation and ownership affected because of the COVID pandemic?
	To what extend could local participation and ownership be seen as mediating factors in the impact of COVID? probes: external support; dependency; project sustainability
Policy analysis discussion	*Explain the policy analysis results and discuss them, trying to find explanations, compare with reality and views of staff.* probes: Sida conceptual, ZOA YMCA more practical ; ownership versus participation; phase out; inclusiveness; power relations; partnership
Survey discussion	*Explain the main survey findings and discuss them, trying to find explanations, compare with policy and with reality and views of staff.*
	Low participation levels, but high PO, how? Also: high evaluation + everyone wanted the project to be sustained after its official project-life-cycle.
	PO constructive version (self-efficacy, accountability, sense of belonging and self identity) high for everyone PO defensive (territoriality) high for those people that have a localised idea of who the funding partner is. (Sida 1.3, ZOA 2.1 YMCA 2.8)
	CTW participants score higher on territoriality. How come?
	Longer involved → more territorial. How come?
	Gender: 10 people ''other''. How come? Also, they evaluate the project lower. How come?
	To what extend do project beneficiaries have decision power?
	To what extend do YMCA staff have decision power?
	How does the M&E go? What role do project beneficiaries have there?
Concluding	
	All right, I belief we've discussed all the topics I wanted to discuss so I think we can wrap up. Are there any things you would like to add or ask relating to my research topic?
	I would like to thank you very much for your time and your interesting views. It's really helpful for my research. The final version of the thesis will be send to ZOA and YMCA, so it will also be available for you if you wish to see it. Have a great day and thanks again!