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Financing Post-2015 Development Goals: Shaping a New Policy Framework for Aid in Liberia

Apollos Ikechukwu Nwafor
Walden University

Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Apollos Nwafor

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Review Committee
Dr. George Kieh, Committee Chairperson,
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

Dr. Heather Mbaye, Committee Member,
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

Dr. Lynn Wilson, University Reviewer,
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

Chief Academic Officer
Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

Walden University
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Abstract

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Apollos Nwafor

M.Sc., University of London (SOAS), 2011

B.Sc. University of Nigeria Nsukka, 2004

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Abstract

Liberia, Africa's oldest democracy, has made several efforts in becoming a developed economy and ending poverty, but these efforts have been hampered by lack of appropriate financing mechanisms to achieve this goal. The most recent challenge which was the purpose of this study was to understand how Liberia can finance and achieve the sustainable development goals adopted by the United Nations in September 2015. Despite substantial external aid, Liberia was only able to meet 3 out of the 8 Millennium Development Goals, and more than 60% of the population remain extremely poor. The main research question was to understand what policy shifts are need for Liberia to finance its post-2015 development goals. Using Kingdon's multiple streams theory as the lens, a qualitative case study design was used to analyze literature, public reports, government reports, and the loosely-structured interviews of 15 purposefully-selected participants. The interview data were coded and categorized for thematic analysis. Results reveal that Liberia needs to make a policy shift in key areas including domestic resource mobilization, natural resource governance, combating corruption, strengthening the justice system, strengthening capacity for policy processes, and improving political leadership. The positive social change implication of this study includes recommendations for policymakers, the Ministry of Finance, and the donor community to strengthen domestic resource mobilization and undertake pro-poor tax reforms in order to reduce aid dependence, support Liberia's long-term plan to eradicate extreme poverty and become a middle-income country by 2030.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to God of all grace that brought me out from the dirt and gave me a life I could never have. To Him I say thank you!!

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Many people have contributed to the success of this study. First, I would like to thank my committee chair, Prof. George Kieh, for his guidance and support throughout the study. You have reshaped my thinking and made me a better scholar. I will always remember and appreciate the support of Dr. Heather Mbaye, my committee member, for her invaluable comments. You made sure nothing was left out and provided the right support. Many thanks! Thanks also to Dr. Lynn Wilson for her very objective and critical reviews. You made sure I did not leave anything to chance and kept the right standard.

To my wife and children, I say thank you for allowing me to pursue my dream and for using some of the family resources for this study. My wife Chidimma and my children, you all have been an inspiration. I am indebted to you for all the support. To the rest of my friends and family, thank you and Blessings!

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

In September 2015, the Sustainable Development Goals were adopted by member states of the United Nations to address the unfinished business of Millennium Development Goals which were not completed as at the end of 2014. It also has the overall aim to end extreme poverty and eliminate inequality by 2030. The agenda encapsulates a plan of action and recognizes that eradicating poverty remains the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development (United Nations, 2015). This was based on the premise that while poverty was halved, there was growing inequality in the world and more people were living below the new poverty line resulting in increased extreme poverty.

The Millennium Development Declaration preceded the SDGs and was adopted in September 2000 by 189 UN member states, which birthed what became the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and redefined how countries all over the world approached their national development. The Millennium Development Goals were the 8 international development goals agreed to by the 191-member states of the United Nations. The overarching aim was to have poverty by 2015. Each gaol had specific targets. Thus, the MDGs became the framework within which most countries framed their poverty reduction strategies and national development plans. Here, the MDGs do appear to have been much more influential both with governments and with policy communities and civil society (Manning, Scott & Haddad, 2013). By 2015, Liberia as a country was only able to meet 3 of the 8 goals and no sub-Saharan Africa country met all the goals. For Liberia in particular, this was despite the huge amounts of aid it received between 2005 and 2015 during the MDG period. In this study, I addressed the need for a deeper understanding on why Liberia was not able to achieve the MDGs despite the huge amount of aid and how Liberia can finance the SDGs.

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets is an ambitious framework agreed to and adopted by member states of the United Nations under UN resolution A/RES/70/1 to end extreme poverty by 2030 and demonstrate an ambitious commitment to end extreme poverty. As stated in the preamble, member states of the UN stated that these 17 goals are urgently needed to shift the world on to a sustainable and resilient path with a pledge to leave no one behind in ending extreme poverty. According to the United Nations (2015), they build on Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)- which were 8 in number and preceded the SDGs by completing what they did not achieve as highlighted in the UN (2015) final MDG report as well as end extreme poverty by realizing the human rights of all including achieving gender equality and empowerment of women and girls.

The SDGs are indivisible such that they are linked and address the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social, and environmental. When they were agreed to in 2015, they were expected to stimulate action over the next 15 years. This was because progress by the UN on the MDGs were largely focused on developing and least developed Countries (LDCs) with the final report of the UN in 2015 revealing that no African country met the eight Millennium Development Goals (United Nations Development Programme, 2015). Furthermore, the Sustainable Development Goals take a human rights-based approach to development and now holds all member states accountable.

Recognizing the ambitious nature of the SDGs and the need to avoid the challenges with inadequate financing as experienced by poor countries like Liberia faced with the MDGs, a financing framework was agreed to by UN member states known as the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAA). At the third international conference on financing for development held in Addis Ababa, member states of the UN including Liberia adopted the framework for mobilizing financial and technical resources to implement the SDGs. The framework reflects the need of all countries to align all financing and policies with economic, social, and environmental priorities as well as the need for countries to ensure integrated national financing frameworks (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2015; United Nations, 2015; World Health Organization, 2015).

When the Millennium Development Declaration was adopted by 191 UN member states, which birthed what became the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and redefined how countries all over the world approached their national development, the MDGs became the framework within which most countries framed their poverty reduction strategies and national development plans. Here, the MDGs do appear to have been much more influential with governments, policy communities and civil society (Manning, Scott & Haddad, 2013). The declaration which was encapsulated in the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 55/2 clearly states in section 2, article 11 that "We will spare no effort to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty, to which more than a billion of them are currently subjected. We are committed to making the right to development a reality for everyone and to freeing the entire human race from want". This seemed to set the framework for huge overseas development assistance (ODA) to aid poor countries, most of which are in Africa and Asia, to finance their national development plans, as long as they were framed to meet the MDGs. Today, ODA budgets are under even greater pressure due to the tepid global economy and heavy fiscal burdens on many major donors (World Bank, 2013). For instance, ODA to Africa fell by 4% in 2012, and by 2015, ODA was reduced to only 0.3% of GNI, which is far from the promised 0.7% of GDP by the 7 most industrial countries (G7) (OECD, 2015; World Bank, 2015).

Many developing countries like Liberia in Africa did not meet the MDGs and were less than successful in meeting the targets largely due to inadequate financing and a huge dependence on foreign aid which perpetuated a culture of dependence and mismanagement of scarce resources (Asongu, 2014; Overseas Development Institute, 2014; Rensick, 2013). Today, the MDGs have been replaced with the post-2015 development goals, also known as the SDGs. Given the state of the global economy where there is slow growth and declining financing, poor countries like Liberia are likely to be left behind in achieving the SDGs. The theoretical framework, which may help in understanding the nature of this problem, is discussed in Chapter 1. The chapter consists of the background to the problem, explains the purpose and significance of this study, and outlines the research questions that this study seeks to answer, nature of the study, scope and limitations, and implications for positive social change.

Background of the Problem

Liberia is characterized as a fragile state and depends on aid to finance most of its development plans. This is because it is still recovering from its second civil war, which ended about 14 years ago. The 14-year civil conflict happened in 2 parts. The first was between 1989 and 1997, took the lives of about 250,000 people and ended with a peace agreement facilitated by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). But the peace lasted for only 2 years and in 1999, the second civil war broke out and lasted for another 4 years. The Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed by the warring parties on August 18, 2003 marking the political end of the conflict and beginning of the country's transition to democracy.

Current SDGs have been available since 2015 with progress on reducing inequalities and creating jobs, but progress has left much to be desired (UN, 2018) with many African countries including Liberia struggling to finance the goals. The current SDGs have become a global accountability framework for all member states and will seek to end extreme poverty and inequality by 2030 (UN, 2015). The challenge most countries are facing is how to finance these goals as they are more in number than the MDGs and require huge amounts of financing given the scarce financial resources and dwindling external aid which most countries including Liberia relied on during the MDG era which was between 2000 and 2015.

While the MDGs expired at the end of 2015, one critical issue of concern, as the UN member states negotiated a new set of goals known as the post 2015 development goals, was how this new set of goals would be financed. According to the UN (2015) report, many developing countries did not meet the MDGs. In Liberia, 81.9% of the population are multidimensionally poor, while an additional 12.9% are near multidimensional poverty (UNDP, 2014). This is despite $534,200,000 received by Liberia between 2011 and 2015 from the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD (World Bank, 2015), and $1.8 billion from the European Commission and EU member states between 2008 and 2011 for development aid and debt relief (European Commission, 2015).

According to the UN (2013), MDGs were less successful because the 8 goals were not fully achieved especially in sub-Saharan Africa. For example, the inequality gap between the rich and the poor widened (UN, 2013). Even though extreme poverty was reduced by half (UNDP, 2015; World Bank, 2016), progress has been uneven among and within countries and as at 2015 2.1 billion people still live in poverty, which is unacceptably high (World Bank, 2016).

In the case of Liberia, the country was able to meet only three of the eight MDGs gender equality, treatment of HIV/AIDs, malaria, and other diseases, and global partnership (AFDB, 2015; UNDP, 2015). Consequently, MDGs have failed to shift the focus of the development discourse from income-poverty to the multidimensional nature of human poverty, and from a narrow growth paradigm to a broader human-centred perspective of sustainable and equitable well-being (Vandemoortele, 2011). Furthermore, Wytech (2012) said that international aid to fragile and conflict-affected states accounts for 30% of global ODA flows. Yet, as at 2015, no low-income, fragile or conflict-affected country was able to achieve more than 3 of the MDGs (UNDP, 2015). This begs the question as to how these resources are yielding less than successful results given the poor performance of the MDGs in Liberia. A major issue is how a country like Liberia, which is a post-conflict and poor country, can learn and finance its post-2015 development agenda

Post-conflict Liberia's national development strategies have included short, medium, and long-term visions for moving toward a sustainable future (Republic of Liberia, 2012). A short-term strategy was the 2006-2008 interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), which focused on rebuilding the country after the 14-year conflict. The medium-term strategy was a PRSP titled 'Agenda for Transformation' which focused on peace and security, economic revitalisation, governance, the rule of law and infrastructure and basic service. Yet, 81.9% of Liberia's population of about 3.5 million people live on less than $1 a day. Women and children continue to be sexually abused or exploited, and many Liberians lack access to appropriate healthcare (United Nations Development Assistance Fund-Liberia, 2013).It is very unclear as to how the SDGs will be financed in Liberia.

There is a global consensus that achieving sustainable development requires substantial mobilization and reallocation of financial resources, which makes financing a central theme in the post-2015 development agenda (UN, 2013). The financing approach underpinning the original MDGs was that rich countries would give more aid through ODA complemented by domestic resource mobilisation. The implicit underlying assumption by the UN and rich countries was that, when poor countries were unable to mobilise enough domestic resources to finance progress towards MDGs, the financing gap should be filled either with ODA or through debt cancellation. This implicit assumption about burden sharing underpinned the 2005 Gleneagles commitment on increasing aid to 0.7% of GDP and cancel multilateral debt (Greenhill & Prizzon, 2012).

International development aid was justified by the UN and rich countries who provide aid as necessary due to low domestic income to finance investments in MDGs plans in the absence of adequate domestic savings in poor countries (Fukuda, 2011). As a result of inadequate financing, most developing countries hinged their poverty reduction strategy papers and programs on aid flowing from the global north. Without an alternative policy framework to guide Liberia, it may take the same approach of aid dependency to finance the post-2015 goals, and this approach will no longer hold, given the global economic recession, and the need to move away from the dependency culture of expecting external aid to finance national development plans.

Aid has been essential to helping low-income countries accelerate economic growth and lift people from extreme poverty over the last decade (World Bank, 2013). For instance, Liberia benefited from some of the highest ODA per capita in the world of about $185, more than 3 times the African average of $49 (African Development Bank, 2013). However, the 2008 global financial crisis has weakened the economies of donor countries and stalled the flow of needed financing to many developing countries, which largely depend on aid for their budgets. More importantly, the culture of financial transparency and accountability is lacking in the developing world. Corruption has come to characterise political leadership. For instance, Human Rights Watch (2014) noted that insufficient efforts by the political leadership to address official corruption continue to undermine development and human rights in Liberia. For example, the Liberia anti-corruption agency has only been able to secure two convictions since 2008 when it was established. Most state officials see the country's finances as private funds, and this in effect has had an impact on Liberia's development as no further corruption case has been addressed and the inability of the anti-corruption agency to hold corrupt officials accountable reflects a lack of relevant policies which is a weakness in policy environment and the need for a major policy shift in terms of development finance, especially as the country seeks to finance its post-2015 goals.

Theory has influenced policy in terms of international development, but the interaction has been a two-way process such that while theories legitimated new policy, appraisals of policy and experience have given rise to theoretical insights (Fukuda, 2011). When it came to orienting and co-ordinating international financing for development within (or at least following) the Millennium Declaration and MDG ethos, the Monterey Consensus of 2002 placed it squarely within the mainstream neoliberal and strategic policy framework—an acknowledgment of the centrality of sustainable, gender-sensitive, people-centred development notwithstanding (Poku & Whitman, 2011). Thus, the MDGs were the catalyst for increased expenditure on the poor and improved gender equality, education enrolments, child mortality, and increased aid to Liberia (Darrow, 2014; Sachs, 2012; UNDP, 2014). However, this was largely criticized, especially by civil society organisations who participated in the 2005 G8 Gleneagles summit where more aid was promised by rich countries in view of the failed structural adjustment policies and programs of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, which aided development and created a culture of aid dependency and increased poverty. In view of this, multilateral institutions financial policymakers and regulators are unable to communicate a clear financial sustainability position (UN, 2013).

Poor governments like Liberia are adopting financing and development policies and institutions that they cannot afford to implement or sustain, often with donor encouragement if not long-term commitments of support (Thomas, 2012). This puts a strain on meeting the SDGs, and will present even a greater challenge of financing, given the changes in the financial landscape regarding aid and accessibility of loans that will determine mobilisation and allocation of resources in a post-2015 world. For instance, objections to aid from researchers and scholars stemmed from the motives behind aid, the structure of aid, the lack of effective management systems, weak sector coordination, and corruption (Asongu, 2014). In this regard, policy coherence and coordination between and among different policy processes and institutions responsible for policy making will be critical given that institutions are guided by policy processes which may be conflicting or complementary given their mandate and objectives (UN, 2013).

Liberia was one of the 193 countries that signed up for the new post-2015 goals, which are also referred to as the Global Goals. There is limited understanding by policy makers and scholars regarding how the SDGs will be financed and what policy shifts are required, given Liberia's need to consider alternative financing and strengthen transparency and accountability in financing development in the country.

Statement of the Problem

There is a problem regarding how the Sustainable Development Goals will be financed in Liberia, despite huge aid support and recovery efforts since the end of the civil conflict in 2003. 81.9% of the population are multidimensionally poor, while an additional 12.9% are near multidimensional poverty (UNDP, 2014). Over time, rich countries have sought to foster global development with aid. But often, there is little to show from the efforts as shown by the MDG reports for Liberia's spending, now over $135 billion a year and rising (Economist, 2015). Liberia only met three of the eight MDGs: gender equality, treatment of HIV/AIDs, malaria and other diseases, and global partnership (AfDB, 2015; UNDP, 2015). This is even though overseas development assistance or foreign aid remains the largest source of external financing for the development of Liberia (Wamboye, Adekola, & Sergi, 2014). For instance, in 2013, Liberia received $583 million from the US in ODA and $765 million in 2014 (OECD, 2014; World Bank, 2016), which showed decreasing aid to Africa, which fell by 4% from 2012 to 2015 (ODI, 2015).

With the reduction in aid due to the global economic crisis since 2008, and the lack of clarity on how post-2015 development goals will be financed, very little is known regarding why aid has not worked in Liberia (Economist, 2017), and how Liberia can finance Post-2015 goals, given that it is seeking to become a middle-income country by 2030. This study will seek to understand the problems with aid in financing development in Liberia, how the problems have impacted meeting development goals, and what policy shifts are required to improve development financing for Post-2015 development goals in Liberia so that the country can become a middle-income country by 2030.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to improve understanding of how the Post-2015 development goals can be financed in Liberia, based on Liberia's poor performance on the MDGs with and the existing financing policies guiding the country's development planning. The focus will be on the water and health sectors. The literature review will identify gaps, and how they impacted achieving MDG goals in Liberia. The method for investigation and specific interview questions are provided in Chapter 3 and Appendix B.

Research Questions

Central Question: What policy shifts should Liberia make to finance its post-2015 goals?

Sub-questions:

RQ1: What are the perceived policy gaps related to financing the MDGs in Liberia?

RQ2: How did these policy gaps impede the financing of the MDGs in the water and health sectors?

RQ3: What policies and or strategies are needed to ensure improved financing of the post--- 2015 development goals in Liberia?

Theoretical Framework

Developed by Kingdon (1995), the theory of ambiguity and multiple streams Framework (MSF) was first used to explain agenda setting on what should be the main policy focus in the United States. The MSF is a theory that is used as a lens to explain how policies are made by national governments under conditions of ambiguity. It can also be extended to cover the entire policy making process Its underlying assumption rests on the notion of ambiguity in the polity and temporal sorting. The main argument is that policies are the results of problems, solutions and politics, coupled or joined together by policy entrepreneurs during open windows of opportunity" (Zahariadis, 2003). Kingdon conceptualised three streams that flow through the political system: problems, policies, and politics (Weiner, 2011).

The problem stream refers to the problem that is of interest to everyone in the public sphere and requires a solution that is of interest to all. The challenge with policy making here is that solutions are usually not for all, given the inability of policy makers and political leaders to satisfy the entire polity. The policy stream refers to the multiplicity of policy ideas and solutions to the problem, which may conflict with each other, and in some cases refer diversity of interest on the agenda or issue. Bringing these policy ideas and solutions to convergence is the key here because of the quest to satisfy the various interests. The politics stream refers to the differing interests, public opinions that shape policy. These streams do not run in parallel to one another but are interwoven in nature. This may be what accounts for the ambiguity in the policy making process. The MSF theory suggests multifaceted processes in which problems, ideas, and politics combine with choice opportunities to move issues onto the decision agenda of the national government to determine a course of action (McClendon, 2003). This framework can be applied in developing policies and can be useful for describing how policies are made when there is ambiguity, lack of clarity and diversity of interest. The Multiple Streams framework can help to develop strategies (Weiner, 2011; Zahariadis, 1999). Ambiguity as defined by Zahariadis (2003) suggests that ambiguity is having multiple ways of thinking about the same problem, rather than a loss of idea. This may evoke stress or complexity like the garbage can model of policy making; but it does not in any way imply a vacuum in the policy space. The current debate on financing the post-- 2015 goals exists within the ambiguity of policy choices being put forward by governments and multilateral institutions like the World Bank, the United Nations and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). As such, this theory will appropriately serve as the lens for this study. Also, the current political environment globally and in Liberia under which policies are made has changed and keeps changing. As outlined in the garbage can model where policy making is messy, especially in international development, the MSF approach will be most appropriate for my dissertation given the ambiguity surrounding the most appropriate financing approach to achieving the SDGs. The study focuses on searching for a new policy framework for development aid in terms of finance policies and strategies that Liberia should put in place for effectively financing and achieving SDGs.

The MSF provides a lens for contextual analysis of the policy choices that are applicable to Liberia and possibly other developing countries considering several proposals by institutions like the World Bank Group and the OECD which are not entirely based on the local situation in Liberia. These institutions provide policy choices that make the process chaotic and decisions by policy makers difficult to reach as reflected in the AAA. This is because the policy environment is unpredictable and requires interactions between stakeholders and institutions to explore the impact of context, time, and meaning on policy change and assess the institutional and issue complexities permeating the problem (Ackrill et al., 2013).

The MSF's heuristic value and related concepts are proven, and have been used to study agenda-setting in education (Ridde, 2009; Lieberman, 2000), health policy (Odom-Forren & Hahn, 2006) and international aid (Travis & Zahariadis, 2002) Furthermore, it has been applied in analysing policies like information literacy, public health, and decentralization of higher education. The applicability of this theory to the study and its implications will be further elucidated in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

The study will be qualitative in nature using a case study approach. This is because qualitative research is consistent with gaining understanding why and how policies regarding financing development may be improved, how they will impact on development efforts, and what alternative policies can be developed or framed in meeting development goals which is the primary focus of this study. This is because qualitative research as a process is naturalistic which seeks in-depth understanding of a social phenomenon and focuses on the why and how rather than on the what of social phenomenon and relies on direct experience rather than logistical or statistical procedures. The research will also use triangulation which refers to the use of multiple data sources and involves verifying findings against different sources and perspectives

The case study will provide the basis for further research into how development financing can be contextualized in different countries, given that it will focus on the unique nature of Liberia. Using Kingdom's multiple streams framework, the study will focus on examining policy choices that are available for Liberia in financing the SDGs and outline a set of policy recommendations for decision-makers to help in meeting the post-2015 development goals. The study will focus on the development finance policies that underpinned the delivery of MDGs in the water and the health sectors in Liberia with a view to identifying the challenges, drawing lessons, and developing clear recommendations for a policy shift for financing the SDGs, which may result in the development of a new policy framework that will enable Liberia to finance post-2015 development goals.

Definition of Terms

Development finance: According to the UNDESA (2012), there is no one set definition of innovative development finance. The Leading Group on Innovative Financing for Development describes it as comprising all mechanisms for raising funds for development that are complementary to official development assistance, predictable and stable, and closely linked to the idea of global public goods.

Extreme Poverty: Extreme poverty is a technical term to describe those who live on less than $1.25 a day (Word Bank, 2016). In October 2015, the World Bank (2016) redefined extreme poverty at $1.90 a day.

Fragile States: These are countries that are failing to provide basic services to poor people because they are unwilling or unable to do so (OECD, 2007).

Least Developed Countries: A group of countries with a gross national income of less than $1,035, weak human resource development (based on indicators of education, health, and nutrition) and adult literacy, and a high degree of economic vulnerability (UN, 2015). Liberia is currently on the latest list from December 2015 (World Bank 2015).

Overseas Development Assistance (ODA): This consists of disbursements of loans made on concessional terms (net of repayments of principal) and grants by official agencies of the members of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC), by multilateral institutions, and by non-DAC countries to promote economic development and welfare in countries and territories in the DAC list of ODA recipients. It includes loans with a grant element of at least 25 percent (calculated at a rate of discount of 10 percent) (Kharas et al. 2016; OECD, 2016; World Bank, 2015).

Post-2015 Development Goals: These are also Known also as Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) or global goals, which are 17 development goals which build on MDGs and lay the foundation for international cooperation aimed at eradicating extreme poverty by 2030 (UNDP, 2015). These goals are universal in nature implying that they apply to all countries

Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs): According to the International Monetary Fund (2015), these are documents which assess poverty challenges, describe how macroeconomic, structural, and social policies and programs can promote growth and reduce poverty, and outline external financing needs and the associated sources of financing. They are prepared by governments in low-income countries generally through a participatory process involving domestic stakeholders and external development partners.

Sustainable development: Sustainable Development has been defined in many ways but the most common definition used by the international community is the one from the Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future also known as the Brundtland Report which states that sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (UN, 1997; 2015).

Assumptions

I assumed that the Liberian government is keen on addressing poverty based on its Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). As such, one assumption was that the Ministry of finance and economic planning would be cooperative in assisting me with data collection and analysis. Another assumption is that participants in the study who are drawn from the government institutions, development partners and civil society will also be willing to respond, given that they are considering better financing options for the development agenda through their participation and contribution to the Liberia PRSP. The results of this study are limited to the health and water sectors in Liberia but may have implications for financing sustainable development goals in Liberia. As such, results cannot be generalized to other countries, given the unique nature of Liberia, especially in the policy making process which are unique to its legal and institutional environment.

Scope and Delimitation

This study involves health and water goals in Liberia. Furthermore, there are differing development financing policies for each sector to guide implementation of development plans and programs. For example, the policy on the health pooled funding which is a product of the National Health and Social Welfare Financing Policy and Plan. for the health sector in Liberia was agreed to by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), Department for International Development (DFID) and Irish Aid, but the United States Agency for International Development disagreed with the policy on the grounds that the legislative body known as the Congress has specific rule regarding funding which would not allow it participate in a pooled funding and as such applied its own policy to financing health in Liberia.

Limitations of the Study

The results of this study will be limited to Liberia only. Other countries that have similar situations in the region are not part of this study. Furthermore, the results may not be generalized to cover other countries in the region even though they may face similar financing challenges. This is because the conditions that might favor Liberia's political and policy environment might not be appropriate for other countries given that each country has its own policies and legislation which define how institutions operate and how policy is made. This study will focus on filling the knowledge gap in understanding the conditions under which Liberia can finance its SDGs and as such, it will be limited in providing the same understanding for other countries in the region.

Significance of the Study and Implications for Positive Social Change

This research will help improve understanding regarding how post-2015 development goals can be financed in a developing country context. This is unique, given that external aid has largely been the source of development financing for Liberia and with the new SDGs, financing them remains a challenge globally. It will be significant in developing policies that will ensure effective financing of post-2015 development goals in Liberia given that they differ in scope, targets and results from the MDGs.

The research will fill a gap in the literature, given that the issue of financing the SDGs is a current debate, which has not been addressed adequately as a global concern for International Financial Institutions by actors who provide aid and Least Developed Countries who are struggling with financing their development plans. Furthermore, the study will clarify understanding of policymakers in Liberia regarding the role of finance in achieving national development plans, which will have policy implications for Liberia's development plans and shape future policy-oriented research. There is a huge risk that this challenge of financing the SDGs, if not addressed will result in the inability of most developing and fragile states to meet their national development goals by 2030, which in turn will further create an environment for political and economic instability that will further aggravate the already dire situation of inadequate finance Liberia is facing. An implication for social change is that this study will create the opportunity to develop context specific policies and approaches to dealing with poverty reduction challenges that will enable the government of Liberia to have sustainable local financing solutions that bring lasting change and make Liberia a middle-income country by 2030.

Summary

With the advent of SDGs, there is a global challenge for countries, especially developing countries and fragile states, in terms of how they will finance new goals. This is against the backdrop of decline in aid for countries in need of it. The study therefore examines alternative financing policies that will ensure that scarce financial resources are used, and Liberia can alleviate poverty by 2030.

Liberia is characterized as a fragile state and depends on aid to finance most of its development plans. This is because following the coup in 1980, it is still recovering from its second civil war, which ended about 14 years ago. The inability of the country to have met MDG targets, which was partly due to inadequate financing, is also an issue of concern for the government. This is especially important because Liberia will no longer get much-needed aid it used to receive because it qualified for debt relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative which was launched in 1996 by the IMF and World Bank, with the aim of ensuring that no poor country faces a debt burden it cannot manage. Liberia has been able to develop its medium- and long-term Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) which has now qualified it to access credits or concessional loans from international financial institutions. Aid to low income countries like Liberia has been reduced partly due to the economic recession. The MSF theory serves as the theoretical framework for the study. In Chapter 2, this theory will be discussed as part of the current debate including existing gaps in financing. In turn, this will help in understanding the policy challenges with financing development and aid delivery in Liberia.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

As Africa's oldest republic with a population of 4.3 million people, Liberia has struggled since the coup in 1980. The country's 14-year conflict further plunged it into a weak economic and political situation where it has not been able to finance its development even after the conflict. There is a problem with how SDGs will be financed in Liberia, despite the huge aid support and recovery efforts from OECD countries and the United Nations since the end of the civil conflict in 2003. The UNDP (2014) said that 81.9% of the population are multidimensionally poor, while an additional 12.9% are near multidimensional poverty. Liberia met only 3 of the 8 development goals: gender equality, treatment of HIV/AIDs, malaria, and other diseases, and global partnership (AFDB, 2015; UNDP, 2015). With the reduction in aid due to the global economic crisis, and the ongoing debate regarding how post-2015 development goals will be financed, very little is known regarding why Liberia did not meet the MDGs despite the huge aid it received, and how Liberia can finance Post--2015 goals given that it is seeking to become a middle income country by 2030, under its 'Liberia Rising 2030' strategy. The aim of this study is to understand how the new SDGs can be financed in Liberia. This study seeks to understand problems with aid in financing development, how these problems have impacted MDGs, and what policy shifts are required to improve development aid in financing post-2015 development goals in Liberia so that the country can become a middle-income country by 2030.

The literature approached the issues of aid and development using qualitative and quantitative approaches. Some of them built on earlier studies and provided further evidence regarding why MDGs were not fully achieved in Sub-Saharan Africa and Liberia in particular. The literature included articles and reports from various authors and institutions like the World Bank, IMF, OECD, and ODI.

The ambitious SDGs are now underway. Many LDCs and LICs are not likely to meet the SDGs if current trajectory continues given the slow progress as seen in the 2018 progress report by the UN. There is a need for a transformational shift in policy and strategy to improve financing for SDGs. Liberia's unique nature as a post-conflict country hit by the Ebola crisis in May 2014 strengthened the need for new policies and strategies given that despite all the efforts and huge external aid provided to Liberia, it met only three of eight MDGs and its development gains were eroded as a result of the outbreak leaving more people in extreme poverty.

The chapter discusses the MSF theory and its underlying assumptions. It then reviews Liberia's development path leading up to the SDGs covering the Lagos Plan of Action (LPA), structural adjustment programs initiated by the World Bank and the IMF, Liberia's poverty reduction strategies, MDGs, and the support Liberia received in the health and water sectors as well the role of external aid in Liberia's development. It also reviews the progress so far in addressing SDGs since they were adopted in September 2015. The chapter ends with a summary of the review and its relation to the methodology which will be discussed in Chapter 3.

Literature Search Strategy

I drew primarily on peer-reviewed journals and articles using the Walden University Library databases. The databases I used were Academic Search Complete, Google Scholar, ProQuest, SAGE Premier and Political Science Complete. My key search terms were *development finance*, *sustainable development*, *Liberia*, *post-2015 development goals*, *poverty*, *millennium development goals (MDGs)*, *poverty reduction strategy paper*, *aid*, and *international development*.

To ensure I had current information, I researched articles that were published between 2011 and 2018. I accessed reference materials and articles also from the World Bank and UNDP websites. I also accessed and reviewed reports from the Ministries of Finance and Economic Planning, Health, and Public Works of Liberia. I further reviewed MDG reports on Liberia published between 2011 and 2014. This formed the basis for the literature review. I also had to draw from literature that was more than 5 years old given the need for me to draw on the history of Liberia and its development path.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

Theories play an important role in qualitative studies. According to Creswell (2009), theories are used to guide the researcher in determining the issues in the study that are important, how to position the researcher in the study, and how to organize and present the final report. In the following sections, Kingdon's Ambiguity and Multiple Streams Framework (MSF) is examined as the theoretical foundation of the study.

MSF Theory

The MSF was developed by Kingdon (1995) as a lens to explain policy processes in the United States under conditions of ambiguity and further refined by Zahariadis (1999, 2007, 2014). It is a theory that explains how policies are made by national governments under conditions of ambiguity (Zahariadis, 2015). Ambiguity refers to "a state of having many ways of thinking about the same circumstances or phenomena" (Feldman 1989, p. 5). It draws insight from interactions between agencies and institutions to explain how policy processes work in organized anarchies where decision making is a collection of choices based on problems and the multiplicity of ideas which may be conflicting (Cohen, March & Olsen, 1972) and where there is a shifting roster of participants, opaque technologies, and individual policy makers with unclear preferences (Ackrill, Kay & Zahariadis, 2013). Further, it does not reject but rather supplements rational choice (Zahariadis, 2016). As such, MSF as a theory is used as a lens to understand and frame public policy where there is a plethora of information with competing and complementary information due to the diverse nature of interests among stakeholders in the policy process. Using the Greek higher education reforms as their case study, Zahariadis and Exadaktylos (2016) expanded the borders of MSF by extending their analysis to implementation and exploring the interaction between policy adoption and implementation. They further deepened it by incorporating entrepreneurial strategies and examining how such strategies may be used to undermine the application of a law or policy (Weible & Schlager, 2016).

In developing the MSF, Kingdon conceptualized three streams—problems, policies, and politics and incorporated actors in all three streams making the importance of policy makers pivotal as facilitators of choice and revised the concept of choice opportunities (Zahariadis, 2016). The concept of choice is seen as a garbage can into which different policy makers or participants drift in and out without any one person having control of the policy process. Furthermore, Zahariadis, (2007) notes another two; windows of opportunity and policy entrepreneurs.

The problem stream consists of the various undesirable conditions that policy makers and to a certain extent citizen want addressed. Problems are situations or conditions that stakeholders including policy makers and interest groups believe require attention and have indicators of consequences to the stakeholders if not addressed. They are usually seen as gaps and issues that are not in line with the desired state of affairs. Problems could be pollution, poor basic healthcare, lack of access to clean water, inflation, national debt, or imbalance in trade. The policy stream consists of a diversity of ideas proposed by professionals or specialist. Policies are ideas or solutions that specialists develop to address pressing problems (Ackrill, Kay & Zahariadis, 2013). Policies are also seen as intentions of government, proposed solutions to perceived problems, and actions to be carried out to address the undesirable nature. For instance, the Sustainable Development Goals framework is a policy solution to the problem of extreme poverty. Politics refers to the diverse interest, driven by macro and micro level actors in the society as well as events that shape national mood and thinking on a particular issue like elections, legislative turnover, and economic development. It is the broader environment within which policy is made (Cairney & Jones, 2016; Ackrill, Kay & Zahariadis, 2013).

Underlying Assumptions of MSF

In contrast to the rational behaviour model, time and context within which the policy is made is critical given that time is a scarce resource to policy makers who value this above their task of policy making or the management of policy implementation. According to Ackrill, Kay & zahariadis (2007), the MSF has three assumptions. First, policy makers operate under significant and varying time constraints implying that all the problems cannot be attended, problems will be solved using exploratory or experimental methods that may or may not work and outcomes accepted will be satisfactory rather than optimal solutions.

The second assumption is that means and ends, solutions and problems are generated independently of each other. The implication here is that there may be no satisfactory way of determining an appropriate set of means or ends that would obtain sufficient agreement among a diverse set of stakeholders (Alpaslan & Mitroff, 2011). It also implies that policy making is rife with conflicts, information is vague, subject to diverse interpretation and the outcomes are uncertain.

The third is that ambiguity permeates the process. This implies that actors and institutions are opaque in nature and not driven by values but by political interest which keep them in a dynamic form and not static on the issue. It is clear case of bias and political manipulation in favour of those who have the overarching power in the policy process, can generate information, control access, exploit groups and institutions and determine outcomes.

The framework's heuristic value and related concepts are proven, and have been used to study agenda-setting in health policy Odom-Forren and Hahn (2006), international aid Travis and Zahariadis (2002) and education (Lieberman, 2002; Ridde, 2009).Furthermore, it has been applied to analysing policies like information literacy (Weiner, 2011), public health (Craig, Felix, Walker & Phillips, 2010), water pollution, (Patterson et. al. 2013), the relaunch of the European Union's (EU) economic reform agenda (Copeland & James, 2014), Crafting a transport policy (Weber, 2014), climate change (Turin, 2012), applicability in China with a focus on matriculation of children of migrant workers into colleges (Zhou & Feng, 2014), analysing the Moral and National Education (MNE) curriculum in Hong Kong (Chow, 2014), the failure of policies (Zahariadis, 2014) and the decentralization of higher education (McLendon , 2003). It is important to state here that these studies used a mix of qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods and largely used a case study approach to apply the theory.

For example, Weber (2014) applied the theory as a more suitable framework for understanding decision making in non-motorised transport policy in contrast to the Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA) model. The qualitative study concluded that given the complex nature of the transport policy, the MSF ensured the inclusion of valuable concepts such as advocacy organisations, policy windows and policy entrepreneurs. The study also concluded that the MSF provides a comprehensive framework for implementing and improving policy outcomes in the transport sector and further made recommendations for further research in the field on the role of advocacy groups in planning and policy processes. Also, Ridde (2009) carried out an empirical study on the applicability of the MSF in examining the implementation of public policy at the local level in a low-income country using Burkina-Faso as the case study which focused on a health district project. The study concluded with a confirmation of the premise that the Ambiguity and Multiple Steams framework can be used to formulate and review policies in a low-income country as well as lead to the formation of theoretical propositions. This study confirmed the transferability of the theory and its application to public policy processes in a low-income country given that it was first used in the United States and mostly in rich countries (Zahariadis, 2014; Ridde, 2009). Similarly, Abiola, Colgrove & Mello (2013) applied the theory in the study of human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccines and how the theory provides a framework for crafting vaccination policies in the United States. Further, Martinez et al., (2015) applied the theory in the study of anti-immigration policies and their impact on the health of undocumented migrants in services and outcomes in the United States, France and Spain given that undocumented migrants were excluded from accessing health services. The authors concluded that there was a direct relationship between immigration policies and the health of undocumented recommending policy solutions based on social justice and human rights as well as strategies to eliminate discrimination against undocumented migrants. Other studies where the Ambiguity and Multiple Steams Framework has been used include Copeland & James (2014) who used it to explain the relaunch of European Union’s reforms agenda in 2010 argued that the EU’s 2020 strategy was a product of the Greek sovereign debt crisis as the problem stream and shifting institutional dynamics as the policy stream, two policy windows which emerged suddenly and resulted in the EU refraining from its initial Lisbon strategy of exiting the debt crisis. The authors through the study demonstrated policy change processes under conditions of ambiguity and the role policy entrepreneurs played in the process.

The Ambiguity and Multiple Streams framework (MSF) has been chosen for this study given that the underlying assumptions hold that ambiguity is not a lack of choice but rather multiplicity of choices (Howlett et al. 2015). Given that the world is aware of the challenge of financing the Post-2015 agenda and there are diverse and conflicting frameworks based on the political priorities and interest, the MSF is applied to understand public policy at the system level, modelling context to understand specific policy decision (Jones et al., 2016). The MSF has contributed to the development of evolutionary policy theories and has prompted a large dedicated literature. The theory is applied as the lens of this study because the problems that Liberia has faced with meeting the MDGs despite huge external aid is less understood and the perceptions of these problems require clarity to enable government act to resolve them. Given that Liberia relies heavily on external aid, there are also a plethora of experts within the huge development partner community in Liberia who are in control of their own aid and have come up with very diverse policies and frameworks to help meet the SDGs which have led to conflicting policies and actions causing a chaos in the political environment and conflict among the different institutions . These myriad possibilities or proposed solutions need to be assessed and narrowed down to a set of feasible options.

MSF remains a key influence on the study of public policy (Cairney & Jones, 2015). The theory will aid in answering the research questions posed in chapter one of this study by reviewing possible policy options within a changing environment and ensure that the policy decisions are responding to the context of Liberia and a rapidly shifting political context (Cairney & Jones, 2015; Howlett et al., 2015; Petridou, 2014; Obonye, 2012; Ridde, 2009). Furthermore, the theory will serve as the lens of understanding the power dynamics, who the policy entrepreneurs are and how sustainable positive social change can happen by coupling both problems and solutions to politics (Beland & Howlett, 2016).

Literature Review

Poverty reduction and development

One of the oldest debates on poverty concerns whether it is absolute or relative (Chen & Ravallion, 2013). Poverty has not been easy to define and there is no generally accepted definition of poverty (Kaka & Launi, 2014; Devarajan, 2013; OECD, 2013; Carmody, 2012). In the global discourse, poverty has been defined as either relative or absolute (Kaka & Launi, 2014). However, there have been controversies as to what is absolute and what is relative. In view of this, the World Bank recently defined ending poverty as when only 3% or less of the global population are living below US$1.25 a day (Chen et.al., 2014). Absolute poverty does not include the quality of life or inequality on the society and as such fails to recognize other human development and social needs (Chen & Ravallion, 2013). It was against this background that the concept of relative poverty was defined. Relative poverty is defined in relation to the economic status of other members of the society (UNESCO, 2016; World Bank, 2014; IMF, 2013; UNDP, 2011). For example (Asongu, 2014; Kratzer, 2013; Grosso & Smith, 2012; Stein, 20110 & UNDP, 1990) defined poverty from a human development perspective while (Ogujiuba & Jumare(2012; Azam, 2011; Barlett, 2011; IMF, 2000; World Bank, 2000) define poverty using income and consumption as well as headcount of those living below a certain income per day measured by Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (IMF, 2014; OECD, 2014). In their study, Chen & Rvallion (2013) concluded that economic growth tends to reduce absolute poverty but leaves relative poverty unchanged.

Following the Second World War, the dominant definition and approach to poverty reduction was in monetary terms using several measures including income, consumption and a headcount of those who fall below a given income level. This dominant definition and approach still holds today as the World Bank and IMF use income levels like 'those is living below $2" and recently those living below $1.25 (World Bank, 2013). Given that this was not adequate to define measure and approach poverty reduction, other organizations like the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) began to define and measure poverty from a human development perspective because economic growth alone does not automatically translate into human development progress (UNDP, 2013). Thus, the UNDP published its first Human Development Report (HDR) and introduced the Human Development Index which transformed the landscape of development theory, measurement, and policy (Stanton, 2007). This of course did not mean an abandonment of the income measure, it only integrated it and widened the definition and approach to poverty reduction. Today the concept and definition of poverty includes social, political and cultural issues that impact on human development and nation building (UNESCO, 2016: UNDP, 2013). This suggests that poverty is a multidimensional social phenomenon (World Bank, 2015; UNDP, 2013) making it difficult to assess poverty reduction and growth particularly in Africa. Using income levels, wealth and headcount, (Naqvi, 2014; AfDB, 2013; Devarajan, 2013; World Bank, 2013) argued that despite the global economic crisis Africa's economic growth has been impressive, averaging almost five percent a year since 2000, and is expected to rise even faster in the years ahead noting that the portion of Africans in the region living on less than $1.25 a day fell for the first time, from 52 percent to 48 percent (Devarajan & Fengler, 2015; UNDP, 2015).

However, (Page & Shemeles, 2015; Barret et al., 2013; Dulani et al., 2013; Martins, 2013; Carmody, 2012) argued that despite the economic growth, it has not resulted in poverty reduction as widespread political instability, renewed violence, growing inequalities, lack of unemployment and access to basic services for the poor remain impediments to poverty reduction and growth. Similarly, Devarajan & Fengler (2015) further argued that countries, such as Burkina Faso, Mozambique, and Tanzania, have barely managed to reduce their poverty rates as Africa continues to confront a significant poverty problem and they were unable to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) such as quality education, livelihoods and health (UNDP, 2015; Fisher et al., 2012; Ogujiuba1 & Jumare, 2012) casting doubts on the World Bank's measurement of poverty. They did not however, say how this can be addressed.

The World Bank it its policy research report, which seemed like a response to the critique, announced that it was reducing poverty to 3% by 2030 (Chen et al., 2014) but its approach using income and consumption as well as headcount has not changed. This may mean that the current approach by the World Bank may achieve the same result as Low-income countries like Liberia will continue to rely on aid in achieving their development gaols and by implication rely on the Bank for policy guidance and approach. In their qualitative study on chronic poverty, Hickey & Du toit, (2013) argued that the contemporary study of poverty has notably failed to address the underlying causal processes that produce and reproduce poverty over time, preferring instead to focus on its correlates and characteristics which implies that addressing poverty needs to be done with specific context as each country is unique in its own way (World Bank, 2015).

It is important to note here that financing strategies for poverty reduction were based on key policies and programs largely driven by Bretton Woods institutions based on key theories and assumptions. The major ones which this literature reviewed were the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) which succeeded it as these were the programs that served as the strategy for reducing poverty and financing development in many low-income countries including Sub-Saharan Africa and Liberia in particular (ODI, 2015; OECD, 2014; Wamboye, Adekola & Sergi, 2014).

The efforts to address poverty and finance development in Africa

While Liberia was already an independent state since 1847, many African states gained independence from 1960 which led to high optimism for these countries to develop and become economic giants (Pierre, 2013). In view of this, African leaders believed that it was time to catch up with the developed world as well as develop Africa by Africans themselves (Heidhues & Obare, 2011). However, the economic crisis in the 1970s saw negative economic growths and retarding development. This was also because of the 30 poorest countries, 20 were from Africa as classified by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

In the wake of the economic downturn in Africa, politicians and technocrats under the auspices of the then Organization of African Unity and the Economic Commission of Africa came together in July 1979 in Monrovia calling on all member states to support a comprehensive mutual economic blueprint for cooperation and development based on concepts of self-reliance and economic integration (UNECA, 1980). This was later adopted by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1980 in Lagos which resulted in the development of the Lagos Plan of Action (LPA). The LPA and the Final Act of Lagos were based on the principle of collective self-reliance; achieve rapid economic and social development (Madziwa, 2005**).**

The Lagos Plan of Action was built on the ideology of Pan-Africanism and borne out of an overwhelming necessity to establish an African social and economic order primarily based on utilizing to the full the region 's resources in building a self-reliant economy (Confraria & Godinho, 2015; UNECA, 1991) which was reflected in the declaration on the need to take urgent action to provide the political support necessary for the success of the measures to achieve the goals of rapid self-reliance and self-sustaining development and economic growth (OAU, 1980). This is because the African governments had initially believed that the private sector was not performing and stimulating economic growth. In view of this, they adopted the socialist approach to development where economic development was government-driven (Adejumobi, 2006; Kalsen, 2003). Guided by this approach and with donor support, they invested in large scale industries and enacted strict regulatory regimes in pricing, trade, credit allocation and foreign exchange earnings (Heidhues & Obare, 2011; Owusu, 2003). Thus, the plan was built on the political freedom and the rise of Africa in a bid to strengthen that with economic freedom by reducing the dominance of external actors on Africa's economic development with as well as strengthening home-grown approaches (Pierre, 2013). The plan noted that national governments were responsible for implementing the plan and its attendant strategies to achieve an African Economic Community by 2000. It further highlighted that the Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and others would provide technical assistance to member states.

Within a year of its adoption, the World Bank issued what can be described as an antithesis known as the Breg report (World Bank, 1981) titled 'Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Agenda for Action' (World Bank, 2011). The World Bank report which emphasized neo-liberal policies like export-oriented growth, deregulation, trade and exchange rate policies as the panacea for Africa's development problems argued that African economies failed due to unnecessary subsidization, gross resource mismanagement, faulty exchange rate policies, excessive state intervention in the market, protection of inefficient producers and general corruption. The central recommendation of the report was for governments to refrain from intervention in their economies and to liberate market forces by freeing foreign trade and currency exchange from controls (Heidhues & Obare, 2011; Browne & Cummings, 1984).

However, the Lagos Plan of Action failed to provide an effective monitoring and follow-up mechanism (UNECA, 1991). Five years after its adoption, it was faced with a huge economic crisis. It was characterized with persistent fall in output of goods and services, and dwindling production of food (Motsamai & Qaba, 2012). The LPA was not a success as Adedeji, (2004; 1991) and Cowan (1994) argued that while the plan represented Africa's first effort to develop a unified approach to development and ending poverty, the plan's content had little to say on how the strategic objectives were going to be reached within the period for their implementation and more importantly how they were going to be financed. On their part Heidhues & Obare, (2011) argued that institutional weaknesses of African states, as well as the rejection by the World Bank were responsible for the failure of the LPA. Furthermore, Motsamai & Qaba (2012) and Obonye (2012) argued that the failure of the plan was due to the dominance of Europe in knowledge production and policy direction which has had a huge impact on how regional integration is understood and to some degree charting new policy direction in Africa.

However, the World Bank (2005) argued that the failure was due to the inability of African governments to adjust to the changing global economic conditions. In support of the World Bank, Kwame et al. (2011) argued that these liberalization and privatization policies were required to integrate Africa into the global market, attract private investments and replace state ownership with public ownership which had to be imposed on recalcitrant Governments through policy conditionalities for providing desperately needed credit (p.3). These arguments were based on qualitative case studies but used quantitative data as hard evidence for their analysis. While they differ on why, they all agree that it failed. They, however, did not make any recommendations for policy shift. In fact, (Sulaiman et al., 2014; Motsamai & Qaba, 2012; Obonye, 2012; Heidhues & Obare, 2011; Owusu, 2003); argued that while the World Bank acknowledged the concerns raised with its 'Breg Report', it stuck to its neoliberal policy recommendations which led to the introduction of the Structural Adjustment programme (SAP).The first SAP was implemented in Turkey in 1980 and by the mid-1990s, SAP was already negotiated in 64 developing countries (Dickenson et.al, 1996) including Liberia.

Structural Adjustment Programs

With economic stagnation and recession following the failure of the Lagos Plan for Action, (Heidhues & Obare, 2011; Easterly, 2005) argued that the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) were introduced to Low Income Countries most of which were in Sub Sharan Africa (IMF, 2015; World Bank, 2015). The Structural Adjustment Programs in Africa were hinged on the theory of neoliberalism and market-based economy where the market determines the forces of demand and supply (Kaka & Launi, 2014; Sulaiman et al., 2014; Heidhues & Obare, 2011; Adejumobi, 2006; Owusu, 2003). Neoliberalism is generally understood as a system of ideas circulated by a network of right-wing intellectuals, or as an economic system mutation resulting from crises of profitability in capitalism (Connell & Dados, 2014; Petithomme**,** 2012). As a policy, it seeks to transfer the control of the economy from the public to the private sector, suggesting that government must limit subsidies, make reforms to expand the tax base, reduce budget deficit and liberalise trade (Poyi, 2006). As such, the theory is political and economic in nature. The International Financial Institutions like the World Bank and IMF argued that African governments; intervention were insufficient because they distorted market signals which resulted in the neglect of industrial policies and long-term development planning (UNECA, 2013). The expansion of neoliberalism supposes the extension of market mechanisms to the lifeworld, as well as the emergence of a judicial apparatus that enables competition and frees up the potential of collective life for organising itself (Hilgers, 2012).

The politics of structural adjustment in the 1980s and 1990s involved the dismantling or scaling back of many state policies that were designed to redistribute income or provide economic protection to low-income groups (Roberts, 2012). As such, it was hinged on the economic liberalization theories for free market, privatization, deregulation and removal of government subsidy from goods and services (Hilgers, 2012). By the mid-1980s, SAP became the main approach to correcting macroeconomic problem in the continent. The neoliberal ideology hinged on the 'Washington Consensus' formed the basis for which the World Bank and the IMF argued that the economic crisis in Africa was due to state-controlled economies and weak commitment of Africa's leaders to neo-liberal market reforms which they saw as very critical for African's development (Petithomme, 2012).

The Structural Adjustment Program was built on lending framework to poor countries that needed the support of the IMF and the World Bank (Sulaiman, Migiro & Aluko, 2014: World Bank, 2014). The IMF lending frameworks included Structural

Adjustment Facilities, Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facilities which later became Poverty Reduction and Growth Facilities, Extended arrangements and standbys. The World Bank lending included Structural Adjustment Loans and Sectoral adjustment loans (IMF, 2015). These loans or facilities had macroeconomic conditions such as currency devaluation, budget deficits, privatisation of state-owned entities, flexible interest rates controlled by market forces rather than the state (IMF, 2014).

The neoliberal theory which was the basis for the SAP has been viewed as a major cause of failure in many African economies given that it was the strategy for financing development plans and ending extreme poverty for several reasons. It was fraught with pitfalls and failures to effectively address challenges to economic development in Africa (Hickey, 2013; Heidhues & Obare, 2011). There was a loss of national sovereignty as countries were heavily penalised for failure to successfully implement key reforms through denial of loans and credits, a hold on exports and denial of access to the capital market (Dean, 2014; Deeming, 2013). This resulted in widened inequality gap between the rich and poor as well as an erosion of the middle class in the social structure (Wilson, 2013). There was a neglect of social benefits regarding the provision of key public services and utilities like water and primary healthcare as well as a decline in human capacity in public enterprises leaving them inefficient where they were not privatised (Bruff, 2013; Joseph, 2013). Furthermore, social development was ignored as governments had to cut down on social welfare which resulted in the removal of safety nets for those below the poverty line. Arguably, neoliberalism as a solution was part of the problem and led to more problems which persist today (Aalbers, 2013;

Ogbonna, 2012). This is because the imposition of SAPs since the mid-1980s followed this neo-liberal orthodoxy: import policy and accumulated debts (Petithomme, 2013).

There were several arguments on why SAP as a poverty reduction and development financing strategy failed. First, there were institutional weaknesses in Africa member states. It failed to account for institutional diversity or innovation within governmental practice, instead remaining within a largely normative terrain about what constitutes the ideal society (Flew, 2014). Governments focused on macroeconomic stability and institutional reforms to protect property rights and ensure contract enforcement. (Kingston, Irikana, Dienye & Kingston, 2011) based on their study in four African countries including Uganda, Zimbabwe, Ivory Coast and Senegal argued that the free market neoliberal concept has a catastrophic effect and the policies, lacked coherent strategies to address inherent market failures and externalities, and these actions ended up constraining investment, growth and economic development. The World Bank (2012) noted that between 1987 and 1991, 29 sub-Saharan African countries were implementing SAPs with mixed results and it admitted that SAPs in Africa had neither accelerated growth nor reduced poverty, and there was a notable lack of ownership or resistance to conditionality from recipient governments. Africa recorded the lowest growth rates in its post-independence history. According to recent World Bank data, the continent's average annual growth rate declined from 4.7% in 1961-1970 to 2.7% in 1980-2000 (UNECA, 2013). Also, adjustment programs were often unresponsive to country conditions and changes in external circumstances, wrote the (World Bank, 2013), which led to a lack of shared vision between the Bank and recipient governments as to the aim of the programs.

Liberia as a country experienced a decline in its Gross National Income GNI) nine years into the SAP (Brown et.al, 2013). For example, GDP dropped from more than US$200 to less than $120 by 1987 (ODI, 2015; World Bank, 2015). Furthermore, most African economies experienced a decline. For instance, Ghana lost its leadership as one of the world's leading cocoa exporter and Nigeria moved from being a palm oil exporter to an importer by 1989. For Liberia and Sierra Leone, it was even worse. There was a decline in the value of exports and the volume of leading exports during the period (Brown et al., 2013; Pierre, 2013; Sharma, 2013; FAO, 1991). This exacerbated the balance of payment problems and was further worsened by three other economic policies; the import substitutions strategy of industrialization, the policy of forced savings by taxing rural producers and the policy of deficit budgeting and overvalued currency which resulted in low growth and development in the region (Mkandawire, 2014).

Following the criticisms and the effects of SAP on African economies, the UN Economic Commission of Africa noted that there were several strategies developed to finance development and poverty eradication in Africa which included the Africa's Priority Program for Economic Recovery 1986-1990 (APPER) which was later converted into the United Nations Program of Action for Africa's Economic Recovery and Development (UN–PAAERD) (1986), The African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Program for Socioeconomic Recovery and Transformation (AAF-SAP) (1989), The African Charter for Popular Participation for Development (1990) and the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s (UN-NADAF.

1991). These documents were developed with the facilitation and guidance of the United Nations mostly through the Economic Commission for Africa.

In assessing the impact of SAP, there was a mix of approaches. Sulaiman et al. (2014), using Nigeria as a case study, concluded that SAP is beneficial to the growth of an economy and it enhances the stability of the economy. They however, admitted that certain economic problems facing Nigeria can be attributed to SAP and controversy still exists as to whether SAP had a positive impact on other developing countries in Africa. Similarly, (Naqvi, 2014; Jinjarak, Salinas & Tsikata, 2013) argued that SAP had positive effects on low income countries in Africa. For example, Naqvi (2014 p.43) in his study on IMF conditionality concluded that SAP was effective in improving resource distribution where external interest was absent. Also, Jinjarak, Salinas & Tsikata (2013) who conducted an empirical study on how SAP had affected growth and export in 45 developing countries concluded that adjustment loans positively affected export growth and increased revenues. Similarly, Sulaiman et al. (2014) further argued that SAP was not responsible for the recession recipient countries faced but rather economic growth challenges due to problems such as mismanagement of public funds, corruption, political instability and poor infrastructural facilities.

In contrast to the above arguments, other studies by (Brown et al., 2013; Heidhues & Obare, 2011; Wodon & Zaman, 2010; Kieh, 2008; Noorbakhsh & Paloni, 1997) which were also case studies of other developing countries in Africa argued that SAP was a failure. For example, Kieh (2008) argued that the economic situation in Liberia grew worse with the advent of SAP as evidenced by continued deterioration in the standard of living of most Liberians, the reduction of earning power, growing unemployment and increasing levels of abject poverty. Authors such as Apodaca (2010) and Easterly (2005) in their review argued that structural adjustment loans were given despite the weak systems and poor accountability and these loans increased the risk of political instability and in some cases were used to fuel conflicts in many African countries including Liberia and Sierra Leone. Further, Maertens et al. (2009), and Grioves & Hinton (2013) using Senegal as their case study, argued that rich countries imposed stringent conditions which were not applicable to African countries. In their study on impact of Structural Adjustment Programmes in Liberia, (Benton & Yi Dionne, 2015; Pfeiffer & Chapman, 2012; Rowden, 2009) argued that SAP had enduring negative consequences for health care provision claiming that the IMF loan conditions restricted government spending on social services including public health. They further argued that the IMF programmes placed limitations on wages of health workers including decentralised health care in a way that served as an impediment to mobilising coordinated responses during the Ebola outbreak (Benton & Yi Dionne, 2015; Kentikelenis, King, McKee & Stuckler, 2015)

The problem with these strategies was they were trapped within the paradigm of advice to governments within the same strategy not recommending any new policy shift. While it can be argued that these strategies sought to move the countries away from aid dependency, they were unreflective of their own role and trapped within a methodological nationalism, seeing problems as located within countries requiring solutions to be found within them. (Deacon, 2011; Wodon & Zaman, 2010). While the methods used in assessing SAP were well known (Pierre, 2013), proffered solutions were alien to the context of the countries and derived from policies that had very little relevance to the economic conditions that the IMF and the World Bank demanded (Devarajan, 2013; Obeng-Odoom, 2013).

Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers

Following the failure of the Structural Adjustment Programmes and the Financial programmes of the World Bank, the Bank and IMF introduced Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) in 1999 to strengthen domestic accountability in poverty reduction efforts and enhance coordination of development assistance between governments and development partners; and a precondition or access to debt relief and concessional financing from both institutions' in the context of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative (World Bank, 2016; IMF, 2015). The PRSP was set to reduce poverty, and to promote growth and external financing needs through a country's social, structural and macroeconomic needs. Thus, the PRSP was based on core principles which included country ownership, results orientation, comprehensive approach, partnership framework and long-term outlook (Canagarajah & Diesen, 2011). This was in view of the argument that poverty never results from the lack of one thing but from many interlocking factors that cluster in poor people's experiences and definitions of poverty (World Bank, 2015; Niño-Zarazúa, Barrientos, Hickey & Hulme, 2012). Furthermore, economic growth has been the primary driver of poverty reduction (Watkins, 2014).

However, (Hickey, 2013; Randel et al., 2013; Fisher, 2012; Whitfield, 2009) using a qualitative study approach gathering evidence from Uganda, Senegal and Ghana argued that growth remains necessary but insufficient for poverty reduction which is the narrow focus of the PRSP model for poverty reduction and development. These PRSPs, they further argued, were limited in visions of the Millennium Development Goals and to some extent aid funded growth which triggered the search for ideological inspiration outside the PRSP idea. Consequently, the international financial institutions have remained influential in shaping and delivering PRSPs (Sheppard & Leitner, 2010) leaving many African countries characterised by ambiguities within the ideology and political economy context of their development aspirations. Researchers like (Carmody, 2009; Levinsohn 2003; Malaluan & Guttal, 2003) who reviewed the World Bank's evaluation of the PRSP argued that the reviews did not ask the hard questions and little has changed since the introduction of the PRSP as the programs were mere window dressing and more or less the same as the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) which resulted in economic crisis in many African countries. In what may seem like an admittance, the World Bank, (2014; 2011; 2002) and the IMF (2013; 2011; 2003) agreed that the PRSP process could be improved but concluded that the PRSP was yielding good results and reducing poverty in many Africa countries drawing evidence from progress reports at country level.

Arguing that PRSPs were just another face of the Structural Adjustment Programmes given that (Sneyd, 2015; Asongu, 2014; Hickey, 2013; Fisher et al., 2012; Bartlett, 2011; Apodaca, 2010; Adejumobi, 2006) in their studies argued that the PRSPs ideological underpinnings and the global context within which they were framed were contradictory to country ownership, poverty reduction, governance and did not seem to improve the lives of the people and the economy of the countries in Africa. Similarly, Holvoet, Gildemyn & Inberg (2012) in their study using 20 aid recipient countries including Sierra Leone, Gambia, Guinea, Burkina-Faso, Benin and Gambia showed that PRSPs were hugely dependent on aid and country ownership was at best weak given that it was hugely influenced by the International Financial Institutions and donors. This resonates with (Fukuda-Parr, 2012; Bartlett, 2011) who noted that the International Financial Institutions prioritised poverty reduction under the Millennium Development Goals, the approach to financing was through aid conditionality as the World Bank and the IMF had to approve PRSPs before any lending and aid support was agreed including a blend of concessional and non-concessional loans as well as other forms of aid to recipient countries including Liberia who had to meet certain conditionalities including the development of its own PRSP before it could access aid and other development assistance (AfDB, 2013; IMF, 2012; World Bank, 2012).

While there seems to be diverse views on why the PRSPs were not effective, the authors seem to conclude in their arguments that it was fraught with pitfalls and failures to effectively address challenges to economic development in Africa (Heidhues & Obare,2011; Vandemoortele, 2011; Whitfield, 2009). Reviews and studies carried out by (Olinto, Beegle, Sobrado & Uematsu, 2013; Fosu, 2012; Mils & Herbst, 2012; AfDB, 2011) who used a trend analysis drawing from statistics provided mostly by governments and the World Bank reports based on Gross Domestic Product (GDP) performance argued that Africa is doing well. For example, Olinto et al. (2013); argued that based on GDP figures, the poverty gap was now less than one tenth of what it was in 1981 which is when the World Bank had proposed the SAP model for ending poverty. However, Devarajan (2013), argued that many countries including Liberia have GDP accounts which use old methods, population censuses are out of date, and poverty estimates are infrequent and often not comparable over time.

The PRSP as designed by the World Bank and IMF (1983; 2011) outlined four major areas which every PRSP must contain. They included macro and structural policies to support sustainable growth, improve governance and public finance management, appropriately selected policies and programmes and realistic costing and funding for the major programmes (IMF, 2014; World Bank, 2014 & Levinsohn, 2003). However, the same guidance document did not say how these macroeconomic policies would be implemented and neither was there any guidance on how governance can be improved. It rather left it to the countries to determine how as a way of building local ownership. The results have been mixed. In view of this, Martins (2013) in his paper on the world development report argued that Africa's recent economic performance has been quite impressive. However, strong economic growth has not always delivered corresponding benefits in terms of poverty reduction. His study om PRSPs which focused on investigating the relationship between economic growth and income clearly articulated that a wide range of economic and social policies are required to reduce poverty and achieve development outcomes (p.44) but it fell short in saying how sector policies can be prioritised and more importantly how they can be financed.

Despite the criticisms and flaws with the PRSPs, the IMF (2015) decided that while it will continue to involve country authorities in the performance review of their poverty reduction strategies, it will draw on the advice of the World Bank in making any decision through a letter from the bank to the board of the IMF. Furthermore, countries under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative which includes Liberia will be subject to PRS documentation procedures as defined by the Bank. This implies that the World Bank and the IMF will continue to exercise control over poverty reduction policies and their financing for poor countries who are heavily dependent on their financing which will keep them poor and definitely not allow for Liberia to determine any home-grown policy on financing its development goals (Stein, 2011& Fosu, 2010).

Liberia's PRSPs

As Africa's oldest republic, Liberia, which had its independence since 1847, was dominated by the minority known as the 'Americo-Liberians' who marginalised the indigenous population. This also triggered several factors ranging from breakdown of democratic institutions to military rule (Howe, 2015; UNECA, 2012). As at 1970, only 20 percent of the country's labor force was employed in the formal sectors and 74 percent were peasant farmers with very little productive value. Inequality was very high as per capita GDP for agriculture was less than US$120 per year compared to an estimated US$2,500 per year in the concessions sector (World Bank, 2012). The average level of educational achievement was only 1.3 years and only 3.9% of the population controlled more than 60 percent of income (UNECA, 2012). Liberia began a long-term economic decline which was exacerbated by the civil conflict resulting in a failed state.

The 14-year conflict in Liberia which began in 1989 had enormous negative consequences. Social, political and economic governance structures were destroyed, families were displaced and separated, commercial and productive activities which yielded income ceased as various factional leaders looted the treasury and mismanaged the resources. This resulted in a collapse of the economy as GDP fell a catastrophic 90 percent between 1987 and 1995 making it one of the largest economic collapses recorded globally (IMF, 2015; ODI, 2015). Following the Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement of August 2003 and the transition to democracy which resulted in the election of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as president in 2005, peace and stability gradually returned to Liberia (Backiny-Yetna, Wodon, Mungai & Tsimpo, 2012) but GDP per capita was just US$470. Only DR Congo, Niger, Burundi, Chad and Central African Republic scored lower on the Human Development Index in the same year (OECD, 2015). The IMF noted in its 2008 report on Liberia's PRS that the starting point for Liberia's development is recovery and stability from the conflict and Economic growth reached an estimated 5.3 percent in 2005, an estimated 7.8 percent in 2006, and further accelerated to an estimated 9.5 percent in 2007 (IMF, 2008). Liberia has had four poverty reduction strategies. They include the short term one; 2006-2008, the medium-term ones which are the 2008-2011 and 2012-2017. The long-term strategy covers 2012- 2030 aimed at making Liberia a middle-income country by 2030 but economic growth alone does not guarantee poverty reduction and stability (IMF, 2008). These strategies were the basis for financing poverty reduction in Liberia. In 2010, under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative, Liberia received a US$4.6 billion in debt relief which reduced its balance of payment deficit and allowed it access credit from the World Bank (AfDB, 2013; World Bank, 2012).

Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper: Breaking with the past: from conflict to development

Following the election of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as President of the Republic of Liberia in 2005, the first Poverty Reduction Strategy paper was developed. It was built on the Results Focused Transitional Framework (RFTF) developed by the transition government after the conflict and the 150-day action plan that the government implemented at the commencement of the Sirleaf administration. The 2-year strategy (July 2006 – June 2008) was described as an interim short term and served as a bridge to the full PRSP which was based on the Millennium Development Goals launched in 2008 (Republic of Liberia, 2006).

The strategy which was titled “Breaking with the Past: from Conflict to Development” had four pillars prioritised poverty reduction (Republic of Liberia, 2006 p.11). The four pillars included enhancing national security, revitalising economic growth, strengthening governance and the rule of law and rehabilitating infrastructure and delivering basic services. The strategy also claimed that these pillars would address the income and the non-income dimensions of the poverty challenge. However, there was a challenge with the strategy itself. As admitted by the government in the document, there was a lack of up-to-date information and data on the socio-economic conditions (Republic of Liberia, 2006 p.4). The strategy was fully financed by development partners as Liberia was just recovering from the conflict and there was still a ban on its exports. Given that it was a transition strategy to recover from the conflict and serve as a temporary framework until the next PRS; its focus was on preparing Liberia for its development journey.

PRS-1: Lift Liberia

Post-conflict Liberia's path to development began with the first Poverty Reduction Strategy (Lift Liberia) developed in 2008 led by the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank. The PRS as it was called covered the period between April 1st, 2008 and June 30th, 2011. This was in line with Liberia's fiscal planning. The PRS focused on four main pillars. The first was the peace and security pillar which dealt with capacity building for the military and security agencies to prevent crime and ensure security of the state. The idea was that by 2012, the defence of the state would be in the hands of Liberian armed forces. The second pillar was on Economic Revitalisation which dealt with building a regulatory environment to stimulate growth and promote private sector investment as well as develop the support ministries to oversee policy and strategy. The third pillar was on governance and the rule of law which had to do with reforms in public agencies, civil service and developing a strong and effective governance system that supports democracy and rule of law in the country and the fourth was the Infrastructure and Basic Services pillar (IBS) which was concerned with social services including health, education, water and sanitation among others. It also dealt with physical infrastructure and planning. There was also a fifth cross cutting theme which dealt with gender, equality, human rights and capacity building Liberia PRS (2008-2011).

The PRS-Lift Liberia according to the (IMF, 2012) report was not only a strategic plan for government action but also served as the framework for donor aid. The cost of implementing the PRS was estimated at US$1.6 billion while the government's commitment was put at US$500million representing about 29% of the cost and even this was not in secured cash but projected revenues by the ministry of finance. These costs did not include the support from the United States government on military and security as well as the cost of the United Nations Missions in Liberia (UNMIL) expenses. To mobilise resources effectively, the ministry of finance set up an aid management unit to collate information on aid flows and how they were used. This is because much of the needed financing was to be funded by external aid given Liberia's precarious situation. The PRS also noted that there were attempts to develop the County Development Agenda (CDAs) which were less than satisfactory due to weak governance systems and capacity at the county level (UNDP, 2012).

As at 2010, the ministry of finance's aid management unit's report (2010) showed the aid flows which revealed that the United Sates government provided 28%, the World Bank 22%, the United Nations 13% and the European Commission 12%. The others included Germany, Norway, Sweden, Ireland, Denmark and the United Kingdom through its Department for International Development (DFID) (Government of Liberia, 2012). The net official Development Assistance (ODA) TO Liberia as at 2010 was 1,413 billion US dollars (World Bank, 2012). Yet some activities remained under the direct execution by donors and a number of aid funded activities were underreported (Ministry of Finance, Aid Management Unit, 2012). This was on the premise that the government of Liberia lacked the capacity to execute certain projects (IMF, 2012).

Despite the huge aid support which was the financing mechanism for the PRS, the results were less than satisfactory. Another challenge with the PRS was data used. This, Backiny-Yetna et al. 2012) claimed that the poverty level estimates were not reliable even though a Core Welfare Questionnaire Indicators survey carried out in 2007 formed the basis for the poverty level used in the PRS.

PRS-2: Agenda for Transformation (AfT)

By 2013, Liberia had crossed the 10-year milestone on omnipresent threat which is a 50 percent chance that a post-conflict country is likely to relapse into conflict within 10 years of ending it (World Bank, 2012). It was on the premise of this that the second poverty reduction strategy was developed which was to build on the first. The PRS-2 also known as the Agenda for Transformation was the Government of Liberia's five-year development strategy. It followed the three–year (2008-2011) Lift Liberia Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS), which transitioned Liberia from post -conflict emergency reconstruction to economic recovery (IMF, 2013). It did not plan to deliver transformation in five years bur rather sought to take steps towards recovery and stability as well as achieving the goals set out in the Liberia 2030 rising strategy.

The 'Liberia Rising 2030' development strategy was developed and launched in December 2012 and its implementation commenced immediately given that the second poverty reduction strategy –Agenda for Transformation (AfT) was the first medium term plan to deliver the 18-year strategy. It was hailed as an ambitious plan as it originated from the people and it was promulgated as a people driven strategy (Government of Liberia, 2014).

The PRS-2 had 5 key pillars; Peace, security and rule of law, Economic transformation, Human Development, Governance and Public Institutions and Cross-cutting issues Government of Liberia, 2013).The strategy was premised on the gains Liberia made under the PRS-1 which saw a growth in GDP and the need to take significant steps towards being a middle income country by 2030 (AfDB, 2013; Republic of Liberia, 2012; UNDP, 2012). Thus, the PRS-2 was Liberia's medium-term strategic plan towards 2030. This is because it was important to link medium term growth with long term strategic visioning and as such, both the PRS-2 and the Liberia Rising 2030 strategies were developed simultaneously (Liberia, Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs, 2012) The strategy seemed to be comprehensive as it addressed the long term developmental issues under the 5 main pillars as well as the major constraints to growth and development as well as the costing and macroeconomic policy framework which are contained in chapters 13 and 14 of the strategy. It further highlighted the risks and how they will be mitigated (GOL, 2012). The cost of delivering the strategy was put at US$3, 209, 70,000 (Three billion, two hundred and nine million and seventy thousand).

Under the PRS-2 financing, the government of Liberia articulated some assumptions. While it acknowledged the fact that the global economy was slowly recovering (AfDB, 2013; IMF, 2013; World Bank, 2012), it did rely on the projections that African economies were recovering and growing faster. Particularly, the government referred to the fact that on the average, African economies were growing at 4.9 percent as against global average of 4.2 percent (AfDB, 2013; World Bank, 2013; Republic of Liberia, 2012). Second, it relied on a flexible labour market and a competent educational system that would produce the skilled workers they require to fill the projected jobs created under the strategy as well as the projection that the number of Africans between the ages of 15 and 24 was expected to double by 2045. A third assumption was that Liberia's economy stood at US$1.7 billion as at 2012 and this for the government, it was a reflection of what it had achieved within a short period and given its recovery, it could do more over a medium-term strategic period.

The other assumptions were based on the fiscal and monetary policy environments. Under the fiscal policy environment, the strategy envisaged working with donors to bring in more money given that the government has been donor dependent since the end of the civil conflict. It did however note that donor financing may not be enough and as such, there will be encouragements to attract private sector investments, but the strategy did not say how this was going to happen. It also assumed that tax revenues would grow as the economy grew and grants and non-tax revenues would remain consistent but did not give a rationale for this assumption even after it had acknowledged the fact that post-recession growth was slow and declining. Under the monetary policy environment, the government's strategy was price stabilisation and promoting access to the banking sector. It noted that the Central Bank of Liberia (CBL) would use exchange rates as the primary indicator of monetary conditions and ensure that price stability was maintained through exchange rate stability.

The strategic period of the PRS-2 ended in 2017 but certain developments have revealed that there were gaps which affected its financing and progress. The World Bank Institute, (2013) noted a number of issues which included limited involvement of non-governmental organisations in oversight roles, non-integration of the National Capacity Development Strategies (NCDS), the need to enhance government capacity in results-based budgeting and the need to strengthen the sub-national planning process (World Bank, 2015).

Furthermore, the strategy made reference to the poverty analysis drawn from several studies, but it fell short in clarifying progress made in the first PRS and did not address the lack of access to infrastructure, high rate of unemployment, lack of access to education, health, water and sanitation which deserve further consideration World Bank, 2013). The bank also noted that the poverty profile of the poor and vulnerable in the urban and rural areas which informed the strategy was less than accurate and the absence of social policies to back up the implementation of the strategy was a limitation that needed to be addressed. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) in its 2013 review of the extended credit facility arrangement noted that the PRS-2 had significant weaknesses in liquidity management which resulted in over spends in 2012 and 2013 and brought the country's debts to program limits as well as high inflation rates due to weaknesses in its monetary policy.

MDGs

In September 2000, governments of 189 countries came together under the auspices of the United Nations and adopted the United Nations Millennium Declaration which committed member states to a new global partnership encapsulated in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to reduce poverty by half within a 15-year period (UNDP, 2014; Barimah & Diko, 2013; Vandemoortele, 2011). The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) marked a turning point in the world's fight to reduce poverty as it mobilized the world around a set of important priorities and established measurable and time bound objectives and that promoted global development, increased political awareness and put public pressure on governments to deliver (Sachs, 2012). They also served as catalyst for governments, private sector and civil society to advance development which have strengthened advocacy and global monitoring, particularly of key indicators of progress in education, health and gender equality (UNECA, 2014).

As a strategy and framework for financing poverty reduction, countries including Liberia structured their poverty reduction plans and program to achieve the MDGs (IMF, 2012; Republic of Liberia, 2012; 2008). This is evident in the annual MDG reports dating from 2010 which now included Liberia since it had recovered or was recovering from the conflict and had a Poverty Reductions Strategy (PRS) developed in 2008 facilitated by development partners including the IMF and UNDP (UNDP, 2012).

While there have been several theories used to explain the MDGs, the modernisation theory seems to hold given the arguments of (Foster, 2012; Gilman, 2003) who argued that it is a functionalist and evolutionary approach in the development and social sciences discipline, which maintains that countries are autonomous units that develop through stages and transform from traditional societies to modern forms (Ogujiuba & Jumare, 2012; Fangjun, 2009). Drawing on earlier views of capitalism and rationalisation, modernization theory was concerned first and foremost with the promotion of the ideology of Cold War liberalism (Foster, 2012) The theory stipulates that non-western societies would only attain the stage of being developed if they acquire the instrumental rationalities of western societies (Dibua, 2006). Other authors (Foster, 2012; Heid, 2011; Gilman, 2003), argued that liberalism was the primary ideology of modernization. However, Fourie (2012) argued that while modernity has had undeniable global impact on poverty reduction and development, it is radically mediated by the historical and cultural background of each society it encounters implying that the results of the application of MDGs have been mixed.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) in its 2014 progress report on the MDGs noted that African member states made remarkable progress despite the difficult conditions they faced arguing that African countries were among the top achievers of the MDGs. The report also noted that progress was more rapid in least-developed countries (LDCs) than in non-LDCs despite the significant investments in infrastructure and human capital that countries at very low levels of development require to achieve the MDGs (UNECA, 2014). Also, Darrow (2014) argued that donor countries agreed to several commitments in connection with aid, trade, debt relief, access to essential medicines and technology transfer which attracted wider donor support and brought a number of advantages to development work including the fulfilment of human rights principles.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) which produces the progress reports on the MDGs noted that the MDGs have also been the catalyst for increased expenditure on the poor, improved gender equality, education enrolments, child mortality and increased aid to Liberia (UNDP, 2014). While the UNDP reports (2012; 2013; 2014; 2015) noted that there was a global achievement on all the goals but then it admitted that the achievements left much to be desired. The final report which was released in September 2015 revealed that despite the enormous progress made (Fehling et al., 2013; Summer, 2012), progress has been uneven and limited. For instance, inequality increased with 800 million people still living in extreme poverty, 160million children under the age of 5 are malnourished, 57 million children of primary school age are not in school, almost half of the global workforce still work under vulnerable conditions, 160 thousand children die every day before their fifth birthday due to preventable diseases, maternal mortality rates in developing countries were 14 times higher, 2.4 billion still use unimproved sanitation facilities, 946 million people still practice open defecation and 800 million people live in slum-like condition in developing cities (UNDP, 2015). Furthermore, the inequality gap widened with more people being poor, progress has been slower amongst those hardest to reach, and there is little evidence of improvements in most of the goals (ODI, 2016; World Bank, 2016; UNECA, 2015).

A review of studies has revealed that the MDGs were less than successful for various reasons ranging from the way they were framed, the content and the results. For example, Fukudar-Parr, Greenstein & Stewart (2013) argued that the ways in which global goals achieved their influence in shaping priorities and actions of the key stakeholders were not well understood which accounted for the uneven results Despite the fact that the MDGs actually helped governments operate in a particular manner and structure their priorities to focus on reducing poverty (Langford et al., 2013; Fukudar-Parr, 2012). Other scholars (Fehling, Nelson & Venkatapuram, 2013; Oya, 2011; Hulne, 2010; Amin, 2006) argued that the process of formulating the MDGs was exclusive ad non-participatory as it was led by the United States, Europe and Japan with support from the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). They further argued with evidence that the influence of these institutions and countries was responsible for the removal of the gaol on reproductive health from the final list, restriction of the gender gaol to educational parity, the setting of the poverty margin at $1 per day and the focus on developing countries. Researchers including (Richard et al., 2011; Waage et al., 2010; Fukuda-Parr, 2006; Kabeer, 2005; Haines & Cassels, 2004) argued that globally, very few parliaments discussed the MDGs and developing countries and civil society had very little involvement in the formulation of the MDGs. Similarly, Darrow (2012) and Vandemoortele (2011) argued that that the process was secretive and characterised by the doctrine and interests of rich countries and multinational corporations. They further argued that the MDGs failed to address the root causes of poverty, were weak in accountability, was not owned by the global south and was centred on aid dependency

In critiquing the structure of the MDGs, Bames & Brown (2011) claimed that the MDGs were unambitious and did not meet basic human needs but (Oya, 2011; Langford, 2010) argued that they were rather ambitious and unrealistic which impacted negatively on local capacities and governance. Similarly, (Van Norren, 2012; Brikci & Holder, 2011; Smith, 2006) argued the MDGs were less than successful because they focused on developing countries, neglected other important goals and their interconnectedness. For example, the separation of Malaria and HIV was a missed opportunity to address the synergies between control and treatment of these communicable diseases (Fehling, et al., 2013; Molyneux, 2010).

In their criticisms about the content of the MDGs, (Brikci & Holder (2011) and Fukuda-Parr (2010) argued that there were missing goals like reducing inequality between countries and progress on equity and inclusion were ignored, non-focus on the poorest due to unreliable data and over-generalisation. Further, Edward (2006) argued that the use of $1 as the poverty line oversimplified poverty and made it seem easy while Pogge (2010) argued that use of the $1 was misleading as the use of $2.50 would have shown no improvement given that many people live above $1 a day and the use of money terms to qualify poverty was narrow and unrealistic given that poverty is multidimensional (UNDP, 2014). Similarly, (Sachs, 2012; Poku & Whitman, 2011; Saith, 2006) claimed that the goal of halving poverty was unethical and fell short of being futuristic. Also, Friedman (2013) noted that there were issues of data quality and reliability as well as the fact that the baseline for measuring success was pegged at 10 years before the declaration which questions the credibility, motives and results of the MDGs

Liberia's progress on the MDGs has been characterised as mixed and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) of Liberia were framed within the context of the MDGs (AfDB, 2013; IMF, 2013; World Bank, 2012; Republic of Liberia, 2012). Liberia met only 3 of the 8 development gaols. Goal 3 on gender equality, Goal 6 on the treatment of HIV/AIDs, malaria and other diseases and Goal 8 on global partnership (AfDB, 2015; UN, 2015; UNDP, 2015).

From 2000 when they were established, the MDGs have been lauded as a huge success and sanitised to fit the conventional development paradigm and statistics have been manipulated to fabricate evidence of success (Mkandawire, 2014; Jerven, 2013; Vandemoortele, 2011) and the percentage of the world's population living on under $1.25/day has barely changed since 1990 (Sumner, 2012). Most importantly, however, they were misappropriated to propagate an economistic perspective of development. Consequently, they failed in their attempt to shift the focus of the development discourse from income-poverty to the multi-dimensional nature of human poverty, and from a narrow growth paradigm to a broader human-centred perspective of sustainable and equitable well-being (Vandemoortele, 2011).

While it can be argued that the MDGs did have some positive impact in developing countries and Liberia in particular given that it was framed to attract increased capital flows through further debt reduction or cancellation and increased Official Development Assistance (ODA) flows (Obonye, 2012), but the shortfall in achievement has been regrettable and deeply painful for those in poor countries especially as this was tied to Overseas Development Assistance which was promised by rich countries but was not kept (Sachs, 2012). Given the inability of donors to fulfil their promise and the dwindling aid to Liberia, the problem of how Liberia's 2030 vision can be financed remains unsolved.

Health Sector

As a post-conflict country, Liberia's health system was characterised by damaged health infrastructure, weak sector leadership, inadequate financial resources and human capacity (Petit, Sondorp, Mayhewa, Roura & Roberts, 2013). Liberia's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper which was framed to achieve the MDGs was expected to address these challenges. To address these issues which are common with post-conflict countries, the Basic Package of Health Services (BHPS) approach designed by WHO (2014) was used for post-conflict countries like Liberia, Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan and Afghanistan. The BHPS consists of priority primary and secondary health care levels of services which are cost effective (Petit et al., 2013). This approach formed the basis for financing the health sector in Liberia to meet its MDG target in health. Given that the objectives were long term, complex and political (ODI, 2013), the BHPS served as the approach to delivering the National Health and Social welfare Plan (NHP) which was developed in 2008 and incorporated into the Poverty Reduction strategies developed in 2008 and 2012.

The major financing strategy for the health sector was the Liberia Health Sector Pool Fund which was established in April 2008 with three main objectives which included financing priority unfunded needs within the National Health Plan, increase the leadership of the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (MoHSW) in the allocation of resources and reduction of transaction costs associated with managing multiple donor projects (Republic of Liberia, 2012). The fund had four donors including the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations High Commission for Refugees

(UNHCR), Department for International Development (DFID) and Irish Aid and by 2011, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the French Development Agency (AFD) joined the pool fund. By 2012 commitments had reached over US$35 million (Hughes et al., 2012) and by 2014, the pool fund had over US$70 million of which 99 percent was committed to unfunded priorities and 89 percent had been spent (Republic of Liberia, 2014). In addition to this, other donors including the European Union, Global Fund and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) provided a total of US$197 million for implementation of the BHPS which served as the framework for the National Health and Social Welfare Plan (WHO, 2014).

As at 2015, many Liberians could not reach a clinic in 80 minutes (Stanturf, Goodrick, Warren, Charnley & Stegall, 2015). Also it would follow that these huge amounts of aid would have been used to build a resilient system but that was not the case as the World Health Organisation (2014) noted that Liberia's health system was operating at a sub-optimal level with very weak capacity and inadequate infrastructure which raises question about the effectiveness of aid to the health sector given that Liberia's heath sector was heavily dependent on external aid, which emphasised donor procedures, reduced allocative flexibility and efficiency, target-oriented approaches and tangible impacts at the expense of a holistic vision of health systems in the round (ODI, 2015; Hughes et al., 2014).

In their article, Lomazzi, Borisch & Laaser (2014) in their study on the health goals, argued that while the MDGs managed to mobilise political consensus and mobilise development aid for poor countries like Liberia, they were not a product of comprehensive analysis of development needs and consequently, too narrowly focused, without a clear local ownership and leadership. Similarly, Bryce, Black & Victora (2013) argued that the inadequate foreign aid, lack of political will and weak technical capacities at country level were impediments to achieving the Millennium Goals on health. They concluded in their study that the interplay of these factors at national and sub-national levels in the highest-burden countries needs further research, and there is unlikely to be a 'one-size-fits-all' solution. Further, Hsu et al. (2012) in their study on innovative financing for health in Liberia concluded that the reduction in donor aid was worrying and there is a need to monitor performance of aid flows but like other studies, it fell short in saying how the health sector can be financed given the gaps in donor assistance and how performance can be measured.

The outbreak of the Ebola Disease Virus (EVD) in 2014 in Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone was a stark reality that aid in the health sector was not having the right impact. Of the three countries within West Africa where the EVD occurred, Liberia had the second highest number of confirmed, probable and suspected cases (WHO, 2015). By the time it was declared Ebola free in May 2015, Liberia alone had suffered 40% of the total cases which was over 10,000 and 4,769 deaths accounting for 43 percent of the total mortality in West Africa (Stanturf et al., 2015). As at the time of the outbreak, the World Health Organisation (2014) noted that the capacity of the health systems in Liberia was weak with inadequate qualified health workers. Infrastructure, logistics, health information, surveillance, governance and drug supply systems were weak. Return on health expenditure was less than satisfactory even though ODA was high and there was private sector expenditure in the form of out of pockets payments for health services coupled with a weak Public Finance Management system creating a number of fiduciaries, reputational and operational risks for donors engaging in Liberia (ODI, 2015; Petit et al., 2013).

The primary cost of the crisis was the loss of human lives, hard earned development gains and the worsening of the already entrenched poverty. Other impacts included job losses and food insecurity (World Bank, 2016). To finance the Ebola response, the World Bank Group provided US$385 million for Liberia in providing supplies, supporting surge of foreign aid workers and budget support to the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (World Bank, 2016).In their study on building resilient health system in Liberia, Kieny, Evans, Schmets, & Kadandale (2014) argued that with the Ebola outbreak ending, there is a need to increase domestic financing but aid will be needed in the short term. However, the study did not offer ways on how domestic financing can be mobilised neither did it offer any recommendations on increasing aid in the short term.

Despite efforts made to reform, revitalise and finance Liberia's health services, the country still faces very high levels of maternal and neonatal mortality and ranks among the ten highest in the world (Moseson et al., 2014). While Liberia made progress on tackling specific issues such as maternal mortality and HIV/AIDS, its health system is still heavily dependent on external aid which emphasises target-oriented approaches at the expense of holistic vision of a healthy system (DuBois, 2015).Aid to Liberia is dwindling at a very alarming rate (OECD, 2015; Asongu, 2014) and it is not known how Liberia will finance its 2030 vision for the health sector

Water Sector

Globally, the world met the MDG goal on halving the proportion of people without safe drinking water five years before the 2015 deadline (UNDP, 2015; 2012; WHO, 2012). The WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Program for Water Supply and Sanitation (2012) report noted that 6.1 billion people had gained access to drinking water and this number would increase to 92% of the global population by 2015. It was a celebrated success at the United Nations given that it was actually the first goal of the MDGs to be met (WHO, 2012). However, Sub-Saharan Africa countries did not achieve this target and were left behind (UNICEF, 2012).

Post-conflict Liberia saw very few water facilities which survived the conflict. As at 2008, access to water in Liberia was put at 68% (WHO/UNICEF, 2010). It was based on this data that targets were set in the PRS-2 and the crafting of investment plans was made but there was a problem. The sector consensus was and still is that coverage rates are well below those reported by the JMP and data remains unreliable in Liberia (WSP, 2012; USAID, 2010). The government of Liberia's approach to the water sector as defined in the PRS was that it will contribute to strategy to improve health conditions, spur economic growth, and thus reduce poverty (AfDB, 2011; Republic of Liberia, 2010). Similarly, the World Bank's Water and Sanitation Programme (WSP, 2012) in a study on Liberia's water sector claimed that Liberia loses US$18 million annually which is an equivalent of 2% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) arguing that its inability to improve access to water was impacting on poverty reduction efforts and affecting economic growth.

Recognising the very poor situation of the water sector and the lack of resources, a multi-donor joint mission was carried out in May 2011 (Republic of Liberia, 2011). The conference was specifically held to develop a strategy and to fund the sector through external aid. The result of that meeting was the development of a framework knows as the Liberia WASH Compact: Sanitation and Water for All: A Global Framework which set out the roadmap for reaching universal access and coverage by 2015. It was later called the 'WASH Compact' (UNICEF, 2012).

The 'WASH Compact' had four main objectives which included establishing and strengthening institutional capacity, ensuring equity and prioritised service provision, develop a monitoring system and improve financing mechanisms (Republic of Liberia, 2011). It became the basis for financing the sector and developing the sector capacity development plans and the sector investment plan. Following this, a Sector Investment Plan was developed with funding from the water and Sanitation Programme of the World Bank as well as a Sector Capacity Development Plan funded by UNICEF. These plans were developed to align with Liberia's second Poverty Reduction Strategy paper (2012-2017) and by extension the Liberia 2030 rising strategy as these documents had medium and long term financing needs articulated in them (WSP, 2013; UNICEF, 2012).ODA to the water sector in Liberia stood at US$566.2 million and by 2014 it had increased to US$740.2 million (OECD, 2015). A further US$2.5 million was spent by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in 2013 in implementing water and sanitation projects across the country (Republic of Liberia, 2014). However, the Government of Liberia (2013) argued that domestic and donor financing to the sector which stood at US$25 million annually remain low compared to the estimated needed financing of US$110 million by 2014.

In September 2011 WaterAid commissioned a progress review of the compact and the report revealed that out of the 26 indicators, only three had been achieved and the president was yet to sign the compact which meant the government was non-committal six months after it had agreed to the compact with donors and non-governmental organisations. A second review was carried out by WaterAid and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) water governance facility in 2012. The reported noted that the compact had helped improve sector coordination and information sharing, standardised data for reporting and the development of the Sector Capacity Development Plan. But it's also said that progress was very disappointing and left much to be desired (Nwafor, Hubendick, Battle & kamara, 2012).

For instance, the president only signed the compact ten months after it was developed and till date there has been no budget allocation for water. Furthermore, the inability of the government to establish the Water Supply and Sanitation Commission was a major bottleneck to progress on other commitments to establish institutional capacity. The latest statistics on water show that Liberia has met the MDG for water with an access rate of 75% (UNDP, 2015; WHO/UNICEF, 2015) But in what may seem like a contradiction of the statistics, the government in a statement to the Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) high level meeting with the World Bank reported that only three agencies

(Ministry of Public Works, Ministry of Lands and Mines and the Monrovia City Corporation) had shown signs of budgeting for water and these do not materialise into delivery of activities suggesting a lack of absorptive capacity (Fukuda-Parr, 2012).

Additionally, there was a challenge of poor targeting in service provision, lack of skilled human resource and inadequate financing. The World Bank (2016) conducted an impact assessment of the water sector and found that despite the claims that Liberia has met the MDG for water, large population of Liberians are still expose to unsafe water. In the capital city, an estimated 80% of the population still rely on hand-dug wells which may be improved but unsuitable in dense urban environments (Ngo-Bodog, 2016). Water related diseases are still rife in the country with diarrhoea widespread among children of under-five years and cholera which is a water borne disease remained high in 2014 (UNICEF, 2015). Furthermore, the lack of safe water contributed to the spread of Ebola virus and impeded children from attending school (AfDB, 2015; UN, 2015; World Bank, 2015). These issues have cast doubts on the UN's MDG report by WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme which is the United Nations official platform tasked with the monitoring the progress towards the Millennium Development Goal on drinking water and sanitation (WHO, 2015).

Despite the aid flows for the sector, the Joint Sector Review (JSR) report by the Republic of Liberia's Ministry of Public Works (2014) revealed that too little progress was made in achieving the Sector Strategic Plan (SSP), the Sector Capacity Development Plan (SCCDP) and the Sector Investment Plan (SIP). The report highlighted major challenges which include lack of credible data for planning and financing, difficulty in collecting financing information. The report also noted that there was a need to double up efforts, but it did not say how and in what areas these efforts were required.

The challenges which limited the ability of Liberia and largely most African countries in achieving the MDGs were not clearly articulated in reviews and there seemed to be lack of accountability on who was responsible, or any lessons learned. It was hoped that the SDGs would address these issues ensure accountability (Stafford-Smith et al., 2017; UNDP, 2015).

The Sustainable Development Goals

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals are the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. They address the global challenges countries face, including those related to poverty, inequality, climate, environmental degradation, prosperity, and peace and justice. The Goals interconnect and in order to leave no one behind. They are an urgent call for action by all countries - developed and developing - in a global partnership to end extreme poverty by 2030.

Following the fact that the MDGs were to expire by the end of 2015, the world began the debate for a new set of goals and the common theme that marked all the debates was reaching everyone. In September 2015, member states of the United Nations agreed to a new set of goals called the Sustainable Development Goals or the Global Goals (UNDP, 2015). However, the concept of sustainable development is not new and has always been the desire of nations characterised with different assumptions based on the various disciplinary approaches and diverse institutions which has resulted in a plethora of ideas on the best way to achieve sustainable development (Ciegis, 2015; Pearce et al., 2013; Eliott, 2012).

In 1987, the concept of sustainable development was brought to the fore with the release of the Brundtland Report on the World Conference on Environment and Development (WCED) titled 'Our Common Future' defined sustainable development as Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. While this definition seemed to have provided some theoretical stability to address issues of sustainable development, it however created some ambiguity in the literature on the subject (Cantor, 2011; Daly, 1996) but remains the subject of recent development thinking (Pearce et al., 2013; Haines et al., 2012).

The debate over what would succeed the Millennium Development Goals by member states of the United Nations and other organisations reflected the diverse opinions on the MDGs and called for a shift in development thinking and approach. While there are several studies which have argued on the success and failure of the MDGs with evidence, the final UN report on the MDGs revealed that progress was less than satisfactory. The UNDP (2015) report supported by other studies and reports by (ODI, 2016;World Bank, 2016; Republic of Liberia, 2015; UNECA, 2015; WHO, 2015) revealed that progress in Sub Saharan Africa was negated by growing inequalities, weak health systems, regression in access to sanitation and safe water as well as disasters (IMF, 2015; OECD, 2015). The 2015 report of the Africa Progress Panel provided a summary of Africa's achievement on the MDGs when it said: 'After a decade of buoyant growth, almost half of Africans still live on less than $1.25 a day. Wealth disparities are increasingly visible. The current pattern of trickle-down growth is leaving too many people in poverty, too many children hungry and too many young people without jobs. Unequal access to health, education, water and sanitation is reinforcing wider inequalities viewed through the lens of the SDGs; the equitable growth agenda is more relevant than ever: on current trends one-third of Africans will still be living in extreme poverty in 2030. Africa will account also for a rising share of child and maternal deaths and out of school children' (Africa Progress Panel Report, 2015 p. 10)

In July 2012 the United Nations Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon set up a 27-member High Level Panel on Post-2015 co-chaired by the president of Liberia Ellen Johnson Surleaf, Prime Minister of United Kingdom David Cameron and the Prime Minister of Indonesia Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. The objective was to prepare a bold yet practical agenda with a shared responsibility that puts the poverty eradication and sustainable development at the core of the agenda to be presented to member states for consideration (UNDP, 2012). The report of the panel which was released in July 2013 was titled "A New Global Partnership: Eradicating Poverty and Transforming Economies through Sustainable Development" (UNDP, 2013).

This report became the first in a series of frameworks to be considered in the lead up to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The report as outlined by UNDP (2013) came up with an underlying theme that was its main message; 'leave no one behind'. This was underpinned by five transformational shifts including sustainable development, jobs and inclusive growth, peace and effective open and accountable institutions and a new global partnership. It also proposed twelve goals, forty-four targets including the eradication of extreme poverty. However, the report did not have targets to reduce inequality and it only made recommendations on monitoring progress towards 2030 by collecting data on socioeconomic groups and include specific data for the most marginalized but did not say how it should be done (Watkins, 2014).

The report also made recommendations on financing, but it did not say how these goals should be financed. What followed was the work of the Open Working Group (OWG) of the United Nations which was established as part of the outcome of the Rio+20 summit held in 2012. Established on the 22nd of January 2013 by decision 67/555 of the United Nations General Assembly, the OWG was made up of 30-member states with a constituency-based system that limited member states and other membership bodies of the General Assembly whereby most of the seats were shared by member states (United Nations, 2013).

The Open Working Group spent 18 months working with diverse stakeholders and reviewing documents and proposals by member states and other organizations including civil society organizations. The final report came up with 17 goals which largely incorporated the report of the High-Level Panel as well as the proposal of the Rio+20 earth summit. The final report did not however include mechanisms for financing as this was treated in separate discussions by the United Nations Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing and the Financing for Development Conference held in July 2015 in Addis Ababa.

The Intergovernmental committee was established by the United Nations resolution 66/288 which endorsed the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing, 2014). Specifically, paragraph 225 of the resolution stated that "We agree to establish an intergovernmental process under the auspices of the General Assembly, with the technical support from the United Nations system and in open and broad consultation with relevant international and regional financial institutions and relevant stakeholders. The process will assess financial needs, consider the effectiveness, consistencies and synergies of existing instruments and frameworks and evaluate additional initiatives, with a view to preparing a report proposing proposing options on an effective sustainable development financing strategy to facilitate the mobilization of resources and their effective use in achieving sustainable development objectives" (p.3)

In its final report submitted to the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in September 2014, the committee noted in paragraph 20 of its report that they were mindful of the work of the Open working Group and commitment of the international community to sustainable development. The report concluded that there was no one policy solution to the problem of financing the sustainable development gaols recommending a cohesive approach with national financing strategies and made a series of generic options leaving the choice of strategy and approach to each country when it noted in paragraph 24 that "our approach is based on the principles of country ownership, supported by a strengthened global partnership for sustainable development" (p. 7). Thus, the report fell short of providing clarity on how countries could finance the SDGs.

Another major step towards addressing the challenge on financing the SDGs, was The Third International Conference on Financing for Development (FFD3). The terms of reference for the conference was set in the United Nations General assembly resolutions 68/204 and 68/279 which was threefold: to follow-up on commitments and assess progress made in implementing the Monterrey Consensus and the Doha declaration, to strengthen the framework to finance sustainable development and means of implementation for the Post-2015 development agenda and to strengthen the financing for development follow –up process to ensure that reviews were timely and transparent . The conference produced an outcome document titled the “Addis Abba Action Agenda” endorsed by General Assembly resolution 69/313. The final report presented a fundamental shift by considering a much broader approach to sustainable development (OECD, 2015) and acknowledged that it would serve as a framework for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals.

It however fell short in saying how this would happen when in paragraph 3 of the report it agreed that cohesive nationally owned strategies and integrated financing which in effect leaves each country to determine how it would finance the SDGs. Developing a national strategy that explains how a country will finance its development agenda remains and unanswered question as a study by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) argued that this remains a challenge given the huge dependency on external financing notably from bilateral and multilateral donors, public revenuers remains highly volatile and largely non-renewable and affected by depleting resources as well as high dependency on government subsidies and tax incentives which are difficult to sustain (Rabinowitz & Prizzon, 2015).

Furthermore, the continued global economic crisis and dwindling aid implies that increased external financing is unlikely in the short and long term and as such, new funding must be sought from innovative financing sources (ODI, 2015; World Bank, 2015; Atum, 2012). Similarly, the Development Committee of the World Bank (2015) argued that while ODA will remain important in financing the Sustainable Development Gaols, the global community needs to move from "billions in ODA to trillions" in investments of all kinds in public and private funds suggesting that Aid will no longer be at the fore of development financing for low income countries (Mawdsley, 2018). The paper also noted that each country will need to develop its financing plan and went ahead to develop context specific papers for 11 countries including Liberia. However, the World Bank (2015) admitted that the paper was only able to provide an initial picture of the implications for the Post-2015 agenda but did not say how Liberia can finance the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Financing Sustainable Development in Liberia

Official Development Assistance (ODA) has been a major source of development finance for many least developed Countries (LDCs) including Liberia (World Bank, 2014; UNDP, 2013; OECD, 2012; UNICEF, 2012). The UN millennium Development summit in 2002, the UN conference on financing for development in Monterey in 2002 and Rome in 2008 as well as the G8 summit in 2005 in Gleneagles, Scotland where it was agreed that aid would be doubled were all key initiatives of increasing ODA to LDCs (ODI, 2015; Greenhill & Prizzon, 2012; Moss, 2010).

While these initiatives were highly applauded, the impact on recipient countries was less than satisfactory (OECD, 2014), given that USD$25 billion was promised to Africa but it had not received more than half of that (Gnangnon, 2013). After the declaration of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), aid to Least Developed Countries (LDCs) was mostly tied to achieving the MDGs (OECD, 2015; Juselius et al., 2014; UNDP, 2014; AfDB, 2013; Hailu & Tsukada, 2012; Vandemoortele, 2011). Globally Official development Assistance grew by 66 percent to US$135.2 billion between 2000 and 2014 (UNDP, 2015). Country Programme Aid (CPA) increased by US$5.2 billion between 2013 and 2014 to Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Low-Income Countries (LICs) most of which were in Africa (OECD, 2014).

Foreign aid has been and remains one of the most important policy instruments which rich countries use to help poor countries (Asongu, 2014; Qian, 2014; Wamboye et al., 2013; Sachs, 2012). This became all the more evident with the advent of the Millennium Development Gaols (MDGs) and the calls to increase aid to Africa which resulted in the 2005 decision of the Group of eight most industrialised nation (G8) to double foreign aid to Africa from US$25 billion a year to US$50 billion with the aim to finance the “big push” to achieve the MDGs. (Asongu, 2012; Kalyvitis et al., 2012; Easterly, 2005; Devarajan et al., 2002; Zedillo et al., 2001).

In the same year, the European Commission (2005) launched its EU strategy for Africa which increased aid to Africa to end poverty and achieve economic growth

(Kalyvitis, Stengos, Vlachaki, 2012). In the simplest terms, foreign aid is the transfer of resources from one or multiple governments and organisations to another government usually descried as the recipient government for the purpose of economic, social and political development (Nielsen et al., 2011). Officially, the argument for aid has been that it is an obligation for rich countries to poor countries to reduce poverty and achieve the MDGs (Sachs, 2005). This argument is an echo of the (UNDP, 2014; 2010; 2005; World Bank, 2014; 2011; 2005; AfDB, 2013; 2011; IMF, 2010; 2005) that aid flows can help poor countries to access additional resources reduce poverty and achieve sustainable growth. However, evidence from empirical studies have failed to justify this argument (Asongu, 2015; 2014; Wamboye et al., 2013; Easterly, 2009; Ranjan & Subramanian, 2008). Furthermore, there are arguments that aid allocation has been determined by geopolitical interests, colonial ties and commercial interest among others in favour of the donor (Hailu & Tsukada, 2012)

There has been a growing controversy on the effectiveness of aid (Asongu, 2014; Qian, 2014; Rensick, 2013; Easterly, 2009). These studies have used empirical evidence with mixed results that have further deepened the controversy. The divergent evidence on the effectiveness of aid in reducing poverty is quite confusing given that these researchers use data from the same publicly available sources including aid and macro data from the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD, Penn World Tables (PWT), World Development Indicators (WDI) and the Human Development Index (HDI) by the UNDP (Juselius, Moller & Tarp, 2014). Furthermore, Juselius et al. (2013) argued that what accounts for these divergent conclusions are the choices researchers make in transforming data, economic models and assumptions related to endogeneity

In his study using descriptive statistics from poor countries including Liberia, Qian (2014) concluded that aid is determined by the objectives of donor countries rather than the need of recipient countries and the impact of foreign aid is hindered by problems of measurement and identification due to the heterogeneous nature of aid. Relatedly, (Easterly, 2005; Heckelman & Knack, 2008) in their studies concluded that aid has no systemic influence on policy and that aid policy conditions do not improve a country's ability to address poverty. In his study using fifty-two African countries including Liberia, (Asongu, 2012) reviewed an updated data covering the period between 1996 and 2010 and concluded in the study that aid is detrimental to GDP growth, GDP per capita growth and inequality adjusted human development. The author further claimed that aid has duelled corruption. Similarly, Asongu & Jellall (2013) in their study argued that foreign aid channelled through government's consumption expenditure increased corruption while aid channelled through private investments decreases corruption.

In a survey conducted by Doucouliagos & Paldam (2009), their findings concluded that after forty years of development aid, the evidence revealed that aid has not been effective. Also, Hezer & Nunnenkamp (2012) examined the long run effect of aid on twenty-one recipient countries using panel contingent techniques and concluded that aid promoted increasing inequality on income distribution for poor countries. In their study on aid effectiveness and proliferation, Rahman and Sawada (2010) argued that aid proliferation due to a large presence of donors overwhelms the recipient government's capacity to manage aid flows as well as promotes fragmentation and conflicting policies which may impede its vision for poverty reduction.

The study of Ogundipe & Jumare (2014) which examined the role of macroeconomic policy on aid effectiveness in Sub-Saharan Africa applied a theoretical framework which is similar to the endogenous model concluded that foreign aid does not result in real GDP growth in the countries. Their study was building on the work of Moyo (2009) who challenged the theoretical framework on the effectiveness of aid where she argued that aid has not resulted in poverty reduction and growth but has rather led to escalating poverty levels, declining growth rates, corruption, market disruptions and created a vicious cycle of aid dependency leaving these aid recipient countries in need of more aid. In a similar study by Dreher & Langlotz (2016) drawing data from 96 countries concluded that aid has no significant effect on growth and poverty reduction. In his study on aid flows to Liberia from the United States of America, (Kieh, 2014) using data on aid flows from 1946-2015 concluded that aid flows from America were designed to serve the political and economic interests of U.S. which required Liberia to serve as a ‘foot soldier’ to promote America’s national interests and as such, aid flows have not resulted in advancing the material conditions of Liberia’s poor. Other studies by (Asongu, 2014; 2012; Morrissey, 2012; Easterly, 2009; 2005; Addison et al., 2005) have shown that aid has not worked in poor countries.

For instance, Asongu (2012) in his study of aid in selected African countries including Liberia argued that development assistance has been detrimental to GDP growth and perpetuated inequality in achieving the MDGs. He further argued that there should be a rethink of the models and theories on which foreign aid is based to hold aid agencies accountable. In their studies on aid volatility and predictability, (Kangoye, 2011; Bulir & Haman, 2003; Bulir & Lane, 2002) using evidence from Sub Sharan Africa countries argued that aid is unpredictable and volatile putting the recipient countries in difficult situations which negatively impact on their fiscal revenues. Further, Wamboye, Adekola & Sergi (2013) argued that there are three broad views in literature which explain the relationship between aid and growth in poor countries which include take-off hypothesis, conditionality requirement and the aid quality argument. It was based on this that they carried out an empirical study on the impact of aid on poverty reduction and economic growth of twenty-six African countries including Liberia which were tagged by the World Bank and IMF in 2001 as Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) using data between 1984 and 2010. Their study concluded that aid has not contributed to poverty reduction and growth. They further argued from the study that these countries have remained aid dependent which is detrimental to their growth.

Aid has been and remains the main resource for Liberia which has been channelled largely through debt relief and project aid (ODI, 2015; World Bank, 2014). Liberia has been a huge beneficiary of ODA most of which have been grants and soft loans given its fragile nature and slow recovery from the 14-year civil conflict. After its interim poverty reduction strategy, the focus for all aid was on achieving the Millennium Development Goals. The MDGs defined the first and second Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (Lift Liberia and Agenda for Transformation which were developed as short- and medium-term strategic plans for the Liberia 2030 rising strategy). From 2003, ODA to

Liberia was on the increase as the country benefited from some of the highest ODA per capita in the world about US$185, more than 3 times the African average of US$49 (AfDB, 2013) and attracted over US$16billion in Foreign Direct Investment since 2006 (World Bank, 2015; AfDB, 2013; OECD, 2013). In 2013 Liberia received US$583 million in ODA and US$765 million in 2014 (World Bank, 2016; OECD, 2014) showing a significant increase in aid flows against the backdrop of decreasing aid to Africa which fell by 4% in real terms from 2012 (ODI, 2015). To finance the Millennium Development Goals, the European Commission provided about US41.8 billion in development aid and debt relief between 2008 and 2011, priority was given to health, water, and sanitation and food security.

Despite these huge amounts in aid the results have been less than satisfactory and very little has changed. In 2011 the Human Development Index (HDI) which is a summary measure for assessing long-term progress in three basic dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, access to knowledge and a decent standard of living ranked Liberia 182/187 (UNDP, 2011) and by 2017 Liberia's HDI value was 0.435— which put the country in the low human development category— positioning it at 181 out of 189 (UNDP, 2018).While the results showed a recovering economy, the country has not been able to generate the large-scale employment opportunities essential for absorbing a large pool of unemployed and underemployed young men and women (UNDDP, 2014; AfDB, 2013) and the growth figures also exaggerated the positive impact that aid had in the country (Castilo, 2011). Currently, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rates remains very low. The agricultural sector is yet to show growth due to weak recovery of global prices of rubber and palm oil and inflation rising to an all-time high of 24% in June 2018 as against 10.8% in the same period in 2017 following the drop in external aid. Cost of living has also increased coupled with limited employment opportunities which undermine the welfare of Liberians and puts the economy at risk (World Bank, 2018).

Development aid allowed Liberia to adopt a free health care policy, but its implementation has been weak and has left more than 40% of children vulnerable to preventable diseases child birth attended to by unskilled healthcare workers (European Commission, 2014). There was also the challenge of weak systems and corruption which revealed that mechanisms for accountability were more outward to meet aid conditions and satisfy the donors rather than promote sustainable public accountability (Qian, 2014; World Bank, 2013; IMF, 2012).

This raised criticisms about the effectiveness of aid given that it was driver to achieving the MDGs in Low Income and Least Developed countries. The arguments have been that first, foreign aid is often determined by the objectives of donor countries rather than the needs of recipient countries (Qian, 2014; Hoffer, 2012). Secondly, more aid does not necessarily result in more growth and development (Hoffer, 2012). Thirdly, ODA should at best be a complement and not a substitute for domestic resources (UNECA, 2014) which creates a culture of dependency and perpetuates poverty in the long run (Asongu, 2014; Juselius et al., 2014).

In looking at forms of aid, Morrison (2012) argued that aid took two forms. The first was policy conditionality with the aim of changing government behaviour and secondly by projects with the aim of bypassing governments to some degree. Other studies by (Easterly, 2005; Burnside & Dollar, 2000) concluded that governments indeed were influenced by these conditions but they did not have any systematic influence in shaping or improving policy because there were political opposition to the policy conditions and donors had other incentives to continue disbursements even when they knew these conditions were not being met as such, these condition were not sustainable and rather had adverse effect on poverty reduction and development .

The effectiveness of aid has also been measured using the principles of the Paris declaration which include ownership of the aid programmes by the recipient country, alignment of aid with the recipient government policies and systems, emphasis on delivery of results rather than inputs alone and mutual accountability (Coppin, 2012). The (OECD, 2014; AfDB, 2013; World Bank, 2013; IMF, 2012) have argued that aid is important and necessary for poor countries and was useful in meeting the Millennium Development Goals. They argued that aid helped developing countries reduce poverty and build sustainable economic growth within the framework of the MDGs and that these principles of aid were useful in avoiding fragmentation and promoted accountability to citizens' (Coppin, 2012).

However, (Asongu, 2014; Gil-Alana & Singh, 2014; Wamboye et al., 2013; Gnangnon, 2013; Feeny & De Silva, 2012; Hailu & Tsukada, 2012; Hoffer, 2012; Nowak-Lehmann, Dreher,, Herzer, Klassen & Martínez□Zarzoso, 2012) argued that aid was important for poor countries and particularly necessary for countries recovering from conflicts but the benefits were more in the short term only. In the longer term the effectiveness of aid became controversial because of the longstanding debate fuelled by the less than satisfactory results in many poor countries including Liberia and questioned the purpose of aid given that out of all the foreign aid flows, only 1.69% to 5.25% are given to the poorest twenty percent of countries in any given year (Qian, 2014). They also argued that the reports of the United Nations, World Bank and OECD reveal that there were capacity constraints with aid. These included human and physical capital constraints, policy and institutional constraints, macroeconomic constraints, deficiencies in the way the international donor community delivered its foreign assistance; and, social and cultural constraints. (Feeny & De Silva, 2012)

While the quantity of aid remained a critical factor, other factors, such as aid quality and national policies impacted on growth development (Glennie & Prozzon, 2012). This is based on the long standing debate on the and economic impact of aid (Hoffer, 2012) and the lack of clarity on the mechanisms of delivery which had put recipient government at a loss of strategic direction for developing their countries given the conflicting aid conditions with home grown economic and social policies (Gil-Alana & Singh, 2014; Nowak-Lehmann et al., 2012). This is also because aid did not reflect the needs of recipient countries but the priorities of the donors (Hailu & Tsukada, 2012; Vandemoortele, 2011) and the evidence from studies which have concluded that aid dependence undermined institutional quality, weakened accountability, encouraged corruption and weakened the capacity to develop context specific policies due to imported policies and conditionalities which came with the aid (Kangoye, 2011).

For instance, Liberia's real economic growth declined from 7.43% in 2011 to 0.87% in 2014 despite the huge amounts of aid and the forecast for 2016 has been put at 5% which is still less than the growth rate of 2011(IMF, 2015). There was also the challenge of corruption which impacted on poverty levels and made widened the inequality gap (Beekman et al., 2013). Furthermore, donors largely failed to understand the enormity of the gap between their governments and the recipient government did not have the capacity and resources to build weaker versions of the donor country systems and this resulted in the quality of aid delivery making them weaker and more aid dependent than ever (Thomas, 2012).

Synthesis, Analysis and Implications for this Study

The literature reviewed revealed that the studies have been a mix of quantitative and qualitative case study and comparative approaches, given the nature of debate and the need to ensure the use of evidence in arguing for results. For the quantitative studies, the authors used data from country statistics and public available and accredited sources (OECD, 2014; Juselius et al., 2012) while the qualitative studies focused on using theory to explain poverty and its impact on growth and development as well as how poverty reduction and growth strategies have either worked or otherwise. In their studies the authors use several theories and concepts in which they have admitted to the growing ambiguity in the political environment which accounted for the conflicting policies on foreign aid, application of poverty reduction and growth strategies as well as financing options (Ogundipe et al., 2014; Hailu & Tsukada, 2012; Vandemoortele 2011). It is against this background that the Ambiguity and Multiple Streams (MSF) theory by

(Kingdon, 1995) has been used for the study. Samples were drawn from Low Income Countries (LICs) which were either recovering from conflicts or were characterized as poor given the use of the Human Development Index (HDI). All of these cases were from Sub-Saharan Africa including Liberia.

Globally, the world has made efforts to end poverty and the fundamental controversy over poverty has been its definition given that poverty has been largely defined 'absolute' and 'relative' (Kaka & lanui, 2014). These efforts have largely been driven by rich countries that provide development assistance. In a bid to build consensus, they have used the platform of the United Nations supported by International Financial Institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to provide legitimacy for these efforts. These efforts have been focused more on Least Developed Countries (LDCs) most of which are in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. Liberia which is still recovering from a conflict fourteen years after it has ended remains poor (UNDP, 2014) and largely depends on donor funding to meet its development need (OECD, 2014). A summary of the policy and strategic measures taken are summarized below.

The Lagos Plan of Action was built on the ideology of Pan-Africanism and presented a bold step by Africa to take responsibility for ending poverty and achieving economic growth but as (Confraria & Godinho, 2015; UNECA, 1991) argued, it failed for a number of reasons among which were its inability to transform Africa's poverty including persistent fall in output of goods and services (Motsamai & Qaba, 2012), lack of an implementation strategy as well as uncertainty on how the plan was to be financed (Adedeji, 2004; 1991) and recalcitrant governments (Kwame et al., 2011).

The World Bank which was against the plan issued its own plan for Africa known as the Breg report (World Bank, 1981) titled 'Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Agenda for Action' (World Bank, 2011). The central recommendation of this report led to the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP). The Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) were introduced to Low Income Countries most of which were in Sub Sharan Africa (IMF, 2015: 2011; World Bank, 2015) and was built on lending framework to poor countries that needed the support of the IMF and the World Bank with macroeconomic conditions such as currency devaluation, budget deficits, privatisation of state owned entities, flexible interest rates controlled by market forces rather than the state (IMF, 2014).

However, studies by (Flew, 2014; Brown et al., 2013; Pierre, 2013; Sharma, 2013; Kingston et al., 2011) argued that SAP was a failure as it resulted in increased poverty and economic hardship for many African countries including Liberia. In contrast, (Naqvi, 2014; Jinjarak et al., 2013) argued that SAP had positive effect on African countries based on their case studies. Similarly, (Sulaiman et al., 2014) using Nigeria as a case study concluded that that SAP was beneficial to the growth of an economy and it enhances the stability of the economy but admitted that certain economic problems which Nigeria faced could be attributed to SAP. The World Bank (2012) in its study concluded that SAP produced mixed results sparking the controversy on the effectiveness of SAP. While the methods used in assessing SAP were well known, (Pierre, 2013), proffered solutions were alien to the context of the countries and derived from policies that had very little relevance to the economic conditions that the IMF and the World Bank demanded (Devarajan, 2013; Obeng-Odoom, 2013).

Following the problems associated with SAP, the World Bank and the IMF introduced the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) they were set to reduce poverty, promote growth and external financing needs through a country's social, structural and macroeconomic needs (IMF, 2011) and were based on core principles which included country ownership, results orientation, comprehensive approach, partnership framework and long term outlook (Canagarajah & Diesen, 2011).

Various studies by by (Olinto et al., 2013; Fosu, 2012; Mils & Herbst, 2012; AfDB, 2011) argued that SAP has had a positive impact on African economies based on GDP performance. But Devarajan (2013), argued that many countries including Liberia have GDP accounts which use old methods, population censuses are out of date, and poverty estimates are infrequent and often not comparable over time. Similarly, (Sneyd, 2015; Asongu, 2014; Hickey, 2013; Fisher at al., 2012; Bartlett, 2011; Apodaca, 2010; Adejumobi, 2006) in their studies argued that the PRSPs were heavily influenced by the World Bank and IMF and the results were rather misleading and resulted in increased poverty. Despite the criticisms and flaws with the PRSPs, the IMF (2015) decided that it will continue the PRSP approach particularly with countries under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative which includes Liberia who will be subject to PRS documentation procedures as defined by the Bank.

Liberia in particular had three Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers which included the interim PRSP 2006-2208, the short term PRSP titled 'Lift Liberia'; 2008-2011 and the medium term PRSP 2012-2017 titled ‘Agenda for Transformation’ which is the medium term plan to meet Liberia’s 2030 vision of Liberia being a middle income country. Related to this is the Millennium Development Gaols which were agreed to by United Nations member states in 2000 which committed member states to a new global partnership encapsulated in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to reduce poverty by half within a 15-year period (UNDP, 2014; Barimah & Diko, 2013; Vandemoortele, 2011).

As a strategy and framework for financing poverty reduction, countries including Liberia structured their poverty reduction plans and program to achieve the MDGs (IMF, 2012; Republic of Liberia, 2012; 2008). While the UNDP reports (2012; 2013; 2014; 2015) noted that there was a global achievement on all the gaols, it however admitted that the achievements left much to be desired. Several studies by (Fehling, et al, 2013; Friedman, 2013; Oya, 2011; Richard et al., 2011; Hulne, 2010; Amin, 2006) argued that the MDGs were less than satisfactory for various reason ranging from poor and unreliable data, failure to address poverty, heavy dependence on aid, weak absorptive capacity and its narrow focus on growth rather than the wider dimensions of poverty among others. Liberia met only three of the eight MDGs. Goal 3 on gender equality, Goal 6 on the treatment of HIV/AIDs, malaria and other diseases and Goal 8 on global partnership (AfDB, 2015; UNDP, 2015; UN task team, 2015).

Aid has been and remains the main resource for Liberia which has been channeled largely through debt relief and project aid (ODI, 2015; World Bank, 2014). Liberia has been a huge beneficiary of ODA most of which have been grants and soft loans given its fragile nature and slow recovery from the 14-year civil conflict. However, the results have been less than satisfactory and very little has changed as 81.9 percent of the populations are multidimensionally poor, while an additional 12.9 percent are near multidimensional poverty (UNDP, 2014). Furthermore, outbreak of the Ebola Disease Virus (EVD) in 2014 in Liberia was a stark reality that aid in the health sector was not having the right impact (ODI, 2015; Petit et al., 2013; Stanturf et al., 2015). Following the expiration of the MDGs, member states of the United Nations in September 2015 agreed to a new set of goals called the Sustainable Development Goals or the "Global Goals" (UNDP, 2015). However, the concept of sustainable development is not new and has always been the desire of nations characterised with different assumptions based on the various disciplinary approaches and diverse institutions which has resulted in a plethora of ideas on the best way to achieve sustainable development (Ciegis, 2015; Pearce et al., 2013; Eliott, 2012).

In view of this, there have been several efforts to ensure effective financing of the SDGs which included the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing established by the United Nations in 2013, the Common Africa Position which included proposals on financing the SDGs and the Financing for Development Conference (FFD3) by the UN member states which also had recommendations on financing the SDGs. These efforts in summary concluded that that there was no one policy solution to the problem of financing the sustainable development gaols recommending a cohesive approach with national financing strategies and made a series of generic options leaving the choice of strategy and approach to each country

(AU, 2014; UN, 2014). Furthermore studies by (OECD, 2015; Kharas et al., 2014; World Bank, 2014; Sachs, 2012) on financing the SDGs focusing on developing countries including Liberia concluded that there is a need for a shift in policy and strategies to finance the Sustainable Development Goals given the dwindling aid flows and economic recession as well as the fact that rich countries will also have to dedicate resources to address the poverty gaps in their own countries; but has left the choice of policy shifts and strategies to each country to determine what works best and how. Liberia must therefore make a transformational shift and walk away from its dark history of poverty and conflict. Therefore, this study is important for the government and people of Liberia as well as its partners in making Liberia a middle-income country by 2030.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study is to improve the understanding of how post-2015 development goals can be financed in Liberia, based on the current challenges Liberia experienced with financing the MDGs. The first two chapters provided a background of the study as well as a review and analysis of current literature focusing on what is known about poverty reduction, growth, and development financing in Liberia and efforts that have been made to address poverty reduction and its financing as well as the challenges that exist. Evidence from the literature revealed that despite the efforts made, none of the cases reviewed adequately addressed Liberia's inability to achieve the MDGs and finance its development plans. The MSF theory provides the appropriate framework for understanding an ambiguous policy environment where there needs to be a coupling of Kingdon's three streams of problems, policy and politics in deciding the most appropriate policy and strategy for addressing poverty reduction and financing development in a poor or low-income country.

In view of Liberia's need to achieve its development goals, the research questions for this study require an in-depth understanding of what policy shifts are required to finance poverty reduction in Liberia and the qualitative study designed with the MSF theory as the theoretical foundation will provide an understanding to policy makers and scholars of what these policy shifts might be and how they can be applied in order to eradicate poverty in Liberia and make it a middle income country by 2030. This chapter outlines the research methodology, including a description of the key concepts used in the study. It describes the research design, participants in the study, role of the researcher, instruments used for data collection, steps taken to protect the participants in the study, and data analysis plan. The chapter ends with an explanation of how ethical issues will be handled and how data will be verified and made trustworthy.

Research Design and Rationale

This qualitative case study is aimed at understanding how Liberia can finance its post-2015 development goals. The guiding research questions include:

Central Question: What policy shifts should Liberia make to finance its post-2015 goals?

Sub-questions:

What are the perceived policy gaps related to financing the MDGs in Liberia?

How did these policy gaps impede the financing of the MDGs in the water and health sectors?

What policies and or strategies are needed to ensure improved financing of the post---2015 development goals in Liberia?

The study will help in understanding the various policies and strategies that guide poverty reduction and development financing in Liberia, their impact, why they fell short, and how they were addressed. It will also provide a deeper understanding of why poverty is still rife in Liberia despite the huge foreign aid received and what needs to be done differently given the dwindling ODA to the country from US$1.5billion in 2008 to US$820 million in 2016 with ODA making 43% of GNI as against over 70% in 2008 (Development Initiatives, 2016).

At the problem stream, the set of conditions underlying the problems of financing poverty reduction and development in Liberia will be explored to understand how poverty has impacted on Liberians and why previous poverty reduction strategies regarding development efforts fell short of addressing the poverty challenges. The policy stream will consider the various policy options, ideas, and strategies for financing development that exist, the extent of their applicability to Liberia's context in meeting its 2030 vision and SDGs and how they might impact on Liberia. The politics stream will seek to understand the diverse interests, proposed solutions, how they might be implemented, and what influence the various interest groups might have in shaping proposed solutions and actions. The study will help in improving the understanding of and clarifying what works under conditions of ambiguity and time constraints in the political environment using the MSF theory as the lens for the study.

My understanding of the key concepts in this study remained important in understanding Liberia's case, what policy options are available, and how they can be applied in the country. In this study, Extreme poverty refers to those who live on less than \$1.90 a day (World Bank, 2016). According to the Brundtland Report (1987), Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own need. Development finance here is described as all mechanisms for raising funds for development that are complementary to official development assistance, predictable and stable, and closely linked to the idea of global public goods (UNDESA, 2012). Poverty Reduction Strategy papers refers to documents which assess poverty challenges, describe how macroeconomic, structural, and social policies and programs can promote growth and reduce poverty, and outline external financing needs and the associated sources of financing. They are prepared by governments in low-income countries generally through a participatory process involving domestic stakeholders and external development partners" (IMF, 2015).

The qualitative case study is an approach to research that facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources which is different from a quantitative study which is used to quantify data that can be translated int statistical information. This ensures that the issue is not explored through one lens, but rather a variety of lenses which allows for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Case studies are focused on the unit of analysis rather than the method used to collect and analyse data. It is important to note when case studies should be used. They should be used when the focus of the study is to answer the 'how' and 'why' questions, when you cannot manipulate the behaviour of those involved in the study and when you want to cover contextual conditions because you believe they are relevant to the phenomenon under study or the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context (Yin, 2003). Furthermore, case study research is an increasingly popular approach among qualitative researchers, which provides methodological flexibility through the incorporation of different paradigmatic positions, study designs, and methods (Hyett et al., 2014)

The study was a qualitative case study based on the constructivist paradigm which helps to understand the efforts that have been made to finance poverty reduction and development that were implemented given that these efforts were bounded by time and activity (Creswell, 2013). Given that Liberia is a unique case in itself, the study facilitated the exploration of a phenomenon within the context using a variety of sources which ensured that the issue was explored through several lenses to allow for multiple facets of the case to be revealed and understood (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The case study approach enabled participants in the research tell their stories and describe their views of why past efforts failed, what a new policy shift should look like and how the new development goals for Liberia can be financed. This enabled me as the researcher to understand participants proposed policy shifts and action within constraints of time and ambiguity (Zahariadis, 2014; Creswell, 2013; Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2003; Robottom & Hart, 1993).

The study also required that participants were given the opportunity to share their perceptions and views on how poverty reduction and development can be financed which enabled me as the researcher draw on multiple sources of data that respond to the research question (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009) which ensured that the study was guided by a world view given this is a global problem and as argued by (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Furthermore, Case study has proven particularly useful for studying evaluating programs, and informing policy (Merriam, 2009). While there are other approaches to qualitative research which include phenomenology, grounded theory, narrative and ethnography, they were appropriate for this study. For instance, a narrative approach was not appropriate because according to Creswell and Denzin & Lincoln, a narrative approach focuses on the lived experiences of a few people which is not the situation in this study. The study required drawing experiences from multiple sources as the intention was to focus on not less than 10 participants and the review of key documents and reports from which analysis was done and a narrative approach cannot do this. Ethnography was also not appropriate for this study given that the focus of ethnography is a homogenous intact group bounded by culture (Creswell, 2013 p.123). As an approach, phenomenology was not appropriate for this study given as an approach it looks at the "lived experiences" through prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationships of meaning (Moustaas, 1994).

This study went beyond that and secondary sources of information which are varied as the study involved in-depth interviews from institutions and organisations who implemented the poverty reduction strategies. While a grounded theory may have been appropriate and not ruled out, it was not the focus of this study. The study aimed to have an in-depth understanding of the conditions under which the poverty challenges have persisted and how policies, strategies and financing mechanisms have failed in the past with a view to making policy choices under the context of ambiguity and time constraints.

The Role of the Researcher

In qualitative studies the researcher is considered as an instrument of data collection (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Therefore, I did clarify my role in this research by clarifying aspects of myself including biases, assumptions, expectations and experiences in the conduct of the research (Greenbank, 2003). This resonates well with Creswell (2013) who explained that in qualitative research, the researcher has a personal history that situates them as enquirers. As the researcher, my world view which is constructivist in nature and my experience was brought to bear. I have experienced poverty and its impact living in poor cities across West Africa including Nigeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Ghana. I have alas been involved as a development policy analyst in shaping the Sustainable Development Goals and financing for development initiatives while working in coloration with United Nations Agencies and the Liberian government in particular. My knowledge of poverty reduction and development finance was very useful in designing the interview guides, selecting participants for the study as well as conducting the interviews.

Research Methodology

As much as methods in qualitative study are dependent on this issue being studied, decisions on methodology are dependent on the design and should be done in advance rather than developing or modifying this using the research (Maxwell, 2013). This section outlines the methods employed in this study. It includes a description of the study population, sample size and sampling strategy, the data collection instruments, how the data was collected, managed and analyzed. It also includes how data was treated to ensure that the results were trustworthy as well as how ethical issues were handled.

Participant Selection Logic

It was important that the bounded area of study is defined in every qualitative case study (Creswell, 2013). This study was about how the Sustainable Development Goals can be financed in Liberia with a focus on the health and water sectors. All the departments of government have a responsibility for planning, implementing, monitoring and financing Liberia’s 2030 vision (Republic of Liberia, 2012). The participants for the study were drawn from key ministries and departments in the government of Liberia as well as form the donor and civil society communities in the country. A total of 15 participants were selected. All participants were drawn from within the country given that the focus is on Liberia. However, follow up discussions and interviews were necessary based on the responses and review of documents in the process. As the researcher, I was responsible for leading the data collection process, managing the data and ensuring that data collected is valid and useable for the analysis and interpretation.

Sample Size

Samples for qualitative studies are generally much smaller than those used in quantitative studies (Mason, 2010). The sample size in qualitative research was deliberately decided by the researcher based on a purposeful sampling which looks at the quality of the sample rather than quantity. This meant that the inquirer selected individuals and sites for the study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon of the study (Creswell, 2013 p.156). Considering the five approaches by Creswell (2013), it is clear that the sample size ranges from just a single individual in the case of a narrative to a maximum of 20 which could be in an ethnographic or case study. This does not in any way imply a prescriptive figure for qualitative sampling but rather a range that shows that the size is quite minimal, but the quality and purpose of the sample is more important than the size. The size therefore is a function of the design, methodology and approach. Determining adequate sample size in qualitative research is ultimately a matter of judgment and experience in evaluating the quality of the information collected against the uses to which it will be put, the research method and purposeful sampling strategy employed, and the research product intended (Sandelowsk, 1995).

In determining the sample size for my study, I employed purposeful sampling which is mostly used in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). While there are several strategies of purposeful sampling in qualitative research, the concept requires careful consideration before choosing a particular strategy given that in many cases a thin line separates one strategy from another, and the choice should be based on the design and purpose of the study. Furthermore, purposeful sampling focuses on selecting information rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study (Patton, 2002 p. 230).

Given that my research was designed as a case study, I used a sample size of 15. This is because the individuals to be interviewed were diverse cutting across government departments, donors and civil society organisations and the quality was the focus. This was supported with review of documents and observations that ensured that the analysis was supported with clear evidence that informed the outcome. I further ensured maximum variation to ensure that all perspectives in responding to the research questions were reflected. While efforts were made to ensure that data was collected from all possible sources identified, the process was discontinued when I realized that there was saturation or no new information.

The sampling strategy and approach was purposeful given that this is a case study. Purposeful sampling focuses on selecting information rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study (Patton, 2002).

Sampling Technique

Purposeful sampling was used here. In his book, Maxwell (2013) outlined five possible goals of purposeful sampling. These include achieving representativeness given that it is a small size, capturing heterogeneity in the population; identifying cases that are critical for testing the theory, establish comparison and establish the most productive relationships.

A combination of sampling techniques were employed for this study. The first was the snowball sampling technique which requires an initial contact with a few potential respondents and then referrals are made to other possible respondents who may have more and new information. This technique is used where identification of participants in a research may be difficult Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). The second was the maximum variation sampling which is about purposefully picking a wide range of participants who have diverse interests, and this will include documents and reports of diverse variations. This enabled me to have a clearer understanding of how donors funded Liberia and offered me the opportunity to document unique variations (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013) and how they perceive the country should approach and fund its 2030 strategy. A third technique was the politically important cases sampling which seeks to increase the usefulness of the information based on the prevailing political interests and ensured that I did not lean on any particular political interest regarding policy and strategy in the research.

Gaining Access

There was a need to gain access to interviewees, documents and other information which were very necessary for the study. My primary source of contact and information was the Liberia Ministry of Finance and Development Planning. This is in view of the fact that the Ministry of finance and economic planning coordinates donor assistance and oversees the economic management and development planning for Liberia. Approval was sought from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Walden University with approval number 08-04-17-0473311.

The finance ministry referred me to other possible respondents as well. Other documents like donor reports and sector performance reports were also provided as pointers to possible respondents in the health and water sectors for the study. To ensure transparency and credibility of the study, the purpose of the study, why they have been selected to participate, the usefulness of the study to them, the government and people of Liberia and how the results will be used were explained to them. They were also informed of their ability to decline or accept to participate.

Data Collection

As a reflection of the MSF theory, the case study approach considers data collection techniques from multiple data sources that view the problem from different perspectives as well as ensure that data collected is rich and credible given the nature of the study. Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audio-visuals material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case-based themes (Creswell, 2006).

I used the interview method to collect my data. As a method of data collection in qualitative research, the interview method is an organised exchange in communication which can take different forms which could be between structured and unstructured in nature with semi-structured sitting in between (Gill et al., 2008). In broad terms, it could be done as a face-to-face interview which is a situation where the interviewer and interviewee are physically in the same location and are seeing each other without any barrier or “not in person” which would include Skype, emailing, video conferencing, synchronous chat or other forms that do not require a face-to-face conversation.

The strengths of the face-to-face interview are that issues can be discussed in-depth; the body language can give more information and help the interviewer understand the issues being discussed. There is also the fact that the researcher can put a face to the issues as well as raise follow-up questions. Furthermore, questions and issues can be redirected in real time once there is new information coming up in the initial answers. The interviewee can give the interviewer a lot of extra information that can be added to the verbal answer of the interviewee on a question. Furthermore, in face-to-face interviews there is no significant time delay between question and answer; the interviewer and interviewee can directly react on what the other says or does which makes the answer spontaneous and less cautious or conservative. However, face-to-face interviews are time consuming when they are not properly managed, responses can be false due to the physical presence of the researcher, the presence of the researcher can lead to disturbing effects on the interviewee especially where there is an absence of an interview protocol. In view of this, all interviews will be conducted using an interview guide to ensure uniformity and relevance of the study (Patton, 2015).

While information from documents and reports were collected and used, primary data were collected through face-to-face interviews as the first option and where this was not possible, telephone or skype interviews served as alternative options given that in some cases a participant may be constrained with time and space. While this may have denied me the advantage of seeing the person and increase the cost of data collecting via internet costs or telephone bills but the participants were able to respond to the questions. While the interviews were conversational and allowed for open ended responses and in-depth discussions, the interview guide was used in managing my time as the researcher as well as the participant’s flexibility to keep within the limits of the discussions and ensure the interviews were systematic and professional (Patton, 2015). Where it was possible to secure the time and opportunity of a participant, an alternative participant was selected. A field assistant was also be recruited and trained for no less than one week on the issues and processes to be followed. However, the role of the field assistant was no longer necessary following the advice of the IRB and to ensure confidentiality.

The interview process was in two stages. The first stage was the consent seeking stage which involved building a relationship or rapport with the participant and getting their written consent. This was with the use of the written consent forms after approval was sought from the IRB. This stage involved a detailed explanation of the purpose of the research, its relevance and use and how the participant will be protected from being identified. This enabled the participant to sign the consent form and keep a participant's copy. The second stage was the interview itself where I asked the structured but open-ended questions using the interview guide provided in appendix D. The interviews were conducted at a location identified and deemed safe by both parties where there was be no disruptions to ensure that the participant was focused to comfortably and effectively engage in the interview as well as work within the agreed time. The participant had access to the interview notes to verify them as part of the process to create trust and validate the information provided.

In addition to individual interviews, some information that involved the views of International non-governmental organizations and local civil society organizations, on their perceptions in implementing poverty reduction initiatives were collected through discussions. Through this method, information was collected fast and helped to verify previous information collected from government as they shared their experiences.

All data collected were transcribed and stored in one laptop, a desktop, an external hard drive and google drive to ensure that there were multiple copies and very minimal risk to loss of data. These files were pass worded to ensure data protection and confidentiality. There were also hard copies which were stored in a file in my personal study which only myself had access to. Data were organized using the NVIVO software and files in the software were the primary working files for the analysis. The others served as backup.

Data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organizing the data, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes and then representing the data in figures, tables or a discussion (Creswell, 2013). Miles, Huberman & Saldana (2014) argued that data analysis happens alongside data collection. In view of this, I employed a four-phase process as outlined by Creswell (2013; 2009). The first was to organize and prepare the data for analysis. This involved the use of journaling and organizing data as they were collected onsite from interviewees, documents and reports. I made notes and observations on documents and responses, developed daily journals from my field interviews and observations or discussions and entered them into the computer systems as well as store daily notes and data captured. The second phase was the reading and memoing by reading the transcripts from the field and journals made to make sense of the data and using short phrase and ideas that helped in organizing them into groups of responses and ideas that are common based on the notes made and journal reviews.

The third phase was the detailed analysis with a coding process. At this phase, I employed the use of the NVIVO software. The process of coding involved aggregating the text or visual data into small categories of information seeking evidence for the code (Creswell, 2013). This also helped in understanding the big picture and the emerging common themes including gaps that existed. I also used this phase to seek further understanding of what these gaps were and how they could be addressed. The process also involved recoding where it was necessary after the review. The fourth phase was the interpretation, description and representing the data. This stage involved the use of the NVIVO software in the initial coding and transforming them into themes and patterns.

This then followed with a report writing and triangulation as a means of reducing bias and ensuring trustworthiness.

Issue of Trustworthiness

Reliability in qualitative research indicates that the researcher's approach is consistent throughout the process Creswell, 2013; Gibbs, 2007). I documented all my procedures, obtained detailed field notes by transcribing the records of my interviews and blind coding them to ensure that they were protected and supported by a database that is computer assisted. I decided to use the NVIVO software in this case. As the researcher, I was the only one coding the responses and frames to avoid multiple uses and meanings to codes.

To improve trustworthiness and reliability, I employed strategies recommended by (Creswell, 2013; 2009; Maxwell, 2013). These included prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field to build trust with the participants. The period for the field work was four weeks and this was used in building on existing relationships I had while working in Liberia and particularly with government officials and development partners. Another strategy is triangulation which involves corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective (Creswell, 2013). A third strategy I used was peer review, which provided an external check on my research process and results. Related to this was an n external audit check on the process and results and finally I cross checked the results with the participants which is known as member checking.

Ethical Procedures

Generally, there are always ethical concerns in research. In qualitative research, this is even all the more important given that the researcher is not distant from the research and there will always be interaction between individuals and groups with the researchers. The major perceived ethical issues I envisaged included;

Do No Harm: This ethical issue was high on my research because it is about ensuring that the study does not cause any harm to the participants and organisations involved. As a qualitative research, it may seem that very little harm is expected but the information being collected and the process of collecting the data may do harm to the participants. For instance, information on budget expenditures and perceived corruption in the financing of development projects may do harm to the participants. It was therefore important that I made explicit any possible harm of this research.

Privacy and Anonymity: Participants in my study would normally expect some form of privacy and anonymity and this is even the more critical if they are sharing sensitive information on government business or are not officially authorised to share such information. Privacy and anonymity remained very important in my study and it is an ethical issue that I watched out for in the course of collecting, interpreting and using data.

Confidentiality: Here the perceived risk was based on the fact that any individual participating in the research would expect that the information provided is treated in a confidential manner as well as used solely for the research purpose and no more.

Consequently, the participant expects that I do not give such information to anyone else. Identity and information protection are the main issues.

Informed Consent: This ethical issue was about getting the consent of the participant to collect information and use it for the research purpose only. It required that I inform the participant of the nature of the study and make it very clear that the participant has a choice to or not to participate without any form of coercion. This also meant using a specified template or form to ensure that there was a written consent given by the participant and this form contain enough and detailed information that ensure that the participant was satisfied to provide or decline consent. It should be noted that consent implies the capacity to withhold consent and understand what is being consented to (Stevens, 2013).

Unwanted intrusion: As an ethical issue, this consisted of regular reviews of my actions to ensure I was not intruding into the participant's space, time and their personal lives.

Improper behaviour: This 9s about how I conduct myself personally as the researcher and ensure that my conduct is professional and transparent such that the information, I collect is credible and should not be questioned based on my conduct towards the participant and the organisations involved.

To mitigate these ethical risks, I ensured that every participant was well briefed and understood the nature of the study and information required using a briefing pack and an informed consent form which they would have to sign up to after their briefing and they will be allowed to pull out at any time during the research. Official and written permission was sought from institutions and private person who provided the information and clarity on their use was sought through a written permission. Furthermore, information was coded and stored in protective places to ensure that there was no leakage. Coding was used to ensure confidentiality and protection of identity of data providers. For instance, the use of NVIVO software in coding and grouping responses to ensure that no one response was identified with a respondent. Informed consent was sought before interviews or discussion on data collection to ensure the participants were aware of the study and able to comfortably be interviewed. This was captured in an informed consent form and a copy shared with the participant. I also ensured that informed consent was continuous and periodical to ensure that the participant was fully aware, and some authors recommended a model of continuous or process consent where the researcher reaffirms consent throughout the research process (Stevens, 2013).

Summary

The main purpose of this chapter was to describe the methodology and the entire plan for the research which focused on the rationale for the study, the sample size, data collection and analysis plan as well as steps taken to address issues of reliability and trustworthiness. The chapter also addressed ethical concerns and how they were mitigated.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

There is a problem with how SDGs will be financed in Liberia. A review of the literature showed that despite the fact that Liberia benefited from some of the highest ODA per capita in the world, it was only able to meet three of the eight MDGs and 81.9% of Liberians remain below the poverty line. The problem of financing new SDGs remains a challenge given the global economic crisis and dwindling aid to Africa and Liberia.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to provide an understanding of how Liberia can finance its. The study was conducted to examine effective and appropriate policies in an ambiguous environment using the MSF theory. The central research question that guided the study was:

Central Question: What policy shifts should Liberia make to finance its post-2015 goals? Three sub questions were asked:

SQ1: What are the perceived policy gaps related to financing MDGs in Liberia?

SQ2: How did these policy gaps impede the financing of MDGs in the water and health sectors of Liberia?

SQ3: What policies or strategies are needed to ensure improved financing of post-2015 development goals in Liberia?

In this chapter, I present the results of the study. I begin with an introduction and then describe the research setting followed by a description of the demographics of research participants and how the data were collected. I also describe how the data were analyzed in response to the research questions and include a description of how issues of trustworthiness were handled. I end with a summary of the entire chapter**.**

Setting

Data collection for this study was done just before the presidential elections in Liberia which were held in November 2017. Liberia was hugely dependent on aid because of weak systems, corruption, and lack of human capacity to design and implement programs. Some participant responses may have been influenced by the presidential elections.

Demographics

Data for this study were collected from individuals in various departments of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning as well as donor agencies in implementing MDGs in Liberia as well as local civil society organizations representatives as a result of referrals during individual interviews. To ensure data was representative of the diversity among actors, three broad categories of participants were selected (donors, policy staff, and civil society organization) based on their involvement in the financing and implementation of MDGs as a result of referral to organizations during discussions with the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning and were interviewed using open-ended questions. In all, 15 participants (nine from the ministry of finance, three from the donor agencies and three from civil society organizations) were interviewed.

All participants were selected from a pool list provided by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning. The final list of participants, which included nine men and six women, was selected without the knowledge and influence of the ministry.

Therefore, the total number of people interviewed was 15. The number of participants from each category is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Number of Participants by Source, Location, and Frequency

Individual interviews	Source	Location	Number of participants
	Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning	Monrovia	9
	Development partners (Donors)	Monrovia	3
	Civil Society Organizations	Monrovia	3
	Total		15

Data Collection Process

Qualitative data were collected through key informant interviews and a review of documents. Before field work started, I sought and obtained the approval of the Walden University IRB on November 14, 2017 with approval number 08-04-17-0473311. The notice of approval was deposited at the Office of the Assistant Minister for Expenditure in the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning for information as required. I was then assigned a ministry staff to support me with information gathering and guidance through the documents and different offices and agencies under the Ministry.

The ministry of finance and economic planning staff introduced me to the departments and helped in identifying the first set of potential participants. The potential participants were contacted through phone and face-to-face discussions, and those who agreed to participate in the study were listed and appointments were made for interviews. The ministry staff did not know the eventual participants as some others were determined through the snowball sampling technique. Snowball sampling is a situation where a participant in a research refers the researcher to another potential participant who may provide more information or data that the researcher needs. This final list was purposively selected based on the participants' knowledge and experience regarding financing and implementing MDGs and national development priorities of Liberia as encapsulated within he poverty reduction strategy paper.

In all cases, consent was obtained (verbally and in writing) before interviews were conducted. Each was given copies of the signed consent form. Each participant had the opportunity to review the consent form and it was explained to them that both verbal and signed consent forms had the same outcome and it was for them to choose how they wanted to express their consent. Before the interviews commenced, interview dates, venues, and times of day were agreed upon and confirmed in advance before the actual interviews. Each participant was told the purpose and benefits of the research and the fact that it was voluntary, and their participation or nonparticipation would not affect them in any way. I emphasized throughout that the research was for purely academic purposes and the results would not be used for any purpose other than what was stated. I assured each of them that their names were not required and would not be linked to any information they provided. All interviews were conducted face-to-face in a location chosen by the participant. Once these individuals agreed to participate and gave their consent, the interviews commenced. Individual interviews took an average of 1 hour and 15 minutes due to participants wanting to provide explanation for some of their responses.

Besides individual interviews, further work was done reviewing documents and reports as a means of obtaining details regarding information that was provided and triangulating information obtained through interviews and initial discussions with the Ministry of Finance. During the interviews, reference was made to ministerial cabinet meeting decisions. These were all verified through document reviews, and information available in hard copies were photocopied and stored separately in files.

All data were recorded in a field notebook and later typed and imported into NVivo. Daily journals were also kept for every day of the interview. Through this, all observations, notes, and key issues were recorded. Some of these included sources of information given by the participants like reports and meeting minutes, links to other key informants, and appointments. The data collection process was smooth, and no incidence was recorded throughout the 2 weeks that the interviews lasted. In the following subsection, I present a description of how the data were analyzed.

Data Analysis

I started data analysis on the field by ensuring that the data collected were prepared and organized. This involved ensuring that the information was carefully typed, and the interview transcripts for those interviews that the participants agreed to proofread (member-checking) were proofread and corrected where necessary. The set of interview scripts was then organized according to research question to ensure that there were no data gaps. As data collection was going on, recurring codes were noted in the daily journal, such that by the end of the interview, the first set of codes had already been generated. Once the data were imported into NVivo, further codes were generated and later transformed into categories. The codes and categories generated from individual interviews are discussed in the following sections.

Data analysis from interviews

RQ1: What were the policy gaps related to financing the MDGs in Liberia? This question aimed to explore the experience of participants in the implementation of the MDGs in the country. Specifically, I sought to know whether there were any policy gaps, and if there were, whether these policy gaps impeded or impacted on the nature of results. I also sought to discover from participants whether any measures were taken, and finally If these measures improved the financing for the MDGs. The answers to these questions were meant to lead naturally to the next question about how these policy gaps and challenges impeded the financing of the MDGs.

The codes that emerged were descriptions of various policy related challenges which included Corruption, over reliance on foreign aid, weak finance management systems, lack of policy direction and strategy for planning and management, poor planning and management, corrupt political leadership, strategies for financing were not home-grown and were not fit for Liberia, donor aid was not reaching the poorest, most of the aid was spent on the expatriates rather than on the Liberian people, Technical expertise was not home-grown, weak coordination among government agencies, support was donor driven and not government driven, conflicting donor policies, approach to financing was not participatory, community participation was totally absent and in a few cases where they existed, very weak, poor popular participation, disregard for the Liberian technocrats/civil servants, weak staff capacity, high staff turnover, weak tax system, poor tax management, weak fiscal policy, weak institutional capacity, weak civil society engagement, weak local/decentralized governance systems, irresponsible leadership, decentralized financing is absent, Ministry of finance leadership are not true Liberians, corrupt/opaque trade agreements on natural resource exploitation, private sector corruption, unnecessary tax incentives, weak civil society knowledge of the issues, unwillingness of the people to pay tax and weak domestic revenue mobilization . Most of these issues were similar in nature and implied the same thing but stated differently. Although they were stated differently, similar codes were brought together under one category. A common category that explained other codes was identified to stand for the others. For example, corruption, corrupt political leadership and corrupt trade agreements were taken to mean the same thing. In this case, corruption was used as the main category to describe the issues. However, certain codes given by participants were left unchanged given that they were repeated severally by participants. Responses that were outliers (for example, Ministry of finance leadership not true Liberians and weak domestic resource mobilization) were transformed into categories as they were given. Table 2 provides a summary of how these categories were obtained.

Table 2

How Categories and Frequencies were identified for RQ1 (table continues)

Codes	Category	Frequency

Corruption (3) Corrupt political leadership (8) Private sector was corrupt (2) Corrupt trade agreements (2)	Corruption	15
Weak institutional capacity (10) Weak staff capacity (1)	Weak institutional and human capacity	11
Weak domestic resource mobilization (10)	Weak Domestic Resource Mobilization	10
Leadership of the Ministry of finance not true Liberians (1)	Leadership of the Ministry of finance not true Liberians (1)	1

tTe responses to RQ1 were summarized as presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Summary of Categories From Responses to RQ1 (table continues)

Research question	Category	Frequency

Q1. What were the policy gaps related to financing the MDGs in Liberia	Corruption	15
	Irresponsible leadership	13
	Weak policy and strategy	9
	Conflicting donor policies	11
	Aid was not effective in reaching the target population	13
	Poor planning and management	9
	Weak institutional and human capacity	14
	Weak civil society engagement	7
	Disregard for the Liberian civil servants/technocrats	2
	Weak Domestic Resource Mobilization	10
	Ministry of finance leadership not true Liberians	1
	Unwillingness of the people to pay tax	9
	Multiple data sources which were unreliable	12

From the responses, all 15 participants agreed that corruption was the most challenging issue to financing the MDGs. Anti-corruption policies were weak, and, in some cases, the justice system did not have the capacity to try corruption cases. They also claimed that the justice system was susceptible to corruption. Related to this was that 13 of the participants said irresponsible leadership was a huge challenge to financing the MDGs.

While this may not be a direct policy issue, on further probing, they claimed that the leadership was not willing and propositional in setting the right policies or addressing the policy gaps but were more interested in the contract payments and allowances they were getting from donor agencies under the guise of a post-conflict country. In relation to this, 9 of the participants claimed that their conflicting donor policies was a major policy challenge as donors were driving the MDG projects and there was no harmonized donor policy to guide all donors. It is probably for this reason that there were gaps in implementation as 13 participants claimed that development aid which Liberia largely relied on was not reaching the target population.

Of the entire participants, 9 claimed there was poor planning and management and weak policy and strategy in financing the MDGs while 14 participants claimed weak institutional and human capacity. Seven claimed that civil society engagement was weak which accounted for the weak policies and strategies for financing and linked it to the unwillingness of the people to pay tax.

From the responses to question one, the policy gaps relate to aid effectiveness, donor coordination, leadership, civil society engagement, capacity and people participation. It can also be seen that 10 respondents claimed that weak domestic resource mobilization was a policy gap. This implies that government's efforts at raising tax was very weak. One participant claimed that the Ministry of finance leadership were not true Liberian. On probing for further understanding, the participant claimed that the deputy-ministers in the ministry who though were Liberian nationals, were US citizens who were only brought in to manage the ministry and as such, did not understand the Liberian context as they had no lived experience of the war and were paid very huge amounts in US dollars. Two of the participants claimed that the expatriates and representatives of the aid agencies were not taking advise on strategies from the Liberian civil servants in the ministries and agencies. They felt the civil servants did not have capacity to provide strategic and technical support. How these issues impacted on meeting the MDGs are discussed in question 2.

RQ2: How did these policy gaps impede the financing of the MDGs in the water and health sectors?

The purpose of this question was to further understand how these policy gaps impeded the achievement of the MDGs. Though the focus was on the water and health sectors, they applied to the 8 MDG goals. In question one, participants identified the policy gaps. In this question, they were given the opportunity to explain these gaps and how they impacted negatively on meeting the MDGs.

The process of identifying categories was the same as was done for question 1. Where some of the codes were similar, a category which represented the rest was chosen and a combined frequency for all similar codes assigned to the emerging category as demonstrated in Table 4.

Table 4

Identification of Categories From Codes to Question 2

Codes	Category	Frequency

Donor interference in policy making (6) Conflicting donor policies was confusing and misleading (4) Over reliance on donor aid (3)	Over reliance on donors	13
Difficulty in planning and resource allocation (4) Data was misleading and impacting on planning, strategy and financing (5)	Poor planning and financing	9
Civil society could not engage in the budget process (5) Civil society were confused on which policy to engage in (6) The policy environment made civil society ineffective (3)	Limited civil society engagement	14
Most projects were uncompleted due to corruption (6) Corruption cases were not addressed (9)	Corruption not addressed	15
Programme delivery was adhoc and inefficient (4) Projects were left halfway (5)	Uncompleted projects and programs	9
Budgets were not fully utilized (4) Project funds were not utilized (9)	Weak absorptive capacity	13
Access to health was more difficult for the poor (2)		(table continues)

Access to safe water was almost impossible for communities (4)	Difficulty in accessing services	6
Civil servants became unhelpful because they were neglected (2)	Unhelpful civil servants	2

Some of the codes generated from the responses included: Donor interference in policy making, conflicting donor policies were confusing, projects fund underutilized, inefficient and adhoc programme delivery, difficulty in planning and resource allocation, corruption not addressed, inability of civil society to engage in the budget process, planning and strategy was not effective, uncompleted projects due to corruption, budget not utilized, disregard for budget and unhelpful civil servants. In all, 24 codes were identified for this question. These were re-grouped into eight (8) categories as presented in table 5.

Table 5

Summary of Categories From Responses to RQ2

Research question	Category	Frequency
Q2. How did these policy gaps impede the financing of the MDGs in the water and health sectors?	Over reliance on donors	13
	Poor planning and financing	9
	Limited civil society engagement	14
	Corruption not addressed	15
	Uncompleted projects and programs	9

Weak absorptive capacity	13
Difficulty in accessing services	6
Unhelpful civil servants	2

From the responses categorized, the issues relate to donor dependence on financing, institutional capacity in planning and financing, corruption, weak absorptive capacity, limited civil society engagement and leadership. Participants felt that the impact of these policy challenges on the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) led to the poor performance by Liberia. At least 14 complained that limited civil society engagement was a result of lack of a coherent policy on civic space in the country which meant that people could not help in shaping the policy processes and programme designed. All 15 participants claimed that the inability of the government to address corruption in the system was an outcome of policy and institutional weakness. Some of these participants claimed that even the donors were casting a blind eye to corrupt practices while other participants claimed that corruption was part of the leadership and as such the justice system was also compromised. A total of 13 participants claimed that due to the lack of clear policy guidance on fiscal responsibility and budget management, there was weak absorptive capacity even among donors to utilize budgets and complete projects. Related to this was the level of uncompleted projects as claimed by 9 participants. Six of the participants claimed that the policy gap in financing led to difficulty in accessing services in the health and water sectors as seen in the Ebola virus outbreak while 2 participants claimed that the civil servants became unhelpful due to the donors neglecting them in the process of policy making and financing mechanisms. They also claimed that donors were leading these processes and as such, it was difficult to advise them based on their knowledge of the local context.

RQ3: What policies and strategies are needed to ensure improved financing of post-2015 development goals in Liberia?

The purpose of this question was to explore the conditions under which policies and strategies might enhance development financing to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the commitments in the Liberia 2030 vision of becoming aa middle-income country by 2030. Codes for this question which emerged included: Improved Domestic Resource Mobilization, increase tax revenues, strengthen civil society engagement, make the budget process transparent, improve monitoring and evaluation, strengthen government leadership, strengthen institutional capacity, build trust between the people and government, improve planning and coordination mechanisms, ensure community ownership of programmers, improve donor coordination, strengthen public accountability, address the inequality in the tax system, ensure regulation of private sector financing and create and even distribution of wealth.

As was done for previous responses/codes, the similar ones were put together and a common category that most appropriately defines the like codes identified. A summary of these codes and categories for question 3 is shown in table 6.

Table 6

Summary of How Categories Were Identified for Similar Codes to RQ3

Codes	Category
Ensure legal and political space for civil society (5) Build capacity of civil society in development finance (3) Increase awareness of CSOs in SG financing (5)	Strengthen civil society engagement in the SDGs
Increase tax revenues (6) Strengthen tax collection (3) Improve Domestic Resource Mobilization (6)	Improve Domestic Resource Mobilization (15)
Strengthen parliamentary capacity in law making and budget processes (7) Strengthen the Liberia Revenue Authority (3) Strengthen the Liberia technocrats in policy monitoring and financing (5)	Strengthen institutional capacity (15)
Corrupt officials should be arrested and tried in the courts of law (6) The judiciary should proactively corrupt cases (3)	Address corruption

Table 7 shows the categories and their corresponding frequencies as summarized from the codes.

Table 7

Summary of Categories and Their Frequencies for RQ3

Research question	Category	Frequency
What policies and or strategies are needed to ensure improved financing of the post--- 2015 development goals in Liberia?	Strengthen institutional capacity	15
	Improve domestic resource mobilization	15
	Address corruption	14
	Strengthen natural resource governance	13
	Strengthen civil society engagement in the SDGs	13
	Adopt a people centered approach	13
	Strengthen Political leadership in policy and strategy	12
	Regulate private sector financing	10
	Strengthen public accountability	9
	Ensure transparency in financing processes	9
	Improve project and programme monitoring	5
	Decentralize financing to empower Counties	4
	Financing policies should focus on women and youths	3
	Improve donor coordination	3

From the responses, the two important policies for improving financing of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Liberia are strengthening institutional capacity which is about building the capacity of government agencies and its human resource to raise and manage revenues and improving domestic resource mobilization which is about raising tax and other non-tax revenues internally to meet its development needs. All the participants were very clear in stating that relying on donor financing was a huge mistake in implementing the MDGs and the same mistake should not be made again given the dwindling aid flows to Africa and Liberia in particular. Another important issue was the governance of natural resources in the country. Of the 15 participants, 13 of them noted that the governance of natural resources was important if Liberia is to become a middle-income country by 2030.The participants noted that the recent discovery of oil in Liberia as well as other natural resources like Timber and rubber if not well managed could result in conflict and poor financing of Liberia's development needs. This is related to the fact that 10 participants noted that regulation of the private sector is another important step in ensuring financing of the SDGs in Liberia. They noted that regulatory mechanisms were weak and there is a need to avoid political capture by the private sector as much as they are needed. Strengthening political leadership in policy and strategy was raised by 12 of the participants as a critical factor in ensuring political will for financing the SDGs in Liberia. The recommendations to strengthening public accountability and transparency in the budget process raised by 9 participants is linked to the call to address corruption raised by 14 participants. The suggestion that financing should focus on youth and women raised by 3 participants was as they explained due to the fact that Liberia has a largely young population with the average age of 17.5 years and a youth dependency ratio of 77.6% Index (Mundi, 2018). Participants also noted that a mix of strategies would be required to address the financing challenged Liberia is facing.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Data findings from qualitative research are subjected to checks of trustworthiness (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, (2012). In line with the guidance of (Anney, 2014; Silverman; 2005) about ensuring that information recorded is credible and reliable, I took notes as participants were responding to questions and sharing their experiences. Furthermore, I kept daily journals which included the learning, observations made during the day and reviews every evening. These were to ensure that information was not lost. Also, to ensure that people were free to share information, no names were required during the interviews and all information was blind coded. Consistency of coding and interpretation were guaranteed by the fact that I was the only one who developed and used codes and coding frames.

To mitigate threats to data quality arising from interpretation and transcription of data, I checked with each participant ensure that I had captured exactly what was said and the meaning to avoid wrong interpretation. I also reviewed documents and reports from government and donor agencies for data triangulation (Anney, 2014).

In line with constructivist tradition, I relied on information drawn from multiple sources. In addition to information collected through individual interviews, I reviewed documentary sources to get more detailed information and check on facts pertaining to some claims that participants made during interviews. For example, reference was made to Millennium Development Goal (MDG) reports for Liberia conducted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Ministry of Finance reports, donor reports on the MDGs for Liberia and reviews conducted by the World Bank and IMF as well as civil society shadow reports. All these were checked against what participants said before conclusions were made.

During the data collection process too, I consciously engaged two reviewers to audit the information and check quality control. These two doctoral persons have at least 15 years in conducting qualitative research in Africa. Once the first draft was ready, I used a colleague to read through the results and confirm that what was written reflected what was in the data set.

Results

This study sought to provide a deeper understanding of how Liberia can finance its Sustainable Development Goals to become a middle-income country by 2030. The study employed the definition of the Ambiguity and Multiple Streams Framework (MSF) developed by Kingdon (1995) which was first used to explain agenda setting in the United States. Its underlying assumption rests on the notion of ambiguity and temporal sorting. The main argument is that policies are the results of problems, solutions and politics, coupled or joined together by policy entrepreneurs during open windows of opportunity (Zahariadis, 2003). Kingdon identified three streams that flow through the political system: problems, policies, and politics (Weiner, 2011). The study also examined the challenges and opportunities that Liberia faces with meeting the Post-2015

Development Goals as defined by UNDP (2015) also known also as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) or Global Goals, which are the 17 development goals building on the Millennium Development Goals which aimed at eradicating extreme poverty by 2030. These goals are framed with the “2030 agenda for sustainable development”, which was adopted by the UN member states on September 25, 2015. The framework sets out an ambitious plan to address the world’s problems, especially for poor countries (UNDP, 2015) and World Bank (2016). Liberia aims to become a middle-income country by 2030 based on its ability to meet these goals as encapsulated in its growth strategy known as ‘Liberia rising 2030’.

In this section, I present the results under the lens of Kingdon’s Ambiguity and Multiple Streams Framework under the three main themes of (Problems, Politics and Policy). The categories which are presented under these themes emerge from the NVivo coding. These codes emerged as tree nodes which help to create order, clarify concepts and identify patterns (Bazeley, 2007).

The Problem Stream

Corruption

All 15 fifteen participants claimed that corruption is an endemic problem in Liberia, and it impacted negatively on financing the MDGs and will impact on the SDGs if not addressed. While there is a code of conduct law known as the penal code of conduct for economic sabotage, mismanagement of public funds and bribery which stipulates guidelines for public officials and civil servants against corrupt practices, it is lacking in stipulating penalties for official corruption and does not extend to family members of officials and political parties. The records show that Liberia has made very minimal progress in combating corruption despite the laws and institutions established. According to Transparency International, Liberia ranked 90 out of 176 countries in 2016 and did worse by ranking 1223 out of 175 countries in 2017 under the Corruption Perception Index (CPI) of 2017. Participants claimed that bribery remains widespread often referred to as 'cold water' or 'my Christmas'

There are institutions to counter public corruption and conflict of interest in procurement and awarding of government contracts. These include the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission (LACC), General Auditing Commission (GAC), Public Procurement and Concession Commission (PPCC), and Internal Audit Agency (IAA). However, the results so far show that they are weak and not adequately backed by a strong judicial system. For instance, since the establishment of the anti-corruption commission, only two cases have been addressed and the weakness in the judicial systems hinders the implementation of the laws and regulations

The 2013 human rights report from the Department of State noted that the Anti-Corruption Commission received 25 cases, investigated 23 of them and recommended only 4 for prosecution but there were no convictions. As at 2017, the president in her final state of the nation address stated that corruption in Liberia was too great for her administration to eliminate Fox News (2017). Furthermore, participants claimed that the judicial system suffers from inadequately trained and poorly compensated judicial officers, which has resulted in flawed proceedings.

Aid Effectiveness

Of the 15 participants, 13 claimed that aid was ineffective in Liberia. The amount of aid given to Liberia as one participant claimed should have made Liberia the pride of West Africa but this is not the case as Liberia was only able to meet 3 of the 8 MDGs (UNDP, 2015) and even today It remains the world's fourth- or fifth-poorest country, and the poorest one with a solid government The Economist (2017). Foreign aid has been the main source of income for Liberia given its fourteen-year conflict which left the country in ruins and triggered the need for recovery. It attracted a lot of donors given that it is a country with an estimated population of 4.3 million people. Donors saw it as an easy place to pour in aid and achieve results in the shortest possible time. But this was not the case as one participant claimed. Liberia has been a huge beneficiary of aid. After the period of its interim poverty reduction strategy, the focus of all policies and strategies was on achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

From 2003, ODA to Liberia was on the increase as the country benefited from some of the highest ODA per capita in the world about US$185, more than 3 times the African average of US$49 (AfDB, 2013) and attracted over US$16billion in Foreign Direct Investment since 2006 (World Bank, 2015; AfDB, 2013; OECD, 2013). In 2013 Liberia received US$583 million in ODA and US$765 million in 2014 (World Bank, 2016; OECD, 2014) showing a significant increase in aid flows against the backdrop of decreasing aid to Africa which fell by 4% in real terms from 2012 (ODI, 2015). To finance the Millennium Development Goals, the European Commission provided US41.8

billion in development aid and debt relief between 2008 and 2011, priority was given to health, water, and sanitation and food security.

As some of the participants noted, ‘aid has brought Liberia from the brink of collapse to the brink of chaos’. This was similar to the Economist (2017) observation that aid brought Liberia from the brink, but it also weakened the country’s fledging government. Participants from a ministry claimed that aid in Liberia is fragmented, not captures systematically and there is not adequate mutual review of the effectiveness of donor aid. This has not helped the finance ministry in making progress in aid management.

Weak Institutional Capacity

The challenge of institutional and human capacity was raised by 14 participants making it a huge and most of them claimed was responsible for weak absorptive capacity and poor quality of programs and projects carried out under the MDG programs. Most of the institutions responsible for implementing the MDG related programs and projects are understaffed and do not have the required skills and capacity to manage project funds or oversee policy implementation and reviews. A lot of the programs were delivered by consultants hired and directly managed by foreign aid agencies and international NGOs. There has been very little attempt to train the civil servants. Instead, Liberians in diaspora were brought in and paid huge salaries which are outside the pay scale of the civil service and brought a lot of criticism and lack of commitment from the civil servants. Participants noted that the salaries of civil servants are very discouraging and will not attract the right skills. One participant noted that the Senior Executive Service (SES) program created a huge disparity in remunerations and treatment.

Yet another issue raised by the participants is the institutional weakness in policy and human capacity. Two participants particularly noted stated that the Liberia Anti-corruption Commission and the General Auditing Commission are hugely understaffed and there is no system or policy that requires private companies to establish internal codes of conduct that, among other things, prohibit bribery of public officials. All participants agreed that most of the institutions are weak and in their current state, meeting the SDGs will remain an aspiration and not a reality. At least 10 of the participants noted that the institutional weakness was largely responsible for the poor financing of the MDGs especially because there was huge mistrust by the donor community in the ability of the government agencies to manage donor aid which was the main source of financing

The Politics Stream

Political Leadership

In the MSF theory, Kingdon (1995) defined politics as the influential factors and processes that affect the agenda. Kingdon separated the politics stream into three broad categories: mood, organized political forces, and events within government. At least 13 participants claimed that poor political leadership was a major factor in affecting the financing of the MDGs. After the signing of the Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement which brought the 14-year civil conflict to an end, there was hope for Liberia. Almost as soon as Ellen Johnson Sirleaf became the president, aid started pouring in millions of dollars. Liberia became the first African state to sign up to and comply with the Extractive Industries and Transparency initiatives (EITI) and was the first West African country to pass the Freedom of Information Act to ensure a transparent and accountable government. Participants claimed that this has not translated into the required political will for financing development in the country. One participant said, 'donors are dictating the politics of this country because they have the money and can decide which way the country goes' given that aid accounted for over 73% of GDP between 2007 and 2013. Another participant noted that the aid dependency undermines the political leadership and weakens any home-grown policy at the expense of donor policies which are not adaptive to the political realities in the country.

It should be pointed out here that Liberia's political leadership under Ms. Sirleaf did make efforts to provide political leadership evidenced by the establishment of the Liberia Reconstruction and Development Committee (LRDC) which was chaired by the president and had senior minister and representatives of large donor agencies as members. It did set the broad policy direction and had the ministry of finance playing a major role in determining the areas of intervention under the poverty reduction strategy. However as one participant noted, 'Liberia needed and still needs the money so it's difficult to provide leadership when you are not in control of the resources.

Overreliance on Donor Aid

A total of 13 participants claimed that the government was over reliant on donor aid and as such had to adhere to their policies rather than the government policy on financing which caused a friction between the ministry of finance and the donor authorities in many cases. These donor policies prevailed because they held the money. Seven participants highlighted the fact that well-qualified Liberians were drawn away from government or civil society jobs by donor agencies who paid higher and better much needed benefits given the living conditions in the country. At least two of the participants further said that these donor organizations each had their own methods, funding streams, target beneficiaries and political agenda which influenced the way programs were implemented without recourse to the poverty reduction strategy. One example that a participant pointed to was the Liberia Health Pool fund which had a number of donors pulling resources together in a pool managed by the ministry of health, but some donors including USAID refused and were funding the health sector separately in line with their own regulations which resulted in duplication of projects and coordination problems for the government. It also opened the door for corruption as claimed by another participant. By most definitions, Liberia is a fragile state and the 14-year civil conflict strengthened that definition. This implies that aid was needed but as three participants noted, it weakened the government's ability to raise taxes and other forms of domestic revenue.

Weak Civil Society Engagement

The claim by 10 of the participants that civil society engagement in financing and development was weak may not be unconnected to the fact that most of the civil society organizations in Liberia emerged after the 2005 presidential elections. Participants noted that due to the gap in the education system, engagement was weak and there was very little capacity support for Liberian civil society organizations during the MDG period. Two participants noted that civil society groups particularly women and youth groups were intimately involved in the peace process that led to the Accra agreement in 2003 but beyond that they were not involved in development processes. Three of the participants claimed that most civil society organizations which emerged after the 2005 elections were focused on recovery and service delivery efforts which turned them into contractors rather than advocacy groups. This was evidenced by the donor reports which showed that civil society organizations worked more in providing services like water pumps, sanitation facilities, distribution of relief materials and community services.

There remains a gap in areas such as governance, accountability, policy development, advocacy and financing. While there have been capacity building efforts as seen in several donor reports reviewed, engagement with government has been weak and adhoc as 4 participants claimed. Yet another challenge raised by participants is the dependence on international NGOs and donors for funding support for civil society organizations in Liberia. A lot of these monies participants claimed, went for salaries and administrative costs to ensure they survive, and little was left for actual support in policy processes or advocacy.

The issues raised by the participants was echoed in a study carried out by the West African Civil Society Institute WACSI, (2014) assessing civil society in Liberia which revealed that vulnerability in funding stream due to donor dependence, weak capacity, poor communication and poor access to communities and institutions were impacting on the effectiveness of civil society engagement. A weak public support base and lack of accountability have been important factors in undermining the position and strength of institutionalized civil society. Dependence on external donor funds has contributed to a perception that some non-governmental organizations are elitist and more accountable to donor requirements than to the people whose interests they claim to represent. Many institutionalized civil society organizations have failed to establish genuine links with citizens, to allow space for the younger generation in their own organizations, and to connect their own programs and campaigns with broader social movements.

Decentralized Financing

In Liberia, decentralization is part of a broader post-conflict governance reform process. Over the years, efforts have been geared toward developing and implementing a comprehensive decentralization program (Nyei, 2014). The government of Liberia launched the National Policy on Decentralization in 2012 with a view to systematically guide the process of decentralizing power, authority, functions and responsibilities from the central government to local governments. The policy demonstrates the government's commitment to bring governance and decision making closer to the people in a participatory manner that is gender sensitive and ensures public accountability. The policy further provides that county level administrative institutions are restructured and harmonized to implement the policy in a manner that is responsive and responsible with a view to efficient, transparent and accountable management of local resources. The policy also aims to empower Liberians at all level to engage in the political, social and economic development of the country in accordance with the Liberia 2030 rising strategy and actually contributes to Governance and public sector modernization pillar.

With support from donors (UNDP, USAID, EU, UNMIL and Government of Sweden) a five-year program of implementation was launched in 2013 and later revised in 2015. The program is aimed at achieving four outcomes which include; Outcome 1: Deconcentrated services and corresponding resources managed at the assigned level of government; Outcome 2: Service delivery and accountability of local government improved; Outcome 3: Legal and Regulatory framework for decentralization is in place; Outcome 4: MIA is capacitated to lead and implement decentralization reforms and Outcome 5: program management support, coordination, and monitoring strengthened. This program costs US$ 10,476,406.56 million with the government contributing less than 10%. As at the time of data collection and document reviews, this program has yet to show results as outcome one should have ensured decentralized financing. Progress has been slow, and donors have not been able to explain why there have been delays given that more than 90% of the program is funded by them.

Four Participants claimed that there is a political blockage to this because the ministry of finance had refused to implement its part of the policy and the recommendations of the Governance Commission which was set up to reform the governance systems in Liberia. This they claimed hampered the financing of programs at the county level which left much to be desired with achieving the MDGs. Two participants further claimed that this was largely responsible for the slow response to the Ebola outbreak and clearly demonstrated the level of corruption and false reporting the government had been given on the health gains they had made regarding the MDGs and echoed by (Nyei, 2014; Petit et al., 2013).

The Policy Stream

Poor Planning and Mismanagement

Nine participants claimed that planning, mismanagement and financing was a huge problem and impacted on achieving the MDGs. Though Liberia has a Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) known as the Agenda for Transformation (AfT). There was no record of implementation and monitoring reports except the ones prepared for donors which seemed to have been done because it was a requirement for the funding. This is linked to the problem of multiple and unreliable data sources as claimed by 12 participants. The challenge of data, monitoring and reporting is further fueled by a weak monitoring policy which is largely led by donors and not the government.

Weak Domestic Resource Mobilization

The huge dependence on donors was a major challenge to financing the MDGs and will be even more for the SDGs as one participant noted. Given that 10 participants raised the challenge of Domestic Resource mobilization on the grounds that most government departments including the Liberia Revenue Authority (LRA) have not successfully implemented the tax code to increase domestic revenue as amended by the Consolidated Tax Amendments Act of October 15, 2011. Three participants claimed that at least 4 private companies refused to pay taxes in the 2015/16 fiscal year, and nothing was done about it. For example one company mining iron ore failed to pay US$2.5 million in taxes and another company which has been operating in Liberia since the 1920s refused to pay US$380,000 in taxes for the same period which according to one participant was due to fall in global prices of rubber and iron ore but more importantly a policy gap that weakens the legal authority and capacity of the revenue authority.

It would seem that the Government of Liberia recognized this weakens and undertook an institutional reform in 2015 to create the Liberia Revenue Authority (LRA). This new institution has greater autonomy than the former Tax and Customs Departments which was part of the Ministry of Finance. Today, the Liberia Revenue Authority is responsible for collecting almost all revenues received by the Government and to ensure that these are transferred to the budget to fund public services.

Domestic resources are the largest untapped source of financing to fund national development plans and without effective mobilization of domestic resources, the Sustainable Development Goals cannot be achieved (United Nations, 2016). In addition to increasing the sheer volume of tax revenue, the mechanism of tax policy and collection matters. Fair, efficient tax systems are necessary for poverty alleviation and equitable growth. They ensure that even the powerful pay their fair share and that the poor see a path to economic development (World Bank, 2016).

Natural Resource Governance

Liberia is rich in iron ore, gold, diamonds, natural rubber, timber, a vast land for agriculture and recently oil. However, greed and corruption have engulfed natural resource revenues and derailed good governance in the sector. Another participant claimed that the revenues from natural resource exploitation can keep Liberia. Some of the participants highlighted the lack of policy coordination in the governance of natural resources and the opaque nature of deals closed with companies. A total of 13 participants agreed that natural resource governance remains a huge challenge to financing the Sustainable Development Goals. This is on the grounds that while natural resource revenues provide opportunities to fast track the achievement of the Liberia 2030 rising vision, the allocation of resource revenues remains challenging in the face of competing demands between capital investments and consumption. Creating the right balance as one participant said, requires sound macroeconomic policies that promote inclusive growth, sound investments and sustainable development. A gap that still exists in the policy environment.

Poor Targeting

As raised by 10 participants, the huge amount of aid to Liberia was not targeted ta the poorest and most excluded. While the successive MDG reports seemed to have captured progress, the data was misleading and based on false reports. This is in line with the misleading and unreliable data raised by 12 participants. Two participants mentioned that it was against this background that the final MDG report on Liberia revealed that only 3 of the MDGs were met and even at that poverty did not reduce as the UNDP (2015) showed that 81.9% of Liberian are still living below the poverty line. Three other participants raised the problem of statistical reports being used in planning and targeting which impacts on financing development. They also claimed that this challenge still exists as most of the planning and development aid support in the SDG era are still based on these statistics that are questionable.

Another participant from the ministry further went on to claim that the Ebola outbreak revealed that financing was not targeting the poor and those in need which is why poverty and inequality persist in the country. The World Bank (2015) showed that 63.8% of the population of Liberia had incomes below the poverty line, 47.9% lived in extreme poverty, 32.05 of children were stunted, and 15 were underweight. This was further corroborated by the Ebola recovery mission report of February 2015 by a joint mission of the World Bank, United Nations, African development Bank and the European Union. Two participants pointed to the flaws in the Health financing strategy and the national social protection strategy and policy which in reality they claim do not target the poorest and this diverts much needed financing away from those who need it most.

Summary of Research Sub questions

Summary of SQ1:

SQ1 What are the perceived policy gaps related to financing the MDGs in Liberia?

The analysis of data revealed that the problem stream covers a plethora of issues which impacted negatively on the success of the MDG implementation in Liberia. All 15 participants said the problem of financing the MDGs began with leadership at the political level. The problem of corruption raised by all 15 participants reflected the huge leakage in the system as Liberia received huge foreign aid. This was related to the issue of ineffective aid by 13 participants and conflicting donor policies raised by 11 participants suggesting that this was responsible for the challenges the government faced in financing the MDGs. Poor planning and management raised by 9 participants was linked to the multiple data sources which are unreliable raised by 12 participants was seen as a critical gap in financing as they claimed that planning was done based on false data which impacted on projects and programs delivered under the MDGs.

Weak institutional capacity raised by 14 participants was a critical issue as they explained that donors were actually making the decisions and not the institutions. Another 2 participants claimed that Liberian civil servants in the ministries were not involved in decision making and policy processes because the experts and donors felt they lacked the capacity to do so. They claimed that only the deputy-ministers and in some cases assistant ministers were involved in policy processes and decision making because a larger number of them studied in institutions in the global north and were seen to have better capacity than those who studied in the University of Liberia. The unwillingness of people to pay tax as a problem raised by 9 participants was as they claim, a result of wreak leadership and corruption in the system which made the political leadership focus more on foreign aid contracts rather than domestic resource mobilization which remained a challenge as claimed by 10 participants.

Summary of SQ2

SQ2: How did these policy gaps impede the financing of the MDGs in the water and health sectors?

The question aimed to understand how the problems impacted on financing the Millennium development Goals. Thirteen participants claimed that there was an over reliance on donors which led to weak absorptive capacity as claimed by 13 participants as it was only when donors decided that a project could go ahead that programs were delivered ignoring agreed plans signed off by cabinet. Fifteen participants claimed that corruption cases were not addressed due to policy gaps, weak legal system and political capture by contractors and family members of the political leaders which created huge accountability and transparency issues and led to donor mistrust and delays in releasing funds for programs and projects. Fourteen participants claimed that one of the reasons for limited civil society engagement in the MDG financing was the refusal of government officials in allowing them access to information despite the Freedom of Information Act (FIA) and the Open Budget Initiative which the government committed to. Related to this was that nine participants claimed that many projects were uncompleted and there was no sustainability measure to ensure that there were government funds to complete them. This led to a re-awarding of the same contracts and a waste of government's funds. As the researcher, I found that at least 4 water projects and three health related projects were budgeted for in the 2014/15 fiscal year even though these same projects were already funded by donors. Another six participants claimed that it was difficult for people to access services due to the high level of corruption and weak planning and management systems. Only 2 participants claimed that the civil servants were very unhelpful due to their lack of skill and capacity and unwillingness to be trained by the experts. But one participant claimed that the experts who are paid by the donors do not want to transfer knowledge and expertise to ensure they keep eating as she put it.

Summary of SQ3

SQ3: What policies and or strategies are needed to ensure improved financing of post-2015 development goals in Liberia?

The question aimed to understand what policies and strategies might be helpful in financing given the experience from the MDG era. Participants raised several policy related suggestions. All 15 participants suggested that strengthening institutional capacity and improving domestic resource mobilization were critical factors to financing the Sustainable Development Goals. This is against the background of dwindling aid the global economic crisis of 2008 which the world is still recovering from. Fourteen participants suggested that addressing corruption remains important in building trust with donors and the international community as well as with the citizens and will forestall any political crisis rising from mistrust and displeasure with the government. This is also related to the suggestion by 13 participants to strengthen natural resource governance and civil society engagement also suggested by 13 participants. This they claimed was part of the reasons for the 14-year civil conflict and remains a critical issue to address going forward given the action by the administration in appointing family members to head key institutions dealing with oil and gas for example.

Strengthening political leadership suggested by (12 twelve participants, public accountability by 9 nine participants and transparency in financing processes by 9 participants are pivotal to avoiding leakages and improving the lives of the poorest. This is related to regulating private sector financing raised by 10 participants and improving donor coordination raised by 3 participants. Other issues raised by participants include improving program and project mounting by 9 participants, financing policies to focus on women and youth by 3 participants due to the demographics in Liberia which show that more than 60% of Liberians are young (world Bank, 2016) and decentralizing financing to empower thee counties as raised by (4) four participants.

Summary of Chapter 4

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a deeper understanding of the challenges faced with financing MDGs as well as how SDGs which replaced MDGs can be financed. Data was collected from a total of 15 participants through individual interviews. The analysis revealed that corruption, huge donor dependence, weak domestic resource mobilization, lack of donor coordination, weak policy and strategy, poor planning and mismanagement, as well as lack of civil society engagement were the major policy challenges which led to poor financing of the MDGs. Participants argued that in order to ensure Liberia is able to finance the SDGs and become a middle-income country by 2030, institutional reforms must take place, natural resource governance must be strengthened, political leadership needs to improve, targeting must improve, donor coordination should be strengthened, corruption needs to be addressed and domestic resource mobilization needs to be strengthened. In the following chapter, the summary of key findings is presented and interpreted. Then a further examination of the findings in relation to Kingdon's MSF is presented with a focus on windows of opportunity and policy solutions.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

Financing SDGs remains a critical challenge for countries, particularly fragile states, who have been depending on foreign aid for their development needs. With the decline in foreign aid as discussed in chapter 2, this has become more critical for 2030 goals in Liberia, which informed this study. In this study, I sought to understand problems with financing MDGs in Liberia, how these problems impacted Liberia's development, and what policies and strategies need to be applied to ensure that SDGs can be effectively financed in order for Liberia to become a middle-income country by 2030, using Kingdon's MSF as the theoretical framework. Data based on the research questions were collected through interviews with key informants using open-ended questions and through archival research. In the following sections, I discuss the key findings under the lens of the MSF framework looking at the windows of opportunity.

Summary of Key Findings

In 2003, after the Accra peace accord where the peace agreement was signed by the warring parties, which ended the 14-year civil conflict in Liberia, the assumption by donors was that Liberia, given its population size of about 4.2 million, would quickly recover and take the development path to become a self-sustaining nation. This was in line with MDG objectives to halve poverty by 2015. This did not happen. In fact, the

UNDP (2015) noted that Liberia only met three of the eight MDGs. One of the resulting effects of not meeting the MDGs was that 81.9% of the population were living below the poverty line. This is despite the fact that Liberia had received at least $4 billion in development aid and other forms of ODA yet, extreme poverty still persists in the country.

Based on the research questions used in this study under Kingdon's MSF framework, major issues included weak political leadership, which implied an inability of the political leadership to lead the country effectively and steer it towards a sustainable development path. This was reflected in huge dependence on donors and their foreign aid, the inability of the country's administration to plan and manage development programs, poor institutional leadership in setting the policy agenda and determining what policy actions to take at key moments of decision making, as well as poor planning and management. Participants also raised concerns that the political leadership remains weak given the dismal progress that Liberia has made so far in financing SDGs. These policy-related challenges impacted achieving MDGs in many ways, including Liberia's overreliance on donors, delays in program and project implementation, inability to address cases of corruption, neglect of domestic resource mobilization, mismanagement of foreign aid, weak accountability systems, weak civil society engagement, limited capacity within institutions, particularly the Liberian civil service, uncompleted projects, and poor financing mechanisms. There were recommendations to strengthening domestic resource mobilization in financing the SDGs given the dwindling aid to the country.

In view of the challenges of meeting MDGs, participants in the study suggested strengthening institutional and human capacity for planning and management, improving domestic resource mobilization, strengthening accountability mechanisms and taking a people-centered approach to financing development, strengthening natural resource governance, decentralizing financing to improve country development, engaging civil society in an institutional manner, regulating private sector financing, strengthening donor coordination and management and focusing on the most vulnerable, including women and youth, as strategies for improving targeting in financing the SDGs. Kingdon's MSF theory provides the lens for interpreting the findings of this study.

Interpretation of the Findings

The Problem Stream

Liberia was only able to meet three of the eight MDGs, despite the huge amount of development aid to the country of about $4 billion, which was more than three times the African average of $49 million (AfDB, 2013). In addition, Liberia has attracted over $16 billion in foreign direct investment since 2006 (World Bank, 2015; EU, 2014; AfDB, 2013; OECD, 2013). This confirms the fact that aid did not make the right impact given the fact that currently, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rates remains very low. The agricultural sector is yet to show growth due to weak recovery of global prices of rubber and palm oil and inflation rising to an all-time high of 24% in June 2018 as against 10.8% in the same period in 2017 following the drop in external aid. Cost of living has also increased coupled with limited employment opportunities which undermine the welfare of Liberians and puts the economy at risk (World Bank, 2018). A state is defined as fragile when it is incapable of performing its core functions and displays vulnerability in terms of social, political, and economic domains (Dalamar etr.al., 2017; Gu et al, 2015; Kolk & Lenfat, 2015). This also includes its inability to raise resources to meet its needs, as well as its dependence on external resources to keep the state functional. Liberia has largely depended on external aid.

Liberia as a country seemed to have focused more on getting external aid and not emphasizing governance and accountability mechanisms to ensure sustainable development. There appeared to be a neglect by its leaders of domestic resource mobilization and building the capacity of the technocrats in the civil service. But rather, it seemed that the focus of the government was on the use of expatriates, which led to capital flights of much needed resources for the country's development needs. It appeared that huge donor aid crippled the country even more and weakened its governance systems and ability to raise and manage resources ([Economist, 2017; Asongu, 2015).

The Politics Stream

In view of the challenges with financing Liberia's development priorities as outline in chapter 4, shifting institutional dynamics which put the institutional burden on policy making and financing on the donor community which seemed to influence the financing of development priorities in Liberia. As mentioned in the literature, the politics of donor financing played a huge role in Liberia with different development partners pulling the fragile institutions in different directions with their conflicting policies and methodologies to program implementation and financing. The establishment of the Liberia Reconstruction and Development Committee (LRDC), which was chaired by the president of Liberia and set the broad policy agenda, had major donors on the committee who were the drivers of change and led the agenda setting instead of the government. This politics of development cooperation put Liberia in a dilemma because often, it was a function of who controlled the resources that had the political weight to make the decisions and drive development policy and programs and not the government which had to manage conflicting interests (Scoones et al., 2016; Sewell, 2015).

The Policy Stream

Liberia has had four different policy frameworks between 2005 and 2018, which covered three different development periods, commencing in 2005 with the transition agenda. The latest being the Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development 2018 to 2023. The PAPD is the second in the series of the 5-year National Development Plans (NDP) encapsulated within the Liberia Vision 2030 framework. It succeeds the Agenda for Transformation 2012-2017 (AfT) and is informed by the lessons learnt from the implementation of previous PRSPs including the Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy 2007 (iPRS) and the Poverty Reduction Strategy (2008-2011). These have led to the shaping of several policies covering health, water and sanitation, infrastructure, agriculture, gender and budgeting. However, as seen from the findings of the research, they were largely driven by external actors, and therefore did not fit with the local context. Most of these policies were adopted from donor countries providing financing; and in other cases, developed by experts paid by the donors. The current policy agenda, which is the Liberia 2030 rising strategy, to make Liberia a middle-income country by 2030, may need to be further reviewed, as my findings seem to suggest that there is very little evidence of local ownership of this strategy. There are also fears that the new political administration which came into office in January 2018 may want to set its own political agenda for Liberia, which may mean abandoning the gains made in the last twelve years by the former administration. The most critical issue raised in the course of the research was the gap in accountability. No mechanisms of accountability were formally established in the Millennium Declaration or the MDG framework to consistently hold governments (including developed countries) accountable for their MDG commitments, nor were there any sanctions in the case of failure to meet the goals (Donald & Way, 2016).

Windows of Opportunity

The SDGs as a new policy framework to end extreme poverty and the Liberia 2030 rising strategy present a window of opportunities to couple the three streams together for Liberia. Furthermore, the new political administration in Liberia, which came into power in January 2018, is expected to usher in a new set of political entrepreneurs, who should according to Kingdon's (1984, 1995) theory, play key roles in shaping policy. Researchers have long discussed the role and characteristics of policy entrepreneurs as special actors, crucial for achieving policy change (Böcher, 2016). There is a huge opportunity for the new political leadership to build trust with the citizens and the international community by demonstrating that Liberia can become a middle-income country by 2030. This needs to be demonstrated by strong political leadership as suggested by the participants in this research and strengthened capacity to raise and manage domestic revenues rather than depend on external aid from donors. Policy entrepreneurs will play a huge role in this. Policy entrepreneurs are assumed to have a decisive impact on policy outcomes. Their access to social and political resources is contingent on their influence on other agents (Christopoulos & Ingold, 2015).

The findings also show that there are fears of a policy somersault, which may disrupt the current progress given that the new administration was the main opposition party in the last government. It is important that the new political leadership demonstrates accountability and capacity for making policy decisions going forward to attract the right investments and resources required to achieve Liberia's vision of being a middle-income country by 2030.

Limitations of the Study

As I stated in Chapter 1, the results of this study are limited to the Liberia experience only. Other countries in similar situations in the region are not within this study. Furthermore, the results may not be generalized to cover other countries in the region. This is because the conditions that might favor Liberia's political and policy environment might not be appropriate for others. Given the qualitative nature of the study, the findings might not be used to prove cause and effect relationships, but it provides the basis for further studies which might be quantitative in nature. Also, the participants for the interviews were limited to policy makers and actors. Beneficiaries were not included due to the nature of the study.

Recommendations

The qualitative study focused on how Liberia can finance the Sustainable Development Goals and become a middle-income country by 2030. The literature review of this study revealed that while there seems to be an understanding that development goals need to be financed, there was a gap in understanding why, despite the huge aid, Liberia was not able to meet the MDGs. And more importantly how Liberia is going to finance the SDGs, given the dwindling aid flows to developing countries, including Liberia. Based on the findings of the research, the following recommendations are made;

The aid policy needs to be reviewed to encompass donor behaviour and coordination. This will ensure that any scaling of development cooperation will be rooted in a comprehensive understanding of Liberia's aid environment, and improve documenting and reporting, as well as capturing tax related activities by donors. It will enhance aid effectiveness in Liberia and ensure coordination among institutions.

Private finance plays an increasingly important role in bringing innovation, expertise and additional resources to help developing countries achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (OECD, 2018). Recognizing this, the government of Liberia must ensure a strong regulatory policy environment for private sector engagement that encapsulates accountability and flexibility to attract private financing for development priorities in a pro-poor manner.

Liberia is rich in natural resources and this provides opportunities to mobilize resources. It is important that there is a robust policy on the governance of natural resources to include revenue mobilization, local content development, investment in people and public accountably

The Liberia Revenue Authority (LRA), which was established in 2015, needs to be strengthened through a legislative review of its law to cover reforms in the tax system that allows the LRA to expand its reach and increase its revenue mobilization by establishing a data processing canter, licensing e commercial banks to collect tax on its behalf, introducing an e-payments system and decentralizing e tax collection.

To improve development financing, the decentralization program managed by the Governance Commission needs to be accelerated. This requires a constitutional review to allow for county authorities to raise and manage local revenues, as well as involve the communities in the development of programs. Furthermore, there should be a legislative process to ensure deliberate fiscal and administrative decentralization, if Liberia is to achieve its 2030 strategy. This will strengthen the County Development Fund (CDF), which is currently blind to development priorities in the counties and facilitates an update of the National Policy on Decentralization and Local Governance, which needs to be reviewed to reflect the Liberia 2030 rising strategy. It will further improve people's willingness to pay taxes.

In democratic theory, citizens are regarded as inherently equal in fundamental rights, implying that the exercise of political authority should be accountable to the people (Fox & Stoett, 2016). In view of this, deliberate steps must be taken to ensure civil society participation in development financing through the budget process and parliamentary engagement in implementing, monitoring and reporting.

To combat corruption, poor governance and illicit financial flows, Liberia should endorse and domesticate the new single global standard for Automatic Exchange of Information to fight against corruption and tax evasion. This should be coupled with a strengthening of the justice systems, and particularly the anti-corruption agency to deal with cases of corruption and illicit financial flows.

Domestic resource mobilization should be strengthened with tax reforms that are efficient and equitable. This should be backed by political commitment to the reforms that support local leadership, and home-grown solutions that are sensitive to the local political and social context.

Implications

Positive Social Change

The results of the study hold a promise for the people of Liberia. I conclude that Liberia can realize its 2030 vision and become a middle-income country, where no one lives below the poverty line. Coupling the three streams of problems, politics and policy will open windows of opportunity to improve the lives of the people and ensure continued political stability, which is necessary for development.

The recommendations and initiatives to be implemented by government, development partners and civil society must be well coordinated, well timed and integrated such that they reinforce each other and end extreme poverty, using home grown solutions that are sensitive to the local political and social contexts of Liberia. Potentially, it will provide the opportunity for people at the community level to be at the center of their own development and improve the social conditions of the people. In collaboration with civil society, the people will be able to engage in decision making processes with local officials, and progressively move away from donor dependence. Furthermore, it will enhance local capacity in development financing and planning. It will also trigger other developing countries to review the recommendations for their development and provide a basis for further research and scholarly thinking in agenda setting and policy development, which will in turn influence how aid is delivered in an equitable and pro-poor manner to deliver people centered results and eradicate the culture of dependency.

Theoretical and Methodological Implications

This study was conducted with the assumption that the Liberian government and the international community are keen on finding ways to finance the Sustainable Development Goals as encapsulated in the Liberia 2030 rising strategy and the Addis Ababa Agenda for Action (AAA). The inability of Liberia, and indeed all sub-Saharan African countries to meet the MDGs was worrying for the international community and indeed all developing countries' governments. The findings of this study revealed that indeed the efforts to finance the MDGs left much to be desired. The theoretical framework applied as the lens of this study shows that the policy environment is ambiguous and the politics in development financing calls for strong local leadership and accountability. Therefore, the use of the Ambiguity and Multiple Streams Framework theory for this study was appropriate.

The qualitative case study approach of using data drawn from multiple sources was also assumed to be suitable for this kind of study, where the issues of development financing required exploration. As such, the case study approach was most feasible to do. The recommendations made in this study are drawn from the analysis of data and will be useful for policy development, reviews and decision making in the interest of the people and government of Liberia.

Conclusion

Following the adoption by member states of the United Nations, including Liberia, of the 2030 agenda described as an ambitious transformative plan of action for people, planet and prosperity, there has been a huge debate on how the 17 Sustainable Development Goals will be financed, particularly for developing and fragile states, who have largely depended on external aid, especially during the MDG era. This study sought to understand the problems associated with financing the MDGs in Liberia, and find out how the SDGs can be financed, given the less than desirable results Liberia achieved with the MDGs, using the Ambiguity and Multiple Systems Framework as the theoretical lens for the study.Using key informant interviews and review of archival information, it was revealed that Liberia needs to make strategic policy shifts with the right political leadership and institutional reforms, if the country is to achieve the SDGs and become a middle-income country by 2030, as encapsulated in its 2030 vision. Based on the results of the study, several recommendations were made. They include improving domestic resource mobilization, strengthening donor coordination, improving political leadership, realizing fiscal decentralization, improving citizens' participation in development, and strengthening civil society engagement, as well as combating corruption and poor governance.

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Appendix A: Letter to Public Office Holders

Date…………

Official Title Head of Public Office
Address

Dear Sir/Madam

INTRODUCTION AND REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE TO CONDUCT RESEARCH.

My name is Apollos Nwafor, a doctoral student at the Walden University. I am conducting a research on "Financing the post-2015 development gaols: Shaping a new policy framework for aid in Liberia". I will be using the heath and water sectors as my case study and will be looking at the policies and strategies as well as aid flows to the sector under the Millennium Development Goals with a view to drawing lessons and making recommendations on a policy framework for financing the Liberia 2030 rising strategy which aims to make Liberia a middle income country by 2030.

A review of current literature reveals that aid has had mixed results and with the global economic recession, dwindling aid to Liberia and the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), there is gap on how Liberia can finance the SDGs as encapsulated in the Liberia rising 2030 strategy. It is hoped that the outcome of this study will result in effective policies and strategies that when implemented will help Liberians walk away from poverty and make Liberia a middle income country by 2030.

In view of this, I am kindly requesting your help in identifying someone within your office who can speak with me and provide me with information needed for this study. If possible, I would appreciate someone who has been involved in the implementation of poverty reduction strategies and the financing mechanisms. I would further need your help in identifying other institutions that may provide relevant information for this study. Once these individuals are identified, I would welcome the opportunity of meeting with them at the earliest possible time

I would like to state here that the purpose of this engagement is purely for academic reasons only and the information provided will be treated with the highest level of confidentiality and will not be used for any other purpose. As such, participation is voluntary and does not come with any financial burden to the organization or individual

If you have any queries and need further clarification regarding this request and the study, please do contact me on +231880757808 or by email on apollos.nwafor@waldenu.edu You can also reach my supervisor by email on George.kieh@waldenu.edu

Yours Sincerely,

Apollos Nwafor

Doctoral Candidate, Walden University.

Appendix B: Research Assistant Confidentiality Form

You are invited to participate in this study as a Research Assistant. The study is titled: “The Impact of “Financing the post-2015 development gaols: Shaping a new policy framework for aid in Liberia”. The main purpose of this study, which is purely an academic one, is to understand hoe Liberia can finance it pos-2015 development goals and become a middle income country by 2030.

The Study

This study is being conducted by Apollos Nwafor, a Doctoral Candidate at the Walden University.

Your role in the Study

You have been selected as a Research Assistant in the study based on your knowledge of the poverty reduction and development in Liberia. Your role will be to assist in data collection. It also includes helping to locate potential participants after their initial identification as well as arranging and managing call-backs for interviews. Finally, you will be required to direct all queries to the researcher as soon as practicable.

Confidentiality

The information obtained from this study, whether written or verbal, is solely for the purpose of the study and must not be disclosed to anyone whatsoever. You are not permitted under any circumstance to disclose information regarding this study which includes but not limited to identities of participants, documents, verbal and written information. All information collected as part of this study must be handed over to the researcher who is the owner and user of such information.

Statement of Consent

I have read the information above. I am clear with my role and the purpose and conditions under which the study will be conducted and I hereby consent to participate in the study.

Name of Research Assistant…………………………………………………………

Signature……………………………… Date……………………………………………………….

Signature of researcher………………………………Date…………………………………………

Appendix C: Participant Consent Form

You are kindly requested to participate in this study titled “Financing the post-2015 development gaols: Shaping a new policy framework for aid in Liberia”. The main purpose of this study, which is purely an academic one, is to understand hoe Liberia can finance it pos-2015 development goals and become a middle-income country by 2030. The information from this study is for academic purpose only. It will not in any way be used for any other purpose covertly or overtly.

The Study

This study is being conducted by Apollos Nwafor, a Doctoral Candidate at the Walden University.

Your role in the Study

You have been identified and selected as a potential participant in the study based on your knowledge and experience in shaping and implementing policies and strategies on poverty reduction and development financing as well as your lived experience in Liberia. If you agree to be part of the study, you will be engaged in a face-to face interview which is scheduled to last for about one hour. The date and time for the interview will depend on you. If a face-to-face interview will not be possible or convenient for you, we can try telephone or Skype. That again will be at your convenience.

Nature of the Study

Your participation in this study is purely voluntary. If you choose to participate, you are free to opt out or stop the interview at any time. Your name will not be linked to any specific information in the final report. If you decide to participate or not to, this decision will not affect your relationship with any individual or organization, including the one you work for.

Risks and Benefits of the study

As your identity will not be known, there are no known risks associated with your participation or none participation in the study. The potential benefit to your participation in the study is that the information you provide will contribute to improving knowledge about how Liberia can walk away from poverty and rise to become a middle-income country. This can hopefully pave the way for effective policies and strategies to be used by development experts and external support agencies in implementing Liberia's 2030 rising vision.

Confidentiality

The information obtained from this study as well as the eventual report will not be linked to any individual and will be kept private. All hard copies of records will be kept in folders and locked up in a cabinet and only the researcher will have access to them. Soft copies will be stored in files which will be password protected and this will be known by only the researcher. All audiotapes used during the interview will be destroyed after completion of the study.

Contacts and Queries

The main researcher is Apollos Nwafor, reachable by phone on +231880757808 and by e-mail on apollos.nwafor@waldenu.edu or apolloscharles@yahoo.com . The Research Assistant is XXXXXX and his/her phone contact is YYYY. The Chair of the research Committee is Prof. George Kieh and can be reached by e-mail on George.kieh@waldenu.edu . If you have any queries on this research, you can ask them now or send them to the Chair of the Committee later.

Statement of Consent

I have read the information above/ or the information has been explained to me in the language that I understand. I am clear with the purpose and conditions under which the study will be conducted, and I hereby consent to participate in the study.

Name of participant……………………………………

Signature………………… Date………………………

Signature of researcher……………………………Date……………………………

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Date……………………………………………

Location…………………………………………

Name of Interviewer………………………………………………

Name of Interviewee……………………………………………….

Thanks again for agreeing to participate in this study. The interview will take approximately one hour and as explained earlier before you gave consent, this discussion and the information provided will be treated as confidential and your identity will not be disclosed. The information is purely for academic purpose only.

Section A. The current poverty situation in Liberia

1. How would describe the poverty challenges in Liberia and in what ways are they impacting on Liberia's development efforts?

2. How would you describe the influence of the Millennium Development Goals on Liberia's efforts to reduce poverty and achieve its development objectives?

3. In your view, how did foreign aid influence poverty reduction efforts including the implementation of the MDGs in Liberia, given that Liberia met only 3 of the 8 MDGs?

4. Apart from foreign aid, what other financing mechanisms, policies or strategies influenced poverty reduction efforts and how effective were they?

5. Specifically, despite the huge aid and the health pol fund in Liberia, the Ebola virus outbreak revealed that Liberia' health systems are still weak and fragile,

    a. What were the challenges with financing the health sector and how did they impact on efforts by governments and development partners?
    b. How did a lack of or an existing policy contribute to the failure of the health system?

6. Liberia has been reported to meet the MDG target on water, do you agree?

    a. If yes, why and how did foreign aid influence these achievements?

    b. If not why and how do you think aid or other financing mechanisms were responsible for this?

Section B. Post-2015 development financing

7. Do you think foreign aid will continue to have a major influence in meeting Liberia's development objectives?

    a. If yes, how?

    b. If no why?

8. In your view what other options or strategies are available to Liberia to finance its post-2015 development goals as encapsulated within the Liberia rising 2030 vision?

9. Given the results and experience of the MDGs, what should be done differently with aid and other forms of financing development in Liberia?

Thank you for your time