



**First report on progress
December 2011**

1. Introduction

Liberia has shown great leadership in its commitment to address armed violence. In 2006 the country signed the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development; a diplomatic initiative aimed at addressing the interrelationship between armed violence and development. Liberia, along with over 100 state signatories, is thus committed to achieve *measurable reductions* in the global burden of armed violence by 2015.

The Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development defines armed violence as: *“the intentional use of illegitimate force (actual or threatened) with arms or explosives against a person, group, community, or state, which undermines people-centered security and/or sustainable development.”*

Armed violence constitutes a security threat and affects all members of society; rich and poor, old and young and men as well as women. Real or even perceived insecurity caused by armed violence undermines development, has negative effects on social cohesion.

Reliable data on the incidence, impact and perceptions of armed violence are critical to addressing the root causes of violence, and ultimately reducing its incidence and impact.

The Liberia Armed Violence Observatory (LAVO) was established in March 2011. Since then, a multi-stakeholder working group (see a full list of members in box 1) has been working to set up the observatory and develop a collaborative facility to collect and analyze data.

This constitutes the first LAVO report, presenting data on armed violence collected from official sources for the period 15 April to 31 August 2011. In addition to presenting data and characteristics of armed violence in Liberia, this report outlines some of the opportunities and challenges involved in the Observatory development process.

Box 1: LAVO Stakeholders

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of Defense • Ministry of Foreign Affairs • Ministry of Gender and Development • Ministry of Health and Social Welfare • Ministry of Internal Affairs • Ministry of Justice • Ministry of State and Presidential Affairs • Liberia National Police • Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services (LISGIS) • Liberia National Commission on Small Arms • World Health Organization (WHO) • United Nations Development Program (UNDP) • Liberia National Red Cross Society | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • West Africa Network for Peace Building (WANEP) • Peace Interaction Network • ActionAid Liberia • Liberia Action Network on Small Arms • Youth Crime Watch • Press Union of Liberia • New Democrat Newspaper • Inquirer Newspaper • Kofi Annan Institute for Conflict Transformation
 • <i>Observers:</i> • Liberian National Bar Association • Supreme Court of Liberia • Danish Demining Group |
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2. Purpose of this document

This report documents progress on the LAVO made to date, including the formation of a dedicated group of high level stakeholders, and the development of a model for systematic data collection, collation and dissemination. However, it also highlights the gaps in existing data sources due to incomplete records, limited capacity to collect data (particularly in rural areas), and insufficient fields to capture information at its source. It is the intention of the LAVO to address these requirements in order to strengthen the accuracy and value of LAVO data for use by policy and programming practitioners.

LAVO stakeholders have frequently raised concerns that the publication of data demonstrating high levels of armed violence in Liberia may discourage national and international investors. This has potential impacts on sustainable development and the consolidation of democracy. The LAVO data must therefore be presented in a sensitive manner. However, the LAVO and its transparency represents an effective and collaborative national function to record, analyse and make evidence-based recommendations to address armed violence; it demonstrates to the international community that Liberia is capable of and committed to identifying and addressing social issues.

Benefits and Challenges of an Observatory

Following the initial experience of implementing an observatory in Liberia, the following observations have been made regarding the benefits and challenges of establishing a national observatory on armed violence.

Challenges

- Armed violence incidents, especially in remote rural areas, go unreported to authorities meaning that official data may not be sufficient to gain a complete nationwide picture.
- If armed violence is not treated as a national issue of concern, institutions may not have separate categories for armed violence incidents, making data collection time consuming.
- A committed multi-stakeholder working group is key to the success of an observatory. If commitment is lacking in one area, it will affect the whole project.
- Sharing data in certain situations can be sensitive in terms of security and/or political interests. An Observatory may cause tensions between stakeholders if not carefully managed.

Benefits

- Primarily uses existing data-sets and sources meaning that an Observatory is a relatively small and low cost project.
- An Observatory enhances triangulation of individual data sources and identifies gaps and duplications.
- Involving civil society organizations, international organizations and media actors in the analysis will help fill the gaps as they have supplementary armed violence data and information to share.
- Key stakeholders are present at the same time for comprehensive discussion and analysis of armed violence and development issues beyond data collection. This also helps to develop commitment to the issue of armed violence.

3. Collection of data

This is the first LAVO report, and as such, the data presented below should not be read as a complete picture of the incidence of armed violence across Liberia. The data collected to date forms a solid foundation for systematically collecting, collating and analyzing data. Over time, it is anticipated that data collection and submission systems will be improved, current gaps in data will be identified and addressed, and the LAVO will serve as a valuable and functional resource for policy and programming practitioners to develop effective, evidence-based initiatives to reduce armed violence and its effects.

The LAVO collects data on:

- Demographics of victim(s) and perpetrator(s) (e.g. age, gender, nationality)
- Time and place of the incident
- Type of violence
- Type of weapon used
- Outcome of the incident (e.g. physical harm, theft)

In order to create an accurate coherent picture of the situation in Liberia it is important that the LAVO draws on various government and non-government data sources. By pooling and triangulating individual data sources, the LAVO can identify gaps and duplications in official datasets.

The Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, United Nations Police and the Liberian National Police are the key data providers for the LAVO. In addition, media actors, international organizations and Liberian civil society organizations also provide data on a smaller scale, covering particular regions or subgroups. The data providers for this report are:

1. Liberia National Police (LNP)
2. United Nations Police (UNPOL)
3. West Africa Network on Peacebuilding (WANEP)
4. Liberia Early Warning and Response Network
5. Liberian media
6. Sample hospitals in Monrovia

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) also provided data for this report on the prevalence of arms in cases of sexual violence.

Members of the LAVO working group meet to analyze the data collected on a monthly basis. LAVO data and analysis are open to public scrutiny – in keeping with the transparency and accountability the observatory itself embodies – such that information and analysis can be checked and corrected. This means that anyone is welcome to contact the secretariat to report incidents of armed violence or to challenge or correct LAVO data or analysis.

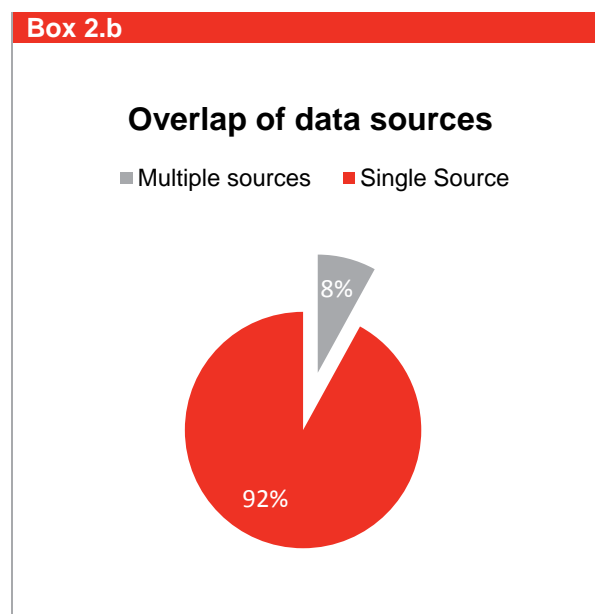
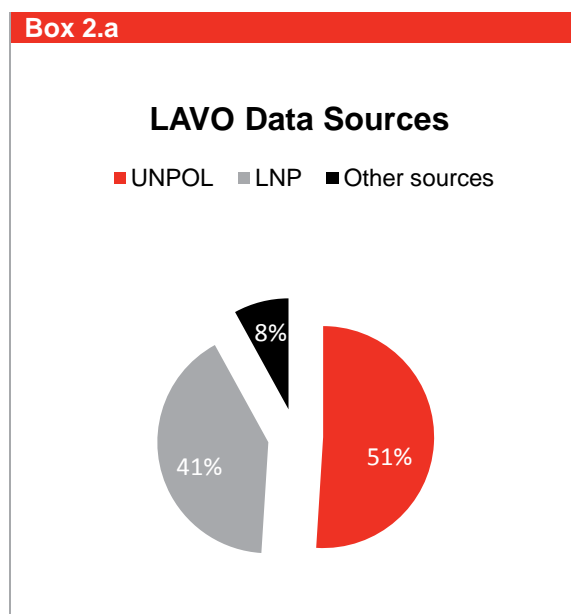
Mamba Point, Monrovia
(Photo by Teresa Dybeck)





Broad Street, Monrovia
(Photo by Adam Garley)

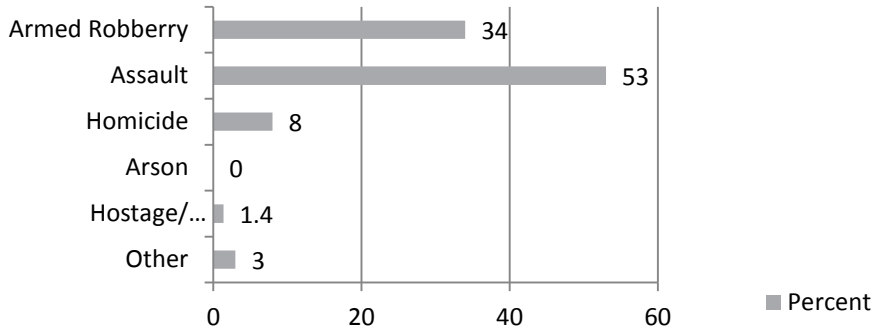
Box 2.a below presents the proportion of data collected by the LAVO from various sources. UNPOL and LNP combined provided 92% of currently held LAVO data. However, it is expected that this will change once more systematic nationwide data collection for hospitals is in place. See section 11.2 to learn about the current situation at hospitals. Box 2.b illustrates that few armed violence incidents are recorded by multiple agencies. This demonstrates the pre-existing lack of coordination among agencies to share data, and the consequential gaps in official datasets, which the LAVO seeks to address.



As demonstrated in boxes 3.a, 3.b and 3.c, there are also differences in the nature of violence reported by data providers. This may reflect how the institutions categorize crime. Nonetheless, incomplete and/or inaccurate datasets limit the capacity of agencies to effectively design appropriate policies and programmes to address the causes and effects of armed violence. For example, one could make different assumptions regarding the requirement to address incidents of assault, based on data held by UNPOL versus the LNP.

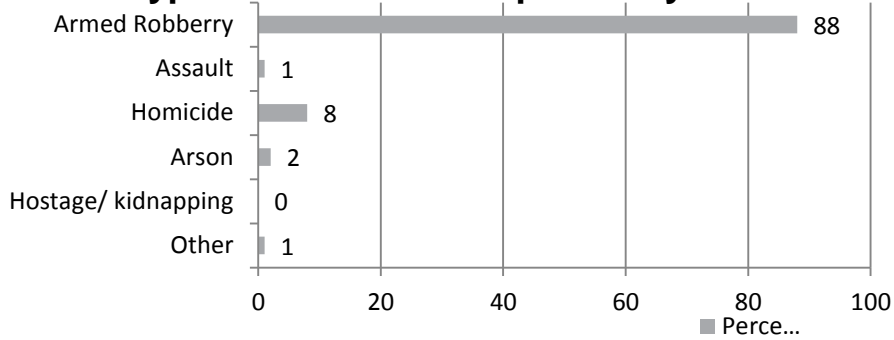
Box 3.a

Type of violence as reported by LNP



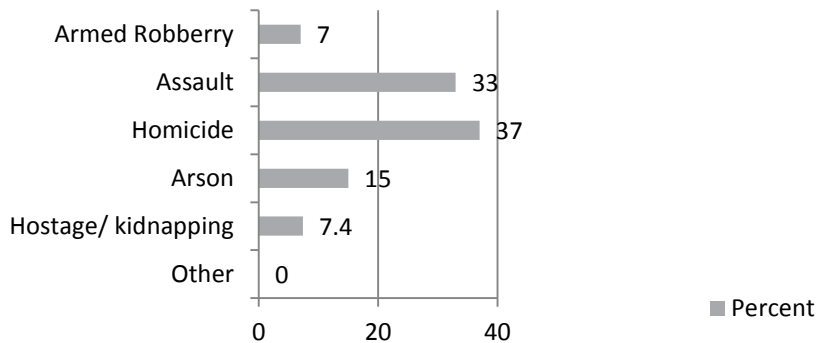
Box 3.b

Type of violence as reported by UNPOL



Box 3.c

Type of violence as reported by Media



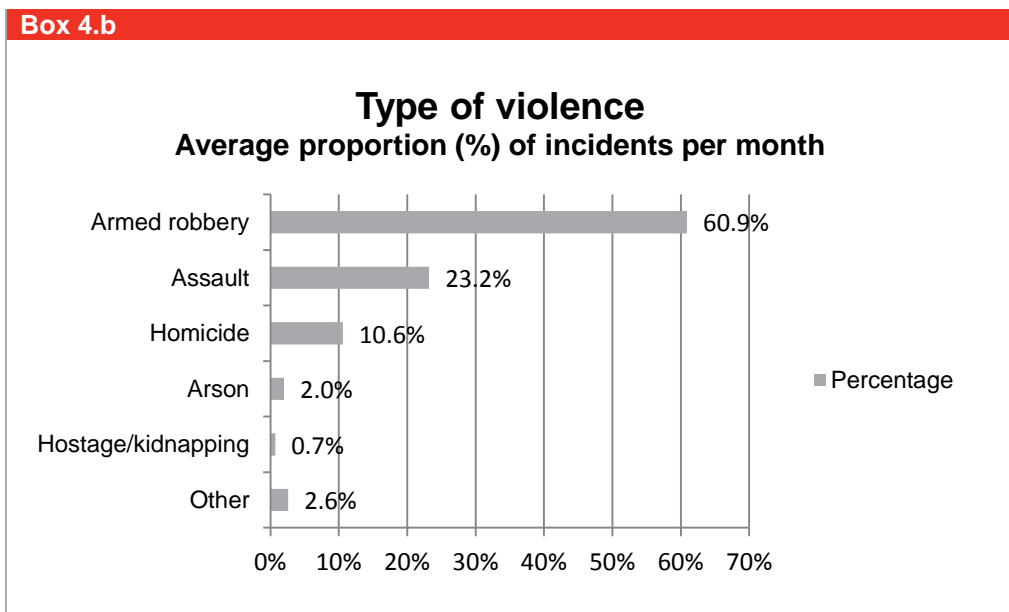
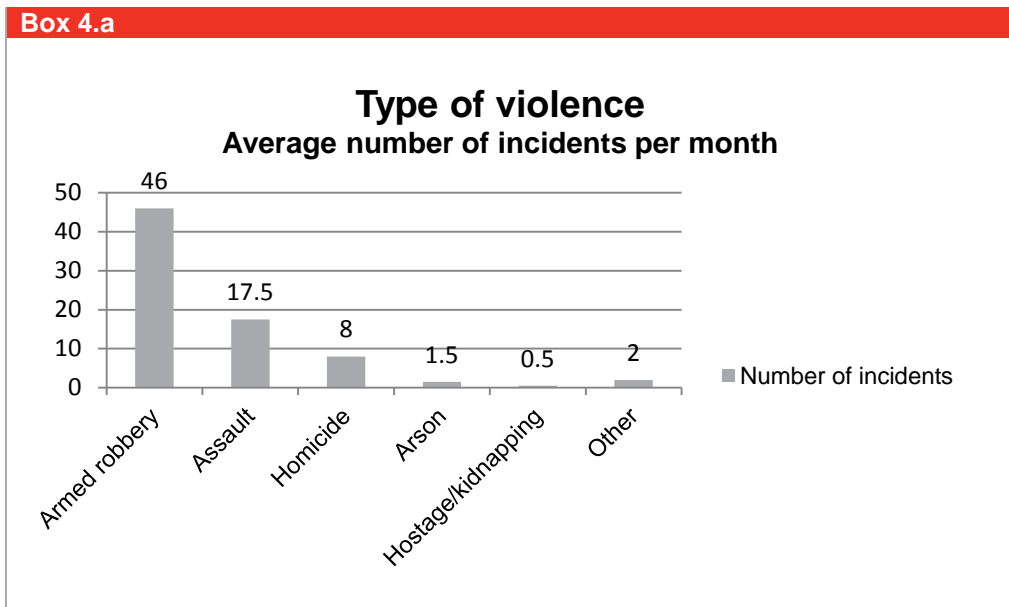
The collation of datasets from multiple sources through the LAVO ensures that an improved and more accurate overall picture of the incidence of armed violence across Liberia can be determined so that responsive initiatives to address problems are targeted and evidence based.

4. Delays in data gathering

Since April 2011, the LAVO has received datasets from the six data providing organizations listed above. However, due to a heavy workload during the Liberia 2011 General Elections period, the UN Police has been unable to provide datasets for July – August 2011. It is expected that these will be available in time for the second report. This gap in data has been taken into consideration for this report and, if not otherwise stated, the graphs are based on data from periods when all six data providers are included.

5. Type of violence

Boxes 4.a and 4.b display the average number of incidents recorded per month by type of violence. The prevalence of armed robberies corresponds with the results of the 2010 Baseline Assessment on armed violence in Liberia¹.

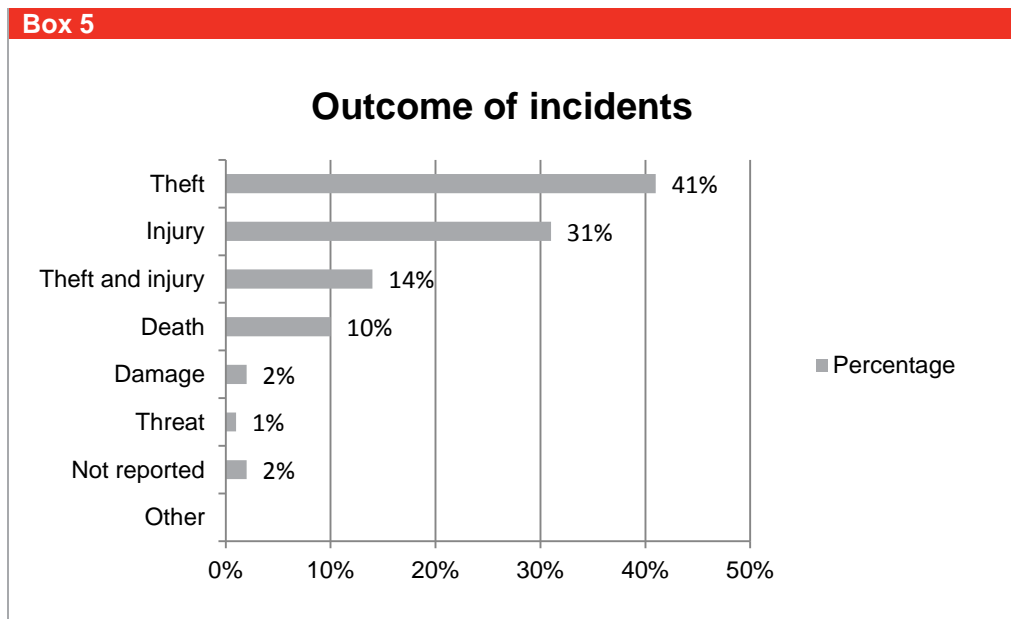


¹ AOAV (Action on Armed Violence) conducted a baseline assessment of armed violence in Monrovia in 2010, while Small Arms Survey (SAS) conducted a baseline assessment of armed violence in the counties. The household surveys were conducted in coordination with the Liberian Institute for Statistics and Geo-Information Systems (LISGIS).

6. Outcome of incidents

According to LAVO data, theft is the most common reported outcome of armed violence incidents, indicating that economically driven crime is prevalent in Liberia. In 14% of the armed robberies, the victim is also reportedly injured.

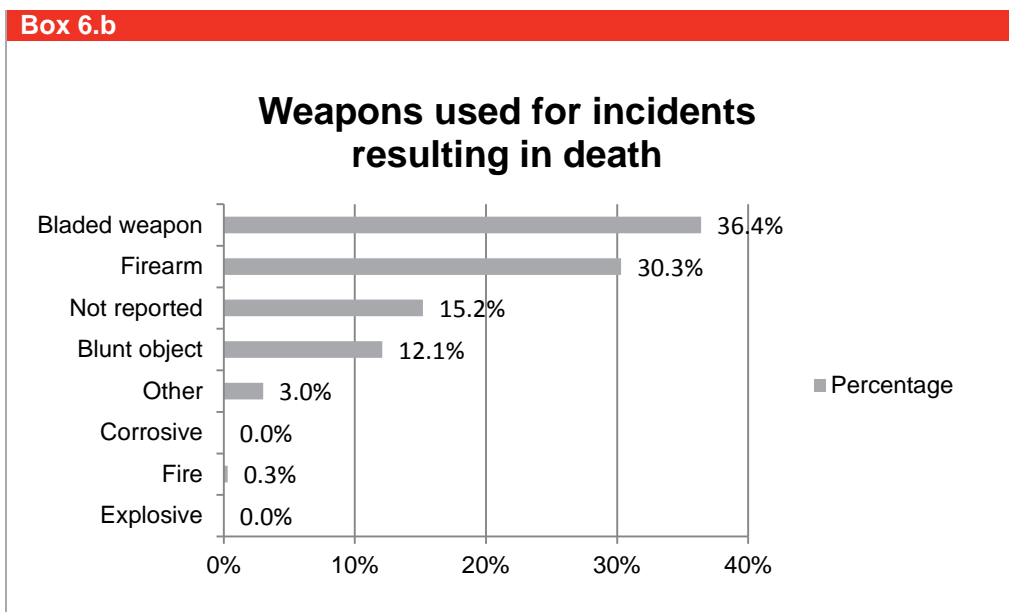
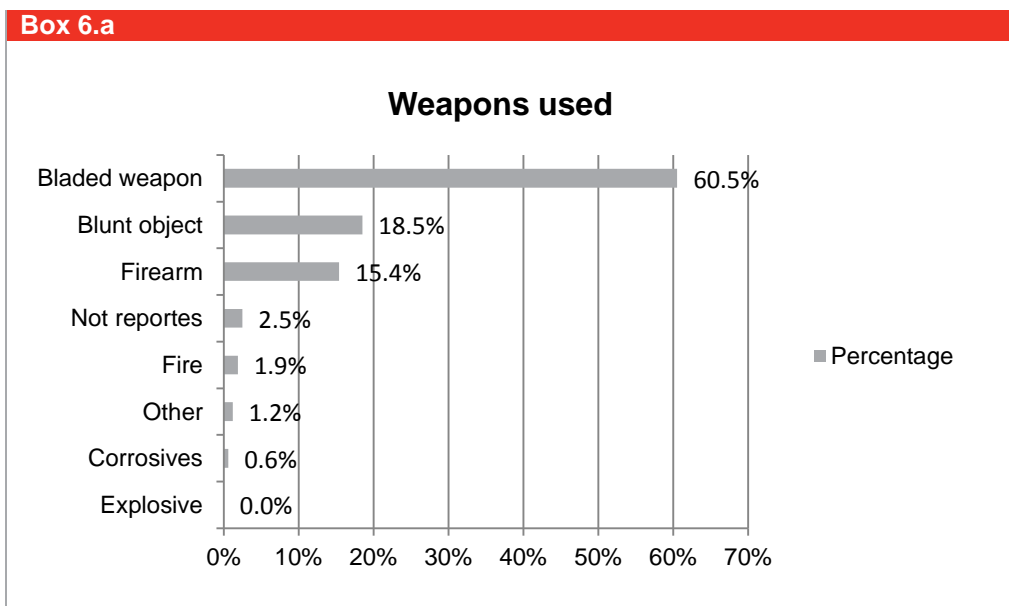
The interactive LAVO map at lern.usahidi.com (select 'LAVO' under 'Group' to display LAVO data) allows for deeper analysis of incidents and their outcomes, as the viewer can display the outcome of incidents by category.



**Paramount Chief
in the Southeast**
(Photo by Adam
Garley)

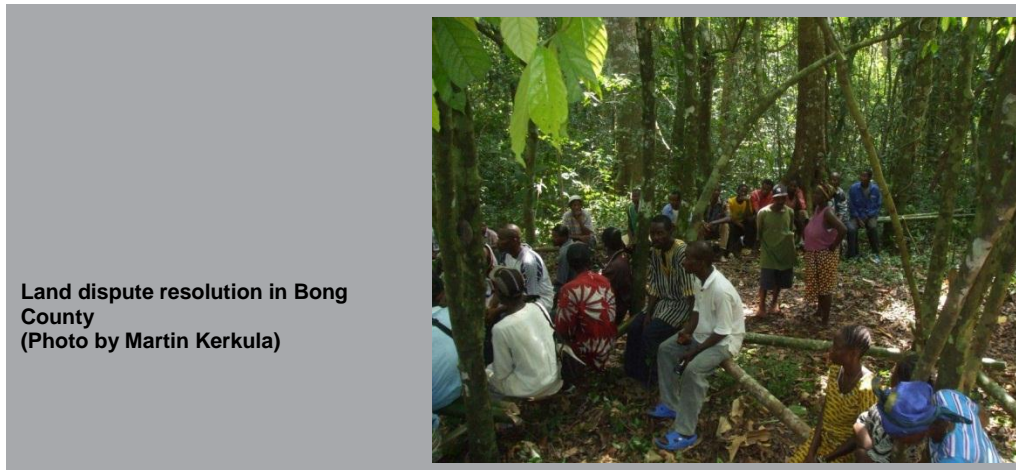
7. Weapons used

According to the LAVO data, the most common weapon type used in Liberia is bladed weapons, followed by blunt objects such as sticks and rocks. Firearms are only used in 15.4 % of cases recorded. However, for armed violence incidents resulting in death, firearms are used in 30.3 % of cases. On a global scale this figure is relatively low since worldwide an average of 60% of homicides are committed with firearms. The recorded incidence of death and injury resulting from firearms use demonstrates that this is an issue requiring attention in Liberia. However, the prevalence of other tools of violence, in particular bladed weapons and blunt objects, which cannot be reduced by legislation, demonstrates that the underlying causes of armed violence must also be addressed. The prevalence of bladed weapons and blunt objects in incidents of armed violence corresponds with the results of the 2010 Baseline Assessment results.

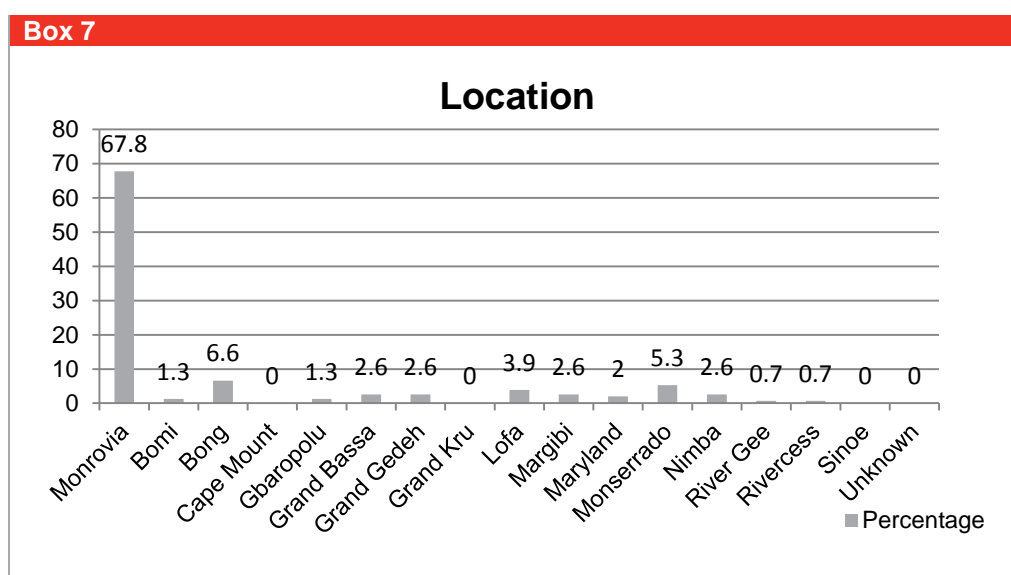


8. Location

The vast majority of armed violence incidents recorded by the LAVO take place in the capital Monrovia (see Box 7). It should however be noted that half of Liberia's population reside in the capital, and data collection capacity is much higher here. The lack of economic opportunities in rural areas continues to cause large scale migration of people to urban centres in search of employment. Persistent unemployment nationwide has resulted in the creation and growth of a sizeable underclass of unemployed Liberians in rural and newly urbanised areas. This creates significant risk factors for renewed armed violence. In urban areas, Monrovia is hardest hit by this problem although the trend is now evident in county capitals, particularly those close to natural resources.



In Liberia, the differences between Monrovia and rural areas are vast in terms of capacity, communication and infrastructure. While the standard of reporting of data is relatively high in the capital, the situation in the counties is very different. In the case of the LNP, although regional command structures are in place, the system is overly centralised and regional offices receive inadequate logistical support. The presence of police officers in the counties is considerably low and staff also struggle with poor road conditions and communication technology². The LAVO aims to address this lack of county data in future, and will build on the 2010 Baseline Assessment results conducted in the counties by SAS and LISGIS.



² 'Security Sector reform in Liberia – a case of the Liberian National Police and its capacity to respond to internal threat in the wake of UNMIL drawdown in 2012. Research undertaken by Search for Common Ground/ Talking Drum Studio in partnership with SIPRI, 2010, p 6.

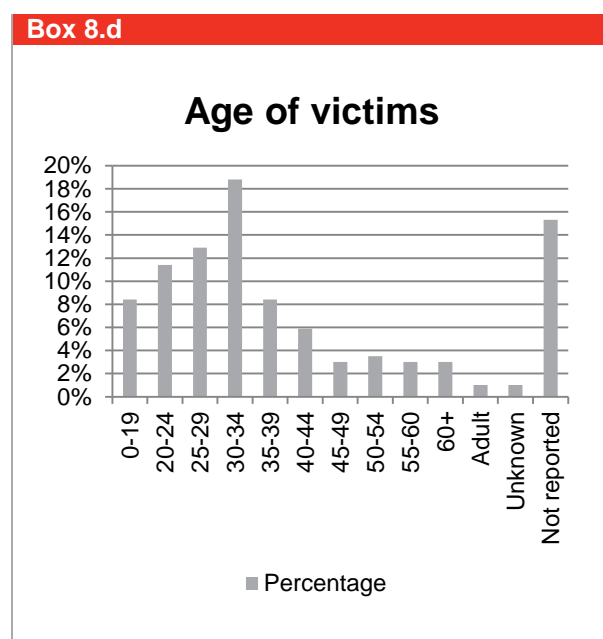
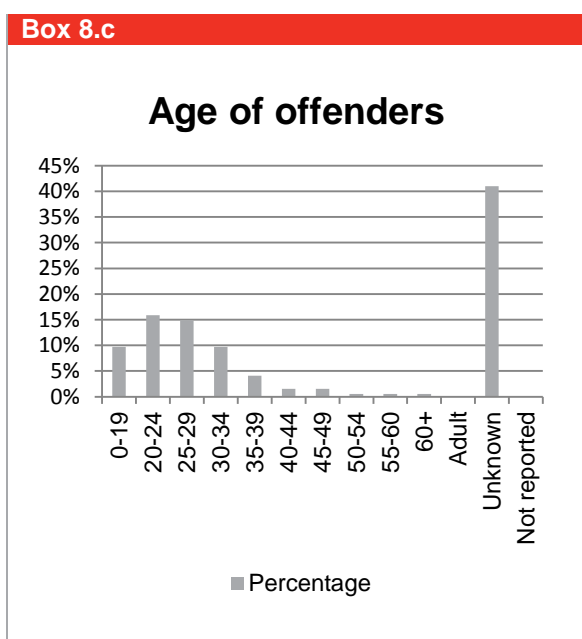
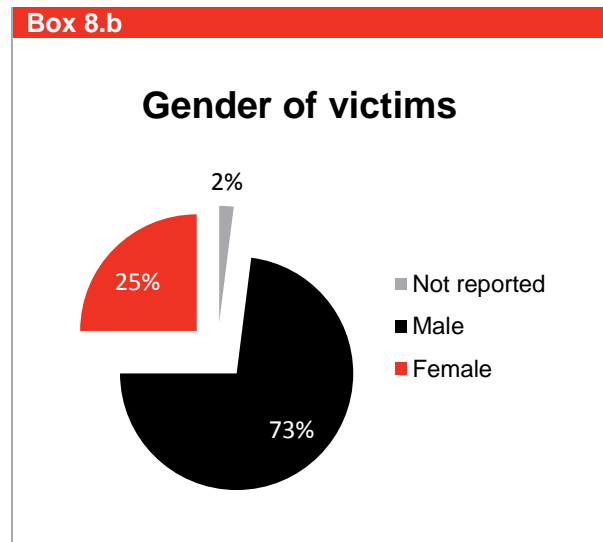
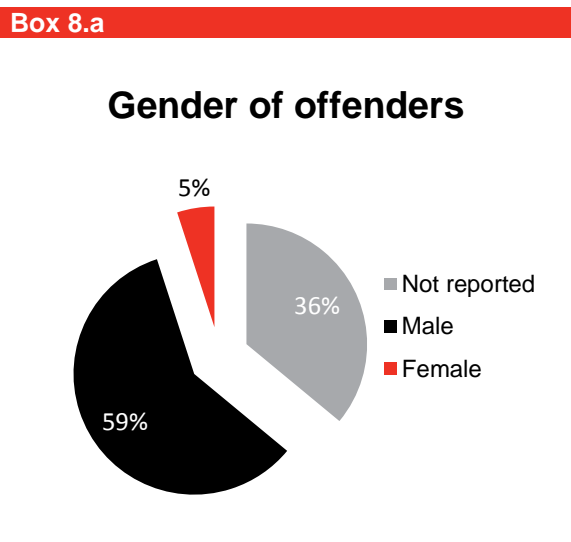
9. Demographics of offenders and victims

It should be noted that LNP is the only data provider with substantial data on offenders. However, recent cases reported to the LAVO are still under investigation, so many do not include data on offenders.

LAVO can easily identify which data providers are not providing certain data and consequently can encourage the institution to address this in order to improve data collection in that area.

While the collection and publication of Liberia National Police (LNP) data is to be commended, there are still significant gaps in official data collection and handling. Comparing official LNP data with the 2010 Baseline Assessment results reveals that incidents routinely go unreported to the police. For example, the household surveys found that, with the exception of gender based violence, men and women are almost equally victimised by armed violence³ whereas the official LAVO data indicates that only 25% of the victims are women.

Boxes 8a-d present the gender and age of offenders and victims according to the LAVO data.

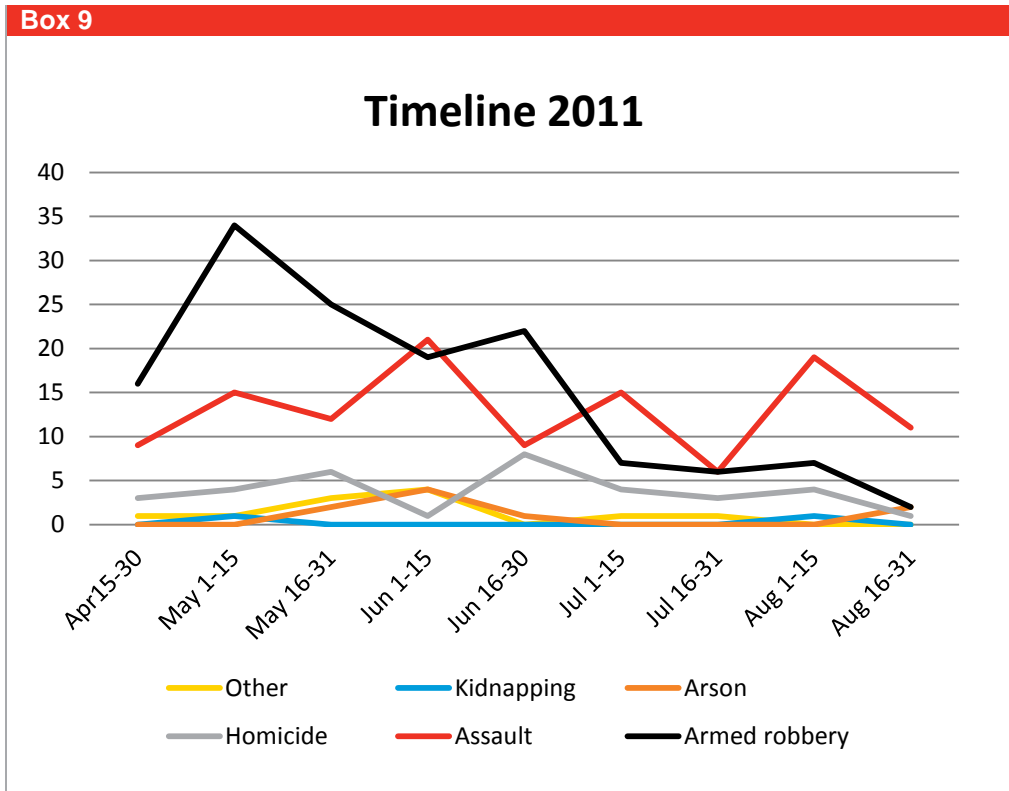


³ Action on Armed Violence 'Monrovia- An Assessment of violence and insecurity in the Liberian capital' June 2011, p 28.

10. Timeline

One of the LAVO's core functions is to report on trends over time. Since the LAVO currently only holds 4.5 months of data, no real assessment can be made on trends to date.

Box 9 displays the number of armed violence incidents by type of violence from 15 April to 30 August 2011 (i.e. all data collected by LAVO at the time of writing). It should be noted that there is no UNPOL data for the second half of this timeline from July to August, meaning that data presented for this period is incomplete (this particularly affects the number of 'armed robbery' incidents recorded during this period).



Sinoe County
(Photo by Teresa Dybeck)

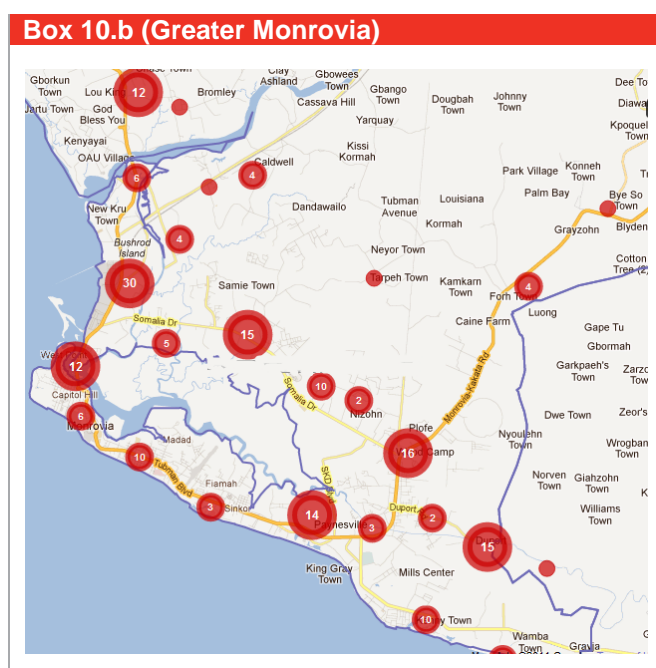
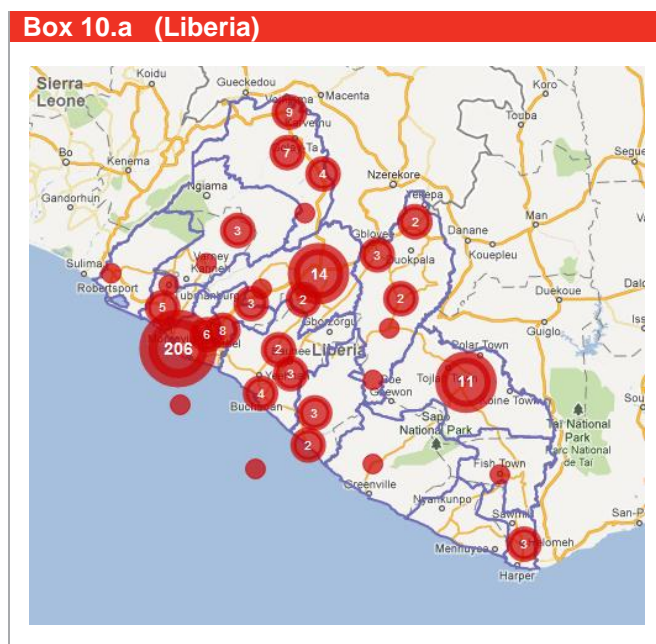
11. Mapping the incidence of armed violence

Mapping the incidence of armed violence will reveal hotspot areas particularly affected by violence. The LAVO will soon have an interactive website which will allow anyone in need of or interested in armed violence data to filter out categories and cross check different datasets by location.

The LAVO data are currently available online at the Early Warning and Response Network's site: lern.usshahidi.com (LAVO findings are accessed under 'groups').

This map allows the viewer to filter out categories such as: type of violence, weapon used, demographics of offenders and victims, date and location.

Boxes 10.a and 10.b display all armed violence incidents recorded by the LAVO from 15 April-30 August 2011.



12. The data providers

12.1. Liberia National Police and UN Police data

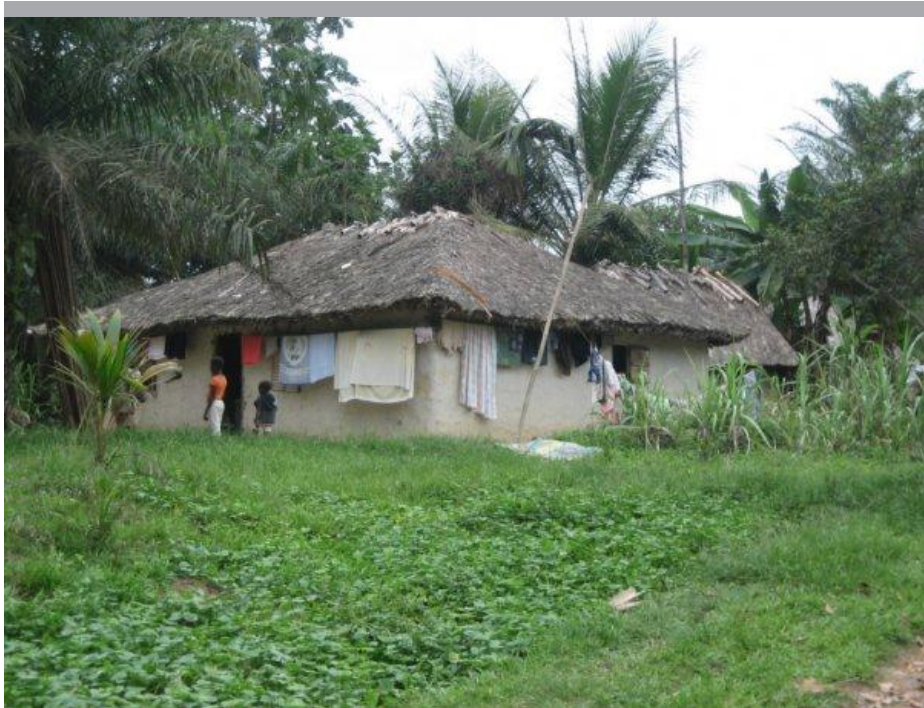
The collection of Liberia National Police (LNP) data is to be commended given the logistical constraints still faced by the institution. Nevertheless, the UN Police (UNPOL) is still providing considerable support to the LNP and produces unique data on incidents. UNPOL is therefore a separate data provider for the LAVO.

12.2. Hospital data

Hospital data is central to creating a comprehensive picture of armed violence nationwide, particularly in capturing data on victims who do not report the incident to other authorities. The standard Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (MHSW) reporting forms do not have a separate category for injuries caused by armed violence, making data collection time consuming (as the data collector must manually go through all medical records in order to identify the cases where armed violence is the cause of injury or death). While some medical records clearly state that an injury was caused by armed violence, this is not a universal field on forms. As such, these incidents will not be captured by the LAVO.

The MHSW is amenable to creating a separate category for violence related injuries on the standard reporting forms nationwide, and to contributing this information to the LAVO. Accurate information on the number of violence related injuries treated by Liberian hospitals will allow the Ministry to calculate the actual cost of armed violence in Liberia and will therefore promote the recognition armed violence as a national health issue.

Prior to nationwide implementation of MHSW data collection, the LAVO has gathered data from two major hospitals in Monrovia (St. Joseph's Catholic Hospital and Redemption Hospital). Comparing this data with the other datasets shows that a significant number of cases are not reported to the police.



House in Sinoe County
(Photo by Adam Garley)

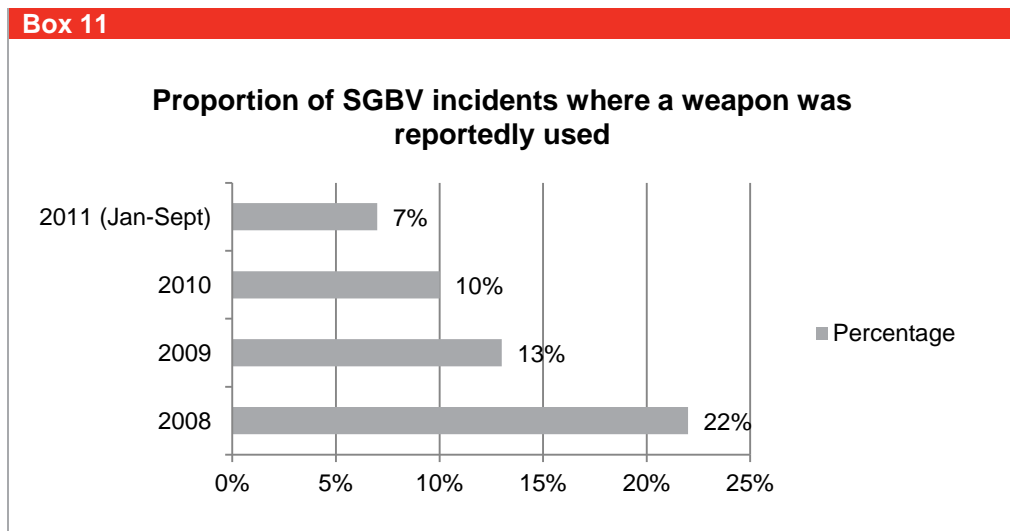
12.3. Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV)

The 2010 Baseline Assessment determined that while SGBV appeared to be common in Liberia and widespread in Monrovia, reporting of SGBV incidents was significantly lacking. This makes the collection of incident data particularly challenging for the LAVO, which relies on official data sources.

The Ministry of Gender and Development (MGD) collects data on cases of SGBV. However, similar to the Ministry of Health, the MGD does not currently collect data on whether a weapon was used to facilitate or intensify violent incidents. Since the use or presence of a weapon facilitates SGBV and makes the abuse more lethal, it is important to understand the scope and scale of this type of violence.

The Ministry has been positively receptive to the idea of creating a separate category on reporting forms. It is hoped MGD data will therefore be available for future reports.

For this report Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) provided the LAVO data on weapon use in cases of sexual and gender-based violence reported to MSF (Box 11). It should however be noted that the figures are not nationwide and only contain data collected at MSF clinics.



13. Gaps in data collection

There are still gaps in official data collection and handling. In Liberia, the differences between the capital Monrovia and rural areas are vast in terms of capacity, communication and infrastructure. While the standard of reporting of data is relatively high in the capital, the situation in the counties is very different. Given these circumstances there is a risk that armed violence incidences occurring in rural areas go unreported.

However, it should be remembered that any observatory is a process and an important part is to develop national capacities on data collection. Additional data sources will be added contributing to a more complete picture.

The LAVO will also conduct research on armed violence occurrences in order to (1), support LAVO by capturing data not reported to the authorities and (2), conduct targeted research projects to better understand the root causes of violence in certain areas or within certain groups, identified by the LAVO as especially violence prone.

LAVO will also continue to investigate if there are additional existing sources, i.e. agencies and organizations that collect data or work with armed violence prevention.

14. LAVO secretariat

Liberia's development depends on national ownership; any program, reform plan or project must be designed by Liberians or in close cooperation with Liberians, who best understand the country's history and current situation⁴. This has been a guiding principle when designing and implementing the LAVO. British Non-Governmental Organization Landmine Action facilitated the establishment of the LAVO and stakeholders have identified the Kofi Annan Institute for Conflict Transformation (KAICT) at the University of Liberia as a partner and host of the LAVO.

15. LAVO online

LAVO will soon have an interactive website which will allow the public to view armed violence data, to filter out categories, and to cross check different datasets.

LAVO findings are currently available online at the Early Warning and Response Network's site lern.usshahidi.com (LAVO findings accessible under 'groups').



**Fish Town, River
Gee County**
(Photo by Martin
Kerkula)

⁴ International Crisis Group 'Liberia: How Sustainable Is the Recovery?' Africa Report N°177, 19 Aug 2011, p 26.

Is your organization in need of specific data on armed violence?

LAVO data and analysis are open to public scrutiny – in keeping with the transparency and accountability the observatory itself embodies – such that information and analysis can be checked and corrected.

This means that anyone can contact the secretariat to:

- Contribute data or research on armed violence and contribute to the LAVO stakeholder discussions
- Report incidents of armed violence
- Challenge or correct LAVO data or analysis
- Request specific data by location, type of violence and /or a cross referencing of different categories.
- Suggest areas of research or analysis that will add to the LAVO's understanding of armed violence and its effects.

Contact:

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