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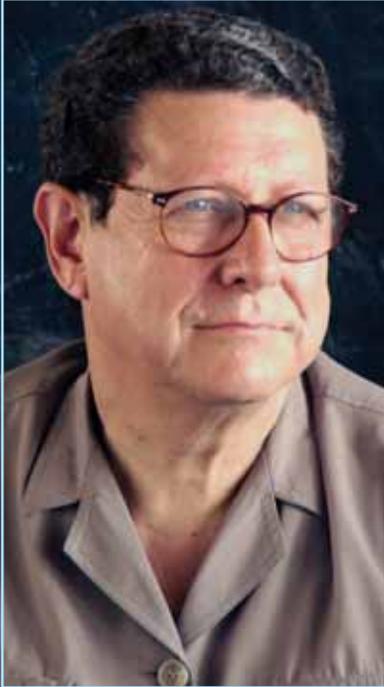


Making An Impact

**Reclaiming Shattered
Childhood**

Rescuing Rice Farmers

Message from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General



Since I last wrote in this column, Liberia has crossed another significant milestone on its way to economic recovery. In late April, the UN Security Council unanimously voted to lift the sanctions on Liberian diamonds, paving the way for Liberia to resume diamond mining, which, following on the earlier lifting of sanctions on timber exports, should give a helpful boost to the economy. In the past, instead of contributing to national development and benefiting the population, these natural resources fuelled conflicts in Liberia and the region.

The lifting of the timber and diamond sanctions is an acknowledgement by the Security Council of the Liberian government's determination to put in place internal control measures to ensure that these natural resources benefit the people of Liberia and are not misappropriated. This is yet another endorsement by the international community of the country's progress towards good governance and rule of law. For over a year now, the United Nations Mission in Liberia has been supporting the Liberian government in its efforts to institute measures that would lead to the lifting of the embargo.

In March, I had the opportunity to present the Secretary-General's fourteenth progress report on Liberia to the Security Council. The report highlighted the successes made in Liberia to bolster peace and further economic progress while pointing out the various reconstruction and development challenges that need urgent attention. These challenges to peace in Liberia must be tackled head-on to ensure the process of renewal and recovery is on course.

In view of the continued need for international support to Liberia's recovery and development, the Security Council renewed the mandate of UNMIL for a further period of six months. The Council also called on the government of Liberia to take further steps towards achieving key benchmarks aimed at facilitating a phased, gradual consolidation, drawdown and withdrawal of UNMIL's troop contingent without compromising the country's security.

In a few months, a drawdown plan for UNMIL, based on the operational requirements and the progress towards consolidation of peace, will be submitted to the Security Council. This plan will take into account the security situation in the country and the capacity of the new Liberian National Police, the Armed Forces of Liberia and other national security agencies to manage the security challenges facing the country. The plan will be discussed with the government and other partners to ensure that all stakeholders in the Liberian peace process are fully consulted before the Security Council makes its decisions on the future directions for UNMIL.

While we all recognize and applaud the progress made so far, we cannot afford to be complacent. Liberia is no longer a "failed state." But the challenges abound. UNMIL and the UN Country Team must continue to be vigilant and diligent both to lock in the gains made so far and to assist the government and the people of Liberia to chart the way forward to a better future.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alan Doss". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Alan Doss

**Special Representative of the Secretary-General and
Coordinator of United Nations Operations in Liberia**



UNMIL has so far implemented more than 250 Quick Impact Projects to benefit communities across Liberia. Communities themselves identify these small-scale projects, which cover various sectors such as education, energy, shelter, road rehabilitation and the rule of law.



Nearly 12,000 children were among the more than 100,000 combatants disarmed in Liberia as the civil war came to an end. The children's agency, UNICEF, is spearheading their reintegration into the society by offering formal education and skills training programmes.



For Liberia's farmers, whose livelihoods were shattered by the civil war, this year's farming season looks set to be better than any in the recent past as emergency assistance reaches 80,000 vulnerable farmers. The assistance includes rice seeds and training to enhance crop productivity.



The new Women and Children Protection Section of the Liberian National Police is a boon to Liberia's women and children, who have been the worst affected by sexual violence during the civil war.

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Challenges Remain Despite Progress

By Mathew Elavanalthoduka

Pervasive poverty, high unemployment, massive illiteracy and food insecurity continue to be major obstacles to Liberia's development despite numerous successes in bolstering peace and furthering economic progress in the war-torn

nation, says Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's latest report on Liberia presented to the Security Council in March.

Ban acknowledged the country's steady progress in consolidating peace, stability and democracy as well as in promoting economic recovery with sustained support from the international community. "Liberia continues to make steady

progress in consolidating peace, stability and democracy, as well as in promoting recovery" but the country still faces "significant reconstruction and development challenges" arising from 14 years of civil strife, said the report, presented by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Alan Doss.

"A number of tasks that are critical to



the consolidation of peace in the country have yet to be completed, including the reintegration of ex-combatants, the resettlement of returnees, the reform of the judiciary and the extension of the rule of law throughout the country,” the report cautioned.

The report highlighted the potential threat to Liberia’s stability stemming from high unemployment, including among former combatants and deactivated security personnel, as a source of “serious concern.” Labour-intensive employment opportunities must be provided in the short term to address this threat, while sustainable employment opportunities generated through a revitalized economy will need to be created in the long term, the report pointed out, stressing the need to intensify efforts to provide reintegration opportunities to former combatants who have not

yet benefited from reintegration programmes.

Warning of the plausible external threats to Liberia’s peace and stability, the Secretary-General said the “unpredictable situations” in Côte d’Ivoire and Guinea create an environment that poses additional challenges to efforts to build sustained stability in the country. Policies at the highest political levels to promote good neighbourly relations and to build mechanisms for stability in the border areas and the wider sub-region are required, he pointed out.

The report praised the “very encouraging” positive expressions of support by international partners during the Liberia Partners’ Forum held in Washington in February that brought together the donor

“A number of tasks that are critical to the consolidation of peace in the country have yet to be completed, including the reintegration of ex-combatants, the resettlement of returnees, the reform of the judiciary and the extension of the rule of law throughout the country.”

Ban Ki-moon

community and multilateral agencies supporting the country’s reconstruction. “I was particularly gratified by the commitment made towards helping the government find solutions to clear its debts with international financial institutions. It is hoped that the partners will follow through on these commitments so that Liberia’s multilateral debt arrears can be cleared in a timely manner,” said the Secretary-General.

Citing the slow progress of the work of Liberia’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission owing to a number of management, personnel and budgetary challenges, the report said these problems need to be resolved “on an urgent basis” so that the Commission can continue its valuable work of ensuring lasting peace in Liberia.

Based on Ban’s report and recognizing

the significant challenges that Liberia continues to face, the Security Council unanimously adopted a resolution that recommended the extension of the mandate of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) for a further period of six months. The Council also called on the Secretary-General to take steps towards achieving key benchmarks aimed at facilitating a phased, gradual consolidation, drawdown and withdrawal of UNMIL’s troop contingent “as the situation permits and without compromising” the country’s security.

The Security Council commended the continuing steps taken by the government of Liberia to improve governance and combat corruption, as well as the significant progress made in regaining government control over Liberia’s natural resources. The Council also welcomed UNMIL’s policy to promote and protect the rights of women and called on Liberian authorities to continue their efforts to enhance cooperation with the UN country team and civil society to combat sexual exploitation and abuse in the country.

An additional element of administrative and related support and security for the activities of the Special Court for Sierra Leone in Liberia was added to the mandate of UNMIL by the Security Council on a “cost-reimbursable basis” and “without prejudice to the performance of its other mandated tasks.”

Reacting to Liberian media reports that portrayed the Security Council’s request to the Secretary-General to submit a drawdown plan for the mission as an indication of UNMIL’s imminent withdrawal from Liberia, Special Representative of the Secretary-General Alan Doss ruled out any precipitous withdrawal of UN peacekeepers from the country.

“The resolution does not call for the withdrawal of UNMIL forces at this time. Help me reassure the people of Liberia that UNMIL is not on the way out. But there will be readjustment of our forces. For example, we have increased our police presence, and one military battalion left at the end of last year. Others will leave but it will not be done in a hasty fashion,” Doss assured the Liberian population. ♦

By Sulaiman Momodu

The mandate of securing peace and sustaining security in Liberia is shared by the 14,000-strong international military personnel from 48 nations and over 1,200 UN Police personnel from 39 countries who form part of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). Lt.-Gen. Chikadibia Isaac Obiakor from Nigeria commands the military force while Commissioner Mohammed Alhassan from Ghana heads the UN Police (UNPOL).

UNMIL took over peacekeeping operations from the ECOWAS Mission in Liberia (ECOMIL) on 1 October 2003. Since its deployment, security and stability have been restored to the war-ravaged country. Currently, UN troops are deployed throughout the country, which is divided into four sectors, with each sector comprising a brigade-strength unit with full combat, engineering and medical support elements.

As Liberia emerges from 14 years of mindless violence, simple incidents like vehicle accidents or unfounded rumours continue to occasionally spark spontaneous violent reactions from members of the public. Houses have been set on fire in some instances. A UN funded police station was set ablaze in Bong County in late April this year.

“People think that in a democracy development should come in one day but it does not happen that way,” says Force Commander Obiakor, pointing out that there is a problem of expectations vis-à-vis the capacity of the government to deliver what people want. He describes the occasional internal disturbances in the country as “risks and not a threat” to the peace process. “Such risks can impede development if people destroy property. It means we move forward and come back, so there is no progress.”

UNPOL is engaged in training the 3,500-strong Liberian National Police (LNP) and other statutory law enforcement agencies as part of the efforts to restructure and rebuild these institutions as well as supporting their operational activities. So far, over 2,800 LNP have been trained while more than 700 are undergo-

Bolstering Peace and Security



Lt.-Gen. Obiakor

ing training. At present the LNP lacks the capacity to efficiently carry out its responsibility to maintain law and order throughout the country.

Shortly before he left on a temporary assignment to New York, UNPOL Commissioner Alhassan told UNMIL FOCUS that the number of riots and protests in the country continues to decline and that the LNP, with support from UNPOL, has been able to police these gatherings professionally and without resort to use of force.

“In many cases crime is being reported to the police as opposed to mob action when UNMIL first came to Liberia three years ago,” he noted.

In restructuring the LNP, which was bloated and largely discredited in the eyes of the public, over 2,000 police officers who did not meet the required recruitment criteria were deactivated. UNPOL has assisted

to bring in donor support, vital equipment, vehicles and other accoutrements to enable the Liberian Police to be in a position to function. Several police stations throughout the country have been rehabilitated through UNMIL’s Quick Impact Projects. At the Police Academy, new classroom blocks have been constructed through the support of the governments of Norway and the Netherlands.

In the new LNP, policies and procedures are being instituted to ensure that police practices are in consonance with democratic principles and international standards. New rank structures have been introduced, command and control have been strengthened and efforts are being made to ensure that there is total decentralisation of the police throughout Liberia.

Although much progress has been made, Liberia’s new police force has a long way to go before it can effectively maintain law and order in the country. “We still have much more to do in assisting the LNP to become a democratic, principled and modern police force. This will be ongoing until the last UNPOL officer leaves Liberia,” reiterates Commissioner Alhassan.

While the police force is being trained and incrementally deployed, training is also going on for the new Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) as part of the overall security sector reform. The first batch of 106 soldiers graduated out of a targeted number of 2,000 last year. AFL recruits are being trained by DynCorp International, a pri-

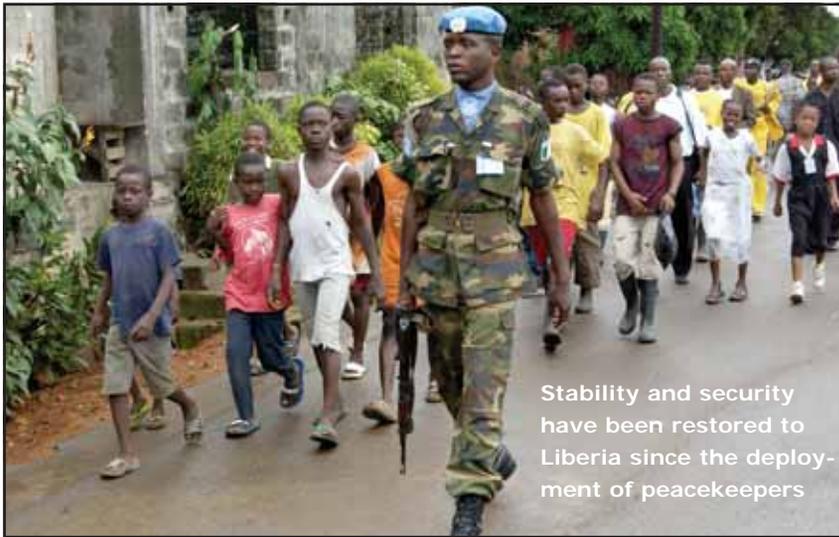


Commissioner Alhassan

Guinea.

To enhance regional security, ECOWAS is forming a 3000-strong standby force with its logistics base proposed to be in Hastings, near Freetown, capital of Sierra Leone. “So even if there are only 2,000 troops in AFL, it does not mean that is all. On the wings, there will be the ECOWAS standby force that can move into any place,” says Force Commander Obiakor, looking at the long term prospects of regional security in West Africa.

In Monrovia, police carry out cordon and search operations in addition to conducting night patrols to enhance security. Special Representative of the Secretary-General Alan Doss, Inspector General of the LNP Beatrice Munah Sieh and other security personnel participate from time to time in the night patrols to gauge the performance of the police and to get feedback



Stability and security have been restored to Liberia since the deployment of peacekeepers

vate security company contracted by the United States Government.

In the past, cross-border attacks have been part of the conflicts in the West African region. To prevent such attacks, UNMIL has been conducting border patrols, including “Operation Mayo” on the Ivorian border, “Operation Logo” on the border with Sierra Leone, and “Operation Seskin” on the border with

from the public.

Further to restoring peace and security in Liberia, UNMIL also collaborates with the UN Mission in Côte d’Ivoire and protects the UN-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone. The police and military components of the mission have also been rendering humanitarian assistance to the local population as they savour peace after long years of civil war. ♦



Making an Impact

Alan Doss inaugurates a newly built police station

By Sulaiman Momodu

For 15-year-old Ernest Konneh of Robertsport, capital of Grand Cape Mount County, protection of his mother's fish was foremost on his mind as a team from the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and government officials arrived in the coastal town sometime in April to inaugurate a police station.

"My mother buys raw fish from fishermen at the wharf, which she smokes and sells. It is with the little that she gets as profit that she supports the family. But sometimes rogues break into the kitchen at night and steal all the fish from the dryer," he says, in the company of friends who had all converged to catch a glimpse of the handing over of the building.

Aimed at restoring law and order as Liberia recovers from the ruins of 14 years of civil war, the newly rehabilitated station in Robertsport is one of 24 police stations that have been funded by UNMIL's Quick Impact Project (QIP) across the country. "We have 261 projects completed and 21 are ongoing," says Faith Harding, Chief of

Resource Mobilization and Trust Fund Programme. Usually, the UN funds QIPs for two years, but in view of its huge

The small-scale projects are implemented with the full participation of the community members. After identifying the projects in areas that are prioritised by UNMIL, communities allocate land, provide labour and monitor the implementation of the projects by non-governmental organisations, government institutions, UNMIL's military forces and other sections of the mission.

needs, Liberia has been fortunate to receive funding for four years running since 2003.

Education, energy, good governance,

health institutions, road rehabilitation, rule of law, shelter, and water and sanitation are the sectors in which QIP has intervened. The education sector accounts for 41 per cent of the projects implemented as getting Liberia's children back to school has been a top priority. Montserrado County, including Monrovia and its environs, has the highest number of 100 projects as the focus during the first two years was where a high number of people had settled during the civil war. As many people began returning home with the restoration of peace, QIP literally followed them to their communities to assist them resettle.

The small-scale projects are implemented with the full participation of the community members. After identifying the projects in areas that are prioritised by UNMIL, communities allocate land, provide labour and monitor the implementation of the projects by non-governmental organisations, government institutions, UNMIL's military forces and other sections of the mission. The ceiling per project has been raised from US\$ 15,000 to 25,000. So far, nearly US\$ 4 million has

been spent on the implementation of the projects, offering short-term employment for the local population. Today in many communities across Liberia, the QIP label could be seen emblazoned on schools, prisons, clinics, police stations and other structures.

Currently, Liberia is among countries with the highest infant and maternal mortality rates. One in four children in the country dies before the age of five because of the lack of health facilities or poor quality of health care, especially in rural areas. To enhance health care, five health structures have been built for traditional birth attendants in Saclepea, Nimba County. The new structures bring to 15 the number of health facilities constructed and rehabilitated by the QIP in eight counties.

“Health is wealth. We must help you generate this wealth. Without healthy children, there will be no healthy Liberia,” says the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Alan Doss, as he hands over a health facility completed by QIP to a rural community.

Recently, QIP built 10 regional diamond offices following the lifting of sanctions on diamonds by the Security Council. When the ban on timber was lifted last year, QIP assisted with building offices for the Forestry Development Authority. “Quick Impact Projects are small, but very effective,” points out Harding.

In the Monrovia suburb of Caldwell in mid-March, children and youth thronged the premises of the first youth peace centre in Liberia to witness the inauguration of

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the QIP building which would be a model for the country where young people will meet to talk about peace and development. Hitherto, the community was notorious for

violence. Inaugurating the centre, the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Jordan Ryan, pointed out that the challenges facing post-conflict Liberia are enormous but the determination of the youth to make a difference is the country’s greatest gift.

Before the intervention of QIP, a major constraint public servants faced was the need to travel to the capital Monrovia to collect their salaries. QIP built three payment centres for the Central Bank in Voinjama, Zwedru and Tubmanburg, thus enabling the civil servants to collect their pay from these locations.

In the Cowfield community, on the outskirts of Monrovia, Special Representative Doss recently handed over a new police station much to the relief of local residents. During the war, residents say several civilians were massacred in the Cowfield community. But as if that was not enough, with the restoration of peace, a criminal gang had begun terrorizing the community. “We could not sleep. Now, we are sleeping in peace,” says a community leader, expressing gratitude to UNMIL.

As implementation of QIP continues, inadequate funding, bad road conditions and lack of capacity of local organisations to fully implement the projects on time are some of the challenges being faced. Notwithstanding the challenges, these small-scale projects mean a lot to the beneficiaries. ♦

Small, yet very effective



Reclaiming Shattered Childhood

By Rebecca Bannor-Addae

Roosevelt Jallah is among thousands of Liberian children who lost their innocence early in life, having been sucked into the whirlpool of Liberia's brutal civil war at a tender age. "I joined NPFL [Charles Taylor's rebel outfit] when I was a small boy because my people had been killed. I wanted to protect what was left," recalls Jallah, now in his late 20s.

It is estimated that by the end of the war, children associated with the fighting forces represented 11 per cent of the total armed elements in the country. Some of the children were forced to commit terrible atrocities, often under the influence of drugs. Yet others were used as labourers or sex slaves. With the war coming to an end in 2003 and with the deployment of peacekeepers as part of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), the children were poised to return to a normal life.

More than 100,000 former combatants laid down their weapons during the two phases of UNMIL's year-long Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (DDRR) programme that began in late 2003. Among them were 11,780 children (9,042 boys and 2,738 girls) who were targeted for rehabilitation and reintegration, a long term process requiring active participation not only by the children but also by their communities. "The whole of Liberia has

been affected by war, and all children have been affected one way or the other," says Alfred Mutiti, a Reintegration Officer with UNICEF.

According to UNICEF, successful demobilization and rehabilitation entails more than taking the weapons out of children's hands. In addition to being reunited with their families, the children also need psycho-social care. They need to firmly resettle in their communities to regain a sense of safe normality. "We went to their communities not singling out the demobilized child, but rather using the child as an entry point in order to implement our programmes in a comprehensive manner," Mutiti explains UNICEF's efforts to reintegrate the war-affected children in Liberia.

For most Liberian children, school was interrupted continually throughout the war leaving an entire generation with little or no formal education. In addressing this concern, UNICEF initially mobilised action for the Back to School campaign which distributed school-in-the-box kits to more than 750,000 children and trained nearly 5,000 classroom instructors. UNICEF and other partners are also supporting the Government's Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP), condensing six years of primary school into a three-year intensive programme targeting 400,000 children, nearly half of Liberia's student population.

In 2005, UNICEF, together with child protection agencies implementing the chil-





Liberia's younger generation is less educated than the older generation

dren's DDDR programme and the Ministry of Education, launched the Community Education Investment Programme (CEIP). While CEIP offers formal education and training of educators, a 9-month skills training and apprenticeship programme has helped beneficiaries to take up various trades and vocations. These programmes are linked to community welfare committees, youth groups and children's clubs that have helped in mobilising children into programmes as well as providing psycho-social support and monitoring performance of those that complete skills training.

CEIP identifies the formally demobilized children, places them in a school in their community and waives school fees. Although CEIP was meant for government and community schools, demobilised children often registered into private schools because they are generally of a better standard. The other students of that particular school will also benefit from CEIP in the form of educational and recreational material distributed by UNICEF.

Susan A. Berry Memorial Institute, a school on the outskirts of Monrovia with 789 students from kindergarten to grade 12, has enrolled 11 students who are direct beneficiaries of CEIP. "Mixing the demobilized children with the rest of the student group was challenging in the beginning. Their sometimes angry manners, including their lack of respect, could be difficult at times. Also remember that these children were used to command structures and we had to ensure that they did not form groups applying those old habits," says the Principal, Kaifa K Kamara.

"We do a lot of extra curricular activities such as sports as a means to integrate the children and they are gradually getting along," says Kamara, who himself went through a one-week intensive workshop that has equipped thousands of teachers, principals and education officers with skills to offer trauma counselling to children affected by armed conflict.

Some children did not qualify for formal education or they simply chose to learn a trade. The 9-month Skills Training and apprenticeship programme offers the possibility of learning a trade for demobilized children above 15. Graduates from this programme receive tool kits and a

cash grant to start small businesses. Finda Boundo, who graduated in May 2006, today runs her own little catering enterprise on the outskirts of Monrovia. "I make cakes, cornbread and biscuits, which I sell in the street, and sometimes people will ask me to cater for a party or a celebration. The programme helped me to establish my life," says Boundo, who spent two years in the bush with government soldiers as her brother had joined their ranks and brought her along.

The last of four skills training centres in Montserrado County was recently completed by Children Assistance Program (CAP), a local NGO partnering with UNICEF in implementing the reintegration programmes for demobilized children. "The demobilized children registered with us for the skills training and apprenticeship programme in Montserrado have completed their nine-month course. The skills training was successful and has enhanced the reintegration process of the children. We managed to get most of the children into school and if not that, they learned a trade," says Deroe Weeks, Director of CAP.

A total of 4,295 children accessed CEIP in the academic year of 2005/06. The official end of the reintegration programme is set for July 2007. However, funding for CEIP is secured until the end of September. UNICEF is currently discussing ways to ensure that these children can fit into a wider education framework. "There has to be some sort of continuity and we are working on an exit strategy," says UNICEF's Mutiti.

Currently UNICEF is reviewing proposals to continue post-DDRR support to skills training graduates through a business development services (BDS). The BDS is meant to provide mentoring and coaching services to the graduates to ensure that the new businesses succeed. "A sustainable reintegration programme for former child soldiers is vital for Liberia. While ensuring equity of benefits between child and adult demobilizing soldiers, there should also be recognition of the special needs of child soldiers and the particular problems they face in reintegrating into their communities," says Rozanne Chorlton, UNICEF's Representative in Liberia. ♦



Rescuing Rice

By J. Wesley Washington

As this year's farming season is set to begin with the heavens opening up, soaking the entire country in incessant rains, there is a new wave of optimism among Liberia's struggling farmers. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA), has secured US\$2.2 million for emergency assistance to 80,000 vulnerable farmers throughout Liberia.

The assistance from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) follows an urgent appeal from the United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, Jordan Ryan, to support Liberia's farmers facing critical shortfall of seeds of their favourite rice crop. In addition to more than 2,000 metric tons of

rice seeds already procured, the fund will over the next three months provide train-

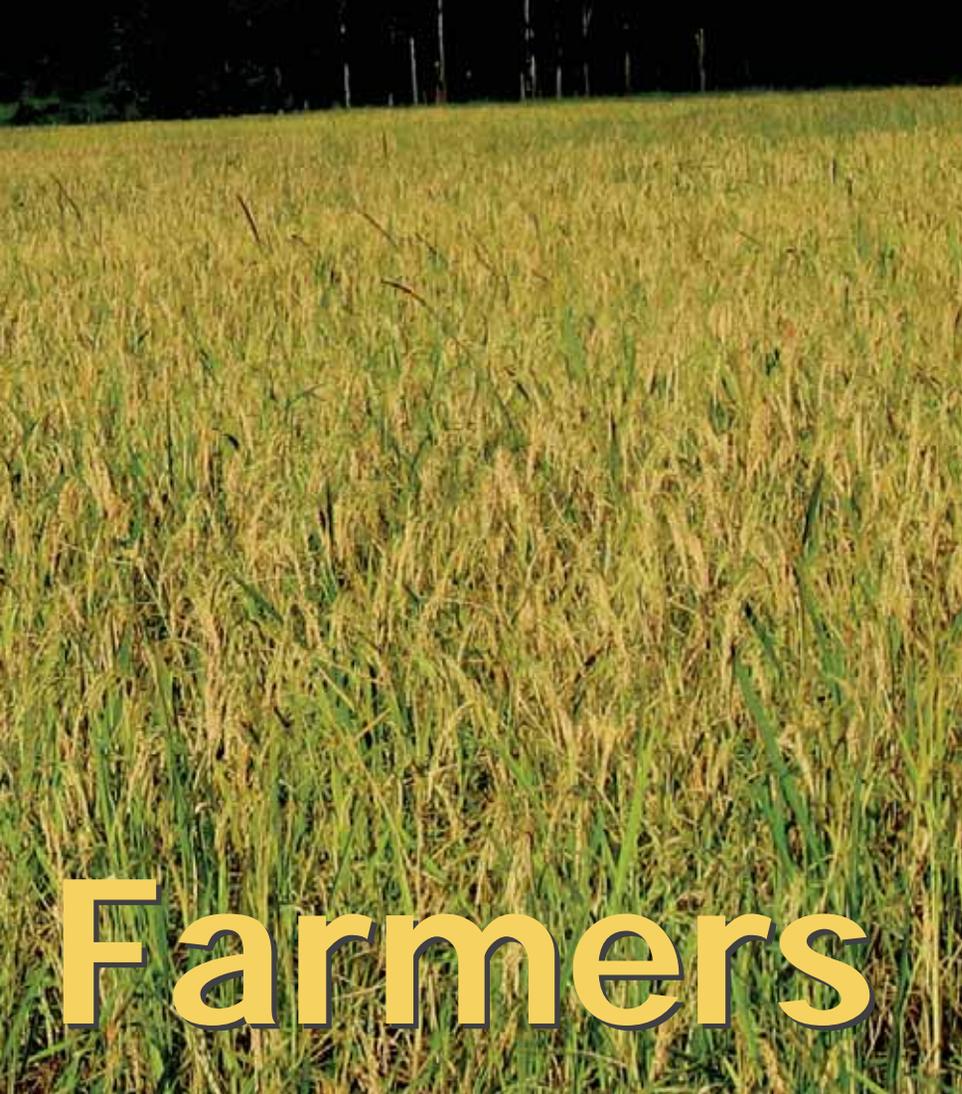
Years of conflict severely curtailed Liberia's agricultural productivity. Only half of rural households have access to land and used it for cultivation in 2005. The key problems of food insecurity, the survey noted, included low agricultural production capacities, limited economic access as well as low biological absorption capacities.

ing to farmers on improved crop production methods, seeds multiplication and

fresh technical know-how to enhance rice production. This will enable the struggling farmers earn their livelihoods and enhance food security in the country.

An assessment carried out by the Agriculture Coordination Committee, which includes FAO, MOA and other strategic partners, found urgent need for emergency assistance to 140,000 farming families in the country. However, only 80,000 farming families, including returnees who did not receive any assistance last season, will benefit from this year's gesture.

"Considering the prevailing rice seeds deficit nationwide and the significant number of vulnerable farmers to be assisted, a rapid response was crucial to ensure availability of seeds and other inputs, rescue the current planting season from failure and avert a potential further deterioration of food security situation in the country," says Winfred Hammond, FAO Representative in Liberia.



J. Wesley Washington/UNMIL

Farmers

A wide-ranging Comprehensive Food Security and Nutrition Survey (CFSNS) released in October 2006 identified three key problem areas -- low agricultural productivity, limited buying power, and worrying levels of malnutrition across the country. The survey highlighted other factors such as road infrastructure and market access as central to the improvement of Liberia's post-war food security picture.

Years of conflict severely curtailed Liberia's agricultural productivity. Only half of rural households have access to land and used it for cultivation in 2005. The key problems of food insecurity, the survey noted, included low agricultural production capacities, limited economic access as well as low biological absorption capacities.

The analysis showed 11 percent to be food insecure, 40 per cent highly vulnerable to food insecurity, 41 percent moderately vulnerable and only 8.6 percent food secure. "River Gee, Grand Gedeh, Lofa

and Grand Kru have the highest proportion of households with poor consumption and dietary diversity," the survey noted, while households with the weakest access profiles were found in Lofa, Bomi, Grand Kru, River Gee and Bong.

During the launch of the 2007/2008 rice seed distribution, Agriculture Minister Dr. Christopher Toe termed the situation as very alarming. "We need to act now to reverse this creeping trend of food insecurity," he said, pledging government's commitment to improving food security. During last year's rice planting season, 47,250 farming families received 355 metric tons of rice seeds with funds provided by the Liberian Government, said Dr. Toe.

This year, with funding from the current fiscal budget increased by over 250 per cent from a five-year outlay of less than US\$1 million to over US\$3.2 million, the Ministry of Agriculture has begun rehabilitating the Central Agriculture Research Institute (CARI). "As a result,

nine New Rice of Africa (NERICA) varieties and four high yielding local varieties are currently under multiplication," he said. "We are also reactivating our seed multiplication sites throughout Liberia which will compliment other undertakings," Dr. Toe added.

FAO Representative Hammond pointed out that a good portion of the CERF, besides supplying rice seeds to farmers, is to set up seed multiplication projects throughout Liberia. "Next year, we don't hope to go begging to procure the same quantity of seeds. We could produce our own seeds, if not the same quantity, but a substantial amount," he said.

Due to the scarcity of rice seeds in-country, only 700 metric tons were purchased locally this year. The remaining requirement of high yielding rice seeds

For many of Liberia's farmers, whose livelihoods were shattered by the long civil war, this year's farming season looks set to be better than any they have known in the recent past.

was made available by the Seed Multiplication Unit of FAO and the Ministry of Agriculture of neighbouring Sierra Leone.

The first consignment of rice seeds arrived in the country in early March 2007 and a robust coordination mechanism has been put in place to distribute the seeds throughout the country by both land and sea. With the help of the World Food Programme (WFP) and the United Nations Mission in Liberia, about 950 metric tons had reached the targeted beneficiaries in Maryland, Grand Kru, River Gee and other counties in southeastern Liberia by mid April.

For many of Liberia's farmers, whose livelihoods were shattered by the long civil war, this year's farming season looks set to be better than any they have known in the recent past. ♦

Protection From Sexual Abuse

By Rebecca Bannor-Addae

“My name is Nowelyn*. I’m 16 years old.”

“Where do you live?”

“I live on the main street in town.”

“Will you tell me what happened?”

It was a Sunday afternoon when Nowelyn’s mother sent her to fetch water from the community well. There Nowelyn ran into Marie*, a girl from her neighbourhood. The two of them walked home together, balancing the water filled jerrycans on their heads. Stopping outside Marie’s house, the girls chatted and laughed for a while. Then Marie asked Nowelyn to come inside.

“What happened next?”

Nowelyn sits gingerly on the chair opposite Eugenia J. Roberts and Christopher S. Davis, two investigators of the Women and Children Protection Section (WACPS). The teenager bites her thumbnail as she looks around the room. From this point on, Nowelyn tells her story in abrupt sequences, holding back tears by biting her lips and speaking in whispers.

Nowelyn was raped by Marie’s older brother when sitting in the room waiting for her friend who had to abruptly go for an errand for her father. No one heard her cries when Marie’s brother forced her onto the bed. When she at last flung open the door, only the dim light of the afternoon sun witnessed her face streaked with tears. She ran all the way home.

It is to tackle such abuses and crimes that the Women and Children Protection Section (WACPS) of the Liberian National Police (LNP) was established by UNICEF in September of 2005 in collaboration with the LNP and UNPOL, the civilian police

of the United Nations Mission in Liberia. Mirrored on similar systems in Ghana and Sierra Leone, the Section handles cases of sexual assault and gender-based violence in addition to assisting children in conflict with the law.

In Liberia’s male-dominated society, women and children have historically occupied the fringes. The 14-year civil war only deepened the stigma of inequality. Children made up a large portion of the fighting forces while women and young

Changing the pattern of gender based violence and sexual abuse is a gradual process requiring consistent and progressive efforts by all parties involved. WACPS does not exist in isolation and relies on the effectiveness of the extended police system, the judiciary and the various government institutions working towards building a protective environment for women and children in Liberia.

girls became easy targets for sexual exploitation and abuse. According to World Health Organization surveys conducted in 2004 and 2005 in six counties, 90.8 per cent of women and girls were sexually abused during the war. In 2006 WHO surveyed an additional four counties and found that 82 per cent of the female population had been subjected to violence of sexual nature during the conflict.

As the war came to an end in 2003,

reversing this pattern of injustice became urgent. In December 2005 Liberia passed one of West Africa’s toughest rape laws. The inauguration as President of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, a strong champion of human rights, gave tremendous impetus to the cause of the vulnerable and the neglected. UNMIL, in collaboration with the



Staff of Women and Children Protection Section

government, began public awareness campaigns in the form of radio shows, jingles and bill boards highlighting the wrongs of sexual abuse. Local and international NGOs also began sensitizing communities nationwide on women’s rights and the importance of an environment free from sexual and gender based violence.

“It was important to establish WACPS

especially in this post-conflict situation were so many women and children walk around with wounds of abuse. And sometimes even telling your story will serve as a means to heal,” says Asatu Bah-Kenneth, the Deputy Inspector General of LNP. The first units of WACPS were located in Monrovia, operating initially with 25 specially trained LNP personnel. Today, 82 police investigators work from 10 police stations throughout Liberia while an additional 25 investigators are currently being trained. UNPOL assists with six personnel attached to the Section as trainers and mentors. The Netherlands and Norway have provided logistical support in the form of transportation and building or renovation of police stations.



Children Protection Section assist victims

It is now a standard requirement that a separate Women and Children Protection Section is included in the design when police stations are being built or renovated under UNMIL's Quick Impact Projects (QIPs). With the expansion of WACPS, the population is gradually becoming aware of this new law enforcement facility intended to protect the rights and well

being of women and children.

“Our biggest challenge is that at the end of the day the victim, especially the sexually abused, expects that the perpetrator be caught. If the perpetrator escapes he might come back to further harm the victim. It is our obligation to provide full protection for the victim, it is paramount,” says Christopher S. Davis, WACPS investigator. Upon receiving a case of rape or other sexual abuse, the Section will determine whether the victim is in need of immediate protection in the form of medical treatment and removal from the home. Nowelyn was among those taken to a “safe home” for protection.

UNICEF supports one safe home in Liberia while other such homes are operated by local and international NGOs. Safe homes provide a temporary shelter for the victims of sexual abuse while the perpetrators undergo court procedures. The UNICEF-supported safe home has a striking resemblance to a family household. Children's drawings hang on the walls of the living room. A TV sits in the corner and a china cabinet displays porcelain ample for an extended family. In the bedrooms are neatly made bunk beds and toys lay on the floor. The atmosphere is calm and outside in the yard one can hear children laughing. But the 34 children and teenagers who play around the house all carry the gruesome memory of being raped.

“The safe home is intended for girls and women of all ages but older women tend to stay away perhaps due to stigma,” says Fatuma Ibrahim, Protection Project Officer, UNICEF. “However, we are working toward establishing a home separating the older victims from the younger although that is mainly because they need different kinds of intervention. The younger ones need motherly care. They have a deep emotional void,” says Ibrahim.

UNICEF facilitates training for the caregivers to cope with the emotional stress the victims offload. “If the caregivers are burnt out they are of no use to themselves, they are of no use to the victims. After all this is a safe home and that is also why we don't want to talk too much about the safe homes. For instance we don't disclose information regarding loca-

tion and so on, says Ibrahim. “We need to protect the victim against possible attacks by the alleged perpetrator. In fact in most cases, like no other place in the world, the sexual violence is committed by someone close to the women or the girl. More and more we hear that it's the uncle, it's the cousin, the neighbour.”

The Ministry of Gender and Development heads the Sexual Gender Based Violence Task Force composed of government, UN agencies and local and international NGOs. The Force assemble bi-monthly and is responsible for coordinating intervention by partners working on the ground, in accordance with the Gender-Based Violence National Action Plan adopted in November 2006.

“We can't continue to blame everything on the war. Prior to the war and after the war sexual abuse was and still is a truism. But most definitely this type of violence has become an every other day issue especially when it comes to domestic violence and children, even babies, being raped,” says Deddeh Kwewe, focal person for gender based violence at the Ministry.

Changing the pattern of gender based violence and sexual abuse is a gradual process requiring consistent and progressive efforts by all parties involved. WACPS does not exist in isolation and relies on the effectiveness of the extended police system, the judiciary and the various government institutions working towards building a protective environment for women and children in Liberia.

“UNICEF will continue to advocate against gender-based violence because more still needs to be done, not only in Montserrado but in the entire country. Women are becoming aware of their rights, cases of sexual abuse are being reported all over the country,” says Ibrahim. Liberia's Chief Justice recently vowed to dedicate two courts as well as to allocate judges to prioritise the prosecution of cases related to gender based and sexual violence.

Liberia's women and children have a long way to go before they can be free from atrocious sexual violence. But the journey has begun.

**Some names have been changed to protect their identity. ♦*



Back Home for Good

With farms being cleared for cultivation, shelters being built and a sprinkling of basic facilities coming their way, there is a buzz in the communities to which Liberian refugees and internally displaced persons have returned. UNMIL FOCUS visits Grand Cape Mount and Bomi counties to see how the former refugees and IDPs are resettling in their communities.

By Sulaiman Momodu

Nyallay Kanneh, a single mother with seven children, wakes up as early as 4:30 a.m. and heads straight to her kitchen. For the next few hours, she prepares snacks, which she sells at the Bo Waterside lorry park near the border with Sierra Leone. The days are long for Kanneh and she doesn't go to bed until about midnight. It is the regular routine for this former refugee who returned from neighbouring Sierra Leone earlier this year by a convoy organized by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

"As you can see, this is what I do to support my family," she says, busy displaying her snacks for potential customers. "I tell God thank you that I am alive today," she says as she narrates how as a

pregnant woman she was captured and tortured by rebels together with her husband, who was killed. As she eventually returned to Liberia, Kanneh sold some of the food and non-food items she was provided by UNHCR and the World Food Programme (WFP) to start her petty business.

Hundreds of thousands of Liberians who fled the civil war ended up in refugee camps in neighbouring countries or in internally displaced persons (IDPs) camps. According to UNHCR, organised repatriation of Liberian refugees reached 94,804 in March this year with 88,425 still registered in asylum countries. The refugee agency has however announced that organised repatriation of Liberian refugees will end this coming June. Last year, some 35 IDP camps in the country were officially closed after UNHCR, in collaboration with the Liberian Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission (LRRRC)

and partners, facilitated the return of over 34,000 displaced persons.

Resettling in their communities has not been an easy task for many of the returnees. Yet, seemingly happy to have returned home for good, they are slowly piecing together their shattered lives.

Mustapha Massaquoi in Sanie, a village along the Klay-Tubmanburg highway, expresses appreciation to UNMIL for the restoration of peace and to UNHCR for providing shelter for vulnerable returnees. "When we came back, it was very bushy here but today, we have a place to sleep, a hand pump and latrines. However, our children are not going to school as we have no school in this area, so we are appealing for assistance," he says, adding that he teaches the village children from time to time. "I am now 76 and as you can see, my hair is all grey, but my profession is teaching, so I find time to teach the

future generation -- a teacher never retires," he says cheerfully.

The UNHCR Field Office in Tubmanburg, established in 2004, is in charge of repatriation and reintegration of returnees in the western region comprising Bomi, Gbarpolu and Grand Cape Mount counties. The refugee agency is involved in reintegration activities through partners including Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) for water and sanitation, shelter, and returnee monitoring. Africa Humanitarian Action (AHA) is collaborating with UNHCR to provide health services while Peace Winds Japan (PWJ) is involved in shelter programme and reviving water and sanitation facilities in addition to rehabilitating 10 bridges.

The shelter programme caters for vulnerable returnees by providing a two-room structure per family. UNHCR has also provided some communities with skills training, rehabilitated schools, and assisted farmers with tools and seeds.

At the UNHCR-funded Sinje Health Centre, medical personnel of AHA say they treat patients free of cost. In Klay, PWJ is building shelter for vulnerable returnees in four categories including single parents, clinically ill, physically disabled and unaccompanied elderly. Since last May when the programme started, PWJ has constructed about 500 shelters in

Bomi with funds from UNHCR. A similar programme is being implemented by PWJ in Lofa, the county with the largest number of returnees.

Returnees of Zuannie 2, in Tewor District, had just finished rebuilding their houses when a fire incident on 20 March this year burned down the village and all their meagre possessions. Of the 15 houses in the village, only two were not touched by the inferno, which was believed to have been caused by a bush fire. According to the residents, their village was set ablaze by rebels during the war.

Following the incident, UNMIL's Humanitarian Coordination Section in Tubmanburg took the lead in responding to the emergency, bringing together UNHCR, local authorities, the LRRRC and other organizations to assist the hapless villagers. Undeterred, the residents are rebuilding their village once again.

The LRRRC monitors reintegration programmes in collaboration with UNHCR and other partners such as UNDP, UNICEF, Norwegian Refugee Council, Christian Children's Fund and German Agro Action. The Commission's Reintegration Officer in the western region, Boima S. Quaye, says there is some improvement in the education and health sectors. "All health services are pro-

vided free of charge," he says, adding that a government-funded hospital was opened in Gbarpolu in early April. Some schools also offer the Accelerated Learning Programme to help students who were out of school for many years to catch up again.

Since 2004, the UN refugee agency and its partners have been implementing Community Empowerment Projects (CEPs) in which communities identify the projects in accordance with their needs, says UNHCR Protection Officer Malumba Ntambwe. These small scale projects are implemented with the full participation and collaboration of the beneficiaries. Currently, the refugee agency is developing a compendium of the hundreds of projects that it has implemented in return areas in Liberia.

Some of the other major actors assisting returnees are the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), World Food Programme (WFP) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Notwithstanding the enormous challenges facing the returnees, there is a buzz in the communities in which they are trying to rebuild their lives. Amidst high hopes of a better future, those who have returned say they are glad to be back home for good and pray that never again should Liberia taste the bitterness of war. ♦

There is a new buzz in the communities where returnees have settled



Magical Cauldrons

By Rebecca Banner-Addae

It is time for lunch and the Grade 2 pupils form a long, noisy line in front of two gigantic cooking pots that look like straight out of a Harry Potter movie. With a plate in one hand and books in the other, the children

keep stepping out of line glancing sideways to see how long it will take to reach their destination.

As the line slowly progresses, Samson and his friend Joseph cling onto each other. “I did not eat before coming to school,

I’m hungry,” says Samson, looking at Joseph. “Our parents cannot always afford food,” Joseph nods in agreement. The two boys attend the Dorothy Cooper Elementary School in Gbarnga, one out of 162 schools in Bong County to benefit from the Ministry of Education’s Emergency School Feeding (ESF) programme supported by the World Food Programme (WFP).

Two women appoint-



ed by the school's Parent and Teacher Association (PTA) have been cooking on an open fire since early morning. Samson and Joseph eventually get to collect their food and they soon sit down to eat their meal of bulgur wheat and beans. "The school feeding programme is very helpful. Eighty per cent of our students are IDPs [Internally Displaced Persons] and most families have no land, meaning very limited access to food. If the children were not receiving food during school hours they wouldn't function. They lose their concentration if they are hungry," says H. Moses Wah, the school's principal.

On a small scale, WFP has been conducting school feeding programmes in Liberia since early 1970s. However, the current, expanded ESF programme was launched in November 2003 to help the transitional government rehabilitate the entire education system, which collapsed during the 14 years of conflict. Fighting and looting displaced nearly a third of the population and school was interrupted continually leaving an entire generation with little or no formal education.

A high percentage of the Liberian population is food insecure as



It's all smiles at lunch time

Rebecca Bannor-Acdaae/UNMIL

families have limited or no access to adequate safe and nutritious food. According to the government's 2006 Comprehensive Food Security and Nutrition Survey (CFSNS) supported by WFP, UNMIL and WHO, among others, 11 per cent of Liberian households are food insecure and 40 per cent are highly vulnerable. As the agricultural sector has disintegrated by the displacement of farming communities, Liberia currently relies heavily on food imports. The high unemployment rate and the poor state of water and sanitation are contributing factors to food insecurity in the country.

"FAO is still providing emergency assistance to farmers. Currently we are distributing over 2,500 metric tons of rice seeds to some 80,000 farming families in all 15 counties. We of course hope that these efforts will make some gains in terms of food security," says Jallah M. Kennedy, Director of Planning and Policy at the Ministry of Agriculture and national consultant for the Food and Agricultural Organization on food security and nutrition strategy.

As Liberia strives to recover from the ravages of war, the ESF programme benefits nearly 600,000 primary school pupils who receive a hot lunch during school hours Monday through Friday. On a monthly basis, WFP delivers an average of 2,500 metric tons of food consisting of cereal, pulses, vegetable oil and salt to all 15 counties. The food items are transported from the harbour in Monrovia to seven WFP sub-offices throughout the country. Local and international NGOs collaborate as implementation partners.

"The challenge is that the community works with us, that school authorities ensure the food reaches the students, otherwise the objective will not be met. To that end we have to be efficient in terms of monitoring," says Johnny Ndorbor, Officer in Charge of WFP sub-office in Bong County. The Lutheran World Service, an international NGO, collaborates with WFP on distribution and monitoring in Bong County. The Ministry of Education has its team of monitors stationed throughout Liberia. All partners are present as the truck pulls up to Dorothy Cooper Elementary school to off load WFP rations for the months of May and

June. The bigger boys get ready to stack the many sacks as a line of girls forms in front of a registration desk.

A component of the ESF programme is to provide the girls from Grade 3 to 6 with a monthly ration of cereal and vegetable oil -- two girls per one gallon of oil and a 50kg sack of cereal. This is an incentive to encourage parents to send their daughters to school, breaking with the tendency of leaving girls at home to work on the farm or do petty trading in the market. "I have five children and four of them are in school. I know that one day we will have to manage without the assistance of the school feeding programme, but for now it helps us greatly when my big girl brings home the provisions once a month. I myself depended on school feeding when I was a boy," says Emmanuel N. Johnson, whose children attend the Dorothy Cooper Elementary School.

"During the peak of the emergency, most schools in the country were benefiting from ESF. As we are moving further away from emergency towards recovery and development, we are beginning to scale down. Currently some private schools benefit from ESF but as of July this year we will be targeting community based schools and public primary schools only," says Maran Narma, WFP's head of school feeding. The next phase of WFP's school feeding programme will benefit some 450,000 primary school students until 2009. WFP is collaborating with FAO on a new component including the establishment of vegetable gardens to supplement food rations as well as to encourage future self-sufficiency. WFP will be providing seeds in addition to support for NGOs assisting communities in establishing school gardens.

"Literacy in Liberia is as low as 10 to 15 per cent. At that rate we know that something has to be done to get children into school. Numerous studies conducted in various countries have shown that school feeding does help to motivate parents to enroll their children in school," says Narma.

In Liberia, perhaps the only country where the older generation is more educated than the younger generation owing to the prolonged civil war, those Harry Potter - type cauldrons are indeed magical. ♦

Water, Water...

By Rebecca Bannor-Addae

With the Atlantic Ocean making up the shore to the south and the Mesurado River to the north, the township of West Point is located on a narrow peninsula in the western part of Liberia's capital, Monrovia. Home to some 40,000 residents during the pre-war days, the population in the township swelled as a result of the large number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) fleeing to the capital city during the civil war. Today, with close to 75,000 residents, West Point bears the brunt of environmental problems worsened by the war.

Walking down the narrow main road in West Point, it becomes evident that almost every inch of the peninsula is inhabited. Zinc shacks, makeshift shops, mountains of garbage and hordes of people compete for space. Strolling through the township, Wannie Hodo, the Health and Sanitation Officer for West Point Development Committee, talks of how the inadequate water supply and sanitation facilities pose a major problem for the densely populated community.

"Water is life, without clean drinking water diseases run wild. During the war we had to drink whatever water was available to survive. In fact unclean water killed thousands of people during the war. Today we have pipe-borne water but the pressure is low and some days there is no water," says Hodo. "We do have toilets now but it costs five Liberian dollars per visit. You see, that becomes expensive if one has diarrhoea."

West Point was amongst the first communities to benefit from basic social services in line with the government's efforts to address the pressing needs of the country under the interim Poverty Reduction Strategy (iPRS). The township could boast of streetlights along the main street in September 2006. In April this year, the government commissioned four pipe-borne water units, each with six faucets.

Although these are major developments in West Point, the majority of residents continue to depend on alternative water sources due to low pressure in the newly installed pipes. Some families have

private wells but most people rely on the vendors with the push-carts that sell water for a tidy profit. "We pay between 15-25 Liberian dollars per gallon. The price varies according to the need and we cannot be sure that the water is clean. Sometimes it is drawn from contaminated wells or streams," says Wannie Hodo.

Only 32 per cent of households in Liberia have access to safe water and less than five per cent have proper sanitation. Water-borne diseases such as diarrhoea and cholera are common conditions and, in a country with just 120 doctors to an estimated 3.5 million people, this can prove life threatening.

Diarrhoea, a result of unclean drinking water and lack of hygiene, causes 22 per cent of deaths in children under five. The World Health Organization (WHO) responds to outbreaks of diarrhoea according to a contingency plan established by the government, other UN agencies and various NGOs. Apart from tracking diseases and providing treatment for the sick, the contingency plan involves preventive measures such as supplying chlorination disinfectants for household water and conducting nationwide hygiene awareness campaigns.

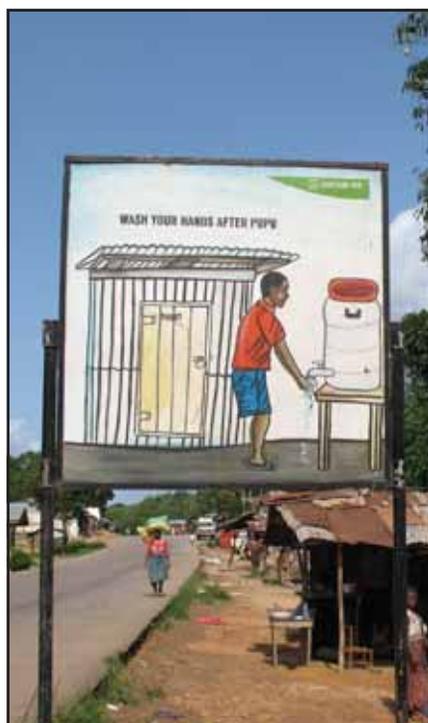
"Waterborne diseases are an endemic problem in the country at the moment. However, when the rainy season comes the endemic becomes pandemic, different water bodies wash up and contaminate streams and wells that people drink from. What we have to remember is that until we deal with the problems of unsafe drinking water and poor sanitation, we will continue to have these problems. At best we will be acting as fire fighters -- an epidemic occurs, we stop it," says Dr. Eugene A. Nyarko, WHO Representative in Liberia.

Close to 95 local and international NGOs and UN agencies work in the field of water and sanitation in Liberia. The capacity of these partners varies widely depending on funding and human resources but interventions include bore-hole drilling, construction or rehabilitation of wells and latrines along side hygiene promotion. The Water and Sanitation (WATSAN) Cluster chaired by the Ministry of Public Works in collaboration with UNICEF and four other government ministries coordinate and support activi-

ties of partners involved on a national level. The Cluster meets on a monthly basis for joint assessments and monitoring.

"Despite the numerous partners and contractors working on water and sanitation in Liberia, it will take time. Funding is of course a limiting factor but even if we had all the funding necessary, it would take a number of years to complete what needs to be done. The capacity for implementation is another real factor," says Kabuka Banda, Project Officer for Water and Sanitation, UNICEF.

Today the government-owned Liberia Water and Sewer Corporation (LWSC)



Rebecca Bamor-Addae/UNMIL

A billboard encourages hygiene

operates one out of ten water treatment plants in the country supplying Monrovia and the vicinity. The plant is working on 18 per cent design capacity up from seven in January 2006. Areas of concentration such as the JFK Hospital, the largest hospital in Liberia, the Foreign Ministry and University of Liberia today receive piped water.

"The plant was massively looted during the war and most equipment needs to be replaced. The EU and the World Bank have made funds available for partial rehabilitation and this fiscal year we intend to extend our operations to Kakata and

Zwedru [the county capitals of Margibi and Grand Gedeh counties]. This will make us operate at 30 per cent pre-war capacity," says N. Hun-Bu Tulay, Director of LWSC. Prior to the war, LWSC supplied piped water to urban centres in 9 of the 15 counties but the water and sanitation infrastructure entirely collapsed under the weight of 14 years of conflict.

"Now, water and sanitation are connected. But all over the world you'll see that very little is spent on sanitation. Yes, it's pleasant to work with water and it's not so pleasant to work with sewage, human waste. Not only that, there is very little revenue connected with sanitation," says Tulay, referring to the lack of priority generally attributed to the sector of sanitation.

Densely populated West Point suffers from lack of toilet facilities. The 18 public toilets available in the township do not meet the demands of the community. Additionally, the cost associated with visiting the toilet is higher than what many families can afford. As a result, most people do their toilet visits on the beach or on the river shore, which also serves as garbage dump sites. This leads to high incidence of diarrhoea, swarms of flies carrying infectious diseases and sewerage entering the under ground water levels contaminating private wells, which in turn means a rise in cholera infection.

The World Bank has allocated US\$ 7.02 million for sanitation work in Monrovia through 2010. The funds are made available through UNDP as part of the Emergency Infrastructure Project aimed at rehabilitating public toilets, dump sites, sewerage and drainage as well as solid waste clean-up.

Worldwide, an estimated 2.6 billion people live without basic sanitation services resulting in a disastrous impact on global health and social development. Referring to the stark scenario, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon recently said that the situation is "simply unacceptable" adding that efforts by UN agencies are just part of the equation. "Real change demands resources, commitment, policy changes and other concrete steps by governments, civil society and all stakeholders," he stressed.

The International Year of Sanitation will be marked in 2008. ♦

"The Best School of Life"

By J. Wesley Washington

Dozens of sportsmen and women, eager to get into the game they are about to play, line up at Monrovia's Antoinette Tubman Stadium, surrounded by hundreds of people who have come to watch the teams battle for victory. A dignitary has travelled from afar to address them today. And they all listen carefully as he extols the virtue of sports.

"Sport is the best school of life. In sports you learn to win without thinking you're the best; you learn to lose without thinking that's the end. You learn to respect your opponent; you learn to accept the rules; you learn to accept the decision of the referee. You learn integration, fair play, courage, discipline."

Inspiring the athletes is Adolf Ogi, a former Swiss President who is currently

Special Adviser to the United Nations Secretary-General on Sports for Development and Peace. Together with Liberia's President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Ogi was launching the "Sports for Peace" tournament aimed at encouraging Liberians, especially youth, to embrace and use sports in promoting peace, reconciliation and development in the country wrecked by nearly 15 years of brutal civil war.

In a war-ravaged country with high illiteracy and severe unemployment, spreading the message of forgiveness and acceptance is a mammoth challenge. Soccer, a national passion, and other games such as kickball and volleyball have become important tools in the armoury of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) to bring together former foes in a spirit of reconciliation to foster peace in the country.

By bringing people together across the

boundaries of culture, religion and ethnicity, sporting activities have proved to be effective in promoting peace, tolerance and understanding. Reigniting dialogue among nations, a table tennis match in 1971 set the stage for the resumption of diplomatic ties between China and the United States. In 2000, both North and South Korea merged their athletes into a common team for the Sydney Olympic Games.

"No doubt, sports offer a sense of belonging and connectivity that has been and can continue to be an instrument for bringing our people together," said President Johnson Sirleaf, herself a sports enthusiast, during the launch of the tournament. She urged all Liberians to look at sports as the key element in the assertion of human values and in countering prejudices and violence. "We must see sports as a means to help our traumatized citizens, especially our young ones to overcome our

Amidst jubilation, memories of war are forgotten





It's a proud moment for the winner

experience of pain, fear and loss and to reintegrate them into the mainstream of our national fabric.”

The Special Representative of the Secretary General, Alan Doss, said the concept of “Sports for Peace” grew out of the concern about young people who most times are involved in conflicts. “Young people have been the perpetrators as well as the victims of conflict,” he said, citing the past conflicts in West Africa. “We were thinking about how we can help young people get out of this cycle of violence and I think nothing could be better or useful than sports.”

The tournament, initiated as a result of efforts by UNMIL and the Liberian government with support from the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and several sporting associations and non-governmental organizations, brought together teams from all the 15 counties of the country in the first week of March. The IOC donated a container-load of sporting goods and equipment valued at over US\$76,000 for the organization of the games.

More than 30 games in soccer, kickball and volleyball were played in various sectors of the country, bringing together ex-combatants and community residents. The

games provided a unique opportunity for bringing counties, communities, and individuals together. Loud microphones belted out messages of peace, reconciliation and recovery to thousands of spectators who thronged to watch their favourite sports. In addition, organizers used the events to carry out sensitization through the distribution of leaflets in support of community initiatives in creating awareness on HIV/AIDS, rape, sexual exploitation and other forms of gender-based violence.

At the grand finale of the five-week long tournament at the Antoinette Tubman Stadium, Special Representative of the Secretary-General Alan Doss and Liberia’s Justice Minister Frances Johnson Morris presented trophies to the Grand Bassa, Montserrado and Grand Cape Mount counties, winners in soccer, kickball and volleyball respectively.

Minister Johnson Morris, who represented the Liberian President, applauded the winning teams and encouraged Liberians to use sports to advance peace and reconciliation in their communities. “Sporting activities can be undertaken to build, promote and sustain peace,” she stressed.

Youth and Sports Minister, Mrs. Jamesetta Howard Wolokollie, whose

ministry collaborated closely with UNMIL and other partners for the successful hosting of the tournament, praised the international community and UNMIL that saw the need for Liberians to be united in order to forge ahead and have sustainable peace. “This is only possible when we interrelate and come together as one people,” she said, adding that the international community decided to give support to the government through sports because “sport is a unifying factor.”

The captain of the winning Grand Bassa County soccer team, Lester Moore said the intent of the tournament was remarkable and a splendid idea. “However,” he said, “to add more spice and enthusiasm to the competition, I’m suggesting that there shouldn’t be only a trophy to play for, rather additional incentives should be available.”

A musical jamboree bringing together prominent Liberian artists from home and abroad crowned the day’s celebrations amidst loud messages of peace and reconciliation. Though the scars of a bloody brutal civil war takes time to heal, Liberia’s healing process has begun in earnest -- from the soccer, kickball and volleyball fields across the nation. ♦



More Light Today, Big Light Tomorrow

By Sulaiman Momodu

Liberia's Independence Day last year, celebrated on 26 July, was more than special. The darkness that had for many years become the hallmark of its capital, Monrovia, was partly chased away as electricity supply was restored to some parts of the city on that day. The challenge was so formidable that, despite many residents wishing to have power supply in their homes and businesses, only parts of the city could see the light.

Nearly one year after the lights were switched on in the two neighbourhoods of Congo Town and Kru Town in addition to some streetlights in line with President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf's "150-day deliverables," efforts are now underway to extend the Emergency Power Project (EPP) to other parts of the city. That will mean an increase of output from the current 2.7 megawatts to 7.9 megawatts.

"The Emergency Power Project 1, or EPP 1, was about turning on the lights but EPP 2 is about keeping them on and

Before the war broke out in 1989, Monrovia and other parts of Liberia enjoyed 24-hours electricity. However, with the Mount Coffee Hydro Plant which used to provide power to Monrovia in ruins and the Bong Mine Company which also provided power completely destroyed, going back to the pre-war days is clearly an uphill task.

extending power...it is small light in EPP1, more light in EPP2 and big light

tomorrow," explains Monika Hencsey, Head of Operations of the European Commission (EC), the organization that took the lead in EPP1 and is also one of the major partners in EPP 2.

In EPP 1, the government of Liberia signed an agreement with the EC and the governments of Ghana and the United States for the project worth seven million dollars. The United Nations Mission in Liberia offered assistance with logistics by providing cranes and trucks to help transport heavy equipment to project sites as well as machines for drilling and breaking rocks.

For EPP 2, Liberia signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Government of Norway, EC, USAID, and the World Bank in December last year. Liberia also has made its own contributions to both programmes.

EPP 2, worth about US\$ 24 million including diesel generators that are being provided by the Norwegian government as grant to the Liberian government, is



Photos/World Bank



expected to provide electricity to more of downtown Monrovia, more public facilities, and more streetlights in the crime-prone Paynesville suburb and Bushrod Island. More private consumers and businesses will benefit from EPP2. Already two generators of 400kW each have been installed in Paynesville.

Although EPP1 was not initially intended to provide electricity to public facilities and small businesses, as of 27 February this year, 98 private residences have also been connected to the network. The EPP Coordinator at the EC in Liberia, Yrjo Honkanen, says public facilities such as schools operate during the day and that the load at night was significantly less, leading to the decision to provide electricity to some residential areas. In the two neighbourhoods where EPP1 began, 30 health facilities are provided with power. Others are 18 schools, 19 mosques and churches, 11 ministries and agencies of the government, 22 offices, 16 NGOs and 239 businesses.

Harry T. Yuan, Managing Director of the Liberia Electricity Corporation, points out that the power provided is not for profit. “We are not looking for profit – we just want to provide power for now and look for operational maintenance,” he stresses. This means that for the project to be self sustainable, the charges collected should cover operating costs.

Soon after the EPP1 was switched on, the John F. Kennedy hospital recorded disproportionately high consumption. The mystery was solved when it was discovered that at least one welding shop had illegally connected to the lines. There is now vigorous monitoring of the network to reduce incidents of power theft and currently the power losses are within range and are technical, according to LEC.

Before the war broke out in 1989, Monrovia and other parts of Liberia enjoyed 24-hours electricity. However, with the Mount Coffee Hydro Plant which used to provide power to Monrovia in ruins and the Bong Mine Company which

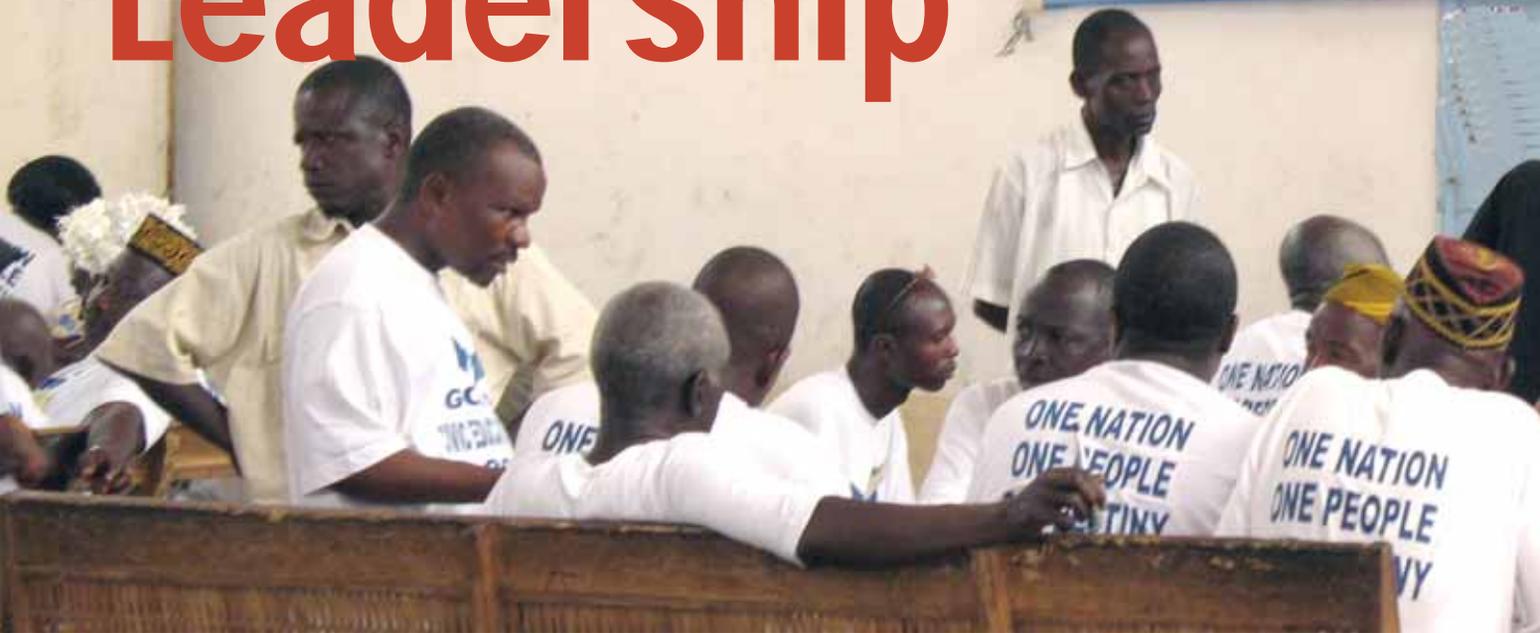
Power generation work in progress

also provided power completely destroyed, going back to the pre-war days is clearly an uphill task.

Between EPP2 and until a permanent solution can be found in the next five years, there would be a private provider that will fill in the gap, according to EC and LEC officials. The International Finance Corporation (IFC), the private sector arm of the World Bank Group, signed an advisory mandate with the government of Liberia in February to support the redevelopment of the country’s electricity infrastructure by attracting private investment into the sector.

When will the whole of Monrovia and most parts of Liberia enjoy 24-hour electricity? “It is a gradual process,” says EC’s Honkanen. Meanwhile, those already connected to the network are constantly reminded through jingles aired on local radio stations about what they are expected to do. “Keep your lights on – pay your bills – go to the Liberia Bank for Development and Investment (LBDI) and pay there!” ♦

Civic Education to Strengthen Local Leadership



By Rebecca Bannor-Addae

Inside a courthouse in Voinjama, capital of Lofa County, 120 local residents closely follow a drama skit. The theme of the skit is no less than sublime: ‘Transparency and Accountability.’

As the drama ends, participants form four groups around individual tables where a question is placed at the centre. ‘How has the lack of transparency caused problems for your community? Discuss!’ says the question facing group 3. A debate follows before making a presentation sharing their views with the rest.

Group 3 unanimously concludes that the lack of transparency slows down

development in their communities and causes funds to disappear. The group also agrees that people shy away from participating in decision-making when leaders do not command their respect. The skit is part of a workshop aimed at enhancing awareness of civic responsibilities among the local population.

Most of the infrastructure and basic social services in Liberia are located in the capital city, Monrovia, and a few other urban centres. The consequences are ubiquitous -- gross disparity in living standards among the urban and rural population as well as exclusion of the vast majority of people from political decision-making. This reality is not lost on Liberia’s new government, which is currently working

on a decentralization strategy, recognising that sustainable peace requires placing the interest of the people at the centre of development planning.

The decentralization efforts draw significant support from the UN County Support Teams (CSTs) through the UN family that works closely with local government authorities and traditional leaders. The CST mechanism is a process fashioned as a coherent UN approach to strengthen the government’s recovery process under the four pillars: expanding peace and security, revitalizing economic activity, rebuilding infrastructure and providing basic services, and strengthening governance and the rule of law.

The hurdles on the way to achieving



Rebecca Bannor-Addae/UNMIL

needs. Power was concentrated at the central level and we did not know that government was supposed to belong to everyone,” confesses Kortimai.

“The new government has decided to decentralize, starting from the bottom to the top, and slowly the population is being sensitized to the fact that we are all part of the process. What belongs to the government belongs to us and people are starting to believe they are important in society,” says the Superintendent, standing outside the Voinjama courthouse where he has been participating in the civic education workshop for the Lofa County leadership.

From civic responsibilities and leadership to national identity, universal human rights and environmental protection, the workshops cover a vast array of topics in eight modules. The government, UN and NGOs have worked closely with the Liberian Institute for Public Administration to devise a two-day interactive workshop model combining drama skits, discussion and plenary presentations. The workshop is designed to cater to a broad spectrum of local leadership coming from wide ranging educational backgrounds. Approximately 40 per cent of local leaders in Lofa County are illiterate.

“One has to come down to the level of the participants. We speak in a language that is understood by everyone and we use humour. The atmosphere has to be friendly,” says J. S. Cammue, a journalist by profession, who works as a facilitator at the nationwide civic education workshops. “In the workshops people are allowed to talk about those things that can sometimes be embarrassing. Of course it is a painful exercise to some people and some do not

meaningful decentralization in Liberia are many. Top on the list is the sheer lack of awareness among the vast majority of the population. A series of civic education workshops conducted in March and April this year in all the 15 counties of Liberia, spearheaded by a CST project, addressed the urgent need to enhance awareness of civic responsibilities among the people. Local superintendents, mayors, chiefs, line ministry representatives and community leaders attended the two-day workshops.

When he was a young boy, Galakpai Kortimai, now the Superintendent of Lofa County, did not know what or who the country’s government was. “In the past government used to sit in Monrovia deciding for the people without knowing their

want to be reminded, but the vast majority of participants see this as an eye opener.”

There are only seven female participants in the Civic Education workshop in Voinjama reflecting a past trend of exclusive male dominated leadership in Liberia. However, the new government is striving to introduce gender equality in social and political life. One of the eight civic education modules of the workshop deals with ‘Gender and Governance.’

A clan chief of Lofa has a question: “Do we have children for the government?” “No,” answers the other participants in unison. “A man has just two small compounds but six wives and twenty children. Now, does he have the resources it takes for them to become something tomorrow? We keep saying the government should give us this, give us that, but we need to be able to take care of ourselves and we are here today to build our own capacity. Women need to be part of our decision-making and we need to do family planning,” the clan chief lets off steam before he sits down.

“It is about the quality of thinking. Accountability and transparency needs to be in place if the country is to embark upon sustainable development. The civic education workshop is important because it serves as an interactive context promoting civic duty and governance,” says Eric Hubbard, a Civil Affairs expert of UNMIL and CST Alternate Facilitator for Lofa County. Collection of data from participants of the civic education workshops will form the basis for a capacity needs assessment to guide further training as part of the CST project. ♦

The CST project has three areas of focus:

- Functionality of administrative buildings, led by UNMIL Civil Affairs.
- Capacity building amongst local leadership, led by UNDP.
- Information and data management capacity at the county level, led by National Information Management Centre/UNDP.

The CST project is administrated by UNDP and managed by the Joint Steering Committee co-chaired by Minister of Internal Affairs and UNMIL Deputy SRSG, Jordan Ryan.

Funding for the CST project is provided by the Swedish and Irish governments and UNDP, amounting to US\$ 2.3 million.



Liberia marks World AIDS Day

Battle Against AIDS

By Sulaiman Momodu

When 36-year-old Roosevelt Howard was told one day in April, 2004, that he was HIV positive, his past life flashed before him abruptly. Shocked and dazed, Howard, then a student at the University of Liberia, thought death was beckoning as he felt the whole world was crashing around him.

Three years after he was tested positive, Howard, still a healthy-looking young man, is today an anti-HIV/AIDS campaigner helping people to prevent themselves from catching the virus and educating those already infected how to live positively. But how did he get the virus? "I will put it down to sex. I can tell anybody any day that I think I got infected

from being promiscuous and I was not always using condoms. There is no need to pretend about it."

A Global Fund grant of over US\$ 12 million to support the HIV/AIDS programme in Liberia was signed on 6 March this year with a goal to reduce the incidence of HIV, stabilize its prevalence rate and provide care and treatment for those already affected.

Currently the vice president of the Light Association, an association of peo-

ple living with the HIV/AIDS (PLWHA), Howard says some people still don't believe when he tells them that he is HIV positive. "They even say we have been paid to go public and tell people that we are HIV positive. Others provoke us or treat us with contempt."

At the association's office in downtown Monrovia, Howard is joined by one of their members, Kpannah Jallah. To a warm handshake, Jallah discloses that she was the first person to break the silence on HIV and AIDS in Liberia in 2002 and is a founding member of the Light Association, established the same year by the National AIDS Control Programme (NACP). The association's membership has grown from the initial 17 to 400 as it endeavours to fight against the stigma associated with the disease, create awareness, and provide care and support.

Another member of the association is Joe Joe Baysah, who currently works as a counsellor in the HIV/AIDS Unit of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). Baysah, in his late thirties, goes to wherever UN military and civilian peacekeepers are present throughout Liberia to narrate his experience and to provide counselling on how to live with the virus.

According to Col. Joyce Puta, Head of the HIV/AIDS Unit, Baysah's role is "very cardinal" in the mission's HIV/AIDS prevention strategy. "There is no effective or comprehensive HIV programme without the involvement of people living with HIV," she confides. Describing him as an 'Ambassador of hope,' Col. Puta says Baysah's testimony to people living with the virus makes them realize that it is not the end of the world.

A military officer from Zambia who had also served in the UN mission in East Timor, Col. Puta stresses that Baysah offers living proof that HIV positive people can live positively, contribute effectively to national development and enjoy life without putting other people at risk. Baysah, who openly declared his status in 2003, advises those who are HIV negative to guard their status jealously and reminds them that it is not good to be taking anti-retro viral drugs everyday, twice daily, as he does. "When we go out on sensitization campaigns, no one who does not know him suspects that one of our members has the virus. It proves that looks are deceptive -- a person with HIV can still look very attractive to you," emphasizes Col. Puta.

A 2006 anti-natal clinic survey carried out with the assistance of WHO and UNDP put the prevalence rate of the disease in Liberia at 5.7 per cent with people between the ages of 15-24 being the most affected.

The first case of AIDS was discovered in Liberia in 1986, according to the National AIDS Control Programme

(NACP). Since then, over 1,000 people are reported to have died of the dreaded disease. However, some medical personnel suggest that the figure is grossly underestimated as many people do not want others to know that their loved ones died of the disease.

NACP, established in 1987, has set up 10 anti-retro viral drug centres and eight Voluntary Counselling Testing (VCT) centres across Liberia and supplies drugs free of cost to patients. Latest figures from VCT centres indicate that more people are testing positive for the virus with some centres recording 10-15 positive cases per month. "The challenge ahead is huge," says an official of NACP.

Col. Puta debunks the widely held per-



An AIDS patient receives attention

ception that peacekeepers greatly contribute to the spread of AIDS. Most troop contributing nations do pre-deployment testing, she points out, and the majority of peacekeepers come to the mission HIV negative but some return home HIV positive. "It is more of peacekeepers catching HIV in the mission area than vice versa," she maintains.

The HIV/AIDS Unit collaborates with the UN country team and the task force on HIV/AIDS, the NACP and the Ministry of Health. Beyond catering to 15,000 military

officers and 1,000 police officers who rotate every six months, and hundreds of civilian staff, the unit visits schools, universities, religious bodies and other public places from time to time to carry out sensitization activities. Several religious leaders, media practitioners and community-based organizations have benefited from the unit's capacity building activities so far.

UNAIDS, the joint UN programme on HIV/AIDS, chairs the Technical Working Group composed of technical staff of all UN agencies having something to do with the pandemic. It is currently identifying gaps in the fight against AIDS so that stakeholders can address them.

A few of UNMIL's peacekeepers have been repatriated because of full blown AIDS and some have even died of the disease. Although pre-deployment testing helps, people who are tested negative may not be properly counselled on how to stay negative. "Negative status is not permanent. It is very easy to change negative to positive, so we encourage all peacekeepers to come forward to our VCT centres and do the test even if you had done the test before and were negative," says Col. Puta.

Reiterating that peacekeepers are mandated to help and should not molest, exploit or abuse those they serve, Col. Puta stresses that sex is not an emergency. "I have never seen an ambulance carrying a peacekeeper who had not had sex for six months and is about to die. Never! But I have seen an ambulance with a peacekeeper with AIDS who is about to die, and that virus was probably contracted through sex."

A Global Fund grant of over US\$ 12 million to support the HIV/AIDS programme in Liberia was signed on 6 March this year with a goal to reduce the incidence of HIV, stabilize its prevalence rate and provide care and treatment for those already affected. Hopefully, Howard and others living with the virus will benefit more from this grant. ♦

Preventing Mother-to-Child Transmission of HIV/AIDS

By Adolphus Scott

In collaboration with the government of Liberia, the United Nations Children's Fund is currently supporting five health centres in two counties by making available drugs and other services for pregnant women to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS.

"After speaking with health workers, I was motivated to be tested for fear that my unborn child could contract HIV during delivery," said Loretta Willie, 30, who had given birth a few hours earlier. "One positive effect of an expecting mother being tested and getting to know her status is that she can receive appropriate information on the best way to feed her baby."

In 2005, around 700,000 children became infected with HIV around the world, mainly through mother-to-child transmission. About 90 per cent of such infections occurred in Africa where AIDS is beginning to reverse decades of steady progress in child survival. HIV can be transmitted from an infected mother to her child during pregnancy, labour and delivery, or through breastfeeding. There is a 35 per cent chance that a pregnant HIV-positive woman will transmit the virus to her child if no preventative action is taken.

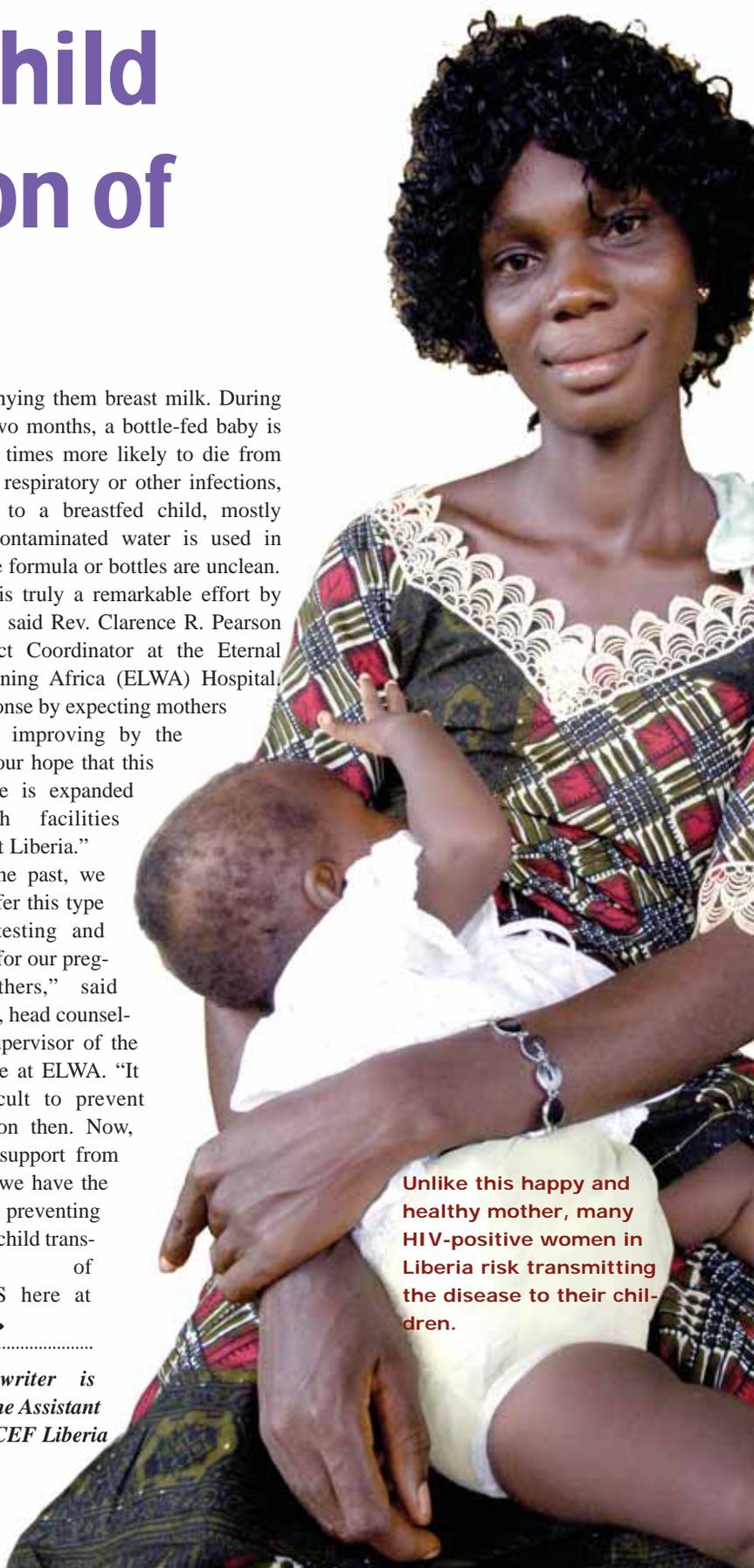
For HIV-positive mothers with limited income and poor access to clean water and sanitation, the choice of whether to breast-feed or not can be a painful dilemma. New mothers must weigh the risk of passing on the infection to their infants against the

risk of denying them breast milk. During the first two months, a bottle-fed baby is nearly six times more likely to die from diarrhoea, respiratory or other infections, compared to a breastfed child, mostly because contaminated water is used in mixing the formula or bottles are unclean.

"This is truly a remarkable effort by UNICEF," said Rev. Clarence R. Pearson Sr., Project Coordinator at the Eternal Love Winning Africa (ELWA) Hospital. "The response by expecting mothers is greatly improving by the day. It is our hope that this programme is expanded to health facilities throughout Liberia."

"In the past, we did not offer this type of HIV testing and treatment for our pregnant mothers," said Paté Chon, head counsellor and supervisor of the programme at ELWA. "It was difficult to prevent transmission then. Now, with this support from UNICEF, we have the means of preventing mother to child transmission of HIV/AIDS here at ELWA." ♦

The writer is Programme Assistant with UNICEF Liberia



Unlike this happy and healthy mother, many HIV-positive women in Liberia risk transmitting the disease to their children.



President Johnson Sirleaf, flanked by Ambassador Donald Booth and Alan Doss, inaugurates a diamond certification office

Diamond Sanctions Lifted

In late April, the UN Security Council announced the lifting of the sanctions on Liberian diamonds, paving the way for one of Liberia's key national resources to play a part in kick-starting the country's badly bruised economy.

Diamond exports have been a major source of Liberia's national income in the past. However, instead of contributing to national development and benefiting the population, this precious natural resource fuelled conflicts in Liberia and the region, and thus came to be known as "blood diamonds."

It is to prevent Liberia's natural resources from feeding the war machines that ravaged the lives of millions of people in the West African region that the Council instituted sanctions on the country's diamonds and timber. The timber sanctions were lifted in June last year as the Council recognized the new government's commitment to transparent management of the country's forestry resources following a number of reform initiatives.

In less than a week after the diamond sanctions were lifted, Special Representative of the Secretary-General Alan Doss handed over to the Liberian government a regional diamond certification office funded by UNMIL's Quick Impact Projects in Tubmanburg, Bomi County, some 50 kilometres west of the capital, Monrovia. The diamond office is one of ten spread throughout the country.

Speaking at the hand-over ceremony,

President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf expressed appreciation to international partners, including UNMIL and the American Embassy in Liberia for the parts they played in the lifting of the diamond ban. She noted that diamonds have been so misused in this part of the African continent that the UN had to impose sanctions to protect the people. The Liberian leader pointed out that the sanctions were lifted under certain conditions and that "those conditions have to be met or Liberia runs the risk of having the sanctions re-imposed."

Special Representative Doss said that as diamond mining was a hard way of earning a living, those who participate in the industry, and communities where the precious stones are mined, should also be allowed to enjoy some of the benefits through initiatives such as "diamonds for development."

The Minister of Lands, Mines and Energy, Dr. Eugene H. Shannon, outlined internal measures and controls his ministry has instituted as recommended by the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS) regarding rough diamond exports and imports. He promised to communicate to the public about the procedures for the granting of licences, fees and other requirements to participate in the diamond sector as a miner, broker, dealer or exporter.

The process of dealing in diamonds was demonstrated to all at the ceremony with the American Ambassador, Donald

Booth, playing the part of a miner and Doss serving as the broker who sold the gem (an ordinary stone) to the President who served as the dealer. The dealer then went to the Government Diamond Office (GDO) at the Ministry of Mines where, after all the required processes, the 'diamond' was sealed and certificated.

The GDO at the Mines ministry in Monrovia was also dedicated as traditional dancers and singers thronged outside the office appealing to the authorities through their songs to use diamonds for development, and not for conflict.

Liberia was admitted to the Kimberly Process just days after the diamond sanctions were lifted. The announcement was made by the European Commission, which currently chairs the Certification Scheme. EU Commissioner for External Relations Benita Ferrero said Liberia's admission into the Kimberley Process "shows the confidence of the international community in Liberia's new path."

The Kimberley Process Certification Scheme came into effect in January 2003. It requires governments to implement import and export-control regimes that certify and control the trade in rough diamonds, and it creates a documentary trail from the extraction to the polishing of diamonds. The KPCS originated from a meeting of South African diamond producing states in Kimberly, South Africa, in May 2000. The initiative now controls diamond production and importation in about 70 countries. ♦

S. M.

Action Plan Launched



By J. Wesley Washington

Despite the significant achievements scored by the Liberian government over the past one year in moving the nation along the path of recovery and rehabilitation, far too many Liberians remain in a state of high vulnerability as a result of the extent of destruction from 14 years of civil strife, according to the 2007 Common Humanitarian Action Plan (CHAP) launched in March.

“Though enshrined as basic rights for all, healthcare, safe water and appropriate sanitation, shelter and education remain out of reach for the majority of Liberians. Until rule of law institutions become fully functional, protection issues also remain a serious humanitarian concern,” the Action Plan pointed out.

As a means to address these critical humanitarian needs in Liberia, the United Nations and its international partners, jointly with the Liberian government, launched an appeal to raise US\$117,000 to support the 2007 Action Plan.

Launching the 2007 CHAP in the conference room of the Humanitarian Coordination Section, Acting Humanitarian Coordinator Mengesha Kebede said the government’s efforts to make major improvements in social serv-

ices must be maintained in the near future as a foundation for revival and growth.

“The document brings together various humanitarian actors in Liberia to collectively extend our support to the government of Liberia. It’s primarily to acknowledge the significant strides that are being made by the government and to commit ourselves to do our share with regards to the sustainability of the humanitarian work we are currently undertaking,” Kebede pointed out.

The strategic humanitarian priorities for 2007 include provision of basic social services to vulnerable populations, revitalization of returnee communities for security and productive livelihoods as well as strengthening the capacity of civil society and local authorities. The sectors earmarked for priority include health, multi-sectoral, protection/human rights/rule of law, agriculture, water and sanitation, and education.

On behalf of the NGO community, Phil Samways of the Monitoring and Steering Group (MSG) said the international non-governmental organizations remain totally committed to continuing the delivery of relief support to the many poor and vulnerable people in the country as well as supporting the government through this transition period.

“You do not move through relief and

emergency activities and draw a line in the sand and say we’re now on to development. This can possibly will miss the point that there are still thousands of people who have real relief needs out there,” Mr. Samways said. He reiterated that the country is far from being rebuilt to a position it was 14 years, pointing out that the Action Plan brings out quite clearly the need for on-going emergency activity.

The CHAP, a strategic plan for humanitarian response, reflects the challenges and includes additional actions to minimize the gap between humanitarian action and development, as prioritized by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee.

The Deputy Minister of Health for Administration, Dr. Mohammed Sherif, acknowledged that currently there are critical problems as though the country is still in an emergency phase. As the relief phase gives way to the developmental stage, he said NGOs are now winding down in the health sector and the government has identified the upcoming gaps.

People still need to have access to quality health care, they still need to have access to water and sanitation; they still need to have access to primary education,” Dr. Sherif said. For this, the 2007 Common Humanitarian Action Plan awaits international support. ♦

UN Family Executive Boards Visit Liberia

By Rebecca Bannor-Addae

“Liberia is becoming a model nation.” Paulette Bethel, Executive Board member of UNICEF and Ambassador of Bahamas to the United Nations, is addressing the media at the end of a week-long visit to Liberia. Bethel is the team leader of a 19-member delegation representing the Executive Boards of four UN funds and programmes -- UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA and WFP. The representatives are visiting Liberia to witness at first hand the delivery result of programme activities countrywide.

“Despite the enormous challenges facing the Liberian people as the country moves from humanitarian emergency to development, we want to commend the four UN funds and programmes on the exceptional work they are doing in Liberia and the cordial and supportive relationship that exists between the government and the integrated UN mission in Liberia,” Bethel observed. As the governing bodies, the Executive Boards are responsible for providing inter-governmental supervision of the activities of UN funds and programmes and, in order to better understand the work carried out in the field, they conduct annual joint visits to various countries.

During their visit the team members met with President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and other senior government officials. They also held meetings with representatives of the private sector and the civil

society, as well as the senior leadership and various sections of UNMIL. Two days were reserved for site visits to inspect programme work in Bomi, Lofa, Montserrado and Nimba counties.

In Montserrado County the team visited the Star of the Sea Health Centre located in West Point, Monrovia. Established in 1986, the clinic serves the nearly 75,000 inhabitants of the community. It is a hectic schedule for the small staff as they offer emergency and lab services, TB programmes, vaccinations and counselling on various health-related issues. Together with UNICEF, the clinic has trained 12

Another stop for the team was the Monrovia Vocational Training Centre (MVTC), a government-owned institution established in 1980 to provide vocational skills training for youth. As a result of the 14-year civil conflict, the institution was vandalized and all equipment looted. Since the end of the conflict the centre, with initial food assistance from WFP and funding from UNDP, has trained over 2,000 former combatants in a dozen trade areas, including general mechanics, electrical installations, tailoring and graphic design. The team visited the numerous workshops of MVCT, engaging the students who also comprise non-combatant youth seeking to enhance chances of employment.

The team conducted a host of site visits to inspect programme work in hospitals, schools, training centres and police units in addition to meeting with country support teams of the four counties. Summing up the week-long visit, team leader Bethel said the funding gap that may occur in humanitarian interventions between

now and 2009 was an issue of concern. “We’re encouraged about the clear consolidation of the ongoing peace and security process in the country and the positive implications this is having – and will have – for the region. We recognize that the international community needs to continue its engagement in Liberia. It is now our duty to report back to our respective Boards, encouraging the continuation of the collaboration with the government of Liberia as the country moves from post-conflict to development,” Bethel concluded. ♦



Members of the Executive Boards meet with President Johnson Sirleaf

volunteers to work in the community sensitizing the population on the risks and dangers of HIV/AIDS.

Three walk-in centres in West Point, established just two days prior to the team’s visit, had already tested over a hundred people. “This programme was made possible via the collaborative partnership with UN agencies; initially WFP, UNDP and the Global Fund. Now we are fully funded by UNICEF. We all have a common enemy: the disease,” says a doctor at the clinic, proud of the initial success of the walk-in centres.

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Jordan Ryan hands over the vehicles to the LNP

More Assets for Liberian Police

Gleaning in the searing sun, a fleet of 11 blue-and-white coloured new Nissan pickup vans parked in front of the Liberian National Police (LNP) headquarters in Monrovia one day in late March drew everyone's admiration. On the vans were inscribed the words, "Serve and Protect." But in serving the people of Liberia and protecting their lives and property, a major handicap of the LNP has been the lack of adequate mobility. The donation of 11 vehicles by the government of Netherlands therefore is a welcome relief as it will help Liberia's new police force to carry out their activities better, especially in responding to crime in a timely manner.

Handing over the vehicles to the Liberian government, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General Jordan Ryan extended thanks and appreciation to the government of the Netherlands. "We are very grateful for this donation which is just the first of 22 vehicles," he said. He also reminded that with the increased mobility and visibility of the

LNP come increased responsibility and accountability.

Ryan pointed out that vehicles alone don't make a good police force and expressed the hope that the donation and previous donations by other people and partners will be used to best deliver services to the Liberian people. He reiterated that the police "must be one that the people can trust, that they can feel protected by" and the LNP administration to ensure that appropriate measures are put in place to properly use and maintain the vehicles. "As you manage these resources effectively, we do hope more will come," he said.

A visibly delighted Inspector-General of LNP, Beatrice Munah Sieh, expressed gratitude to the donors for their overwhelming support in prioritizing the security of the state and pointed out that the donations will enhance the work of the police.

The Government of the Netherlands has so far contributed over US\$2 million to the restructuring and equipping of the LNP. Two of the 11 donated vehicles were allocated for use by the Women and Child

Protection Section. Most of the rest will be used in Montserrado County, comprising Monrovia and its suburbs, that normally records the highest crime rate among all the counties of Liberia.

Recently, UNDP donated 22 motorcycles under the Small Arms Project and made available nine Toyota 4 Runners while Nigeria donated 12 vehicles in addition to firearms for use by the police. Other countries who have offered assistance to the newly trained Liberian police include China, Norway, UK and USA. Several UNMIL Quick Impact Projects have also been implemented in many parts of Liberia to construct new police stations or renovate existing ones.

Meanwhile, a Nigerian police officer serving with UNMIL, Aliyu Abubakar, has personally donated sets of uniforms and accoutrements worth US\$7,000 to the LNP. The donation by Abubakar, who had also served in the UN mission in Kosovo, was in fulfillment of a promise he made last July when the LNP launched an appeal to the public for assistance. ♦

S. M.

IMF Predicts Surge in Economic Growth

Bouyed by the expected revival of mining, forestry and agricultural sectors, Liberia's economic growth during the next five years will average around 11 per cent, well over the average rate for sub-Saharan Africa, according to a team of experts from the International Monetary Fund that visited the country in early April. A statement released at the end of the team's visit however said Liberia's huge external debt is "clearly unsustainable" and called for a comprehensive debt relief.

"Liberia's economic recovery continues to strengthen, and medium term prospects have improved. In 2006, real GDP growth is estimated to have increased by 7.8 percent, driven mainly by construction, the recovery in the agricul-

tural sector, and the donor-funded expenditures in the country. A similar growth rate is projected for 2007," said Robert Powell, head of the IMF team.

During the visit, the IMF team met with President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Finance Minister Antoinette Sayeh, Central Bank officials and members of the legislature and the donor community, among others. The discussions centred on key objectives, including maintaining macroeconomic stability, further strengthening public financial management and the banking sector, and implementing tax reform, the anti-corruption, and domestic debt resolution strategies that were developed in 2006, the statement said.

The IMF team said the government had achieved most of benchmarks under its Staff Monitored Programme through

the end of March 2007. "In particular, revenues continue to exceed the programme targets by a significant margin. This positive outcome reflects the government's continued efforts, with the support of the international community, to strengthen the tax system, including improvements in revenue administration and enforcement."

Further support and training is being provided to government ministries to expedite the implementation of their approved spending plans. Implementation of the government's domestic debt resolution strategy has commenced, and the government has also broadened and updated the consumer price index to give a more accurate measure of inflation, the statement added. ♦

Ministry of Agriculture Gets Support

As part of its capacity building support to the Ministry of Agriculture under the Human Security Fund, UNDP in late March handed over a 4-wheel drive vehicle as well as computers, office equipment and furniture valued at US\$57,840 to the Acting Minister of Agriculture, Lwopu Kandakai. The items were donated by the Japanese government.

Speaking during the handing over ceremony at the Ministry of Agriculture in Sinkor, UNDP Country Director Steven Ursino and Kandakai expressed gratitude to the government of Japan for its continuing support for the rebuilding and recovery process in Liberia. Such logistics, equipment and vehicle support would help to enhance the capacity of the Ministry of

Agriculture for overall project management, monitoring and evaluation, they said.

The government of Japan and the United Nations have been providing assistance to Liberia through the Trust Fund for Human Security toward a project entitled Rebuilding Communities in post-conflict Liberia - Empowerment for Change (RCPLEC). The project, implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture, UNDP, FAO and WFP, covers nine counties: Lofa, Bomi, Bong, Maryland, Nimba, Gbapolu, Grand Cape, Grand Geddeh and River Gee.

RCPLEC aims to support communities in restoring their livelihoods by encouraging their members to participate in the decision making processes in the reconstruction activities. It is also expect-

ed to assist in the rebuilding of local communities in Liberia thereby lowering social tensions and contributing to sustaining peace and security in the country.

Ursino highlighted the progress achieved by the project since its launch in November 2006. He said the project has trained village blacksmiths, trained farmers and provided tools and seeds to farmers. The project has been supporting the provision of basic services through rehabilitation of social service infrastructure at the community level such as school buildings, health clinics, roads and bridges.

A total of 23 micro projects have been approved and are ready for implementation while additional projects are under consideration. In addition, the Human Security project has also supported the training of 41 District Development Committees across Liberia. ♦

UNDP Supports Resource Centre

Amidst continuing efforts to support capacity building in Liberia, the United Nations Development Programme in April handed over to the Liberian National Legislature various items valued at US\$56,880 for a resource centre that would enable the lawmakers to do research and enhance their work. The centre will be set up at the Capitol building, the seat of the Legislature.

The items include 10 desktop computers, two photocopiers, two air conditioners, four printers, a 22.5 KVA generator and a set of recent editions of the Liberian Law Reports and Liberian Code of Revised Laws.

At the handover ceremony in Monrovia, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Alan Doss, described the items as a "worthwhile contribution" that would help the legislators carry out their work. "In today's world where so much information is available at the touch of the keyboard, it would be very

sad if the Liberian Legislature were not able to tap into that body of knowledge and make use of it." Expressing thanks to the joint Legislative Modernization Committee for setting up the framework and playing a key role in putting together programmes of support and capacity building, Doss stressed that "a successful democracy needs a successful legislature."

Kamil Kamaluddeen of UNDP said the items would assist in legislative drafting, support committee procedures and administrative work of the law making body. "This is a promise made and this is a promise delivered. I am very happy that this is done in the context of overall UN support to the recovery process in Liberia." Assuring the law makers of UNDP's continued support, Kamaluddeen expressed the hope that the contribution would strengthen dialogue, law making, and partnership and cooperation among the various arms of government.

The Acting Speaker of the National Legislature, Tokpa Mulbah, thanked UNDP and UNMIL for their "excellent

collaboration" leading to the purchase of the items. A member of the joint Legislative Modernization Committee, John Ballout, said dialogue was in progress with partners, especially UNMIL and UNDP, to implement a scholarship programme for university students who would be deployed to work with their various committees as interns "in a win-win situation that will expose them to the working of the Legislature, while assisting the committees in their legislative work."

Last October, the Liberian legislature received two grants from the United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF) totalling nearly half a million US dollars. The two grants included the Legislative Study Grant Programme of \$120,000, which is to last for two years and is intended to strengthen the professionalism of the Legislature and encourage the participation of youth in the democratic process, and the project, "Building a National Integrity Framework for Liberia," amounting to \$360,000, to be implemented by the Governance Reform Commission.

UNDP-Global Fund Grant to Fight HIV/AIDS

The United Nations Development Programme and the Global Fund signed a US\$12m grant agreement late March to fight the spread of the HIV/AIDS virus in all the 15 counties of Liberia over the next two years.

The agreement is expected to build on existing public and private health sector interventions to reduce the burden of

HIV/AIDS in Liberia and support key interventions such as strengthening health systems and national HIV/AIDS programmes in the country.

The grant will allow for capacity building of the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare as well as the public and private health facilities at the county and district levels. It will also help expand the voluntary counselling and testing services

and assist to prevent mother to child HIV transmission.

The grant will also help enhance awareness of HIV/AIDS prevention methods and to reduce the stigma against the disease through Behaviour Change Communication methods and provide increased care and support for people already living with HIV/AIDS and their families. ♦



Correction

In our story on the visit to Liberia of Chinese President Hu Jintao (pictured) in the last issue of UNMIL FOCUS (Vol. 3, No 2), we erroneously described him as the President of the Republic of China. Hu Jintao is the President of the People's Republic of China. The error is regretted – Editor.



The Philippines Contributes to Peace in Liberia

By J. Wesley Washington

The peacekeepers from the Republic of Philippines form the 12th largest group among the 48 troop contributing countries to the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). Barely a month after the commencement of peacekeeping operations in Liberia, the first contingent of 145 Filipino soldiers was deployed in the country on 2 November 2003.

Now the seventh contingent, the Filipino soldiers provide a significant contribution to the overall efforts of UNMIL in terms of security and clerical support to the mission's leadership and force headquarters. This contingent has a total strength of 165 personnel including 15 female soldiers.

The contingent's security and defense platoons are tasked primarily to provide security to the senior leadership of the mission. In addition, the contingent maintains three vital posts around UNMIL's Headquarters at the Pan African Plaza and

nine security posts at the Logistics Base and the Staff Officers Accommodation at Star Base on a 24-hour basis. A small group of the contingent provides efficient clerical services to the different staffs at the Force Headquarters and the Logistics Base of the mission.

Since their deployment over three years ago, the Filipino contingent has rendered invaluable services to the Mission. "We have been doing our job smoothly, established good relations with other contingents and with the community where we live," said the Filipino Commander, Francisco Patrimonio.

Col. Patrimonio said his troops, even though far away from home, have enjoyed their work in Liberia. He said they appreciate their mission and understand the importance of their contribution to the overall peacekeeping efforts of UNMIL.

"The Filipino contingent feels proud of its contribution to peace and progress in Liberia. The contingent might be small as compared to the other troop contributing countries, nevertheless, we believe we give our share for the attainment of peace,

progress and development in Liberia," he said.

The Special Representative of the Secretary General, Alan Doss, has on several occasions praised the Philippines contingent's professionalism and dedication to the mission.

The Philippines, one of the 50 original signatories of the UN Charter, has a long tradition of contributing to peace and security throughout the world since the early years of UN's existence. The country first began its participation in peacekeeping operations when it contributed Military Observers to the United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation (UNTSO) in the Middle East in 1948.

To date, the Philippines have participated in a total of 26 missions including in Burundi, Cyprus, Lebanon, Cambodia, Western Sahara, Georgia, Sierra Leone, and Ethiopia and Eritrea. Currently Filipino peacekeepers (Military, Police and MILOBS) are deployed in Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Haiti, East Timor, Sudan and Kosovo. ♦

HOW CAN WE STOP MOB

The issue of the rights of those accused of crimes is something the average Liberian does not understand. He prefers taking the justice system in his hand which results to mob violence. However, to reduce mob violence, we must understand the root cause and then educate the populace on the need to abide by the rule of law.



Alfred K. D. Konnah (Job Seeker)



Mob violence is on the increase all because people are taking situations in their own hands as they are not satisfied with the police and justice system. The public needs to be a little more educated on the dangers of mob violence. Likewise, the public needs to exhibit a little more patience in their action against criminals and allow them to have their day in court.

Christian T.G. Tabla
(Human Resource Manager)

Public education is very important for Liberians to become aware of the effects of mob violence. It is also very important that we educate Liberians that mob violence is not the way to go in solving problems that have to do with theft or otherwise. The best option is to trust our justice system, though it's difficult to do so in most instances.



Yatta Kamara (Housewife)

The population needs to be sensitized that they should not necessarily take the law into their hands. The police are there, the courts are there and people should channel their grievances through the proper authority. We agree that there are times that people get frustrated with the law, when they want police to come to their aid and the police aren't available. That doesn't necessarily give them the cause to take the law into their hands. They must learn that this is a new Liberia and people should begin to follow the law.



Bendu Nimley (Journalist)



I would prefer that to reduce mob violence, people at the scene should investigate these suspects to ascertain the truth rather than resorting to instant mob justice.

Yatta Williams
(Student, United Methodist University)

Speak

3 VIOLENCE IN LIBERIA?



What I think should be done to decrease mob violence is that there should be more sensitization and education of the public. For the past 14 years we have been through a civil crisis and most people believe that violence is the way out. As such they should be educated that the rule of law is there to protect each of us. They should know that the police is a friend to each and every citizen so when there is a problem, they should go to the police and not take the law in their hands.

Fatee Wollo-Zeiglar
(Administrative Secretary)

The government needs to educate the populace that if they are aggrieved there is a course of justice. I would like the government to realize that it's their responsibility to remind Liberians that mob violence is not the way to go to seek remedy.

Rattee Flomo
(Student, AME University)



I think the police needs to be given weapons to effectively do their job. If they are adequately equipped, they can reduce the crime rate. For example, if there is a call to the police requesting their presence at a crime scene, the police cannot just go there empty-handed. If they are equipped, I think they will be able to reduce mob violence.

Suzette Blake
(Student, AME University)



To reduce mob violence in Liberia, police must be on top of the situation. When there is a cry from a citizen, the police must come around immediately and intervene instead of waiting to be called upon. Secondly, we as Liberians must educate others when they try to institute these kinds of actions. We must remind them that the rule of law is the best course of action.

Moses G. Sekou (Banker)



I would want a suspected rogue or anyone caught by a mob to be turned over to the police for investigation to determine the truth of the allegation. You cannot catch a suspect and just begin to beat or inflict injuries on him. It might cause a problem because you don't know whether the allegation against him/her is true or false.

Anthony N. Gray
(Photographer)

Government needs to take a stand against those who are involved in mob violence so as to stop those who think that by doing so, they are right. Also, these mob violators should know that where their rights end someone else's rights begin.

George Rattio (Intern Broadcast Journalist, UNMIL Radio)





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