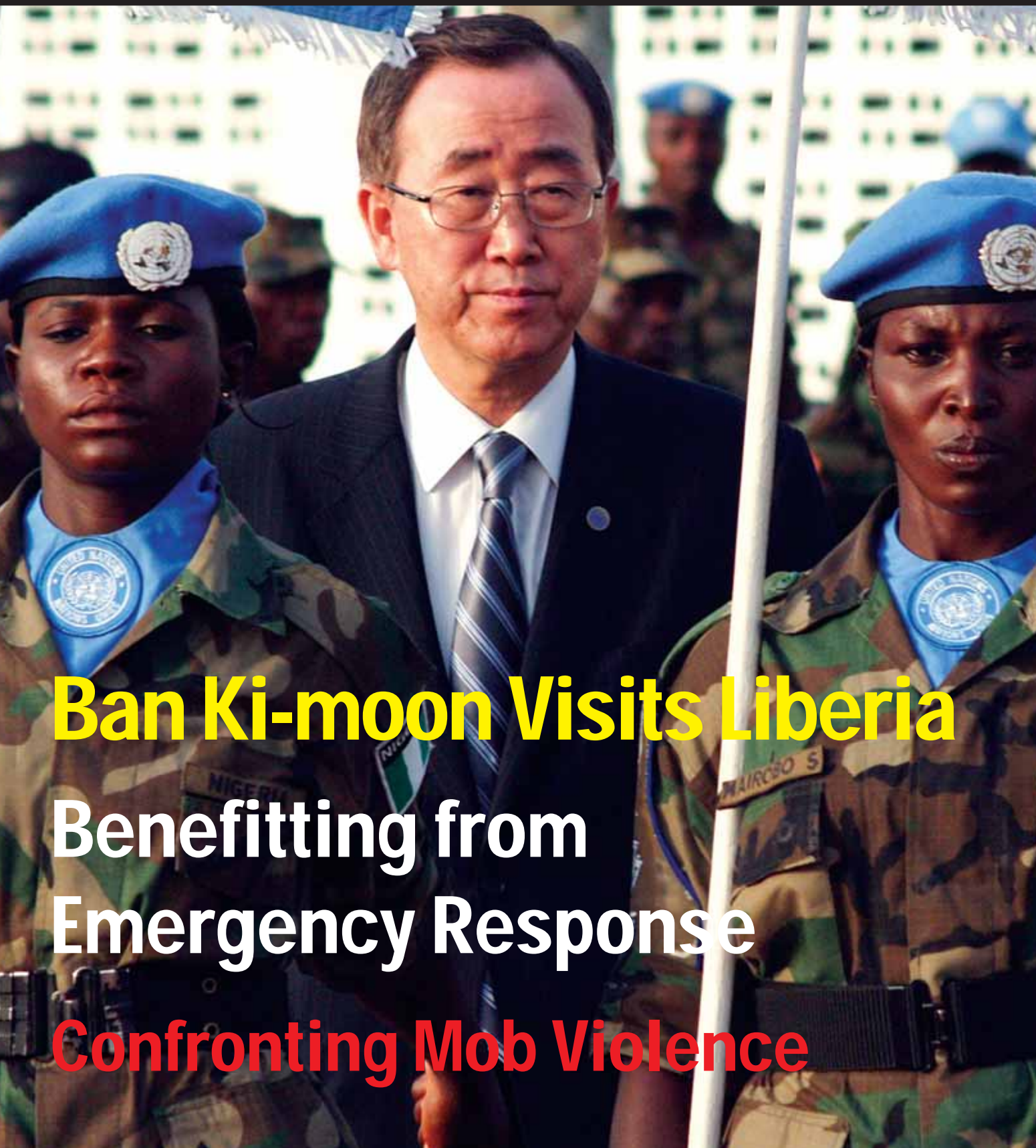


UNMIL FOCUS



March - May 2008

Vol. 4, No. 03



Ban Ki-moon Visits Liberia

Benefitting from
Emergency Response

Confronting Mob Violence



Message from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General

consolidating peace, should motivate the people of Liberia and all of us in the UN family as well as humanitarian and development workers to re-commit ourselves to the full recovery of the nation. It was also important that the Secretary-General stressed the need for us to strictly adhere to his zero tolerance policy against sexual exploitation and abuse, and lead by example.

In April, I had the opportunity to present the Secretary-General's sixteenth progress report on Liberia to the Security Council. The report highlighted the progress being made in Liberia as the country rebuilds while pointing out the significant challenges that remain to be addressed such as the reform of the security sector, strengthening of the rule of law, poverty reduction, and unemployment. In my remarks to the Security Council I stressed the priority need to accelerate the reforms of law enforcement and judicial institutions in particular the LNP, the courts, and other related institutions. These challenges to peace consolidation in Liberia must be tackled head-on to ensure the process of renewal and recovery is on course.

The recent concern about crime, in particular armed robbery, emphasizes the urgency of making the police more effective and professional, capable of dealing with security challenges, especially as we advance the drawdown process. In this regard, there is urgent need for additional donor assistance to address the logistical and infrastructural needs of the Liberian

National Police. A 500-strong Emergency Response Unit of the LNP, whose first ninety officers are undergoing training, also requires support from donors in order to keep to the time line for its development. UNMIL is developing an analysis of the funding needs of the Police and the gaps over the short, medium and long term to help facilitate donor support for this pivotal national institution crucial to maintaining security across the country.

Travelling all over Liberia, I am pleased to note that UN peacekeepers are assisting communities beyond their call of duty by rehabilitating roads, rebuilding schools and clinics, conducting free medical camps and offering vocational and skills training. The UN family is actively involved in many areas of development, including education, health, resettlement of the war-affected populations, rebuilding of national institutions and environmental conservation. I commend all UN personnel for their continued commitment to the peace process in Liberia.

Let me say that although UNMIL has embarked on the first phase of its draw-down plan, the Mission will continuously evaluate the progress being made in meeting the benchmarks linked to the reduction of troop levels, with particular attention to Liberia's ability to assume full responsibility for national security. Having invested heavily in restoring peace to Liberia, the international community cannot afford to put at risk the achievements made so far.

The two-day visit to Liberia by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in April underscored the importance that the international community continues to attach to the country's recovery from the long years of conflict.

During his visit, the Secretary-General held talks with Vice President Joseph Boakai, members of the Cabinet and the UN Country Team, and also addressed a joint session of the Parliament. He pledged continued assistance of the United Nations to Liberia and, while commending the great strides Liberia has made in recovering from the civil war, also pointed out that the country still faces daunting challenges in areas such as security, rule of law and development.

The Secretary-General's visit, at a time when Liberia is slowly but steadily



Ellen Margrethe Løj

Ellen Margrethe Løj
Special Representative of the Secretary-General and
Coordinator of United Nations Operations in Liberia

IN THIS ISSUE

- 4 Ban Ki-moon Visits Liberia
- 8 Drawdown Depends on Progress
- 10 Benefitting from Emergency Response
- 12 Confronting Mob Violence
- 14 Community Policing to Tackle Crime
- 16 More Corrections Officers Graduate
- 18 Taking Environment Seriously
- 20 Interview: Ban Ki-moon
- 22 The Struggle for Basic Education
- 24 Engaging Civil Society for Lasting Peace
- 26 Unsung Heroes of Micro-credit
- 28 Mission Clean Water
- 30 Time for Local Integration
- 32 Women's Conference Held in Monrovia
- 36 Jordanian Medics Reach Out
- 38 Liberians Speak



4 Ban Ki-moon Visits Liberia

Visiting Liberia in April for the first time since assuming office last year, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon reassured the Liberian people of his steadfast commitment to peace, stability and prosperity in their country.



10

Benefitting from Emergency Response

Nearly 1.2 million people across Liberia benefit from projects supported by grants from the UN's Central Emergency Response Fund. The projects focus on health and water and sanitation.



12

Confronting Mob Violence

The UN Police and the Liberia National Police step up efforts to confront the increasing menace of mob violence in the country.

Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Coordinator of United Nations Operations in Liberia
Ellen Margrethe Løj

Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Recovery and Governance
Jordan Ryan

Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Rule of Law
Henrietta Mensa-Bonsu

Chief of Public Information
George Somerwill

Editor and Head of Publications
Mathew Elavanalthoduka

Staff Writers
Sulaiman Momodu
Rebecca Bannor-Addae
J. Wesley Washington

Design and Graphics
Paddy Defoxy Ilos, II

Photos
Christopher Herwig

Published by the Public Information Office, United Nations Mission in Liberia

Printed by Buck Press Ltd., Accra, Ghana

Ban Ki-moon Visits Liberia

By Sulaiman Momodu

Visiting Liberia in April for the first time since assuming office last year, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said Liberia has made great strides in its recovery from conflict but the country still faces daunting challenges. During the two-day visit, aimed at witnessing firsthand the remarkable achievements Liberia has made in recovering from a devastating conflict, the Secretary-General reassured the Liberian people of his steadfast commitment to peace, stability and prosperity in their

progress in reforming the legal and judicial system and extending the rule of law throughout the country. He also stressed the need to do more in reintegrating populations affected by war and promoting reconciliation and national unity.

Ban called on the law-makers to build a national vision for Liberia. "As the most representative legislature in the history of this country, you have a unique chance to build a national vision for a secure, peaceful and prosperous Liberia – one that provides opportunities for all its citizens. You have a mandate to open a new chapter in Liberia's history, and put the country and its people first, before personal interests,"

Addressing a joint session of the Parliament, Ban commended the Liberian government for focusing, since its inauguration in January 2006, on important priorities ranging from economic recovery, poverty reduction, debt forgiveness and fighting corruption and impunity.

country.

Addressing a joint session of the Parliament, Ban commended the Liberian government for focusing, since its inauguration in January 2006, on important priorities ranging from economic recovery, poverty reduction, debt forgiveness and fighting corruption and impunity. Other areas of the government's focus include revitalizing the agricultural sector and restoring basic services and infrastructure, including roads, schools and hospitals. "All of these are essential to the vital and painstaking work of healing the wounds of conflict and fostering national reconciliation," the UN chief said.

Noting that big challenges remain in the areas of reconstruction and development, Ban highlighted the need for more

he said.

Referring to the rising prices of food commodities worldwide, the Secretary-General observed that Liberia is abundantly blessed with agricultural resources. "Today, I challenge your country to demonstrate to the world you have the capability to not only meet many of your own needs, but also to export food to the region. I challenge you to reduce poverty and create jobs in Liberia by developing your agricultural sector. And I challenge all international partners to help you realize your country's potential in this area."

Ban assured that the entire United Nations family will work with the Liberian people to address the challenges facing the nation. "We will work with you as you heal the divisions that tore Liberia asunder





in the past. We will work with you as you build a comprehensive national strategy for the future -- one which gives equal weight and attention to development, security and human rights, all underpinned by the rule of law.”

“Today, we can look to this country as an example of what the international community can achieve when it pulls together in a clear and common cause,” Ban said, referring to the collaboration of international and regional partners, including ECOWAS and the African Union, in Liberia’s peace process.

The Secretary-General paid tribute to President Johnson-Sirleaf for her vision and commitment and also held discussions with Vice President Joseph Boakai, Cabinet ministers and members of the UN family. He assured that UNMIL’s draw-down will proceed in a cautious and gradual manner. “We will not put at risk the gains that have been made so far,” he said, adding that a gradual withdrawal should allow the government sufficient time to assume full responsibility for national security. “Our common strategic goal is to ensure that Liberia has a solid security sector -- one that can stand on its own feet before UNMIL completes its withdrawal.”

Referring to the “persisting scourge of rape among the Liberian population and sexual abuse and exploitation by UN personnel,” Ban reiterated his policy of zero tolerance. “Such conduct goes against everything that we, the United Nations, stand for. It undermines the trust that is essential for our success in this country and elsewhere. We have taken strong actions against UN staff members found guilty of such acts and will continue to do so. Zero tolerance means zero acceptance and zero impunity,” he stressed.

“It is regrettable that rape continues to be the most commonly committed crime in Liberia. I call on community leaders, traditional chiefs, elders and prominent Liberians to take the lead in combating the scourge of rape and other acts of sexual and gender based violence. Violence against women should not be tolerated,” Ban said.

Special Representative Ellen Margrethe Løj described the Secretary-General’s visit as a real honour and privilege, pointing out that his presence motivates staff to continue to do their very best on behalf of the United Nations and for Liberia’s success. ♦

Emmanuel Tobey/UNMIL



Secretary-General





General's Visit



Drawdown Depends on Progress

If Liberia is to solidify the progress made so far and the United Nations is to successfully draw down its presence in the country, challenges related to security, rule of law and economic development must be addressed, Special Representative of the Secretary-General Ellen Margrethe Løj told the UN Security Council in April. “The hope and tranquility we see today is tempered by a tenuous and fragile peace,” she informed the 15-member Council.

The UN envoy pointed out that while the overall situation in Liberia was stable, recent months have witnessed several incidents of violence on rubber plantations and in diamond mining areas, as well as mob violence. Such incidents highlight the need for security sector reform in the country, which is rebuilding after a devastating civil war.

The security of the country continues to rely heavily on the presence of the police and military forces of UN Mission in Liberia. “This is clear evidence that peace has not taken firm roots and it is not yet time to declare victory and leave the country,” she stated.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, in a report issued last August, outlined a drawdown plan for both the military and police component of UNMIL to be carried out in several stages, resulting in 9,750 peacekeeping troops and UN police on the ground in Liberia at the end of 2010. The plan is contingent on a number of core benchmarks, particularly relating to the Liberian National Police (LNP), military forces and rule of law institutions.

Speaking to reporters after the Council meeting, Special Representative Løj noted that there are concerns among Liberians that UNMIL would depart the country prematurely, leaving behind a security vacuum. “The Mission is trying to assure the public that the drawdown is taking place



Special Representative Ellen Margrethe Løj addresses the Security Council

Eskinder Debebe/UN

so as to minimize threats to the security of the country and also to deal with any serious disruptions,” she pointed out.

The drawdown plan, the envoy pointed out in her briefing to the Council, “is intended to provide the time and space

the need to focus on improving the quality and professionalism of the officers, enhancing management and providing the LNP with the equipment and resources required to perform effectively.

Deficiencies in the justice system – including lack of adequate funding, shortage of qualified personnel, lack of infrastructure, low salaries and corruption, pose another major challenge, Special Representative Løj said, adding that many Liberians have little confidence in such a system.

“Liberians do not trust the system. They do not trust the Liberian police. They do not trust the justice system, and they are all too quick to return to the civil war mentality of fending for themselves,” she told journalists.

She also highlighted the need for economic growth, particularly to reduce the high unemployment rate, which poses a “serious security threat.” Crucial in this regard will be implementing the country’s new national poverty reduction strategy. ♦

Speaking to reporters after the Council meeting, Special Representative Løj noted that there are concerns among Liberians that UNMIL would depart the country prematurely, leaving behind a security vacuum. “The Mission is trying to assure the public that the drawdown is taking place so as to minimize threats to the security of the country and also to deal with any serious disruptions,” she pointed out.

needed for Liberia to build up its own police and military forces and progressively assume full responsibility for national security.” Progress is being made, although slower than expected, in the training and restructuring of the new Armed Forces of Liberia, she reported, adding that any further delays will prevent the new army from becoming fully operational before late 2009, and impact on the timeline for UNMIL’s drawdown.

The reform of the LNP “constitutes a bigger challenge,” she stated, emphasizing

Retreat Evaluates CSTs

By Jessica Duplessis

Sanniquellie, the capital city of Nimba County and the place where the African Union is believed to have been conceived, is today more reflective of the decades of war it has endured than of its notable past. Yet, in late April 2008, the city saw a gathering of people reminiscent of the era when African leaders united there to promote solidarity throughout the continent. Governmental authorities, civil society actors, UN officials and others came together at a retreat to evaluate the progress being made by the Country Support Teams (CSTs), and the challenges faced by this innovative approach to strengthen the government's recovery and development efforts.

The CSTs lie at the heart of the efforts by the UN family in Liberia to support the government's Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS). Each of the CSTs in all of Liberia's 15 counties offers guidance as well as technical and logistical support to advance the County Development Agendas (CDAs), the county-level blueprint for development that feeds into the national agenda. Working closely with local government authorities, the CSTs also serve as a means to facilitate information sharing and coordination between county government officials and UN bodies.

During the retreat, chaired by Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Recovery and Governance



Jordan Ryan with Minister Ambulai Johnson

Jordan Ryan and Liberia's Ministers of Planning and Internal Affairs, participants discussed successes and failures as well as implementation strategies for the future. Dubbed an "historic" opportunity for the Liberian people, the retreat began by analyzing the triumphs and obstacles faced by the CSTs and discussed elaborated ways of implementing the Poverty Reduction Strategy and County Development Agendas. The CSTs were to utilize this opportunity to find out where rifts had developed and to ensure that these "divisions are not dividing the nation," Ryan said.

The role of local authorities in the national development strategy is key to ensuring all segments of society benefit from the country's national resources -- a break from the past that witnessed marginalization and neglect of particular groups by those in authority. The CSTs enable the

counties to work better with Monrovia and give a voice to Liberians across the nation. DSRSG Ryan described the success of the CST initiative "considerable." Liberian people have the power to improve their own lives and the lives of their fellow citizens, he said.

Compiling, managing, organizing and sharing information in County Information Packs and information offices is crucial, participants agreed, to holding government officials accountable for their actions. If records are kept and files organized, mismanaged resources or failures will ensure that ineffectual leaders will not retain their positions.

Internal Affairs Minister Ambulai Johnson stressed the importance of information sharing, citing the fact that with so many actors involved in the development process, knowing which entity is playing what role is often muddled. He said the government is working to streamline communication strategies. A comprehensive report containing data on each of the counties and the work being carried out by superintendents is expected to be published shortly and distributed to all county administrative offices. Retreat participants stressed the importance of overseeing the entire development process every step of the way through national and county-level monitoring mechanisms. Ryan praised Liberians on their "tremendous accomplishment." The true success, he said, lies in knowing that change has been made for every Liberian woman, man and child. ♦



Benefitting from Emergency Response

By Rebecca Bannor-Addae

Patience Johnson and Esther Garmongu are sitting in the shade of a tree watching a group of men installing a hand-pump. “I’m very happy that we’re getting a hand-pump,” says Johnson. “Maybe that will mean we won’t get sick anymore.” The two young women live in Gbawolo Town in River Cess County. Soon, and for the first time, they will have access to clean drinking water. “We’ve always got our water from a creek

As Liberia has moved from an emergency phase to that of recovery, funding for humanitarian activities has dwindled. Many humanitarian agencies providing basic social services are phasing out their activities and moving to other emergency hot spots. However, the Liberian government continues to rely heavily on donor support to bridge the gap in provision of basic social services. The south-eastern region of the country in particular suffers from high rates of maternal and child mortality and frequent outbreaks of water-borne diseases, a stark reminder that

provide support,” says Ryan. “The grant was timely and helped us cover funding gaps. But more importantly, we were able to target this assistance to the most vulnerable and underserved communities within a short period.”

Nearly 1.2 million people across Liberia benefit from seven projects funded by a 2007 CERF grant focusing on health and water and sanitation. The health projects provide life saving medical services in 10 counties while an estimated 44,500 people in Montserrado, River Cess and Sinoe Counties benefit from improved access to sanitation facilities and clean drinking water.

“And we got new latrines,” remarks Johnson, glancing at the group of men digging the well for the hand-pump. “We’re learning that it is not good toiletting in the

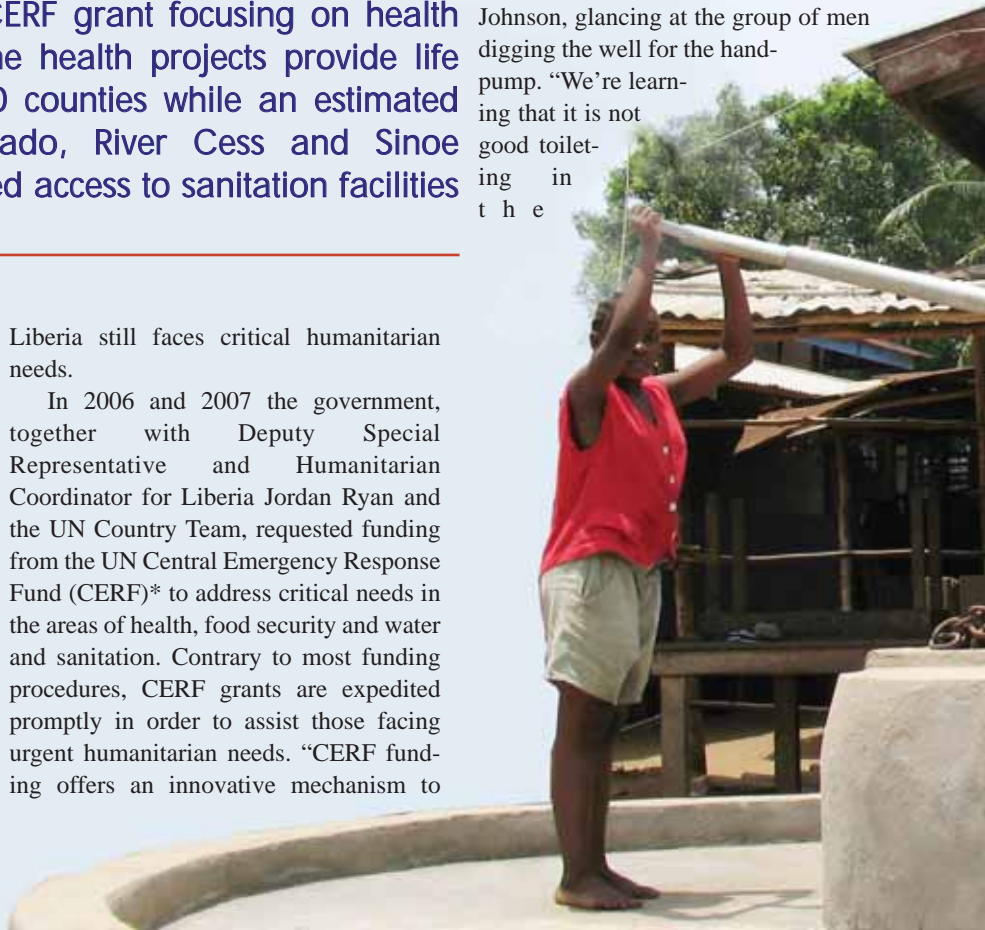
Nearly 1.2 million people across Liberia benefit from seven projects funded by a 2007 CERF grant focusing on health and water and sanitation. The health projects provide life saving medical services in 10 counties while an estimated 44,500 people in Montserrado, River Cess and Sinoe Counties benefit from improved access to sanitation facilities and clean drinking water.

half an hour walk from here,” says Garmongu. “The creek water is not clean. We get sick from drinking it.”

River Cess County is among Liberia’s isolated and underserved counties, most of which are located in the south-east. Despite efforts by the government, the UN family and NGOs, the residents of these counties continue to face acute humanitarian needs. There is an extreme lack of access to basic health services and safe sanitation facilities. Food production is low and poor road conditions make movement very difficult particularly during the rainy season that often lasts up to six months.

Liberia still faces critical humanitarian needs.

In 2006 and 2007 the government, together with Deputy Special Representative and Humanitarian Coordinator for Liberia Jordan Ryan and the UN Country Team, requested funding from the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF)* to address critical needs in the areas of health, food security and water and sanitation. Contrary to most funding procedures, CERF grants are expedited promptly in order to assist those facing urgent humanitarian needs. “CERF funding offers an innovative mechanism to



bush.”

Worldwide, over 2.6 billion people -- 41 per cent of the global population -- have no access to proper sanitation services. Lack of decent toilet facilities and hygiene forces girls to stay out of school rather than risk indignity by not having access to private latrines. In addition, raw sewage flows directly into water sources exposing millions of people to diseases.

“Sanitation is critical to human development,” says Olav Kjørven, UN Assistant Secretary-General and Director of Policy for UNDP. “More than 5,000 children around the world continue to die from diarrhoea each day because they don’t have access to a decent toilet and clean water. That’s like ten jumbo jets full of children crashing every day.”

CERF funding is channelled through UN agencies or, as in the case of Liberia, through the Humanitarian Coordinator. Implementation of the various projects may involve several tiers of partners from UN agencies, local and international NGOs to local skilled contractors. “The various layers of implementa-

tion often help ensure the timely completion of projects because jobs are done by the appropriate partner at the appropriate level,” says Ryan. “In fact, we learned firsthand [from the first CERF grant received in 2006] the important role NGOs can play in getting resources delivered at the community level. That is like taking advantage of the best that the UN and the NGOs have to offer.”

County Evangelical Children Rehabilitation Programme (ECEP), a local NGO, is responsible for executing water and sanitation projects in River Cess County. “The hygiene people come every so often. They teach us good, good things like why we have to wash hands with soap and water after toileting and before eating even if we eat with spoon. They teach us about cleaning the house, all our areas,” says Garmongu. “I think it’s good that they tell us this

and I hope the water coming from the pump will help my children not to get sick. That is my biggest hope,” says Garmongu with a wide smile.

*The Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) is a stand-by fund established by the UN General Assembly to enable more timely and reliable humanitarian assistance to those affected by natural disasters and armed conflicts. CERF has two funding windows. The Rapid Response grant can be released within 48 hours to enable prompt humanitarian assistance to people in acute need. One-third of the CERF grant facility is earmarked for underfunded emergencies. Liberia has received a total of US\$ 7.7 million from the Underfunded window. ♦



Rebecca Banno-Acdaae/UNMIL

Confrontin g Mob

By Sulaiman Momodu

In just over a year, between January 2007 and February 2008, there were a total of nine attacks on police stations in Liberia, while there were 56 attacks against police officers during the same period, out of which 23 occurred in capital Monrovia and its environs. The disturbing statistics were revealed by Henrietta Mensa-Bonsu, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (DSRSG) for Rule of Law, at a forum held at the Monrovia City Hall in March to discuss ways to curtail mob attacks on the Liberia National Police (LNP) personnel and the vandalizing of police stations.

Referring to “mob justice”, the Deputy Envoy said there was no semblance of justice in what a mob does. “It is mob violence,” she pointed out. When citizens take the laws into their own hands instead of relying on law enforcement officers to handle grievances in a manner prescribed by law, it is lawless behavior and has no place in a civilized society, she added.

In April 2007 more than 200 people stormed the police station in Bong Mines, broke into the cell, released a suspect and burnt down the station. A motorbike and accommodation, both belonging to the LNP, were also burnt. In Harbel, about 250 persons armed with sticks, cutlasses and stones, demanded the release of a murder suspect in September 2007 with the intent of killing him. The police depot was completely burnt and the suspect died of injury inflicted on him by the mob which also left

some LNP personnel and peacekeepers injured. In February this year, an UNMIL-funded Quick Impact Project police station which had been opened a few weeks earlier in Tappita, Nimba County, was set ablaze leaving one woman burnt to death. In March this year, the police station in Cestos City also came under attack on account of the arrest of one person but for the presence of UN peacekeepers, it would have been burnt down. Mensa-Bonsu noted that communities were quick to ask for police stations but were equally quick to destroy them. “We cannot keep asking donors to fund police stations only for people to put them on fire.”

Even the staff and property of the UN Mission have not been spared by the mob. One early morning in March, UNMIL’s vehicles and staff were attacked in Monrovia by a mob believed to be former individual contractors of the Mission. Two vehicles were burnt and a third one was damaged. Three UNMIL personnel sustained injuries during the attack.

Emerging from a devastating civil war, incidents of violence which put lives and property at risk are of great concern to the Liberian authorities. Addressing the media in April, the Inspector General of the LNP, Beatrice Munah Sieh, said the police, in collaboration with other security apparatus and UNMIL, were doing all they can to put crime under control and encouraged the public to hand over suspects to the police. “We don’t want any mob violence. Just call the police,” she stressed.

Many Liberians attribute mob violence



Many Liberians attribute mob violence to deal with wrongdoers. LNP cases they do not show up at all, hotline to call the police are usually always off.

MOB VIOLENCE!



ence to the public perception of insufficient efforts by the author- personnel are usually late to arrive on crime scenes, and in some some say. Another refrain is that telephone numbers provided as usually unreachable as the mobiles phones provided are almost

to the public perception of insufficient efforts by the authorities to deal with wrongdoers. LNP personnel are usually late to arrive on crime scenes, and in some cases they do not show up at all, some say. Another refrain is that telephone numbers provided as hotline to call the police are usually unreachable as the mobiles phones provided are almost always off. Some participants at the forum held in Monrovia had photographs of their dead loved ones in their possession and accused the authorities of doing nothing to bring the criminals to justice.

Special Representative of the Secretary-General Ellen Løj says mistrust in security and justice structures propels mob violence. "There is mistrust in the justice and security structures of the country, thus propelling citizens to opt for mob justice." She told the UN Security Council recently that despite the government's efforts to enhance the rule of law, deficiencies in the justice system continue to pose serious challenges to the administration of justice countrywide.

UN Acting Police Commissioner Henrik Stiernblad explains that there are many challenges the Liberian national police faces but they are not limited to the police alone. The challenges, most of them linked to the availability of resources affect all sectors of the society. "So police officers are also victims of the system."

Mensa-Bonsu points out that although the LNP faces challenges, amongst them allegations of corruption, they must not be addressed with instant justice or mob violence. "And when criminal behavior on the part of a police officer is established, the police officer will be prosecuted as any other citizen; there is none above the law, and none greater than the law."

Joint police patrols by UN police personnel and the LNP have been increased to deal with crime, including mob violence. However, the UNPOL Commissioner points out that patrols cannot be everywhere and that communities should understand the dangers of mob violence. "Whenever people attack a police station, they attack the state, so they attack themselves," says Stiernblad. Since 2003, UNMIL has been assisting in restructuring the national police and strengthening the rule of law. ♦



A Community Police Forum in Progress

Community Policing to Tackle Crime

By Sulalman Momodu

Paynesville, located on the outskirts of capital Monrovia, is a community prone to crime and violence. Armed robberies have been common and unsuspecting pedestrians are often relieved of their meagre possessions by pick-pockets. Now, however, Paynesville residents seem to be breathing a sigh of relief thanks to the introduction of Community Policing (CP) in their midst.

“Before, we had lots of armed robberies. All around us people were just harassing and snatching things but with the community policing, we are very vigilant and things are improving,” explains David M. Kun, who is a chairperson of Community Policing Forum (CPF) in Paynesville.

Although practised in other parts of the world as part of modern policing, the concept of CP was only introduced in post-war Liberia by the United Nations Mission (UNMIL) in November 2004. Essentially,

the approach makes the police the servants of the people. “Community policing is about dialogue with the police, with the police listening to the public, understanding their security needs and trying to address them,” says UNMIL Acting Police Commissioner Henrik Stiernblad.

Most Liberians recall the country’s former national police as one not only riddled with bribery and corruption but also had ruthlessness and brutality as its hallmark. Before UNMIL began training a new police force with United Nations

Police (UNPOL) playing a pivotal role, confidence in the Liberian National Police (LNP) to protect lives and property had all but eroded.

With such mistrust, getting people to embrace working together with the police has been challenging. “We had to go from county to county, community to community, educating people that the only way we can live in a crime-free society is by participating in our own security,” says the National Chairman of CPF, Isaac Nyenati Kaffey. If communities and the police were working together, it would have been very difficult for insecurity to have broken out and devastated the country at the scale at which it did, he contends. Currently, various counties have been divided into zones and communities with 198 active CPFs in the country, including 98 in Montserrado, the county of the capital, Monrovia.

To fight crime the newly trained LNP, in collaboration with UNPOL, conducts patrols but the security personnel cannot be everywhere at the same time making the participation of the community very crucial. At the National Police Academy as well as in the counties, specialised training courses are conducted from time to time for CPF heads and police commanders.

Also, in various communities, workshops are conducted to educate community members on how to carry out community policing duties.

At one such workshop held in May in Paynesville, CPF heads

were educated on the establishment of the Professional Standards Division where complaints of police misconduct can now be reported. In addition, they were enlightened on the country’s criminal justice system and the need to curb mob violence. Participants were also informed that even if someone was caught red-handed committing a crime, the suspect is assumed innocent until proven guilty by a compe-

tent court of justice.

President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf strongly condemned a recent surge in armed robberies in Monrovia and urged communities to work with the police in curbing the menace. During “Operation Thunderstorm”, launched to counter the rising crime, some suspected armed robbers were rounded up. “It is the social responsibility of every citizen and resident



Henrik Stiernblad

To fight crime the newly trained LNP, in collaboration with UNPOL, conducts patrols but the security personnel cannot be everywhere at the same time making the participation of the community very crucial. At the National Police Academy as well as in the counties, specialised training courses are conducted from time to time for CPF heads and police commanders. Also, in various communities, workshops are conducted to educate community members on how to carry out community policing duties.

of Liberia to inform the police when a crime is taking place. Without information, the police would not know what is happening,” says Kaffey. CFP members proudly point out that it was as a result of their vigilance that two notorious criminal groups, one terrorising residents of Monrovia and the other in the counties, were crushed. Notwithstanding these efforts though, despondency is sometimes

not too far away. While they cooperate with the security forces to tighten the noose, CPF members say arrested hardcore criminals are rarely punished and soon return to their communities with a vengeance.

Addressing a recent press conference on crime, Liberian Police Director Beatrice Munah Sieh noted that because the laws entitled people to bail, arrested criminals taken to court are soon out on bail and ready to go into action again. “Criminals steal good money – good dollars, so they can afford good lawyers to take them out.” The Liberian government has now proposed a bill which seeks to make armed robbery, terrorism and hijacking a non-bailable offence, with life imprisonment if found guilty.

Some Liberians argue that in combating crime, more police officers should be armed. UNPOL Commissioner Stiernblad differs: “Combating crime is not all about carrying weapons. It is about doing good policing, using your experience, using intelligence, knowing who the criminals are and in a timely way taking steps to prevent them from doing their things.” He says before, the police were reactive and would sit in their stations and wait for crime reports to reach them but today, they

are proactive in crime prevention.

CFP members say despite the training and some mobile phones to report crime, lack of logistics to effectively carry out their job is a major challenge.

“Anywhere I am called, I pay my own way or beg someone to give me a ride. People are gradually having trust and confidence in community policing and are willing to give us sensitive information which we share with UNMIL and the LNP, but we need more support,” says the CPF chairman who has taken up security work as an unpaid part-time job together with dozens of other Liberians. ♦

More Corrections Officers Graduate

The fifth class of 33 Corrections Officers, including six females, graduated in May, adding momentum to the ongoing efforts to strengthen Liberia's Rule of Law institutions. The new graduates will soon be deployed at various Corrections facilities across the country.

Smartly dressed in grey khaki uniforms, the graduates paraded before dignitaries and guests at the National Police Training Academy, visibly elated to have successfully completed the 12 month intensive induction training, which was jointly conducted by the Ministry of Justice and the UN Mission's Corrections Advisory Unit. The graduation brings the number of Corrections Officers who have successfully completed the training at the Academy to 142. Another group of 67 trainees are currently undergoing on-the-job training and will be graduating in August this year.

"Now that peace has returned to Liberia, and an elected democratic government is in place, respect for the rule of law must be seen as the cornerstone for the nurturing of the sustained peace," said the Deputy Special Representative for Rule of Law, Henrietta Mensa-Bonsu, congratulating the officers on their chosen career. Pointing out that a lot still remains to be done to achieve the goal of training a sufficient number of qualified staff to manage the different corrections institutions in different parts of the country, Mensa-Bonsu urged the newly-trained officers to strive to reflect discipline, excellence and commitment at all times in their professional career. "The knowledge you have acquired must be applied on the job, and in the spirit of continuous learning, you must keep abreast with developments in your area of specialization," she advised the new graduates.



Corrections officers at their graduation ceremony

The corrections officers, who will be responsible for the care, custody and control of prisoners, were reminded to uphold internationally accepted standards of human rights and to ensure the humane treatment of prisoners entrusted to their care while ensuring a safe and secure environment. As Liberia consolidates peace after years of carnage, correction officers are no doubt an important part of the country's criminal justice system. The Director of Prisons, Edwin Zayzay Volawuo, urged the graduates to be serious with their job and to be prepared to work for their coun-

try and people. Certificates including awards for outstanding performances were jointly distributed by the Deputy Special Representative and the Prisons Director.

"I was recruited in Maryland County and will be sent back to work in my county," said a smiling Thesesa Nyanti, who received the best motivational award. The officers assured that they will utilize the knowledge acquired in line with best practices and expressed gratitude to UNMIL for the training. A targeted 500 officers are to be trained to run the country's 13 functional corrections facilities. •

Internal Affairs Ministry Rehabilitated

By J. Wesley Washington

The Ministry of Internal Affairs, charged with the responsibility of pursuing the extension and consolidation of state authority throughout Liberia, received a massive boost when Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Recovery and Governance Jordan Ryan handed over the UN-funded, newly rehabilitated offices to Minister, Ambulai Johnson, on the grounds of the Executive Mansion.

Ministries and agencies, over the years, have spent considerable portions of their annual budget to remunerate private property

owners for buildings hosting them with minimum facelift or none at all. In order to reduce the strain on government's meager budget, ministries and agencies are now identifying abandoned government buildings which they rehabilitate and renovate thereby saving substantial amounts.

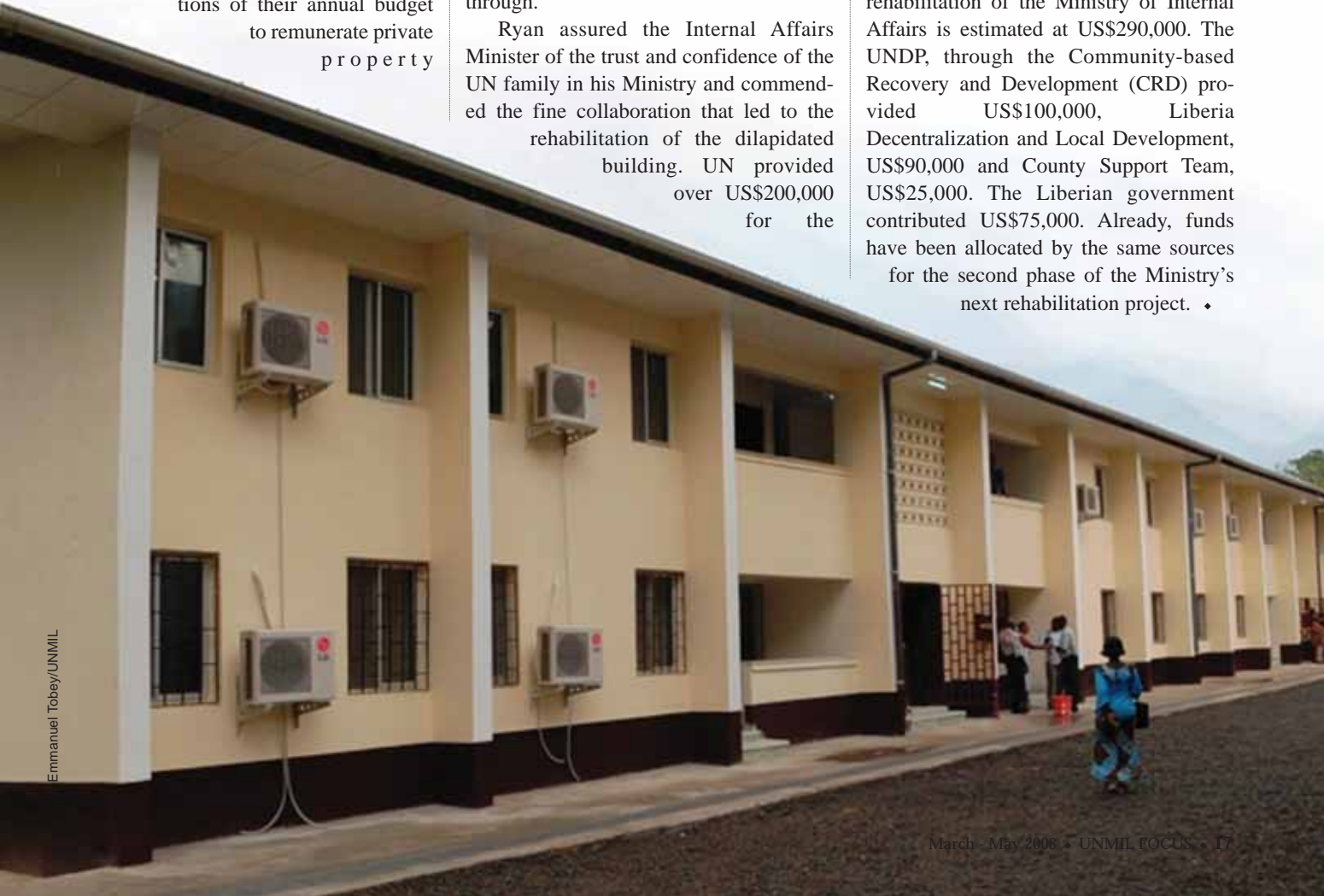
Ryan, who is also UNDP Resident Representative in Liberia, expressed hope that the Ministry would successfully pursue its mandate from the renovated premises, "active in support of building peace, show an example that the government is working for the people throughout the country, as well as help Liberians realize that their country can be a dream come through."

Ryan assured the Internal Affairs Minister of the trust and confidence of the UN family in his Ministry and commended the fine collaboration that led to the rehabilitation of the dilapidated building. UN provided over US\$200,000 for the

rehabilitation.

Referring to the United Nations as their most trusted and cooperative partner, Minister Johnson said the completion of the first of two buildings was in support of the government's capacity-building. "Infrastructure is an element of capacity-building because in order to perform to expectation, one has to have a comfortable place to sit, organize, plan and execute from." The newly renovated premises will now host the essential Ministry staff pending the completion of the second building that would facilitate the return of remaining staff members.

The first phase of the outlay for the rehabilitation of the Ministry of Internal Affairs is estimated at US\$290,000. The UNDP, through the Community-based Recovery and Development (CRD) provided US\$100,000, Liberia Decentralization and Local Development, US\$90,000 and County Support Team, US\$25,000. The Liberian government contributed US\$75,000. Already, funds have been allocated by the same sources for the second phase of the Ministry's next rehabilitation project. ♦





Taking Environment Seriously

By Rebecca Bannor-Addae

Joseph Klimi sets out in his canoe from Robertsport, the capital city of Grand Cape Mount County. Paddling across Lake Piso he points out fish breeding holes at the bottom of the lake. Where the water is shallow he catches crabs and snails. “The snails taste good with pepper,” says Klimi, looking at a purple-coloured shell in his hand. A colony of little grey birds with white necks takes off from a bundle of waterlogged tumbleweed.

Lake Piso is a saltwater lake with an open connection to the Atlantic Ocean. Several rivers and streams empty into it. The lake and its surrounding areas make for a uniquely diverse landscape of wetland, coastal rainforest and savannah grassland, home to several endangered animal species. The government of Liberia recently designated Lake Piso a protected area on account of its rich biodiversity.

One may wonder why biodiversity

protection is of significance to the government at a time when most Liberians struggle to make ends meet. “We need to protect our invaluable environment and in fact, apart from the Lake Piso basin, the government has identified two other areas for protection adding to the two existing protected areas of Sapo National Park and East Nimba Strict Nature Reserve,” says Theo Freeman, Technical Manager for Conservation at the Forestry Development Authority (FDA). “This concerns our present generation and future generations to come.”

Liberia is home to exceptionally diverse plant and animal species. The country has signed and ratified a series of international treaties and conventions calling for the establishment of protected areas. However, it was not until 2003 that Liberia established its Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). This government agency is responsible for environmental impact assessment of forestry, mining and logging, construction, and agricul-

tural activities, and subsequent alignment with regulations.

EPA collaborates with Liberia Protected Areas Network, in part consisting of FDA, UNMIL’s Environment and Natural Resources Unit, NGOs, private industry and civil society. The Network identifies, with active community participation, areas for conservation and assists with guidance on sustainable mechanisms for protection. The Network’s recommendations will feed into final FDA conservation regulations for the Lake Piso basin such as, fishing periods during the year, size of nets, quota, and guidance on harvest of materials like rattan and medical plants.

Close to 9,000 people live in and around the lake and they largely depend on the immediate surroundings for their livelihood. “We use the lake and its rivers as means of transportation,” says Klimi pointing to a settlement along a riverbank. “These people have no road access. If they want to trade, they get in their canoes and

sail across the lake to Robertsport to sell crops or fish they've caught in the river. We use wood for construction of houses and for firewood and people hunt the animals that live here."

The World Bank recently approved a grant to assist FDA with socio-economic studies of the Lake Piso basin. Freeman highlights the necessity to consult the local population before finalising conservation regulations. "We will not move people from the area but together we need to find alternative means of livelihood where existing ones are taken away or reduced during certain periods of the year, such as fishing," says Freeman.

Historically Liberia's economy has depended on extractive industries, including timber, rubber and minerals. Despite a serious decline in production due to the 14 years of civil war, extraction of natural resources is relied upon for economic revitalisation.

Recently there have been reports of some people seeing unidentified divers dipping in and out of the lake. Erasmus

D a o d a

Fahnbulleh, Development Superintendent of Grand Cape Mount County, verifies that there has been such activity in the lake. "We understand the interim government [Transitional Government] entered into an exploration agreement with a foreign company and their researchers have been here. It is believed that Lake Piso houses minerals such as diamonds. We, the citizens of Grand Cape Mount, wish to utilise the lake not as a ground for exploitation but for

Liberia's previously poor environmental management, especially in relation to natural resources, is now being corrected under the current government. Hopefully, the Lake Piso Basin is destined for a bright future.

protective purposes that will benefit everyone and not just a few," says Fahnbulleh firmly. "In fact, eco-tourism could be a solution to bring sustainable development to the County for generations to come. We will not enter into exploitative agreements and in any case such agreements should be revisited by the current government."

Between 2006 and 2007 a review committee of national and international

al experts looked into all existing contracts and concession agreements. Three mineral agreements were recommended for cancellation and one for re-negotiation, explains Gesler E. Murray, Assistant Minister for Mineral Exploitation and Environmental Research at the Ministry of Land, Mines and Energy. The Lake Piso exploration agreement passed scrutiny. Should the company wish to go further it would need to submit an environmental impact assessment study to EPA and all stakeholders would have to revisit future plans.

Liberia's previously poor environmental management, especially

ly in relation to natural resources, is now being corrected under the current government. Hopefully, the Lake Piso Basin is destined for a bright future.

UNMIL's Environment and Natural Resources Unit provides support to the government, the UN family in Liberia and NGO partners on appropriate environmental and natural resources policies and strategies. UNMIL is the first mission to staff dedicated environmental specialists to tackle these issues. ♦



“The drawdown will be gradual...”

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, along with wife Soon-taek, paid a two-day visit to Liberia starting 21 April to witness firsthand the progress the country has made with assistance from the United Nations. He met with Vice President Joseph Boakai, addressed a joint session of the national legislature and held talks with Cabinet members and senior UN officials in the country. In an exclusive interview with UNMIL Radio’s **Eva Flomo**, the Secretary-General discusses UNMIL’s planned drawdown and expresses continued support and commitment to help Liberia overcome the various challenges it faces. Excerpts:

What has prompted your visit to Liberia at this time?

First of all, I am very pleased to be in Liberia for the first time in my capacity as Secretary-General. I come to Liberia to witness myself the progress Liberia has made with the cooperation of the United Nations. This is a country that has experienced a long civil conflict and is now in the process of peace building. I just wanted to send my strong message to the people and Government of Liberia of the United Nations’ strong commitment to support their noble efforts to bring peace, stability and development. Again, I have strong admiration and respect for the first African woman President, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, for her leadership. I commend her leadership and initiatives to bring to this country peace and stability.

With all the progress in recent years and the peace-building efforts, is Liberia still being regarded as a country in crisis?

No, I don’t think so. Liberia is now in the phase of peace consolidation, which is also drawing to a close, and will hopefully soon return to normalcy. Liberia, particularly during the last four and a half years, has made tremendous progress in the area of peace-building and also in strengthening relationship with the regional coun-

tries, particularly in the Mano River basin and also ECOWAS.

After UNMIL’s drawdown, what sort of United Nations’ presence will be left in Liberia?

The Security Council has accepted my recommendation for the first phase of drawdown of UNMIL by the end of September this year. I have also discussed this matter with President Sirleaf. The drawdown will be done in a gradual and step by step manner so that it will not have a negative impact on the peace consolidation process. Even when the drawdown is implemented, all the UN agencies, Funds and Programmes will continue to operate focusing on development in Liberia.

There have been calls by Liberians on the UN travel ban list for their removal from the list, indicating the reasons for them being put on the list no longer exist, particularly with former President Charles Taylor now facing trial in The Hague. What is your response, Sir, to these calls?

Decisions to remove names from the travel ban list rests solely with the Security Council Committee concerning Liberia. I am aware that the Committee is engaged in reviewing the list in light of the developments in Liberia. A mechanism exists

by which individuals on the list can appeal to the Security Council Sanction Committee. I understand two persons have already been removed from the list through this mechanism.



There have been problems in several Sub-Saharan countries recently over the rising price of food and oil. How is this affecting the work of the UN World Food Programme and how does the UN plan to deal with this issue as most relief food is purchased from the same major producers who are deciding to reduce their exports?

This is a very serious issue which I have recently taken up in close coordination with the international community. This has a very negative impact. The WFP and the UNCHR are experiencing shortage of resources. The WFP has made an urgent appeal to the donors to fill this missing gap. In the long term, this will also have a very negative impact on our efforts to realize the Millennium Development Goals. I am afraid that it will negatively impact the poorest of the poor of the world, mostly in African countries. Therefore I have decided to urgently create a task force, including eminent experts and policy makers as well as international financial institutions like the World Bank and IMF, to address this issue. On the basis of their recommendations, I am going to take actions to address this very serious issue so that the

international community will be able to help those people with acute shortages. Unfortunately, we have seen many manifestations through protests and riots in many parts of the world, starting from Haiti, Cairo, Burkina Faso and other places.

Is the African solution -- resolving African conflicts through the African Union -- a real option? People are thinking whether it is something that is working...

The United Nations has been maintaining a very close partnership with the African Union in addressing many important and serious issues -- regional conflicts, political, development and human rights issues. Recently, there was a very important Security Council debate where many Heads of States and governments of Africa and Europe discussed how to strengthen the partnership between United Nations and the African Union and other regional organizations. I'm very much committed to work closely with the African Union in addressing many African challenges.

The UN was founded to maintain world peace. What are the main challenges it is facing in meeting this mandate today?

The UN deals with peace and security, and development and human rights. One of the most important mandates is to maintain peace and stability all throughout the world. In the areas such as Dafur and Somalia, we have seen many serious humanitarian issues and conflicts and I'm expediting the deployment of a hybrid operation in Dafur. I have dispatched assessments teams to Somalia to determine how the UN can strengthen the capacity of the people there. We have successfully facilitated the peace process in Kenya and political stability has been restored in Kenya. The situation in Zimbabwe after presidential election is very worrisome and of concern and I am working with leaders of Africa and other leaders of the international community.

Where do you see Liberia in the next five years?

I am very proud over the progress Liberia has made over the last four and a half years in the areas of peace building, strengthening its relationship with the Mano River and ECOWAS and also enhancing good governance. Even though lagging in the area of the MDGs, I am quite confident that in five years' time through this peace consolidation process, Liberia will be known as a country with democratic principles and economic development and transparency.

Finally, what in specific terms would you want to tell Liberians in relation to your visit and what would you be taking back with you?

I was very much impressed and overwhelmed by such a very warm welcome upon my arrival. I am here to express my strong support and commitment of the United Nations to help the Liberian government and the people to overcome the political, social and economic challenges the country faces. We will continue to help and at the same time, I hope the Liberian leadership and people will continue to exert their efforts to make their own country more democratic and more prosperous based on democratic rules and principles. ♦



The Struggle for Basic Education

By Sulaiman Momodu

By now Togar Yondoe, 18, could have begun her university education. Instead, she is only beginning her primary school. “I had no support,” she confesses. Yet she is happy to be in school, which is free of cost, and is proud to be able to read and write her own name.

Like Yondoe, many Liberian children today enter grade one in their late teens -- a sad testimony of how the civil war robbed many children of their education and their future. Under the Free Primary Education Policy, enrollment in public primary schools has increased from 597,316 in 2005/2006 academic year to 1,087,257 in 2007/2008, representing 82 per cent increase nationwide. In private schools, which have sponsors or generate funds through school fees and charges, there are currently nearly 80,000 boys and over 85,000 girls enrolled.

Currently, Liberia has about 4,000 primary and secondary schools including nearly 2,300 public primary schools. The Liberian government has abolished all fees in public primary schools and has committed to pay the fees for the West African Examination for all sixth graders.

“The challenges of Liberian education are enormous,” President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf said earlier this year while addressing the National Legislature. “There are insufficient numbers of schools to accommodate the nation’s growing school-age pop-

ulation. The quality of instructional programme is not the best for the training of our nation’s youths and future leaders. The majority of our teachers have no professional background and salaries and incentives offered bring little attraction for recruitment and retention of teachers in the profession.”

Until recently, Liberian primary school teachers were paid about US\$10 to US\$15 per month, says Assistant Minister for Primary Education, Keturah B. Siebu. Now, however, the teachers’ salary has been increased to US\$50 - US\$55 per month, still inadequate to meet their needs. Also, many teachers are volunteers and do not receive salary. Education Minister Dr. Joseph Kortu says efforts are on to regularize volunteer teachers who have career interest in the teaching profession.

Liberia’s education system includes six years of pri-

mary school. And after years of conflict, the need for children to get back to school could not be more urgent. “What I tell the children is that we don’t go to school only to make money. Most times we feel if we learn we will be rich – you may or you may not. What is important is, if you can read and write you will be able to differentiate things and to



understand the world around you. Education is an eye opener,” says Siebu, who had spent long years in the classroom before her appointment as Minister.

Among the partners offering support to the Ministry of Education (MoE) are UNICEF, UNESCO, USAID, EU, IRC, UNHCR, UNDP and the Chinese government. Following Liberia’s Partners Forum in 2007 in Washington, DC, the MoE and partners developed the ‘Liberia Primary Education Recovery Programme’ (LPERP), which was forwarded to the Education For All - Fast Track Initiative (EFA-FTI). The

Netherlands made available about US\$12 million. The MoE also received US\$5 million from the American phil-

anthropist, George Soros.

UNICEF, the lead agency for education, has developed a five-year country programme focusing on education. The agency has been providing educational materials, including stationeries, to public and community schools and conduct short-term teacher training workshops. It has supported the MoE to conduct two school censuses to establish a clearer picture of

Until recently, Liberian primary school teachers were paid about US\$10 to US\$15 per month, says Assistant Minister for Primary Education, Keturah B. Siebu. Now, however, the teachers’ salary has been increased to US\$50 - US\$55 per month, still inadequate to meet their needs. Also, many teachers are volunteers and do not receive salary.

school enrollment, teachers and schools. It has also produced furniture for schools, provided seven vehicles to seven county educational offices, and supports the

Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP) to help over age or older children get back to school. UNICEF supports the girls education programme geared towards basic education in collaboration with UNIFEM and UNDP.

For its part, UNMIL has been assisting the education sector through its Quick Impact Project with the renovation of schools. Its Civil Affairs section also provides technical assistance. Through personal contributions,

peacekeepers continue to render support by adopting schools in their areas of deployment. In March, for instance, residents of Kpor Town along the

Roberts International highway were proud recipients of a new school building constructed by the 15th battalion of the Nigerian contingent. The construction was possible through the voluntary contribution by peacekeepers who raised US\$ 20,000.

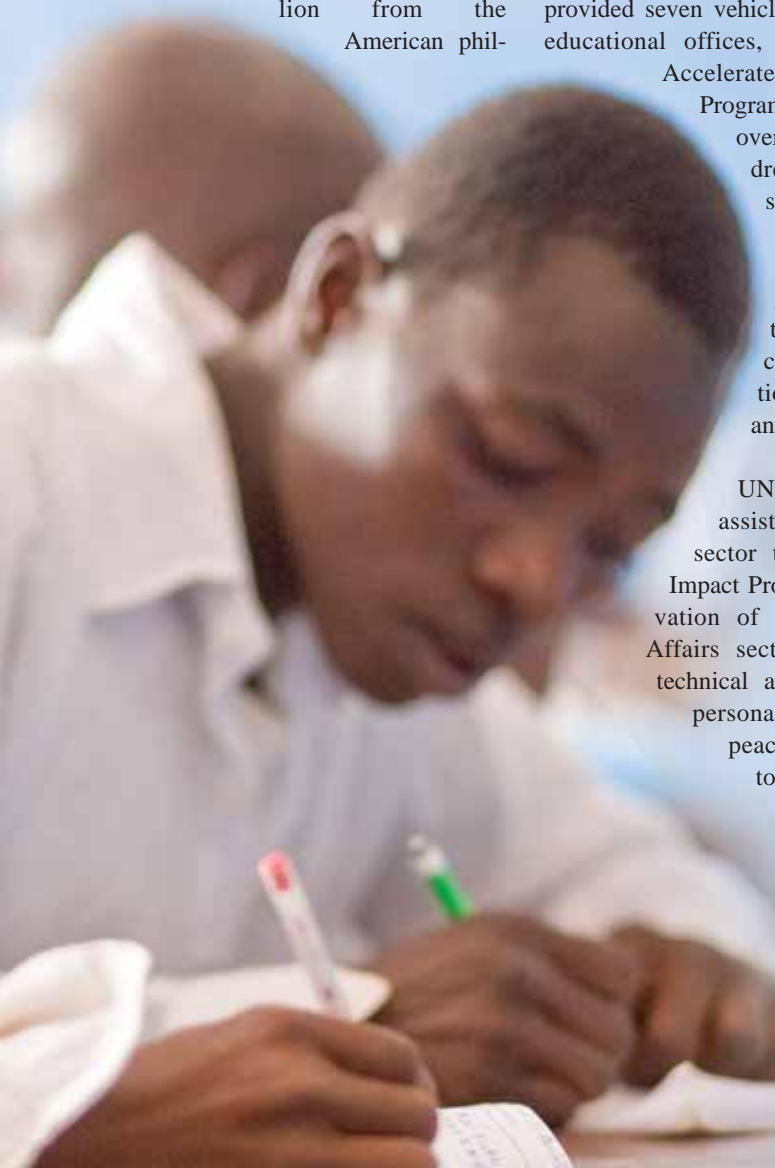
“Liberia needs to do many things at the same time: train teachers, build schools, provide teaching and learning materials and make teaching attractive,” says the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Officer-in-Charge, Ahmed K. Ferej.

Since 2004, UNESCO has been involved in emergency educational activities in collaboration with other partners in a multi-agency approach. The agency has been working with the MoE to review the national curriculum, which has now introduced Peace, Human Rights and Citizenship Education as a subject on a pilot basis.

With the current focus on primary education, the secondary phase will be more challenging to accommodate the huge enrollment in primary schools, say some education experts. Unless and until the next level is addressed, problems await the country’s educational sector as the infrastructural support is not available for the secondary level.

Also, notwithstanding free primary education, some pupils still drop out. “Yes, it is true that primary education is free, you just come and put your name down, but some parents cannot even afford footwear and uniform for their children,” explains Philips Williams, a teacher in Monrovia.

Many children are yet to enroll in school and could be seen on the streets hawking goods or begging. By all indications, it looks an uphill task for Liberia to achieve the Millennium Development Goal of basic education by 2015. As the struggle continues, the future of many children, including 18-year-old Yondoe who dreams of becoming a medical doctor, remains uncertain. ♦



By Sulaiman Momodu

As the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) starts a gradual and phased drawdown of its peacekeepers, its Civil Affairs Section is actively working with civil society organizations (CSOs) to bolster the consolidation of peace in the war-ravaged nation.

“Civil society is crucial in any post-conflict country,” says Chief of Civil Affairs Francis Kai-Kai, pointing out that civil society is the interface between the government and the governed. “This mission has focused a lot on ensuring that the new government is properly established in Liberia. We cannot do everything at the same time. Now is the time we should pay a bit more attention to civil society organ-

With many government structures now in place and the link between capital Monrovia and the counties improving, the UN mission is exploring the role of civil society to enhance and consolidate peace in the country.

izations,” he adds.

During Liberia’s intermittent civil war, various CSOs were established, including religious and women’s groups, which played a crucial role in urging warlords to give peace a chance. Civil Society groups have also been a critical force in the movement for democracy, threatening to reject any faction or rebel leader that came to power through bullets rather than ballots. The efforts by CSOs apparently contributed in some ways to the restoration of peace.

The UN Special Representative to Liberia, Ellen Margrethe Løj, has urged CSOs to work with the people of Liberia in passing on key messages. “The Government cannot do it all,” she said in May at the National Women’s Conference



Engaging Civil Society for Lasting Peace

held in Monrovia on peace-building, recovery and development. Løj noted that a rich civil society is important for bringing development forward in any country. “It is important for any government, including the Government of Liberia, to have a civil society that is on their back all the time and keep them focused.”

Since 2003, Civil Affairs (CA) has

been supporting the Liberian government and related institutions to establish themselves not only in Monrovia but in the counties as well. With many government structures now in place and the link between capital Monrovia and the counties improving, the UN mission is exploring the role of civil society to enhance and consolidate peace in the country.



Emmanuel Tobey/UNMIL

UNMIL has been the driving force behind the attainment of peace and stability, but this output will be incomplete if the mission fails to translate its achievement into transferring capacity and skills to CSOs to guarantee the sustainability of the gains made so far,” says Saryee, while recognizing UNMIL’s participation in the NGO policy development process.

The Civil Affairs Section has already held consultations with some CSOs that represent various interests -- youth, women, religious, human rights, community-based and other groups -- and have the right spread and capacity to take messages from the government to the people and back. The move is to assist CSOs to enhance their capacity and be better organized, eventually leading to the creation of an umbrella organization. The LDI, a pro-democracy and rights advocacy national organization, has already had discussions with UNMIL on possible collaboration. The concept note on the UN peace-building fund has also been shared with this organization, which has already made its initial input. All credible CSOs will soon be meeting with UNMIL’s leadership to discuss the drawdown process and other issues.

Generally, civil society represents the views of ordinary people. In the case of Liberia, as part of peace consolidation, CSOs can be relevant in implementing aspects of government policies such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS). Also, with the current global food crisis sparking riots in many parts of the world, it is believed that CSOs could reach out to the grassroots and deliver services that will enhance food security. Some CSOs also ensure that local and government officials are held accountable, especially when it comes to the implementation of projects that benefit communities and subsequently contribute to improving the lives of people and enhancing peace.

UNMIL’s collaboration with the civil society groups will enhance the capacity of the latter by bringing their synergies together. The objective is to ensure that Liberians “own the peace process” and will continue to live in peace long after peacekeepers have withdrawn from the country, says Kai-Kai. ♦

Civil Society for Peace

Although there is no shortage of CSOs in Liberia, there is no known umbrella organization or forum for effective coordination to avoid duplication of efforts. The Executive Director of the Liberia Democratic Institute (LDI), Dan T. Saryee, admits that duplication of efforts is a problem not only with national but even with international civil society groups. Some

regulatory framework to avoid duplication of efforts is now in progress, he adds, noting that UNMIL’s collaboration with CSOs in the area of peace consolidation is a welcome move.

“Civil Society Organizations and UNMIL engaging concretely in consolidating peace in Liberia remains a cardinal pillar for genuine democratization.



President Johnson Sirleaf, Jordan Ryan and Gilbert Hougbo at the ceremony

Unsung Heroes of Micro-credit

By J. Wesley Washington

In 2002, Quita Jallah began petty trading with only LD\$500 (Liberian dollars) in Gbarnga, Bong County, where she lived with her three children during the civil war. She purchased goods from traders and re-sold them in camps for the displaced for a small profit. She joined a *susu* (savings) group and slowly her business grew. Unfortunately, Jallah lost all she had during the second phase of the war in 2003, forcing her to seek refuge in Monrovia.

As the civil war came to an end, Jallah returned to Gbarnga in 2004 determined to

turn things around. In need of capital, she sought help from Liberty Finance, a microfinance enterprise. Through hard work and commitment, her business grew rapidly. She has already built a small shop in Sergeant Kollie Town (SKT), on the outskirts of Gbarnga, and is currently building a bigger shop.

Jallah is just one of the many beneficiaries of a micro-credit scheme that gives out small loans to the poor to enable them start small businesses. “You may not believe that what I’ve acquired today, I restarted with LD\$140. I started on the ground selling bulgur wheat by the cup and today I’m in a shop with goods worth over LD\$240,000 and earning a substan-

tial amount of profit to expand and diversify my products,” says 38-year old Jallah. “That’s the wonder of God and what microfinance does for the active poor.”

Dressed in T-shirts inscribed “Transforming lives through microfinance”, beneficiaries of microcredit gathered at the Centennial Memorial Pavilion in May to honour 11 ‘Unsung heroes of microfinance entrepreneurship in Liberia.’ They were presented certificates and gifts to their businesses by Liberia’s President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and the visiting UNDP Assistant Administrator and Director of the Regional Bureau for Africa, Gilbert Hougbo.

The stories of the unsung heroes of

microfinance, who started with small loans, repaid and got bigger loans and repaid them are quite uplifting. At the programme, specific recognition was made of Kebbeh Sumbo, one of last year's honorees, a business woman who sells palm oil at the Red Light Market in Paynesville on the outskirts of Monrovia. Kebbeh started out as a very small business woman with only a gallon of palm oil years back. She joined the Local Enterprise Assistance Program (LEAP)

Microfinance Program and received her first loan of LD\$3,000 and was subsequently able to expand. Kebbeh has now become a major supplier of palm oil and employs 13 people.

With unemployment above 70 per cent, micro-credit is helping Liberia's low income households to set up small businesses or engage in other productive ventures. The overall objective of the project, supported by the Central Bank of Liberia (CBL), is to ensure that low income earners gain access to microfinance not only contributing to the Millennium Development Goal of reducing poverty, but also to support the national priority of economic revitalization, a pillar of the government's Poverty Reduction Strategy.

The Governor of the Central Bank, Dr. Mills Jones, promised to work with vari-

ous stakeholders to get microfinance well established in Liberia. "In fact, we're working to ensure the establishment of a Micro-finance Bank in Liberia that will be capitalized and provided with the requisite expertise to ensure its sustainability, catering to the low income people," he said.

Houngbo termed as inspiring plans by the CBL to establish a Micro-finance Bank in Liberia. He said real economic growth is meaningless unless it serves all seg-

because if you pay back, you can again get a bigger loan." She said it is her government's dream to move the beneficiaries from being petty traders to a bigger stage of owning shops and even getting involved in export activities. She appealed to international partner institutions to include literacy programmes in the microfinance project as a means of providing more opportunities for Liberians.

A recent study shows that the demand for microfinance has increased to 138,000 potential clients. Mainly implemented by the Local Enterprise Assistance Programme (LEAP) and the American Refugee Committee/Liberty Finance, only 11,000 clients, mostly women, in Bong, Margibi, Montserrado, Nimba and Bomi counties are currently benefitting from the credit

With unemployment above 70 per cent, micro-credit is helping Liberia's low income households to set up small businesses or engage in other productive ventures. The overall objective of the project, supported by the Central Bank of Liberia (CBL), is to ensure that low income earners gain access to microfinance not only contributing to the Millennium Development Goal of reducing poverty, but also to support the national priority of economic revitalization, a pillar of the government's Poverty Reduction Strategy.

ments of the population, and microfinance scheme at different levels is the way to fight poverty. "As you are setting the pace for what would be a model for other countries, we in the UNDP are very glad and wish to confirm that we will continue to be there with you," he stressed.

President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf encouraged Liberian entrepreneurs to be honest in repaying loans entrusted to them by lending institutions or individuals. "I appeal to you all to follow this example. When you borrow money, pay back

scheme.

According to the UNCDF Country Technical Advisor, Kenyeh Laura Barlay, efforts are on to mobilize between US\$35-36 million to implement microfinance activities throughout the country. She said the honouring of the 'unsung heroes' is to show that a small amount of resources can make an impact on people's lives. "Let the government and donors know that there's a framework in place. We want to be in all the counties; however, we cannot do this unless we have the resources," she noted.

Unsung heroes



Ousman Diallo/Executive Mansion



Mission Clean W

Consisting of communities surrounding Henry Town, about 30km north of Bopolu City in Gbarpolu County, the Koninga Chiefdom borders on the Kpelle Forest, one of the last remaining virgin rainforests in the region. Due to the remoteness of the Chiefdom, the residents have received very limited humanitarian assistance since Liberia's civil war ended in 2003. However, a multilateral collaboration has helped bring safe drinking water to the community.

With a US\$ 7 million funding from the British development agency DFID, a Watsan Consortium comprising Oxfam, Tearfund, Concern, Action Contre La Faim (ACF) and Solidarités, has been

leading the efforts to help the residents of this community.

In October 2007 Tearfund and its local partner, the Association of Evangelicals Liberia (AEL), under the guidance and direction of District Superintendent Moses Monoporlu, began focusing on providing safe drinking water and sanitation to Koninga residents. Tearfund built into its project design the provision of Bio Sand Filters (BSFs) to meet the needs of the community. These Filters provide a very simple and effective way to clean contaminated water through the slow sand filtration process.

Tearfund and AEL partnered with Samaritans Purse (SP), an organization known for its expertise in the provision of

BSFs, leading to the construction of hundreds of Filters in Bopolu.

Once the Filters were ready, a major logistical challenge emerged. How to get the huge Filters, made from concrete and weighing 140 kg each, to Henry Town?

The road from Bopolu City to Henry Town is one of the worst in Liberia and can only be traversed in the dry season by strong 4x4's with very competent drivers. One pick-up can only carry three BSFs at a time and 40 of them were needed in Henry Town to be distributed before mid March so that community training could begin before the rainy season.

Deputy Special Representative Jordan Ryan in November 2007 had pledged support to the Watsan Consortium. And since



On a bright and clear day in the first week of March, a helicopter landed at the football pitch of a school in Bopolu. The Filters were already lined up, ready to be transported. Within 30 minutes after landing, the first batch of Filters was airborne en route to Henry Town.

Water

the situation required the strong arm of UNMIL, discussions finally led to the decision to use the Mission's helicopters to transport the Filters to Henry Town.

On a bright and clear day in the first week of March, a helicopter landed at the football pitch of a school in Bopolu. The Filters were already lined up, ready to be transported. Within 30 minutes after landing, the first batch of Filters was airborne en route to Henry Town.

It's not often that Henry Town residents get to see a helicopter in their midst. There was much jubilation and excitement as the chopper landed with its cargo of 17 Filters and four friendly peacekeepers, whose job it was to protect children by keeping them off the football pitch-turned-

airfield. Two more trips were made the same day bringing all the Filters plus a couple of tons of cement for the construction of a clinic. What would have taken at least one month took just one day with UNMIL's timely assistance.

Town Chief Abu B. Barak said: "We will send these Filters to the small remote commu-

nities in the forest and to the new communities that are sprouting up now that Tearfund/AEL and their donors have brought so much development to the area. This will be the first time ever that some of these very remote towns get clean water, our children will no longer get sick. We the people of the Koningia Chiefdom thank everyone who made this possible." ♦



Time for Local Integration

By Sulaiman Momodu

For some Liberian refugees who fled the country during the height of the civil war, it was a one-way journey, never to come back again.

"I fled Liberia with nothing and all my family members were killed in the war. What do I have to go and find in Liberia again? For me, anywhere I can live in peace is home," says a female Liberian

the assisted voluntary repatriation officially ended in June 2007. By then more than 111,400 refugees had returned to Liberia.

For those refugees still remaining in the countries of their asylum, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is now focusing on local integration as a durable solution as resettlement in third countries is a very limited option. The process of local integration is undertaken by the host countries in collaboration with UNHCR and partners.

Among other reasons, many refugees who have decided to locally integrate are doing so because they have established stronger social and other links in their present communities with some refugees even getting married to members of their host community.

Raouf Mazou, the UNHCR Regional Local Integration Manager for the Liberian operations, says the objective of the local integration initiative is to assist refugees to assimilate in their various

The process of local integration is undertaken by the host countries in collaboration with UNHCR and partners. Among other reasons, many refugees who have decided to locally integrate are doing so because they have established stronger social and other links in their present communities with some refugees even getting married to members of their host community.

refugee who has decided to integrate in Sierra Leone where she had sought asylum many years ago.

About 78,000 Liberian refugees still remain in the West Africa sub region, including Guinea, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria and Gambia after



countries of asylum and become a part of the society, eventually leading to self-reliance and self-sufficiency. UNHCR is currently working on the legal aspect of the stay of the refugees, including proper documentation as foreign or naturalised citizens. The local integration process also involves reinforcing existing social infrastructure such as health care, education and livelihood in areas where the refugees will be integrated.

Currently, there are more than 8,000 Liberian

refugees in Sierra Leone. At his Wilkinson Road office in Freetown, the UNHCR Acting Representative, Abid Ali Mir, says eight sites have been established for the integration of refugees in the southern and eastern regions of the country. At the moment, 40 families have been settled in these communities as a pilot phase.

Some refugees, though, are unenthusiastic about local integration. In the Eastern provincial capital town of Kenema in Sierra Leone, Satta Samula, does not want to stay in Sierra Leone or to return to Liberia. “My husband was killed in the war and left me with four children. Who will take care of me if I go back?” With no

The integration of both Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugees is in line with relevant conventions and in the interest of good neighbourhood, stability and solidarity in the Mano River Union (MRU), which recognizes local integration as a durable solution. Although many refugees may still have their eyes set on Europe and America, the reality is, it is now time for local integration.

relief assistance, Samula says life for her and her children is a constant struggle. “My only hope now is for the UN to send me to another country.” Like Samula, many remaining Liberian refugees in the sub region want resettlement in a third country.

In April, Liberian refugees in the

Some Liberian refugees in Sierra Leone



Buduburam refugee settlement near Accra, Ghana, made headline news when they demonstrated against local integration, leading to the arrest and deportation of some of the ‘refugees’ not registered with UNHCR. They were demanding resettlement to a third country and rejected US\$ 100 offer to each refugee to return home.

There are nearly 27,000 registered Liberian refugees in Ghana.

In addition to the Liberian refugees, there are more than 14,000 Sierra Leonean

refugees in the sub-region, including 3,563 in Liberia. According to UNHCR Field Officer Henok Ochalla, a survey indicates that 2,433 refugees wish to integrate locally while 1,130 remain undecided. Of those who have opted for local integration, 81 per cent have decided to naturalize as Liberian citizens while 19 per cent would like to become resident aliens.

In Bensonville, near Monrovia, 31 former government-owned houses are being rehabilitated, half of which will be occupied by the former refugees as a pilot phase while the other half is to be occupied by their hosts. Between 27 March and 4 April this year, 2,167 Sierra Leonean refugees in 867 families completed the Resident Permit Application Forms with the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization. The Liberian National Police simultaneously conducted finger printing of all refugees, including children, as part of the police clearance requirement.

The integration of both Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugees is in line with relevant conventions and in the interest of good neighbourhood, stability and solidarity in the Mano River Union (MRU), which recognizes local integration as a durable solution. Although many refugees may still have their eyes set on Europe and America, the reality is, it is now time for local integration. ♦

Women's Conference Held in Monrovia

By Sulaiman Momodu

In early May, dozens of Liberian women from all walks of life met at the Monrovia City Hall for a five-day National Women's Conference with the theme: "Advancing women's human rights in peace-building, recovery and development in Liberia."

As Liberia emerges from a brutal civil conflict that saw women's human rights

diplomatic corps, civil society organisations and the NGO community, the conference discussed issues such as food security, sexual violence, education, health care, agriculture, economic empowerment and women's participation in local governance.

"We have realised that gender-based violence is an issue and rape is of particular concern to us because it has reached unbearable proportions," said Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. She noted

building, recovery and development processes require real justice for women in accordance with international human rights standards.

In recent times, the Liberian government has made progress in ensuring that women participate in policy making at all levels, particularly in the development of the Poverty Reduction Strategy and County Development Agendas. Giving some statistics of women's participation, Minister of Gender and Development Varbah Gayflor said over 10 per cent of active police officers are women and that women occupy 23 of the top positions in the Liberian National Police including the Inspector General. She said 14 out of 94 members of Parliament, five out of 15 county superintendents and two out of five members of the Supreme Court judges are women, and there are five women Senators. In addition, women also head key ministries, including Finance, Commerce, Foreign Affairs and Gender.

The UN Special Representative to Liberia, Ellen Margrethe Løj, recognised the efforts President Johnson Sirleaf and her government have demonstrated in their commitment to the cause and inclusion of women in the development of the country. She reiterated that issues affecting women should not only be discussed with intellectual women in Monrovia but all Liberian women should be involved.

The Special Representative encouraged the conference to come out with a national action plan for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, dealing with women, peace and security. She urged the conference to make Liberia the first country in Africa that has a national strategy for the implementation of the resolution. Løj assured that the UN will fully support the implementation of the recommendations made by the conference. ♦



grossly violated by the fighting forces, the aim of the conference, which was organised by the Liberian government in collaboration with the UN system and other key partners, was to discuss thematic issues that affect women on a day-to-day basis. Attended by members of the UN family, government officials, members of the

that women's institutions and participation in governance will be strengthened in the context of the country's development agenda and the poverty reduction strategy.

Liberia's Vice-President Joseph Boakai, who opened the conference and called for the removal of all discriminatory laws against women, stressed that peace

Strengthening Liberia's Political Party System

By Sulaiman Momodu

Like mushrooms springing up after the rains, a host of political parties emerged from the shadows to contest the national elections in 2005, the first since Liberia's civil war came to an end two years earlier. Including a handful of previously known ones, some 30 political parties were in the fray to influence the country's 1.35 million registered voters. After adding their share to the sound and fury of the elections, and having won no significant following, many of those political parties are currently back in hibernation, probably to re-emerge during the next elections.

Recognizing the need for a coherent, cohesive and inclusive party system to ensure the consolidation of democratic gains and to strengthen national reconciliation, the Political, Policy and Planning Section (PPPS) of UNMIL engaged collaboratively with the political parties and relevant stakeholders, notably the International Republican Institute (IRI), National Democratic Institute (NDI), National Elections Commission (NEC), Governance Commission (GC), and UNDP to discuss how best to carry forward the process and address key concerns of the political parties.

It is against this background that for two days in March, representatives of a number of political parties came together at the University of Liberia auditorium to deliberate at a workshop on how to strengthen and consolidate Liberia's political party system. The capacity-building workshop was jointly organized by UNMIL and the IRI, responding to a

request from the Consortium of the Leading Six Political Parties for assistance in strengthening the party system in Liberia.

"A vibrant political party system is very critical to any functioning democracy as it is the channel for expressing divergent views in a pluralistic society in an orderly and productive manner thereby shaping public policies, programmes and initiatives to reflect the diversity of society," the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (DSRSG) for Rule



Mensa-Bonsu with Amos Sawyer

of Law, Henrietta Mensa-Bonsu, said in her opening remarks at the workshop. She stressed the importance of a viable political system in post-war Liberia but also pointed out that those who want to enjoy democracy must themselves have democracy within their structures.

In his keynote address, the Chairperson of the Governance Commission, Dr. Amos Sawyer, rued the fact that partisans abandoned their parties if they failed to capture political power and instead looked for alternate parties that could catapult them to power in the next elections. When it was time for elections again, such people "sharpen their opportunism to see who is likely to win and eventually jump onboard," he said.

Sawyer, who was once Liberia's interim leader during the civil crisis, said such an attitude was not the way to build a multi-party democracy and cautioned against using political parties to promote personal ambitions. Political parties should not be fly-by-night but must be groups of people organized around a set of ideas that will form or promote a vision for the country, he added.

Although Liberia has gone through many tough times, that should not be an excuse for not democratizing, the IRI Country Director, Monte McMurchy, noted. "International agencies and organizations cannot do what can only be done by a national group," he pointed out, appealing to politicians to set aside the past and look forward to the future.

The workshop led to resolutions on vital thematic issues including strengthening of the legislative framework for the establishment and existence of political parties, democratization, and enhancing the relationship between the parties and their representatives in the National Legislature. The participants, who commended UNMIL and partners for organizing the workshop, also resolved that there was an urgent need for a national conference to address the political, constitutional, social, and development problems facing Liberia.

It is expected that the workshop, which was funded by USAID, will spur legislation that clearly defines the legal framework for parties, encourage greater inclusivity, and thus foster national reconciliation. UNMIL continues to support Liberia's nascent democracy to offer a political climate that would allow all citizens the right to exercise their democratic franchise. ♦



Gender and Development to address the increasing incidence of gender-based violence but noted that a lot more needs to be done. She highlighted the need for the Ministry to initiate the process of drafting a Domestic Violence Law to specifically address the serious issue of domestic violence in Liberia and expressed concern over incidents of rape that continue to rise at an alarming rate.

“I am concerned about the high incidence of rape and deficiencies in the implementation of the Rape Law,” Abaka noted. She said she was encouraged by the fact that the special court to deal with sexual offences would soon be ready and functional, hoping that “the undue delay in prosecuting such cases will now be a thing of the past.”

She noted at the current session of the commission on the Status of Women (CSW) at the UN Headquarters in New York, violence against women, including Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), has been identified as a grave human rights abuse, and measures to prevent, punish,

Expert Points Out Human Rights Challenges

By J. Wesley Washington

The United Nations Independent Expert on the situation of human rights, technical cooperation and advisory services in Liberia, Charlotte Abaka, says though progress has been made on a number of issues, serious challenges still remain in the promotion and protection of human rights in Liberia, noting that the necessary prerequisites for an effective national human rights protection system are not yet in place.

Speaking at a news conference at the UNMIL Headquarters following a six-day visit to Liberia in early March 2008, Abaka said the delay in the establishment of an Independent Human Rights Commission is of serious concern. “The

enabling legislation for this body was enacted in 2005 and it is now imperative that the Act to amend certain sections of that enabling legislation be put before the National Legislature as a matter of urgency,” she noted.

The Independent Expert noted that the establishment of the Law Reform Commission was provided for in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of August 2003 and was also part of the new government’s 150-day deliverables. She said many of the existing laws and regulations did not conform to Liberia’s own Constitution and to international human rights instruments to which Liberia is a party.

On her ninth visit to Liberia since 2003, Abaka welcomed the establishment of the special unit at the Ministry of

and provide support to victims must be put in place.

Abaka termed the participatory approach to consultative meetings held at both the county and regional levels during the preparation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy a “positive indicator” and hoped that the final document would address the concerns and needs of all citizens, particularly the most vulnerable in society.

She praised the passage of several pieces of legislation, in particular the amendments of Section 1508 of Chapter 16 of the Labour Practices Law which aims at settling disputes between employers and employees, the establishment of the National Child Labour Commission, and the National Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force. ♦

Liberia's First Veterinary Laboratory



Vice President Boakai inaugurates the laboratory

By J. Wesley Washington

As global concerns over potential pandemic threats such as bird flu and mad cow disease persist, Liberia has inaugurated a Central Veterinary Laboratory, the first of its kind in the country. The over US\$400,000 facility, situated on the University of Liberia's Fendell campus, now provides diagnostic medical testing to assist veterinarians and others in identifying and controlling disease conditions affecting animals. It will also be used as a teaching facility aimed at training university students in the area of veterinary science.

Diseases have no boundaries, and in Africa where the health system is precarious, Liberia stands at great risk as bird flu cases have been reported from as near as Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and partners, in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, took the lead in establishing

the much needed facility in Liberia.

Inaugurating the building, Liberia's Vice President Dr. Joseph N. Boakai said the government was proud that the country has not only a structure, but a well equipped one to be able to cater to problems of animal diseases in the country. "It's a proud moment for Liberia," he said. He thanked all the donors and institutions that made the dream a reality, especially the government of Ghana for providing technical experts to set up the laboratory as well as the initial training to the staff that will run the facility.

"With the support of donors including the governments of Sweden and Great Britain, we were able to not only refurbish this building, but also equip it with modern equipment to identify and control disease conditions affecting animals," the FAO Representative Winfred Hammond said at the inauguration of the facility.

Liberia's Agriculture Minister, Dr. Chris Toe, said the facility represents the beginning of efforts to build a well-struc-

tured veterinary service as the surveillance, disease and veterinary laboratory diagnostic quarantine services are non-existent in the country. "This facility, to a large extent, is the minimum infrastructure that you need to protect the population."

With only one trained veterinarian in the country, Minister Toe said the technical assistance received from the Government of Ghana to set up the laboratory was timely. In the medium term, the Government of Nigeria has also pledged its support to join Ghana in providing more veterinary experts to train laboratory assistants and veterinary technicians. The candidates for the training will be students from the University's Agricultural College who are to be recruited immediately. He also noted that the government of Cuba has agreed to provide scholarships to Liberians to study the discipline in that country.

Vice President Boakai announced that in addition to the US\$400,000 that has already been pledged by other partners to the Veterinary and Human Health Services Integrated National Action Plan, the World Bank has committed itself to provide US\$1 million. A national taskforce that includes FAO, WHO, UNICEF, UNMIL and other sectoral partners is expected to solicit additional sources of funding for the action plan.

Though the laboratory has been handed over to government, the FAO and other partners will provide technical assistance to the facility over the next three to six months. They have committed themselves to provide funding for the expatriate experts brought in to set up the facility.

Over the period, these experts will initiate training and capacity building programmes for Liberians including university students. Already four Liberians have begun receiving training at different levels through the experts. ♦

Jordanian Medics Reach Out

By J. Wesley Washington

Almost all of Liberia's hospitals, clinics and health centres were looted or destroyed during the 14-year civil war, and qualified medical personnel were either displaced or fled the country due to insecurity. So there was a sigh of relief among Liberians when the "blue helmets" were deployed, not only because of the enhanced sense of security they provided but also because of the massive medical help the peacekeepers offer the ailing population as part of their humanitarian assistance.

Jordanian military set up the largest and best equipped hospital (JORMED Level III) in the mission temporarily at the government's referral hospital, the John F. Kennedy Medical Centre, in November 2003. The JORMED hospital treats both out-patients and in-patients,

mainly UNMIL military and civilian staff, but also renders humanitarian services to the local population. It has an in-patient ward with 50 medical and surgical beds, operation theatre and recovery room, an intensive care unit, physiotherapy unit, ancillary services and has four equipped ambulances for emergencies.

Relocated to UNMIL's Logistics Base (Star Base) in January 2006, the Jordanian hospital has 115 medical and non-medical staff, including 20 doctors who offer specialized treatment in diverse areas such as internal medicine, surgery, orthopaedics, anaesthesia, ENT, ophthalmology, dermatology, gynaecology, psychiatry, paediatrics and dentistry, amongst others.

"Professionalism, ability to render prompt and efficient medical

assistance, readiness to help -- these are the main characteristics of the Jordanian medical team," says John Kiawhen (40), a local resident who underwent two critical surgeries under the Jordanian doctors some time ago. "I could not believe that I'm still alive. I'm thankful to God and to the UNMIL Jordanian doctors for their help," he said.

Kiawhen is just one among many Liberians who have benefited from the Jordanian medics. Another memorable case is that of six-year old Sylvia George

who had a bullet lodged in her head for nearly two years.

The stray bullet landed in little Sylvia's



head when she stepped out of her house in the Mamba Point area in Monrovia to answer nature's call during the height of the civil conflict. Though she survived, she had quite an unhappy time until her parents approached the UNMIL Medical Section.

After nearly two years of suffering, a Jordanian doctor dislodged the bullet from her head after an hour-long operation. The doctor considered it a miracle that Sylvia survived as the bullet was located few millimetres from the brain and right below the eye.

Despite successive rotations, the ninth to date, the Jordanian peacekeepers continue to maintain the high standard set by previous contingents. Recently, in the VOA-1 Community in Brewerville, outside Monrovia, the Jordanian peacekeepers conducted a medical camp catering to over 1,500 patients. Besides providing free medical care to the residents, the peacekeepers distributed school bags, stationary packages and footballs to the VOA-1 Academy that caters to nearly 1,000 students from elementary to high school.

S p e c i a l
Representative of the Secretary-General Ellen Margrethe Løj, who was special guest at the programme, praised the Jordanian peacekeepers for their humanitarian gesture to the local population. "Your action clearly demonstrates to each and everyone that the United Nations is in Liberia not only to keep the peace and security of the country but also to assist Liberians in moving forward and developing the country."

She praised them for reaching out to

Liberian children and assisting them with school materials intended to better their lives in the future. "We all know how important education is for building a strong and prosperous Liberia. By assisting the children with school supplies, I'm confident that Jordanian peacekeepers are contributing to laying a foundation for an educated young population in Liberia," Løj noted.



Members of the Jordanian FPU in action

In addition to the medics, a Jordanian Formed Police Unit (FPU) is also deployed in Liberia. The FPU is charged with performing vital roles complementary to those of military forces including managing civil disturbances, VIP protection, mobile and static security of vulnerable areas and prison security. It also acts as a rapid response back-up force to the Liberia National Police (LNP).

As of April 2008, the Jordanian hospital had treated over 44,500 patients, both UNMIL civilian and military as well as local inhabitants since commencing operations in Liberia. "We have dealt with a sizable number of local patients on a humanitarian basis too, especially during our medical camps," recounts Col. Adel-al-Shehan, JORMED Contingent Commander. Jordanian peacekeepers undertake these camps three times a year.

The JORMED III hospital serves as

the referral hospital for the Level II hospitals in Tubmanburg, Gbarnga Zwedru, and Harper. They have treated a good number of surgical cases that otherwise would have been referred to Accra, Ghana.

The Medical Commander of JORMED III hospital, Col. (Dr.) Mohammed Hababed advises patients to come to the hospital early to receive medical attention, noting that delay to seek medical attention

can sometimes be fatal. "When people are ill, they need to come to the hospital as early as possible to receive medical attention and not wait till it becomes complicated. This is very important."

In addition to the medics, a Jordanian Formed Police Unit (FPU) is also deployed in Liberia. The FPU is charged with performing vital roles complementary to those of military forces including managing civil disturbances, VIP protection, mobile and static security of vulnerable areas and prison security. It also acts as a rapid response back-up force to the Liberia National Police (LNP). The Jordanian peacekeepers have contributed significantly to the capacity and institutional development of the LNP by mentoring and

training new officers at the National Police Training Academy.

The Jordanian FPU Commander, Lt.-Col. Amer Aljaafreh, is encouraging Liberian youth to join the efforts to protect the lives and properties of their fellow compatriots. "Peace and safety are necessary if Liberia is to develop and forge ahead. However it depends on the protection and security that you [Liberian youth] provide by joining the new police force that can make this happen," he points out. ♦

Liberians

What should Liberians do as

What we need to do is provide support to the farmers in the rural areas to grow our 'country rice' which will reduce dependence on the varieties of imported rice. If we have more people planting and eating locally produced 'country rice' and reducing their consumption on imported rice, the price will eventually decrease.

Mama Binte (Trader)



In my opinion, we should return to the soil and engage in large mechanized farming. Subsistent farming will not feed a nation in this age. In doing that, you'll have to change the mindset of our people. You can only do that through education. Teach them the dignity of labour. Unfortunately, if you walk around, most Liberians have become beggars even if we don't realize it. We have to change our minds that the best place to make money is to return to the soil, which is the best bank.

Ashley Rennie (Senior Citizen)



Food prices are high and government needs to work towards reducing it by stabilizing the price of petroleum products, an essential ingredient to the escalating price increase. Locally produced food prices have escalated tremendously because of the ripple effect on the price of petroleum products which in turn is filtered down to the consumer. Increment in the price of food concerns me greatly as people might become incapacitated and unable to pay such high prices for good food that provides nutrients which means good health.

Lorpu Togba (Nursing Student)



Government should come in with some stable price for commodities like petroleum and food prices. However what I think that Liberians should do for themselves is actually go back to the soil and grow more food. We don't always have to wait on foreign imports of food, but encourage Liberians to go and till the soil. If we do that, we will reserve a lot of foreign currency that otherwise leaves the country to purchase these commodities.

Pauline Scott (Nursing Student/Broadcast Journalist)



As Liberians, we should not depend on other countries to produce what we eat.

We need to grow what we eat. For quite a small population, we have plenty of land. Government can call in foreign agricultural experts to teach us the best farming methods. In that way, we will be able to learn from them, thereby taking agriculture and food production to the next level. We also need to diversify our diet. We should grow and eat things other than rice like eddoes, cassava, and plantain.

Abraham Borbor (Trader)

Liberians need to go back to the soil and produce our own food. It is not that difficult to do; however, we only need the support of government to help us initially.

Francis Tweh (Electrician)



Speak

food prices continue to soar?



The best solution to the problem is to get back to the soil, prioritize the green revolution in our country but this should be the initiative of the government. The government must start the process. Mechanized farming is a priority and we need to encourage rural farmers to go back to the soil by giving them subsidy and financial assistance including tools and seeds. Following our civil war, ordinary farmers are just not capable of growing food by themselves. I also believe that taxes should be reduced on all food items imported in the country. The food crisis is not just limited to Liberia but it's all around the world. We should get stronger and see this as a challenge to get back to the soil.

Lyndon Ponnio (Journalist)



As a Liberian, I think we need to put our hands to farming. If we can produce our own rice here, it would not be so expensive for us. What we need is to be supported by the government to relocate to the rural areas where there is an abundance of farmland. Government could sponsor us with seed rice and tools to start the process. This would help us immensely.

Nathaniel Dainway (Job Seeker)

The business people are the ones that are increasing the food prices everyday and contributing to the increase of prices on the world market. They are the ones that should bring the prices down. If food grown in Liberia is being sold exorbitantly, then we are the cause.

Olivia Sorbor (Educator)



As regards the escalation in food prices, I've got nothing much to say because we're already into it, even if I talk now my few words wouldn't make a difference. However, I believe that the best solution is to get back to the soil. If we begin to produce our own food here, it will help to reduce our dependence on food imports.

Bendu Massaquoi (Student)



We need to establish community farms around the country with government's support. That's the only way we will see the decrease in the price of food. Government should provide local materials to farmers to help them boost food production. In that way we will see a decrease in the consumption of imported food in favour of locally produced food.

Kenneth Moore (Corrections Officer)



With the economy in the hands of foreigners, Liberians can do little about what is obtaining about the rise in food prices. Government needs to come in and jump-start the process of us being wholesale importers of food products. They should also assist us in the process of returning to the soil. That's the way forward.

Patrick Saah (Driver)



