

# UNMIL FOCUS



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## Ban Outlines Progress

## Campaign Against Rape

## Confronting Food Insecurity



## Message from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General

the people of Liberia.

A key focus of the Berlin Forum was Liberia's infrastructure and social services. Without adequate infrastructure, development cannot reach where it must -- Liberia's citizens, be they in urban communities or in remote villages. Liberians must be able to expand their businesses, market their produce, send their children to school and have access to health facilities. However we must not forget that security must underpin any development efforts. Liberians must feel secure in their communities and be able to travel anywhere around the country without fear or apprehension. Without this kind of development, the benefits of which are equitably distributed among the population, sustainable peace will remain elusive.

A recent security assessment carried out jointly by the government and UNMIL highlighted the urgent need to improve the operational capacity of the national security and rule of law agencies. This again highlights the important link between security and development. Without the former, the latter cannot be achieved. The security assessment reveals that we have a lot more to do to ensure that people have confidence in the country's law enforcement agencies and the justice system.

In any post-conflict situation, restoring national security and rule of law institutions is often a challenging task that cannot be accomplished overnight. UNMIL's drawdown is being carried out in a phased and well-planned manner so as to minimize any threats to the security situation in the country and sustain the gains that have been made in all sectors of the Liberian society. This will allow the coun-

try space and time to develop and strengthen its security forces and the national police, whose members must earn the trust of the people through their professionalism.

A recent report by the World Bank praised Liberia for the great strides it has made in combating corruption. Globally, in comparison to the previous years, Liberia has become the most improved country in reducing the scale of corruption. It is indeed a testimony to the importance Liberia's democratically elected government attaches to governance reforms and economic management.

Liberia is on the right track to tackle the enormous challenges it inherited from a dark era in its history. But not all challenges can be overcome immediately no matter how hard we work. The crucial step is to ensure, in the next few years, that a firm foundation is laid for a prosperous Liberia. To manage the rising expectations among the population, it will also be important to communicate realistic goals and to deliver concrete results that show tangible improvement in the lives of the people. High unemployment, especially among the youth, and all too prevalent gender-based violence, such as rape, need to be addressed as a matter of priority.

The United Nations is proud of its partnership with Liberia. We are implementing several joint programmes within key areas in close cooperation with the government to help consolidate peace and deliver basic services to the population. A strong and sustained international partnership will remain crucial to the recovery and development phase Liberia has now entered.

In late June, I participated in the Liberia Poverty Reduction Forum in Berlin, Germany. Hosted by the government of Germany and well attended by Liberia's development partners from around the world, it served as a symbolic concluding event to the formulation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS), which defines the country's approach to the recovery process and outlines key initiatives for the next three years.

The PRS received strong endorsement from Liberia's partners. The government was especially commended for the extensive consultations throughout the country during its formulation phase. But Liberia continues to face formidable implementation challenges under all four pillars of the Strategy. Much as the formulation of the PRS was important, its implementation will be even more crucial. As in the formulation phase, the United Nations Mission in Liberia and indeed the whole UN Country Team will fully support the government in the implementation of the PRS to ensure it fully realises the development targets that have been prioritized by



**Ellen Margrethe Løj**

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



## 6 Campaign Against Rape

The Liberian Government and UNMIL continue with the Stop Rape Campaign across the country as rape has become the most frequently committed serious crime in Liberia. Musical concerts, sporting events, road shows and screening of anti-rape documentaries form part of the sensitization campaign.



## 12 Back to the Soil

Despite abundant fertile land and plenty of rainfall, agriculture in Liberia is yet to pick up, leaving the country at the mercy of food imports and many people unable to feed themselves. As world food prices shoot up, the government and UN agencies such as the FAO are urging the population to go back to the soil to increase food production in the country.

# 24 Quick Impact Projects Make Headway



As part of its efforts to assist the reconstruction and rehabilitation process, UNMIL continues to carry out Quick Impact Projects to enhance basic services across the country. This fiscal year, rule of law infrastructure, restoration of state authority and enhancement of food security will be the major focus of such projects in Liberia.

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# Ban Outlines Progress, Threats to Peace

By Mathew Elavanalthoduka

**A**s Liberia's first democratically elected post-war government is poised to reach its mid-term mark and the UN Mission in Liberia soon enters its sixth year, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has taken stock of the country's progress towards peace and the challenges it continues to face.

"Overall, the main threats to peace and stability emanate from the law and order maintenance issues," Ban said in a report to the Security Council in August. The struggle with the rule of law and competition over natural resources threaten Liberia's fragile stability despite its economy showing significant improvement, he said.

Liberia's annual economic growth rate, according to the report, has increased to 9.4 per cent, a figure that is well above the average rate in sub-Saharan Africa, and close to the magical double digit growth chalked up by some major developing countries elsewhere in the world. The heavy external debt of over US\$ 4 billion the new government inherited when it took over in January 2006 has been significantly reduced. Liberia is also poised to benefit from the enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative, the report pointed out.

The Liberian State is "at peace with itself and its neighbours," Ban said in the report, and the country is enjoying its fifth year of peace and stability, which is "unprecedented" since the start of the conflict in 1989. However, the prevalence of law and order incidents, including mob justice and random violence, has become a major national security concern, underlining the "tenuous state" of the security situation in the country.

Among the potential threats to sustained peace and security in Liberia, Ban lists violent criminal activities, especially armed robbery and rape, as well as disturbances in the country's rubber plantations and protests by students and former personnel of the security forces. He also cites the high unemployment among young people and frequent ethnic tensions and land disputes among communities and commercial enterprises as other likely threats to peace in the country. "Much still needs to be done, urgently, to strengthen the capacities of both the police and the army, and facilitate their effective presence in the country," Ban pointed out.

The delay in the reinforcement of the national police and the establishment of an Emergency Response Unit is making it difficult for UNMIL police units in Monrovia to reduce its tasks and redeploy to other "hotspots" around the country. A joint security assessment conducted by the





Liberian government and the UN had identified as a threat to peace the weak operational capacity of the security and rule of law institutions and the public loss of confidence in those institutions, the report pointed out.

To contain the rising law and order incidents, the Secretary-General has proposed expanding the size of the police units in UNMIL from 605 to 845 officers. He urged Liberia's international partners to urgently provide assistance to reinforce the national police.

While the increased value of natural resources has contributed to an improvement in the Government's revenue, "it has created a stronger incentive for illegal exploitation of natural resources, particularly minerals and rubber," the report warned. Within the diamond sector, the government has made efforts to extend its presence to the mining areas and enhance the integrity of the chain of custody system, in compliance with the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme.

Liberia is among the lowest in the world in key social indicators with more than 60 per cent of the population living below the national poverty line, posing a potential risk to the delicate peacebuilding process in the country. The recent surge in fuel and food prices as well as political instability in neighbouring Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire could also have negative implications for security in Liberia, the report added.

While proposing an increase in the number of police personnel, the Secretary-General recommends UNMIL continue with its planned reduction in military personnel, repatriating almost 1,500 -- including troops, officers, observers, and engineering and administrative units-- leaving a troop strength of just over 10,200 by September 2009.

"I am confident that UNMIL will be able to continue to discharge its mandate of maintaining a stable and secure environment and providing the necessary security umbrella throughout the country to enable the Government to continue its reform and restructuring programme," Ban reported. He reiterated UNMIL's security responsibilities along the borders of the country and its contingency plans to deal with potential fallouts from external



**I am confident that UNMIL will be able to continue to discharge its mandate of maintaining a stable and secure environment and providing the necessary security umbrella throughout the country to enable the Government to continue its reform and restructuring programme.**

developments.

During the next phase of troop reduction, from October 2009 to December 2010, UNMIL envisages, subject to review, a further reduction of over 2000 troops, bringing the troop strength to just over 8,000 in December 2010, the Secretary-General said. ♦



# Campaign Against

By Sulaiman Momodu

**L**iberia's Minister of Gender and Development, Vabah K. Gayflor, has a gruesome story for a very attentive audience at the University of Liberia Auditorium about a Liberian woman. "During the war, the woman was forced to watch rebels kill her husband by cutting him into many pieces with a machete. Eight of them gang raped her...She then

had to wrap the pieces of her husband in a 'lapa' and go home to her five children and bury their father's body. Stories like this are not unique; there are many more."

During Liberia's civil war, women were subjected to numerous indignities. Rape was a common occurrence. But five years after the restoration of peace, the rape statistics in the country still remain gloomy. "In the first five months of 2008, 450 cases of rape and 109 cases of domestic violence were reported to us. Of the rape cases, 379, or 84 per cent, of the sur-

vivors were younger than 18, 201(45 per cent) were younger than 13, and 39 (9 per cent) were between one and five years," says Gayflor. It is feared that these statistics are just the tip of the iceberg as the figures represent only cases reported and offered services at various health facilities.

As concerns mount over the alarming rates of rape and other forms of sexual violence, thousands of Liberians recently thronged the Samuel K. Doe Sports Complex in Monrovia for an "anti-rape" concert, which brought together a promi-



rassed. We want to let you know that rape is no joke. We will do anything to stop it," said Liberia's Vice-President, Joseph N. Boakai. He pointed out that rape is currently the most frequently reported serious crime in the country and warned perpetrators that they would be prosecuted.

Urging Liberians to prevent and report rape, UNMIL's Deputy Special Representative for Rule of Law, Ms. Henrietta Mensa-Bonsu, called for speedy assistance to victims of rape. She said people should not blame a rape victim but should support her to seek help early. "Report it so that the security agencies and the justice system can deal with the matter."

Amidst thunderous cheers and applause, popular Nigerian movie star Stephanie Okereke described rape as a crime against a woman's pride and dignity and emphasized the need for change. "The future of this country is in your hands and change is now," she said, reminding the mammoth gathering about the campaign's theme: "It could be your mother, niece, sister or daughter." Various other performers urged Liberians to stop rape, pointing out that "Real men don't rape."

"It is a pity that many of the victims of rape are usually girls who have not reached puberty," lamented Liberia's

ment of local authorities.

Since its inception in 2003, UNMIL through its Office of the Gender Advisor and the Legal and Judicial System Support Division, has been providing technical support and advice to address rape and other sexual violence. UNMIL has supported the review of the penal law to address rape, conducted trainings and distributed tips on how to avoid rape and other information materials during the sensitization campaigns.

Although rape is no more a taboo subject and there is increased awareness to report it, dealing with perpetrators had often posed a huge challenge due to the tendency to settle such cases within the families involved. Now, however, a new rape law is in force with stiff penalties for rapists. The law stipulates that anyone found guilty of statutory rape (raping a female below 18 years) will be imprisoned for life while lesser penalty is placed on anyone found guilty of raping someone older. The amendment of the Rape Act by the National Legislature initially increased the penalty for rape to a death sentence, but this was later reduced to life imprisonment.

Although it is expected that the rape law would contribute to minimizing rape, human rights activists say life sentence for rape is a harsh penalty. "I think a life sen-

# Stop Rape

The Liberian Government and the UN mission re-launched the Stop Rape Campaign in Monrovia last November and since then, musical concerts, sporting events, road shows, screening of anti-rape documentaries, among other activities, have been organised in 10 of Liberia's 15 provincial capitals with the active involvement of local authorities.

nent Nigerian movie star and musical artists from Ghana, Sierra Leone and Liberia, to denounce the scourge. The clarion call to all Liberians is to 'Say No To Rape' and 'Report it'! The concert marked the end of the first phase of the six-month-long 'Stop Rape' campaign led by the Liberian government, the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and other partners.

"Our Government is headed by a woman and we cannot see women being unduly disrespected, molested, and embar-

Minister of Information, Culture and Tourism, Dr. Laurence Bropleh, who has been going from county to county with the anti-rape sensitization team.

The Liberian Government and the UN mission re-launched the Stop Rape Campaign in Monrovia last November and since then, musical concerts, sporting events, road shows, screening of anti-rape documentaries, among other activities, have been organised in 10 of Liberia's 15 provincial capitals with the active involve-

tence in cases of rape is too harsh and I sincerely hope that the judges will not go that far," says the United Nations Independent Expert on the Situation of Human Rights, Technical Cooperation and Advisory Services in Liberia, Dr. Charlotte Abaka.

In June, the United Nations Security Council passed a resolution declaring "rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute war crimes, crimes against humanity or a constitutive act with respect to genocide." ♦

# Emergency Response Unit to Fight Crime

By Carly Learson

Patience Cooper owns a mini market in Paynesville, on the outskirts of capital Monrovia. Her market was recently ransacked by armed robbers. “There were six men with cutlasses, and another with a gun, they took all our money and things like cell phones,” she recalls. “The police came but said nothing could be done.”

Law and order issues have dominated the Liberian media over the past months after a spate of armed robberies hit the capital, some of which allegedly involved a few officers of the Liberian National Police (LNP). Liberia has been peaceful for nearly five years now with the civil war ending in 2003. But with reports of an increase in armed robberies in the capital, residents are becoming increasingly jittery and a perceived lack of prompt response from the police seems to have dented confidence in the law enforcement agency.

Amidst the reports of a rising crime wave, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in July signed into law amendments to the Penal Law of 1976 making armed robbery, as well as terrorism and hijacking non-bailable capital offences and punishable by hanging if deaths occur as a result of the crime. In a statement to the press, the President said although she was aware that Liberia was a signatory to the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which seeks to abolish the death penalty, she signed the Act to address the appeal from a majority of people for a robust response to the increasing crime rate. The President promised to revisit the Act as soon as there was a significant reduction in

the rate of armed robberies.

With security as one of the key elements of its mandate, UNMIL is working very closely with the Liberian National Police and the Ministry of Justice to enhance the capacity of the country’s law enforcement agencies. To reinforce LNP with additional capacity, a 500-strong Emergency Response Unit (ERU) is currently being trained by UNPOL. The Unit will be called on to deal with dangerous or emergency situations, including hijackings, terrorism-related offences and armed

robberies.

“We’ve had a few problems with the quality of recruits, but I now believe we have the most committed police officers who will be graduating within the next month,” says Tom Sears, an American police officer with extensive experience who is in charge of the training of the ERU. Weapons are being sourced from the US Government, and will be subject to strict controls by UNMIL. “Within the next couple of months the first team of armed elite officers will be deployed to

Jordan Ryan presents the vehicles



start responding to serious crime,” says Sears.

In July UN Assistant Secretary-General for Rule of Law Dmitry Titov visited Liberia to get an overview of the ongoing security sector reforms in the country. He witnessed the ERU trainees in action at the Police Training Academy in Paynesville. They demonstrated how they would respond to a complex hostage situation, storming the building, surrounding the perpetrators and protecting the victim.

Titov said the Police Training Academy had improved dramatically since his last visit four years ago, and the development of a special rapid response team was an exciting development. He noted that four years ago there was no electricity or water, and the buildings were only basic. He said the academy had become a centre of professionalism and excellence, with facilities that are truly conducive to professional training in a country where it is sorely needed. He praised the work of the LNP and UNPOL in developing the Emergency Response



Unit, and encouraged the trainers to continue working on improving mobility and coverage of the force.

In early August the Irish Government presented 18 vehicles to the Liberian National Police for use by the Emergency Response Unit, the first of 30 to be provided through Irish Aid. Presenting the vehicles on behalf of the Irish government and the UNDP, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Recovery and

of contact between the government and the people of Liberia. “These thirty vehicles will go a long way when the ERU is up and running,” he added. The Inspector-General of the LNP, Beatrice Muna Sieh thanked the Irish Government for responding to the needs of the ERU.

Tom Sears sees the first contingent of ERU officers as just the beginning. “Within a year I hope to have up to 500 ERU officers out on the streets of



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Governance Jordan Ryan said restoring the authority of the LNP was central to restoring stability and prosperity to Liberia. “Ongoing concerns regarding crime, such as incidents of gender-based violence and armed robbery, highlight the urgency of establishing a more responsive police force,” he said.

Accepting the vehicles, Minister of Justice Philip A.Z. Banks emphasised the importance of the police as the first point

Monrovia,” he said. The graduating ERU officers have a huge responsibility which extends beyond their official duties. Their visibility and profile will mean they are judged as representatives of the government and its law enforcement strategy. Perhaps it will be the most influential factor in curbing the rising crime and turning around the public perception of the police force in Liberia. ♦



By J. Wesley Washington

For a few months now, Martha Togba, owner of a small shop in a suburban market on the outskirts of capital Monrovia, has been concerned about the prospect of her small retail business selling rice. Before the global food crisis began biting Liberia, she could buy a 50-kg bag of Chinese-milled (butter) rice for US\$26 and sell by cups to get at least a 10 per cent profit. Even by selling the higher grade long-grain US parboiled (pussawa)

rice at US\$30 she could make a profit that would support her family.

Today, things are different. The government stipulated price of the 50kg bag of butter rice is US\$35, while the US parboiled rice also sells for US\$35, if one can find it. However, retailers are suspected of hoarding and selling the commodity far above the government's approved price. Although Togba, a widow, still makes some profit since she has increased the retail price of a cup, she is troubled as complaints by her customers over the increased price are getting louder each

day. Togba, like most other Liberians, has also realized that the prices of locally produced (country) rice and other grown consumables are also increasing by the day due to higher production and transportation costs. As a country that imports all of its fuel products and over 60 per cent of its major grains, Liberia has become vulnerable to the global food crisis and most Liberians find it quite difficult to cope with the rising cost of living.

With the immense challenges facing its own food production, processing and preservation, now exacerbated by the global food crisis, Liberia's Ministry of



# Confronting Food Insecurity

Agriculture and its partners have been propelled into a three-pronged response. This includes ensuring access to food for vulnerable populations; easing domestic price increases and ensuring consistent food supply; and promoting increases in domestic food production.

The World Bank (WB) has listed Liberia among several countries to benefit from a US\$1.6 billion assistance to help address the immediate effects of the ongoing food crisis. Of the US\$200 million grants set aside by its Global Food Price Crisis Response Trust Fund for 'high priority' countries most at risk of acute hunger, Liberia got a grant of US\$10 million to feed the most vulnerable people.

The WB provided US\$3 million each to two existing projects -- Agricultural Productivity Intervention and Cash for Work Employment Programme. A new project, Food Support for Vulnerable Women and Children, will be started with the remaining US\$4 million. The Ministry of Agriculture, the Liberian Agency for Community Empowerment and the World Food Programme (WFP) will implement these projects. It is expected that this will complement other efforts aimed at tackling the short and medium-term effects of rising food prices.

Following consultations at various levels to address the immediate and long term effects of food price increases, the government lifted the US\$2 tax on rice imports but this has not had any significant impact on the price of rice. It is believed that hoarding, profiteering and structural

inflexibility in the import sector are to blame for this. However, the government is working with partners to help farmers grow more food and remove institutional difficulties to the importation and sale of rice and other basic commodities.

The Agriculture Ministry has been allotted US\$3 million in its 2008/2009 budget to hasten essential Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS)-based food and agricultural interventions which will benefit the rural farmers. Over 50 per cent of the non-contingent funding allocation has targeted four critical areas. These include providing farmers with agriculture materials and supplies (fertilizers, disease and pest management inputs) intended to boost production and minimize Liberia's high pre-harvest loss rate of over 40 per cent. Farmers will be provided with high quality and high yielding certified seeds and cassava cuttings intended to increase the yield of the two crops without increasing acreage. Constructing 15 community-based food security facilities (one in each county) to improve the dismal post-harvest performance, and building the capacity of the staff of Ministry and the Central Agricultural Research Institute (CARI) are the other areas of focus.

Considering most farmers depend on subsistent farming with crude post-harvest production methods, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has teamed up with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), donors and the Ministry of Agriculture to put in place mechanisms to meet the challenges.

Through the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and the Japanese Government, the FAO initiated the training of a number of

war-affected persons, including ex-combatants, in basic blacksmith skills to produce cutlasses, hoes and other basic farming implements. A total of 46 blacksmiths were selected and provided an intensive two-month advanced training in producing agro-processing equipment such as rice threshers, rice winnowers, rice mills, cassava graters, palm oil presses, and palm kernel crackers that now carry the label "Made in Liberia." The trainings took place in Tubmanburg, Bomi County and Zwedru, Grand Gedeh County.

The FAO, the Liberian Government and its partners offered the trained blacksmiths a three-month contract worth US\$317,000 to produce nearly 500 pieces of each agro-processing machine. A plan has been devised to sell these tools at half price to farming groups, cooperative societies and community-based women's organizations. "Besides instituting other measures to enhance the situation, we needed to improve the kinds of tools and equipment that this country uses in agricultural production," FAO Representative Winfred Hammond told UNMIL FOCUS.

Agriculture Minister Dr. J. Chris Toe lamented how pathetic it is to see most farmers go through the burden of threshing rice with their feet and pounding it in mortars with pestles. "We can provide simple agro-processing equipment to our farmers in order to ease the burden associated with food production, processing and preservation."

Meanwhile, the FAO, its sectoral partners, and the Ministries of Agriculture and Gender and Development recently conducted a one-month training involving 30 women from each of the 15 counties in the use of these "Made in Liberia" agro-processing machines. ♦

# Back to the Soil

By Sulalman Momodu

**A**gainst the background of the worldwide rise in food prices, the Liberian government recently launched a 'Back to the Soil' campaign at the Samuel Kanyan Doe Sports Complex in Monrovia with the theme "Eliminating hunger."

Currently, almost all of Liberia's staple food, rice, is imported. During Liberia's 14-year civil war, many of the country's cutlass-and-hoe subsistent farmers were uprooted from their villages. Some of them who ended up in Monrovia are yet to return despite struggling to feed themselves.

John (not his real name), who lives in Monrovia, is one among them. With a wife and three children, feeding his family is a daily struggle for him. But instead of returning home to till the soil as a farmer, John discretely begs along the streets of the capital telling incredible stories to anyone who cares to listen. "I don't like what I do, but I have to feed my family," he confesses, disclosing that he was growing his own food in his backyard until the war forced him to become a displaced person. The 40-year-old dreams of getting a good job in Monrovia, so he can build his own house and drive his own car.

Adequate food is a major issue in

many homes in Liberia, a country endowed with abundant fertile land and water, including almost half a year rainfall that would make arid countries green with envy. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf says her government will encourage and support Liberians to embark on food production. She disclosed that some concession agreements have been submitted by companies expressing their interest in rice production in Lofa and other counties, a venture that is also expected to create job opportunities.

"Today's event is a first step within Government's overall short, medium and long term programme towards rendering Liberia less vulnerable to international threats coming from rising commodity prices, and instead more reliant on its own natural and human resources," said the UN Special Representative Ellen Margrethe Løj at the launch of the campaign, pointing out that increases in the prices of many staple foods, including rice, is a problem that is unlikely to go away soon.

Recently the Liberian government validated the "Food Security and Nutrition Strategy" as part of a joint UN-Liberia programme, which is an important part of the UN Country Team's response to efforts aimed at achieving the goals set out in the Poverty Reduction Strategy. The UN Envoy assured that UNMIL and the UN Country Team remain firmly committed to





supporting the Government in its effort at empowering the Liberian farmer and also making Liberia self-sufficient in food. Since its inception in 2003, UNMIL peacekeepers have been actively assisting local residents in the production of food by supplying them quality planting materials, and providing technical training and logistics.

According to Dr. Winfred Hammond, Country Representative FAO, the current conditions of high food prices have increased the urgency to achieve the objective of increasing domestic food production that is included in Liberia's Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS). "This is why the FAO and our partners are actively supporting the campaign through projects such as the post-emergency accelerated capacity building for Liberia's national food security programme, *Operation Eliminate Hunger*, valued at

agricultural production used for biofuels, rapid population and urbanization as well as trans-boundary animal and plant diseases.

At the campaign launch, the Farmers' Association of Liberia handed over a resolution to President Johnson Sirleaf on what needs to be done for the country to be able to feed itself. The resolution includes, among others, the need for modern and mechanised farming against the traditional use of crude implements.

Liberian musician Jones Dupoe, 68, who has been singing for many years for people to go back to the soil, sang the 'Back to the Soil' theme song. "Backyard garden", "Swarm farming" and "Cassava leaf" are some of his songs which encourage Liberians to till the soil. The artist, however, observed that most Liberians do not want to work, even make small backyard gardens, but they want to eat. "Look

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**Adequate food is a major issue in many homes in Liberia, a country endowed with abundant fertile land and water, including almost half a year rainfall that would make arid countries green with envy. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf says her government will encourage and support Liberians to embark on food production.**

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US\$490,000. FAO also supports the 'Food Security through Commercialization of Agriculture', being implemented by the Agriculture Ministry in four counties -- Nimba, Maryland, Grand Kru and Montserrado," he said. The US\$2.25 million project is funded by the Italian Government and FAO Trust Fund for Food Security and Food Safety. Currently, about 40 per cent of rice in the field is lost due to pests as well as poor soil fertility. The agriculture agency, as part of its Integrated Production and Protection Management, is also providing the farmers with fertilizers and training them in good crop management practices, integrated pest management, efficient harvesting practices, processing and storage techniques to improve marketability of the produce.

Specialists say food insecurity has been exacerbated in Africa by challenges such as climate change, greater demand for food products in emerging economies,

at how many young people are idling on the streets of Monrovia. The government can mobilize and engage these youths in agricultural activities which will also reduce crime rate in the country," a woman points out.

With Liberians urged to go back to the soil, the Chairman of the National Chief Council of Liberia, Zanzan Kawah, has a different perspective. To loud cheers and applause, he called on lawmakers and other government officials to take the lead in the 'Back to the Soil' campaign and not just sit in Monrovia and tell people up-country to till the soil. He pointed out that since the legislators go on agriculture break for six months and have funds for it, they should go to their constituencies and participate in the campaign. "We want to see your farms," he stressed. Eliminating extreme poverty and hunger is one of the eight Millennium Development Goals. ♦

# Model Enterprise

By Carly Learson

**A**s the members of the Ganta Concerned Women's Group break into spontaneous dancing and singing, Yah Paye, the Treasurer of the group, looks happy and proud. She ought to be. From a small group of traumatized and abused refugees who started a street-side counselling group, Paye and her friends have now scaled greater heights and are well on the way to setting up a cassava processing plant and ten community farms, bringing employment, food and financial security to the community. Having secured half a million US dollars in funding from external sources, the group is working with UNIFEM and local NGO Agricultural Relief Services on what could be an inspiring model for women's development initiatives in Liberia.

During the 14-year civil war, Ganta, on the border with Guinea, was a fertile recruiting ground for women who were forced to cook and be sex slaves

to combatants of various hues. Many of those who fled the war by crossing into Guinea have recently returned to start a new life. Paye and Musu Kardomie, Chairperson of the Ganta Concerned Women's Group, are two such women. On

its way to establishing a thriving cassava processing enterprise. The group approached UNIFEM, and with the agency's help managed to source funding from the World Bank, FAO, UNESCO and the Government of Korea. The project,

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**The success of the project so far owes a great deal to the ambition and commitment of the members of the group. At Tonglewin community farm, one of the ten created as part of the project, machete-wielding women clear the weeds as they sing about their lives. For seven months they have been working, preparing the field, planting and now weeding and inspecting the plants.**

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their return home, they found that many women in the community had been beaten, raped and traumatized and were struggling to cope with the scars inflicted by the conflict. They realized that the best way to deal with their experiences was to help each other.

The Ganta Concerned Women's Group, now with 526 members, runs adult literacy programmes and is well

also supported by UNIFEM, is one of six Results Based Initiatives worldwide -- women's economic empowerment projects focusing on specific enterprise development.

The funds have been used to lease land in ten communities, and the women

on



prepared the land and planted cassava crops. On the outskirts of Ganta stands a brand new, \$75,000 factory ready for machinery to be installed to start processing cassava. The cassava will be peeled and then processed to remove the moisture and create a flour-like derivative called farina. With local women to be employed by the collective to operate the machinery, UNIFEM Project Manager Yarkpazuo Kolva hopes to process up to 1,500 kilograms of raw cassava into high quality farina daily. On acquiring enough capital, the group intends to buy cassava from other farmers in the area to process, package and sell at a profit. The peelings will be sold as animal feed to form a second stream of income.

Through the factory and community farms the women of Ganta will be able to earn a steady income and ensure there is always enough food for their children. Paye says in light of the increasing price of rice, cassava will only become more important to her community. "Liberians love cassava," she says. "It is better than rice, and can be turned into so many different foods. Cassava should feed all of Africa."

UN agency WFP uses farina for its feeding programmes because of its portability and popularity with children. Kolva has ambitions for the collective to eventually supply the WFP with farina for its programmes in Liberia. UNIFEM has also engaged a consultant to explore possible markets in Monrovia and Guinea for the product.

The success of the project so far owes a great deal to the ambition and commitment of the members of the group. At Tonglewin community farm, one of the ten created as part of the project, machete-wielding women clear the weeds as they sing about their lives. For seven months they have been working, preparing the field, planting and now weeding and inspecting the plants. "For a long time we

had no food," says Onikel

Peaten, the manager of the farm tasked to supervise the work and to ensure its completion. "That's why we are so determined here. We do not eat all day; we work hard so that we can feed our children."

Kou Pealea, a vil-

lage elder of Tonglewin, is an advisor on the project. The grandmother of 30 is suffering from a painful infection in her knee but continues to work hard in the field. "The best part of this project is seeing the community come together and create value," she says. Pealea was one of the women who took part in training provided by Agricultural Relief Services in sustainable and efficient farming practices. She is now passing on her skills to other women in her community. She believes it is only through the strength of the women involved and their resolve in making the project work that it has been so successful already. "What I want is to see our daughters and granddaughters becoming leaders in the community as well," she said.

Musu Kardomie hopes to eventually employ local people to work on the farms as profits increase, giving the women time to work on new projects. She wants to see schools built for the children in the villages around Ganta which can also be used by women to take classes in the evening. However, her ultimate goal is the expansion of the cassava industry in Ganta. And there is conviction in her voice. "Nimba county could be the centre of cassava production in Liberia, and with women in charge it will happen." •



# Fish, fish, everywhere...



By Carly Learson

At Jumah Town beach, a few kilometres from Monrovia, waves crash onto smooth, clean sand. The coconut palms that fringe the beach sway in the breeze. Under their shade, a few dozen people are busy working on their fishing boats, mending nets, hawking donuts, and braiding hair.

Every night men from Jumah Town village and other villages along the road to Monrovia take their canoes out to sea in the moonlight. They stay there for up to ten hours, fishing with nets and lines. As they approach the shore in the morning, groups of young boys run to meet them. Using an elaborate system of wooden planks and iron bars, the fishermen struggle to haul the canoe up the beach to the shade of the palm trees, where women from the surrounding villages have gathered. After ten hours of concentration throughout the night and back-breaking labour to get the canoe in and out of the water, they display their catch -- a pile of no more than 30 small fish and a couple of small crabs.

Yet Liberia is blessed when it comes to fishing. According to the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, Liberia has 570 kilometres of coastline and a continental shelf that extends out to sea for 34 kilometres, thus a total of more than 20,000 square kilometres of fishing grounds, in addition to the myriad rivers that wind through the interior of the country. Yet, traditionally Liberians have viewed fishing as somewhat undesirable, and fishermen and their families are among the poorest in the country. But the good conditions have attracted fishermen from Ghana, Benin and Côte d'Ivoire who now compete in the artisanal fishing market. In Cape Mount

County, Senegalese and Gambian fishermen are competing with locals. On the inland rivers, Fulani fishermen from Mali are taking advantage of the abundance of freshwater fish, which has a high market value in Monrovia and abroad.

Local fishing communities have come to grudgingly accept the presence of these foreigners on the waters. But they harbour fervent frustration for the most recent arrivals, industrial fishing vessels from far away countries exploiting the Liberian waters. In contrast to the back-breaking labour of the artisanal fishermen, trawlers operate with relative ease. The most effective way to catch fish is to use twin trawlers -- two fishing boats with a huge net strung between them. But this method is known to quickly and irreversibly deplete fish stocks and it is internationally condemned.

The number of unregistered vessels exploiting Liberia's fishing waters is unknown. The companies registered with the Liberian Government pay duties according to the size of the catch, calculated every five days. Yet the systems in place to monitor catch size are fundamentally flawed as the officers deployed to collect data are paid by the owners of the vessels. There are no proper regulations in place to streamline handling, processing or storage. None of the facilities used by the companies meets international standards on safety or hygiene. The relative margins available to fishing companies are substantial -- low or nonexistent taxes, no regulatory burden, cheap labour, and the ability to flout the law with a very low risk of being caught.

Point Four is a landing spot near Douala in Monrovia, and the beach is covered by canoes, nets and people. This is where Victoria Weah and her daughter and son come to buy fish and then re-sell it at the market. She says there is less and less fish coming in on the boats. Low yields are seasonal - from May to September seas are usually rough and churned up by the rain. But Weah insists there is more to the story. "This year is the worst," she says. "The big big boats are taking all the fish."

The Liberian Government has released its vision for the future of fishing in the

there is still more to be done in the areas of surveillance capability, infrastructure and improving the human resource capacity in the fishing industry."

The United Nations is playing a role in developing a sustainable fishing industry through the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). Jumah Town is one of several villages along the Liberian coastline to be chosen for a programme through which small outboard motors are donated to villages to be attached to canoes. J. Augustine Botoe is the field officer from the Bureau of National

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**At Jumah Town, when the motorized boat appears in the distance after a day's fishing the crowd gathers, anxious for something they can take to the market. They are not disappointed. Enormous cassava fish, barracuda and even small sharks are presented to the waiting crowd along with pipefish, croakerfish, and pentenfish.**

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form of a policy document that will ultimately lead to legislation replacing outdated laws. The policy sets ambitious targets for monitoring of the seas and enforcement of maritime laws. Already a new regulation is in place providing a three nautical mile exclusion zone reserved for canoes. Minister for Agriculture J Chris Toe says work has already begun to train Standards Officers who will inspect and test goods coming in and out of the port for hygiene and quality. "We hope to have legislation in place soon," he said. "But

Fisheries, who is working with the Ministry of Agriculture and a local NGO Faimaba Fisheries Development Corporation to supply motors to villages in the Monrovia area. "We give the motor to the Chief of the village," he says, "but the idea is that it belongs to the whole village." Motors cost around US\$ 3,000 each -- out of reach for any Liberian fishing village.

At Jumah Town, when the motorized boat appears in the distance after a day's fishing the crowd gathers, anxious for something they can take to the market. They are not disappointed. Enormous cassava fish, barracuda and even small sharks are presented to the waiting crowd along with pipefish, croakerfish, and pentenfish. Jumah Town Chief Kofi Roberts is extremely happy with the motor FAO has provided. "Without a motor we can only get the boats out far enough to catch small things like silverfish, crabs and lobsters. But with a motor we can get the boat out to 25 fathoms -- that's deep enough to find snapper and barracuda."

The Government of Liberia and FAO are attempting to build sustainable business models so that Liberian fishermen can compete with the 'big big boats' and ensure one of the country's most valuable and important assets benefits its people. ♦



By J. Wesley Washington

A national conference that reviewed the implementation of Liberia's 2007-2008 National Health Policy and Plan has set a target to reduce the country's infant mortality rate by 15 per cent and the maternal mortality rate by 10 per cent. The conference in mid July, supported by the World Bank and the children's agency, UNICEF, brought together 200 participants, including key health sector partners and stakeholders as well as officials of the Ministry of Health.

The overall objective of the review process was to agree on priorities for action to facilitate the implementation of the second year of the health plan and address other issues such as contracting, health sector financing, the transitional gap, the lead donor concept and various assessments conducted by the Ministry over the year. Prior to the formulation of a strategic plan to address health issues in Liberia, the country's health care system was fragmented, uneven, heavily dependent on vertical programmes and with NGOs operating in a humanitarian mode.

Even after five years since the civil war ended, Liberia's health statistics remain grim. The country's infant mortality ratio stands at 157/1,000 (sub-Saharan average 102) while the maternal mortality ratio of 580/100,000 is among the highest in the world. While HIV prevalence among the population stands at 5.2 per cent, only 24 per cent of the population has access to safe water, and 5 per cent of children under five are severely underweight.

A rapid assessment done by the Ministry of Health has found that only 41 per cent of the Liberian population has access to health facilities. The Ministry



# Health Sector Pic



identified 354 functional health facilities, 286 clinics, 50 health centres, and 18 hospitals, while another 200 health facilities were non-functional. The health workforce consisted of approximately 4,000 full-time and 1,000 part-time staff, including 168 physicians, 273 physician assistants and 453 registered nurses. Significant achievements include some form of rehabilitation to 35 per cent of the country's health facilities, and the Expanded Programme on Immunization has increased to 87 percent.

The operational and integrated framework for implementing the National Health Policy and Plan is based on four key pillars – Basic Package of Health Services (BPHS), Human Resources for Health, Infrastructure Development, and Support Systems. It outlines the objectives, strategies and resources to reform the health sector to effectively deliver quality health and social welfare services to the Liberian people.

The Ministry of Health outlined modest achievements, which included finalizing technical documents to guide provision of care at the facility level, improving the capacity of health workers to deliver quality services, and developing and monitoring County Health Plans to coordinate the delivery of essential services at the county level. A policy on Human Resources for Health has been established, standard procedures and job descriptions have been drafted and an assessment of the health workforce, including current records of all paid staff, has been completed.

Despite these achievements, a lot of challenges still remain. The continuing shortage of qualified health workers and health managers, particularly in the rural areas, is a major challenge. As a result,

many Liberians do not have access to basic preventive and curative services. Health information and health sector activities at the county level are not always coordinated. In addition, the lack of a standardized payment structure, including incentive packages for “hardship posts”, reduces the motivation for many health workers to serve in rural areas and can contribute to a sense of “inequity” between the Ministry's workers and the higher paid staff hired by NGOs.

Another concern relates to the serious implications of health sector NGOs winding down their operations due to lack of funding for service delivery as many donor assisted contracts will expire by the end of the year. Absorbing the health workers in the NGO sector will also pose a major problem.

The proposed action plans for 2008-2009 include developing curriculum and training modules, training 4,000 health workers in BPHS, implementing BPHS in 70 per cent of the existing functional health facilities, restoring ambulance and communication services to strengthen the referral system in 15 county hospitals, and establishing 50 basic Emergency Obstetric Care centres. The action plans will ensure a coordinated approach to human resource planning, establish a pre-service nursing and midwifery programme in Zwedru, Grand Gedeh County, and re-establish the laboratory technician programme at the Tubman Institute for Medical Arts.

The Ministry of Health is to rebuild or renovate 84 of the 205 health facilities projected in the Poverty Reduction Strategy, reconstruct two midwifery schools in Grand Gedeh and Lofa counties, as well as rebuild one national mental rehabilitation centre and rehabilitate two mental health facilities. ♦

# ks Up

Despite these achievements, a lot of challenges still remain. The continuing shortage of qualified health workers and health managers, particularly in the rural areas, is a major challenge. As a result, many Liberians do not have access to basic preventive and curative services. Health information and health sector activities at the county level are not always coordinated.

# UNMIL will one day leave Liberia...

After serving for about two-and-a-half years as Force Commander of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), Lt.-Gen. Chikadibia Isaac Obiakor recently left Liberia to take up a senior job at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, as the Military Adviser (MILAD) to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. In this candid interview with Staff Writer Sulaiman Momodu before his departure, the Force Commander talks about the gains the mission has made and reminds Liberians that UNMIL will one day leave the country.

**After two and half years at the helm of UNMIL military force, what would you say were some of the major achievements during your tenure?**

We have come a long way to ensure peace and stability and the growth of the nascent democracy. You would agree with me that January 2006 was looked at as a dream as at that time people lacked the confidence of what the experiment would be; people were still looking at each other with suspicion; people had all sorts of feelings about what was happening around them and there were a lot of stories of combatants in rubber plantations – all sorts of stories and rumours about instability. We have provided security that now enables people to live in an environment of peace and stability; a lot of investors are coming in, developments are going on because there is security. Within the last 30 months, we have not had any major breakdown of law and order as had always happened in Liberia. So collectively, we have ensured that the peace had not been reversed over the past 30 months.

**What is your assessment of the current security situation in Liberia against the backdrop that recently an incident over land in Grand Bassa claimed the lives of over a dozen Liberians?**

I would say it was unfortunate. But it serves us notice that there are still a few spoilers amongst us who could go so low to re-enact some of the scenarios we saw

during the conflict. I am confident that the laws of this country will catch up with them. The majority of the population are interested in the rule of law and it will go a long way to reassure Liberians that peace is a dividend they deserve. Liberia is secured as there is no identified threat to the state. What happened was law and order issue – it is an internal security issue which is in the purview of the police and other security agencies.

Liberia's relations with the neighbouring states are in good shape, and now there are mechanisms in place to ensure that there cannot be any incursion from anywhere outside Liberia that cannot be identified well ahead of time and dealt with.

**Elections are coming up in Côte d'Ivoire in November this year. Does it concern you?**

We have arranged concurrent border patrols so there would not be any threat from Côte d'Ivoire. All the main forces in Côte d'Ivoire would be on the other side and we would be on this side.

**As UNMIL begins a gradual drawdown process, do you think Liberians have any justification to be jittery?**

Not at all. Like the Special Representative has always said, this is a well calculated move. We can't do any thing to truncate the peace which all of us collectively have worked hard to achieve. The fact is UNMIL force need to trim

down and it is just a natural reorganisation that takes place in every organisation. We are too large for the job at hand but wherever we had been before, we are still there.

**So in the coming years, are we going to**



**see troops leaving certain areas and other troops replacing them? Is that the strategy?**

We won't be leaving anywhere we are. We will reduce the number of troops wherever we are but not that we shall leave the place. Liberians need to understand that the internal capacity is growing – the police is growing, all the other security agencies, the customs, the Bureau of Immigration, state security sector – everybody is on the move. UNMIL force is currently playing two roles: the role of the army and supporting role to the police. When the state capacity grows the army will focus on its role of external threat while the police support unit and then the emergency unit will handle all what UNMIL force today is supporting the Liberian National Police to handle.

But the security authorities always say they do not have capacity...

Yes, it takes time. That is why our drawdown is gradual. We cannot just pull out and say whether or not you are ready, we are going. The UNMIL force has other

tasks mandated by the Security Council – we have been tasked to secure the Special Court for Sierra Leone. We have to reinforce Côte d'Ivoire if needed. All these things are considered to arrive at what should be the force level in Liberia.

**Beyond the call of duty, UNMIL peacekeepers are daily involved in rendering one form of assistance or the other to the local population. Can you highlight some of these activities?**

Principally, we are involved because professionally all militaries are trained to win the hearts and minds of the communities in which they operate. Apart from that, it is the responsibility of the military after bringing about peace – stabilising the place – to assist kick-start the lives of the people. So what we are doing is in line with our professional calling.

**But there are concerns that such assistance might create a dependency syndrome. What is your take on this?**

In capacity building I don't think there

is anything bad about what we are doing – to train someone how to become a mechanic, to train someone to be computer literate, to train someone to be a tailor, a mason, a carpenter, to train someone in anything we know we have expertise. We are teaching people how to farm, we teach people how to multiply seeds, that is why contingents have brought seeds from their countries to help their communities.

**As you leave the mission, what would you say to Liberians in order to secure their hard-earned peace?**

I would tell Liberians to cherish peace; there is nothing comparable to peace. They should also cherish the rule of law.

But some Liberians don't trust the justice system evident by mob violence which we have been witnessing during which even police officers and police stations had been attacked.

Liberians have to trust the justice system. It is Liberians that should function, it is Liberians that make the laws; Liberians should obey the laws. But if one feels he is not part of it, then it is unfortunate.

**What was your most challenging moment in Liberia?**

The most challenging was how to secure the borders of Liberia and that is why I initiated border patrols and it worked. The UN force is patrolling and working with the armed forces of sovereign states and you need to see the amount of confidence they have in our activities because they know our cause is genuine.

**What message to the thousands of troops you are leaving behind and to your successor?**

I will tell them to keep on what we have been doing and improve on our efforts to assist. We should do things that will encourage Liberians to take ownership and move on because definitely UNMIL will one day leave Liberia because there are other parts of the world that needs assistance, particularly in Africa.

**Congratulations on your appointment and thank you for your time.**



# Restoring Women's

By Sulaiman Momodu

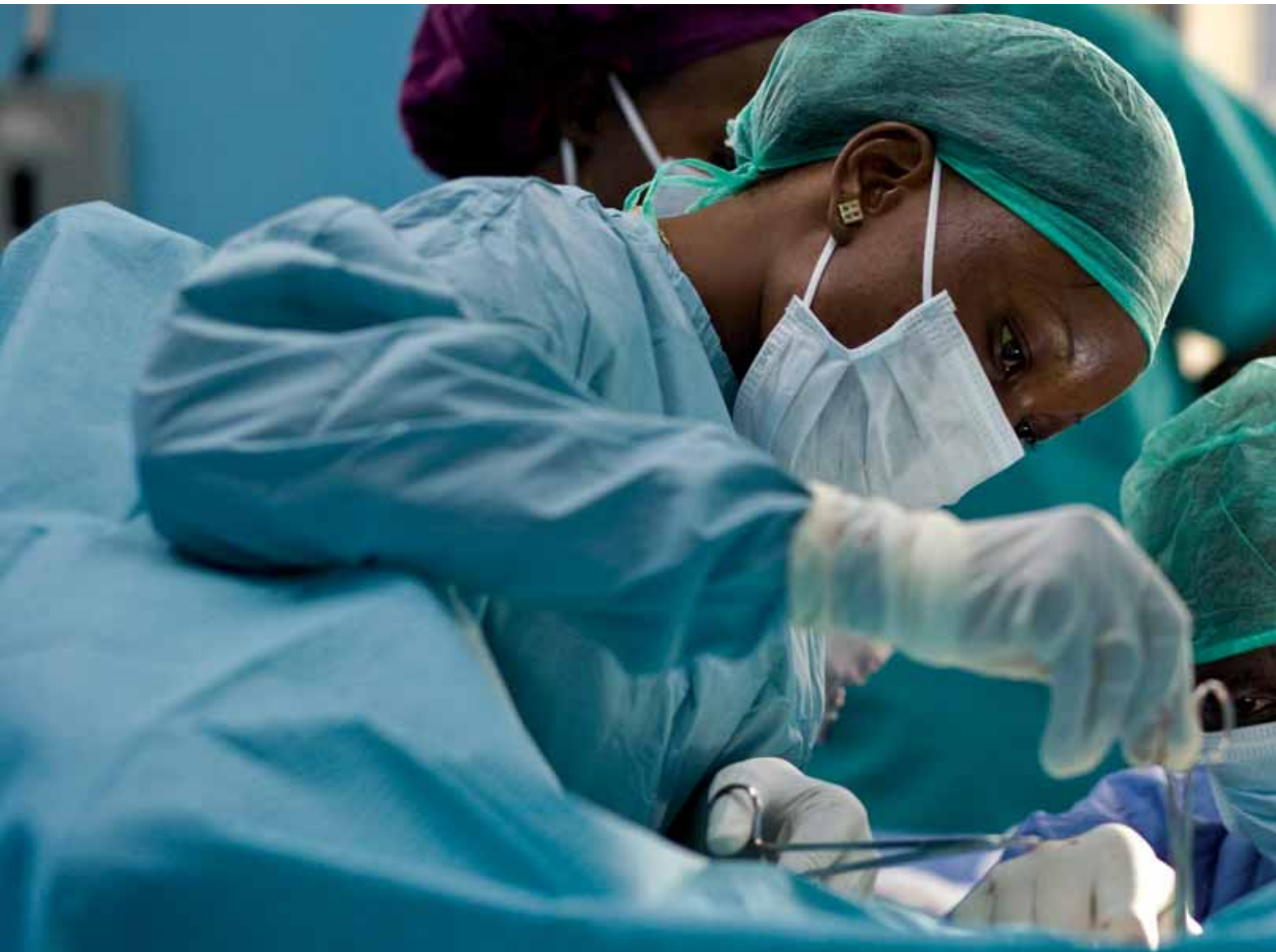
For more than five years, Bendu would sit in her bedroom and cry for most part of the day. She was abandoned by her husband and ostracised even by her best friends. Her offence? A medical condition she developed during childbirth.

The condition, obstetric fistula or fis-

tula in short, is an abnormal connection between the bladder or rectum and the vagina leading to a continuous leakage of urine or stools as a result of an abnormality during childbirth or trauma. Each year, many women and girls die due to fistula, while others suffer in silence, stigmatized by the condition.

Explaining her ordeal to a packed University of Liberia auditorium in July, Bendu said wherever she went people

would embarrassingly hold their noses. "One day, I was listening to UNMIL radio when I heard an announcement that women who are suffering from the 'pupu' (faeces) and 'peepee' (urine) sickness should go to John F. Kennedy (JFK) Hospital in Monrovia for free treatment." She subsequently made her way to the hospital. "I never thought I would be well again. I never thought I would come to a place like this where people are gathered. I



# Dignity

am well again. Praise be to God!” she said amidst rounds of applause as a two-week Fistula Surgical Campaign was launched in Liberia.

As part of the campaign with the theme “You are not alone”, dozens of women, including health professionals, marched along the main streets of the capital, carrying placards with sensitization messages and donning T-shirts inscribed: “You are not alone – prevent Fistula for a

Affairs (UNFPA), the reigning Miss Liberia, and some non-governmental organisations. The campaign is also supported by the United Nations Mission in Liberia’s Public Information Section through information dissemination on the mission’s radio and the production of T-shirts and other sensitization materials. As part of the campaign, aimed at helping at least 150 fistula patients across the country, three Malian doctors and one support staff from the Fistula Centre in Mali arrived in Monrovia to assist their counterparts perform surgeries.

As the operations got underway, women and girls patiently waited for their turn. “In 2002, I became pregnant. I was in

professionals in fistula surgery and case management. The agency’s medium term plan is to have fistula health professionals in every county.

“Fistula treatment goes beyond repairing the hole in a woman’s body, especially those who have lived with the condition for many years and have been shunned, stigmatised, abandoned, rejected and isolated. They need emotional, economic and social support to fully recover,” says Gakuba. Skills training, counselling and community awareness-raising are also an integral part of the healing process.

Medical personnel say their desire is to kick fistula out of Liberia. But clearly, this is a daunting task exacerbated by the high incidence of rape in the country. “Just this

As part of the campaign with the theme “You are not alone”, dozens of women, including health professionals, marched along the main streets of the capital, carrying placards with sensitization messages and donning T-shirts inscribed: “You are not alone – prevent Fistula for a healthier and happy family life.”

healthier and happy family life.” The marchers distributed leaflets on a condition that many erroneously believe is as result of the victim practising witchcraft.

Bendu is among more than 200 fistula patients in Liberia who have undergone surgery over the past one year thanks to the Liberia Fistula Project which is supported by the Liberian government, the United Nations Fund for Population

Sinoe County,” said Felicia, one of the patients. “But when it was time to deliver, there was no way for the baby to come. People failed to help me deliver, so they took me to the hospital. The baby had already died in my womb.” The 20-year-old said doctors later battled to remove the dead baby and save her. However, after that excruciating experience, she started urinating uncontrollably. “People who were my friends were now laughing at me and never wanted me in their company.”

The project’s Programme Manager, Dr. John K. Mulbah, says added to JFK, they have seven sites for the fistula project including Bomi, Lofa, Nimba, Grand Bassa, Grand Geddeh and Maryland. “In addition to our project, others are doing fistula work at Ganta and Phebe hospital where visiting doctors from Sweden sometimes perform surgeries.”

“The most effective way to prevent fistula is to ensure access to quality health services. Massive investment is still needed to bring these services close to the people of Liberia,” says the UNFPA Representative in Liberia, Rose Gakuba. UNFPA has supported the upgrading of the Fistula Centre and continue to supports outreach sites and trainings of health pro-

April, a study by Women of Liberia Peace Network (WOLPNET) of 600 Liberian rape survivors found that 90 per cent were suffering from fistula,” says Liberia’s Minister of Gender and Development, Vabah K. Gayflor.

Although the project is making progress, challenges remain. “We need more manpower. And even though treatment for fistula is free, someone is paying. So far it is only UNFPA that is sponsoring the programme. What will happen when UNFPA withdraws? Also, we only have one vehicle provided by UNFPA that allows the mobile team to go upcountry and perform surgeries, and with the condition of our roads, sometimes the vehicles spend days in the garage,” says Mulbah, appealing to donors for more support.

In an effort to rehabilitate survivors, the UNFPA has supported the construction of a Fistula Rehabilitation Centre located on the Paynesville suburb of Monrovia where psychosocial counselling and skill trainings are being provided. As they struggle to put years of experience with fistula behind them, Bendu and others are delighted to acquire skills that would enable them rebuild their lives in dignity again. ♦

By J. Wesley Washington

**M**arie Toby, a mother of four, chairs the South-eastern Women Development Association (SEWODA), a women's group based in the least developed provincial capital, Barclayville, Grand Kru County, some 680 kilometres from Monrovia. She has been instrumental in persuading the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) through its Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) Unit to construct a skills training centre in this remote city targeting women (teenagers, single mothers and illiterate women) to enable them to learn income generating skills to better their lives.

"I'm so delighted with what UNMIL is doing for us. Building up our skills will be of immense benefit to us, our families and the county as a whole. We are so pleased with what they're doing for us, I just don't know how to express our happiness," Marie Toby, also a widow, recently told UNMIL FOCUS.

As part of its efforts to assist in the country's reconstruction and rehabilitation process aimed at strengthening peace, UNMIL through QIPs have shifted its humanitarian focus in line with its overall mission plan and broader strategies for community outreach. Since 2003, UNMIL continues to carry out QIPs to bolster the plight of thousands of Liberians returning to their places of origin where basic services had been either destroyed or were non-existent.

South-eastern Liberia has benefitted very little from QIPs or other donor sources. So far, Montserrado, Nimba, Bomi and Margibi counties have most benefitted from such projects with Montserrado and Nimba counties profiting by 17 and 15 per cent of such projects respectively.

However, focus has now shifted to the south-eastern Liberia, most especially Sinoe, Maryland and Grand Kru counties which have been allotted 10 per cent each of the approved projects. River Gee has received eight percent and Grand Gedeh, six percent. Of the 49 approved projects planned for implementation during the 2007/2008 fiscal year, 25 were approved



Special Representative Loj commissions a newly rehabilitated community school

# Quick Impact Projects Make Headway

for communities in that part of the country. US\$1 million is allocated to QIPs annually.

The 2007/2008 budget of QIPS in large part caters to three major thematic sectors to assist the government to restore

basic social services. These include the construction or rehabilitation of health facilities, school buildings and water and sanitation projects in needy communities across the country. Of the 49 projects, 22 are earmarked under this sector for educa-

tion, health and water and sanitation.

Among the ongoing projects are the installation of hand pumps in Krowroken, Webbo and surrounding villages in River Gee, the construction of the Youkudi Health Centre, Maryland County, and the rehabilitation of the Health Clinic at the Sinoe Rubber Company, Sinoe County.

Under the Rule of Law sector, with an

Among the projects currently under construction are the Grand Cess Police Station, Grand Kru; the Karloken Police Station, Maryland; the AFC-Kahn Town Police Station, Sinoe; and the Geplaken Immigration Office, River Gee. Construction of new magisterial courts is underway in Fish Town, and Grand Cess, River Gee and Grand Kru counties.

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overall 39 per cent of the projects, the construction or rehabilitation of such infrastructures including court houses, police stations, prison facilities and immigration offices in most parts of the country, especially the south-east, is another major focus of QIPs. Twenty of the approved projects are in this category.

UNMIL is also constructing regional offices for the Ministry of Agriculture, regional payment centres for the Central Bank of Liberia and a Women's Development Centre in Barclayville, Grand Kru County.

Over the past few months, about 20 of the completed projects were handed over

Deputy UN envoy Mensa-Bonsu inaugurates a newly constructed police station



to various communities around the country. The Gbeletuo Community School, the King's Town Community School and the Flumpa Police Station - all in Nimba County, the Vocational Training Institute in Bong, the Sinoe Multilateral High School in Greenville and the Safe House for sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) victims in Montserado are among those recently handed over.

The hand-over ceremony for the Safe House meant for SGBV survivors and victims took place at the Ministry of Health compound in Monrovia in order to maintain the anonymity of its location and to protect victims. While handing over the keys of the completed US\$24,000 project to the Executive Director of the non-governmental organisation Touching Humanity In Need of Kindness (THINK), Special Representative Ellen Margrethe Løj said any woman or girl who falls victim to sexual and gender-based violence, especially rape, is having her possibilities for contributing to society greatly diminished. She called for greater involvement of elders and community leaders in preventing violence against women.

As the 2008/2009 fiscal year commences, rule of law infrastructure, the restoration of state authority and the enhancement of food security will be the major thematic focus areas for programming QIP resources.

Are QIPs making any impact? "The community people are best placed to tell whether we are making an impact. But if we should comment, it is yes, QIP is definitely making an impact with a capital I," says Ahmed Diallo of UNMIL's Rehabilitation Recovery and Reintegration Section. He points out that communities usually initiate the projects by identifying their needs and participating in implementation to ensure local ownership.

Toe's Town District Commissioner Jackson Quinwon, whose community has benefitted from a police station and a Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization office, sums it up. "UNMIL QIPs are making an enormous impact. Though UNMIL is here to provide security, the various QIPs are an indication that they are here to help us rebuild this ravaged country." ♦



# Logging for Dev

By Sulaiman Momodu

**D**uring the civil war, Liberia's rich forestry resources were used by the warring factions to fuel the conflict. They traded timber products for arms that killed and maimed thousands of people. That ignominious role played by Liberia's "blood timber" is now a thing of the past and, as commercial logging and export set to begin soon, the country's natural resources will from now on foster national development.

Commercial logging will generate US\$ 21 million in revenues by next fiscal year, says the Director of the Forestry Development Authority (FDA), John T. Woods. It is projected that this will be the single highest source of revenue for the post-war government, which is in need of huge capital to address the country's

immense development challenges. During the pre-war era, timber trade once accounted for more than 50 per cent of the country's exports worth an estimated US\$ 80 million at peak time.

Among the seven countries sharing the Upper Guinean ecosystem, Liberia is endowed with the most forests. More than 45 per cent of the country's landmass is covered in forest, amounting to half of the remaining forests in the whole of West Africa. In 2003, the United Nations Security Council slapped a ban on Liberian timber to prevent its trade from fuelling war in the region.

The plunder and environmental degradation of Liberia's forests happened while rural communities and locals lived in poverty and misery. Communities were either deceived or forced into allowing logging companies into their areas and such companies refused to honour commitments they made to the local people

before starting operations.

The passage of the National Forestry Reform Law by the Legislature in September 2006 paved the way for the UN Security Council to lift the timber ban the following month. With the new reform law, part of the timber revenue will henceforth be used for the country's development and to improve the living conditions in communities around the forests. These communities lack infrastructure and basic services such as clinics, schools, safe water supply and roads.

The new law prohibits anybody from having access to forestry resources before going through the procurement process. Logging companies must do an environmental impact assessment, have a plan of operation and are awarded a certificate to operate. A policy framework calls for sustainable forest management on three pillars, including commercial use of forest resources, conservation, and community



# elopment

participation and management, otherwise known as the three Cs.

In the first phase of commercial logging, a total of 30,000 hectares of forests were up for grabs in six areas, all of which are in Grand Cape Mount, Bomi and Gbarpolu counties. After going through a rigorous national competitive bidding process, three companies have satisfied the requirement to begin the logging process through the Timber Sale Contract (TSC), which is of three-year duration and covers 5,000 hectares each. One of the requirements for companies to qualify for the TSC is that they should be 51 per cent Liberian-owned. While the TSC is for a relatively small operation, another category of licence is for 50,000 to 100,000 hectares spanning 25 years.

All of about 70 logging concessions that existed were cancelled by President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf under her first Executive Order upon assumption of

office as the logging companies were not complying with the laws. The constitution of Liberia says it is the responsibility of the government to control and manage the natural resources of the country for the maximum benefit of the people. But over the years, large sections of forests had disappeared as a result of poor management.

However, with soaring food prices and the need for people to boost agriculture, will commercial logging not affect food production? FDA authorities say it will not as the forests are not necessarily in areas where communities cultivate. At the same time, unlike highlands, farmers are now encouraged to cultivate swamps or lowlands for high crop productivity.

Since 2004, FDA has been receiving assistance from various organizations including the Food and Agriculture Organisation and the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), among others. "UNMIL has been a part of all the

committees on policies," says Woods adding that the UN Mission was instrumental in the lifting of the timber sanctions. "The UN Mission has also come up with a regulation to help patrol the borders to prevent illegal trade in timber and has also helped us to re-possess the natural resources," he says.

Last year, UNMIL built inspectorates for the authority to serve as check-points for small scale timber business. With these offices, the authority was able to realize thousands of dollars in revenue. Structures have been put in place to ensure that there is transparency for every amount collected.

In addition to the revenue generated, it is projected that by 2013, Liberia's forestry would have generated at least 8,000 jobs, crucial in the country that is faced with very high unemployment. FDA authorities say commercial logging and export are expected to begin after the rainy season which ends in October. ♦



By Sulaiman Momodu

**A**s small enterprises backed by microfinance continue to better the lives of some Liberians, especially women who had little or no means to support their families, an internship programme has now been launched to enhance the sustainability of the sector and meet the demand for financial services.

“To ensure that microfinance is sustainable in Liberia, it has to be matched with the relevant technical competence,” says Keyeh Bailey, Technical Adviser of the United Nations Capital Development Fund, which, together with UNDP, is co-funding the internship programme. She points out that one reason why some microfinance organisations have not yet started operations in Liberia is the lack of human resource capacity.

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**Over the years, microfinance has demonstrated its potential to improve livelihoods and reduce the vulnerability of the poor and the low-income people. Yet, microfinance is still at a nascent stage in Liberia and the few Micro Finance Institutions (MFIs) in the country are yet to achieve the needed outreach.**

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the poor and the low-income people. Yet, microfinance is still at a nascent stage in

Liberia and the few Micro Finance Institutions (MFIs) in the country are yet to achieve the needed outreach. “Microfinance is technical. It is not just a matter of giving out money -- you need to have some specific techniques in terms of product development and delivery, delinquency, etc.,” says the technical adviser.

To augment quality human resources, the Launch of an Inclusive Financial Sector (LIFS-Liberia), in conjunction with the University of Liberia, is carrying out the internship programme using training modules adapted from microfinance distance learning programmes. The programme also collaborates with the Njala University College in Sierra Leone, a country which introduced microfinance before Liberia.

During the first phase of the internship programme, 21 University of Liberia graduating students majoring in accounting, economics and management were target-

# Training for Microfinance

ed. The process involved advertisements in the local press inviting qualified candidates, short-listing, and interviews based on predetermined criteria, which, among others, included gender and willingness to work in rural areas.

Following the selection, LIFS personnel conducted lessons in basic microfinance for about four months. The interns were then posted for six months with institutions including the Central Bank, Ecobank and the two main microfinance finance institutions in the country, Liberty Finance and the Local Enterprise Assistance Programme (LEAP). The interns were under the close supervision of the MFI management and monitored by the microfinance project staff during which each intern was provided a stipend of US\$100-150 depending on whether one is still taking courses at the university or not.

The terms of reference for the Interns included passing on their skills to the staff of the different departments and divisions in which they worked. Based on their application of theory to practice, they provided meaningful feedback to the project and the various institutions they were assigned regarding what works and what does not. Three of the interns who had completed their courses have now gained full employment with banking institutions while others are rounding up their courses in the university.

The internship programme, which will create a pool of young employable people in middle level management positions, has also been extended to other universities as well as to other social science disciplines. The second phase of the apprenticeship internship programme, involving 16 stu-

dents who have already completed their university courses, is currently in progress.

Many of the interns say they are delighted to have gained experience and look forward to worthwhile employment and helping their compatriots. "Microfinance has helped a lot of people in a lot of ways by putting food on their table. I would like to make microfinance a very serious part of my professional life,"

Supported by the Central Bank of Liberia, the main objective of the microfinance programme is to assist low income earners to gain access to microcredit to help them engage in small businesses or other productive ventures, which will subsequently contribute to the Millennium Development Goal of halving poverty and hunger by 2015. With unemployment estimated at 70 per cent, many Liberians live on less than a dollar a day. ♦

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says an intern at the Central Bank. It is expected that more microfinance organisations will be starting operations in the country including a well-established organisation based in Bangladesh.

As of June this year, the number of microfinance beneficiaries stood at more than 15,600, some of whom had been honoured as "unsung heroes" at a recent ceremony attended by several dignitaries including President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and UN officials. Currently, microfinance is implemented in only some parts of the country, but with more professionals and more organisations expressing interest in the sector, it is hoped that the programme will soon start expanding to other parts of the country.



By Sulaiman Momodu

**T**hey may not be aspiring to become another Abraham Lincoln but, as if taking a leaf out of his poverty-stricken childhood, many Liberian children in Monrovia can be seen sitting under street lights at night reading their books. But even street lights can be a luxury in Liberia, for only parts of the capital city are lit up by government-supplied electricity.

Statistics are grim. Less than two percent of Liberia's rural folk and 10 percent of urban residents have access to electricity, which is mainly produced by fuel-guzzling generators at high costs. Much of Liberia's infrastructure, including the electricity grid, lay in ruins – a legacy of the brutal civil war that shattered the nation.

As the lack of regular and affordable electricity supply poses a major challenge to development in post-war Liberia, the United Nations family in the country, through its County Support Teams (CSTs), is turning to the sun for rescue. With abundant sunlight available throughout the year, solar power is considered a more sustainable option for the country rebuilding after a 14-year civil conflict.

In Cestos City, capital of the remote River Cess County, local residents were in a festive mood when UN officials recently arrived to hand over a newly-constructed solar-powered administrative building to the Government of Liberia. While thanking the United Nations for the new building, Superintendent B. Rancy Zainkahn described the occasion as a “new dawn” for River Cess County. “The building will not only allow the county administration to work effectively, the solar power will allow local Government to use money that it would have had to spend on fuel for a generator for the direct benefit of Liberian communities,” he said.

Liberia's Deputy Minister for Urban Affairs at the Ministry of Internal Affairs, J. Amadu Kiawu, saw the hand-over as another significant step towards effective decentralization across Liberia. “This will allow all line ministries to work together under one roof,” he said, pointing out that Liberians could now expect progress from their government.

UN Deputy Special Representative of



# Solar Power

the Secretary-General for Recovery and Governance, Jordan Ryan, called on the people of the county to work closely and constructively with the Government in order to achieve their development objec-

tives. He also used the opportunity to express the UN's appreciation to a visiting team of Parliamentarians from Sweden, who joined the ceremony in Cestos City, for their government's timely and gener-



River Gee and River Cess.

At a total cost of almost US\$200,000, five administrative buildings have been constructed and equipped with a 7 KVA solar power system, furniture, clean running water, computer equipment and a back-up 30KVA generator. Three of these buildings were handed over to the Government in May and June this year.

The entire building of the Kakata/Margibi Administration is powered by solar panels. This includes running air-conditioners and computers for all the staff. Procurement Officer Jeremiah Quaye estimates that having the solar panels saves US\$15 a day in fuel costs. "Having the solar panels in place means that we save a lot of money on fuel, without any inconvenience to the staff."

Although solar power usage involves an initially high capital investment, over time, benefits far exceed the cost. It is estimated over a ten-year period, the cost of running a generator is 600 per cent higher than for solar alternatives. While the durability of a generator is estimated to be about three years, solar systems last for 25-30 years and are also environment-friendly.

Thanks to significant support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the CST project, all 15 county administrative buildings will have been constructed or rehabilitated by the end of this year. However, to supply the remaining county administrative buildings with solar systems, and to ensure their functionality for the next 25 years, additional donor support estimated at US\$600,000 is required.

With more funding, solar-powered offices will provide the base for local

# Brings New Hope

ous support to the innovative CST efforts in Liberia to restore national authority at the local level.

With technical assistance from UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS) and

Kenital Solar of Kenya, and through joint collaboration with UNMIL, the CST project has constructed solar-powered county administrative buildings in the remote counties of Grand Kru, Gbarpolu,

authorities and communities in their recovery efforts. To many Liberians, that is light at the end of the tunnel, literally. ♦



# Census Results Out

By J. Wesley Washington

**D**espite a shaky start to the 2008 National Population and Housing Census (NPHC), the Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services (LISGIS) completed the ten-day enumeration exercise successfully and, after a three-month compilation, has announced the provisional results.

Making the official announcement of the provisional results of the 2008 NPHC, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf revealed that Liberia now has a total population of 3,489,072 as on the night of 20/21 March 2008. Acknowledging the results as “a milestone in our efforts to rebuild our country”, the Liberian President noted that the statistics would serve as a guide for government and its partners in planning recovery programmes. Although the results are still preliminary, she expected little changes in the final result now being compiled.

Liberia last conducted a census 24 years ago, in 1984. Unfortunately, the final report of that census was never published and most of the data went missing during the civil war. The country’s first census,

conducted in 1962, was followed by another in 1974. Liberia should have had two more censuses, in 1994 and 2004, but the civil war made such an exercise impossible to conduct. Because of this lapse, the country lacked timely and accurate data for socio-economic, political and physical development planning.

The Liberian leader emphasized that post war socio-economic planning and development of the country is a pressing concern of any government and its development partners. “Such an onerous undertaking cannot be actualized with scanty, outdated and deficient databases,” she pointed out.

Liberia presently finds itself at the crossroads of major rehabilitation and reconstruction with virtually every aspect of life becoming an emergency. Crucial decisions need to be taken in a carefully planned and sequenced manner. President Sirleaf has recommended that in the interim, the preliminary statistics be used in all of Liberia’s development planning.

The Special Representative of the Secretary-General to Liberia, Ellen Margrethe Løj, said the 2008 NPHC represents an important milestone in Liberia’s transition from war to an era of sustainable development and prosperity. “This census

will provide a reliable database for planning, recovery and development programmes for the people of Liberia,” she added.

The census results show that the average annual increase rose between 1974 and 1984 but had declined slightly by 2008. Liberia’s population size is relative-





ly small compared with other countries in the region. If the trend of the 2.1 per cent annual growth rate continues, Liberia's total population would be double the 2008 figure in 34 years (by 2042).

The preliminary report notes that the national population is unevenly distributed among the counties. Out of the 15 counties, three counties alone -- Montserrado, Nimba and Bong -- hold 56 per cent of the population. Since 1984, population distribution favours the 'big six' -- Montserrado, Nimba, Bong, Lofa, Grand Bassa and Margibi counties in descending order.



They account for 75.2 per cent of the total population, up by 0.7 per cent of what it was in 1984.

The report also looks at the lower end of the scale. The 'small five' -- Grand Kru, River Cess, River Gee, Bomi and Gbarpolu counties -- continue to hold the least population totals. Together, these five counties have only 10 per cent of the national count -- each of them contributing less than 2.5 per cent. "The fact that the bottom five counties in 1984 had a population of 12 per cent shows that there has been a tendency for the population to gravitate towards counties with higher populations during the inter-censal period," the preliminary report notes.

The results also show that Liberia's population density is 93 persons per square mile. This national density is exceeded only in Montserrado, Margibi, Maryland, Bomi, Nimba and Bong counties, which reveals that the population is spread in a north-east south-west line drawn across Liberia from the hump in Nimba County.

The preliminary results also show that the mean household size declined from 6.2 in 1984 to 5.1 in 2008. A household size normally reduces in a situation of increasing urbanization and modernization and as people become more educated.

"In specific terms," according to the preliminary results, "apart from Bong, Margibi and Nimba counties where the household size tended to remain the same, the rest of the countries were almost even-

ly split in terms of counties with rising household sizes and those that experienced a decline on the 1984-2008 inter-censal period. The national household size of 5.1 was exceeded in eight of fifteen counties. The most dramatic fall in household sizes was River Cess County while the reverse is true for Grand Gedeh, Maryland and River Gee."

To test the accuracy of the field enumeration exercise conducted in March, LISGIS in June undertook a Post Enumeration Survey (PES) among five percent of the 7,023 enumeration areas in the country. Results from the PES would determine the level of coverage and content error made during the field enumeration exercise of the census.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the African Development Bank (ADB) had offered support to the census exercise. With the population agency's support, five persons have been trained in Census Cartography Mapping and Management in Kenya and Zambia while another five were trained in Intermediate GIS Geographic Information System in Ghana. The UNFPA also recruited long term technical advisors and consultants to aid the Census Secretariat in the preparation of various census instruments, including the production of enumeration maps. ♦



# Retreat Dissects Civil Affairs Role in Drawdown

By Sulaiman Momodu

**A**s the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) undergoes a gradual drawdown process, a recent three-day Civil Affairs Section retreat attracted key representatives of the Government of Liberia, UN agencies, civil society and personnel from the civilian, police and military components of the mission. The overarching goal of the retreat was to review the changing context of Civil Affairs work in the light of new GoL priorities and UNMIL Drawdown strategy, achievements in the previous year and map out a way forward for mandate implementation in the coming year (2008-09). The meeting provided an opportunity for positive interaction, partnership and team building and the sharing of ideas and experiences.

"It is a good time to reflect on how can we adjust and adapt to the new situation. The timing for this retreat is very crucial," Special Representative of the Secretary-General Ellen Margarethe Løj in her keynote address. She urged all to seize the opportunity to build consensus and suggest ways of enhancing the mission's effectiveness and find ways to support the Liberian government. Løj also highlighted the achievements under the County Support Team (CST), noting that the CST project has made Liberia an example of

best practice in respect to capacity support to national authorities in post-conflict countries.

Senior government and civil society officials addressed issues that are central to the mission's benchmarks in the drawdown phase. Talking on "Management of Mineral Resources", Dr. Eugene Shannon, Minister of Lands, Mines and Energy noted the strategic importance of minerals to national development. "Minerals are strategic to national development and non-renewable, so there is need to exploit and maximize returns and at the same time preserve the environment," he said, adding that mineral resources could also be a curse if not properly managed.

On the topic "Challenges of Decentralization and Local Governance - a Liberian Government Perspective", Ambulai Johnson, Minister of Internal Affairs deliberated on four critical areas on decentralization and local governance, including the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) mandate for decentralization; key issues at the County level; Information management; and civil society empowerment.

In his presentation, "Implementing the PRS - Institutional Arrangements and Challenges", Natty Davies, Executive Director, Liberia Reconstruction and Development Corporation (LRDC) expressed appreciation to the mission for its support to the post-war country. He said

monitoring and evaluation is a key part of the PRS process and discussed its implementation and the linkages between various ministries and agencies. He said government's vision is one of change and a departure from the old way of governing, which he noted lacked equity and excluded the citizens from government. Among other key government officials was the former interim Liberian leader, Dr. Amos Sawyer, now Chairman Governance Commission, who spoke on "Reform of the Liberian Governance System".

Chief of Civil Affairs Francis Kai-Kai expressed delight that many stakeholders came together to discuss key issues and noted that it was an excellent opportunity for the mission's leadership to convey their expectations of Civil Affairs and other sections of the mission and partners in the implementation of Mission mandate. These would be used to guide priority setting and implementation of support activities that promote state extension of authority and management of natural resources in the next one year of the current drawdown phase of UNMIL.

Deputy Special Representative for Recovery and Governance Jordan Ryan in his closing remarks noted that though much has been achieved, there was still need for considerable support to the government, with an agenda to gradually cede the mission's work to national ownership.

♦



# UNMIL FOCUS



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# Mongolians Protect Special Court

By J. Wesley Washington  
in Freetown, Sierra Leone

**T**he UN supported Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL) that is trying those accused of war crimes related to the civil war in Sierra Leone, including Liberia's former President Charles Taylor, relies on the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) for its security. Currently the task of providing security to the Court rests with the Mongolian contingent's Military Guard Force (MGF), which took over from the Nigerian contingent in the first week of January 2006.

The 250-strong MGF has three main tasks: provide security for the premises of the Special Court, convoy protection for detainees of the Special Court when they are moved outside the Court premises and, should there be the need, evacuate officials and detainees of the SCSL in cooperation with UNMIL's Quick Reaction Force (QRF) to a safe location. Starting in June this year, the Mongolian peacekeepers have an additional responsibility to provide 24-hour security to an adjacent facility, LANGATA, a camp where all assets of the United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL) are secured.

Since taking over security at the SCSL, the Mongolian contingent has rotated five times. Although the general security situation remains calm, MGF-5 maintains a high operational tempo to ensure no lapses in security for the Special Court. Besides air reconnaissance patrols, routine foot patrols are conducted within the perimeter of the Court while keeping

under close observation LANGATA and their own camp, SOLAR. MGF-5 continues to embark on training exercises and rehearsals to ensure their full preparedness and alertness in executing their mandate. The Mongolian peacekeepers have conducted several ground reconnaissance missions to various areas such as around Freetown, Lungi International Airport and Hastings Airport.

Recently, MGF-5 and the SCSL Security Section conducted "Exercise Zone Warden" to reiterate the importance of the security warden system in providing protection and to help evacuate the SCSL officials and detainees to a secure location outside the mission area if the need arises. Earlier this year, MGF-5 undertook "Exercise Blue Fish", in collaboration with the SCSL, the Court's Security Section, Sierra Leone Police, MOVCON, as well as the Lungi International Airport Security Services rehearsing the security arrangements.

"We have planned for the challenges ahead as the importance of the Special Court for Sierra Leone looms larger than ever. This places great responsibility on the Mongolian peacekeepers which we have been able to discharge befittingly," said Commanding Officer Lt.-Col. Baljid Baatar during an interview with UNMIL FOCUS recently.

In 1999, the Government of Mongolia made a crucial political decision to take an active part in international peacekeeping operations by signing the Memorandum of Understanding with the United Nations in order to contribute to the UN Standby Arrangement. Since then the Government

of Mongolia has been actively developing the peacekeeping capacity of the Armed Forces of Mongolia.

Following a series of peacekeeping seminars and field training for officers and non-commissioned officers, including at international peacekeeping training centres, the Armed Forces of Mongolia trained its first group of military observers and a small contingent for their deployment to UN peacekeeping missions around the world. In 2002, the State Great Hural, the parliament of Mongolia, passed a law establishing the legal framework for the participation of the Mongolian military and police personnel in the UN Peacekeeping and international missions.

In August the same year, Mongolia sent its first two military observers to the United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC). Four months later, in December 2002, another three officers started their military observer mission in the Western Sahara (MINURSO).

Mongolia's deployment of the 250-strong MGF as part of the UN Mission in Liberia is its largest contribution to a UN peacekeeping mission so far. Being an unwavering partner on the global war against terrorism, the country has sent a mobile training team to support Coalition operations in Afghanistan. Since September 2005, the Mongolian Armed Forces have participated in the NATO mission in Kosovo. A platoon attached to the BELUX company in the French Battalion was Mongolia's first-ever commitment to peace and stability support for the Balkans. ♦

# Liberians

## What Should Liberians Do

**Peter Gblah (Mason)**

"The Liberian Government should empower the Liberia National Police (LNP) and other state security apparatuses with the necessary logistics to combat armed robbery. I suggest that they should be armed in order to combat those armed robbers that are going to pursue."



**Patrick N. Guanble (Petty Businessman)**

"The best we can do is try to find employment for most of our youth in the streets. For me, a money changer, I cannot leave what I'm doing to parade the streets doing nothing because at the end of the day I can earn a few dollars to sustain myself. So this will not encourage me to get in the streets to rob others."



**Musa Kamara (Driver)**

"My suggestion is that the Government creates job opportunities for idle Liberian youth that are parading around the city with no means of an income and nothing to do. I think some youths are not gainfully employed or have no means of an honest income. As a result, they have resulted to committing armed robbery and other crimes in order for them and their families to survive."

**Tarnue Geddeh (Petty Businessman)**

"Government should create opportunities for most of our inactive youths to seek honest means of livelihood. If you look around most of our street intersections, you'll see a lot of young boys loading cars and doing other odd jobs which is incapable of taking care of their responsibilities in the capital city. It would be better if they went to the rural parts and engaged in farming and other agricultural activities; but doing these odd jobs that's not reaping much propels some of them to go into armed robbery and other indecent acts."



**Abu Sherif (Information Officer)**

"Securing and protecting property should first of all start with oneself. Every Liberian should be his or her own security by collaborating with the police, UNMIL and other relevant security agencies as well as with the community in which they live. I will also recommend that capital punishment should be enforced by the government which would serve as a deterrent for other armed robbers. Joint UNMIL/ Police patrols should be beefed up especially at night and not only on major highways but every corner of the country. Security is more about individual commitment at the community level collaborating with security apparatus."



**Hassan K. Kamara (Taxi Driver)**

"I would suggest that Government reinforce the vagrancy laws of the country. A lot of the youth who should be doing something worthwhile continue to sit among their peers in ghettos and hatch sinister plans during the day and at night rain havoc on peaceful citizens. So at night when these vagrants are caught, they should be prosecuted as stipulated by law."

# Speak To Curb Armed Robbery?



**Eugenia Williams (Nurse- Aide)**

"I suggest that Government augment the LNP and other State Security by employing more personnel and have them deployed all over the city and its environs. Secondly, Government should think about providing job opportunities for its citizens. Times are so difficult now-a-days that I believe this has propelled a lot of people to engage in unwholesome acts including armed robbery."

**T. Kai Barnard (University Student)**

"In order to reduce armed robbery, we need to create awareness amongst our youth. Presently, I'm part of a community-based organization aimed at sharing with idle youth the importance of an education. We plan to enlighten them that the use of arms and drugs is not the best alternative for them; rather a vocation or an education will make them useful citizens."



**Comfort Weni (Business Woman)**

"I am a victim of armed robbery. On 7th March 2008 armed robbers went to my Duport Road residence and burglarized my home taking nearly everything I own. As I speak to you, I'm feeling so bad that I hardly want to relate my horrible experience as these armed robbers want to frustrate us. My advice is that if armed robbers are apprehended, they should be gotten rid of because keeping them alive and in the community others would become victims as I became."



**Mac Anthony Peabody (Student)**

"Government should establish vocational and technical schools and have our youth trained in skills that will earn them a livelihood. We should also try to create the awareness amongst our youth against drug abuse and other negative attributes because once these fellows begin to take in drugs and engage in other bad habits, the next thing is to sustain it. This is very important if we want to curb armed robbery."

**Decontee Henneh (Beautician)**

"As for me, I just want us to pray to God to touch the hearts and minds of the armed robbers to stop their trade and become decent citizens. However, if they choose not to stop their ugly acts, when they are caught they should be tried and if found guilty they should be killed."



"My honest suggestion is that Government should encourage the youth to do something positive; probably learn a trade, a vocation or something that they will lead more productive lives. Secondly, I would want for the Liberian Government to allow its citizens to purchase hand guns and have them duly registered so that peaceful citizens will have a means to protect themselves against armed robbers."

**Charles E. Robinson (Money Exchanger)**



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