



Liberia Reopens Border with Côte d'Ivoire

Anti-Rape Campaign Launched

More Refugees Return as Security Improves

Message from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General



In March, I briefed the Security Council on the Secretary-General's Twenty-fifth Progress Report on Liberia. It was a chance to highlight the significant progress the country continues to make as it approaches the ten-year anniversary of its peace agreement, which was signed in Accra in August 2003. Liberia's decade of peace will be consolidated if the foundations are solid. Credible and widely-consulted institutional reform processes and true national reconciliation will enable Liberia to build a peaceful future based on equal access to political, social and economic opportunities. UNMIL will continue to support Liberia in several vital initiatives including constitutional reform, decentralization, and land rights reform, among others.

In April, the Governments of Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire met in Monrovia, along with UNMIL and our sister mission, UNOCI, to discuss ways of strengthening the security and stability of the border area between the two countries. The meeting outcomes were very substantive, building on progress since our last Quadripartite meeting in Abidjan in June 2012, and included reinforcing Liberian-Ivorian security cooperation, working through a tripartite commission to address the situation of refugees, and holding a cross-border meeting of traditional chiefs and elders.

The gradual security transition continued, with the smooth transfer of some security functions from the Mission to national security actors, and the handing-over of several UNMIL facilities. The detailed planning and assessments undertaken by the Joint UN/Government Transition Working Group have kept this first phase of the transition on schedule. Now, for the first time since 2005, UNMIL's military no longer has a fixed deployment in all of Liberia's counties, having withdrawn from three - Grand Bassa, River Cess and Sinoe - since October 2012. UNMIL is preparing to withdraw from a fourth county, Grand Kru, in June 2013. Meanwhile, the Nepalese Formed Police Unit (FPUs), the first of three additional FPUs approved by the Security Council last September, has deployed to Tubmanburg in Bomi County, to provide added rapid

response capacity as UNMIL's military footprint is reduced.

The UN and its partners remain deeply engaged in the development of Liberia's justice and security sectors. UNMIL is supporting the ongoing recruitment drive by the Liberia National Police (LNP), which intends not only to increase its overall strength, but also to increase its percentage of women officers. The Mission is, jointly with the LNP, conducting a baseline capacity assessment of the police, to help establish what kind of support to the LNP can have the greatest impact. In March 2013, UNMIL supported a government-led National Criminal Justice Conference to review and make recommendations for the improved functioning of all components of the criminal justice system; UNMIL is also working to review management and accountability mechanisms within the police, judiciary, and prosecution to support access to justice for all Liberians.

The commitment of Liberians to achieving their country's full potential is inspiring, and bodes well for the hard work that still lies ahead. The UN and Liberia's partners will continue to work together in supporting consolidation of this country's hard-earned peace, and the critical reform processes that are underway. By supporting inclusive and participatory processes, we can help Liberia move beyond her historic cleavages and fulfill the aspirations of her people.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Karin Landgren', written over a light blue background.

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



Liberia Reopens Border with Côte d'Ivoire

After closing its border with Côte d'Ivoire for nearly a year due to alleged cross-border raids, Liberia revokes its decision leading to the resumption of free traffic and commerce between the two neighboring countries amidst signs of improving security.



Anti-Rape Campaign Launched

Liberia kicks off a nationwide campaign against rape that continues to remain one of the most reported serious crimes in the country with more than half of the victims reportedly under the age of ten.



More Refugees Return as Security Improves

Despite occasional security incidents across the border in Côte d'Ivoire, more than 8,000 refugees have returned home from Liberia in the first five months of this year, exceeding the total number of Ivorian exiles who returned the whole of last year.

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AFL troops deployed in Grand Gedeh County

Liberia Reopens Border w

By Napoleon Viban

It was clearly a bold move when, in mid April this year, Liberia announced the reopening of its border with Côte d'Ivoire. The resumption of cross-border traffic between the two neighbours comes in the wake of a Quadripartite meeting held in Monrovia on 5 April.

In June last year, the authorities in Monrovia sealed the border in an effort to contain sporadic raids on western Ivorian towns and villages by armed bands allegedly operating from across Liberia.

The Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL)

launched a campaign to secure the border and, with the support of UN peacekeepers, patrolled the area for several months looking for any signs of dissident activity.

Thanks in part to their vigilance, the region enjoyed some ten months of uninterrupted quiet, and by mid March this year, the consensus across southeastern Liberia was that the time was ripe to reopen the border. When Special Representative of the Secretary-General Karen Landgren met local leaders, including traditional chiefs and elders during a brief visit to Zwedru on 12 March, they entreated her to press the case with

the authorities in Monrovia for the reopening of the border.

After close to a year of quiet and tranquility on both sides of the border, the case couldn't have been more compelling. But hours later the tables turned. The border region woke the following day to news that a band of up to 50 attackers had raided the Ivorian border town of Zilebly, killing six, including four civilians and two soldiers, and displacing thousands from the town and the neighbouring villages of Oulai-Taibly and Diboke. Most of those who fled the fighting took refuge in Bolequin, some 35 km from Zilebly.



Napoleon Viban/UNMIL

unity in June 2012 to secure the borders with Côte d'Ivoire

In quick succession, two more raids followed in Tiobly on 20 March and Petit Guiglo on 23 March. While Tiobly held out relatively well against the attackers, the fighting in Petit Guiglo led to more loss of life and destruction of property. Four people, including three assailants died in the attack and about 20 houses were burnt down.

The sudden resurgence of violence across the border, with little warning, rattled local leaders on the Liberian side. By the close of March the County administration in Grand Gedeh was grappling with a petition from border community chiefs and elders demanding the relocation of Ivorian refugees from their communities to refugee camps established further

inland.

It took the direct and tactful intervention of the then Internal Affairs minister, Blamoh Nelson, to reassure the chiefs. Meeting with them in Zwedru on 25 March, Nelson urged patience, noting that the voluntary relocation of refugees to any new quarters should, at the very least, be carried out in an organized manner. Besides, relocation requires mobilization of resources and coordinated action and planning by UNHCR and other partners.

By and large, before the 5 April Quadripartite meeting of UNMIL, UNOCI and the two governments in Monrovia, things looked pretty much like the March attacks had ruined whatever prospects there were for a

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with Côte d'Ivoire

reopening of the border. Two weeks after the confab, though, Liberia officially declared its border with Côte d'Ivoire reopened. ■

Blamoh Nelson meeting with local chiefs and elders in Zwedru



Napoleon Viban/UNMIL



Anti-Rape Campaign La

By Ruby Ofori

Liberia has kicked off a nationwide anti-rape campaign with a moving ceremony that brought tears to the eyes of many in the audience. Six children who died as a result of being raped in the last 12

months were honored at the launch of the campaign on 1 May at the Ministry of Gender and Development. Children lit candles and read the names and ages of the victims as well as their relationships to the perpetrators – all of them male neighbors or relatives.

“As we sat there listening to the children, the Justice Minister and I

were wiping tears from our eyes,” said President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who officially launched the campaign.

A staggering 60 per cent of victims of reported rape cases in Liberia are children under 14 years of age according to the Ministry of Gender and Development. The theme of the year-long campaign reflects the global



Participants in the anti-rape campaign launch

nunched

theme: "Stand Up Against Rape."

President Sirleaf called on communities around the country to "join hands and pledge their support to the fight against rape." She urged every citizen of Liberia to be vigilant in "keeping their eyes open for the children of the community, and treat the children of the community as their

own."

Liberia's 14-year civil war that came to an end in 2003 was characterized by widespread violence against women and girls. Even after a decade of peace, violence against women and girls continues unabated.

"As Liberia looks forward to celebrating a decade since the signing of its peace agreement, women and girls in this country still face an unacceptable level of insecurity. By engaging with men, educators and religious and traditional leaders, this campaign seeks to bring the discussion of rape and sexual violence into communities with a view to developing better community-based prevention," said Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Karin Landgren. "All members of society, especially those whose opinions are most respected, have the potential to be powerful agents of change, and to instill values and attitudes against sexual violence," she noted.

A total of 2,493 sexual and gender based violence crimes were reported in 2012. This was an increase of 110

over the previous year that recorded 2,383 cases. Montserrado County is home to Liberia's capital Monrovia, and it also tops the list of Liberia's 15 counties with 1,493 reported rape cases in 2012. Second on that list is Margibi County with 180 cases followed by Grand Cape Mount County with 139 and Bong County with 104.

"It is important to note that even when cases are reported in courts very limited action is taken to ensure rape cases are given priority," said Madhumita Sarkar, Advisor to the Joint Government and United Nations Gender Based Violence Programme. "In Bong County, for example, of the 30 cases received in 2012 only two were tried and one was convicted," she pointed out.

The launch of the anti-rape campaign was organized by the Ministry of Gender and Development in partnership with the United Nations Sexual and Gender Based Violence Joint Programme, UNFPA and UNMIL. The campaign is being funded by the Swedish Development Agency. ■





Liberia Battles Obstetric

By Stefanie Carmichael

“Somewhere along the line, society has forgotten the chain of command. The chain of command starts with the woman who will carry that child of the future.”

That was the message legendary Liberian singer and Goodwill Ambassador on Maternal and Newborn Mortality Miatta Fahnbulleh had for her country as Liberia joined the global community in marking the first-ever International Day to End Obstetric Fistula on 23 May.

Obstetric fistula is a debilitating condition that affects between 2 to 3 million women in the developing

world. It occurs when a woman experiences a constant leaking of urine and/or feces as a result of damage sustained to her pelvic bone during prolonged or unattended childbirth. Importantly, however, obstetric fistula is preventable and, in most cases, treatable. Indeed, it has been all but eliminated in developed countries.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called the International Day to End Obstetric Fistula “an important opportunity to raise awareness of a condition that is not well-understood even in societies where it is prevalent, and much less where it is not.”

That is why Fahnbulleh joined her United Nations and Government colleagues, including Resident Representative of the United Nations

Population Fund (UNFPA) in Liberia Esperance Fundira, to mark the occasion.

“This is a place where we can end fistula, in Liberia,” said Fundira. “We need to make sure that every pregnancy is wanted and every childbirth is safe. We need to make sure women have the services when they need them.”

Fahnbulleh’s own daughter endured a lengthy 48-hour childbirth that could have resulted in serious complications, but being in Australia she received the necessary care. “What happens to the girl in Nimba County?” she asks. Indeed, the face of fistula is most often the poor and illiterate who have limited access to health services.

Liberia has made progress in



Ruby Ofori/UNMIL

A patient under treatment for fistula

c Fistula

its fight against fistula. After a national survey completed in 2006 identified those regions with the highest rates of the condition, the government put actions into place. Through a decentralized programme of prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation that has been supported by UNFPA, a total of 1,026 women have been treated to date across Liberia's 11 fistula treatment centres. Last month, 25 midwives graduated from the country's specialized fistula rehabilitation and training centre, which also teaches survivors how to act as fistula ambassadors in their communities. The awareness campaign also reached over 12,000 students, with Fistula Fan Clubs being established in schools across the

country.

Liberia's achievements in fighting fistula have recently been recognized by the international community. Dr. John Mulbah, lead surgeon with

we can continue to do something, we can train our doctors, our midwives, our obstetricians," says Mulbah. "Maternal issues should remain emphasized in the [national] budget."

Tolbert Nyeswah, Assistant Minister for Preventive Services with the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, also took time to underscore the importance of combatting this condition.

"We are making sure that women's health is high on the political agenda," he said. "We are trying to end the stigma, to teach that this condition can be treated."

Stigmatization remains one of the biggest challenges confronting women who suffer from fistula, according to Dr. Mulbah. This, along with increasing demand for services, the need to train more medical personnel, and the rising cost of meeting these needs are the biggest barriers in the fight against fistula, he says. Still, services continue to be provided free of charge to as many who need them as possible.

Liberia made maternal and newborn health a national priority in 2011 with the announcement of an ambitious five-year plan to halve the rate of maternal and newborn deaths. The Road Map for Accelerating the Reduction of Maternal and Newborn Morbidity and Mortality in Liberia,

Obstetric fistula is a debilitating condition that affects between 2 to 3 million women in the developing world. It occurs when a woman experiences a constant leaking of urine and/or feces as a result of damage sustained to her pelvic bone during prolonged or unattended childbirth.

the Liberia Fistula Programme, will be receiving the Friends of UNFPA Award for Women's Health and Dignity in New York on 4 October in recognition of his work.

"With the contribution of the UN,

estimated to cost US\$ 145 million, is being supported technically and financially by UNFPA, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO). ■



Health Vol Up Immu

By Romeo Togba

Rose Sayon, a resident of Buah Geeken, Grand Kru County, is today a proud communicator on health issues, especially routine immunization. She is among 112 General Community Health Volunteers trained by UNICEF and partners, including the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (MOHSW), in the use of a specialized toolkit as well as improved communication skills to encourage mothers to take their children for crucial immunization.

"Wherever I go, I take this material with me to mothers and pregnant women to convince them of the benefits of taking a child to a health centre five times before turning one year old," Sayon says pointing to her communication toolkit.

Routine immunization requires that a mother takes her child for vaccinations five times before the child's first birthday, and it includes shots for the prevention of measles, polio, pneumonia, tuberculosis, and yellow fever, among others.

Sayon will be moving from house to house in the forest region of Buah Geeken talking to mothers, fathers and community leaders. "We must lead the campaign to make sure our children are healthy and strong," she points out.

Sayon and her fellow volunteers have been trained as Liberia's Health Ministry is committed to improving immunization coverage nationwide. Moreover, the initiative is in recognition of the fact that immunization is a "cost-effective"

Volunteers Scale Immunization

strategy to prevent childhood disease and mortality.

"We believe that all efforts should be exerted to help our mothers get the necessary information of the importance of routine immunization and we will roll out this training of General Community Health Volunteers (GCHVs) in all parts the country," said Angeline Tarr, Communications Officer of Liberia's Expanded Programme on Immunization.

The Volunteers are the foot soldiers in the provision of basic information to residents in some of the remotest parts of the country on services available at the various health facilities. By working with the Volunteers, the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, UNICEF and other partners are aiming to put routine immunization on the front burner.

"We are training these GCHVs to help boost usage of the health facilities for routine vaccinations," Adolphus Scott, Communication for Development Specialist at UNICEF-Liberia, explained. "This training is a critical component of our quest to support the achievement of Millennium Development Goal 4, which has to do with the reduction in child mortality."

Mothers in the rural parts of Liberia are already full of praises for the volunteers providing basic education to community dwellers.

Siliphat Stewart, a mother of three, in Nrokwia, Sass Town, Grand Kru County, could not hold back her joy over positive impacts the work of the GCHVs is having on the health and wellbeing of her children.

"The people [GCHVs] have been doing well. Many of us now take our children to the clinic for vaccination five times before they reach one year. I am very happy for the work they are doing," Stewart says.

"With my daughter not falling ill like before, I now have more time to spend on cultivating my rice farm," she adds.

The Ministry of Health, UNICEF and partners are also attracting the participation of community leaders and men in encouraging mothers to take their kids for immunization.

"Vaccinating children against childhood diseases is everybody's business that is why we see husbands as a key partner in encouraging their women to take their children for

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"For me, I come to realize that since I started taking my five-month-old daughter to the hospital for vaccination regularly, she does not fall sick easily again," says Bayonoh Twelh, a mother of two and also a resident Nrokwia.

vaccination to protect them against preventable childhood diseases," points out Angeline Tarr of the Ministry of Health.

"Take a step now to save a child's life," stresses UNICEF's Scott. ■

A child being vaccinated during the African vaccination week





Mamie Johnson and her children with Dr. Philderald Pratt of UNFPA

Door-to-door Approach Boosts Family Planning

By Calixte Hessou

In an effort to scale up family planning among the Liberian population, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), in collaboration with the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), has adopted a “door-to-door” approach for the distribution of appropriate

commodities and services to rural and urban communities.

Liberia, a country of 3.5 million inhabitants, has a maternal mortality ratio of 770/100,000 live births. It is estimated that some 36 per cent of married women have no access to family planning services. That rate is even higher among single/unmarried women of reproductive age. A UNFPA-funded study by Planned

Parenthood Association of Liberia in five counties estimates that 57 per cent of single/unmarried women have no access to such facilities.

With contraceptive prevalence rate low and a significant proportion of Liberians without access to modern health facilities, community-based distribution of family planning commodities is a new approach that is beginning to catch up in the country.



Calixte Hessou/UNFPA

According to UNFPA Assistant Representative Dr. Philderald Pratt, the new approach integrates community based distribution of family planning commodities into existing community based women empowerment initiatives, using women and young girls as community based distributors. "This door-to-door approach not only provides an opportunity for health education sessions at household level, it has also created an environment for male involvement in household level discussions on family planning," Dr. Pratt noted.

One of the many beneficiaries of this project is Mamie Johnson, 48, of Pipeline Community in Paynesville. Johnson has eight surviving children with the youngest born in March 2012 after 16 childbirths. She has had her

children with different partners. Her last partner ran away soon after the birth of latest child, a boy.

Johnson struggles to take care of her eight children by selling cold water in plastic bags. She admits to having had no idea of family planning, and says she would have prevented some of the 16 pregnancies if she had. "I wish I knew about family planning years ago. If I knew something about how to avoid getting pregnant, I would not be suffering to care for eight children; it makes me sad," Johnson laments. Because she has no husband or partner, she is unable to send all of her children to school. "Among my eight children only 3 are going to school through the help of some of my church members," she says.

Today, Mamie Johnson is using contraceptive pills provided regularly under the project by a community at a very minimum cost. "I just give her 10 Liberian dollars per packet. I know it is not the actual cost but just a compensation for her efforts," she said.

Liberia has a high teenage pregnancy rate. According to a 2010 survey, the teenage pregnancy rate in the country stands at 3 per cent.

"Being able to determine the number, timing and spacing of one's children is a recognized human right. But this right is not yet fully realized,

especially among the poor. Access to voluntary family planning alone can reduce unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions, and maternal deaths and disabilities, saving women's lives and those of their children. Access to voluntary family planning can also allow women to enjoy planned pregnancies which increase the mothers' chances of surviving childbirth," said Dr. Pratt.

Availability of affordable life-saving medicines, contraceptives and other essential health supplies is a vital part of a well-functioning health system that Liberia is still far from realizing.

However, more than 20,000 women and girls of reproductive age have so far benefited from the services under the first phase of the new family planning programme.

UNFPA wants to help an estimated 22 million women gain access to family planning services in territories emerging from conflicts and natural disasters. Babatunde Osotimehin, the fund's executive director, says the fund will work with the International Planned Parenthood Federation to address unmet needs for family planning among marginalized populations in Bolivia, Côte d'Ivoire, Congo, Ethiopia, Haiti, India, Kenya, Liberia, Myanmar, Nigeria, the Pacific Islands, Pakistan and South Sudan. ■

UNFPA staff visit one of the beneficiaries of the programme



Calixte Hessou/UNFPA

Gaining Ground Against Maternal Mortality



Mothers at a clinic to vaccinate their children

By Ruby Ofori

After a decade of peace, Liberia is finally gaining ground against maternal mortality albeit at a painfully slow pace. The Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) indicates deaths of pregnant women per 100,000 live births in any one year. It is also an indication of a nation's ability to provide basic healthcare for women.

Globally, Liberia is still among the top 15 countries with the highest MMR in the world. However, there is a growing consensus among health experts that the ratio is on a downward trend in Liberia with fewer women

dying today than they did five years ago.

The most definitive report on MMR was jointly produced by UN agencies such as the World Health Organization, United Nations Population Fund, (UNFPA) the World Bank and UNICEF last year. Trends in Maternal Mortality: 1990-2010 estimates a current MMR ratio of 770 deaths per 100,000 live births, less than the 994 deaths per 100,000 live births recorded in 2007. Put another way the MMR has gone down from 1 in 8 women to 1 in 24 women in 12 years.

Among the first concrete steps taken by the government to reduce maternal mortality was raising the numbers of trained midwives, according to

Esperance Fundira, UNFPA Resident Representative in Liberia. New midwifery training schools have been established in Zwedru, Grand Gedeh County, Zorzor, Lofa County and Phebe, Bong County, to provide quality training to enhance the number of skilled personnel.

The new training regime is part of a broader national plan officially known as The Road Map for Accelerating the Reduction of Maternal & Newborn Mortality and Morbidity in Liberia. Launched on 8 March, 2011, the roadmap is, according to Fundira, "a comprehensive, well budgeted blue print of strategies concerning critical reproductive and maternal health issues to be addressed by the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare for the next 5 to 10 years."

Another critical measure taken by the government has been the "paradigm shift in Family Planning services delivery," said Fundira. "Community based distribution of Family Planning services through Community Health Volunteers is a remarkable strategy increasing access to services by women, girls and couples who want to use Family Planning services." She explained that family planning accounts for 25 to 30 per cent of maternal mortality reduction in any country.

The Government of Liberia is also keen to ensure that there is round-the-clock access to emergency obstetric and newborn care. This too has proven to be a contributing factor in bringing down the maternal mortality rate in the country.

Various partners, including UNFPA, have continued to provide support to the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare for the implementation of the Road Map. Now the challenge is for the government to increase the proportion of the national budget it spends on healthcare from the current 7 to 8 per cent to 15 per cent as recommended by the African Union. ■

Women Debate Liberia's Constitution



Delegates pay close attention to the debate

By James S. King

Women from across Liberia gathered at a local resort in Monrovia in April to debate Liberia's Constitution and to make their recommendations for relevant amendments to the Constitutional Review Committee (CRC). Views from the public to revamp the country's Constitution are currently being sought by the CRC.

Addressing the participants, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf said the Liberian government has initiated the review of the existing Constitution because it "falls short of current realities". She urged the women involved in the Constitution review process to come up with recommendations that represent the aspirations of all women irrespective of their status. "Let the document you produce from the review process reflect your interests and concerns," she reminded the participants.

The conference was organized by CRC, Women Civil Society Organizations, Ministry of Gender and Development and Women NGO

Secretariat of Liberia (WONGOSOL).

"The United Nations Secretary-General has committed the UN to supporting constitution-making processes that are inclusive, participatory and transparent, recognizing that true participation has an impact on the legitimacy of new constitutions," said Special Representative of the Secretary-General Karin Landgren addressing the Consultative Forum.

The UN envoy praised the timing of the Constitution review process and stressed the importance of participation of all Liberians in the exercise.

"The time is ripe for constitutional review. Current initiatives, such as electoral reform, land reforms and the decentralization of governance and administrative processes, seem set fundamentally to alter Liberia's system of governance for the better. There is a recognition, too, that many of Liberia's underlying tensions are perpetuated by provisions of the 1986 Constitution which no longer serve the public good," Landgren said. "The Constitutional Review process inevitably has a role in Liberia's national reconciliation and long-term

stability. This is a historic process," she added.

Calling the women's forum "a first important step" in involving Liberian women in the Constitutional Review process, Landgren promised the full support of the UN family in Liberia to the exercise. "To the women of Liberia, I want to assure you of UNMIL's commitment to working closely with you through the CRC in order that your priorities and recommendations are considered in the review of the Constitution," she said.

The participants in the Women's Consultative Forum drew up proposals for amendments to the clauses in the Constitution that are deemed contrary to women's equal rights and their right to equal participation in the governance process.

CRC Chairperson Gloria Musu Scott said the purpose of the conference was to ensure "mass and informed participation of Liberian women in CRC's planned activities" across Liberia. "Unity of purpose amongst women in partnership with male counterparts is fundamental to successful achievement of guaranteed constitutional rights," she reminded the participants. ■

“Many reasons to be optimistic about Liberia’s future... and to remain vigilant.”

Tamrat Samuel was appointed Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Rule of Law in Liberia in February 2013. With nearly 30 years of service with the UN, he brings a wealth of political and leadership experience to UNMIL. In an interview with Editor **Mathew Elavanalthoduka**, the UN envoy discusses Liberia’s progress in strengthening the rule of law, the challenges facing security sector institutions, the high incidence of rape, and the human rights situation in the country, among other issues.

UN FOCUS: It has been a couple of months since you assumed your role as the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Rule of Law in Liberia. What are your first impressions about the country?

DSRSG Samuel : I have followed Liberia from afar for a long time including the tragic period of conflict. I am very impressed with the tremendous progress Liberia has made in the last ten years following the end of the conflict. There are many reasons to be optimistic about Liberia’s future. But we should also recognize that the job is not yet done. There is always the risk of being complacent once society begins to feel the benefits of the peace dividend. Liberia should remain vigilant and not allow those risks to reverse the impressive progress that has been made. On a personal level, I feel honoured to be in Liberia at a time when the country is striving to consolidate peace and strengthen institutions that provide the foundation for democratic governance and socio-economic development.

One of the challenges facing the rule of law sector in Liberia is building the capacity and professionalism of the Liberia National Police. Where should the focus be in this area, especially since UNMIL has begun its transition with reduction in its troop strength?



There is no doubt that Liberia has made significant progress in building security institutions and agencies. The UN has progressively lowered its profile in terms of its responsibility for security. The Liberia National Police faces similar problems as with the other agencies under the Ministry of Justice. The problems stem from the lack of capacity, resources, professionalism, training, and a

proper system of management and accountability. These are not issues that can be resolved overnight. The Government is making efforts to adopt a holistic approach in addressing the needs of the Justice and Security sectors, and the UN is supporting these efforts in various ways. It is imperative to increase the manpower of LNP, to raise its professional standards at all levels and provide the necessary logistical support to improve mobility and communication. Deployment of LNP in remote places, where they are needed most, will enhance access to security and justice as well as development in those places. Budgetary allocation for LNP is an important factor; at the same time, it is also the responsibility of the institutions, including the LNP, to put public funds to proper use. There is also need for sustained training of senior and middle level management leaders. All of these are becoming increasingly important in the context of UNMIL’s gradual draw down.

Could you explain more about the justice and security hub that is now operational in Gbarnga and four others planned in different regions of the country? What are your impressions of this new approach to making justice and security more accessible?

The hub concept is a novel

approach. The hub in Gbarnga is actually a pilot project. We are still learning and trying to see whether this works, and how well it works. So lessons will continue to be drawn from the experience of the first hub, and also by taking into account the peculiarities of the counties that the future hubs will serve. The hubs seek to provide a kind of forward base for the delivery of justice and security across the country. They are intended to improve access to justice and enable justice and security institutions to have a growing impact. They take a balanced approach to strengthening of justice and security institutions through increased deployment of services and enhanced skills as well as development of required infrastructure. The hubs will not solve all problems. They represent an attempt to build bridges between the centre and the far corners of the county. The mere presence of the police and agencies at one hub location does not automatically translate into justice being delivered everywhere. We have learned a good deal from the development of the first hub and there are elements that still need to be finalized. There is greater interest in moving away from the concept of having the hub as a compound in one specific location and focusing more on how best to make services accessible and relevant to communities.

Liberia's Judiciary faces enormous challenges to the extent that many people have no faith in the justice system. What needs to be done to make Liberia's justice system more effective and reliable?

This is a major part of the challenge the rule of law sector faces. I am very encouraged by the desire of the Chief Justice and Associate Justices of the Supreme Court to carry out far-reaching reforms in this area. There is full recognition of these challenges. I was fortunate enough to participate in the Criminal Justice conference recently hosted by the Supreme Court. All participants acknowledged the challenges and major weaknesses of the Judiciary and their impact on

people's lives. The very high number of pre-trial detainees is an important issue. The inability of the police to regularly investigate and bring to the prosecution well developed cases results in people being held for long time in prisons or in the release of criminals. And the failure of the courts to adjudicate these cases in a timely manner also delays the delivery of justice. Some of the key areas of reform will include strengthening and improving the court administration, staffing and deployment of court administration officers in the regions because there are no administrators to provide basic supplies that prosecutors and judges need in their localities -- they have to come to Monrovia for those basic supplies. There is need for proper record keeping and information management throughout the judicial system. The number of judges and public defenders in the circuit courts also needs to be increased.

Rape remains the most frequently committed serious crime in Liberia. What concrete steps, especially from a rule of law perspective, can be taken to tackle the issue of rape more effectively?

Since sexual and gender based violence often is committed by someone who knows the victim, it is common that these crimes often go unreported to the police, but are instead settled outside the formal legal system and often against the interest of the victim. It is also common that the blame is put on the victim, not the perpetrator, which in turn inhibits other victims from reporting these crimes. Very often the justice system does not have the resources to respond effectively to these cases and to successfully prosecute them mostly because of the lack of evidence. Liberia needs to build its forensic capacity, and the Ministry of Justice is focused on this aspect.

But it is important not to focus exclusively on how to respond to these crimes. We need to focus on prevention as well. There is the need for more awareness of the importance

of reporting these cases to the police. There is the need to inculcate a culture of respect for women and the protection of children. The ultimate solution lies in changing the mind set and behaviour of men.

What is your impression of the human rights situation in Liberia and the progress achieved since the end of the civil war?

Liberia has come a long way. A lot of progress has been made in areas such as freedom of expression and association, conducting democratic elections, and developing the capacities of police, other security agencies and judiciary. There is also some progress in terms of reconciliation - particularly the formulation of the Agenda for Transformation, which focuses on many of the root causes of the conflict, including economic, social and cultural inequalities. The critical process of reviewing of Liberia's Constitution is underway. We are working closely with the Constitution Review Committee (CRC), which has already established wide contacts, including with civil society organizations. It is important that the constitutional review exercise becomes a national one that unifies the country around common principles, a common vision and a national identity that unites the entire country. All of these contribute towards building the culture of human rights that is sustainable and effective. Genuine equality has to come with opportunity for all, including the vulnerable and the marginalized, women and children. A vibrant civil society plays an important role in safeguarding human rights. Establishment of a strong, independent and effective national human rights capacity is of vital importance. It is essential to have institutions such as the Independent National Commission on Human Rights, which can provide impartial and objective monitoring and analysis of the human rights situation and help prevent future violations.

Thank you.



From Communities to C

By Sulaiman Momodu

Getting set to leave the Liberian border town of Blemeplay with his wife and two children, 48-year-old Jean is all excited about the prospect of moving into a refugee camp instead of living amidst the community. In the camp, they are sure of receiving food, shelter and other humanitarian assistance.

"When we fled Côte d'Ivoire in 2011, we sought refuge along the

border hoping to return in a couple of days. People were very helpful to us and we also received relief supply including monthly food but that has long stopped. The Government of Liberia also says refugees should move away from border areas, so we are happy to move," says Jean.

With nearly 60,000 Ivorian refugees remaining in Liberia including about 23,000 living in border communities, their plight continues to be on the front burner. At the recent Quadripartite meeting in Monrovia attended by

representatives of Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire as well as the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and the UN Operations in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI), continuous progress the two sister countries are making in terms of security along the borders was noted as refugee issues were discussed.

With the improvement in border security, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has facilitated the voluntary repatriation of thousands of Ivorian refugees. Almost every week, the UN



Sulaiman Momodu/UNHCR

Relocation in progress

Camps

refugee agency in collaboration with the Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission (LRRRC) organizes convoy movements through various border points in Grand Gedeh, Nimba and Maryland counties. Repatriating refugees include those from both the camps and communities.

"While we welcome the spike in repatriation this year and are busy with that exercise, we are also very busy assisting refugees who have indicated that they would like to stay a bit longer in Liberia to move

away from the border," says Acting UNHCR Representative Robert Tibagwa. "We are targeting 15,000 refugees for relocation this year, so far we have relocated more than 5,000," he adds. Last year, 9,974 refugees were voluntarily relocated from host communities to refugee camps.

In camps, refugees are guaranteed better protection and humanitarian assistance such as regular monthly food supply, shelter, water and sanitation facilities, and medical care. "Food was a major problem for us in the community but here in the camp we received food as soon as we arrived," says Jean, who moved to Bahn Refugee Camp in Nimba County.

Every month, notwithstanding challenges such as deplorable road conditions and broken bridges, about 1,000 refugees are targeted for relocation to camps in Maryland, Nimba and Grand Gedeh counties. In May for instance, nearly 1,000 refugees were relocated to Bahn Refugee Camp alone, including 451 new arrivals who crossed into Liberia in late April this year citing security concerns in

their areas of origin in Côte d'Ivoire. Before relocation, the LRRRC and the UNHCR conduct screening of all individuals. Medical screening is also done to ensure that one is fit to travel. Medical staff also accompany the convoys. Vulnerable persons such as the elderly, pregnant women and nursing mothers receive special care and attention.

During the refugee influx in late 2010 and early 2011, refugees were initially allowed to stay in communities before the Government of Liberia established the encampment policy to improve delivery of protection and assistance services.

Acting Representative Tibagwa says the relocation exercise will continue throughout the year and that many refugees have already declared their intention to relocate. "We thank the Government and the people of Liberia for hosting Ivorian refugees in their communities and for making land available for the establishment of camps which are places of peace and protection for refugees who are usually very vulnerable people in need of assistance." ■

Bad roads and rickety bridges pose challenges



Sulaiman Momodu/UNHCR



New homes for

Former Refugees Integrat

By Sulaiman Momodu

For more than two decades, Mayatta has been living in a shack on the outskirts of Monrovia. Her home is made up of local materials with a thatched roof. Every rainy season, the aging single mother worries about water falling through the leaking roof of the ramshackle shelter. “If we are sleeping and it rains, everybody gets wet plus whatever we have,” laments the mother of four.

Mayatta fled to Liberia in 1991 from

Sierra Leone when civil war broke out in her home country. “My husband was killed by rebels and our house burnt down. I was lucky to survive, so I crossed over into Liberia where I have been living since then. I survive by selling brooms,” she explains.

In early May, Mayatta began a new life as UNHCR trucks arrived at the former VOA (Voice of America) refugee camp to transport the former Sierra Leonean refugees who had opted to locally integrate in Liberia to their new homes. The end of refugee status for Sierra Leoneans was

declared on 31 December 2008.

“UNHCR assisted you for many years, but we would like to remind you that you are no more refugees. As you move to your new home, we would like to encourage you to take initiatives to be self-reliant to support yourself and your family,” Deputy UNHCR Representative, Andrew Mbogori, reminded the former refugees. He also advised them to live within the confines of the laws of Liberia.

The journey from the outskirts of Monrovia to their new home in Sass



Sulaiman Momodu/UNHCR

for Sierra Leonean refugees who opted to integrate locally

e Locally

Town, Bomi County, lasts less than an hour. Upon arrival, the former refugees receive items such as laundry soap,

solar lamps, mosquito nets, blankets and jerry cans. Condoms are also

available on demand. "This is the last batch of 122 former Sierra

Leonean refugees from former refugee camps bringing to about 1,900 individuals relocated to new homes since 2008. This is the fifth local integration community," explains UNHCR's Dokie Nah.

Sulaiman Momodu/UNHCR

In addition to the modest two-room house and non-food items, the former refugees receive a grant of US\$ 50 per family. UNHCR also conducts small business management training and provides an additional US\$ 250 per family as livelihood grant. At every location 20 per cent of the houses is allocated to vulnerable persons in the host community. The selected individuals also benefit from the grant.

Over the years, with funding from donors and organizations like the African Development Bank through the Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS), the UNHCR had constructed 632 housing units in various locations including 82 in Bensonville, 150 Blamasee, 225 in Sinje, 75 in Tieni and 100 in Sass Town for the relocation of former refugees.

Varney Johnson, 37, of Sass Town is one of the beneficiaries from the Gola speaking host community. "We are living here as a family. We do not see the former refugees as strangers, we see them as our brothers and sisters," he says, adding that some former refugees who earlier relocated had already started learning Gola while some members of the host community are also learning Mende, a language spoken by most of the former refugees. Gola and Mende are two languages spoken in the two West African states. Other individuals are integrating in Mende speaking communities near

the border with Sierra Leone.

Although the security situation in West Africa has improved with the restoration of peace in Sierra Leone and Liberia following the deployment of UN peacekeepers, thousands of people remain in countries where they had taken refuge during the civil war years. The UN refugee agency is focusing on local integration as a durable solution to the refugee problem. Many refugees who have decided to locally integrate are doing so because they have established stronger social ties in their present communities amidst inter-marriages. The objective of the local integration process is to assist the former refugees to better assimilate in their communities, eventually leading to be self-reliant. While local integration of Sierra Leoneans is taking place in Liberia, dozens of Liberians are also locally integrating in countries such as Sierra Leone and Nigeria.

The individuals who had earlier moved into new homes are now enjoying peaceful co-existence with their hosts. In Tieni, one of the settlements, former refugee Moris Rogers, 41, who fled to Liberia in 1991, says he relocated in December 2010 together with his wife and three children. "We are very peaceful in Liberia. I am engaged in farming activities to support my family." ■

Refugees on their way to their new homes



More Refugees Return as Security Improves



A convoy carrying Ivorian refugees cross the border

By Sulaiman Momodu

Notwithstanding occasional security incidents across the border in Côte d'Ivoire, more than 8,000 Ivorians who fled into Liberia about two years ago following post-election violence in their country have so far returned home this year. This exceeds the total number of refugees that voluntarily repatriated in 2012.

The refugees, most of them from camps and communities in Grand Gedeh, Nimba, Maryland and River Gee counties, have returned to areas such as Guiglo, Toulepleu, Tabou, Bolequin and Danane in Côte d'Ivoire.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is facilitating the voluntary return of the refugees by organizing road convoys in collaboration with the Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission (LRRRC)

and other partners. Refugees in Nimba County go through the Loguato border crossing point while those in Grand Gedeh County cross the B'hai border post. From Maryland County, refugees are transported through the Duokudi border and then cross the Cavalla River using the UNHCR ferry.

At the various crossing points on the Ivorian side of the border, United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) peacekeepers escort the convoys to transit centres from where the returnees continue their journey home. They receive food, non-food items and a cash grant of US\$ 150 per adult and US\$ 100 per child below 18 years.

Over the past one year, repatriation of Ivorian refugees from Liberia had been interrupted by security incidents in villages on the Ivorian side of the border. On 21 March, a repatriation convoy of 155 refugees that was underway to the Ivorian border was forced to return to Solo Refugee Camp in Grand Gedeh following reports of

a security incident in the main return area. Repatriation from Grand Gedeh County, which was put on hold following that attack, resumed later in April.

"We are doing everything we can to assist refugees to return home. Although security concerns some weeks ago along Liberia's border with Côte d'Ivoire somewhat reduced the momentum, the return over the past five months has exceeded the total repatriation for last year of about 6,000 individuals," said UNHCR Deputy Representative Andrew Mbogori. "We very much welcome the recent improvement in border security which is now encouraging more refugees to return home," he added.

From time to time UNHCR staff from Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire hold cross-border meetings to discuss issues relating to the voluntary repatriation process and to address any challenges to ensure returnees reach their homes safely. ■

UNESCO Promotes New School Programmes for Refugees



Participants of the Values Education Curriculum Revision Workshop held 4-8 February 2013 in Bong County

By Stevenson Seidi

Teaching the values of tolerance, equality, and respect for human rights is vital to education, particularly in areas where local communities and large numbers of refugees must co-exist side by side on a daily basis.

That was the rationale behind the Values Education Curriculum Revision Workshop held from 4-8 February 2013 in Bong County, which saw representatives from the Ministry of Education, the University of Liberia, Cuttington University, and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) come together with 15 curriculum development experts to discuss ways of upgrading the education standard in Liberia. In particular, they sought to target those communities in eastern and south-eastern Liberia with large populations of Ivorian refugees.

In the aftermath of the 2010 presidential elections in Côte d'Ivoire, thousands of Ivorians crossed the border into Liberia seeking refuge. At the peak of the refugee crisis there were more than 200,000 Ivorians, including women and children, in Liberia. Although many of them have since returned, some 60,000 refugees still remain in Liberia today.

In 2011, the UN launched a Joint Assessment Mission to determine the gaps in support to these Ivorian refugees and their host communities. One key finding that emerged was the lack of secondary education available.

Dr. Abdul Rahman Lamin, a Social and Human Sciences Programme Specialist, and Ronald Kayanja, Communications Specialist, both with UNESCO Accra, were two of the facilitators in the workshop.

"Within the broad context of the project," said Lamin, "the exercise is considered a useful contribution towards building new societies in both

countries that will, in the long term, produce a new cadre of citizens."

Lamin suggested that the recent history of conflict and violence in both Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia meant it was doubly important to promote in school curriculum the concepts and values of tolerance, peaceful co-existence, respect for human rights, gender equality, and social cohesion, among others, anchoring these to notions of identity and citizenship. This, in turn, would benefit both the host communities and refugees.

The Values Education Curriculum Revision Workshop was financed by the Government of Japan. Since it was held, the new curriculum has been designed and validated and is awaiting implementation. This will take the form of interactive media products, which will also capitalize on community radio stations in order to be broadcast to the wider refugee and host communities along the Liberian-Ivorian border. ■

Stevenson Seidi/UNESCO

Host Community Benefits as Camp Closes



Sulaiman Momodu/UNHCR

The closed camp is now property of the community

By Sulaiman Momodu

Residents of Dougee community in Grand Gedeh County were a happy lot as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in March handed over to the community several hectares of land that once hosted thousands of Ivorian refugees.

The UN refugee agency in collaboration with partners handed over six structures, including office buildings and meeting centres that once provided various services at the Dougee Refugee Camp. Three hand-pump wells, furniture and dozens of assorted school materials were also donated.

Handing over the 54.2 hectares of land and assets through the Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission (LRRRC), the UNHCR Acting Head of Sub-office, Fatima Mohammed, noted that for everything

in life there is always a beginning and an ending. "We cannot repay you for your kind humanitarian gesture by making available your land for the establishment of a camp. The assets we are turning over are just a token of our appreciation," said Mohamed, assuring that in addition to the assets, UNHCR will ensure that a ten-room clinic the agency is constructing for the community would be completed and handed over in the coming months.

Pointing out that the land was made available for the establishment of a refugee camp on humanitarian grounds as thousands of Liberians were also refugees before, members of the community thanked UNHCR and partners for the assets. District Commissioner Jackson B. Quinwon thanked UNHCR for the clinic under construction. He said Dougee community and its environs of about 10,000 people has no health facility and lamented that locals sometimes walk or put patients in wheelbarrows to the nearest health facility some

11 kilometres away. Local residents recalled with gratitude jobs and skills training opportunities they had during the camp's establishment and operation.

Dougee Refugee Camp was established in April 2011 and hosted nearly 6,000 Ivorians during the peak of the refugee crisis. Most of them had either repatriated to Côte d'Ivoire or relocated to other camps, leading to the closure of the camp. Head of the LRRRC Sub-office in Grand Gedeh, Charles Greene, advised the community to make the maximum use of the assets.

"We are delighted that due to many refugees opting to return to Côte d'Ivoire, we have managed to close Dougee Refugee camp after closing Zhia Refugee camp last year. This is part of on-going strengthening of protection and assistance to refugees in collaboration with the LRRRC," said UNHCR Deputy Representative, Andrew Mbogori. ■



Snail farming is picking up in Liberia

Small Investment in Forest Yields Big Results

By John T. Monibah

Rural families across Liberia are discovering that a little can go a long way when it comes to capitalizing on the natural resources around them. An innovative project funded by the German Government and implemented by the Government of Liberia and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has shown that the very forest that surrounds them can become a source of income generation if managed properly.

In November 2010, Liberia launched the Forest Instrument, also known as the Non-Legally Binding Instrument (NLBI) on All Types of

Forests, a pilot project to improve sustainable forest management and to capitalize on the economic, social and environmental values of its forest.

Speaking at the close of the project in April, FAO Country Representative Jean-Alexandre Scaglia said, "Fortunately, this project has provided us a lot of evidence that a small investment in forest can yield enormous results and multiplied effects for rural families."

The NLBI focused largely on training, through the development of training manuals and training of trainers sessions, as well as on capacity building and the implementation of pilot initiatives. Liberian families in River Gee, Grand Gedeh and Nimba counties were given training

in alternative agro-forestry activities such as improved beekeeping and snail farming. Fifty members of the County Forest Forums and the Community Forestry Development Committee were trained and supported in bookkeeping and financial management. Meanwhile, more than 60 local stakeholders were trained in participatory forest inventory, timber scaling and grading.

"A farm family that owns 25 beehives with a total cost of about US\$ 740 to start with will generate a total revenue of US\$1,500 annually for four years," noted Scaglia. "It means that the family would earn US\$ 125 per month, which is equivalent to the minimum monthly wage of a civil servant."

Through the NLBI, honey and snails with the label "Produced in Liberia" became available on the market in small quantities, and it is hoped that farmers will be able to produce the valued commodities in larger amounts in the future.

The United Nations General Assembly adopted the NLBI in December 2007 with much international consensus, in order to strengthen political commitment towards the sustainable management of forests, to enhance the contribution of forests to achieving the Millennium Development Goals, and to provide a framework for national action.

In Liberia's case, Scaglia highlighted the relevance of the forest sector in empowering rural families, and suggested the project demonstrates ample reasons to invest in agroforestry.

Recently, the Liberian Government and the FAO recommitted themselves to innovation in the forest industry. In November, they jointly launched a technical cooperation project for the establishment of a forest database and information system in order to make available reliable statistical data. In April, the Forest and Farm Facility (FFF) was also introduced to consolidate and build on the achievements of the NLBI, and other national forest-based interventions. ■



New Proposals for Criminal

By Ruby Ofori

A three-day conference to address the systemic weaknesses of Liberia's criminal justice system was held in Monrovia from 26 to 28 March. The event attracted 200 of the nation's most senior justice and security officials, including the Chief Justice and the Associate

Justices of the Supreme Court, the Minister of Justice, senior officers of the Liberia National Police (LNP), the Prosecution Service and the Bureau of Corrections and Rehabilitation, along with a wide range of other critical actors.

Speaking at the start of the event, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Rule of Law Tamrat Samuel emphasized that

reform of the criminal justice system was critical to peace consolidation in Liberia. He said a major objective of the conference was to enable all relevant stakeholders to jointly shape the necessary reforms.

The deliberations led to the participants identifying some of the critical areas requiring reform.

These included the need for greater accountability in justice and



A view of the Temple of Justice

ways to address the administrative failings of the criminal justice chain, as these are a frequent cause of delays in bringing cases to trial and, thus, a major contributing factor to the high numbers of pre-trial detainees. Proposals included the extension of court terms and the possibility of setting up an intermediate level appeal court. Police arresting suspects without due cause were also identified as a factor causing lengthy pre-trial detentions, indicating the need for review of related procedures.

Even in the corrections sector, which suffers the consequences of many of the failings of the criminal justice system, participants identified ongoing pilot programmes involving probation and parole which, though in

review of the current bail procedures and protocols for handling evidence.

The issue of how to measure progress within the criminal justice system was discussed further following a presentation by a representative from Criminal Law Justice Advisory Services in the Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

Looking forward to what would happen after the conference, DSRSG Samuel later said: "I know that both the Chief Justice and Minister of Justice are committed to taking these proposals forward. The Judiciary and the Ministry of Justice will, accordingly, be leading the way over the coming weeks in developing a resolution and

The ongoing effort to establish a civilian oversight body for the police was discussed and there was a proposal to establish a court inspectorate. It was also noted that greater professionalism could also be achieved by moving away from politically appointed leadership in all branches of the criminal justice system, including the LNP.

al Justice Reform

security institutions. The ongoing effort to establish a civilian oversight body for the police was discussed and there was a proposal to establish a court inspectorate. It was also noted that greater professionalism could also be achieved by moving away from politically appointed leadership in all branches of the criminal justice system, including the LNP.

Also discussed were means and

their early stages of implementation, show signs of hope for reform.

Other proposals, which will require further consideration by relevant national stakeholders, included the introduction of plea bargaining; the reform of the Grand Jury system; the development of a national policy on provision of legal assistance to indigents, the possible development of a paralegal programme; and the

an implementation plan based on the outcome of the conference."

The event was also attended by representatives of the Law Reform Commission, the Law School, the Liberia National Bar Association, the National Traditional Council, the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission, the Liberia Peacebuilding Office, the House of Representatives, and the Ministry of Finance and representatives of civil society. Members of the international community, including the UN family, also made presentations and participated in expert panels. The conference was funded and technically supported by UNMIL. ■

Boosting Capacity to Protect Prisoners' Rights



Participants at the training

By James S. King

In a bid to strengthen the ability of Liberian institutions to monitor the conditions and rights of prisoners, UNMIL Quick Impact Projects funded a week-long training workshop for commissioners and monitors of the Independent National Commission on Human Rights (INCHR), representatives of civil society organizations, staff of the Bureau of Corrections and Rehabilitation and UNMIL Human Rights monitors in May 2013.

Speaking at the launch of the event, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Rule of Law Tamrat Samuel said: "UNMIL believes that initiatives of this nature are needed to build and promote rule of law which is paramount for the stability and prosperity of Liberia."

The UN envoy said his personal visits to the nation's prisons had taught him the "great importance of prison monitoring to guarantee prisoners' human rights and to assist prison authorities not only in their own understanding of human rights issues, but in highlighting the challenging circumstances in which they are required to perform their duties."

The US\$ 16,000 training project was initiated following a series of discussions between UNMIL Corrections Advisory Unit and Human Rights and Protection Section on the need to improve the quality of human rights monitoring in detention facilities. The workshop addressed issues relating to prisoners' rights, the role of monitors, and the use of oversight bodies, the balancing of security and the protection of human rights, and the issue of the rights of vulnerable groups.

At the end of the workshop participants developed a standard prison monitoring checklist for use in identifying human rights breaches and for recommending solutions to the government.

"The checklist will assist monitors to focus on basic rights that can realistically be achieved in Liberia which include prisoners' access to fresh air and exercise, healthcare, justice, and provision of food and clothing," said Samuel.

In addition to the training they received, officials of the INCHR also received material support in the form of a multipurpose Yamaha motorbike, 3 cameras, 1 laptop, a filing cabinet, assorted stationery supplies and 20 complaint boxes. These items are

meant to strengthen the human rights monitoring work of the INCHR in Montserrado, Lofa, Bong and Nimba Counties.

Samuel said UNMIL's support to INCHR is a "core transition priority" that requires "honest, fair and professional monitoring that are essential tools to assist national authorities to fulfill their obligations."

The INCHR was founded in 2005 and reconstituted in 2010. Observers say the organization faces a number of challenges in implementing its mandate of objectively monitoring conditions in Liberia's prisons.

Samuel noted improvements in the living conditions in Liberia's corrections facilities, but added that there is need for "an effective independent oversight body" to enhance protection of prisoners' rights. He said prisons are "closed institutions that operate away from public scrutiny," putting prisoners at risk of abuse, neglect and poor conditions.

Government of Liberia dignitaries present at the event included Jamesetta Wolokollie, Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, Hilary Siakor-Sirleaf, Assistant Minister of Justice and Boikai Dukuly, Acting Chairman of INCHR. ■



DSRSG Samuel at the launch

Liberia's Judiciary Achieves a Milestone

By Ruby Ofori

A five-year national plan developed by Liberia's Judiciary to raise the professional standards of judicial and justice officials in the country has been hailed as a milestone.

"This Plan should help to ensure that the Judicial Institute will develop as a centre of excellence in the training of judicial and justice officials in Liberia," said Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Rule of Law, Tamrat Samuel, at the launch of the Five-Year Strategic Plan of the James A.A Pierre Judicial Institute at the Temple of Justice.

"The plan provides a clear roadmap for the implementation of strategies to improve the capacity of judicial actors, improve the administration of justice, and enhance public confidence in the

judicial system in Liberia," said the UN envoy.

The five-year plan was jointly launched on 9 April with the 2011/2012 Consolidated End of Court Term Report produced by UNMIL's Legal and Judicial System Support Division. The report, which is the second of its kind, analyses trends in the trial and disposal of docketed cases during the 2011 - 2012 period.

DSRSG Samuel said the report gives national stakeholders an opportunity to review the state of case progression in the criminal justice system and enables them to recommend changes where necessary. He thanked the team in the office of the Chief Justice for providing invaluable assistance to UNMIL in compiling the report.

Liberia's judiciary has already taken the initiative to address some of the challenges outlined in the report. Draft legislation is in place to extend the jurisdiction of magistrates and amend

the jury law; Judicial Orders have been issued requiring judges to provide written reasons for their judgments and to allow for additional judges to be assigned to the courts with the largest numbers of cases.

"I would like to take this opportunity to commend the Judiciary for these initiatives," said Samuel. He reaffirmed the commitment of the United Nations family in Liberia to support justice sector reform and improved access to justice for the people of Liberia.

The government of Liberia was represented at the launch by Liberia's Chief Justice, Francis Korkpor. Other senior officers of Liberia's judiciary were present, including the Associate Justice and Chairman of the Board of Governors of the James A. A. Pierre Judicial Institute, Philip A. Z. Banks III, Associate Justices of the Supreme Court, the Executive Director of James A. A. Pierre Judicial Institute and officials of UNMIL. ■

Liberia

Is Life Getting Better?



Rev. Joel M. Jackson, Harper District Education Officer: Actually life is improving bit by bit in rural Liberia. Economically you can see a little bit of improvement with infrastructure. People are building infrastructures which is a sign of new life emerging. Education is improving but slowly; no efficient assessment of all education services and materials due to logistics problems in this part of rural Liberia



Choice E. Sampson, widow & trader, Grand Gedeh County: Looking at the trend of events with life in rural Liberia, I can proudly say life over here is getting better. People can now have a say in what they want especially for us women who were made to sit in back seats at most gatherings and not allowed to speak. For now, we have seen massive improvements in life in rural Liberia. Right now we women can participate in community forums, conferences and put forth ideas that improve our communities. This time, we are benefitting from training programmes across Liberia. Women are being taught cross border trade, their rights and everything you think about perhaps due to efforts by UN in Liberia.



Cecelia Harmon-Myers, Resident of Gbarnga, Bong County: Yes, I would say life is definitely getting better in rural Liberia as we see the erection of more basic infrastructures like clinics, community colleges, market halls and schools in every county. We feel the presence of police as depots are being established. Nevertheless, I urge government to double its efforts in the education sector as students are still sitting on the bare ground under make-shift structures and no trained teachers.



Alfredson Taikerweyah, Instructor, Cuttington University, Bong County: I am an inhabitant of rural Liberia and a development planner. Yes, life is indeed getting better in rural Liberia as we rural dwellers can now see and have access to key development indicators such as justice and security system, health facilities, communication system, standard education facilities at populated points, banking facilities and good road network adding value to life in rural Liberia as compared to the past.



Valeria Samalee, President, Rural Women, Harper District: I see life improving. Way back we did not have banking system but now you see people sell their crops and the next thing they do is go to the bank to deposit their money. People used to sit down with their problems and depended on country herb (local medicine). But today everybody is seeking treatment from health centers. So it is an improvement in rural life.

ns Speak

er in Rural Liberia?



Pewee M. Kesselly, Resident Engineer, Grand Gedeh County: Comparatively, I'll say yes, life is getting better for us in rural Liberia. For me, you can see changes of things in rural Liberia. We have many children especially girls enrollment in schools as it was in the past. Infrastructural wise, we are seeing modern buildings, many people are not living in houses made with thatches except for those who believe in the old days of life. With the improvements we can now go in shops and get available items to buy because of the road networks that now link us with Monrovia and other places.



Viola Cooper, President, Liberia Marketing Association, Bong County: I want to firstly be grateful to UNMIL Radio for reaching out to Liberians all over the country because it is through that radio we get to know what's happening in Monrovia. In fact, people in almost every city in rural Liberia can now watch football games through DSTV like others do in Monrovia. Business people in this part of rural Liberia also have access to banks and bank loans just like those in Monrovia. Unlike the past, government comes to people in rural Liberia to know what their specific development needs are. Vision 2030 development agenda is an example where rural dwellers were asked to contribute to the process.



Susie Blojeh, Petty Trader, Grand Gedeh County: I would say yes because now with life in rural Liberia, things are getting better because we are experiencing significant levels of freedom of expressions and movements. Unlike in the past, central government would sit in Monrovia and design policies for the counties. Today, when we look at formulation and implementation of Vision 2030, our county development funds and other issues concerning the counties, we all can now participate in the process at all levels, an indication that life is getting better in rural Liberia.



Thomas T. Neah, Jr., Photographer/Motorcyclist, Grand Gedeh County: I think life in rural Liberia is taking root. It is gradually picking up. Right now let me commend the government of Liberia for decentralizing everything across the country especially decentralization of community colleges in the counties. In the past, we had to travel all the way to Monrovia after high school before one could acquire a degree or career. Now, we are benefiting from the colleges around here. We have functioning health centers; we can remain here and obtain a driver's license or permit. Next thing government should do now is to continue the road maintenance to enable us freely move our goods.

