



Hailing Progress, Ban Urges Reconciliation

Peace in Liberia: The Stakes at the Border

Refugee Returns Exceed Expectations

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH KARIN LANDGREN



Message from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General



I assume my new role as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Liberia at a time when the country has enjoyed almost nine years of unbroken peace.

Liberia has made significant strides since the devastating civil conflict ended in 2003. Two democratic elections have been conducted since the peace agreement, and the 2011 election was managed by Liberia's national institutions. Participatory democracy is taking root.

Restoring a shattered nation is an arduous task. Liberia's progress, although predictably slow, has been commendable. The economy is recovering, the country has freed itself from the huge foreign debt that had accumulated over the years of conflict, roads are being repaired and Liberia's youngest generation is growing up in peace with no memory of the war.

UNMIL has been a constant companion along Liberia's long march to peace. International peacekeepers and the UN family have contributed significantly to transforming the country from a brutal battlefield to a peaceful nation. As UNMIL embarks on

gradual transition and reconfiguration, the focus will be largely on enhancing the capacity of Liberia's national institutions, especially those within the justice and security sectors.

Like any country emerging from conflict, Liberia continues to face challenges -- poverty, unemployment, corruption, and weak basic services. Other challenges include rehabilitating the judicial system, the need for constitutional reform, promoting human rights and genuine social reconciliation to heal the wounds of war.

Liberia still hosts more than 50,000 Ivorian refugees. Enabling a safe environment to which the refugees can feel confident returning is an important goal. Partly to this end, UNMIL and our sister peacekeeping mission in Côte d'Ivoire have stepped up cooperation along the border.

I look forward to working with all Liberians and all of Liberia's international partners to build upon the many achievements of the past nine years. Let us continue to work with dedication and commitment to help make Liberia a true peacekeeping success story.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Karin Landgren'.

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



4. Hailing Progress, Ban Urges Reconciliation

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon hails Liberia's progress in his new report but stresses the importance of reconciliation, confidence-building and the development and strengthening of State authority in border areas for lasting peace.



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In the wake of continuing violence in the western parts of Côte d'Ivoire, UNMIL and sister mission UNOCI enhance border patrols in collaboration with Liberian and Ivorian security forces.



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With the refugee status of Liberians ending on 30 June, the surge in the number of refugees returning home from exile exceeds expectations.

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Hailing Progress, Ban Urges Reconciliation

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has applauded Liberia for continuing to make progress in the country's post-conflict recovery but cautioned that much still remains to be done to address the wrongs of the past.

"I welcome the important efforts being made to transform the country,"

Ban wrote in his latest progress report to the Security Council on the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). "Much remains to be done, however, to address the historical injustices that persist, so that all Liberians feel that they are benefitting from the country's progress in stability, democracy and development," he added.

"Coherent and genuine national

reconciliation should be at the centre of the Liberian peace process," Ban continued, noting that it was essential for all Liberians to have "an opportunity to express their views about how to best address all aspects of reconciliation."

Ban also reaffirmed his recommendation, made in his special report of 16 April, that UNMIL's



Liberia has enjoyed peace since the arrival of peacekeepers in 2003

presence in the country be gradually reduced by about 4,200 troops in three phases between this year and 2015, when it will have a residual presence of approximately 3,750 peacekeepers.

Additionally, the Secretary-General recommended that the Mission's police component maintain its current strength of 498 advisers and 845 officers in seven formed police units, and be authorized to add three formed units as needed over the next three years. UNMIL currently has a total of 9,195 uniformed personnel, which includes 1,279 police, including those serving in formed police units.

He also requested that the Security Council approve his recommendations and extend UNMIL's mandate by one year, until 30 September 2013.

Drawing his attention to the

security situation along the 700 kilometre shared border between Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire, the UN chief voiced concern about continuing instability in what he said was a volatile and porous area. He welcomed ongoing efforts by both Governments to develop a coordinated strategy with regards to cross-border movements, illicit trafficking, and organized crime. He said the United

attention to reconciliation, confidence-building and the development and strengthening of State authority in border areas."

Ban hailed the progress being made in constructing the first justice and security hub in Gbarnga, Bong County, as "bringing security and justice closer to the population is also crucial"

The UN has maintained a

"Security measures alone will not create lasting stability. I would therefore underline the importance of devoting attention to reconciliation, confidence-building and the development and strengthening of State authority in border areas."

- Ban Ki-moon

Nations remained firmly committed to supporting ongoing efforts to develop a subregional strategy covering cross-border issues.

"Security measures alone will not create lasting stability," noted the Secretary-General. "I would therefore underline the importance of devoting

peacekeeping force in Liberia since 2003 to bolster a ceasefire agreement ending a decade of war that killed nearly 150,000 people, mostly civilians. UNMIL's mandate includes helping to restore the rule of law and democratic processes as well as facilitating humanitarian assistance. ■

Ban Ki-moon during a visit to Liberia





Peace in Liberia:

The Stakes at the Border

By Napoleon Viban and William Bwewusa

Much of the international boundary between Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire runs through dense tropical forest. As the canopy stretches into the distance, the view from a low flying UN patrol aircraft is stunning. But the UN Military Observers (UNMOs) on board are not completely taken in by the splendour of one of West Africa's last surviving forest reserves as it is hard to reach and much less penetrate. Little wonder that securing their

common border has over the years been a difficult task for both countries.

In Côte d'Ivoire's western regions, security is still fragile more than a year since the 2010 post-election violence. As ethnic tensions exacerbated by the conflict and compounded by inter-communal land disputes run high, Liberian security agencies have much work to do to monitor cross-border movements. But theirs remains a difficult watch as Liberian outposts along the porous 700 km border are few and far between.

For the most part, the routine among agents of the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization (BIN) and their counterparts of the Drug

Enforcement Agency (DEA) at the manned border crossings involved entry-exit controls for Ivoirians and Liberians engaged in trade or refugees crossing the border. But that changed on 8 June 2012, when an ambush on a ground patrol unit of the UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) near the Ivorian border town of Tai left several people dead, including seven UN peacekeepers. Since then, the watch on Liberia's border with Côte d'Ivoire has been anything but business as usual.

Along with the UN, both governments were unequivocal in their condemnation of the attack, allegedly launched from across the border by



Members of the Armed Forces of Liberia keeping vigil at the border

Ivorian dissidents and fugitives. At a quadripartite emergency meeting convened in Abidjan following the attack, the UN called for a reinforcement of cooperation between Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire. UNMIL and UNOCI reaffirmed UN support for efforts to consolidate peace in the sub region, and announced plans to intensify patrols along the common border.

Following the 13 June quadripartite meeting, military observers from UNMIL units across southeastern Liberia increased their already existing joint ground patrols, conducted with their counterparts from Liberian security units, including BIN and the Emergency Response Unit of the Liberian National Police. In Grand Gedeh County, UNMOs from Team Site 7 in Zwedru alone logged in a total of 92 ground patrols in July, up from 84 the previous month. The

team also posted six air-inserted-foot patrols (AIFP) in June – a record high. Until then, the unit had averaged one AIFP a month.

Team 7 patrols have generally been at the border localities of Tempo, Bh'ai and Garley Town in Grand Gedeh. Further down south, Team 6 in Harper, Maryland County, has been out on the watch in Kablaken, Dakay, Doukudi and Nyaaken. AIFPs have also been

under Operation Mayo, a framework for cross-border cooperation between the two missions and governments, in force since April 2006.

Patrol units from the two Missions and countries keep to their side of the border or area of responsibility. UN air assets are used to patrol both sides of the border.

The watch on the border is an

In Côte d'Ivoire's western regions, peace is still fragile more than a year since the 2010 post-election violence. Ethnic tensions exacerbated by the conflict and compounded by inter-communal land disputes run high. And troubled by the uneasy quiet next door, Liberian security agencies have much work to do to monitor cross-border movements.

conducted in areas like Webbo Chara where access by road is extremely difficult. These apart, special patrols have also been carried out in Grand Kru, River Gee and Grand Gedeh Counties.

On both flanks of the border, UNMIL and UNOCI forces conduct these patrols in collaboration with Liberian and Ivorian security forces

endeavour fraught with challenges. "The biggest issue is getting access to the border itself," concedes Team Site 6 leader, Capt. Alvado Studart. At best, access to most border localities is by near-impassable dirt roads, and forest trails that handle only foot traffic. "Where we can't patrol by road, we have air assets to fall back on," Studart adds, though. ■

Members of Liberia National Police get ready for a border patrol





Karin Landgren visits refugee camp

Operation Restore Hope

By Napoleon Viban

Critically short of personnel and logistics, the watch on the Ivorian border is even more daunting for Liberian security agencies. With fewer than 40 manned official posts across the entire length of the country's frontier with Sierra Leone, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire, more than a hundred clandestine border crossings continue to elude surveillance by the BIN, DEA and LNP. It thus came as no surprise that in the wake of the 8 June attack in Tai, the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) was called in to help secure the border with Côte d'Ivoire.

On at least two occasions since the AFL launched *Operation Restore Hope* in southeastern Liberia late last June, caches of arms have been discovered in Garleo Forest in the border district of Konobo during joint searches by AFL troops and officers from the Emergency Response Unit of the LNP. One haul in mid July included five RPG rockets, 437 rounds of ammunition for automatic weapons,

41 empty AK47 magazines, two empty pistol magazines, 331 AK 47 rounds and four RPG busters. The lot was shipped to Monrovia for forensic examination and eventual disposal.

But the campaign to secure the border with Côte d'Ivoire is by no means exclusively military. Tapping into their knowledge of the dense forest, Liberian authorities have been rallying border communities behind *Operation Restore Hope*.

"We've been consulting with our communities, the chiefs, the elders," says Peter L. Solo, Superintendent of Grand Gedeh County, citing a visit early in August to Tempo and Ziah. "We have been assuring them that the deployment of the AFL and the police is for their own security, in light of recent incidents at the border."

Solo said community leaders had welcomed the move by the government to reinforce security at the border, and were cooperating fully with the AFL. "They even assured us that they will assist in gathering intelligence from the local population," he said, adding that some Paramount chiefs

were actually considering setting up community watch teams to assist with the operation.

Local enthusiasm notwithstanding, the County Superintendent admitted the need for international assistance.

"Securing the border is a great challenge, and we'll need the support and collaboration of just everyone, especially UNMIL," he told UN FOCUS. As long as the western regions of Côte d'Ivoire remain volatile, Liberian security forces will need to be on perennial watch to protect the citizens.

While on a visit to Grand Gedeh in August, Special Representative of the Secretary-General Karin Landgren met with the Joint Task Force Command launched in June by the Liberian authorities to secure the country's 700-km long border with Côte d'Ivoire. "There's been a lot of attention and concerns about the border situation, and my impression is that the Liberian security forces themselves are stepping up to the task of security in this region," the UN envoy said.



Refugees being relocated

Consolidating Refugee Camps

By Sulaiman Momodu

Prompted by the reduced number of Ivorian refugees in Liberia and in view of the high cost of running refugee camps, the Government of Liberia is collaborating with the Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission (LRRRC) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to consolidate refugee camps in the country. Refugees from 15 villages in Nimba County, where they were allowed to stay during the peak influx in late 2010 and 2011, are also being

relocated to Bahn Refugee Camp.

The Ziah Refugee Camp, located some 58 kilometres from the Grand Gedeh County capital, Zwedru, was decommissioned on 29 June with 1,624 registered Ivorian refugees, including 754 males and 870 females, relocated to the PTP camp located at the former Prime Timber Production site. The relocation exercise in south-eastern Liberia started on 15 May but the camp closed ahead of the earlier schedule of September this year.

Ziah and five other refugee camps were established during the Ivorian refugee influx more than

one-and-a-half years ago. At the peak of the influx, more than 220,000 Ivorians crossed over into Liberia. This number has now reduced to less than 58,000.

Expressing gratitude and appreciation to the Government and the people of Liberia for hosting the refugees, the UNHCR Representative, Cosmas Chanda, said refugees are assured of improved services such as health, education, shelter, and water and sanitation at the camps where they are being relocated. He said the UN refugee agency is funding projects in host communities as a sign of appreciation for their assistance to the refugees. The Executive Director of the LRRRC, Cllr. Wheatonia Y. Dixon Barnes, noted that accessing Ziah camp has been a huge challenge with vehicles spending at least four hours on the 58-km road which has deteriorated with heavy seasonal rains.

In addition to Ziah camp, LRRRC and UNHCR officials say Dougee camp, which has a current population of more than 5,000 refugees, will also close in the course of 2012. In early August, Ivorian refugee leadership from the camp went on a "Go-and-See" visit to refugee camps including Little Wlebo, Bahn and PTP in preparation for the relocation exercise. The Little Wlebo camp in Maryland County has enough space to accommodate up to 20,000 refugees. At the moment the camp population is about 5,500.

Meanwhile, relocation of refugees from the 15 villages in Nimba is in progress. Recently, refugees in Sekimpa, Wea-Beadatuo, Zorgowee, Kialay and Beeplay villages were relocated to the Bahn Refugee Camp. Their erstwhile homes -- modest structures constructed for the refugees -- were handed over to the local population.

At the time of going to press, hundreds of Ivorians had started crossing over to seek refuge in Liberia as a result of renewed violence in the Western parts of Côte d'Ivoire close to the Liberian border. ■



Liberian Refugee Returns Exceed Expectations

By Sulaiman Momodu

About two months after their refugee status ended, the number of Liberians returning home from exile has exceeded expectations according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The refugee status for Liberians ended on 30 June.

Expressing delight that more Liberians are returning after many years in exile, UNHCR's Representative

in Liberia, Cosmas Chanda, said the number of refugees who registered to return before the June 30 deadline surpassed planning figures.

"We thank donors for their support to the repatriation process, but we need more support to facilitate voluntary return," he said, adding that the ongoing repatriation involves huge logistical, human and financial requirements. "We had planned to receive 15,000 returnees this year as the refugee status for Liberians ended. However, about 25,000 persons had

registered to return."

From February to August this year, more than 17,000 Liberians returned home with the highest monthly return of 4,481 recorded in August. Most of those who fled Liberia during two periods of conflict between 1989 and 2003 sought shelter in other West Africa countries, including Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Nigeria, and The Gambia.

On the last Friday of July, more than 1,600 Liberians returned home in the single-largest home-coming in



Liberian refugees return home

Sulaiman Momodu/UNHCR

We thank the UNHCR for facilitating our return.”

Since 2004, the UN refugee agency has facilitated the return of more than 143,200 Liberian refugees, including 1,278 in 2010 and 1,762 last year. This year has seen a surge in the number of returnees.

More than 10,000 Liberians still

Oretha Coffa, a 33-year-old single mother of three, thanked UNHCR for the grant. “I am going to use the amount I’ve received to start up a small business to support my family,” she said, hoping for brighter days ahead.

Liberia has abundant fertile land, rain and sunshine. With a strong belief that the soil is a bank, returnee Sawo

Since 2004, the UN refugee agency has facilitated the return of more than 140,000 Liberian refugees, including over 1,200 in 2010 and more than 1,700 last year. This year has seen a surge in the number of returnees.

need help to repatriate. The UNHCR hopes to repatriate them by this coming December. Currently, returnees receive repatriation and reintegration cash grant plus additional transportation to final destination in the sum of US\$375 per adult and US\$275 for each child below 18 years of age.

said he will be farming for a living. “With agriculture I will be able to feed my family, as well as sell the surplus to take care of other needs.”

As UNHCR and LRRRC continue to assist returnees, the hope among the former refugees is to never again be forced to flee their country. ■

Refugees cross the Cavalla River

recent years. The returnees included 79 who were flown from Ghana to Liberia on UNMIL flight while the rest were brought home on buses and barges, crossing the Cavalla river, from neighbouring Côte d’Ivoire.

They were received in Liberia by UNHCR staff after security and immigration formalities. Officials from the Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission welcomed and assured them of security and assistance to reintegrate.

Among recent returnees was Nathaniel Sawo, who left Liberia 20 years ago to escape forced recruitment during the civil war. Now 37 years old, he returned from Côte d’Ivoire with his wife and two children, who were seeing their country for the first time. “It is a pleasure to be home,” said Sawo. “When we were fleeing, we spent several days walking through dense, dangerous forest. This time, we were safely transported back home.

Sulaiman Momodu/UNHCR





Refugee

By Napoleon Viban and William Bwewusa

A way from home, in exile, life just can't quite be the same. So for most refugees, finding food, shelter and clothing are the immediate concerns. But as their plight stretches beyond the foreseeable future, the bigger picture sets in, taking their concerns way past basic necessities. Little wonder, then, that alongside protection, health and sanitation in the camps and host communities, education is emerging as a key intervention in the international humanitarian response to the plight of more than 50,000 Ivorian refugees presently in southeastern Liberia.

Prospects looked grim for especially children who were approaching their certificate exams when they fled the post-election conflict in Côte d'Ivoire early last year. For them, the future seemed compromised, as Liberia's national curriculum was alien to the academic regime under which the children attended school in Côte d'Ivoire. But thanks to timely intervention by UNICEF, all five refugee camps across southeastern Liberia now run full-fledged primary schools aligned to the Ivorian education system and curriculum. Away from the camps, too, several more such schools have been set up to cater to the children of refugees still living with host communities.

In all, more than 11,000 Ivorian children were able to continue their education in Liberia over the last academic year thanks to these schools. What's more, 393 of them effectively sat the exams for the Certificat d'études primaire et élémentaires (CEPE), equivalent to the Anglophone First School Leaving Certificate, which attests completion of primary education.

Photo: UNICEF

Children Excel in Exams!



PhotoUNICEF

An invigilator assists a student

By and large, it was a rare feat to not only conduct examinations for refugee children, but have this certified and approved by their country of origin.

The exam took place on 24 July 2012 with the refugee camps of Bahn (Nimba County), Duogee, Solo and PTP (Grand Gedeh County) and Little Wlebo (Maryland County) serving as exam centres.

UNICEF organized the exams in conjunction with the national authorities of both Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire. Other partners who pitched in to see the venture through included International Rescue Committee (IRC), Save the Children, PLAN International/Caritas, and Visions in Action, the UNHCR, the Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission (LRRRC), and camp managers. Officials from the Ivorian Ministry of Education travelled to

Liberia to invigilate and ensure the exams were conducted in conformity with standards enforced back home.

It was, by and large, a complex process that required close inter-agency and even cross-border coordination. And considerable logistics, too. Children living in distant communities had to be ferried to the exam centres nearest to them. Those from Ziah camp that was under closure, for instance, had to be relocated to PTP weeks before the exam. Besides helping to transport the children and their caregivers to and from the camps, the UNHCR also provided accommodation and food to support them until the exams were over. The exam scripts too had to be returned to Monrovia, from where they were shipped to Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, for marking and grading.

Candidates fielded by the five different centres (camps) included 74

from Bahn, 84 from Duogee, 126 from Solo, 72 from PTP and 37 from Little Wlebo. Overall performance was excellent, with an average pass rate of 84 per cent. PTP camp in Grand Gedeh posted the best performance, with a pass rate of 99 per cent.

Thanks to the CEPE exams conducted in Liberia, the successful candidates should be able to re-enter the Ivorian education system if their families choose to return home.

In the mean time, initiatives are afoot in the camps for a secondary cycle so that refugee children in Liberia can aspire to more than just elementary education. The refugee community and partner agencies such as UNESCO, UNICEF and UNHCR are working together to make that dream come true for those children who may continue to remain in Liberia for a long time. ■



Assisting New Ivori

By Sulaiman Momodu

Angelina, 35, will never forget the long distance she walked from her home in Côte d'Ivoire as she fled for safety with her two young children aged five and three years. She is also eight-month pregnant.

"Carrying the pregnancy and running away was the most difficult thing I had ever done," she explained, as she finally reached the Bahn Refugee Camp in Liberia's Nimba County.

Angelina is among more than

4,000 Ivorians who have crossed over to seek refuge in Liberia since 8 June this year following the killing of seven UN peacekeepers and several civilians by armed men on the Ivorian side of the border and subsequent security incidents near the border with Liberia. "We thank the UNHCR for transporting us from the border to the camp and taking care of us," said Angelina in Yacouba, a language widely spoken in Liberia's Nimba County.

The new arrivals are mainly pregnant women, nursing mothers, young women, children, and the

elderly. "The other day we were about to relocate new arrivals from the border, a pregnant refugee went into labour and gave birth. We later transported both mother and baby to the camp," said UNHCR's Emmanuel Karna.

The refugees hail from areas such as Tai, Toulépleu, Bloléquin and Danané. Their stories are all similar. La guerre -- "the war" -- is the main reason for fleeing. They say armed men had been terrorising their towns and villages and they had to be always running and hiding in the bushes. They had to trek several kilometres through dense



A UNHCR official helps newly arriving refugees

blankets, cooking utensils, and go through biometric screening. Refugees are also briefed on the dos and don'ts while in refuge.

Before the new arrivals, Liberia hosted more than 57,000 Ivorian refugees as violence flared following disputed presidential run-off elections in late 2010 and early 2011. At the peak of the emergency, some 220,000 Ivorians are estimated to have sought refuge in Liberia. UNHCR commenced facilitated voluntary repatriation of refugees following the signing of a Tripartite Agreement in August 2011 with Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, and UNHCR as parties. Many refugees also returned on their own, but others have indicated that they would like to stay in Liberia for a much longer time.

In May this year, ambassadors from all 15 members of the UN Security Council paid a visit to the PTP Refugee Camp in Liberia as part of a mission to assess the security situation in the region. The 15 envoys led by Ambassador Susan Rice of the United States were among a 32-member UN delegation from New York to visit the camp at the former Prime Timber Production compound in Grand Gedeh

Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, the Government of Liberia has the primary responsibility to protect refugees on its territory.

The Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission (LRRRC) says all refugees shall be strongly encouraged to relocate to refugee camps. "All refugees in refugee camps will continue to enjoy protection and receive individual material assistance and services as per current standards. Refugees residing in communities in Nimba, Grand Gedeh, River Gee and Maryland counties, all bordering Côte d'Ivoire where the Government of Liberia is making all efforts to strengthen its security apparatus, shall not receive individual material assistance and services and shall be referred to refugee camps," says the LRRRC Acting Executive Director Chara Itoka Cooper.

In August, Special Representative of the Secretary-General Karin Landgren visited the PTP Refugee Camp to get a firsthand impression of assistance to Ivorian refugees. During her visit, she interacted with refugees and called for peaceful and civilian character of refugee camps to be maintained. "It is very important that refugee camps remain places of safety and protection," she stressed.

As the Government of Liberia, UNHCR and partners continue to provide assistance to Ivorian refugees, site clearing in camps, shelter, funding, and deteriorating roads during seasonal rains pose serious challenges. "Notwithstanding these challenges, we will always remain committed to ensuring international protection and humanitarian services to refugees in line with acceptable standards," UNHCR Deputy Representative Robert Tibagwa says.

For Angelina and her compatriots, the refugee camps offer a roof over their heads in addition to food, water and sanitation, and medical care. Asked when she would like to return to Côte d'Ivoire, Angelina said: "Only God knows. I will only return to Côte d'Ivoire when I'm sure there is peace." ■

Ivorian Refugees

forests and sometimes in pouring rain before arriving on the border with Liberia from where they were assisted by the UN refugee agency and partners to relocate to camps.

New arrivals have been reported in Grand Gedeh and Maryland counties but the majority of more than 3,000 civilians crossed over into Nimba County in mid-August. Upon arrival in the camps, the refugees stay in transit centres for some days before they are provided shelter materials and assisted to build their own individual shelter. They also receive food, and non-food items such as buckets, mats,

County. During their interaction with the Security Council, refugee leaders said their areas of return remained insecure, claiming that armed gangs roamed the area. Some claimed their cocoa plantations were being illegally occupied.

The new arrivals are encouraged to relocate from border areas in line with the policy of the Government of Liberia. The government has reminded humanitarian actors that as enshrined in the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1969 Addis Ababa Convention governing the Specifics

“Transition does not mean

A veteran UN diplomat with considerable experience in peacekeeping, **Karin Landgren** of Sweden has assumed duty as Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Coordinator of UN Operations in Liberia. In an exclusive interview with Editor **Mathew Elavanalthoduka**, she discusses her priorities, reiterates that reduction in military strength does not mean UNMIL is leaving Liberia, and urges Liberians to actively participate in political processes that will help bring about genuine reconciliation and stability. Excerpts:

UN FOCUS: It is almost nine years since UNMIL first deployed, two national, democratic elections are behind us and Liberia has enjoyed peace throughout this period. Now you are at the helm of UNMIL. What are your priorities?

Karin Landgren: My top priority is to move forward with a smooth security transition. The Security Council has instructed a troop reduction of about 50 per cent over the next three years; how we manage this will be very important. We want to do it by working closely with the Government, and making sure we have the order right in the locations where we transition. It is also important that the Government step up their own security strength.

When I arrived, I was fortunate to attend the Security Transition Workshop with the President as well as the Justice, Defence and Internal Affairs Ministers to discuss what is foreseen over the next three years. The Chairman of the Peace Building Commission's Liberia Configuration was also there. The Commission has particular interest in the Justice and Security Hubs and in strengthening policing in Liberia. I've been encouraged by the Government's demonstrated commitments to strengthen Liberian security agencies, including in increased budgetary allocations. Liberia will



need continued strong investments, particularly in the police. The issues of security sector reform and civilian oversight of security actors also need attention, and we are looking at

different programmes across the UN more broadly in support of our justice and security aspect of the transition.

The second priority is the continued instability at the border

the departure of UNMIL...”

with Côte d’Ivoire. The security situation has not improved since the 8 June attack on Ivorian civilians and security forces, along with UN peacekeepers. There are concerns on both sides of the border about how best to manage the situation. UNMIL will work with the Liberian Government to strengthen their security to manage that situation. We have also strengthened our cooperation with UNOCI. I visited the largest refugee camp last week, in Zwedru, and also met the Superintendent of Grand Gedeh County. It’s clear that there are some known measures that the Government has committed to taking and that are awaiting implementation. In particular, the Government is committed to stationing 15 Liberia National Police officers at each refugee camp. There is commitment to screening arriving asylum seekers by the Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission (LRRRC). These measures are part of better security at the border areas. The commitment of the Government to not allow its territory to be used as a staging ground for attacks against another country is very welcome.

The third major priority is the UN’s broader support to the Government as it continues to address some of the fundamental issues that are so relevant to the country’s future stability and peace consolidation. The process of national reconciliation is important. Constitutional reform, which has been pending for a while, is critical to decentralization. And there are issues around the management of Liberia’s huge natural resources. The economic potential of Liberia makes me optimistic about the country’s future but I am also aware of the way natural resources fuel conflict in other countries.

Security remains a concern for most

Liberians. There have been questions about the quality and quantity of the 4,000 plus Liberia National Police which the UN helped restructure and train. Do you feel that improving the professionalism and increasing the number of the Police should be a priority at the moment especially in view of the security vacuum resulting from UNMIL’s transition?

The police have a critical role to play in the transition process, as Liberia takes the lead in security. Issues of professionalism, and the issues of numbers, are equally important. It’s not a one-for-one matching process as UNMIL draws down. UNMIL already reduced its strength from its initial 15,000 military personnel, and Liberia has not experienced greater security problems as a result. So I don’t think we can speak of a security vacuum. At the same time, the population’s trust in the police is also a factor. I want to highlight the importance of creating that relationship of trust between the police and populations. Inclusiveness in national institutions is vital.

Liberia is unfortunately part of a historically volatile region and violence and political instability in neighbours like Côte d’Ivoire and Guinea can impact the country almost instantly. How will this regional fragility influence UNMIL’s drawdown process?

Consideration of the situation in the region is very much on our minds in managing this transition. In addition to the border situation with Côte d’Ivoire, we also have the upcoming Sierra Leonean elections under consideration. Low-risk locations would be the first to transition; locations assessed to be of higher risk would come later. The Government should have ample lead time as we transition to prepare in the different locations. One of the products of

the Transition Workshop was a road map -- a simple matrix -- to work out joint planning and Government preparedness. We will also want to appeal to donors to help support the transition process adequately.

Finally, as we move into transition, it is important to underline that even though the military component will be reduced, UNMIL’s response capacity may be reinforced by additional Formed Police Units, given the situation on the ground.

You have just taken over the leadership of UNMIL. Do you have a message to the people of Liberia and also to the uniformed and civilian personnel of the Mission?

If UNMIL is able to start this transition process today, it is because Liberia has moved in the right direction, on the path to peace, for nine years, with two peaceful and democratic elections and successful political processes. This is a very positive sign and Liberia is recognized worldwide for its achievements as a country on the verge of being an international success story. So transition should be seen in a positive light, and transition does not mean the departure of UNMIL from Liberia.

We look to the Liberian people themselves to do their part not only in maintaining security and law and order but to be active participants in those political processes that will bring lasting peace and stability. We want to see Liberians actively participating in national reconciliation and dialogue around constitutional reforms. These are fundamental to having a stable country. Those are the words of encouragement that I would like to offer. I would also like to thank all our colleagues and all Liberians that I’ve met for a very warm welcome.

Thank you.



Chair of Liberia Peace-Building Commission consults civil

By Daniel Mensah Brande

To streamline strategies and marshal resources with the support of national and international actors for post-conflict peace-building and recovery of Liberia, the new Chair of the United Nations Peace-Building Commission Country's Configuration for Liberia, Ambassador Staffan Tillander, is actively reaching out to grassroots organizations in the country.

The Peace-Building Commission

(PBC) is an intergovernmental advisory body that supports peace efforts in countries emerging from conflict. In addition to Liberia, African countries currently on the agenda of the PBC are Burundi, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, and the Central African Republic.

During his recent visit to Liberia, the second since assuming the Chair of the Liberia Configuration early this year, Ambassador Tillander held a series of consultations with civil society organizations, peace committees, and local political and

traditional leaders in Bong and Lofa counties, in addition to visiting key rule of law facilities.

In the Bong County administrative capital, Gbarnga, Ambassador Tillander, in the company of the new Head of the United Nations Mission in Liberia, Karin Landgren, and the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Rule of Law, Louis Aucoin, inspected the US\$3.7 million Regional Justice and Security Hub being constructed through the UN Peace-building Fund. The Hub will house command structures of



Ambassador Tillander on a visit to the Gbarnga Hub

Building civil society

justice and security providers to make justice affordable and accessible to the people of Central Liberia.

The two top UN envoys were conducted round the project by the Chief Technical Advisor to the UNOPS office in Liberia, Lakis Papastavrou, who explained the various components of the Hub and their functions, and the level of work so far done. Ambassador Tillander and SRSG Landgren expressed concern over the effectiveness of the public outreach activities carried out to enable the local people fully

understand the concept of the hub. They also expressed worry over the delay in completing the project on time, calling on the construction and management teams to use the lessons learnt from the Gbarnga experience to ensure that the four remaining hubs to be constructed in other parts of the country are completed on schedule.

Ambassador Tillander, who has extensive knowledge of African politics, having served as Swedish ambassador to Sudan, Djibouti, Ethiopia, and the African Union, also chaired a forum in Gbarnga attended by over 50 civil society organizations, and gathered first-hand information on the people's perception of the Hub.

During the deliberations, the

when it becomes operational.

Tillander also met with members of the Totota WIPNET, a powerful women peace advocate group that played a major role in disarming ex-combatants after the Liberian civil war. The group, which now focuses on fighting gender violence and empowering women, told the UN envoy that it had established an effective mechanism for resolving cases of domestic violence and that it carries its quasi-judicial activities in close collaboration with the Liberia National Police. Ambassador Tillander was highly impressed by the several peace-building initiatives undertaken by the women, describing them as an "inspiration" to women in other parts

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civil society groups poured out their frustrations over the way the project was being handled, saying they had been marginalized in the designing and management of the project, adding that the concept had not been adequately promoted among the local population. They also told the Chair of Liberia Configuration that "land dispute has become the newest crisis" in the county, and called for the setting up of an effective mechanism for handling land issues.

Responding, Ambassador Tillander commended the commitment of the civil society groups to the sustenance of peace in Liberia, and assured them that their concerns would be looked into. He explained the significance of the Hub concept to the consolidation of peace and development in Liberia, urging the people of Central Liberia to make effective use of the Gbarnga Hub

of Liberia and the world at large.

During his visit to Lofa County, Ambassador Tillander held discussions in Zorzor with local political and traditional leaders, and staff of the Land Coordination Center and Zorzor Peace Council, two peace-building interventions supported by the UN Peace-Building Commission. The UN envoy, who also visited the Liberia-Guinea border post at Yeallah and interacted with Liberian and Guinean immigration officials, stressed the determination of the PBC to continue to work with UNMIL and the Government of Liberia to ensure that Liberia gets the needed support to fully build its capacity.

In Monrovia, Ambassador Tillander also held discussions with President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as well as senior UN and Liberian government officials. ■



New Barracks for Liberia

By Romeo Togba

The trumpeting sound of the Liberia National Police (LNP) Band resonated across Horton Avenue in Monrovia as the band members played beneath the shadows of three towering structures on a rare sunny day in June. They were entertaining guests entering the hall for the ceremonies marking the official handing over of the newly

renovated police barracks to Liberian government authorities.

“These apartments will really help ease the housing problems of some of us police officers,” said LNP officer Miama Weeks.

The US\$ 1 million project was executed under the Justice and Security Trust Fund managed by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). The Japanese Government provided the funds for the project.

Speaking at the handing over

ceremonies, UNDP Country Director Dominic Sam said the initiative is part of the strategic plan to boost the capacity of the Liberia National Police. “Today, we are seeing some of the really concrete results of that strategic plan that was put together four years ago,” he noted.

Sam praised progress in the operations of the LNP including increased police patrols on the streets and along the borders. “A lot has been achieved and a lot still



The newly built barracks



UNPOL Commissioner Nielsen at the hand-over

Shunsuke Sato, First Secretary at the Japanese Embassy in Accra representing his government at the event, noted that the renovation of the barracks was part of Japan’s support to the rehabilitation of public infrastructure in the country.

public infrastructure in the country. He hoped that the newly renovated facilities would serve as an added impetus to the job being done by the national police.

“We hope this renovation of

that the buildings will be used for their intended purpose, he said officers occupying the facilities will be expected to sign a bond committing themselves to the proper upkeep of the barracks.

“My advice to officers who will be occupying these buildings is that you have to be able to maintain these structures by keeping them tidy,” Massaquoi cautioned the LNP officers. “If you don’t clean these buildings, in the next few months, you have no barracks to proudly say is yours.” He hoped that the favorable environment at the newly renovated barracks will help boost the performance of LNP officers.

“When the officers can be able to sleep in these facilities, they will be able to focus properly and adhere to the application of the rule of law,” Massaquoi observed. “We will appeal to the Japanese to look to the south east in the construction of barracks. That is one of the most critical areas in the country,” Massaquoi added. ■

National Police

needs to be achieved but we need to acknowledge and celebrate some of these accomplishments,” he said. He recognized the critical support from various partners in enhancing the capacity of the law enforcement agency.

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the barracks will help create better working conditions and lead to higher performance of the police service,” Sato noted, urging the LNP to institute measures for the proper upkeep of the barracks. He said supporting peace and security was a major focus of the Japanese government’s assistance to Africa.

Inspector General of LNP Chris Massaquoi praised Liberia’s development partners for the renovation of the barracks. Promising



UNFPA Calls for Increased Family Planning Awareness

By James S. King

During a visit to Liberia in July, UNFPA Executive Director Babatunde Osotimehin promised the population agency's continued assistance to Liberia's youth development and maternal mortality programmes and called for increased awareness on family planning in the country. Osotimehin termed the death of a woman at childbirth as "unacceptable". "A woman giving

birth is doing society a service and there should be no reason acceptable if she dies in the process." He said infection and loss of blood during child birth are preventable.

During his visit, Osotimehin met with President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Special Representative of the Secretary-General Karin Landgren, authorities of Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, staff of UNFPA, and various other stakeholders. Liberia's Deputy Health Minister Bernice Dahn presented Osotimehin a road map

that seeks to accelerate reduction of maternal and newborn mortality and morbidity in the country.

During a visit to Redemption Hospital located on Bushrod Island, Monrovia, Osotimehin toured the maternity hall and Emergency Obstetric Care centre to acquaint himself with UNFPA sponsored programmes on family planning and fistula. Osotimehin said UNFPA's assistance to Liberia is meant to "improve the potential of every youth, make every pregnancy wanted and



Osoimehin addresses a meeting

sed ness

Empowering young women and giving them necessary information and support would help adolescent girls “make informed family planning decisions, help them stay in school as well as reduce maternal mortality,” Osoimehin said.

make every child birth safe, a goal that fits into Liberia’s youth development programme.”

Speaking at a presentation of census analysis reports by Liberia Institute for Statistics and Geo-Information Services (LISGIS) at Monrovia City Hall, Osoimehin said UNFPA was a “credible partner” to LISGIS during Liberia’s 2008 census. He praised LISGIS for implementation of standardized census exercise in Liberia but noted that Africa needed to still improve on methods of accurate

data collection and keeping of birth and death records.

LISGIS’ census report indicated that 60 per cent of Liberia’s population are youth, a situation Osoimehin said makes UNFPA to “pay greater attention to youth issues, particularly adolescent girls.” He said adolescent girls represent the most “vulnerable” class of Liberia’s citizens. Osoimehin said he was impressed by Liberian Government’s commitment to address issues affecting young people despite the challenges.

Empowering young women and

giving them necessary information and support would help adolescent girls “make informed family planning decisions, help them stay in school as well as reduce maternal mortality,” Osoimehin said. He also cited insufficient nutrition as another problem impeding the growth and education of adolescent girls in Liberia. He assured UNFPA’s commitment to help Government of Liberia as it invests in agriculture to ensure food security and equal employment opportunities for every Liberian, including adolescent girls. ■



New Lease of Life for Fis

By Daniel Mensah Brande

For many victims of the fistula disease, life is often a long nightmare. However, a number of survivors of the dreaded disease in Liberia's Bong County are a happier lot today as a better future awaits them thanks to the vocational skills they acquired recently.

In collaboration with Liberia's Ministry of Health and Social Welfare and the Phebe Hospital in Suakoko District of Bong County, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has been equipping fistula survivors

with vocational skills to enable them overcome the stigma attached to the disease and reintegrate into society.

Sixteen of the survivors, majority of whom had the disease through unsuccessful delivery by traditional midwives, were recently awarded certificates after receiving training at the Fistula Rehabilitation and Reintegration Centre at the Phebe Hospital. The Centre was established by the UNFPA with support from the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare.

Obstetric fistula is an injury caused by the lack of obstetric care when a woman has a long or obstructed delivery, resulting in the development

of an abnormal communication between the vagina and the bladder or the vagina and the rectum or both, which culminates in the leaking of urine and/or faeces.

The psychological, economic and social consequences of the disease can be devastating. The victims often find themselves ostracized by husbands, friends and families. The stigma and the malodour prevent the women from working or participating in social activities.

The survivors of the disease, who were trained in pastry-making, tie-and-dye, dress-making, hair dressing, soap-making, and



Proud graduates display their certificates

Daniel Mensah Brande/UNMIL

began in 2007 had been successful. The 16 women, one of whom comes from Sierra Leone, were each given startup kits and US\$100 to begin small businesses in their communities. In addition, they were each given a cell phone to enable them to be in regular touch with the Liberia Fistula Project for monitoring purpose.

Overwhelmed by the new lease of life given them, the survivors put up a drama piece depicting how they contracted the fistula disease, and the challenges of coping with the stigma attached to it, advising pregnant women to always seek medical service from hospitals and clinics, and avoid going to traditional midwives, whom they claimed were the main cause of the disease.

In all, more than 40 fistula survivors had received vocational skills training at the centre since the fistula survivor rehabilitation and reintegration programme was moved from Jacob Town in Monrovia to Phebe in August 2010.

While the exact prevalence of obstetric fistula in Liberia is not known, it is estimated that many new cases occur every year. The disease seems to be common among rural women due to the lack of access to maternal health, particularly emergency obstetric care.

However, as Liberia slowly recovers from the devastation caused by the civil conflict, hopes are high of better access to medical care and less number of fistula cases. ■

stula Survivors

cosmetology at the Rehabilitation Centre, have harrowing stories of how they became social outcasts, rejected by their husbands, family members, friends and the entire community.

Speaking at the certificate-awarding ceremony, the Manager of the Liberia Fistula Project, Dr. John Mulbah, said the Fistula Project has three components -- prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation. He cited rehabilitation as a major problem as cooperation of the entire community to accept survivors back into society is crucial. Dr. Mulbah, one of Liberia's only two fistula surgeons, said 93 per cent out of the more than 950 fistula

cases operated upon since the project

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Empowering Adolescence

By Romeo Togba

Tulie Ballah, 13, held out a portrait of a girl studying under candle light. The portrait was her own handiwork, resulting from a training programme for adolescent girls.

“Due to the Joint Programme on Adolescent Girls Empowerment, I am today able to draw beautiful objects. This picture signifies a young

woman’s determination to acquire education,” the teenager told the audience that had gathered at West Point, Monrovia, to see the display of artistic works by the girls benefiting from the empowerment programme.

Like Ballah, at least 500 girls in five communities in Montserrado and Gbarpolu Counties are benefitting from the programme which is a pilot project that involves UNICEF, UN WOMEN, UNFPA, WHO and

UNESCO in collaboration with the government of Liberia.

“We are at this stage targeting adolescent girls in hard-to-reach and vulnerable communities in Gbarpolu and Montserrado counties,” Kula Fofanah, Coordinator of the Adolescent Girls Unit at the Ministry of Gender and Development said.

The Programme mixes education, skills training, sexual and reproductive health education as well as conflict



Adolescent girls attend a training programme

nt Girls

resolution and peace building as tools for the empowerment of adolescent girls.

“We want to go all out to help empower these young girls,” Fofanah stressed, applauding the UN for making sexual and reproductive health education a component of the empowerment programme. “We are optimistic that the sexual and reproductive health education will help us address the problem

of unintended pregnancy in the country.” According to Fofanah, the rate of unintended pregnancy among adolescent girls in Liberia is a staggering 35 percent.

Lezarnya Weekes, Coordinator of the UN joint Programme on Adolescence Girls Empowerment, is also keen to highlight the importance of sexual and reproductive health education for the girls. “Health is an important entry point because healthy adolescents today will make healthy adults tomorrow. Ensuring that the adolescent girls stay healthy and are not victims of unintended pregnancy could help them become educated and productive citizens,” Weekes points out.

The participation of the benefiting communities in the efforts to empower adolescent girls has been an important highlight of the Joint Programme on

other kids to follow.”

“Every Saturday, these children roam the community with information on how to adopt good hygiene and sanitation practices,” says Robert Kumeh, 45, another resident of West Point. “The children go around telling us to wash our hands whenever we use the wash room as well as before we eat.”

Watta Kollie a resident of Bensonville, Montserrado County, and a mother of two adolescent girls, notes that as a result of the awareness being carried by beneficiaries of the joint programme in her community, she has come to realize that the girl child should have a say whether or not she should be sent to the *sande bush* [traditional practices school for girls].

“I now know that the sending of the girl child to the sande bush should be something that she should decide on

“Health is an important entry point because healthy adolescents today will make healthy adults tomorrow. Ensuring that the adolescent girls stay healthy and are not victims of unintended pregnancy could help them become educated and productive citizens.”

Adolescent Girls Empowerment.

“The Community’s participation in this initiative is really crucial to realize the goals of the programme, which are, among other things, to improve the lives and livelihood skills, improve access to reproductive health and to improve the adolescent girls’ knowledge on how to prevent sexual and gender based violence and how to protect them against harmful traditional practices,” Weekes adds.

“The children who are benefitting from this programme have certainly turned a corner in the way they go about their business in the community these days,” says Sarah Tugbeh, an elderly resident of the Monrovia suburb of West Point. “These children are taking their education serious and always setting positive examples for

by herself and not us parents forcing her to go there,” Watta pointed out.

Many of the beneficiaries are also full of praise for the programme and the positive transformation it is having on them. “I am now committed to staying in school rather than just going first semester and dropping in the second,” Antoinette Hodge, 14, says.

Like Ballah, whose painting captured the imagination of many of those who witnessed the display, her fellow beneficiaries are also aiming to use the training and opportunities being afforded them to paint new and positive images of themselves in their communities.

“We will make the best use of this opportunity to help improve our wellbeing for the betterment of our society,” the beneficiaries chorus. ■



The Appeal seeks funds for 36 projects

Funds Sought for Humanitarian Projects

By Seble Worku

A mid-year review of the Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP) has sought nearly US\$ 98 million for various projects in Liberia. The 2012 CAP review, launched in July by Humanitarian and Resident Coordinator Moustapha Soumaré, seeks to implement 36 projects presented by 21 participating agencies in the areas of Water & Sanitation, Education, Health, Protection, Food aid, Agriculture, and Nutrition.

In major humanitarian crises and disasters, which necessitate many aid agencies to deploy on the ground, it is important to coordinate efforts to avoid gaps and duplication, focus on urgent needs, and work towards longer-term recovery. A common strategic approach is essential for an efficient response that builds on each

organization's strengths, allowing for a cohesive rather than a competitive appeal for funds. When revised at mid-year, the CAP helps monitor the progress and implementation of the common strategic approach, and highlight funding shortfalls that could undermine the attainment of the common strategic objectives.

When initially launched on in February 2012, the Liberia CAP targeted the same population categories as in the current review, including refugees, third country nationals, and vulnerable Liberians in communities that hosted refugees. While the number of refugees has significantly reduced from an estimated 128,000 at the initial CAP launch in February, to a little over 50,000 at the mid-year review, the number of vulnerable Liberians and third country nationals estimated at 140,000 and 2,000 individuals respectively has remained unchanged.

"Even though we no longer are in the same situation as we were last year, there are pressing needs which still require our urgent attention," said Soumaré, noting that "this goes both for the Ivorian refugees as well as the Liberian people who, despite their own vulnerability, have kindly opened their homes and hearts to their neighbors." The Humanitarian Coordinator extended the International Community's gratitude to those Liberian families who have "so generously and unequivocally come to the assistance of brothers and sisters in need."

In spite of the relative improvement of the situation, significant humanitarian and recovery assistance is still required to address the needs of the targeted population categories, and particularly the host communities in Nimba, Grand Gedeh, River Gee and Maryland counties. Failure to provide this assistance will harm the lives of refugees and livelihoods of vulnerable host populations, hinder recovery and community rehabilitation efforts, and further exacerbate and destabilize the region along the border with Côte d'Ivoire. The mid-year appeal is exactly about preventing this from happening. ■



Launch of re-usable sanitary pads

Sanitary Pads Project Launched at Monrovia Central Prison

By James S. King

A pilot project aimed at promoting hygiene among female inmates at prisons across Liberia was launched in July at the Monrovia Central Prison (MCP). The project involves training inmates and corrections officers in producing re-usable sanitary pads. The initiative was conceived by the Ministry of Justice (Mo J) and funded by UNMIL. While promoting hygiene among female prison inmates, the project will also empower them economically as the products will be sold at affordable prices in Liberia.

Assistant Justice Minister for Administration Oretha S. Davis said the hygiene project is expected to benefit women inmates in the management of their own health while in detention. Six female inmates including two sentenced and fifteen

correction officers were selected for initial training in the production of the sanitary pads. Davis said the inmates and correction officers will also benefit from the project by becoming “consumers of their own products”.

Health and hygiene standards are expected to improve at MCP following ongoing awareness activities at the prison. The sanitary pads will be sold to low income earners in Liberia. David urged female inmates to take the hygiene training seriously for their own health gains.

Madhumita Sarkar, UN Gender Based Violence (UNGBV) Advisor, called for more donor assistance to the women hygiene project. She said young women’s access to sanitary pads will encourage them to continue schooling. She said the sanitary pad project is an extension of women’s capacity building programme started two years ago and called for involvement of men as partners of the

project.

The General Manager of Safety Plus, Abba Sheriff, who explained the usage and production methods of the sanitary pad described it as safe, convenient and reusable. “The product is made of sponge and carefully selected water resistant materials designed for multiple uses,” he said. He said production of the sanitary pads is the right step forward for the promotion of hygiene amongst women, particularly low income earners.

The head of Women Section at MCP, Krubo Siryon, appealed to UNMIL for material assistance to those who will graduate from the hygiene and sanitary production training programme. Siryon said if given material assistance, the graduates would be able to fully utilize the skills acquired from the programme.

The project will be extended later to other prison centers across Liberia. ■

Liberian

“How can Liberia acceler



Nellie Brown, Businesswoman, Tubmanburg, Bomi County: In order for us to expand rural development, we should first look at self-sustenance in terms of agriculture. We must also focus on expanding and opening more farm to market roads. Urban dwellers should also add value to what is produced by rural inhabitants and as well appreciate their products. Government should provide subsidies to rural farmers as well as create market spaces where farmers can sell their products. It would also be prudent that rural dwellers elect their local leaderships rather than appointing them. Leaders such as the superintendents, assistant superintendents for development, district commissioners should be elected. By this, they would work at the will and pleasure of the people they serve and not anyone else. They could be held accountable to those who elect them. We also need to pay keen attention to health by improving the wages and salaries of our nurses and doctors so that they will be encouraged to work in rural areas to provide quality services to our people.



Agnes Lloyd Artis, Township Commissioner, Owensgrove Township, Grand Bassa County: The way to do this is having constant town hall meetings with rural people. For instance, educating them on what they can do to help develop their communities; what development means in this new era; and how they can help the government and development partners to improve their lives.



P. Matthew Gibson, District Commissioner, District Number 4, Grand Bassa County: Well, the most important thing is taking the government back to the people. Rural dwellers need to be part of decision making, especially decisions that affect their lives for the long term. We have to cultivate in them a sense of ownership; they need to be aware that they too are stakeholders whose roles are essential in any development initiatives. We need to involve them so that they feel they own those projects and therefore will seek to protect them.



Maurier K.L. Wisseh, Resident, Loop 3 Community, Buchanan, Grand Bassa County: In addition to providing proper road networks to achieve rural development, I think we need to provide the relevant education to young people across rural settlements in order to bring them to level of their urban compatriots to instill in them self confidence and independence. The existence of such an environment largely depends on policies promoting rural development. The effectiveness of such policies in turn depends on a conceptual framework about the quality of life we want our rural people to live in the future.



Beatrice M. Choloply, UNMIL Engineer Section, Tubmanburg, Bomi County: We need to firstly look at the definition of rural development before putting forth my point. Rural development is the process of improving the economic well-being of people/communities in the non-urban areas. Based on the definition given, Liberia can accelerate rural development through the supply of safe drinking water, commercial improvement, provision of electricity, creation of accelerated training programs, improvement of the ecosystem, construction of roads to facilitate agricultural activities among others.



Dehyeetee Deesoe, Clan Chief, District Number 3 "C", Grand Bassa County: Development will not take place without empowering people, mainly women. If women in the interior can get access to good roads and bring their produce to town and sell them, they will be able to send their children to school. Their children will return home and help develop their towns and villages.

ns Speak

rate rural development”?



T. Romeo Williams Sr., Youth Activist, Buchanan, Grand Bassa County: My view on this is to decentralize the activities of government; create a transparent and an open system where monies allocated for rural development will be spent accordingly. This means that people in leadership at all levels will have to be sincere in accelerating development. The entire process calls for rebuilding of confidence that allows rural dwellers to view development as a meaningful venture and not just someone wanting to use them as means of enriching themselves.



Aisha Kamara, Social, Worker Action Aid-Liberia, Gbarpolu County: Rural development can be accelerated if we allow rural inhabitants participate in activities that address their basic social and economic needs. From my perspective, rural development can be accelerated by involving rural dwellers in designing and implementing rural development programmes. Outsiders' expertise alone may not work because they do not understand the culture, language and other practices that are common to local people. Involving the people at that level of the development process will promote sustainability and ownership of the development programme. Rural development can also be achieved if you have the right people in the right places, meaning qualified people to the implementation development plan. Accelerating rural development should take into consideration decentralizing basic social services including, economic, education, infrastructure, social and politics making it more assessable to people in rural areas.



Pastor Nerison Miah, Christ Mission International, Bomi County: To ensure rural development, government will have to ensure the decentralization programs ranging from peace, security, reconciliation, road development, education and economic revitalization. I would particularly speak to issues about the educational sector where I feel it will be necessary to have at least two high schools at the district level of all the 15 counties in Liberia. Every county should have at least a university, a vocational or technical college to prevent students' migration to urban communities in pursuit of higher education. I would also encourage banking institutions to extend some of their services to rural area. Authorities of the Land Commission should work closely with local elders and chiefs to amicably resolve all land disputes. I also suggest that we go back to our usual "palaver hut" meetings where we once assembled to settle our differences as a people.



Abel M. Nyounbol, Statutory District Superintendent, Wee Statutory District, Grand Bassa County: If we want to accelerate development at the rural level, we must invest in agriculture where rural farmers will be empowered to form cooperatives and make large farms containing not only our staple rice, but cassavas, plantains, eddoes, vegetables, etc. Of course they will need farm to market roads and the education on how to preserve their crops. So, we have to rethink the building of roads and agriculture in new and meaningful ways.



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