

Voter Registration Ends

Ivorian Refugee Crisis

Capacity Building Plan





Message from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General

With the voter registration exercise that began on 10 December coming to a peaceful end on 12 February, Liberia seems to be on course for its second national elections since the 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement. The National Elections Commission (NEC) has taken the lead in preparing for the elections, and the completed registration process is a testament to how far Liberia has come in just seven years. A successful referendum and credible elections later this year would not only attest to the growing strength of Liberian institutions but would also serve as an example for the entire West African region.

Ensuring the credibility of the elections is critical to the consolidation of peace and democracy in Liberia. While early planning and coordination will be essential, it is also important that the NEC remain objective and transparent, and ensure a level playing field for all participants. During the voter registration exercise UNMIL provided logistical support for the delivery of materials to remote locations. Such support will continue throughout the rest of the process. The UN family and other partners are also working closely with the NEC and Liberian civil society to ensure that all eligible voters are informed of their choices and are familiar with the methods involved in exercising their franchise.

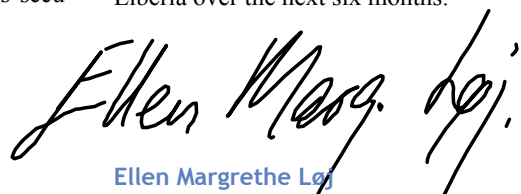
The 22nd Progress Report of the Secretary-General on UNMIL has just been released. In the report, the Secretary-General acknowledges the progress made in a number of areas, including preparing for elections and planning towards a gradual and seamless transition of security responsibilities from UNMIL to Liberia's secu-

rity institutions. However, the Secretary-General also notes that much still needs to be done to consolidate the peace, including addressing issues surrounding a number of factors thought to be root causes of Liberia's conflict. Part of this is the importance of developing a systematic approach to implementing recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which can help to pave the way towards a sustainably peaceful future for Liberia.

The Secretary-General also expressed concern that the troubling developments in Côte d'Ivoire, which has led to an influx of refugees into Liberia, risk undermining the security of the sub-region. Liberian authorities and UNMIL are closely monitoring the situation along the border. Unconfirmed reports of Liberian mercenaries' involvement in the crisis are disturbing, and I would like to echo President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's call to Liberians to not become involved in the Ivorian crisis.

As I write this, almost 70,000 refugees, most of them women and children, have crossed into Liberia -- a major humanitarian burden for the country. Liberian families in border communities have generously welcomed the refugees and have been sharing their resources with them in an act of heart-warming hospitality.

The UN family in Liberia, in collaboration with the Liberian government, is making a concerted effort to tackle the humanitarian situation, which continues to develop in border areas. UN agencies, such as UNHCR, WFP and UNICEF, have been in the forefront of these efforts by providing shelter, food and other basic services. The Emergency Humanitarian Action Plan (EHAF) totalling US\$ 55 million launched in mid January aims to address the needs of an estimated 50,000 Ivorian refugees in Liberia over the next six months.


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



4. VOTER REGISTRATION ENDS

In preparation for the crucial national elections scheduled for later this year, Liberia's National Election Commission has successfully completed the registration of voters that lasted just over two months. While Liberia's national institutions independently run the election process, the United Nations offers logistical support such as transporting election materials to remote places.



6. THE IVORIAN REFUGEE CRISIS

As we went to press, the number of refugees reaching Liberia from Côte d'Ivoire had crossed 70,000. The UN family in Liberia is handling the unexpected crisis on an emergency footing by constructing a camp for the hapless refugees and providing food, water and other basic necessities.



10. A NATIONAL VISION FOR CAPACITY BUILDING

Faced with acute shortage of skilled manpower, Liberia is rolling out a national capacity building plan aimed at creating a pool of professionals and technocrats who could help the country catch up with the rest of the world.

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VOTER REGISTRATION

By Ruby Ofori

Surmounting severe obstacles posed by poor roads and difficult-to-reach communities, the National Elections Commission (NEC) of Liberia has successfully carried out a nationwide registration of eligible voters while preparing for a constitutional referendum and the presidential and parliamentary elections due later in the year. The exercise, conducted from 10 January to 12 February 2011, marked the first phase of a challenging electoral process for Liberia's national institutions which are leading the elections process by themselves for the first time since the end of the civil war.

"Elections always have challenges, especially for a country like ours coming out of war. Even some countries that are stable still have logistical challenges,"

says James Fromoyan, the Chairman of NEC, who readily admits that his institution faces a "herculean" task over the next year. "You are catering to an entire nation. The road conditions are not the best under the circumstances. To get materials from one point to another, in some places trucks get stuck in mud for some time. New pickups wear and tear rapidly. So those are the problems."

Despite these challenges, NEC successfully distributed election materials to 1,780 registration centres across the country and then was able to complete the registration process without any major glitches. The NEC had the technical support of the United Nations Development Programme and logistical assistance from UNMIL to airlift registration materials to remote areas.

"The NEC has shown that it is committed to ensure the process succeeds. Of

course there have been, as usual, some challenges here and there but those challenges have not been insurmountable. With the collaboration that we have had, and working closely with the NEC, it has been possible to get over some of the challenges," says Ademola Araoye, UNMIL's Chief of Political Policy and Planning.

Elizabeth Nelson, the Deputy Chairperson of NEC said their success so far has been largely due to long-term planning which began years earlier. "Since 2006 we have been planning for the next elections to be held in 2011, and so there have been massive preparations towards this."

Aside from the just completed voter registration exercise, the NEC has a long list of activities to accomplish including the ongoing registration of political parties, the delineation of electoral districts, a constitutional referendum and, finally, the presidential and legislative polls as well as



Voter registration materials reach remote areas with UN's help

N ENDS

possible runoffs.

The successful completion of the registration exercise would go a long way in ensuring free and fair elections, said Araoye. "If you don't get the voter registration right then you can't get the elections right. Voter registration is essentially to ensure that every eligible citizen is enfranchised, to ensure that the structures are in place. So it's a very critical stage," he said.

According to Nelson, moving election materials to remote places was one of NEC's biggest challenges but UNMIL's help to airlift the materials resolved the issue. "The assistance that UNMIL has given us has tended to ease one of the biggest challenges that we had." UNMIL's help involved Ukrainian peacekeepers airlifting 21 tonnes of registration materials to sites in Greenville, Harper, and Barclayville in the Southeast and Kolahun in

Lofa County. A second phase entailed the distribution of the materials by helicopters from the four main hubs to five remote locations. A NEC staff was on board of all UNMIL flights to ensure a chain of custody of the electoral material.

The voter registration materials were packaged in the form of kits and included cameras for the voter identification cards, solar panels and background cloths, and optical mark recognition instruments for entering the details of voters as they registered. Each kit weighed about 46 kg. UNMIL also helped transport officials of NEC and the Liberia National Police who were in charge of monitoring and securing the election materials.

"NEC is in charge of the election process with UNMIL playing a supportive role," said Araoye. After being the primary organizer of Liberia's elections in 2005, the United Nations, in line with the drawdown of UNMIL and the international community's increasing confidence in Liberia's ability to manage its own affairs, is playing only a supportive role in the forthcoming elections.

Asked about the relationship between UNMIL and NEC, Fromoyan said: "It has been perfect really. We have had full coop-

eration with them. Prior to even this moment, since we took over, all the by-elections that we have had, they have always given support." He said NEC expected the smooth relationship with UNMIL to continue throughout the election process.

Aside from logistical support, UNMIL is also mandated to help Liberian institutions strengthen their capacity to organize national elections in the years to come. "The whole idea is to strengthen the capacity of the NEC to be able to conduct the elections autonomously and also to be able to do this in the future without dependence on international support. So this as a test run of the capacity, and since it is a test run, we are here to fill in the gaps to help them achieve the capacity," said Araoye.

The ultimate objective, says Fromoyan, is to conduct an election that has legitimacy in the eyes of all the stakeholders, especially the people of Liberia. "If we succeed in having credible elections, as we certainly believe we will, then the efforts of our international partners and all Liberians who are committed to the democratic process will not be in vain. That is one of the major things that we are all mindful of in undertaking this herculean task that we have on hand."

Deputy Special Representative Moustapha Soumaré visits a voter registration centre





SRSB Ellen Margrethe Løj meets newly arrived Ivorian refugees in Nimba County

THE IVORIAN REFUGEE

By Sulaiman Momodu

It is a busy Friday morning in late February in Old Loguato, Kisiplay and Duoplay border villages in Nimba County as the first group of Ivorian refugees prepares to depart for the newly-established Bahn Refugee Camp located some 50 km away from the Liberian border with Côte d'Ivoire. After weeks of extensive preparation the

camp is now ready and the refugees will now have food, shelter, and basic amenities.

Some 93 refugees from 28 families are making final preparations for their voluntary relocation to the camp as humanitarian workers assist with the loading of trucks. The refugees, who have been living in border villages, thank their Liberian hosts for their hospitality as they board the trucks for a five-hour journey. The convoy leaves

behind a trail of dust on the unpaved road that is currently being rehabilitated by the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL).

The establishment of the camp is part of efforts to respond promptly to the unexpected influx of refugees fleeing political unrest in neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire. While the Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission (LRRRC) takes the lead for the government, the UN



CRISIS

assistance is coordinated by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR).

UNHCR Representative in Liberia Ibrahima Coly, who stayed in the country through Christmas holidays to assist the refugees, says the maiden convoy of refugees is part of 39, 784 Ivoirians that have been registered by the UNHCR as of 23 February. As refugees began trickling into Liberia, the government's initial stand was

that the refugees should remain in communities along the border. But as their numbers climbed to thousands, that policy changed. "The government agreed for the establishment of camps," says Coly.

The influx of Ivorian refugees into Liberia began at a time when UNHCR had considerably scaled down its operations in the country. So the refugee agency had to quickly mobilize staff and logistics from around the world, a move that was also undertaken by sister UN agencies. Emergency support personnel worked out of quickly erected tents ignoring the harsh living conditions in Saclepea, near the influx area, where the UNHCR has a Field Office.

In late January, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General to Liberia, Ellen Margrethe Løj, visited the refugee influx areas in Nimba County to take stock of the situation and to monitor ongoing work on the camp. She witnessed the distribution of food and other items and interacted with refugees and members of families hosting them. In meetings with stakeholders, Løj urged all to work as a team for the speedy and efficient delivery of services to the refugees.

"The establishment of the camp will help ease the strain on host populations who are vulnerable themselves, enable humanitarian service providers to access refugee populations easily, and most important of all, provide refugees with better services at one location," said Raouf Mazou, the UNHCR Deputy Director (Africa Bureau) in Geneva, who was among officials that welcomed the refugees at the camp.

Transit Centres have been built in the camp where refugees will initially stay while they will be allocated plots and provided with shelter materials to build their own shelters. However, a few shelters have been constructed to allow the first few convoys of refugees to immediately occupy family structures in order to avoid congestion. Labour is being commissioned from villages around the camp, generating employment among the local population.

As the Bahn Refugee Camp can accommodate only up to 15,000 refugees, assessment for a second camp is ongoing at Garwee, also in Nimba County. The relocation of the refugees, who are staying in

76 border villages, is expected to last for a few weeks. Prior to the commencement of relocation, a mass information campaign was undertaken during which the refugees were given the choice to opt for relocation either to the camp or to one of 15 villages about 20 km from the border.

Since the beginning of the influx, UNHCR has airlifted tons of emergency shelter aid and non-food relief items to Liberia. WFP is providing food and is shipping more food from neighbouring Sierra Leone and Guinea. UNICEF collaborates with the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (MoHSW) and has already undertaken an integrated measles campaign in Nimba County (See story on page xx). It has also increased access to safe water through repairs and improvement of water sources and is assisting with the drilling of bore holes at the camp. The agency is also improving sanitation facilities in communities by constructing latrines and reproducing copies of the Ivorian school curriculum and teachers' guide so that children's education can go on. WHO has provided the MoHSW with emergency health packages, each containing drugs and related supplies. The UNFPA has also provided assistance such as delivery and blood transfusion kits. International and non-governmental organizations are also involved in the humanitarian response to the refugee emergency.

In January, a US\$ 55 million Liberia Emergency Humanitarian Action Plan (EHAP) was launched by the United Nations and International Organization for Migration (IOM) to seek urgent funding for the emergency. (See story on page xx)

As UNHCR continues to register the refugees, renewed fighting in western Côte d'Ivoire on 24 February left more than 5,000 Ivoirians crossing into Liberia in just 24 hours. UNHCR has already reached agreement with the Government to rehabilitate the 78km Saclepea- Bahn - Buuto road and reconstruct bridges and culverts before the beginning of the rainy season in April. The rehabilitation of this route will considerably reduce the travelling time from refugee influx areas to the camp and relocation villages.



six months.

Most of those who fled Côte d'Ivoire have arrived in the eastern part of Liberia, where households in dozens of villages have opened their doors to the hapless refugees. With an estimated 400 to 500 people crossing the border daily, most of them women and children under 18, health, water and other basic services belonging to the host communities have come under severe strain. Poor road conditions are also hampering access to several of these villages.

EHAP also includes plans for an additional 25,000 Liberian returnees as well as third country nationals. When fully funded, the EHAP will be worth US\$55 million, and will meet the needs of both current and projected refugees and other affected people in Liberia for the next six months.

"There is an urgent need for quick financing of the appeal in order to enable us to address some of the most pressing needs of refugees and host families," said Soumaré. "There are a host of needs, including transport for food and other relief items to points of distribution, the provision of adequate water supplies, and prevention of the spread of disease."

The largest portion of the appeal (US\$31 million) is funding sought by UNHCR for the provision of protection and assistance to refugees, including shelter, camp management, and non-food items. UNHCR will also oversee crucial logistics activities such as road and airstrip repair. The second largest sector is food security, which requires US\$10.8 million for helping refugees and host communities meet their food requirements. Other support to be provided through the Plan includes nutrition, health care, water, sanitation and hygiene, protection, education and logistics.

UNHCR is presently working at Bahn, in Nimba County, on the construction of a new camp for refugees. The World Food Programme (WFP) is providing food assistance; the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is providing safe water, nutritional support, education support, and non-food items, while the World Health Organization has prepositioned emergency health kits for 20,000 people.

FLASH APPEAL TO SUPPORT IVORIAN REFUGEES IN LIBERIA

Since the bulk of the refugees fleeing the political unrest in Côte d'Ivoire are streaming towards neighbouring Liberia -- a country struggling with its own mammoth challenges -- an Emergency Humanitarian Action Plan (EHAP) was launched in Geneva on 17 January to help Liberia cope with the Ivorian refugee crisis. As we went to press, the number of Ivorian refugees in Liberia had reached 70,000.

"We are preparing for the worst as we

do not know what will happen in Côte d'Ivoire next," Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General Moustapha Soumaré told **UN FOCUS**. "We are revising the contingency plan with a target of 100,000 refugees," added Soumaré, who is also the Humanitarian and Resident Coordinator in Liberia. He encouraged donors and the international community to generously contribute to the Emergency Humanitarian Action Plan which aims to provide urgently needed support to 50,000 Ivorian refugees in Liberia over the next

MEASLES VACCINATION IN NIMBA COUNTY

By James S. King

UNICEF launched a massive measles vaccination campaign on 2 February 2011 targeting 30,000 children including Ivorian refugee children in Nimba County. Five Liberian children aged between 1 and 5 died earlier from the disease in Nimba County. One hundred cases of the disease had been confirmed by the World Health Organization.

Jointly organized by Liberia's Ministry of Health and Social Welfare in partnership with UNICEF and the WHO from February 2 - 7, the campaign originally targeted

inadequacies of measles immunization", said Crowley. "This is dangerous for these communities and beyond."

The campaign intends to vaccinate children between 6 months and 15 years old as well as women of child-bearing age who are living in the refugee camps and the host communities. The vaccines are fortified with vitamin-A supplements which reduces deaths associated with measles by 50 % and reduces worm infections in children below 5 years. The Ministry of Health and Social Welfare leads the exercise with support from UNICEF-Liberia.

Severely malnourished children will be referred to outpatient treatment centers

while those moderately malnourished will be put under supplementary feeding programmes under the UNICEF/Ministry of Health Emergency health response.

Measles is a highly contagious viral disease that children are susceptible to. Symptoms include high fever and rash, but among malnourished children it can cause serious complications including blindness, severe diarrhea and pneumonia.

Since early December, some 70,000 refugees, majority of them children and women, have crossed over into Liberia fleeing the political violence in the Côte d' Ivoire. The vast majority of asylum-seekers are in Nimba County.

Jointly organized by Liberia's Ministry of Health and Social Welfare in partnership with UNICEF and the WHO from February 2 - 7, the campaign originally targeted 230,000 children in Liberia's second most populous county bordering Côte d' Ivoire, where tens of thousands of Ivorian refugees have sought safety from the ongoing conflict in their country.

230,000 children in Liberia's second most populous county bordering Côte d' Ivoire, where tens of thousands of Ivorian refugees have sought safety from the ongoing conflict in their country.

UNICEF Representative to Liberia Isabel Crowley said it was critical to act quickly to stop the disease outbreak which thrives in congested households with poor sanitation. "The outbreak indicates the



A NATIONAL VISION FO



Liberia faces an urgent need for skilled personnel

Faced with a critical shortage of skilled personnel, Liberia is all set to roll out a national capacity building plan that would take into account future needs of its economy and create an enabling environment for rebuilding the country's labour force. The new vision is articulated in the National Capacity Development Strategy and Action Plan which took two years to develop and was validated through a countrywide participatory process in June 2010. Endorsed by the Cabinet this February, the Action Plan is set to be introduced to stake holders by the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs in March.

"What we've tried to do is to take a step back, look at the broader picture and ask: where is the government going? How is it that we can incorporate a lot of the technical and vocational training programmes into a broader perspective and align them?

How do we align this vision to the areas and the industries that are likely to become the base for growing the economy?" said Monique Cooper, a UNDP Policy Analyst who worked on the National Plan.

While the document does prescribe numbers of personnel needed across sectors Cooper says it also focuses on how to assess capacity needs, improve coordination for capacity development across sectors and guide national investment in capacity development.

"The strategy aims to provide a focused and cohesive framework through which current and future capacity development interventions can be coordinated in line with the national development agenda," Cooper said.

Roland Lepol, a UNDP Programme Analyst on Capacity Building, says the plan will help fast track national development. "It's a plan for developing capacity in different sectors holistically. It's a plan

that includes human and institutional capacity building and the creation of an enabling environment across all the sectors including the private sector," said Lepol.

The National Capacity Development Strategy and Action Plan incorporates a broad range of ideas from both the public and private sectors. The process began in 2008 when the Government of Liberia, UNDP and other partners began putting the pieces together and also engaged the private sector to figure out how development of capacity in that sector could be tackled. "It's a very comprehensive package that spans the next ten years or so. The formulation of the strategy was a very participatory, and consultative process," said Lepol.

Once rolled out to stakeholders, the process of fleshing out the programmatic core of the plan will follow. "That will see teams going from county to county doing quite a substantial amount of awareness raising but also a lot of buy-in around this because we clearly recognize that it's not something that can be done at the national level alone," said Cooper.

The extent of Liberia's capacity shortage is a complex combination of factors mostly stemming from the 14 year civil war that saw many professionals flee the country and also brought the nation's education sector to its knees. "The capacity vacuum is not only in the sense of manpower which is easily identifiable. It's also a function of systemic issues around that and the institutions that need to be there to support the human capacity or the infrastructural capacity," said Cooper.

The National Capacity Development Plan is a long term response to an acute national shortage of skilled labor in almost every sector of society from health care to business to construction and engineering. Cooper also points out that there are professionals in Liberia whose skills have eroded over time because they simply haven't had the opportunity and access to further those skills that they had obtained a number of years ago. "Having capacity

R CAPACITY BUILDING

Extracted from the National Capacity Development Strategy of Liberia

HUMAN CAPITAL TARGETS			
SECTOR / INDUSTRY	RECOVERY:	TRANSFORMATION:	SUSTAINABILITY:
	LIFT LIBERIA POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY	NATIONAL VISION / SUBSEQUENT NAT'L DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES	
	2008 – 2011	APPROXIMATELY 2015	APPROXIMATELY 2020
Social Services			
Overall Strategic target for human capital development: Invest in services that support healthy human development, from early childhood to adulthood, to enable learning and skills development.			
Health (Shortfalls to bridge to reach minimum internal standards, as set by the World Health Organization, to achieve normative ratios of health workers to population size)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physicians: Target workforce – 1,094; Shortfall – 971 Nurses (all nurses): Target workforce – 5,549; Shortfall – 4,801 Midwives (excludes TM/TTM): Target workforce – 1,634; Shortfall – 1,309 Physicians Assistants: Target workforce – 550; Shortfall – 368 Pharmacists: Target workforce – 216; Shortfall – 192 Lab Technicians (includes Lab Assistants): Target workforce: 371; Shortfall – 101 Other health workers in key professions – Target workforce: 3,175; Shortfall – 774 Total workforce shortfall in the health sector – 8,532		
Education (Number of additional teachers needed relative to 2008 baseline – compounding numbers by year)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pre-Primary – 762 Primary – 3,694 Junior High – 1,392 Emphasis on training female teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pre-Primary – 2,286 Primary – 11,082 Junior High – 4,176 Emphasis on training female teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pre-Primary – 4,191 Primary – 20,317 Junior High – 7,656 Emphasis on training female teachers

SECTOR / INDUSTRY	RECOVERY:	TRANSFORMATION:	SUSTAINABILITY:
	LIFT LIBERIA POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY		
	2008 – 2011	APPROXIMATELY 2015	APPROXIMATELY 2020
Economic Growth			
Overall Strategic target for human capital development: Align human capital development investments behind the Liberian Economic Growth Strategy (opening of Economic Growth Corridors, in particular) and investments in Power, Ports, and Roads to combine infrastructure investments with industry growth focused on agriculture.			
Agriculture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food Crops and Tree Crops – 750 Diverse Specialists Livestock – 136 Diverse Specialists Fisheries – 410 Diverse Specialists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food Crops and Tree Crops – 1,500 Diverse Specialists Livestock – 272 Diverse Specialists Fisheries – 4,384 Diverse Specialists 	
Infrastructure / Construction Investments in MoPW only (Number of additional specialists needed relative to 2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Civil Engineer – 3 Structural Engineer – 5 Mechanical Engineer – 4 Electrical Engineer – 5 Soil Engineer – 3 Architect – 8 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Civil Engineer – 16 Structural Engineer – 13 Mechanical Engineer – 10 Electrical Engineer – 11 Soil Engineer – 8 Architect – 20 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Civil Engineer – 39 Structural Engineer – 23 Mechanical Engineer – 18 Electrical Engineer – 19 Soil Engineer – 15 Architect – 35

that is misplaced is just about as bad as not having it at all,” she adds.

With Liberia’s focus increasingly turning to development with the country enjoy-

ing uninterrupted peace since the civil war came to an end in 2003, the new capacity development plan aims to create a pool of professionals and technocrats who could

help the nation catch up with the rest of the world.

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WAR AGAINST POLIO COM

By Adolphus Scott

For a year, in 2008, Liberia enjoyed the status of a polio-free country thanks to a number of successful synchronized immunization campaigns carried out by the Ministry of Health and its partners earlier. This remarkable improvement was the result of a gradual increase in campaign coverage, increase in the number of health facilities, expansion of the cold chain, extensive outreach activities and continued support from partners.

However, the dreaded viral disease reared its head again in 2009 with 11 cases reported, believed to have been spread to Liberia from neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire. In 2010, the number of cases reported in Liberia came down to just two and no case has been reported so far this year.

Based on a Polio risk analysis, three

countries in West Africa -- Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea -- appear to be at high risk of importation of wild polio virus from neighbouring countries. "No country is truly polio-free until all countries have eradicated this deadly disease. The full engagement of political leaders at every level - right down to the district - is considered critical to the success of the campaign," says Dr. Zakari Wambai, Medical Officer and Team Leader on immunization at WHO. "We need to mobilize everybody and all our efforts should be directed to public awareness and social mobilization."

In 2011, two synchronized polio rounds will take place in all 16 West African Countries in March and April. More than 888,000 Liberian children under five years will be immunized with the Oral Polio Vaccine (OPV). With cases of refusal by some parents to have their children im-

munized, and reports of children who were missed during earlier rounds, the government, with support from community leaders and the inter-faith council, is doing all it can to get all children in Liberia immunized.

"The government of Liberia attaches great seriousness to the eradication of polio in the country," says Dr. Bernice Dahn, Deputy Minister of Health and Chief Medical Officer. "We urge all Liberian and foreign nationals to allow their children to be vaccinated during these polio eradication campaigns. The vaccine is free and harmless to children. Help us kick polio out of Liberia."

All across the country, local government authorities, UNMIL, NGOs, community radios, traditional communicators and folk announcers are playing a key role in ensuring that families hear about the national vaccination campaigns. With low



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literacy rate and limited access to television, most Liberians rely on the radio for news and information. UNICEF is supporting the government in working closely with the UNMIL Public Information office and more than 20 community radio stations spread across the country to take the message to every family in the country.

“Getting the polio campaign message to every household in the country is not an easy task,” says Musu Deshield-Mitchell, one of Liberia’s 30 national immunization supervisors. “The government needs every support it can get to mobilize every community in all 15 counties. Lots of children are missed by our vaccination teams during immunization days. It is a must that we visit every household and public place to ensure every child under five is immunized.”

More than 4,000 vaccinators, supervisors and community volunteers have been

mobilized for the upcoming campaign to reach under-five children in every part of the country with the polio vaccine. Fixed temporary vaccination sites as well as mobile teams will be in action during the campaign.

The UN in Liberia is providing the government as much support as possible for the campaign to succeed. UNICEF is

paing efforts.

“Every Liberian child who is not immunized is at risk of being crippled for life,” says Isabel Crowley, UNICEF Representative in Liberia. “Working with the Ministry of Health, development partners, communities and families, our top most priority is to ensure that every child in Liberia under the age of five is immunized

The UN in Liberia is providing the government as much support as possible for the campaign to succeed. UNICEF is providing technical and financial support for communications and supply of 902,260 doses of polio vaccine and WHO is providing technical support as well as funds for logistics, monitoring, transportation and allowances for vaccination teams.

providing technical and financial support for communications and supply of 902,260 doses of polio vaccine and WHO is providing technical support as well as funds for logistics, monitoring, transportation and allowances for vaccination teams. The UN Mission in Liberia provides regular logistical and communication support to cam-

against polio. This is everybody’s business.”

Polio is a viral disease that affects the nervous system and can result in paralysis. Experts say the spread of the virus is dependent on three factors – lack of nutrition, environmental causes and poor hygiene and sanitation.

UNICEF Representative Isabel Crowley with a vaccine recipient





A woman in labour is transported to hospital in a motor cycle ambulance

BATTLE ON TO REDUCE MATERNAL MORTALITY

Faced with one of the highest mortality rates in the world, Liberia is stepping up efforts to reduce this often avoidable tragedy facing the country's mothers. A two-day health fair sponsored by UNFPA in early December in Buchanan, Grand Bassa County, marked the launch of a campaign which will continue, according to health authorities, until ma-

ternal mortality rates are radically reduced in Liberia.

"The health fair focused on how different players in the community and government can get involved to reduce maternal mortality," said Dr. Saye Baawo of Family Health Division, Ministry of Health and Social Welfare.

The long term maternal mortality reduction campaign includes monitoring

and recording the number of maternal deaths across the country by the Ministry to enable it to produce statistics that reflect the current reality in Liberia.

"The President of Liberia has instructed health authorities to report maternal mortality and newborn deaths to determine the cause and to enable us to address the issue," said Dr Baawo, adding that Montserrado county has the highest mater-



“Other reasons are the late arrival of patients to places with health facilities which limits adequate attendance to patients by health workers,” said Dr. Baawo.

Over the past five years the government has sought to bring Liberia’s high maternal mortality rates down with the Ministry of Health developing a roadmap for maternal mortality reduction Liberia. The document looks at the various strategies that need to be put in place using evidence based interventions to address the issues of maternal mortality. Part of the solution includes training birth attendants and increasing the number of trained medics at health facilities, said Dr. Baawo.

The roadmap also seeks to make family planning services available to all. This is particularly targeted at teenagers who are more likely to become pregnant and to seek unsafe abortions.

The Ministry of Health is also planning to invite private sector partners to help fund its programmes and projects to augment the meager funding on health

care by the central government.

Dr. Baawo said two additional midwifery schools have been opened in Zorzor and Zwedru to increase the numbers of medical personnel. The MOH is developing a ten-year health plan and working with county health teams to plan conferences on how work can be done at the community level. UN agencies have been close partners to the MOH and a major supporter of Liberia’s efforts to reduce maternal mortality.

Dr. Baawo believes that with all these activities taking place Liberia’s high maternal mortality rates are already starting to go down. However, he acknowledges that impact of the government’s policies on women’s health will only be confirmed by a demographic health survey (DHS) in a few years time. “Until another DHS study is done, in one or two years, we will not know if maternal mortal rates have been reduced.”

RO

nal mortality rate of all Liberia’s counties followed by Nimba and then Bong. The health fare was supported primarily by the Government of Liberia and UNFPA including some support from other partners.

Available statistics dating back to 2007 indicate that there are 994 deaths to every 100,000 live births in Liberia. Dr. Baawo said this is one of the highest rates in Sub-Saharan Africa. He said the Ministry’s Family Health Division is working to ensure that there are sufficient care attendants at health posts across the country and that neonatal and obstetrics care services are readily available to pregnant women.

He said there was no need for women to die in child birth and the government needs to reconsider its national budget on health. “We have to do a lot towards reducing it.” The high rates of deaths of women in childbirth in Liberia are due to a number of causes including a paucity of medical personnel and health facilities.





POLICY SHIFT TO PREVENT

Following a successful nationwide campaign to raise awareness against Sexual and Gender Based Violence, the government of Liberia is making plans to make a shift in its policy, laying greater emphasis on prevention of such crimes starting this year. Liberian women, especially young girls, continue to be at the receiving end of sexual violence with rape still the most reported crime within the category of sexual offences in the country.

“There’s a lot that needs to be done in terms of preventing impunity, because if we are not dealing with the issue of perpetrators then we are not looking at prevention,” says Izeduwa Derex-Briggs, UN Women Country Representative in Liberia. The policy shift is incorporated in

a recently revised National Plan of Action on Gender-Based Violence which is to be launched in March. The action plan spans a five-year period from 2011 to 2015 with a budget of \$32million.

In the first phase of the National Plan of Action the focus has been mostly on raising public awareness about SGBV and enabling institutions such as the police, health care providers and the judiciary to better respond to victims of SGBV, according to Madhumita Sarkar, Programme Adviser for the GBV Joint UN/Government Programme. “We have set some systems and structures in place but what we need to still work on is setting up preventative strategies which could include support to the women and child protection centers, having more women in the police forces, having women prosecutors and judges,”

says Sarkar.

There are now two SGBV crimes units in Monrovia and there are 40 women and Child Protection Sections (WACPS) attached to police stations around the country. These are specialized units set up to receive survivors of abuse and of SGBV reporting to the police. The Liberia National Police now has standard operating procedures for dealing with SGBV cases.

Much has been done to simplify the legal and medical aspects of reporting incidents of SGBV by victims. In each of the 15 counties there is now a GBV taskforce, which is a multidisciplinary institution meant to support and guide victims of rape and other gender based violent crimes. Each task force is equipped with what the experts call “referral pathways.” These are information packages put together for sur-



Liberian women are now speaking up against sexual violence

NT SGBV

vivors on what to do and where to go in case of rape. They are intended to make it easier for victims to navigate the complex and often frustrating legal, investigative and medical terrain that supports the survivor and that is intended to eventually lead to the trial of the perpetrators.

“So now in each of the counties a referral pathway is in place and is being used and promoted through the Gender Based Violence Taskforces in each county,” says Carole Doucet, UNMIL Gender Adviser. Survivors are advised as to which health clinic they should attend and these clinics are equipped with Post Exposure Prophylaxis kits. These are medicines which must be administered within 72 hours of an incident occurring to prevent infections from sexually transmitted diseases, HIV and pregnancy.

SGBV experts say much more needs to be done to improve the environment that survivors of SGBV undergo after reporting an incident. Doucet says a victim is doubly prone to further victimization from the perpetrator after reporting a crime because often the perpetrator lives in the same neighborhood as the victim. “The lack of safety and security of these individual females is another big challenge,” she adds.

Annette Kiawu, Deputy Minister of Research and Technical Services at the Ministry of Gender, says as a first step in providing security to the victims there is now “one safe home constructed and functional in Grand Bassa County and one nearing completion in Bong County.” In Monrovia there are two safe homes. There are plans to construct a few more but, according to Doucet, these are in the capitals of the counties and for victims to get there is often difficult. “Most safe homes are under-resourced to be able to do what they need to do,” adds Doucet.

Sarkar says the Women and Child Protection Sections in police stations can also be better designed to give survivors more security and safety. WACPS are also in desperate need of resources. “They don’t necessarily have vehicles, female staff or

even cell phones,” says Doucet.

UN Women is planning to address some of these shortcomings. They will support the LNP at community level by providing mobile phones and establishing a national hotline for better communication between rural women and the police on issues of violence. They will also provide them with all terrain vehicles in eight communities within four counties. They are also going to build sixteen more peace huts such as the one in Totota. These will be managed through the rural women’s associations which are all voluntarily run. “The peace huts are meant to be a safe space for mediation, marriage counseling, and dialogue not just on SGBV but on other issues that affect women and they offer a good alternative to dispute resolution,” says Doucet.

Sarkar says though the policy emphasis is shifting to prevention there is still a need to continue the work of raising awareness. This time, she says, there will be sharper and more targeted campaigns focusing on other stakeholders like religious groups, traditional leaders, parents, teachers and county chiefs. “We are trying to make it more focused than the very general kind of awareness that we used to have.”

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Day or night, women and girls risk being raped





Women demand an end to FGM

SPEAKING OUT AGAINST FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

By Seble Worku

Liberian women have spoken strongly against Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) as they joined the rest of the world during the 8th anniversary of the observance of the International Day on Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation with the global theme *Engaging Government, Indispensable to reaching Zero tolerance to FGM*.

At a one-day conference organized to mark the day under the national theme *Creating Awareness on Zero tolerance to FGM, Working with the Government of Liberia*, women from various backgrounds came together in Tubmanburg, Bomi County, to openly talk about FGM and how it has been affecting their lives, health and education.

In her remarks Bomi County Health Officer Dr. Linda Birch said FGM is a harmful traditional practice that is associated with an increased risk of HIV/AIDS transmission, Fistula, and other life threatening infections. “Many young Liberian women are exposed to these practices and many of them have run away from their

family because of fear. We must do everything within our power to stop the genital mutilation of young women and girls,” said Dr Birch. “FGM is not a religious requirement, it must be understood that religion has nothing to do with it,” stressed the County Health Officer. “Therefore we must sensitize communities and traditional leaders on the danger of this practice.”

Dr Birch further noted that in order to make the fight against FGM a reality, the Government of Liberia should enforce laws against the practice and conduct public awareness campaigns to offer alternative sources of income for FGM practitioners.

Likewise Bomi County Gender Coordinator Aminata Tucker said it was time to openly talk about the physical and psychological damage that girls are exposed to as they undergo FGM, “When we go out in the field we gather reports on unpleasant incidences associated with FGM. We all know what this is doing to our children; we know a lot about children who never return home, this is a serious problem and we need to address it.”

The conference heard many bold statements with several women not only openly

talking against the practice of FGM without fear, but also voicing a united commitment to end it. In fact more understanding was added to the event when a drama was staged by elderly women portraying the life of a girl who never had a chance to go to school, but instead was exposed to harmful traditional practices in her community.

The programme was also attended by City Mayor of Tubmanburg, Rebecca Boakai, a representative of the superintendent and other invited guests who spoke strongly against the practice and called for the need to create more awareness and sensitization campaigns for Liberian women.

The programme was organized by the National Association on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children (NATPAH) in collaboration with Working Groups Against FGM and other partners.

The International Day of Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation is a UN sponsored awareness day that takes place on 6 February each year in an effort to make the world aware of the severe ramifications of FGM and promote its eradication.



PRISONERS ACQUIRE NEW SKILLS

By Osman Benk Sankoh

A 15-minute drive on a zig-zag road from the regional headquarter town of Zwedru, Grand Gedeh County, leads to an imposing brown gate that opens the high walls surrounding the National Palace of Corrections, the second largest prison in Liberia. True to its name the prison facility has

at the otherwise gloomy prison as 123 inmates were awarded certificates for having completed training in Adult Literacy, Soap Science, Tailoring, Tie-dyeing and Psycho-social Counseling. This was a rehabilitation programme supported by the Ministry of Justice and the UN Women (formerly, United Nations Development Fund for Women).

The inmates put aside their orange prison garb for white T-shirts with the in-

ceived their certificates

Fatu Daramy-Mensah, Acting Assistant Minister for Bureau of Corrections and Rehabilitation in the Ministry of Justice, told the inmates that she was proud of them for having completed the training which would come handy once they were out of the prison. She assured them that the government was not giving up on them and that the programmes they had just graduated from were geared towards improving their skills that would be useful once they were free again. She hoped that with the new skills acquired the inmates would be productive in the society and called on the communities receiving them to accept the reformed prisoners upon release.

A representative of the graduating inmates thanked the government of Liberia and its international partners for what he described as great efforts applied in preparing them for productive life. He said the training they had gone through had left a positive impact in their lives. He urged President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to “pardon our errors, transgressions and sins of the rehabilitated prisoners.”

The programme, interspersed with gospel musical performances and a drama skit by the inmates, ended with a big feast as the trainees proudly exhibited items such as soap and clothes they had produced.

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been correcting and reshaping the lives of its inmates ever since it was rehabilitated and reopened in 2008.

Recently, there was unusual jubilation

scription of the programme that they had participated in. The mostly young men, who could still be productive in society, looked happy and enthusiastic as they re-



DSRSG Henrietta Mensa-Bonsu addresses the participants

PRE-TRIAL DETENTION

Unacceptably high numbers of pre-trial detainees continue to be a severe challenge facing Liberia's judicial system, undermining public confidence in the country's justice system, according to Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Rule of Law, Henrietta Mensa-Bonsu. She was addressing the participants of a Judiciary and Ministry of Justice Retreat in Monrovia in the first week of February. Policymakers, administrators and practitioners of Liberia's criminal justice system as well as members of the civil society came together at the retreat to further legal and judicial reform in the country.

Fairly or unfairly indicted as having had an adverse impact on the criminal justice system, the Jury Law of 2006 was

blamed for the slow pace of case disposals, thereby "contributing the large number of pre-trial detainees," Mensa Bonsu said. She also said the Jury Law was "reviled as being a fertile ground for corruption and abuse of power" within the justice system.

Ever since its deployment in Liberia in 2003, UNMIL has been working with the Liberian Government to strengthen the rule of law through legal and judicial reforms, training exercises, and rule of law sensitization targeting the population. The Mission has also refurbished and constructed several police depots and magistrate courts through its Quick Impact Project, and has also seconded its legal and judicial personnel to the Ministry of Justice and the Judiciary to serve as advisers.

Addressing the participants of the two-

day retreat, Mensa-Bonsu called for continuity in building the capacities of legal and judicial personnel and improvement in accountability systems throughout the justice and security sectors. She called for efforts to improve the conditions of service of staff to reward productivity and retain qualified staff and to establish transparent system of recruitment that rewards competence and not patronage.

The deputy UN envoy said when these measures are guaranteed, they would ensure swift and smooth process of dispensing justice and enhance the public's confidence in the judiciary, reduce the number of pre-trial detainees and avoid the practice of releasing defendants on "procedural grounds". She commended the gathering as "an excellent move" by the Ministry of Justice and the Judiciary to coordinate

activities geared towards enhancing the workings of both the institutions.

Justice Minister Christiana Tah said the conduct of the judicial reform exercise was a manifestation of the Justice Ministry's desire to ensure the criminal justice reform process is holistic and with emphasis on simultaneous development. She hoped the deliberations to reform the judiciary will examine the jury selection process taking into account the qualifications of jurors, prolonged detention of inmates in pre-trial status, and the Statement of Mutual Commitment based on formal request from the Liberian Government to the United Nations Secretary-General in May 2010 asking for its placement on the agenda of the Peace Building Commission.

She said under the statement of Mutual Commitment, there are agreed priorities relating to justice and security reforms and national reconciliation with the establishment of five regional justice and security hubs, the first to be built in Gbarnga, Bong County this year. Minister Tah expressed thanks to the United Nations and its development partners for their technical and financial assistance to the exercise.

For his part, Supreme Court Associate Justice Kabineh Ja'neh said the Judiciary and the Ministry of Justice share a common concern regarding the issue of access to justice. He said access to justice is one

scars the public thus causing them to lose confidence in the justice system. He said one of the difficulties he observed is the shifting of public service to "money making" which costs the Bench every term

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of the pillars of Liberia's development agenda.

Justice Ja'neh said sustained media reports about the arrest and release from jail of alleged armed robbers on "technical legal grounds" is a phenomenon that

considerable amount of money on jury sitting. He said jurors are using jury sitting as employment opportunities rather than service to the state.

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N POSES CHALLENGE





MAKING LIBERIA A MAJOR

A project offering the hope of reducing Liberia's dependence on rice imports and improving the living standards of thousands of small-holder farmers has been extended for another three years. Known as Purchase for Progress (P4P), the scheme brings together 5,600 farmers to produce commercial quantities of high quality rice, primarily for sale to the World Food Programme (WFP).

Though the nation's reliance on imports has been reduced by about 10 per cent in recent years, Liberia is still predominantly dependent for 50 per cent of its total rice consumption on imports from Thailand, India, Vietnam, and the USA. This is a lucrative domestic market estimated to be worth \$200,000 to \$400,000 per annum. It's a market which local farmers could exploit to the nation's benefit, provided they have the capacity to meet the quantities and international standards of quality demanded by consumers in Liberia.

"Left to the farmers themselves, though, they cannot meet the requirements of urban consumers in Liberia because of too many impurities in the rice they produce and because they don't use proper milling facilities," said Lansana Wonnah, the Coordinator of Purchase for Progress at WFP.

Rice consumed in Liberia is broad ranging from the high quality, long grain, parboiled rice from the USA, which is the most expensive and is consumed by the middle classes, to the cheaper, lower quality Indian product Liberians call butter rice.

Yet Liberia is famously regarded as a natural rice growing country. Wonnah says there are 100 varieties of locally grown "country rice" as the local product is known. Liberian rice has "far better nutritional qualities than imported rice because in most cases it is freshly harvested and most of the traditional varieties have higher protein content than imported rice," says Wonnah.

"The only thing that makes imported

rice better is the processing so that is a major area of P4P interventions," said Lara Eldredge, a WFP project officer. Under P4P country rice is being transformed into a product that can compete with American and Asian high quality grains.

P4P Cooperatives are based in Bong, Lofa and Nimba counties which are widely regarded as Liberia's bread basket, and plans are afoot to expand to Gborpolu this year. Each cooperative group is equipped with an industrial milling machine and members are trained to parboil rice. Their farming skills are sharpened through agricultural extension service support from the Ministry of Agriculture, the lead agency and primary partner of WFP, which also offers additional extension services to farmers the ministry cannot reach.

A key aspect of the project is the pre-financing WFP makes to the cooperatives to enable the farmers to get through the difficult Christmas and New Year season when much of the harvest is done and when financial pressures on farmers are at their highest. The financial advance helps



With fertile land and abundant rains, Liberia can become a major rice producer

R RICE PRODUCER

farmers harvest the rice to meet the production quotas WFP sets in their contracts. WFP believes this is just a temporary solution and expects them to access financial institutions and be self sufficient. Once purchased by WFP, the rice is distributed through the organization's school feeding programme which nourishes poor children in rural schools around Liberia.

"P4P is helping to improve the livelihood of farmers. It is encouraging entrepreneurs to get involved in local production and helping deprived children to get improved nutrition," said Paul Jallah, Deputy Minister for Regional Development, Research and Extension Services, at the Ministry of Agriculture.

Musu Kollie, 26, is a mother of three and a farmer. Kollie is a member of the Kokoya Farmers Cooperative in Bong County. Kokoya is part of the P4P project. Kollie says she was trained to parboil rice and now earns \$3 per day parboiling and bagging harvested rice in addition to income from selling surplus rice from her farm. "Now I can take some of that rice

money to support my family and also send my children to school," said Kollie, adding that the project has changed her life by

P4P is founded on the basis of a strategic partnership between the government of Liberia and the UN agencies. Much of what is being done is spearheaded by Liberia's Ministry of Agriculture. The project relies on the agricultural expertise of the FAO for seeds and fertilizer. FAO also gives smaller rice mills to complete the semi industrial mills provided by WFP.

giving her paid work and enabling her to feed her family better.

The P4P Cooperatives are now producing the same high quality rice as that of their competitors in Asia and the United States. In surveys conducted by WFP, consumers could not tell the difference between locally grown high quality rice and the imported varieties. "If you see our par-

boiled rice on the market consumers will not know that it's produced locally in Liberia and in terms of ranking, they ranked it as the best. Consumers didn't know it was produced here," says Wonnah.

Overall, the cooperatives supported by P4P declared a profit of about \$8,000 last year. "We initially planned to buy 1,400 metric tonnes of rice costing \$1.7million. Over next three years we plan to double that target," said Wonnah. They are pinning these hopeful projections on good harvests from two women-only cooperatives which recently joined the project. These are the 800-member Kamplay Women's group in Nimba County and the 300-strong Palala Women's group in Bong County.

P4P is founded on the basis of a strategic partnership between the government of Liberia and the UN agencies. Much of what is being done is spearheaded by Liberia's Ministry of Agriculture. The project relies on the agricultural expertise of the FAO for seeds and fertilizer. FAO also gives smaller rice mills to complete the semi industrial mills provided by WFP. UNDP has built four warehouses for storage of the harvested produce. A further eight are under construction. Ecobank, a major private sector partner, pays farmers living in remote villages that cannot be reached easily.

When P4P ends in 2014 the small-

holder cooperatives currently receiving support are expected to be transformed into viable agro businesses. The long-term goal? Nurture farming and business practices in Liberia that enable the country to end its dependence on imported rice and to export rice internationally.

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LIBERIA HARVESTS QUALITY RICE SEEDS

By Solo Williams

Rice is Liberia's staple food and majority of the local farmers grow the crop. Yet Liberia imports half of all the rice it consumes. To reverse this trend and to make the country self-sufficient in rice production, the European Union has teamed up with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the government of Liberia.

A major aspect of this intervention is the production of quality rice seeds for farmers. Under the European Food Facility Project, the FAO has provided a seed scientist to train technicians of Liberia's Central Agricultural Research Institute (CARI) in Suakoko District, Bong County, to produce quality rice seeds for farmers.

Already 2.3 hectares of such seeds, known as WITA-4, have been produced and harvested. WITA -4 is the first quality rice seed to be produced in the country. Hitherto, this variety of rice seed was imported into the country from neighboring Côte d'Ivoire and other African countries.

The WITA-4 seeds will form the foundation for the rice seeds multiplication in the country.

Speaking at a brief ceremony to begin the harvesting of the new seeds, Deputy Director General of CARI, Dr. Abagarshall Kai, praised the expertise of FAO seed sci-

entist, Dr. Robert Chakanda, who led the team of CARI technicians to produce the high quality rice seeds. "The project has targeted to produce 10 metric tons of foundation seeds for distribution to farmers of Liberia," Dr. Kai pointed out.

In a statement, the EU official in charge of food security and rural development in Liberia, Adolfo Alonso, said the EU intervention was intended to increase rice production in Liberia, adding, "this will make Liberia less dependent on rice importation."

For his part, Deputy Agriculture Min-

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ister for Administration Charles N. McClain commended the efforts of Liberia's development partners for reviving the country's rice industry and called on local rice farmers and traditional elders to take advantage of the quality rice seeds to expand their rice farms.

In a statement, the EU official in



SIERRA LEONEAN REFUGEE WOMEN GET HELP

More than 800 Sierra Leonean women refugees and families living in five communities in Liberia will benefit from a Japanese government grant of \$100,000 meant to boost women's farming activities. The fund will be used to construct two warehouses, develop five plots of farmland and procure agricultural equipment for use by the former refugees living in communities around Monrovia, including Blamasee Town, Harrisburg, Samukai Town, Bensonville, and Mount Barclay.

Shunsuke Saito of Japan's Embassy said the government of Japan will provide \$102,380.00 to Child-Fund-Liberia for the implementation of the project. He pointed out that despite women's deep involvement in agriculture, they have less access to land, skills training, basic tools and technology and expressed the hope that the grant would enhance the women's economic opportunities and sustainable methods of providing food for their families. The project is from February 2011 to January 2012 but is expected to continue

beyond.

Executive Director Falie Baldeh of ChildFund-Liberia, an implementing partner of UNHCR, said ChildFund-Liberia will continue to work along with UNHCR in providing assistance to the former refu-

assured the LRRRC's cooperation with all the institutions involved with the implementation of refugee assistance programmes in Liberia.

UNHCR Representative Ibrahima Coly expressed optimism that the project

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gees and vulnerable community dwellers including ongoing local integration programme and provision of more than 230 housing units for the former Sierra Leonean refugees.

Wheatonia Dixon Barnes, Executive director of Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission (LRRRC) said: "We are pleased on behalf of the Liberian government for the Japanese government's grant." Barnes lauded the efforts of the Japanese government and

will have a positive impact not only on the lives of the women but also on the lives of members of their host communities. "When you help a woman you help a family," said Coly. He thanked the Government of Liberia for hosting the former Sierra Leone refugees as well as more than 35,000 Ivorian refugees who recently crossed over to Liberia.

The former refugee women thanked the Government of Japan for the grant.



“LOOK, I CAN NOW WRITE MY OWN NAME”

By Magdalene Matthews

Rebecca Koitinai, a resident of Liberia’s northern county of Lofa, is not just like any other ordinary woman in the country. She is the wife of the County Superintendent. But there is

something more than her social status that is making her happy today – for the first time in her life she is able to write her own name!

Until recently, Koitinai was one of over 650,000 Liberian women who cannot still read and write. She had participated in previous elections in Liberia, but unable

to read, write or spell her name, she registered as a voter using her thumb print. But this time around, she wrote her own name.

“During voter registration, I went and for the first time ever, I signed my own name. I felt a part of the process,” she says with a triumphant smile, happily displaying her voter’s registration card with her



Ma Turmah, 65, is an inspiration to others in her community

name written on it.

Koitinai is one of the many beneficiaries of a joint effort by the Government of Liberia and United Nations aimed at building literacy and numeracy skills among Liberian women who are unable to read and write. Women account for 60 per cent of Liberia's illiterate population and 59 per cent of the nation's unschooled. An initiative under two Government of Liberia-United Nations Joint Programmes on Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment (GEWEE), and Food Security and Nutrition (FSN), the women's literacy programme is being conducted in 44 communities across Liberia.

Today Koitinai is proud of her achievement and serves as an inspiration to other women in

Lofa County but life has not always

been easy for her. Like most little girls growing up in rural Liberia at the time, she was not afforded the opportunity to receive an education mainly due to poverty. Besides, educating the girl child was not a priority. When she was just two months old, her father abandoned the family, leaving her mother to care for five children alone.

"My mother got sick, and nobody was able to send me to school," she said. "I was sent to live with an aunt who taught me to cook and clean. I worked as the family's house help while watching my cousins leave for school every day."

Now 49 years old, Koitinai decided to return to school and enrolled in the UN/Government of Liberia literacy programme. With vehicle transportation remaining a challenge in most parts of rural Liberia, she often walks three hours to attend her classes. But Koitinai considers it

a worthwhile effort. So far, she has completed the initial phase of the programme and is now able to write her name, recite and write the alphabet, as well as recognize and spell words.

Supported by the Ministries of Education and Gender and Development, the adult literacy project is designed to empower women across the country. Most of those benefitting from the programme include market women who struggle to properly manage their businesses due to poor numeracy skills. But the literacy classes are helping to change this.

In Parker's Corner, just outside the Liberian capital Monrovia, 65 year old Ma Turmah, a local Traditional Leader, took the lead in bringing the programme to another 40 women.

"Look, I can now write my own name,"

65-year old Ma Turmah happily announces as she proudly displays a sheet of paper with squiggly but legible writing on it.

Overwhelmed by the thrill of being able to write her name for the very first time, Ma Turmah helped sustain interest in the literacy programme in her local community by encouraging other women to continue attending the classes. She was also instrumental in helping to implement other community based development projects in Parker's Corner.

"This is how I try to help other women. I will be so proud the day we are awarded our certificates," she says.

With over US\$500,000 funding from the Government of Denmark and support from the Ministries of Education and Gender and Development, the literacy programme also receives help with learning materials and curriculum from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural

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Organization (UNESCO), UN Women, and the National Adult Education Association of Liberia (NAEAL). Teachers are trained and their salaries paid, and lighting equipment is also provided for classrooms to enable the women, many of whom are petty traders, to attend classes conducted after working hours.

The initiative, which began in October 2010, is expected to extend to early 2012.

"These courses are empowering the women and teaching them skills they need in their daily lives," says Jetty Carter-Smith, administrator of the programme from UNESCO. "They started off unable to read and write, but right now those women can write their name and they're even doing mathematics!"



MUSEUMS AS CEN

By James S. King

With support from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Liberia's National Museum is slowly becoming an institution where people can gain insight into the nation's recent history through the artifacts and photographs exhibited there. That's the view of the National Museum Director.

"The museum is almost like a center for correction. It's where one looks at the past in order to appreciate the future to reconcile the bitter past," says Albert Markeh, the Director of the museum. "When young people see photographs from the war years some of them get to learn from it and some even say they would never go back to that."

Located in bustling, overcrowded, downtown shopping hub of the capital city Monrovia, the 48-year old museum has

seen better days. "There is no electricity; there is no pipe born water. There are no computers there are no vans. We are still not where we should be," says Markeh.

Ravaged and looted by war and years of neglect, the museum is housed in an aged building dating back to the 1860's. Late last year, however, some minor refurbishment was carried out with funding and technical support from UNESCO in partnership with the Ministry of Information Culture and Tourism (MICAT). The project included the installation of modern bathroom facilities and training of museum staff.

"The museum needs a lot of things. We were just making a contribution to ensure that most of what was lost was restored," said Stevenson Seidi of UNESCO. He said the technical training of the staff made a positive impact. "The staff is changed. We have new people coming on so we were trying to give assistance to raise the capacity of the staff who are there now."

With UNESCO's help the museum

mounted a textile and crafts exhibition showcasing the best of local fabric known as 'Country Cloth.' Seidi is proud of the impact of the programme.

"When we went back to the museum a couple of months after the project ended, there was much still wanting but the little assistance we had given to the staff was evident in that they seemed to have a clearer vision about what was needed to be done. We are proud of that," said Seidi.

Isaac Jackson worked with MICAT on the refurbishment of the museum as Assistant Minister responsible for Culture at the time. Jackson says the UNESCO project did a lot to restore the morale of producers of local textiles and crafts.

"The programme also gave our people courage. It reinvigorated their efforts to work more in the artistic industry particularly with the textiles. They came from all parts of the country to exhibit their materials in Monrovia. And so with UNESCO's help the exhibition reinvigorated our people's efforts to make country cloth," said



ITRES OF HEALING

Jackson.

Despite the work done so far, however, the Museum Director says visits from members of the general public are few and far between. “The patronage is very poor because most of those that come are UN workers and staff. Those others who come apart from UN staff are students from schools,” said Markeh.

The Museum Director says he is working with the Ministry of Education on a proposal to seek further funding from UNESCO for vehicles to do outreach work in schools and colleges. “That’s what we are trying to work on with UNESCO in collaboration with the ministry of education to see about taking the museum to the schools.”

He also wants to document the current state of all ten museums dotted around Liberia. “We are trying to do an assessment of the ten museums that were damaged by war but up to now we have not been mobile. We need equipment such as cameras to document the current state of those mu-

seums so all of those things we have earmarked for UNESCO to see how best they could come in and give some assistance.”

The museums relationship with UNESCO goes back a long way. Indeed it was partly with UNESCO funding that the museum was first established in 1962. UNESCO produced a report advocating the redesign of the current premises with modern state of the art air conditioning and a hydro-temperature control system. None of those recommendations were implemented. Now Markeh says it is time to move the museum out of its current premises.

“We need to have a purpose-built building to be used as a museum because of the age of this building now. It has outlived its usefulness.”

Indeed the government of Liberia shares Markeh’s vision of the crucial nation-building role that museums can play in post war Liberia. Jackson says the President of Liberia wants to expand this vision further by transforming a former

maximum security prison; Belle Yalla, in Gborpolu County into a museum. “The president has plans to turn the notorious Bella Yala prison into a museum. Exploratory work is ongoing,” said Jackson.

He said an appeal has been made to the general public to come forward with the names of people who were unjustly imprisoned there. “So we are encouraging citizens and the museum director to work with the ministry of information to get the names of Liberian individuals who were imprisoned at the Belle Yala,” he said.

Citing human rights abuses that took place at the prison, Jackson said it was important to turn Belle Yala into a museum. “It was first constructed to be a place for hardened criminals and then it became a place for political prisoners where people who were not on favorable terms with the government were imprisoned.”

If the current efforts to restore the museums succeed, perhaps they could help heal Liberia’s painful past and serve to remind future generations of the futility and horrors of war.

LIBERIAN

What is your view about the Gender Equity Bill that



Bosede A. Ejekwu: Student, University of Liberia & Stella Maris Polytechnic; I think women should not be given that leverage or that boost. I think it shows some level of vulnerability associated with women by women. They should be able to exert themselves by themselves. The government does not necessarily have to bolster or provide some avenue to push us into obtaining such status. But we ourselves as young ladies coming up, we should try to be independent and strive for those positions without necessarily being pushed for them. Well, realistically, I say we women in Liberia come from backgrounds where we are complacent, having this nonchalant attitude towards excelling, moving to higher heights. "And so on the basis of that, it is incumbent on women to change from that and be competitive."



Fatu Sando: The gender Equity bill is healthy for Liberian women because it helps them to advocate for their own rights. It will help women to be able to stand up for their own rights. The bill, when passed, will allow women a share in anything the men do in the House. Of course women have share, but we want greater share than what we have in there. "So I want the bill to be passed."



Esther N Gborkorquellie: I want the 30% given women in Liberia. The men feel they are everything when it comes to making laws. There are some women who always want their men to run every decision in the home. Based on the qualification of the women, they should be allowed to compete for positions in the House so that they can do some thing for their country too.



Chelsea Fofana: Student, College of West Africa; Let the bill be passed so that women in Liberia will have the chance to stand for election in the House. This will give women equal rights with men in the House of Representatives and even in the Senate. If you give women 30% they will become good citizens and do more good things for Liberia. So I stand on behalf of the women for the bill to be passed. "Thirty per cent representation is good for women, but I also want to encourage my fellow young women to concentrate on school and forget about other things so they can be qualified for future positions when the bill is passed."



Nyama Gborkarquellie: Resident of Cow-field Community; I think it is right that the 30% representation be allotted women in the House. The 30% should not mean any woman can enter the House. "You must be qualified before you enter."



Worman Woyah: Employee, Liberia Water & Sewer Corporation; First and foremost, I will like to commend the women who are advocating for this 30% Gender Equity Bill in the House. For me it is good, because over the years our women have been voiceless, and their representation has not been felt. I favor the bill because this is the only way to deter men who perpetrate violence against women. Those who are opposing this bill are not fair to women. In our own democracy in time past, men have always been in the forefront of all. The case of President Johnson Sirleaf is a special one. She has been in politics long before. Even though no space was created for President Johnson Sirleaf, but now the political ground should be soften for the women who are following. "Doing so will encourage women with the potential to compete for elected public offices."

IS SPEAK

calls for 30% Women Representation in Congress?



Evelyn K. Fissibue: I think anyone desiring elected office must compete for said office just as President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf did. But to say you want 30% before you can compete for the post is not good. It may bring problems. Some women may not be capable for the job. Am not in support of it because I want women to put themselves in the shoes of President Sirleaf. "Let them compete with the men, but at the same time, we need men's support in anything we do, but women should try to compete."



Jackie Perry: Resident of ELWA Community; I think men should remain in power instead of women. Presently in our country anywhere you go females are employed, our men no longer have the opportunity for jobs. And this is causing problems in homes, because women do not want to spend their money as the men would do in the home. When a woman has money she would not want to share with her husband. So this is my point of view. I don't think it will make any difference for women if they can't help their men. "No, I don't think there is any need for this bill."



Paul Blackie: Vendor; I feel that all women have a right to hold public office and to be elected. But what is important here is that they must be qualified for the post and they should contest for the post with others. What I am trying to say is that 30% is really not a problem for me, but they must be qualified. In fact if we had true gender equality it should even be 50 to 50. But women should not think because they want 30% therefore they should not be qualified or they should not compete with the others.



Kaweka K. Watson, Employee, National Investment Commission; I agree with the women that 30% be given them because we need equal democracy. It has always been 95% men political dominance. Let there be democratic competition which is the only way our country will move forward. The country is not for a single group but for all. Let the women come in to play their part. "Women lobby faster than men, if the political avenue is created for them they could do better for the country."



Adicius Nagbe Pouch: Resident of Logan Town; I don't think women should be given 30% equal rights. What women should be doing is to go out and canvass for public office. Advocating for public office allocation is like forcing it and this is undemocratic. Let them sell their platforms to convince voters rather than sit by and request 30% congressional representation. I don't see any logic in 30% political representation. "For example, President Sirleaf did not have to ask for political office allotment before being elected to the highest political office."



Patience Karngar: Employee, Foundation for International Dignity (FIND); I think the bill should be given due credence. We are calling for gender equity to promote women's cause. The bill will allow women to push the cause of women in the House (Congress) to about 85%. The 30% will encourage women to compete for elected office in the House (Congress). Let the space be created for women now, if they fail to utilize the opportunity that may be created by the passage of that bill, then it should be withdrawn. "But I think it should be given them for trial."

