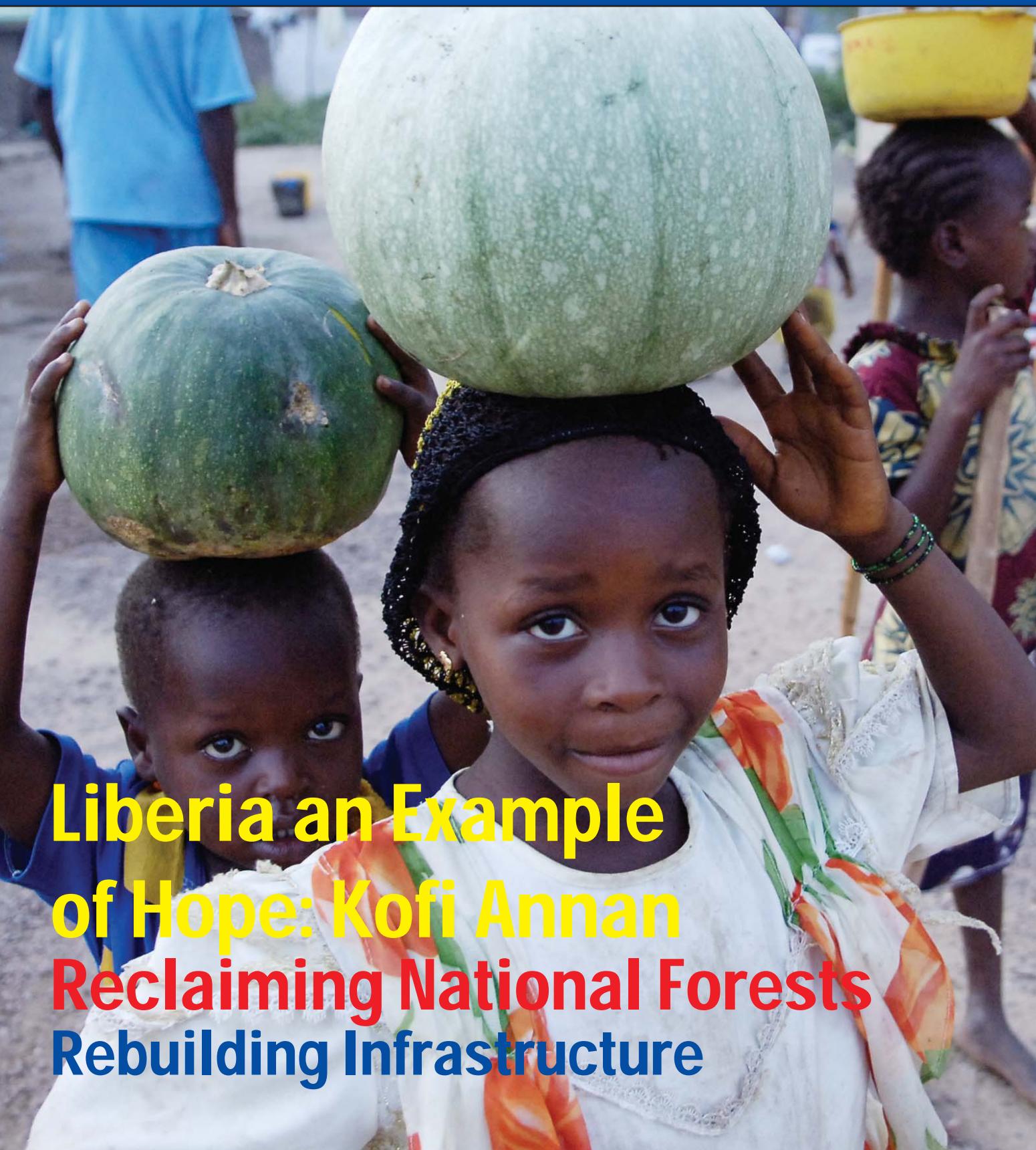


UNMIL FOCUS

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September - November 2006



**Liberia an Example
of Hope: Kofi Annan
Reclaiming National Forests
Rebuilding Infrastructure**

Message From the Special Representative of the Secretary-General



Since I last wrote in UNMIL FOCUS, the government and people of Liberia have continued to make substantial strides in reconstructing the nation that until recently was a victim of a long and painful conflict.

In late September, I had the opportunity to brief the Security Council in New York on Secretary-General Kofi Annan's latest report on Liberia. The report detailed the progress the country has made so far in collaboration with the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). While noting that Liberia is an example of hope as it strives steadfastly to achieve sustainable peace, the Secretary-General also stressed the need for significant support from the international community as the nation faces immense challenges in reconstructing its vandalised economy and in mending its torn social fabric.

Security still remains one of the major concerns, as pointed out in the progress report, and UNMIL is encouraging the Government of Liberia to draw up a comprehensive security policy and strategy. Simultaneously, the restructuring of the Liberia National Police is ongoing, with the recruitment and training of a new force.

The training of the recruits for the new Armed Forces of Liberia began in July and already over one hundred of the first group of trainees, including ten women, have graduated. The new AFL is expected to be partially operational by late 2008.

As the economy picks-up, prevention of crime -- essentially a policing task -- must continue to be a high priority for UNMIL. For this, the Liberia National Police requires urgent, additional donor support, especially for communications equipment and transportation, well beyond what has already been delivered or pledged by donors. UNMIL has assisted the Government in prepar-

ing financing proposals to donor partners, in order to meet these requirements. I hope donors will respond favourably.

Laying emphasis on locally-driven development to spur economic growth, UNMIL, together with the UN funds and agencies, has initiated the creation of a UN County Support Team (CST) in each of Liberia's 15 counties. These teams have now begun assisting local authorities in the counties to design, coordinate and implement community development projects. This initiative is the UN family's response to the government's policy of decentralization and aligns UN assistance with the country's own development agenda.

The UN family in Liberia continues to work actively in infrastructural development, education, health sector and refugee returns to support the Government's own reconstruction efforts.

In October, I attended the meeting of the Heads of the United Nations Peace Missions in West Africa that was held in Dakar. The meeting acknowledged the Security Council's continued support for the consolidation of peace in Liberia and drew attention to the need for job creation, national reconciliation and the realistic management of expectations among the Liberian population and the international community. A major issue deliberated at this meeting was the fragile peace process in Côte d'Ivoire, a subject closely linked to Liberia's own prospects for lasting peace.

A lot more work remains to be done before Liberia can fully emerge from the shadow of conflict. In view of the massive challenges facing the country, the international community will need to remain closely engaged in Liberia while the process of reform and renewal moves ahead. This will be the focus of the Partners Forum, which will bring Liberia and its partners together in Washington, D.C., next February.


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



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In his latest report on Liberia, Kofi Annan takes stock of the progress made in the country and the challenges ahead.



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With the passage of the National Forestry Reform Law and the lifting of timber sanctions by the UN Security Council, Liberia is now poised to benefit from better forestry management.



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The 2006 Liberia National Human Development Report indicts the prolonged conflict for inflicting major setbacks on the economy and identifies priority areas for development.

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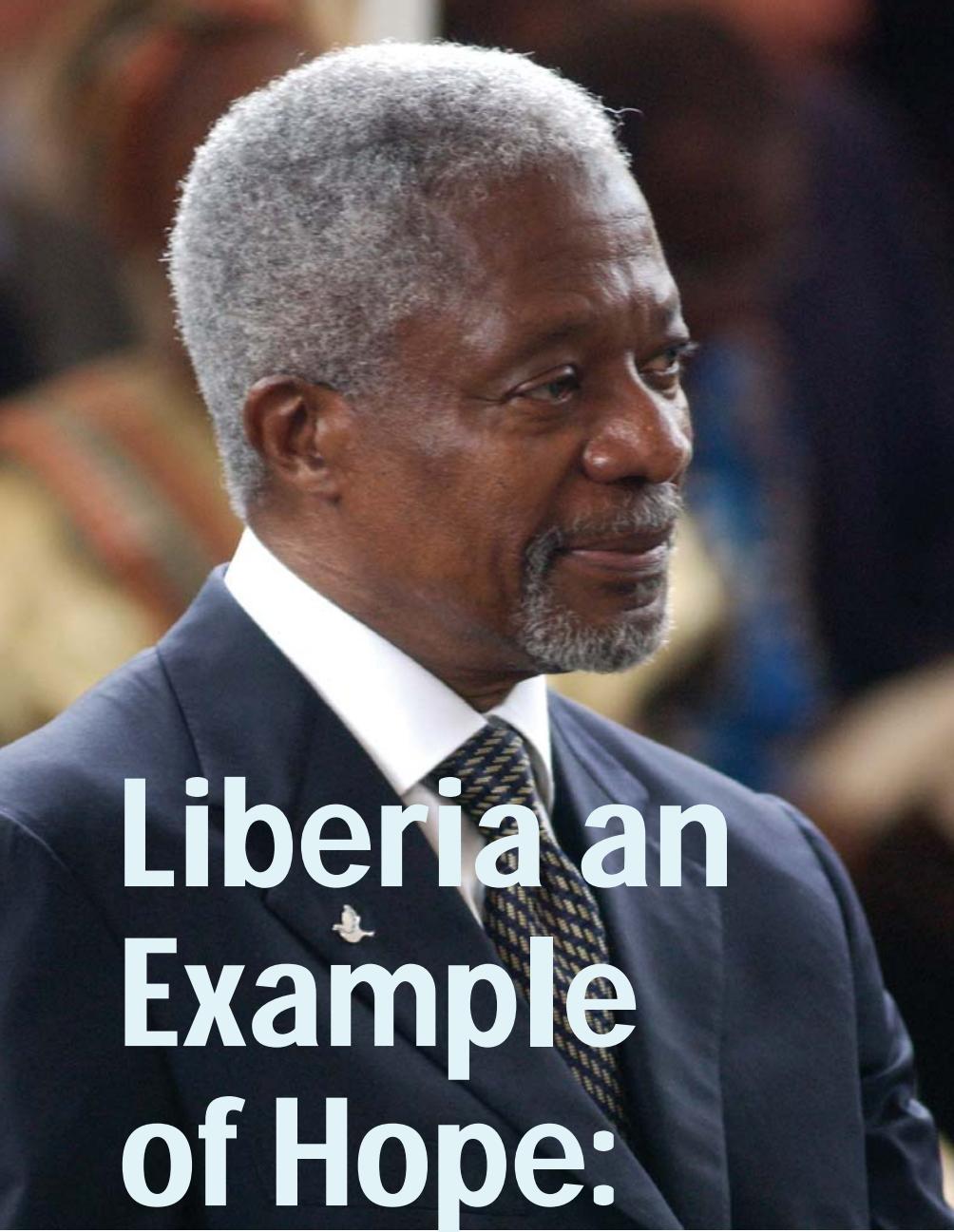
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Liberia an Example of Hope: Kofi Annan

By Mathew Elavanalathoduka

Liberia, which was once at the centre of conflict in West Africa, now serves as “an example of hope” and of what can be achieved when leaders and citizens work together, Secretary-General Kofi Annan said in his recent progress report to the Security Council on the war-torn nation’s efforts to consolidate peace and rehabilitate its shattered economy. “Nevertheless, Liberia still faces enor-

mous challenges in several areas,” he cautioned, urging donor countries to come forward to assist the country recover quickly from long years of civil war.

“Liberia has continued to make tangible progress in a number of areas. The three branches of Government are functioning; the reform of the security sector is gradually progressing; the resettlement of internally displaced persons has been completed; an increasing number of Liberian refugees have returned home,” Annan said in his mid-September report. He also

noted the steps taken to fight corruption and improve economic governance.

Annan recalled his visit to Liberia in July to witness the progress being made in rebuilding the country and his meetings with President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf and her Cabinet as well as senior public and UN officials. “I was impressed by the commitment and dedication to peace and democratic governance demonstrated by the leaders and people of Liberia,” he said.

The Secretary-General highlighted security as one of the major challenges in Liberia’s reconstruction effort. “The country is heavily dependent on UNMIL for the provision of security, given that the new police service is still in its formative stages and the training of the new armed forces is only just beginning,” he pointed out. He urged the Liberian Government and the United Nations to “remain vigilant” to

As the 2006 United Nations Consolidated Appeal for Liberia has only received 34 per cent of the estimated requirements for the year, he appealed to donors to generously provide the assistance required to meet these needs.

carefully manage internal threats to stability.

Although the reform and restructuring of the Liberian National Police continues to make good progress, Annan said the Government urgently needs funds to complete the basic training programme for new recruits as well as for specialized police training, vehicles, communications equipment and accommodation allowances. He lamented the low presence of the national police in the interior of the country which remains “far below acceptable levels.”

However, despite such problems, Annan described the security situation in Liberia as having remained “generally stable” since his last report to the Security Council in June and noted the steady progress being made in the restoration and

consolidation of State authority throughout the nation.

Annan cited in his report several humanitarian challenges that require "urgent attention" in the country. They include provision of health care, water and sanitation, education, shelter, food and livelihood opportunities. As the 2006 United Nations Consolidated Appeal for Liberia has only received 34 per cent of the estimated requirements for the year, he appealed to donors to generously provide the assistance required to meet these needs.

The Secretary-General also said that Liberia's efforts to cultivate good relations with its neighbours were progressing well, and highlighted the important regional message sent by the transfer on 20 June of former Liberian President Charles Taylor from Sierra Leone to The Hague to face charges of war crimes. 'Not only did it signal that the world will not accept impunity, it also demonstrated the recognition by the Government of Liberia, regional leaders and the Security Council that Mr. Taylor's continued presence in Freetown was a threat to peace and stability in the sub-region,' he said.

Briefing the Security Council on the Secretary-General's report, Special Representative Alan Doss reiterated the need for "constant vigilance and robust management" to maintain political stability in Liberia. Demonstrations and threats of violence by former security personnel, disruptions by ex-combatants waiting or contesting reintegration benefits and restive youth searching for employment are "sources of potential instability" in the country, he said.

"We must be prepared too for disruptions that may come from other groups and individuals whose political and economic interests have been adversely affected by the new democratic dispensation and the Administration's reform initiatives," Doss warned. He also highlighted the concern that any deterioration in the security situation in neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire could spill over into Liberia. To address this, the United Nations Mission in Liberia has beefed up security in border areas and is conducting concurrent patrolling with the UN Mission in Côte d'Ivoire.

Among the many challenges of post-



Alan Doss

conflict recovery in Liberia, few are as pressing as the problem of unemployment,

Although the Government has taken some steps towards enhancing the rule of law, a great deal remains to be done to ensure the effective administration of justice, respect for human rights and the ending of impunity. The main obstacles are the lack of judicial infrastructure, a dearth of qualified judicial and legal officers and financial constraints.

Doss informed the Security Council. "Our efforts to bolster stability and accelerate

reform will be seriously undermined if we cannot help Liberia create jobs for the multitude of young people, ex-combatants and former employees who have few or no economic opportunities," he stressed.

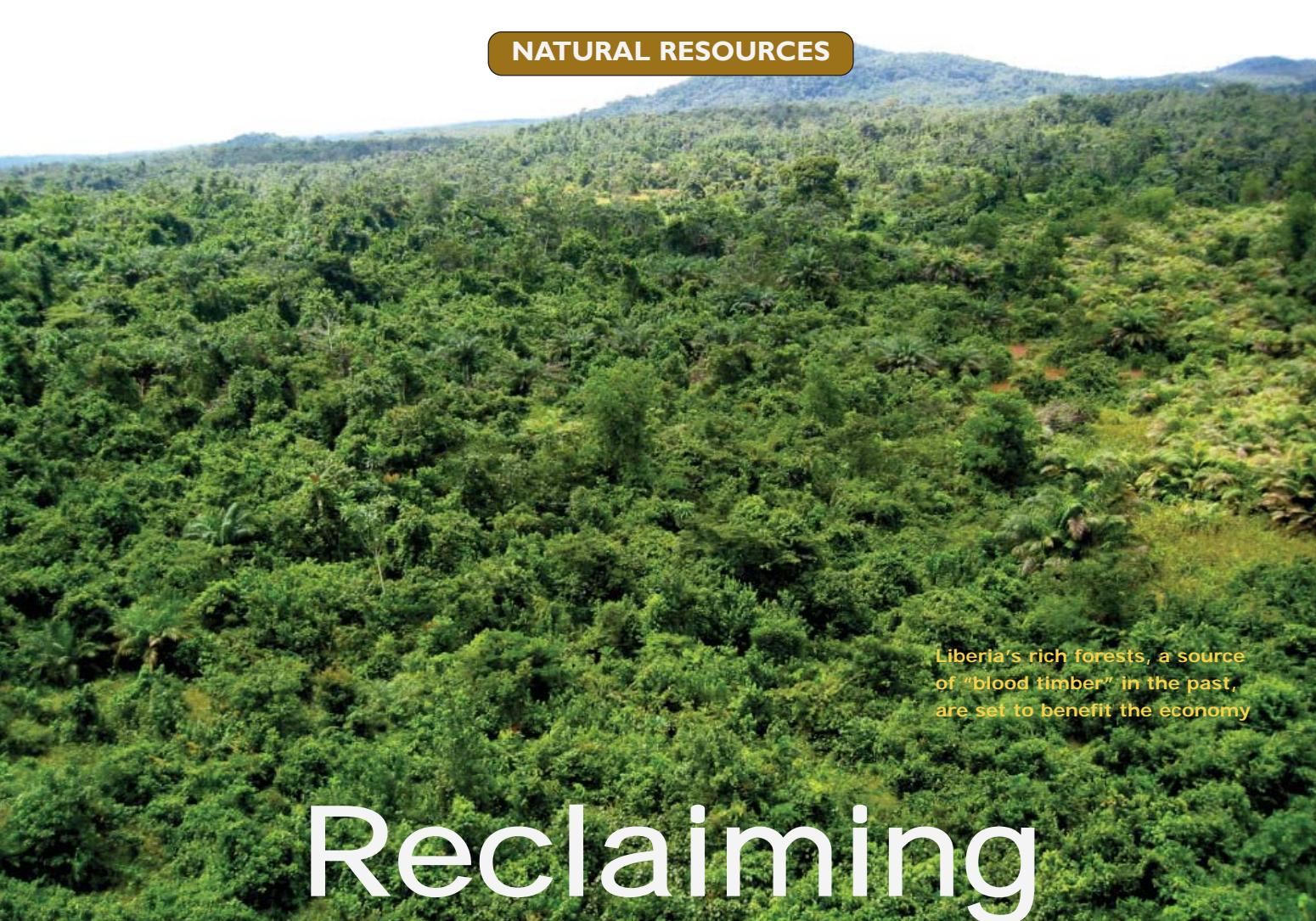
Doss urged donors and partners to contribute as a matter of priority to the initiative launched by the Liberian Government in July for employment generation through labour intensive public works. The World Bank, USAID, ILO, UNDP and the UN Mission in Liberia have already committed support to this initiative.

Although the Government has taken some steps towards enhancing the rule of law, a great deal remains to be done to ensure the effective administration of justice, respect for human rights and the ending of impunity, the Special Representative reminded the 15-member body. The main obstacles are the lack of judicial infrastructure, a dearth of qualified judicial and legal officers and financial constraints, he pointed out.

Doss attributed the progress in advancing the peace process in Liberia to efforts by President Johnson-Sirleaf, and the continued support of the Security Council and other member countries of the United Nations. However, in view of the massive challenges facing the country, the international community will need to remain closely engaged in Liberia while the process of reform and renewal moves ahead, he added.

If the security situation permits, the United Nations Mission in Liberia may begin its drawdown phase in early 2008, the UN envoy said. During this phase, the Mission will seek to progressively transfer security responsibilities to national and local authorities based on criteria and timeframe to be discussed with the Government. The Council will be provided with the plan for the drawdown in September 2007.

Special Representative Doss also thanked the troop and civilian police contributing countries, past and present UNMIL personnel, the UN Country Team, humanitarian and aid organizations as well as ECOWAS, the African Union and the donor community, all of whom continue to support the cause of peace in Liberia and West Africa. ♦



Liberia's rich forests, a source of "blood timber" in the past, are set to benefit the economy

Reclaiming National Forests

By Yuko Maeda

Adramatic passage of the new National Forestry Reform Law at the Legislature in mid-September paved the way for lifting by the Security Council a long-standing UN sanction on timber trade in Liberia for good, opening up a life-time opportunity for the nation to regain control over its abundant natural resources to help develop the country's ruined economy while protecting its rich biodiversity.

The law, subsequently signed by President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf on 4 October, is to create a sustainable forestry sector for the benefit of the people by holistically regulating commercial log-

ging, community forestry and conservation activities. For Liberia which has taken several steps to clean up the chaotic forestry sector in recent months, the passage of the law cleared the final obstacle to secure the full lifting of the timber embargo -- the only condition the Security Council imposed in June to make a temporary lifting permanent.

Calling the passage of the law "a benchmark" in the reform of the forestry sector, Johnson-Sirleaf envisioned the law would bring back credibility to forestry management in Liberia and could allow people in the forestry community to take advantage of their natural resources. "We now have the responsibility to implement this law," vowed the President before signing the law. "We can protect our forests for

the future generations; we can ensure resource allocation and equity in distribution of benefits; we can make sure to add value to our primary commodity, so that we can move on steps along the development ladder."

Liberia lies entirely in the Upper Guinean Rainforest ecosystem. Covering nearly half of the national land, Liberia's forests are home to about 240 timber species, 2,000 flowering plants, 125 mammal species, 590 bird species and a few of the remaining populations of endangered forest elephant in West Africa. Led by timber trade that once amounted to more than 50 per cent of the country's exports worth an estimated US\$80 million, forest resources had contributed more than 20 per cent of the national Gross Domestic

Product at peak time.

However, forest resources have never been properly managed or protected. During the 14-year brutal civil war, timber became a lucrative resource for Liberia's armed factions, who traded timber products for arms. Logging concessions were given out to private companies two and a half times as much as the actual size of forest land available, and only a little portion of tax revenue from trade went to the national coffers. To end the "blood timber" trade, the UN Security Council imposed a ban on timber exports in May 2003, months before Charles Taylor went into exile and the warring factions signed the Comprehensive Peace Accord in Accra. Although export of timber came to a halt and some reform efforts were made by a donors-led Liberia Forest Initiative, the Security Council repeatedly renewed the sanction for lack of measures by the transitional government to ensure the forest resources are used for development.

It was only after Johnson-Sirleaf took office early this year that reform in the potentially viable forestry sector took off. She issued her first executive order to nullify all the 70 logging concessions, all of which were previously found guilty of fueling the war or not complying with the laws, and constituted a joint committee of the government and its international partners, the Forestry Reform Monitoring Committee (FRMC), to develop a comprehensive forestry reform package that included drafting the law and monitoring the forestry.

"It's wonderful to see this new law, which does promote the sustainable use of forest resources, has been signed by the President," said Jordan Ryan, Deputy Special Representative of Secretary-General who co-chaired the forestry reform committee. "We hope...Liberia will get back to work to develop forestry in a sustainable way, which truly benefits all of the people of Liberia."

With the passage of the much-awaited legislation, the Security Council on 20 October decided not to reinstate the sanction on timber trade. "Members of the Security Council commended the Liberian legislature for passing legislation that will ensure a transparent, accountable and government-controlled forestry sector,"

Security Council President of the month Kenzo Oshima said in New York. "This important forestry legislation will ensure that revenues from the timber industry will not again fuel conflict."

The historic law stipulates the Forestry Development Authority (FDA) take full-control over forest resources in commercial logging, community forestry and conservation. It sets out the mechanism to award concession rights, the imposition of systematic taxation and various fees, the protection of forestry-dependent communities and the establishment of protected forest areas.

"Liberianization" is a key concept of the forestry management under the new law to define a fine line between the protection of Liberian businesses and the promotion of foreign investments. It regulates that commercial logging agreements over a land area less than 50,000 hectares can be given exclusively to Liberian-owned companies while a land area between 50,000 and 100,000 hectares to companies owned at least 51 per cent by Liberian citizens.

The law also demands a community-friendly forestry industry. The commercial loggers are obligated to establish a social agreement with local communities living on the fringe of concessions on the benefits and access rights they could enjoy. And from the land rental fees the logging companies pay to the government, 30 per cent would go to communities entitled to benefit and another 30 per cent to the

counties of concession areas. In addition, the law protects the right of local communities to ownership and usage of communal forest resources.

Conservation and protection of forestry environment are another major component of the law. All of the logging companies are now for the first time in Liberia's history required to go through an environmental impact assessment and produce an environmental management strategy plan to ensure an ecologically sound usage of forest resources before starting their operations. The law also demands protected forest areas such as National Parks, National Forests and Game Reserves be established for wildlife protection, eco-tourism and research activities under a Protected Forest Areas Network.

"This law represents a major accomplishment to put Liberia on the right track for sustainable development, economic growth and employment creation," commended Oliver Pierce of the US Department of Agriculture Forestry Service, which provided technical assistance for forestry reform. In the recent past, the forestry sector employed more than 7,000 workers.

The passage of the law was a culmination of a joint effort between the government and the international community, including the UN Mission in Liberia. Together with experts from the World Bank, the USDA Forestry Service and the UN agency Food and Agriculture Organisation, UNMIL's environmental



advisors and civil affairs officers have provided invaluable inputs to the forestry reform.

“Forestry reform deals with three pillars: commercial forestry, community forestry and conservation forestry... We have addressed all issues of forestry, from the issue of Liberianization to the issue of community rights,” recalled Joseph Sesay, an agro-economist and Civil Affairs Officer who has been engaged in forestry reform from the initial stages and drew up a roadmap for the lifting of timber sanctions two years ago. He says as Liberia produces a high quality of timber, the logging industry would bounce back in a few years if the law were implemented properly. “It has potential to boost local economy by generating large revenue from commercial forestry and creating lots of employment opportunities. Timber exports could generate US\$140 million by 2010,” he projects.

Yet challenges in forestry reform still remain. Webby Bwanali, a Senior Environmental Advisor, says capacity-building of FDA and the Environmental



Liberia's forests
are home to a
variety of animal
and plant
species

Protection Agency is one of the urgent challenges to be overcome for the full implementation of the law. And forestry regulations covering such fields as forest land-use planning, chain of custody management and environmental impact assessment need to be developed. “Forest is still intact,” Bwanali says. “It has to be governed well for a great future. Enforcement institutions should be strengthened and the government must ensure the implementation of the law and regulations.”

UNMIL, together with other international partners, stands by the government in implementing the law to make the forestry sector vibrant. “The international partners are delighted to support the efforts of Liberians in having the control of the natural resources,” said Ryan. “We need to make sure the law is implemented fully and fairly. We hope the UN Country Team and UN County Support Teams in the fields will be able to work with logging companies, FDA and people who would benefit from this law.” ♦

Pierluigi Bomi/Università degli Studi - Roma Tre

WB Grant for Forestry Development

By Yuko Maeda

In an effort to strengthen Liberia's forestry management, the World Bank has given a US\$2 million grant to Liberia to develop a soundly-governed, community-oriented forestry sector.

The Bank's Development Forestry Sector Management Project is to increase institutional capacity of Liberia's Forestry Development Authority and other public entities, support community forest activities, develop agro-forestry management, assist small-scale private logging businesses and raise public awareness on the forestry reform. The three-year project will be implemented by the UN Development Programme in conjunction with the Liberia Forest

Initiative, a coalition of donors, the government and NGOs for a long-term forestry development.

The grant came at an opportune time as the new Forestry Reform Law became effective on 4 October. Regulating commercial logging, community forestry and conservation activities, the law is expected to allow the country to exploit its abundant natural resources for the benefit of the forestry community and the country's economic growth, and protect the biodiversity of forests.

“The initial grant of US\$2 million will go to help vitalize the capacity of FDA to be able to implement the law,” said Jordan Ryan, Deputy Special Representative of UN Secretary-General and UNDP Country Coordinator who leads the UN efforts in Liberia's forestry reform. “It's a great

action of the World Bank, very timely.”

Although the passage of the law was a milestone to help create a sustainable forestry sector and lift the UN sanction on timber exports, its implementation remains a considerable challenge as forestry-related regulations and other fundamental management mechanisms are not in place and the capacity of the regulatory body is weak. The Bank's grant is expected to address this area.

According to the project document, the grant will be used for restructuring of the FDA, training of log-tracking and chain of custody and developing new forestry regulations. It will also provide training for developing sustainable forest management plans for communities and help establish two pilot community forestry concessions. Technical assistance to develop market-

Diamond Ban Stays

By Yuko Maeda

Although the UN Security Council acknowledged some progress in Liberia's reform on the diamond mining industry, Liberia failed to make a UN ban on diamond trade lifted, according to a statement issued on 20 October by the Council.

"Members of the Security Council were encouraged by the steps Liberia has taken towards meeting the requirements for the lifting of the measures on diamonds," reads the statement by Security Council President Kenzo Oshima. But the council concluded to retain the ban, noting the findings by the Panel of Experts, a UN body to review sanctions, that "more needs to be done for Liberia to establish a Certificate of Origin Regime for export of Liberian rough diamonds."

The certificate of origin regime is a pre-requisite to join the Kimberley Process, an international certification process to verify whether the precious

gems come from legitimate sources, not from conflict-ridden regimes. It is a joint initiative of governments, international diamond industry and civil society to curb the flow of "blood diamonds" that have financed armed conflicts in Africa and elsewhere, and has a membership of 45 countries and regions, accounting for almost all the global production of rough diamonds.

The Council specifically urged the government to take the necessary reform measures including the development of stronger management of the gem mining industry and more effective verification and accountability mechanisms. At the same time, the Council expressed its wish to lift the embargo "as soon as possible so that revenues from the diamond sector can benefit the Liberian people." It will review the diamonds sanction again in December.

The ban on Liberia's diamond exports was originally imposed in 2001 along with arms embargo when it was a major source to fuel bloody conflicts in Liberia as well

as in neighbouring countries. During the war, Liberia exported an estimated US\$300 million worth of diamonds annually.

In a response to the world body's decision, President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf on 31 October constituted a joint Task Force on Diamond to accelerate the government's efforts to join the Kimberley scheme. With Lands, Mines and Energy Minister Eugene Shannon as chair and Special Representative of the Secretary-General Alan Doss as co-chair, the task force is charged with ensuring the government takes up necessary measures to meet the requirements for the lifting of the UN ban on diamonds.

Timber trade, another UN embargo, is now free from any restriction as the Security Council in October decided not to reinstate the ban, which was imposed in May 2003 and temporarily lifted in June this year, since Liberia passed the new Forestry Reform Law by the deadline set by the Council. ♦

oriented management of tree crops such as cocoa and rubber will come as a part of the grant. The project also envisions supporting the creation of micro-enterprises for reforestation and community-driven development projects around the Sapo National Park.

FDA Managing Director John Woods said the grant will help the community living on the fringe of the forests receive equitable share from the natural resources. "This project is intended to improve the livelihood of people in the forestry community and reduce the level of poverty."

Paola Agostini, a World Bank senior economist who led the formulation of the project, said it will turn around the forestry sector as a major source of growth and income for Liberia. "The first major step is done with the passage of the law. A next major step now is to implement the law and to make sure all the regulations are in place so that we can really be operational in the forestry sector," she said. ♦



Jordan Ryan during an assessment visit to a logging company in Pleebo



Once ruled by rebel forces,
Liberia's rubber plantations are
back under government control

Got Guthrie Back

By Yuko Maeda

As he approached a curve on the road toward the headquarters of the Guthrie Rubber Plantation from one of the three entry points, Allan Quee shifted the gear into second and readied himself to encounter ex-combatants roaming around the overgrowing rubber trees. It was an automatic reaction for the consultant who has been visiting the plantation daily for needs assessment. Instead of the violence-hungry youth, what caught his eyes was hundreds of smiling children in a brand-new white and blue uniform running toward him.

"It was the most amazing moment I've ever had since I started coming here every day," Quee recalls the day the plantation's only full-grade school reopened in early October. "I was almost in tears."

Guthrie signifies a successful joint initiative the government and the UN took to restore State authority over Liberia's abundant natural resources. With the support of the UN Mission in Liberia and other UN agencies, the government in mid-August took over control of the plantation long

occupied by ex-combatants to lay the foundation for future investment.

"With this repossession, the government will restore State authority and rule of law on the Guthrie Rubber Plantation...to create a peaceful and secure environment, give legal employment opportunities and establish an interim management team to rehabilitate the plantation," declared Agriculture Minister Christian Toe, who also heads the government-UN joint Rubber Plantation Task Force, which is mandated to address multifaceted issues to overhaul the rubber industry.

Liberia is home to one of the world's largest rubber plantations, Firestone, and rubber accounts for most of the country's export earnings. But without a proper oversight by the government, the rubber industry has become a hotbed of economic crimes and human rights violations.

Guthrie, the only government-owned plantation which stretches out 300,000 acres in two north-western counties of Bomi and Grand Cape Mount, is the worst case. Opened in 1957, it was long managed by Guthrie Rubber Company from Malaysia from 1981 until 2000, but has recently been occupied by former combat-

ants of the defunct LURD, one of the warring factions involved in Liberia's civil conflict. In the last three years, hundreds of former rebels controlled the plantation to tap and sell illicit latex for millions of dollars and terrorized the plantation community of 36,000 people. August's repossession was a beginning of the long process to recover the ruined plantation.

The takeover of Guthrie was not an easy task. Before the repossession, members of the task force carefully worked out a repossession strategy. First the Liberian National Police assigned 12 police officers to the plantation to secure the environment, UNMIL deployed peacekeepers and UN police officers to backup the national security force, another team of the task force prepared various reintegration opportunities to encourage ex-combatants to abandon illicit business, and the government identified an interim management team from the Rubber Planters Association to put the rubber business back and set up a support group with relevant institutions. Simultaneously, UNMIL engineers constructed pre-fabricated offices for them at the centre of the plantation.

"This didn't happen by chance; it was a



result of a lot of hard work," summarized Alan Doss, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General.

As the takeover began, there were a group of ex-combatants still chanting "we won't leave," demanding the payment of demobilisation benefits. Armed UN police officers from Jordan, backed by Namibian peacekeepers, kept a watch on the agitated former rebels. Intensive information campaigns and tedious dialogues with the illegal occupants and community leaders prior to the repossession apparently didn't work for some.

Despite a few scuffles, the takeover brought hope to many. "This is a dream-come-true. I'm overjoyed!" screamed Richard M. Konenh, a former worker of the plantation, widely smiling to the dignitaries who announced the repossession. In a blue jean jacket and a matching cap, the 52-year-old veteran tapper said he returned to Guthrie for the first time since he fled the war. "I came back here to see the takeover, hoping to get my job back... I want to start working right now!"

Since the reclamation, Guthrie has been slowly but steadily moving ahead. The government managed to convince by

mid-September a majority of the hard-core former rebels to leave the plantation and gradually curbed illegal tapping while a rehabilitation and reintegration component of the task force conducted a screening process to verify the eligibility of ex-combatants for the official reintegration programmes in formal education and vocational training. The interim management team, meanwhile, began restoring the business by putting back a chain of command for operation, hiring, rehiring and training over 1,000 tappers, and brushing the rubber farms and roadsides to start tapping latex. By late October, the management began centrally collecting rubber crops from employees, which are sold to a private company to process.

"Despite some difficulties, we're encouraged by the progress made since the government took over control of the plantation," Doss commended when he revisited Guthrie in mid-October.

Quee, UNMIL's consultant, feels the progress in his bones. When he started regular visits to Guthrie in June, he could not even drive into the plantation without a security escort by armed peacekeepers. But now that the security situation is under control by the peacekeepers and police officers, he can freely move around tappers' camps to survey the need for social services to improve their livelihood. "Within a few months, the plantation made significant progress. It's amazing," he says.

Surely, the shadow of terrifying ex-combatants is fading out of the plantation. Fayiah Bundor, a 37-year-old headman who supervises a group of tappers, says he can now work on his free will. "Since the new management took over, we have had no problems with ex-combatants. Before, we were forced to work, tap rubber for them as they wish." He says former rebels who controlled the area forcibly took clothes, shoes and other personal belongings from tappers. They also forced them to tap latex without any room for negotiation for the price. "Now we are free."

For the reintegration of ex-combatants, the screening process has identified 159 demobilised former combatants as eligible for the formal programmes and the task force is assisting them to enter vocational training courses or regular schools. Nearly 400 other ex-combatants of Guthrie, who

are not qualified for the formal rehabilitation programmes, are scheduled to receive six-month training in rubber and agricultural skills by the UK-based NGO Landmine Action. And some are mingling with regular tappers to work under the new management.

With peace in place, the livelihood of people on the plantation is changing, too. In addition to the full-grade school children walk to for as long as two hours from the edge of the plantation, 15 other schools for kindergarteners and lower-grade kids are now functioning across the rubber farms. A health clinic run by the management team has begun its services since late October to treat outpatients. And a local market of thatched huts is now open near the plantation's central office. Although the number of stalls is still small, the market presents grocery stores, clothing shops and even a restaurant-bar. "I already have regular customers. They stay up to midnight or 1 o'clock in the morning," says Haja Jalloh, the 24-year-old owner of the restaurant-bar who lives outside Guthrie. She grabbed a business opportunity on the plantation as soon as security was restored.

The rehabilitation of the plantation is picking up. Operations Manager Anthony T. Merchant, a veteran retiree from Firestone, says the management continues to brush the rubber farms to clear the sites, plans to stimulate trees to re-energize and trains tappers to respect "rubber culture." Plans are afoot to establish a nursery of small trees to replant the farms before handing the plantation over to a private investor. "We are here to stabilize the situation for investors. It will happen in the not too distant future," he says.

Augustine S. Allie, a long-term former employee and now a production manager for one of the plantation's three estates, dreams the return of old days. He remembers the processing factory was running full-scale, warehouses were full of machinery and, of course, truckloads of rubber filled up weigh stations. "It was full of life. People were enjoying their lives," he smiles. "We can still bring back those days. One day we will get that life back."

Guthrie is slowly rediscovering its former self. •

Rebuilding Infrastructure

By Sulaiman Momodu

Look, most of our roads are filled with potholes," George Richards, a resident of Monrovia, sighs in frustration. "So we want the government to please fix the roads in the country. In addition, we want electricity, we want water supply..."

Amidst soaring expectations among the three million-plus war-weary Liberians who long to see tangible evidence of development, rebuilding Liberia's ruined infrastructure is undoubtedly one of the greatest challenges the Government of President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf is currently contending with.

"We have a lot of work ahead of us to ensure that Liberia is a stable, safe and prosperous country....we have to work together because we all have something to contribute, but also because time is not on our side," Special Representative of the Secretary-General Alan Doss said in November at a meeting with the staff of UNMIL and UN agencies. Terming it as "dry season deliverables," he said over the next six to eight months as the weather improves, "we want to help the government move forward as fast as it can in a whole range of areas but particularly in the area of infrastructure."

Since April 2004, the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) has made emergency repairs or undertaken efforts to improve the most critical spots on over 2,000 km of roads throughout the country. Notwithstanding this effort, and in view of the fact that infrastructure is capital intensive, more needs to be done to improve Liberia's road network system, which has been made worse by years of neglect during the 14-year conflict.

With the beginning of the dry season in

November, many organizations including UNMIL, UN agencies, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector as well as civil society organizations are cooperating with the Ministry of Public Works to rebuild the infrastructure as the World Bank (WB) takes the lead in funding major road works on the country's primary roads.

During his visit to Liberia in July, WB President Paul Wolfowitz observed that Liberia needs "everything and everything all at once." The Bank has provided an emergency grant of US\$68 million to support 'emergency interventions' in addressing some of the critical infrastructure needs of the country, such as rehabilitating dilapidated roads, improving the efficiency of both sea and air ports and restoring portions of the sewerage, drainage and solid waste management systems in the capital, Monrovia, as well as undertaking community empowerment projects in various parts of the country.

"The Liberian people have been promised a lot, now is the time for all to deliver," said Paul Kriss, the Infrastructure and Basic Services Cluster Leader of the World Bank in Liberia.

Whether in Monrovia or in the remotest parts of the country, the cry for better services and improved facilities is a familiar one, with requests for rehabilitation of roads featuring prominently. During the rainy season lasting from April to October/November of each year, bad road conditions continually become worse. And with very poor drainage systems, many roads in the capital are prone not only to flooding during heavy downpours, but some city residents also experience flooding of their homes from time to time.

The hunger for good roads is understandable. Improved road conditions will help facilitate humanitarian assistance,

revive the country's economy through expansion of commerce and trade and contribute to poverty reduction among rural and urban populations. Good roads also mean reduced travel time, reduced transport costs and reduced cost for goods.

The World Bank's grant prioritizes rehabilitation of six rural roadways through the rebuilding of bridges and culverts, rehabilitation of critical segments of road surfaces, roadside brushing and repairing of drainages, among others. WB is funding projects on six rural roads, with UNMIL implementing labour-intensive work on five of them :Foya - Voinjama, in collaboration with UNHCR, Voinjama - Zorzor, Ganta - Saclepea, Saclepea - Tappita and Zwedru - Fishtown. Work on the sixth, the Pleebo - Barclayville road, is to be implemented by the Ministry of



Public Works through local contractors.

In addition to the rural projects, WB is rehabilitating two major roads linking Monrovia to Buchanan and to Ganta, a town near the border with Guinea. "This work is almost complete in terms of preparations," Kriss said, pointing out that actual road works would commence soon. These emergency interventions are, however, on critical sections of the roads, which are to be asphalted. It is expected that rehabilitation of these roads will create short-term employment opportunities for hundreds of youths.

As part of a joint project implementation agreement involving the six above-mentioned projects, WB, UNMIL, Public Works and UNDP meet regularly in a quadrilateral form of cooperation. UNMIL supplies heavy construction equipment as well as military and civilian technical expertise and supervision, Public Works provides added road engineering expertise and knowledge of the terrain, UNDP takes care of the overall management of financial resources, including procurement of auxiliary construction equipment, tools, gear and materials as well as payment of labourers, and the WB contributes finan-

cial resources. At the same time, principal parties involved in road works meet fortnightly in a gathering convened by UNMIL-RRR to focus attention on operational issues and to facilitate cooperation in support of community driven recovery efforts.

Added to the appalling road conditions, Monrovia's Freeport, the only functioning port in the country that is the economic life-line for the nation, is in very bad shape partly as a result of the war, but mainly as a result of neglect and bad management. Much of the food, manufactured goods and fuel are imported into the country through the Freeport, but both the physical infrastructure and cargo handling facilities require urgent attention, which is something that the WB is also looking into so as to ensure that the operation of the port is efficient, effective and secure.

Arriving in Liberia by air, a visitor's first impression of the country's infrastructure is the poorly equipped Roberts International Airport (RIA). The WB, however, has committed US\$600,000 for the purchase of navigational, aeronautical, meteorological and security equipment for the airport. The capital's international air-

port, if well equipped, can attract many international airlines and investors. The government has also come forward with its own contribution to the airport's revival by committing US\$200,000 for the renovation and modification of the existing passenger terminal.

In addition to focusing on roads and bridges, UNMIL continues to rehabilitate many public buildings through its Quick Impact Project (QIP) mechanism, including schools, health clinics, administrative buildings, banks, court houses, police and fire stations, says Gregory Sanchez, UNMIL's Rehabilitation and Recovery Officer. Other structures rehabilitated or built through NGOs and local contractors using QIP resources include prisons and jails, markets, shelter for physically disabled and wells and sanitation facilities.

Among the many organisations assisting with the reconstruction of Liberia's infrastructure are the World Bank, the European Commission, USAID, UNDP, UNMIL, UNHCR, GTZ, ILO, the Swiss Development Corporation, WFP, the Danish Refugee Council, German Agro Action and the Governments of the Netherlands and China, among others. •



Expanding and rehabilitating the road network is a major task facing the government

County Teams Support Local Authorities

By Yuko Maeda

Atall man in a khaki safari suit walks to the podium on the stage amidst a musical chorus by a group of peasant women. A round of spontaneous applause follows as he warmly glances at the audience of a hundred local men and women. The scene is a former courthouse in Voinjama now occupied by UN peacekeepers.

"Everyone from this Lofa County must have the same life. No one is left out from the process to build our clans, to build our districts and to build our county," the man grasps the attention of his audience. "We're going to do everything we can to help district commissioners design what needs to be done in their districts. We're encouraging people to raise issues. Bring issues to us, bring plans and documents to us, so that we can try to execute them for you."

Confident and unpretentious, Lofa County's new Superintendent Galakpai Kortimai shares his vision on how his county administration should be serving a fast growing population of Lofans and how he's going to change the way things work. At this official ceremony to introduce the new Commissioner for Lofa's capital town of Voinjama, Kortimai grabs the opportunity to spell out his vision for Lofa County. "We're all one. We're all together to rebuild our county."

The north-western county of Lofa was once the bread-basket for Liberia's three-million-plus population. Reduced to one of the poorest counties in Liberia today, Lofa has scanty amenities to absorb the influx of returnees from camps inside and outside the country. Farming, a mainstay of economy, is just beginning to resume. The deplorable road conditions isolate towns and villages. A majority of health clinics remain dysfunctional and schools and other public buildings are in dire need

of rehabilitation. Led by Kortimai, the local authorities are now trying to make the county bounce back, and the United Nations is supporting the efforts.

Together with UN funds and agencies, the UN Mission in Liberia initiated in April the creation of a UN County Support Team (CST) in each of the 15 counties to assist the local authorities in administering social services and in designing, coordinating and implementing community development projects. The initiative is a joint UN response to the government's policy of decentralization and is aimed at aligning the UN assistance framework with Liberia's national development agenda in the four strategic areas of peace and security, governance and rule of law, economic revitalization, and basic social services and infrastructure at county levels.

As part of this strategy, representatives of the UN family in the field work closely with the superintendent's office, line ministries and non-governmental organiza-

A County Support Team meeting in progress



tions to identify local needs for development and design action plans to fill the gaps between the needs and ongoing recovery activities. The process is also meant to build the capacity of the county authorities to administer civil services, formulate county development plans and lobby the central government to take back-up measures for the local authorities.

"The CST is an effort to bring the United Nations together at the county level," says Jordan Ryan, the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, who leads the initiative. "It involves the UN Mission in Liberia and all members of the UN Country Team working together in support of the restoration of state authority county by county."

Every month, each county holds a forum called a County Assessment and Action Report meeting where local representatives of the government, UN and NGOs exchange information on the latest status of community development issues and action plans, based on reports by the four sub-groups along the national development framework. Another CST Core Group consisting of UNMIL and UN agencies on the ground holds a follow-up meeting to address local issues highlighted in the forum which should be raised with UN agencies and UNMIL sections in Monrovia. All the information brought up by county actors is compiled into two monthly reports, which are used at the national level to design a more coordinated country-wide action plan to support the counties' recovery efforts.

Lofa is a leading county in this initiative. The County Administration and the Lofa UN family are currently building a new team to develop the county.

"In the past, leaders of the county didn't have a mechanism to see what was happening in the county or coordinate development projects," says Kortimai, sitting in his cramped temporary office with no computer or decent office equipment. He leafs through hand-written documents neatly classified by each subject, from

health services to returnees' reintegration to public works, and says that regular information exchange through the CST mechanism has enabled the county leadership to identify the gaps in recovery efforts. "One of the achievements of CST is to help the county leadership to be informed of UN's and NGOs' activities. It gives us an insight into what is going on in our county and enables us to redirect the activities to meet our people's needs."

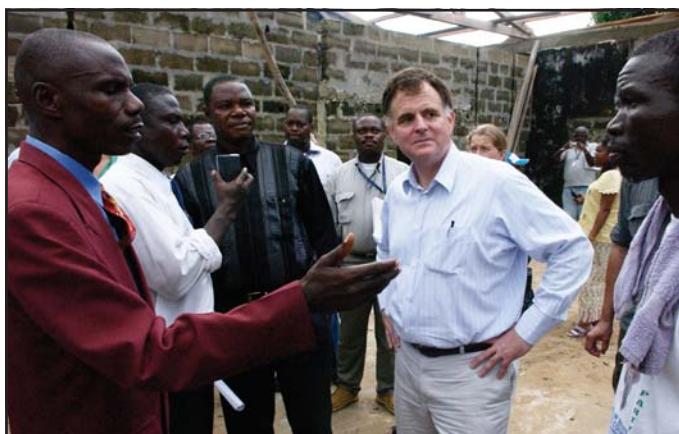
For instance, the county administration found an overlapping project on road rehabilitation through the CST meetings and managed to request a donor plan a repair work on another road. The Lofa team also successfully advocated a speedy solution for a late payment issue, in which hundreds of ex-combatants in a rehabilitation

CST initiative are beginning to see positive changes. "This mechanism has raised the profile of line ministries at a local level. They now take ownership," says Wouter Van Quickelborne, UNMIL's civil affairs officer based in Lofa. Chiara Capozio, county coordinator for the UN Development Programme, says the initiative is critical to empower the county leadership. "The local authorities are more aware of what people expect from them... This mechanism has pushed them to move around to see what's happening," she says. Lauranne Leca of the International Medical Corp sees the CST forum critical to keep informed of recovery efforts done by other development actors. Eric Perry, UNMIL rehabilitation and recovery officer, finds better cooperation among stakeholders through CST. He coordinates a major rehabilitation project on the 95-km-long Voinjama-Zorzor road with local representatives of UNMIL's military engineering, the UNDP, the Ministry of Public Works and the Labour Commission. "Voinjama is very vibrant... CST has created a serious team to go ahead with projects."

Although a gargantuan effort is needed to achieve a semblance of basic development in Lofa, the CST initiative is surely making a significant impact on the ground. It has improved the information flow, coordination and cooperation among development actors, increased the capacity of the local authority to tackle development issues, and raised the participation of local officers from line ministries.

"CST is all about a process," says Monica Andersson, CST Lofa facilitator and UNMIL humanitarian coordination officer. Through the meetings, monthly reports and coordination, the local leadership is building skills and capacity to run the county administration as the UN team imparts their expertise, she says.

Kortimai understands all those benefits of the CST initiative. "We must take control of our own destiny," he says. "CST is helping us to achieve that." ♦



Jordan Ryan with team members

and reintegration programme had not been paid their stipends for months.

The local government is now compiling various data which will form the basis of development planning. An annual report on education in Lofa has been developed for the first time in many years. The report tells not only about demographic data of schools, from the number of students by grade and sex and the figures of teachers by qualification, but also the status of rehabilitation of school buildings. The county is also conducting a property survey to sort out land tenure after imposing a ban on land sale for six months in response to recent violent land disputes associated with returnees and ex-combatants. A survey of NGOs' activities is also underway to map the gaps.

Many county actors engaged in the



The Cost of Conflict

By Sulaiman Momodu

Violent conflict is one of the greatest impediments to human development. It reverses human development gains, suppresses human rights and needs, and destroys all capacity for human advancement," says the 2006 Liberia National Human Development Report (NHDR).

The report, titled 'Mobilizing Capacity for Reconstruction and Development,' indicts the prolonged violent conflict in the country for inflicting major setbacks on the economy, devastating the society and rolling back the meagre human and development gains that were made during the pre-war years. "Violent conflict is one of the surest and fastest routes to the bottom of human development index

table...and one of the strongest indicators for a protracted stay there," the report points out.

Launching the report at a jam-packed Ministry of Foreign Affairs conference room in Monrovia on 25 August, President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf assured Liberians that her Government would endeavour to curb poverty and conflicts, observing that Liberians would not enjoy sustained development amidst insecurity and lawlessness. The Liberian leader said that an effective governance system and an impressive economic growth were vital ingredients for peaceful national development.

Speaking at the launch of the report, Special Representative of the Secretary-General Alan Doss challenged Liberians to elevate their country above poor governance, weak institutions, devastated infrastructure and poverty. He called on the

Government and its international partners to empower Liberians and advance human development in the country, stressing that deep-rooted poverty and food insecurity remained fundamental challenges facing Liberia.

A key message of the report is what it calls "the human development costs" of the Liberian conflict. As many as over 270,000 persons are reported to have died as a direct result of the conflict or through illnesses exacerbated by the lack of health facilities destroyed during the conflict.

The civil war paralyzed the public service, leaving it virtually empty, following massive flight of qualified staff. Currently, the public service is not only ill-equipped to deliver essential services to the people, but it is also unable to steer the much-needed reforms. The report points out that rebuilding Liberia and improving its human development status requires a

holistic capacity building agenda targeting individuals, organizations and the society at large. The report emphasises the importance of reliable data and statistics for policy interventions and calls for reinstating national statistical systems that fell victim to the conflict.

Liberia is among 18 of the world's poorest countries and is worse off today in human development indicators than it was in 1990, says the report. By the time Liberia emerged from war in 2003, it was one of the poorest countries in the world with the majority of Liberians languishing in poverty with as many as 76.2 per cent living on less than US\$1 a day, up from 55 per cent in 1997. As many as 85 per cent are unemployed and the country continues to be among the most food insecure in the world with an estimated 35 per cent of the population undernourished.

Agriculture accounts for the largest (54%) of the GDP, yet agricultural inputs, such as seeds, and basic implements are available only through emergency assistance. Although rice remains the main staple food in Liberia, accounting for 90 per cent of daily dietary intake, virtually all the country's rice needs (95%) are imports. In the midst of a rich and diverse natural resource base, 235 out of 1,000 babies born today do not live to see their fifth birthday.

Incomes are low and have not changed over several decades. A resident physician at a public hospital today reportedly receives LD 4,600 (US\$82.14) per month and a teacher with a university degree and teaching certificate is paid at best LD 1,290 (US\$22.63). Only one in 10 Liberians has access to any form of health care. An overwhelming majority of women who seek maternal care have no access to doctors and are at the mercy of semi-skilled health workers and traditional birth attendants.

The report takes note of capacity building measures initiated by President Johnson-Sirleaf's government intended to improve the functioning of public sector institutions including the civil service. Some early "wins" in this regard include revising the civil service code, a clean-up of the procurement process, introduction of internal controls and overhaul of financial management procedures as well as

measures aimed at fighting corruption in the public sector.

Despite these emerging successes, the immediate problem of capacity weaknesses and poor morale of the civil service remains. The experience of the Government's 150-Day Action Plan has confirmed that the whole of the public service is critically short of capacity, underscoring the need for a properly trained, well motivated and adequately compensated public service cadre.

The NHDR makes a strong case for breaking the cycle of violent conflict in order to build sustainable peace and create conditions for capacity building for reconstruction and development. In addition, the 2006 report supports efforts to renew dialogue on the conditions needed to consolidate peace and security and reverse regression from the Millennium Development Goals across Liberia. It is the second such report Liberia has produced since 1999 and the first since the conflict ended in 2003.

Due to lack of data that help determine human development indices, Liberia does not feature in the 2006 global Human Development Report (HDR) that was launched early November in Cape Town,

South Africa. Globally, Norway tops the HDR index ranking while Niger, at 177, is at the bottom.

UNDP, in collaboration with Liberian government authorities and stakeholders, organized a series of activities linked to the publication and launch of the 2006 Global HDR to highlight the urgency of action to increase access to water and improved sanitation as an integral part of reconstruction and development of Liberia. This culminated in a formal country launch on 15 November followed by a post-launch one-day water symposium the following day.

According to a demographic and health survey conducted in 1999, the proportion of the Liberian population with access to safe water is about 32 per cent in urban areas and 4 per cent in rural areas. The proportion of people with access to sanitation exhibits similar trends.

Since UNDP produced the first global Human Development Report in 1990, HDRs have emerged as its flagship publication and one of UNDP's most important policy analysis and advocacy tools. When the required indices for Liberia to feature in the global report would be available remains anybody's guess. •



Ex-fighters Need More Jobs

By Yuko Maeda

Although a majority of ex-combatants feels accepted by the communities they have resettled in and appreciates their newly acquired skills earned through reintegration programmes, they still suffer lack of job opportunities to participate in the country's development, a survey recently conducted by the UN Mission in Liberia found.

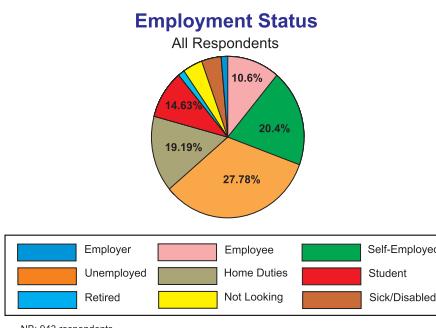
The Ex-combatant Reintegration in Liberia survey, conducted in September across the country by the UNMIL Rehabilitation, Reintegration and Recovery Section, examined how former fighters are coping with the reintegration process, particularly in the economic, social and political aspects of their lives. A preliminary report on the findings of the survey, which interviewed 944 ex-combatants and their resettlement community members, were released in mid-November.

One in three surveyed had a job, either owning business or being employed and self-employed, and 15 per cent of the respondents were involved in studies. Only 28 per cent of the surveyed considered themselves unemployed, much less than the country's estimated unemployment rate of some 80 per cent. However, an "economically inactive" group, who are either engaged only in home duties, retired or disabled, accounts for another 26 per cent of the respondents. Given the fact that two-thirds of those who have a job are self-employed, most likely engaged in the informal sector with petty trade or domestic work, a jobless population of ex-combatants in the formal sector seems much higher.

The unemployment rate among the surveyed differs by geographic setting. Alarmingly, more than 50 per cent of those who live in the capital of Monrovia and its surrounding areas reported they are unemployed while less than one in 10 rural ex-combatants considered themselves jobless. This correlates with a result that farming is

the most popular occupation among all the surveyed. "Rural based former combatants are engaged in subsistence farming activities or able to seek temporary employment on farm plantations," the survey points out, while ex-combatants living in the urban setting keep struggling to find a job.

The survey also found that the completion of reintegration assistance programmes in skills training doesn't increase job opportunities for ex-combatants. More than 42 per cent of those who completed the training programmes are unemployed, eight per cent points higher than those who never participated in any of demobilisation and reintegration process. Less than half of those who completed rehabilitation programme have a job related to the training they received but more than two-thirds of



them agreed they had learned marketable skills. The report says there is "a need to address heightened expectations (of the benefits of vocational training) and to match skills training with employment opportunities."

On the social aspect, two-thirds of the surveyed are resettled in their home communities while the rest live elsewhere mainly because of better opportunities there. Only one in 20 respondents answered a fear of returning to their home communities as ex-combatants as the main reason for their resettlement in strange communities. Regardless of their resettlement areas, though, a vast majority of the surveyed, or 93 per cent, believed they are well accepted by their communities. Nearly 90 per cent of the ex-combatants participate in community activities led by non-ex-combatants, with 57 per cent

claiming to do so often. Group discussions with community members also revealed that ex-combatants are often seen engaged in community work such as road brushing and actively participate in social activities.

The survey found ex-combatants have nurtured a sense of security in the past three years. Nearly three-fourth of the surveyed reported feeling safe "to a great extent" in their communities and more than half of the respondents perceived the level of violence in their communities very low. About 60 per cent reported that they've never had contact with former commanders, and the majority of the focus group discussants stated they don't see any evidence or significant element of a militant command structure in place. However, in Nimba County, the community voiced concern that lack of reintegration opportunities causes some ex-combatants to cross the border to join various rebel forces in neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire.

On political life, more than half of the respondents believed "to a great extent" that the current government will move the country's socio-economic development forward. And a vast majority of them, or 87 per cent, agreed that their vote could make a difference in Liberia's recovery.

The report recommends that "reintegration programmes must be linked to national labour creation and employment opportunities, particularly in urban centres," and suggests the establishment of a national mechanism to offer adequate support for graduates of the skills training and to provide business management training and start-up capital in order to encourage entrepreneurship.

In Liberia, the official Rehabilitation and Reintegration programme began in June 2004 to offer various skills training for more than 101,000 ex-combatants who relinquished their weapons during the Demobilisation and Disarmament process. As of 1 September this year, nearly 30,000 ex-combatants have completed RR training and another 28,000-plus are currently enrolled in various training courses. The official RR programme is scheduled to end in June 2007. ♦

Threat of Food Insecurity

By J. Wesley Washington

Food insecurity in Liberia's rural and semi-urban areas remains a major cause of concern, according to a recent survey conducted by the Government in collaboration with the United Nations, NGOs and donor partners.

The Comprehensive Food Security and Nutrient Survey (CFSNS) conducted between February and June 2006 randomly selected 375 rural and semi-urban communities and assessed 5,409 households. It determined the nutritional status of over 6,000 children under five and their mothers and provided the first reliable picture in many years of the level and causes of food insecurity, vulnerability and malnutrition. The survey also identified livelihood patterns and agricultural constraints.

The wide-ranging CFSNS report released early October at the Monrovia City Hall identified three key problem areas -- low agricultural productivity, limited buying power, and worrying levels of malnutrition. The survey also highlighted other factors such as road infrastructure, market access, health and sanitation, child care and education as central to the improvement of Liberia's post-war food security picture.

"The message of this report is clear. Liberia must act now to address the hunger of its people. This requires a robust response from food aid to rehabilitating the agricultural sector," Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Recovery and Governance Jordan Ryan said during the launch of the survey's findings.

Years of conflict have severely curtailed Liberia's agricultural productivity, creating temporary food shortages. Only half of rural households have access to land and used it for cultivation in 2005. The key problems of food insecurity, the report notes, include low agricultural production capacities, limited economic access as well as low biological absorption capacities.

The analysis showed 10.5 per cent of

the surveyed households to be food insecure, 40 per cent highly vulnerable to food insecurity, 40.9 per cent moderately vulnerable and only 8.6 per cent food secure. "River Gee, Grand Gedeh, Lofa and Grand Kru have the highest proportion of households with poor consumption and dietary diversity," the survey notes.

"In some regions, particularly in the north-west, the civil war has caused temporary food shortages. In other areas, particularly in the southeast, food insecurity is more chronic, and people are unable to meet their minimum food requirements over a longer period of time," the survey found. It also highlighted other factors such as road infrastructure, market access, health and sanitation, child care and education as central to the improvement of



food security. A long term vision is needed to improve farming know-how at all levels, from land management and pest eradication to increased technological inputs and crop diversification.

Caused by chronic malnutrition, "stunting," that robes children of physical and intellectual development, stands at an alarmingly high 39 per cent, the survey found. Nine counties show rates of over 40 per cent -- 'critical' according to World Health Organization (WHO) standards. A worrying 6.9 per cent of children under five suffer from acute malnutrition. In some counties that rate passes 10 per cent, considered 'serious' by WHO.

Acute malnutrition is associated not just with food intake, but also with illness and the manner in which young children

are fed and raised, the survey notes. Malnutrition is not only the result of poor food consumption, but also of variables such as lack of access to safe drinking water, poor sanitary conditions, high disease rates and poor child feeding practices.

The report acknowledges that malnutrition cannot be eradicated overnight. Community health and nutrition programmes are needed to tackle chronic cases while acute stages require feeding programmes to address the health of both malnourished children and their mothers. The survey also showed that many households simply do not possess the means to purchase or produce enough nutritious food to meet their daily needs.

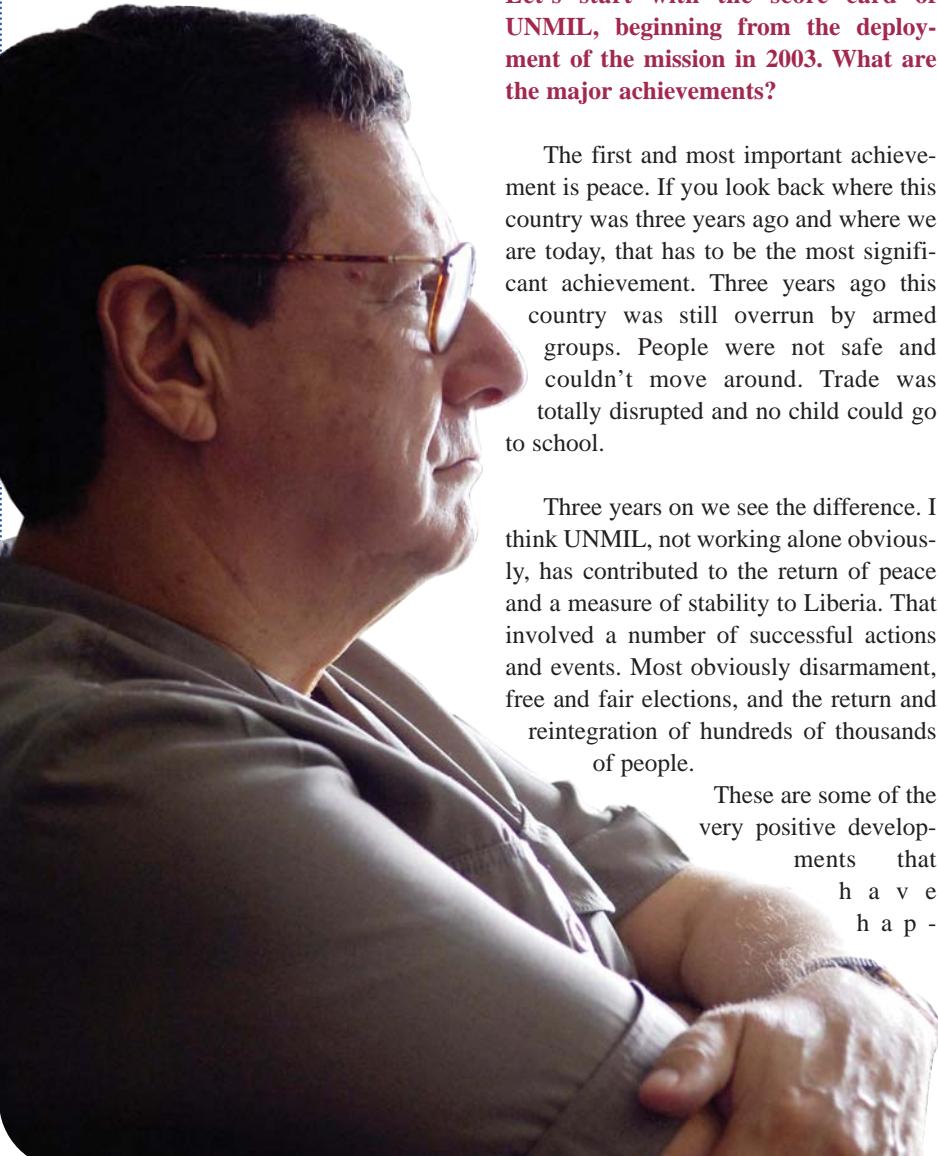
Seventy per cent of those surveyed do not have access to clean drinking water while 80 per cent of households have no sanitary facilities. The predominant health problems are malaria, diarrhoea and respiratory infections.

The survey plays a vital role in filling the information gap in Liberia, at a time when it is most needed, said Planning and Economic Affairs Minister Toga Gayewea McIntosh at the release of the survey. "The report not only reveals the issues of food insecurity and malnutrition problems, but also provides a framework for a coherent response to the basic needs of the people of Liberia, thus providing the first reliable picture in many years of the food security situation across the country," he said.

The CFSNS was largely made possible by the generous financial support of the Humanitarian Aid Department of the European Commission (ECHO) and the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID). The survey was carried out by enumerators nominated by the Ministries of Agriculture, Education, Health and Social Welfare, Planning and Economic Affairs, the Liberia Institute for Statistics and Geo-Information services (LISGIS), and the University of Liberia. Other financial, human resources and logistical support was provided locally by FAO, HIC, UNICEF, UNMIL, WFP, WHO, CRS, GTZ and World Vision. •

Security, roads, girls' education, top priority...

Three years after the deployment by the UN of one of the world's largest peacekeeping missions in Liberia, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Coordinator of UN Operations in Liberia, Alan Doss, discusses the progress towards peace and stability in the country in an interview with Editor Mathew Elavanalthoduka and stresses the importance of rehabilitating roads and enhancing girls' education.



Let's start with the score card of UNMIL, beginning from the deployment of the mission in 2003. What are the major achievements?

The first and most important achievement is peace. If you look back where this country was three years ago and where we are today, that has to be the most significant achievement. Three years ago this country was still overrun by armed groups. People were not safe and couldn't move around. Trade was totally disrupted and no child could go to school.

Three years on we see the difference. I think UNMIL, not working alone obviously, has contributed to the return of peace and a measure of stability to Liberia. That involved a number of successful actions and events. Most obviously disarmament, free and fair elections, and the return and reintegration of hundreds of thousands of people.

These are some of the very positive developments that have happened

opened with the help of UNMIL and the United Nations. It's important to look back at the road travelled. Even though we see many challenges ahead, many problems to be overcome, we should take a measurable degree of satisfaction about what has been achieved to date.

You recently addressed the Security Council on the progress report of the Secretary-General. Do you get the feeling from your interaction with the Security Council members that there is sufficient international attention focused on Liberia and the UN would not withdraw from Liberia hastily?

When I was at the Council in September I received a very strong and positive message about the work of the United Nations and UNMIL in Liberia. I didn't sense at all within the Council a desire to declare victory and leave. The Council recognizes that there is still a lot to be done and that this country, even though is no longer a failed state, will need assistance including security assistance for some time to come.

That's encouraging but at the same time the Council will expect to see progress. The government's reform programme has to be pushed ahead. We have to make progress in strengthening the security services and so on.

With peace holding and a new demo-

cratically elected government in place, the expectations of the people are very high. Yet, the reality may be that the reconstruction of the economy could be agonisingly slow. Isn't there a need to carefully manage people's expectations?

Clearly, in a country where everything fell apart in a violent fashion, it's not going to be easy to right all those wrongs in a few months or so. So I agree that those expectations will have to be managed. We must understand the realities of a country that has lost 90 per cent of its gross domestic product over a quarter of a century. It's still going to take a quarter of a century to get back to where the country was before.

I think people do understand the reality and they don't ask for a great deal. They want to see some progress in areas of roads, health and education. They would want to see that the administration is working for them and controlling corruption. They want to get on with their lives and if they feel safe and reasonably secure, that in itself, goes a long way.

But these expectations apply equally to the international community. We, as partners, must be realistic as to what can be expected in a situation such as this where a country is emerging from a quarter of a century of growing instability culminating in a long and violent conflict that led to a huge drop in the national income and the exodus of qualified people.

What would you say is the one area which we should be focusing on which will be the most beneficial to the population of Liberia today?

Allow me two areas. The bedrock must be security. We must make sure people feel safe and secure, otherwise the rest won't follow. I take that as a *sine qua non*.

Beyond that, I take two things, first, roads. Roads, because it has a tremendous multiplier effect -- it employs people, opens up the country, helps farmers get their goods to market and the supplies, seeds, tools and so on that they need to grow crops. Roads are good for trade and investment. They make the country more

accessible and therefore more secure.

The second will be girl's education. Different field, different impact, but experience in so many countries shows, particularly in Africa, that by educating girls, the return in terms of social advancement and economic progress is very marked. If you want to deal with the problem of fertility, health, nutrition, you name it, putting girls into school is an extremely good investment for a country. And, of course, it is a basic human right.

It's important to look back at the road travelled. Even though we see many challenges ahead, many problems to be overcome, we should take a measurable degree of satisfaction about what has been achieved to date.

What was the focus of UN heads of agencies and peacekeeping missions meeting in Dakar recently?

It was mainly an exchange of experiences and views on peace operations in West Africa and to look at the situation in each of the countries with a significant peacekeeping presence. We also looked at some of the structural problems in the sub-region, like the issue of youth unemployment, arms control and cross-border trafficking. We had some experts from this region and beyond discussing issues of transitional justice. For example, how do you balance the needs of peace and the needs of justice? How do you deal with impunity? We had experts and academics from the region and beyond who have been working on these issues.

What is UNMIL's exit strategy down the road?

It's not a phrase I use -- exit strategy.

Obviously the core of our strategy has to be strengthening of the national security services, particularly the Liberian National Police, which is the principal instrument for domestic law and order, so that they can take over from us eventually. But we also recognize that over time security depends on many factors, not just on having an effective police and military, however important they are.

We need to help strengthen the justice system to ensure the administration of justice in a fair and objective manner. In the remote areas we see serious lapses in administration of justice, where trial by ordeal is still being carried out. A just society is a safe society. We must work towards that goal bearing in mind that this country sadly had a terrible record of human rights abuse. We must support the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and build up the National Human Rights Commission.

More broadly, the Government with its partners have to secure equitable access to education, health and basic services for the people. Infrastructure which will help the economy grow and in turn produce jobs and economic opportunities, especially for young people, is another high priority.

We want to see the basic strengthening of the security institutions of the state, the rule of law institutions, and the economic and social institutions which will underpin growth and development. We need all three elements and different parts of the UN are focusing on this.

This isn't all UNMIL's job. We have UN Country Team colleagues and County Support Teams working very effectively. We have joint ventures with other international partners from the region and beyond like the United States and the European Commission. In fact we're doing a very interesting project with the World Bank and UNDP on road reconstruction using UNMIL military engineers. Above all, we have national partners, the government, civil society and the non-governmental organisations.

Thank you.



Hope for Liberian Green Revolution

By Arthur R. Tucker

Some West Africans call it “Rice of Hope,” and others name it “I will no longer have to sell my best goat” in a local tongue. Liberians are yet to name the new variety of rice recently adopted by the country’s Central Agriculture Research Institute (CARI), but experts expect its introduction will lead to a “Green Revolution” in this food-insecure country.

A few varieties of the New Rice for Africa (NERICA), a hybrid of Asian rice and African rice developed by the West Africa Rice Development Association (WARDA) now known as the Africa Rice Centre, came to Liberia in July. It was a response to a call for attention to the issue of rice self-sufficiency by President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf early this year. In order to increase the productivity of rice crops and enhance Liberia’s food security, the Ministry of Agriculture and its international partners, including the Food and

Agriculture Organisation and the World Food Programme, initiated to adopt the new rice and began a process of replacing the current poor, low-yielding varieties of rice with NERICA.

The NERICA varieties are now planted for multiplication in an area of 11.6 hectares at CARI sites in Suakoko, Bong County. Once the seeds are yielded, they will be multiplied in other five seed multiplication centres across the country, and the yield from the centres will be later distributed to farmers.

“The rice is getting matured much faster than we expected,” says Joseph Qwelibo Subah, CARI Director General who heads the NERICA multiplication project. He predicts the sites will be able to yield an estimated 40.6 tons of seeds. “This means that a modest application of fertilizer can increase yields of NERICA to an average of 3.5 tons per hectare.”

NERICA, originally developed in 1999, has a few hundreds family lines that are suitable for both upland and lowland ecologies of sub-Saharan Africa.

According to WARDA, an intergovernmental research institution, the popular NERICA varieties have proven to be high yielding, early maturing (75-100 days), weed competitive, drought tolerant, resistant against Africa’s major pests and diseases, and tolerant to soil acidity and iron toxicity. NERICA lines have so far been tested in 31 sub-Saharan African countries, and today about 150,000 hectares are under upland NERICA production in Africa, including Guinea, Côte d’Ivoire, Nigeria, Togo and Kenya. It is said to have increased the production of rice by local farmers and brought positive impacts on their livelihoods.

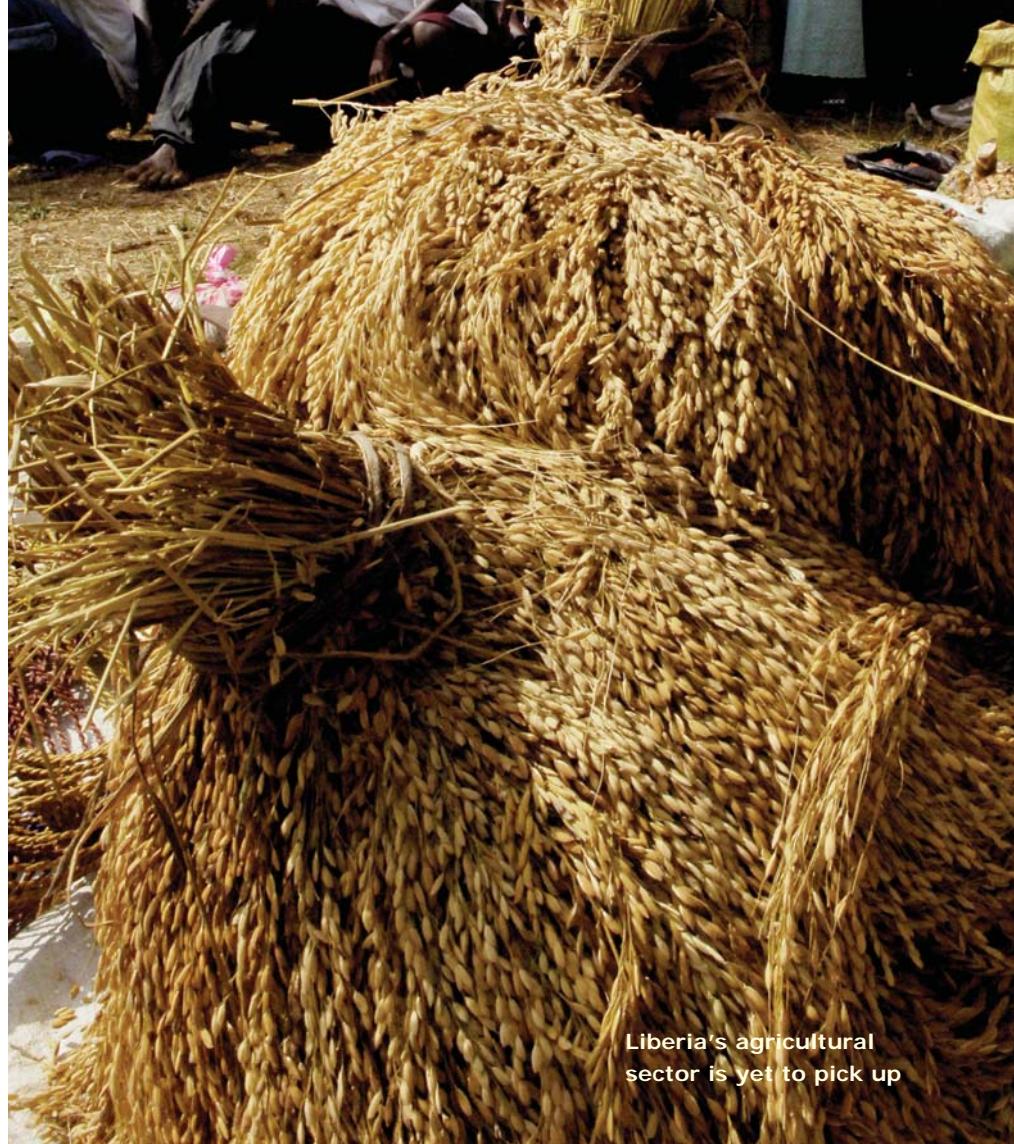
In Liberia, rice is the staple food of the population. People heavily rely on rice imported from overseas as the country’s agricultural sector lay in ruins due to the long years of civil war. An assessment carried by FAO and WFP early this year shows that Liberia needs 278,000 tons of rice to feed its 3 million-plus population but only 30 per cent of it is locally produced.

Agriculture Minister Chris Toe says it is critical for a food insecure country like Liberia to increase agricultural productivity and domestic food production. "Stimulating agriculture production at the local level is far more cost-effective and sustainable than providing food aid," he says. For that reason, the adoption of NERICA would mean more than just an increase of rice production and a reduction of imports, he says. "It will mean more food on each household's table, more money in the farmers' pockets and hope for future farmers. This will in turn contribute to food security and poverty reduction."

Experts hope the adoption of NERICA will lead to a Liberian Green Revolution, a local version of the agricultural revolution with hybrid plant breeds, fertilisers and improved irrigation that has boosted food production in many countries worldwide.

However, FAO Representative Winfred Hammond says a better rice seed alone cannot increase the productivity. He stresses the need to strengthen the capacity of human resources along the rice development continuum. "The capacity of the wide range of stakeholders along the rice commodity chain, including researchers, extension workers, farmers, processors and marketers, need to be strengthened to improve the rice sector," he says. "Still we have a long way to go."

Subah says his research institution is committed to the improvement of agricultural technologies as well as capacity-building of farmers and extension workers. "Scientists at CARI are determined to cultivate the NERICA varieties under best



Liberia's agricultural sector is yet to pick up

management practices for irrigation and agronomic measures, so as to create a multiplying effect and provide training for farmers and extension workers," he says.

Liberian farmers are yet to see some improvement in rice production and

income generation. When it happens, they will coin a new local name for Liberian NERICA. •

The writer is an Information Officer with FAO Liberia.

USAID Grants US\$350,000 for Cassava Initiative

Responding to a widespread cassava mosaic virus in Liberia, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Food and Agriculture Organisation have began an emergency multiplication project to distribute improved, resistant varieties of cassava with a grant of US\$350,000 by the USAID Mission in Liberia.

In recent years, Liberia's farms across the country have suffered from a new virulent strain of mosaic virus, called Uganda

variant of East African Cassava Mosaic Virus. Quickly reacting to the spread of virus, the ministry and the UN agriculture agency approached the International Institute for Tropical Agriculture for their resistant varieties of cassava to distribute to Liberian farmers.

With the grant secured, Liberia imported 15 of the IITA top cassava genotypes. The new cassava varieties are now planted in an area of two acres at the Liberian

Central Agriculture Research Institute (CARI) sites in Bong County. After the season's phytosanitary evaluation on plant diseases and pests, the best will be multiplied and distributed countrywide to replace the current poor infected varieties of cassava.

The new varieties are expected to safeguard the future of cassava production in Liberia and improve the availability of food for rural Liberians. •

Restoring Confidence in Judiciary

By Yuko Maeda

“God, you’re not sleeping!” Maria (not her real name), a widow with five children, screamed when she heard Serena Garlawolu say she would bring the man back to court. Maria had been hurt, disappointed and frustrated since the young man in question, who her 11-year-old daughter claimed raped her, was released from jail for lack of evidence in mid-September. “I felt bad when he was set free. I thought: ‘God will give me judgment if the judge cannot give it to me.’ God heard me.”

Maria says her daughter was sexually assaulted by the man one day in March when the young girl walked to a nearby village to sell smoked fish as she did everyday. The man allegedly grabbed her, dragged her into the bush and sodomised her while threatening to kill her if she screamed. Shortly after the incident, the police found her crying hard in the bush and complaining of severe pain in her lower body and took her to a clinic for medical attention. The man was arrested immediately and the girl was referred to a social counselling service. The case seemed convincing.

The trial was set for September at the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court in Gbarnga, 180 km east of the capital city of Monrovia. However, the prosecutor gave up trying the man during the August term of court, one of the four 42-working-day terms in a year in the judicial calendar, for insufficient evidence. With medical evidence ruling out the occurrence of inter-

course and unable to locate the sole eye-witness to testify in court, the prosecutor entered a “nulle prosequo” to drop the case, in hope of reinstating the case later with better evidence. The judge granted it and ordered the release of the accused. Given the widespread impunity in Liberia’s post-conflict society, Maria had no hope for a second chance.

Garlawolu came back to her rescue within a month. “I’m determined to prosecute all rape cases pending in this court,” says Garlawolu, Prosecutorial Consultant assigned to the Ninth Circuit Court who acts as Assistant County Attorney. She is one of 12 prosecutorial consultants the UN Mission in Liberia funds to strengthen the country’s judicial sector, which had been dysfunctional due to long years of political turmoil and civil conflict. Garlawolu has been handling seven rape cases in her jurisdiction since she took office in late July. During the August term, she tried and won one rape case in which the jury unanimously found a 21-year-old ex-combatant guilty and the judge subsequently sentenced him to 10 years in prison. Her determination to reinstate the case of Maria’s daughter increased when she learned the man allegedly committed another rape on a 12-year-old boy less than two weeks after his release. “I will definitely get him brought to justice for this case, too.” Garlawolu plans to bring the girl to a better qualified doctor to get another medical certificate and track down the eye witness who is said to be somewhere in Monrovia before the next term begins in mid-November.

“Our prosecutorial consultant is very active,” commends Judge Yussif D. Kaba, who is assigned to the Ninth Circuit Court





Efforts are underway to revamp the judicial system

for the August term. He has a reputation for upholding high standards of justice. During the term, the court managed to complete the trial of four cases and dismissed 10 other cases among the 42 cases in the docket. It is exceptional by Liberian standards as normally one to three cases, if any, are heard during one term. Kaba attributes the improvement of case management to Garlawolu, who compensates for the lack of legal training in her partner County Attorney. "The prosecutorial arm of the government is very weak because most state prosecutors haven't been trained as lawyers. Our consultant is trained. She has brought lots of progress in the quality of prosecution," Kaba says.

An acute shortage of qualified professionals, coupled with the poor judicial infrastructure and the lack of resources, has severely hindered the functioning of Liberia's judicial sector. Until mid-2006, Liberia had only six qualified prosecutors serving in the entire country while only nine public defenders aged between 56 and 81 provided defence for suspects. At the magistrate court level, only three out of over 350 magistrates across the country are qualified to practise law. The backlog of cases swells up and corrupt practice continues. This has led to mistrust in the country's justice system, spurring a surge in mob justice and traditional trial by ordeal. UNMIL's most recent report on human rights in Liberia notes that "the judicial system continued to fail to uphold constitutional guarantees."

In an effort to help build the capacity of the legal and judicial institutions, UNMIL has carried out various judicial reform initiatives. Its Legal and Judicial System Support Division has provided training to hundreds of legal and judicial personnel, from magistrates to court clerks to law students, and deployed the division's legal advisors nation-wide to offer consultations on the ground. In June, the mission initiated to fund prosecutorial and defence consultants to be deployed around the country. The new initiative is an additional injection designed to fill the shortage of trained personnel in order to ensure fair trial and speedy handling of cases. Currently 12 trained Liberian lawyers assist County Attorneys as prosecutorial consultants and another 11 help Public

Defenders as defence consultants.

Garlawolu, a 48-year-old attorney-in-law who graduated from law school in 2005 after many years of social work, has been performing her job exceptionally well, people say. Her first trial was a murder case, which was transferred from the Eighth Circuit Court in Nimba. Garlawolu more than once travelled to distant Nimba to gather evidence by examining the crime scene and interviewing key people involved in the case. In the rape case of the ex-combatant, she successfully convinced the reluctant child victim and her caretaker to come forward to participate in the prosecution and managed to reveal the perpetrator's real age to try him as an adult by tracking down documents. She won both cases. "You had to go extra miles to prosecute these cases," lauds Judge Kaba. He says Garlawolu has exhibited her tactful skills in preparing witnesses, collecting evidence and presenting legal argument during the trials. "With her, there's much improvement in handling criminal cases."

Robert Gbarbea, UNMIL's national legal advisor deployed in Gbarnga, sees more impact Garlawolu has brought about. As she helps a city solicitor to the Gbarnga City Court review his cases in addition to hers, the quality of prosecution has improved. And police officers are also benefiting from her advice in crime investigation, evidence collection and the handling of victims, he says. "She's certainly strengthened the legal system."

It is still true that most of the courthouses around the country are in a dilapidated state, many courts do not even have a typewriter to keep case records, and legal and judicial personnel need more training and technical assistance to properly handle criminal and civil cases. But UNMIL's legal consultant initiative is certainly bringing positive changes in the field.

"When I first came to Gbarnga, I thought: 'we're going to make a difference,'" Garlawolu recalls. "As a prosecutor, I have to bring relief for people and help regain people's confidence in judiciary."

Liberia needs more of professionals like Garlawolu to help nurture the rule of law and restore people's confidence in the justice system. ♦

Networking Women in Governance

By Yuko Maeda

Recharged with a strong sense of solidarity, more than 200 women in public offices reaffirmed their non-partisan collaboration for Liberia's development as they exchanged their thoughts at a high-level women's forum in Monrovia.

For the first time since they took office early this year under the new government, female legislatures, ministers, directors and superintendents across the country gathered at the Ministry of Gender and Development on 30 September to share their experiences in running offices as a woman decision-maker and build a better network to strengthen their collaboration. Accepting there had been a "disconnect" among them and recognising the importance of women's solidarity, they suggested ways to bridge the communication gap. At the end of the day-long forum "Women in Governance Making a Difference," the participants agreed to hold similar gatherings more often to collectively advance women's leadership in governance.

"The eyes of Africa and the eyes of the world are on Liberia right now. This is a government that is headed by a woman. The success of this government will open the doors to women all over the world," reminded their role model President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, Africa's first female elected head of state, in her keynote address. "My success is your success. My failure is your failure. This is our time, this is our day."

Last year, in the UN-backed national elections, voters elected eight female Representatives and another five Senators in addition to the high profile female President. Since Johnson-Sirleaf came to power in January, she has appointed several dozens women to head public offices at both national and local levels. Currently women make up 33 per cent of the provincial administrators, 31 per cent of senior ministerial positions, 14 per cent of the

legislature, and two of the five seats of the Supreme Court Bench. The current rate of female representation in governance is unprecedented in the traditionally male-dominated West African nation. "They voted for you to make a difference," the President reminded the participants.

However, women in public offices are yet to use their collective power to make a difference in governance, according to the panellists who addressed the challenges ahead of female leaders.

Joana Foster, Senior Gender Advisor of the UN Mission in Liberia, pointed out that the women in power should accelerate the "institutionalization" of female participation in decision-making by utilising the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), an agreement signed by all member states of the UN. It would build a linkage between the international legal framework and domestic laws to protect women's interests, she said.

Commerce Minister Olubanke King-Akerele suggested women in public offices should refine the quality of leadership, saying an ideal leader must be able to provide a vision, develop an action plan, mobilise resources and empower others to go with her. "We've been blessed by the President, who brought all of us with her to come along... We have to pass a torch to the next generation."

Kagwiria Mbogori, programme manager of the UN Development Fund for Women, UNIFEM, noted that often times women in high level positions end up acting like a man once they take office. "They start going by their patriarchal rules, seeing the work in the eyes of men. Let's not change our gender," she appealed. "Don't forget women's solidarity can make things happen."

Etweda Cooper, President of Liberia Women Initiative, an umbrella organization for women across the country, addressed the importance of networking and building an alliance of women. "We need to communicate with each other,

share information and ideas. We need to support each other," she told the audience. "You have to go back to your constituency and explain what's happening in the legislature," she said, adding that's the way to lift up women as a whole.

Responding to the panellists, many participants voiced concern over the lack of communication among women in public offices and recognised the importance of building an alliance to collectively deal with issues important to women and children.

Some said the female leaders should encourage other women, including farmers and market people, to participate in the country's development efforts, and share information they have with rural Liberians so that everyone can participate in the decision-making process. Others addressed the issue of affirmative action for women to put a minimum quota for female representatives in government in place. In the end, the participants agreed to meet once a month to enhance their alliance.

"It was a great forum," smiled Sedia Massaquoi-Bangoura, Deputy Minister of Labour, who managed to collect at least dozens of names and contact information from participants during the forum. "We definitely have to build the network of women in governance to collaborate."

The forum was organised by the ministry, in close collaboration with UNIFEM and other international partners including UNMIL's Office of the Gender Advisor. Alan Doss, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General, in his address praised the role of women in governance to bring "a different perspective" to development. "It makes economic, social and political sense to put the power of choice in the hands of poor women. Only then can we get significant and quick advances in improving health and education," he said, promising that the international partners stand by them for women's advancement. "We'll do the most to bring women to the centre stage." •

IDP Chapter Ends

By Sulaiman Momodu

Officially, all the 35 internally displaced persons (IDP) camps and spontaneous settlements in Liberia were closed on 20 April this year at a ceremony held at Salala in Bong County, the largest such camp in the country. But some months after the IDP chapter was thought to have been closed with 314,095 registered displaced persons receiving assistance package to return, hundreds of displaced persons continued to live in squalid conditions in about 32 of the camps, prompting an assessment survey by the Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission (LRRRC), UN agencies, UNMIL and non-governmental organizations.

The survey found that some 5,500 displaced persons had stayed back in camps around Monrovia and in the counties partly because their names were removed from the World Food Programme (WFP) logs during camp consolidation exercise conducted in 2004/05. Some did not show up to collect their assistance package during the organized return. Other reasons include the desire of some IDPs to locally integrate and the lack of access to basic services such as schools and clinics in return areas.

The IDP Consultative Forum (ICF), the body that looks into IDP affairs then decided that the remaining IDPs, otherwise called the residual caseload, should be assisted to return. The ICF also resolved that assistance to IDPs should be distributed upon arrival in their areas of return and set November this year as the cut-off point for repatriation.

The repatriation of the residual caseload started on 2 October. Majority of the returnees are heading to Bomi County, according to Henok Ochalla, a field officer with the UN refugee agency UNHCR, which is taking the lead in the IDP return process in collaboration with the LRRRC and other humanitarian actors.

Accompanied by UN peacekeepers, 191 members from 88 families left the out-

skirts of Monrovia on 27 October on their journey home in a convoy of 20 vehicles. While UNHCR trucks carried the IDPs, UNMIL trucks carried their luggage.

At the Sinje transit centre located between Monrovia and the Sierra Leone border, representatives of the LRRRC and NGOs welcomed the IDPs. "You're welcome- there is no place like home." A peacekeeper from UNMIL's Namibian contingent assured them of security. "We are here to protect you -- you have nothing to fear. Peace is here!"

At the transit centre, the returnees received their return assistance of food and non-food items in addition to US\$5 transportation allowance per person to reach home after they are dropped off near their



home areas. During the repatriation earlier, returnees were given four months food ration supplied by the WFP in two installments. This time around, the returnees were given their four months' ration in one go as an added incentive.

"I feel good to be back home today, I am really happy," 52-year-old Taylor Morris from Perry Camp said cheerfully as he arrived at Sinje Transit Camp with his wife and three children. His 22-year-old son stayed behind as he is going to school but will join the family when school ends. Revealing that he intends to go back to his farming work, Morris sounded philosophical: "Once there is life and there is peace, there is hope."

As the IDPs return, some of the

landowners where the camps are located have reportedly requested for the return of their land, an issue that the LRRRC is looking into against the background that negotiations for land for IDP camps were either done informally or the camps sprung up spontaneously. On its part, UNHCR has commissioned a specialist organization, the Environmental Foundation for Africa (EFA), to carry out critical activities to address environmental hazards in former IDP camps. EFA has already begun work on sealing open pit latrines, wells and garbage pits, and demolishing abandoned shelters and disposing of household debris that pose a serious health hazard to people and animals.

UNHCR and partners will continue supporting the thousands of IDPs who have returned through community-based recovery programmes, officially known as Community Empowerment Projects (CEPs), by providing medical assistance and agricultural implements and ensuring that educational facilities are functional.

The IDP return process began on 8 November 2004 through the joint efforts of the LRRRC, UN agencies and NGOs following the deployment of UN peacekeepers and the restoration of peace. Three years on, as the IDP return chapter closes in 2006 much to the satisfaction of UN agencies and other humanitarian actors, the former IDPs are hoping and praying that never again should they be forced to run away from their homes.

Meanwhile, the LRRRC, UNHCR and partners continue to receive and provide assistance to Liberian refugees. As of 20 October, 81,298 Liberian refugees had been assisted to return by road, air and sea mainly from Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, Ghana and Nigeria. UNHCR's office in Kissidougou, Guinea, closed in September, ending an 18-year presence in the region following successful repatriation of 16,000 out of the total 18,000 Liberian refugees in the region between March 2005 and September 2006. The repatriation of Liberian refugees is planned to end in June 2007. •

Women Join Security Services

By Sulaiman Momodu

Dorothy Jartu Quay, 23, is neatly dressed in her Liberia National Police uniform and is very proud of it. "It was no mistake for me to join the police force," she beams, sitting behind her desk at the police headquarters in Monrovia. Although some members of the public provokingly call police personnel "five dollar police" because of a few Liberian dollar tips some members of the "old" police were notorious for collecting from law breakers in order to set them free, Quay said she had never allowed such nicknames to dampen her enthusiasm.

"We are very happy to be serving our country after 10 months of training. This is better than staying at home doing nothing for our country," says Quay's colleague, Roseline Dweh.

Emerging from 14 years of brutal conflict, Liberia is currently engaged in reforming its security sector under the Security Sector Reform (SSR) programme with both the army and the police targeting 20 per cent of women's recruitment. This is in line with UN Security Council resolution 1325, which calls on all actors when implementing a peace agreement to adopt a gender perspective -- measures that ensure the protection of and respect for the rights of women and girls.

As Liberians continue to savour the historic feat of electing Africa's first female president and thus bringing the struggle for gender equality to the fore, security is of high priority for Liberian women who suffered the most during the country's civil war. "We women have to take the lead to ensure that the peace process stays on course," says Liberia's Minister of Gender and Development, Varba Gayflor.

The police reform and restructuring exercise, under the aegis of the UN Police (UNPOL), began in 2004. The restructuring of the previously factionalised army began only this year, with DynCorp

International, a private security company contracted by the United States Government, in charge of the exercise.

Early November, the first batch of 106 soldiers including 10 women of the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) graduated after successfully completing a 15-week course at a rehabilitated Barclay Training Centre in downtown Monrovia. Immaculately dressed in military combat fatigues, the men and women of the new AFL proudly paraded some of their newly-acquired mil-

will start their training in January 2007 at a different location and it will target 500 trainees, 20 per cent of them women. "It is too early to say whether we would have problems attaining the overall target of 20 per cent women in the army," says Bawn. The initial number of soldiers to be trained for the AFL is 2,000.

Previously, recruitment into the army and police was largely based on connections and political affiliations and not on set criteria and competencies. As part of



itary skills at the graduation ceremony.

"I am extremely satisfied with the performance of the women and I feel very proud of them," said Edith Bawn, Public Affairs Officer of DynCorp International. She added that they had a limited number of women in the first group of recruits because they had inadequate accommodation facilities at the current temporary training centre.

The 106 new graduates began a six-week individual advance training in mid-November. The next group of new recruits

the reform agenda, all personnel of the existing LNP were required to register in 2004 and to reapply. Over 2,300 of them who had either reached the retirement age or did not meet the minimum requirements were deactivated, retaining about 900 personnel who were retrained as part of a revamped police force of 3,500 personnel.

Although the new police currently boasts of senior female officers at the helm of the force, of the 2,214 who have so far graduated at the end of October this year, only 133 or 6 per cent, are females.

Due to years of war which seriously affected education in the country, getting people including women who meet the basic requirement of a high school graduation to join the army and police has not been easy, says Paul Frimpong, in charge of UNPOL Reform and Restructuring Section. "But that does not mean we have to lower the standard. We have put a programme in place to accelerate women's education."

UNMIL's Office of the Gender Advisor works with the recruitment team to bring the gender perspective into the exercise. The office also works with UNMIL's Public Information and UNPOL



to design gender sensitive messages, slogans, flyers and billboards, as well as jingles for broadcast on radio to encourage women to join the security sector.

To meet the challenge of reaching the target of 20 per cent female participation in the LNP, the Norwegian government is funding a project that provides interested females who have attained 10th grade the opportunity to qualify for the General Educational Development (GED) accelerated course. Participants who successfully complete the course become eligible to commence the police training programme. ♦

First AFL Recruits Graduate

Graduation of the first class of AFL



By J. Wesley Washington

One hundred and six recruits, including 10 females, of the first class graduated on 4 November to join active service in the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) after successfully completing a 15-week Initial Entry Training Course. Also graduating were recruits of the Band Unit of the new armed forces.

Discipline and respect for the rule of law were the subject of much of the day's ceremony at the Barclay Training Centre in Monrovia as the trainees, neatly dressed in military combat fatigues, savoured their graduation moment.

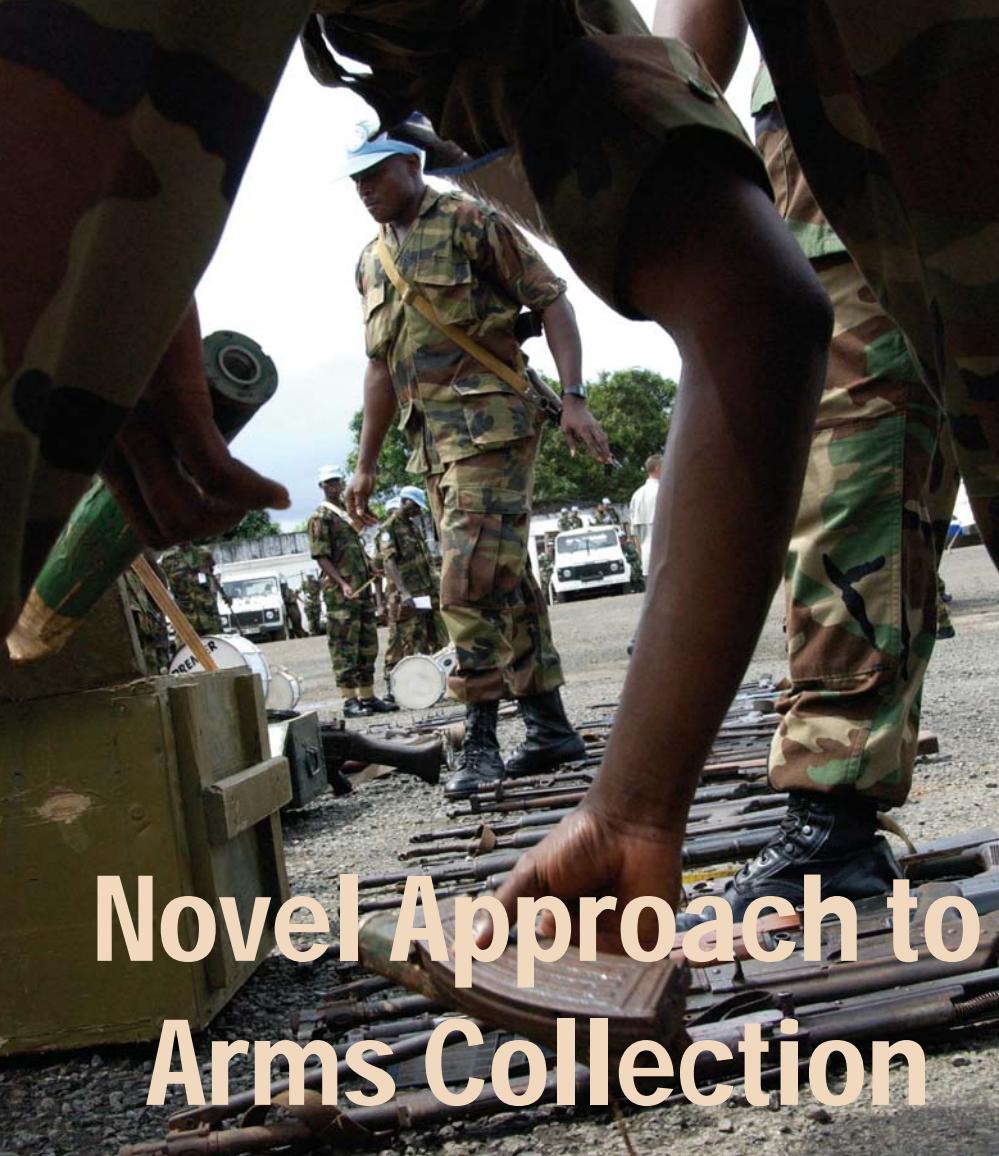
Addressing the graduates, Liberia's Vice President, Joseph Boakai stressed that the new army should be subordinate to constitutional authorities and should act within the bounds of the national constitution and the rule of law. He urged the new graduates to develop respect for human rights through practice and training.

Defence Minister Brownie J. Samukai said that the Government's objective is to develop a professional military, "not in numbers, but in quality -- well-trained, regimented, disciplined -- with robust tactical and technical capabilities." Samukai promised more efforts

from the Government to obtain adequate resources to support, sustain and maintain the new personnel of the AFL. "We will support efforts to have these soldiers, and all other soldiers that are to be trained later, to be paid their salaries on time and in a respectable manner. We shall seek the financial support of Government in maintaining the logistical equipment, quartering and welfare facilities that are being provided by the U.S. Government for the new armed forces," he said.

United States Ambassador to Liberia Donald Booth cautioned the young graduates never to forget that they represent the best about Liberia and its people. "Your uniform is a solid reminder of professionalism, discipline, and responsibility. But whether a soldier is in uniform or out of uniform, whether a soldier is on duty or off duty, a soldier's actions, words and intentions will ultimately determine how your fellow citizens come to view you and respect the AFL," he noted.

Over the next three years, DynCorp International, a private security company contracted by the U.S. Government, will assist with recruiting, vetting, training and equipping the new army of 2,000 soldiers including 94 civil servants for the Ministry of Defence.



Novel Approach to Arms Collection

By Elma Shaw

“Our people say, when strangers come to visit, we must first give them kola before they tell us their reason for coming,” says the young spokesperson for the Elders. He is donning a western suit jacket with a colorful African print lappa wrapped around the waist, the formal Grebo fashion for men.

We are in Freetown, part of the Glarro Chiefdom of River Gee County, to launch the UNDP Arms for Development (AfD) project and are overwhelmed by the elaborate welcome ceremony. We have been here several times before to prepare the community, but this one is a special occasion. The artistically painted women who danced and sang for us as we approached the palaver hut are now seated with their

sasas, and the Elders, all men, are seated in a row with two plates of pink kola nuts and a cup of yellowish water on the floor in front of them.

The team from the Small Arms Control Programme has a lot to do in Glarro in the next two days, but nothing can be started without this traditional ritual. After handshakes and introductions we must eat the kola nuts, drink the water, and give a small token gift of our own as a sign of appreciation. In return, we will have the full cooperation of the Chiefs and the citizens of the Chiefdom. Looking at them now, smiling and in finery, one would never believe that just three years ago many of them lost friends and relatives in what is now known as the “River Gee Massacre.” More than 300 people were rounded up and killed, and to date, no one has been brought to justice for the crime. Behind the smiles today is a determination to rid their communities and their county of all

military-style weapons so that history does not repeat itself.

Beatrice Teah, a subsistence farmer who lives in Freetown, later recalled years of exile in neighbouring Côte d’Ivoire where her daughter still goes to school. “With all the trouble there I want her to come home, but we don’t have good schools here,” she says. “River Gee needs development.”

Musu Kiazolu, UNDP Small Arms County Coordinator for River Gee, agrees. She says people in Freetown drink the yellow water from the River Gbeh because there are no sources for clean and safe water. Health facilities are also lacking, and people often walk miles to get proper care in the county’s capital.

The stories are similar throughout the Southeast region of Liberia where UNDP has begun the Community Arms Collection for Development component of the National Five-Year Programme for small arms control. Despite the challenges of poor road conditions, the AfD project was launched in six Chiefdoms there in August 2006 -- Twainsiebo and Nyemonweh in Maryland County, Cherboken and Glarro in River Gee County, and B’hai and Niao-Gborbo in Grand Gedeh County. The project was also launched in the Zota Chiefdom of Bong County. Communities in these Chiefdoms are encouraged to voluntarily surrender arms and ammunition in exchange for development projects from UNDP.

Four Chiefdoms have already selected their development projects and are now breaking ground or making other preparations to implement their projects.

On day two, at the official launching ceremony in Glarro Chiefdom, the display of cultural traditions to symbolize commitment to the project continued with the presentation of a live rooster and a bowl of freshly harvested rice to River Gee County Superintendent Karku Sampson. The Superintendent encouraged the people to keep up their enthusiasm throughout the Arms for Development process, and, on their behalf, turned over to UNMIL the first weapons surrendered by the Chiefdom. •

The writer is a Communications Officer with UNDP Liberia.

Patrolling the Borders

In the wake of as yet unsubstantiated media reports in Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia of mercenary training on the border, the United Nations peacekeeping missions in the two neighbouring countries have started joint patrols in an effort to prevent any recruitment of mercenaries or arms trafficking, and to reinforce security along their common borders. UNMIL FOCUS joined a patrol team in Nimba County, which shares border with Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea.

By Sulaiman Momodu

From the sleepy Liberian border town of Loguatu in Nimba County, where in 1989 the civil conflict that would engulf the whole country for the next 14 years first began, the patrol team travels along a narrow path through thick bush and forest. A few kilometres later, the team comes to the end of the road, facing the peacefully flowing Cavalla river, the natural boundary between Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia. Across the river one can see men armed with Kalashnikovs in battle ready positions. The men are fighters of the Ivorian rebel outfit Forces Nouvelles (New Forces), who have been controlling the north of that country for about four years running.

Although UNMIL's patrol does not cross over to the Ivorian side, and in the absence of a bridge, some peacekeepers of the United Nations Mission in Côte d'Ivoire, ONUCI, cross the river on rafts from the Ivorian side to meet their counterparts in Liberia. The peacekeepers compare notes. No incident on either side -- all calm and quiet.

With the restoration of peace to Liberia and its neighbour Sierra Leone thanks to UN peacekeepers, there are genuine fears that any deterioration of security in the neighbouring countries could have direct or indirect impact on the gains the UN has made. The war-weary locals of Loguatu summarize it with screaming graffiti on their walls: "No more war, we want peace!"

Peace remains the most cherished desire in the volatile West African sub-region notorious for its porous borders. While Liberia and Sierra Leone enjoy relative peace, the stalemate in Côte d'Ivoire continues. At the same time, there is an air of political uncertainty and despair hanging over Guinea. Although Liberians at the border say the Ivorian rebels have not created any disturbances, a sense of uneasiness with their presence could be clearly seen on their faces.

Chikadibia Isaac Obiakor shed some light on the exercise named "Operation Logo" on the border with Sierra Leone and "Operation Mayo" on the Ivorian border. "We patrol on our side of the border and meet at identified crossing points to exchange information," he said. "While we are doing the western borders, we had troops doing the eastern borders concurrently." The border patrols also include air reconnaissance.

Lt.-Gen. Obiakor points out that there are lots of unsubstantiated stories in local newspapers on camps either in Côte d'Ivoire or in Nimba where rebel recruits are training. "But we have found nothing of that nature."

The UNMIL military boss stresses that although no rebel training camps or recruitment were discovered, the patrols will not be relaxed. "Immigration, customs and the Liberia National Police are all involved in this patrol so it becomes part and parcel of what they should be doing eventually."

Some Liberian residents in the border area with Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone say they are very much appreciative of the border patrols. "With the border patrols, we are sure to go about our daily activities in peace and to sleep in peace," John Johnson, a resident of Loguatu, remarks.

Meanwhile, a regional Force Commanders' Conference in late November in Monrovia reviewed the border patrols and decided to launch Operation Seskin, along the border with Guinea at the end of the month. ♦



During patrols in vehicles and armoured tanks through the jungle in terrible road conditions or on foot, the peacekeepers clearly identify all crossing points and gather information on terrain and road conditions. Troops deployed on both sides know each other and the local residents are reassured of their security. The peacekeepers also obtain maps of the border area as well as information on rebel movements.

Addressing the press at UNMIL headquarters in Monrovia mid-October, UNMIL Force Commander Lt.-Gen.

Quick Impact Projects

By J. Wesley Washington

The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) through its Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) funds community-oriented, small scale but highly visible infrastructure projects aimed at helping Liberia recover from its prolonged war and improve the living standards of the people.

From the initial projects of garbage and metal scrap collection and removal from the streets of Monrovia and its environs in October 2003 to the rehabilitation of roads and educational facilities, UNMIL has continued to support the Government's efforts to realize its programmes of recovery and reconstruction.

Overall, a total of 282 such projects totalling US\$4 million have been undertaken over the last three years. Of these, 215 projects have been completed, while 67 are ongoing.

Since QIPs began, education sector has benefited from the highest number, 38 per cent, of such projects. Among the other sectors benefiting from the projects are rule of law, water and sanitation, road rehabilitation, health, economic activity and shelter.

In far away Buanplay, Nimba County, some 300 kilometres from Monrovia, UNMIL, through a local contractor, is constructing a 13-classroom junior high school building to replace two dilapidated mud brick structures serving as the educational facility for some 500 students in the town and the surrounding areas. This is just one of the 109 projects aimed at rehabilitating the education sector.

"I'm so overjoyed," says Thomas Karngbury, Town Chief of Buanplay, as he thanks UNMIL for the assistance accorded the township through the QIPs. "Our children will be able to learn in an atmosphere conducive for learning. You have brought great relief to us and our children in this community and the adjacent villages."

In Sinyea, Bong County, a town with over 6,500 inhabitants, getting safe drinking water is a nightmare. Local inhabitants rely on water from the adjoining creeks or the open un-chlorinated wells in the vicinity. However, five new hand pumps nearing completion around the town through QIPs will soon provide the residents with clean drinking water.

The major focus of QIPs now is on rehabilitation and refurbishing of courthouses, police stations, and prison compounds aimed at enhancing rule of law and good governance. As part of this, the



Louis Arthur Grimes School of Law, the only law school in the country, has been given a massive facelift.

A number of magisterial and judicial courthouses have been renovated and refurbished in Greenville, Tubmanburg, Kakata, Bensonville, Careysburg, and Gbarnga. Similar renovation projects are underway in Buchanan, Zwedru, Harper, Bopulu, Cestos City, Ganta and Sanniquellie.

Alfred Y.K. Manigbolor, Stipendiary Magistrate, Gbarnga City Court is ecstatic about the renovation of his court by UNMIL. "The renovation of this building has made a great impact. People did not have interest in the judicial system because this place was looking run-down. But since UNMIL QIPs came in and renovated the building, it has given a good impression to the public."

Other institutions like the Monrovia,

Kakata and Gbarnga Central Prisons have received facelifts through UNMIL QIPs. At the Kakata Central Prison, outside Kakata, Margibi County, Corrections Officers were quite overwhelmed with the refurbished and renovated facility.

Correctional Desk Officer Amos Sarnoh couldn't hide his delight. "To be frank, I'm very much grateful to QIPs because when we took over this place, the prison was not suitable. There was a lack of toilet facilities, inmates received very little ventilation and sunlight during the day, the fence was very low, and there were no exercise facilities," he said.

Though with only 51 inmates, Sarnoh says the facilities are now up to standard. "Our static security is in place: fence is higher secured with barbed wire, the entrances have steel gates, there is much more ventilation for inmates and most importantly, an exercise venue and water facilities are all included," he said. There are now four withholding cells with specific cells for juvenile and females at the premises.

Liberia's civil servants who are based outside the capital were forced to travel to Monrovia at the end of every month to collect and cash their salary checks due to the absence of banking facilities in the counties. However, they don't have to go through that stress and strain any longer.

Constructed and refurbished through UNMIL QIPs, the Central Bank of Liberia now has payment centres in Tubmanburg, Voinjama and Zwedru, which will also serve the neighbouring counties. The payment centres will also enable customs and revenue agents to deposit funds and avoid the need for frequent travel to the bank's Monrovia headquarters. Discussions are being finalized for the construction of three more centres in Sinoe, Maryland and Grand Kru counties.

Of all the Quick Impact Projects, 40 per cent were implemented in Montserrado County, followed by Nimba, Bomi, Margibi and other counties. ♦

Fighting Lassa Fever

As the deadly, haemorrhagic disease, Lassa Fever, continues to claim lives in Liberia, the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Ministry of Health (MOH) are implementing an Emergency Lassa Fever Prevention and Control Programme specifically for the endemic counties of Bong, Lofa and Nimba. The project is co-funded by the European Commission Humanitarian Office (ECHO) and WHO.

The ongoing programme, which would be eventually expanded to cover the entire country, is expected to contribute to the reduction of morbidity and mortality caused by Lassa Fever by strengthening the capacities of health workers and communities.

The WHO Representative in Liberia, Dr. Eugene A. Nyarko, said from January 2005 to October 2006, about 12 cases of Lassa Fever were confirmed with three recorded deaths, among them two Pakistani UN peacekeepers. Most of the confirmed cases were reported from the three endemic counties, but Gbarpolu, Grand Bassa, Maryland and Montserrado counties also reported the disease.

Laboratory tests to confirm whether one is suffering from Lassa Fever are usually sent by courier to Hamburg in Germany. It usually takes a week for the results to be known. Nyarko acknowledged that sending samples abroad is a problem but said plans are afoot to have a laboratory in West Africa capable of detecting the disease. The surge in Lassa Fever cases in Liberia has led to a new co-ordination mechanism among principal stakeholders: MOH, the Country Health Teams, UNMIL, WHO, Phebe Hospital and the communities.

In the ongoing prevention and control that started in November 2005, the main strategies include improvement of patient care through clinical diagnosis, case man-

agement, referrals, infection control and injection safety; hospital-based surveillance through improved laboratory services and rapid diagnosis; community mobilization through provision of sanitation tools, surveillance and response to outbreaks; and community sensitization through information, education and communication.

As part of the programme, skills of the mostly untrained or semi-skilled health workers in rural areas get a boost, enabling them diagnose Lassa Fever clinically, report and refer suspected cases to Phebe Hospital, the only facility in the country



for management of the disease, which was looted and all equipment destroyed during the war, but has now been rehabilitated.

First reported in Zorzor hospital, Lofa county in 1970, Lassa Fever has been one of the public health problems in Liberia with consequent impact on the socio-economic and livelihood of the Liberian people. Studies conducted in 1984 suggest high transmission of the disease in the country with varying incidences of between 14-17 per cent in the endemic counties. In the coastal areas the incidences vary between 3.8-4.3 per cent. The proportion of death from the disease has been high, especially in pregnant women.

WHO has trained 162 health workers from the three endemic counties on Lassa Fever prevention and control. Twelve county health team members were trained as trainers to facilitate information sharing

and skills development in the affected counties. In addition, 60 nurses and nursing students from Phebe Hospital were sensitized on aspects of case definitions, clinical presentation and standard precautions. All the trained health workers were provided with guidelines and field reference materials for use in their health facilities. It is envisaged that these tools will equip the health workers in the investigation of Lassa Fever related rumours or outbreaks, surveillance, clinical diagnosis of suspected cases, specimen handling, observation of standard precautions, reporting, and management.

WHO has provided personal protective equipment to strengthen the capacity of the isolation ward in Phebe Hospital, in addition to Biochemistry Spectrometer for blood analysis and the drug, Ribavirin, for treatment of the disease. Community awareness and community cleanup campaigns have started in all the three counties with the support of local community leaders. WHO has provided sanitation tools consisting of wheelbarrows, shovels, rakes, cutlasses, hoes, diggers and sanitation gloves to 60 communities from 20 districts in the three identified counties.

Lassa Fever is endemic in Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone and regions of Nigeria where it was first discovered in a village called Lassa. Lassa infection in rodents persists and the virus is shed throughout the life of the animal. Disease transmission is primarily through direct or indirect contact with the waste of infected rodents deposited on surfaces such as floors or beds or in food or water. Person-to-person spread may occur during the acute phase of fever when the virus is present in the throat. The virus may be excreted in the urine of patients for three to nine weeks from the onset of the disease. Lassa virus can also be transmitted via semen for up to three months. All age groups are susceptible to the disease. •

From China, With Love

By Alexactus Kaure

The road from the Chinese capital of Beijing to Liberia's south-eastern city of Zwedru is long. But for the 12 doctors and 16 other Chinese medical personnel from the Beijing Army General Hospital, Zwedru is their second home. They are part of the Chinese Level II Hospital in Zwedru.

The Hospital provides high quality medical support to mostly UNMIL Sector IV staff but sometimes extends free medical service to critical patients in the local community who cannot be treated at the local hospital. Besides the highly trained and professional staff, the Chinese Level II Hospital also boasts of state-of-the-art medical equipment. Its laboratory has been praised by Madam Bendu Tulg, Liberia's Assistant Minister of Health, as the best in the South-eastern region of Liberia.

Saving the life of an Ethiopian peace-keeper, who shot himself accidentally in the chest early this July, was a significant achievement for Lt.-Col. Sun Tiansheng, Commander of the Hospital, and his team. This won the hearts of fellow peacekeepers in Zwedru, mostly from Ethiopia.

The shot peace-keeper was rushed to the Hospital in a critical condition. The doctors carried out a quick but successful cardio-pulmonary resuscitation. After three hours of surgery, the patient's bleeding was under control, heart-rate stabilized and all the vital signs back to normal. Sweating and exhausted, the Chinese doctors and nurses had pulled the patient back from death. When the good news was announced, people waiting outside the Hospital cheered and applauded to show their gratitude to the doctors.

"The contribution of the Chinese medical personnel in Zwedru is not only well acknowledged by UNMIL but also by the entire Liberian people," Brigadier Birhanu Jula, the Ethiopian Commander for Sector IV, commented recently. Up to now, the Chinese Level II Hospital has received nearly 20,000 out-patients and in-patients of UNMIL staff alone.

Since its establishment, the Hospital has undertaken various humanitarian activities as part of the effort to help rebuild Liberia, including free medical assistance to the local people and health promotion programmes using mobile clinics.

"The contribution of the Chinese Level II Hospital in the provision of health to

Grand Gedeh communities has been commendable. The Hospital has been helping in providing health services to the citizens in collaboration with the government-owned Martha Tubman Memorial (MTM) Hospital in Zwedru in many different ways," said Dr Oluyinka Aderibigbe of MTM Hospital. This help has included the provision of X-ray facilities, laboratory tests and TB medication.

"The people of Grand-Gedeh County are grateful to the Chinese people for the level of work they have carried out," says Ophelia Gledy, Zwedru City Mayoress recalling two cases -- one involving a little boy who had third-degree burns on most parts of his body and needed some intensive treatment, and a pregnant young girl who was transferred from the MTM Hospital with vaginal bleeding.

Despite not having a gynaecologist, the Hospital had no choice but to admit the patient. After several hours of surgery, during which several phone calls were made to China for expert advice, the baby was successfully delivered and the mother was out of danger.

"The tremendous service the Chinese medical personnel are rendering is indispensable in addressing the health needs of our people in that area," says Joseph Boakai, Vice President of Liberia. •

Chinese medical personnel at work



Chinese Keep Roads Open



By Alexactus Kaure

Before the arrival of UNMIL, the Albert T. White Stadium in Zwedru was in a state of total neglect and disrepair. But almost three years later, the renovated Stadium can be mistaken for a spanking military training academy. It is now home to the Chinese Engineering Company.

The Company's story begins here in Zwedru. It is a story of making movement possible, of roads and their regular maintenance. The Company has 275 personnel ranging from commanding officers and sergeants, engineers and technicians, operators, drivers and mechanics.

The statistics can be staggering. The Company has 431 equipments, divided into seven groups, 14 engineering machines, 16 tractors, 58 containers, nine generators and three sets of water treatment plants, says the Commander of the Company, Lt.-Col. Li Chutang.

The Chinese Engineering Company has a daunting task as it is responsible for three major road arteries. It takes care of

the Zwedru-Tappeta, Zwedru-Greenville, Zwedru-Webo Highways and the Toe Town road to the border with Côte d'Ivoire. Put together these stretches of roads represent over 500 km. And the Company's area of operation, Sector IV, is not just the largest of the four sectors, but it is also the only sector that doesn't have a portion of tarred road.

The Commander says the Company is here to maintain roads and not to build them -- a crucial distinction. Asked which of the roads he is most proud of, he quickly picks out Zwedru-Tappeta and Toe Town's. In fact, there is a permanent detachment of the Company stationed on the Zwedru-FishTown road and another on the Zwedru-Tappeta. The trouble spots on the road are immediately taken care of without having to drive from Zwedru every day. For the first time in many years, the Zwedru-Tappeta road has been in good condition even during the rainy season, says the Commander.

However, the task is not easy. The Zwedru-Greenville road has proved to be a nightmare, says the Commander. Lack of timely delivery of construction materials

from Monrovia is the major constrain. It again boils down to transport.

The Chinese Engineering Company has so far built two heliports at Greenville Airport, repaired the Zwedru Airfield, built four steel bridges, rehabilitated two roads and built a truck-port in Zwedru, among other tasks. On the social front, the Company has levelled the ground for an elementary school in Toe Town and repaired the wall of a badly damaged mosque in Zwedru. The Company also rescued 80 stranded vehicles both UNMIL and private, and has lifted 81 containers.

In addition to over 320 km of roads repaired, the Chinese engineers have also fixed 66 seriously damaged road sections. And they have won kudos for their work. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Alan Doss, praised the engineers for their hard work when he opened the Sarbo Bridge in River Gee built by the Company. Recognizing that the bridge had been built in just one week, he said that this achievement demonstrates not only the contingent's technical abilities but also their dedication to their job as peacekeepers. ♦

Grants for Liberian Legislature



By Sulaiman Momodu

Members of the Liberian Legislature had every reason to smile on Thursday, 12 October, as they received two grants from the United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF) totaling nearly half a million US dollars.

The two grants include the Legislative Study Grant Programme of US\$120,000, which is to last for two years and is intended to strengthen the professionalism of the legislature and encourage the participation of youth in the democratic process, and the project, "Building a National Integrity Framework for Liberia," amounting US\$360,000, to be implemented by the Governance Reform Commission (GRC). The latter seeks to promote transparency, accountability and the rule of law, with a view to eliminating or substantially minimizing corruption.

The study grant programme will provide scholarships for some students at the University of Liberia. This will be implemented through UNDP, the University of

Liberia and the Legislature.

Speaking at the signing ceremony held at the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) Headquarters in Monrovia, attended by senior members of the Liberian senate and legislature, Special Representative of the Secretary-General Alan Doss said the project is one of the very first approved by UNDF which came out of a major reform effort by the outgoing Secretary General, Kofi Annan. He said the Legislative Study Grant Programme is important because it meets two needs: "first to strengthen the capacity of the Legislature ...and a strong Legislature means a strong Government... and second, bringing young people into the political arena."

The Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Recovery and Governance, Jordan Ryan, said Liberia should be proud to be one of the few countries to receive two grants from the new Democracy Fund. "Democracy requires that all of the public be outraged when there are examples of corruption but all of the public have the ability to be engaged in processes that put a check on issues of cor-

ruption," he said.

The Speaker of the House of Representatives, Edwin Snowe, lauded the efforts of the United Nations for bringing peace and sustaining it by empowering the Liberian people. "These grants demonstrate that peacekeeping is not only about ensuring security or silencing the guns but also about sustaining peace. By empowering our young Liberians, the UN is not only setting the pace for lasting peace but also ensuring that we can all live together and develop our nation as one people."

The President Pro Tempore, Isaac Nyenabo, expressed gratitude to the United Nations for the grants. "We believe that capacity-building is the essence of national development...we believe that this process of fomenting the strength of the committees by bringing in young professionals to assist in note taking, research work, etc. will help to improve our society."

UNDEF was established at the 2005 World Summit at the UN in New York and is funded through contributions of Member States for the promotion of democracy and human rights. .

Japan Assists Liberian Children

The Government of Japan in mid-November contributed US\$1.6 million to the United Nations Children's Fund, UNICEF, to help reduce Liberia's high under-five mortality rate. The 2006 National Human Development Report stated that 235 out of 1,000 babies born today in Liberia do not live to see their fifth birthday.

The donation will support life-saving child immunization coverage and provide more than 147,000 insecticide treated bed nets to protect infants and pregnant women from malaria. The grant will also be used to provide 780,000 doses of Artesunate and Amodiaquine (ACT), used to treat children who contract malaria, Africa's leading cause of under-five mortality, according to a UNICEF press release.

"We are profoundly grateful to the Government of Japan for their continued commitment to assist Liberia's vulnerable children," said UNICEF Liberia Representative Rozanne Chorlton, while participating in a press conference with Yutaka Nakamura, Charge d'Affaires at the

Japanese embassy in Ghana. "This generous contribution from the people of Japan will support UNICEF's interventions to sustain immunization coverage of Liberian children less than one-year of age at 85 per cent, distribute 147,840 bed nets in Lofa, Grand Gedeh, and Maryland counties and supply 780,000 doses of ACT treatment," Chorlton explained.

For his part, Nakamura noted that the



new funding for UNICEF Liberia is part of his Government's continued trust in UNICEF's capacity to deliver results towards the achievements of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) 4 and 5, which focus on child mortality and maternal health.

Minister of Planning and Economic Affairs, Toga Gayewea McIntosh and Deputy Minister and Chief Medical Officer at the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, Bernice T. Dahn, also participated in the Exchange of Notes ceremony in the Liberian capital, Monrovia. Dahn lauded the Japanese government for the donation and pointed out that malaria is Africa's leading cause of under-five mortality and is the biggest killer of children in Liberia.

With support from UNICEF, the Government of Japan and other partners, measles coverage has increased to 94 per cent from 42 per cent in 2004 and DPT3 (diphtheria, pertussis, and tetanus) coverage is up at 87 per cent in 2005 from 31 per cent in 2004. Liberia is on track to be certified polio free as no cases have been reported for three-years.

Since 2002, the Government of Japan has provided UNICEF Liberia with more than US\$14.24 million to support the reintegration of demobilized Liberian children formerly associated with the fighting forces and the prevention of infectious diseases. ♦

Judiciary Must Be Strengthened : UN Expert

Charlotte Abaka, the UN Independent Expert on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights in Liberia, has said that the country's judiciary must be strengthened to protect against rape and other crimes.

Warning that rape remains "one of the greatest challenges" to human rights as she concluded her 11-day visit to Liberia in November, the expert decried the lack of progress with the nation's Truth and Reconciliation Commission and its human rights body. The TRC is not yet operating fully despite starting its public activities five months ago, while the Commissioners of the Independent National Commission

on Human Rights (INCHR) have still not been appointed more than three years after the body was included in Liberia's peace deal.

Abaka urged the Independent Panel of Experts appointed 10 months ago to prepare the shortlist of candidates, and the Government and Chief Justice to take all necessary steps to ensure that competent and credible Commissioners are appointed without further delay.

However, Abaka noted that "significant" human rights progress has been made in Liberia since the conflict ended, among them several positive steps such as the recent developments in the education sector, the reassertion of State control over

the Guthrie rubber plantation and improvement of the human rights situation in several of the larger plantations.

She commended the Government for its adoption in January of the Act amending the Penal Law in relation to the definition and penalties for rape. "However, I am saddened to learn that there has been as yet little noticeable impact on the prevalence of rape in Liberia, including rape of very young children."

The UN Mission in Liberia is currently supporting the Government in the strengthening of the judiciary through training and infrastructural development such as the construction or rehabilitation of court houses. ♦

LIBERIANS

What must be done to speed up Liberia's recovery process

"One of the ways to speed up Liberia's recovery process is that the government must be in the position to provide job opportunities so that Liberians can get back to work. Right now it's time for nation building. The standard of living in the country is generally low. Many people live from hand-to-mouth. They need to be gainfully employed. So to speed up Liberia's recovery, Government must create jobs for those without jobs and should also reconcile the people."

Prince Collins (Talking Drum Studio)



"We need to work together as Liberians. We need to open schools and institutions of higher learning in the country. The human capacity of the country is very weak. Government should build more vocational institutions and encourage idle youths to take advantage so they can help to rebuild this country. Also, to speed up development in the country, we need electricity, water, health care, etc."

Clinton Nagbe (Student, Stella Maris Polytechnic)



"Nobody wants to do business in a place where security is fragile. The most urgent thing to be done is to consolidate the peace in order to attract investors. Those who might want to invest here will want to make sure that their investment will have some security. And one way to do this is that all Liberians should be security officers. By this I mean, if you see something that is a threat to security, don't say it is not my business. Those who commit crimes are people who live with us in the community so we should be prepared to bring their clandestine activities to the attention of the authorities and speed up the country's recovery process."

William A. Brown (Businessman)



"Liberia needs continued international assistance. It needs all of the partners it can work with. We need to constructively engage the United Nations and other bilateral and multilateral organizations on how they can help because it's clear that Liberia needs all of the partnership for its reconstruction."

Liberians need to cooperate and collaborate. Opposition parties need to be brought on board. We think people from diverse backgrounds need to be brought on board as a way of contributing to the peace and progress of the country."

Isaac Yeah (Journalist)



"The major thing that government should do is to create job opportunities that will empower the youth to make meaningful living. Once everybody is busy, crime would be drastically minimized. Secondly, some of the programmes initiated by the government should be suspended for now. The right-sizing and down-sizing exercise should be suspended. Likewise, the current demolition exercise should be suspended."

James Davis (Businessman)

SPEAK Speed up Liberia's recovery?

"In my view, Liberia's development depends on ourselves -- together we have to make this nation peaceful and prosperous. When one travels, you see how developed other countries are, and when you come to your country, you see small villages which we call cities. Secondly, government should create job opportunities so as to lessen the hardship on the Liberian people.

Elisa W. Dahn (Employee, Government of Liberia)



"The government needs to reconstruct the roads, provide free education, especially to those who cannot afford it. Government also has to improve on the security in this country. These are very vital to the country's recovery.

Government should ensure that refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) have returned to their home areas. The demolition of shacks is untimely. How can you demolish the place where one gets his or her daily bread without any alternative place to relocate?"

Antoinette Wolo (Student, University of Liberia)



"I would like to say that Government and its international partners assist in bringing electricity, safe drinking water as well as create jobs for the jobless Liberians. They should spread to other parts of the country creating an enabling environment for peace, security and economic empowerment for all Liberians."

Esther Chea (Businesswoman)



"To speed up the country's recovery, we need to rehabilitate our road network throughout the country. Once our main trunk roads are rehabilitated everything will speed up in the country. The lack of adequate roads and bridges in Monrovia is causing us problems. With the collapse of the Vai Town Bridge in Monrovia, these days there is immense traffic on the Johnson Street/Bushrod Island route which causes delays for people coming to and from work daily."

James M. Bowah (Businessman)



"Liberia needs all the assistance from all its partners. Liberia needs to remain engaged constructively and actively with the international community. Our government will have to continuously demonstrate that it is indeed prepared to work with its international partners.. When you talk about the educational, health, infrastructural development, everything hinges on the roads -- tackle the roads and everything will fall in place. Also the government must remain resolute in its drive to clear this country of corrupt practices."

Eva Flomo (Journalist)



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