

# UN FOCUS

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"One UN, One Goal"  
United for peace and  
development in Liberia

UNITED NATIONS IN LIBERIA

September - November 2012

**"Helping Bring Peace..."**

**'Operation Restore Hope' Bids  
to Regain Community trust**

**New Push to Combat Sexual  
Abuse of Children**

# Message from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General



In September, I briefed the Security Council on the Secretary-General's progress report on Liberia. I highlighted the importance of national reconciliation and structural changes to address the underlying causes of past conflict, and the need to continue to strengthen Liberia's security sector. I also stressed the need for the international community to continue supporting the country in areas crucial to lasting peace.

As you know, the Security Council extended the mandate of the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) for another year. It also authorized

a phased reduction in UNMIL's military strength by some 4,200 personnel through July 2015 at the end of which some 3,750 military personnel and over 1,750 police will remain in Liberia, with a reduction of less than 2,000 over the first year. At the same time, the Council also approved an increase of three Formed Police Units comprising 420 personnel, raising the ceiling of UN Police in the country to almost 1,800.

To be clear, UNMIL is not leaving Liberia anytime soon. We have been partners in Liberia's quest for peace since 2003, and will continue to stand by the people and Government even as the Mission gradually transitions. The proposed decrease of UNMIL's military strength is predicated on Liberia's ability, especially that of the country's security agencies such as the Liberia National Police (LNP), to protect Liberians and progressively take over the Mission's security role. The UN Police will be actively mentoring and training Liberia's law enforcement agencies in the coming years.

That Liberia is viewed as a country now in need of fewer uniformed peacekeepers is a sure sign of progress. The country has sustained unbroken peace throughout the past nine years. Two successfully conducted democratic

elections since the end of the civil conflict have helped Liberians choose their leaders through ballots, and not through the barrel of a gun. Participatory democracy is taking firm root in the nation and Liberia is treading on a steady path to durable peace. That momentum must continue to be maintained, and Liberia deserves our support to solidify the gains made so far.

Still, various challenges to progress and development in Liberia remain. Instability in southwestern Côte d'Ivoire is a major concern, requiring additional resources to ensure border security. UNMIL and ONUCI, our sister Mission in Côte d'Ivoire, have enhanced our mutual cooperation and are working hand-in-hand with both of our host governments not only to enhance security along the common border but also to foster stability and strengthen state authority in the region.

As UNMIL gradually transitions over the years, we will continue to draw on the full technical capacities of the entire UN family in Liberia in the spirit of "Delivering as One" to enhance the impact of our support. Security will always remain top priority, for without genuine, home-grown peace there can be no meaningful economic and social development.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Landgren', with a stylized, flowing script.

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





## 4. "Helping Bring Peace..."

After shepherding Liberia's peace process since October 2003 and with Liberia sustaining unbroken peace all along, the UN peacekeeping mission in Liberia plans to reduce some of its military strength in three phases lasting till 2015 when the country will still host a significant number of peacekeepers.



## 8. 'Operation Restore Hope' Bids to Regain Community Trust

Exhibiting their increasing operational capabilities, Liberia National Police and its Emergency Response Unit as well as the Armed Forces come together in "Operation Restore Hope" aimed at protecting the country's border with Côte d'Ivoire.



## 12. New Push to Combat Sexual Abuse of Children

With rampant child rape and sexual violence in Liberia, strident voices are now being raised against an entrenched culture of silence among Liberian families over incidents involving sexual abuse of children.

4. "Helping Bring Peace..."
6. Liberia National Police is Progressing: Police Adviser
8. 'Operation Restore Hope' Bids to Regain Community Trust
10. "I am a GIRL, Not A WIFE..."
12. New Push to Combat Sexual Abuse of Children
14. One-Stop-Shop for SGBV Survivors
16. "Separated" Refugee Bags University Degree
18. UN Flights Help Thousands of Returning Refugees
20. Refugee Camps Consolidated
22. New Programming to Boost Agriculture
24. Rural Women Embrace Family Planning
30. Liberians Speak

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UN peacekeepers first deployed in Liberia in October 2003

# “Helping Bring Peace

By Mathew Elavanalthoduka

A wide-eyed 12th grade student, Christine Goethen, was among hundreds of school children in Monrovia, Liberia’s capital, participating in this year’s UN Day celebrations on 24 October. Asked about her presence, she said: “I am here because I want to thank the UN for helping bring peace and helping us to go to school.”

Not too long ago going to school was not an option for a generation of Liberian children. The protracted civil war that began in 1989 and lasted until 2003 shattered the nation with most schools and other infrastructure

destroyed. Several thousand people were killed and a third of the population displaced. Since the deployment of UN peacekeepers in October 2003 that brought an end to the civil conflict, Liberia has been treading steadily on the path to durable peace for the past nine years. Today ballots -- not bullets -- are the choice of the tiny West African country once stigmatized as a “failed” nation.

Among the largest peacekeeping missions in the world at one point, the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) had over 15,000 peacekeepers and more than 1,100 police at its peak. With Liberia’s first democratically elected post-war government inaugurated in early 2006, a phased-out reduction in

troops through 2010 brought down the combined military and police strength to less than 9,000.

The second national elections too concluded peacefully in late 2011. And now into the tenth year of operations, UNMIL has been authorized by the UN Security Council in September to further reduce its military strength by some 4,200 peacekeepers -- in three phases until 2015. Simultaneously, there will be an increase of three Formed Police Units comprising 420 personnel. By the end of this transition phase in 2015, around 3,750 military personnel and over 1,750 police will still remain in Liberia.

The reduction in peacekeepers is predicated on the capacity of national





ce...”

authorities to take responsibility for the country's security. "The Mission is working closely with the Liberian National Police, the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization, and other security agencies to ensure that they have sufficient capacity to assume full responsibility for Liberia's security," says Karin Landgren, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of UNMIL. While praising Liberia's progress towards peace and democracy, the UN Envoy is quick to stress that the country's security and stability still remain "top priority" for the Mission.

A joint Transition Planning Working Group comprising UNMIL and the Government is looking into

the transition roadmap against various challenges, particularly the nascent capabilities of the country's law enforcement and security agencies.

As security is the predominant concern in Liberia, as typical of any society that has suffered appalling trauma, the importance of law enforcement comes to the fore. The surge in the number of UN Police, while reducing the military strength, comes as a result of the critical need for the Liberia National Police to shape up into a professional and competent institution that can ensure security of the population. Liberia's Justice sector too needs to make significant progress to entrench rule of law in a society torn

2010, that number exceeded 200,000. The sporadic security incidents in Côte d'Ivoire pose a significant border security challenge for Liberia. During one such incident in June, seven peacekeepers from Niger working for ONUCI, our sister mission in Côte d'Ivoire, lost their lives. UNMIL and ONUCI have strengthened mutual cooperation and are assisting both governments to enhance border security.

Amidst all this, Liberia is decidedly on the path to peace. The country is involved in a number of initiatives in collaboration with the Peacebuilding Commission. One importance of such an initiative is the concept of regional



**"The Mission is working closely with the Liberian National Police, the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization, and other security agencies to ensure that they have sufficient capacity to assume full responsibility for Liberia's security."**  
- Karin Landgren

apart not too long ago.

Amidst other challenges, Liberia ought to create employment, especially for the youth, and bring about genuine reconciliation among the population. The unacceptably high rate of violence against women, including rape, predominantly of minors, remains a huge blot on the Liberian society. [See story: Page 12]

There are also challenges that are not of Liberia's own making. More than 65,000 Ivorian refugees, driven out by the post-election violence in neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire, are still graciously hosted by its neighbour. In

justice and security hubs spread across the country. One of the five planned hubs is soon to be functional in Gbarnga, Bong County. These hubs bring together police, courts and other related agencies in one place to provide citizens improved access to justice and security services.

Bringing peace to Liberia and helping children go to school, as student Goethen narrated, are among the dreams UNMIL peacekeepers have helped fulfill over the past nine years. The peacekeepers will have to leave one day but those dreams will still need to be nourished and protected. ■



# Liberia National Police Police Adviser

By Ruby Ofori

**D**uring her recent visit to Liberia, UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations Police Adviser Ann Marie Orlor was quick to note a marked improvement in the professionalism of the Liberia National Police (LNP) since her last visit in 2008. Orlor also noted a renewed commitment by

the Liberian Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization (BIN) to reform and to rebuild their service. Yet, despite the considerable progress and commitment, much remains to be done to raise the standards of Liberia's law enforcement agencies.

Although UNMIL is transitioning, Orlor pointed out that the number of UNPOL advisers supporting the development of LNP and BIN will not be reduced. The handing over of

security functions will be gradual, and commensurate with national capacities on the ground. Orlor is responsible for UN police officers assigned in 19 UN missions around the world.

Police Adviser Orlor was pleased to note that the LNP had and will continue to have successes in recruiting more female officers into the service. Currently over 18 per cent of the LNP are female. This figure, said the Police Adviser, is actually higher than the female representation in UN Police in general.

Orlor joined a night patrol with the LNP during her visit. She noticed that



Orler with UNPOL and Liberian security officials

allowing for the national security institutions in Liberia to gain their capacities and proficiencies to take on their new roles. "The LNP and others must be ready before we leave. We will leave when we are ready to leave," Orler pointed out.

There are currently 498 UN Police officers mandated to assist in the development of the LNP and BIN through training and mentoring. The United Nations is working diligently to provide UN Police Officers with the right skills and the right approach to ensure the LNP and BIN achieve a level of professionalism essential for sustaining the peace in Liberia, Orler said.

On the issue of training, Commissioner Orler expressed her pleasure that a Norwegian funded

extensive use of outreach programmes. However, she noted that fundamental to this is the importance of education. "It's important that girls in Liberia go to school and finish school," she stressed.

Speaking on the role of communities, and the relationship between police and communities, the Police Adviser reminded that Liberia has embraced the principles of democratic policing as they rebuild the LNP. "The UNPOL support to LNP is not about creating a police force – it is about developing capacities for delivery of police service – with a very strong focus on service because that's what we – the police- are about. The police should be there to work with the community to make sure everyone feels safe. I have seen over the last

**Speaking on the role of communities, and the relationship between police and communities, the Police Adviser reminded that Liberia has embraced the principles of democratic policing as they rebuild the LNP.**

# is Progressing:

although the working conditions have remained difficult, the officers were present at work and performing their duties. This commitment, despite the challenges, is clearly indicative of a young police service striving to earn the badge of professionalism.

While discussing the recent renewal of UNMIL's mandate, which gives a greater role to the UN police in helping Liberia transition to a peacebuilding phase, and three additional Formed Police Units, Police Adviser Orler explained that the process of transitioning security responsibilities will be very gradual,

infrastructure project has enabled the doubling of the National Police Training Academy's capacity, but lamented that budgetary constraints may likely preclude maximizing seating capacities for training in the coming year. Reminding that police training is a process -- a lifetime of work -- Orler praised the NPTA for their commitment to in-service and specialized training, as well as basic training. "Training is a never-ending story," she said.

The Police Adviser recognized LNP's efforts to encourage females to join the service, including their

couple of days very good evidence that this is what is happening."

The Police Adviser described what she believed to be clear proof that the community trust in the LNP is improving. "Following the recent prison break in Zwedru, the fast recapture of the escapees was due principally to the support provided by the communities to the LNP. This shows that there is no doubt, improvements in the relationship and trust between communities and the LNP." She also witnessed, during the night patrol, community members bringing a suspect into the police station and handing him over to the LNP. In past years, "mob violence" was the norm, not seeking out and handing over suspects to the LNP. "These actions clearly demonstrate improving confidence," she said. ■





Liberian security officials patrol the border with Côte d'Ivoire

# 'Operation Restore Hope to Regain Community Trust'

By Sonnie Morris

**A**s part of efforts to ensure that Liberia's territory is not used for any cross-border attacks, members of the Liberia National Police, the Emergency Response Unit and the Armed Forces of Liberia have moved into phase 2 of *Operation Restore Hope* in Grand Gedeh County.

Senior Inspector of Police Col.

Gregory O. W. Coleman told **UN FOCUS** after the launch of Phase 2 that on a daily basis, a Joint Task Force, with the help of UN Police, Military Observers and soldiers of the Pakistani Battalion carry out foot patrols in and around the County and various crossing points ensuring that calm is maintained at every level.

A key feature of Phase 2 of *Operation Restore Hope* is closer interaction with the local community.

"Whatever development projects

the community or County authority will engage in, we will work with them so they see us from a different perspective," said Coleman. "Some of us in the Force today are choristers, evangelists and have different disciplines but the uniform sometimes makes people go far from us. But we want to do all this as a sign of reconciling the stigma caused by the uniform."

Liberia's security agencies have had a mixed history with protectors





# e' Bids Trust

turning predators during the civil war years, instilling fear among the population. That mistrust is not yet fully eradicated, necessitating the new law enforcement agencies to go the extra mile to regain trust from communities.

Col. Coleman said they will conduct clean up exercises in communities where the security forces are deployed and will even organize community sports tournaments. Such interaction will enable the local community to see

the Police, ERU and the AFL as their friends, and not be afraid to come around them. He said from the initial stage of the Operation, local residents appeared to be afraid of their presence. People didn't seem to understand what they were in the region for.

The joint operation in Phase 2 had also been increased with the Armed Forces of Liberia and the Police and Emergency Response Unit deployed and assigned at various crossing points, including footpaths that snake through forested areas.

*Operation Restore Hope* aims to secure Liberia's territory so that citizens live in peace, besides making sure that refugees residing in the country, especially in Grand Gedeh, do not live in fear or under threat.

## "Operation Mayo" Meeting Notes Calm at the Borders

By William Bwewusa

The border between Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire remains calm and peaceful at the moment according to representatives at a cross-border meeting held in September under the auspices of *Operation Mayo*. Such meetings are a regular feature of the operation, a framework for cross-border cooperation between UNMIL and UNOCI, the sister peacekeeping mission in Côte d'Ivoire.

Joint patrols are continuing along the 760 km border with security agencies of the two countries, with a view to pre-empting and preventing any illegal activity or acts that might undermine security in the region.

UNOCI Force Commander Maj.-Gen. Iqbal Asi commended the governments of Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire for their efforts to ensure peace and security through

information sharing and joint security operations during the meeting in the Ivorian border post of Prollo. He stressed the importance of intermission cooperation and participation of all actors to ensure the protection of civilians, especially in communities along the border.

Security officials from Liberia cited poor road network and limited logistics as major hindrances to effective patrols on their side of the border.

Maryland County Superintendent Nazarene Brewer-Tubman seized the occasion to announce a decision by the Government of Liberia to partially reopen the border crossing at Doukudi. She said the border post would be open from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. until further notice. She called on local security forces on both sides of the border to monitor all crossings closely.

During one of the patrols at the Tempo border and Tempo Town, Col. Coleman held talks with the local chief, Philip Jeldeo, who said he was happy with the presence and activities of the ERU in the town. Jeldeo noted that there were still 181 refugees in the area despite their relocation to the PTP refugee camp just outside Zwedru. The town chief also told the patrol team that the 370 people in Tempo Town, excluding the refugees, are all engaged in farming.

Meetings with the Ivorian intelligence have been taking place to exchange ideas on how to secure the border and prevent attacks. The current phase of border patrols is expected to last for three months, after which there will be a review. ■



Liberian girls take to the streets to celebrate the Day of The Girl Child

# “I am a GIRL, Not A WIFE...”

By Calixte Hessou

**L**iberia has one of the highest prevalence of child marriage in the world. On average, almost two out of five girls will be married before their 18th birthday. The legal age for marriage in Liberia is 18.

Jebbeh [name changed], now 16, was forced into marriage to a man old enough to be her grandfather at the age of 11, and is still suffering from the harmful consequences.

“I used to live with my parents in Margibi County. One day my parents informed me that a man was coming to take me to Monrovia to live with

him. After two days Oldman Boakai [name changed] came and brought gifts for my parents including a cell phone for my father and lappas for my step-mother as my dowry,” Jebbeh says.

A few days after arriving in Monrovia, Oldman Boakai demanded that she begin performing the duty of a wife. “I would cook, clean up and satisfy him sexually,” she lamented.

Jebbeh recounts that Olman Boakai kept her indoors most of the time and forced her to commit abortions: “He kept me locked up in the house. For every time he came home he would have sex with me. Whenever I resisted, he would tie me up and force me.”

Jebbeh was finally rescued thanks to a passerby who heard her shouts. “One day, Oldman Boakai wanted to have sex with me and I refused. He tied me up as usual and I began to shout; calling for help. Just at that time, someone was passing and he alerted the police. That was how I was taken from Oldman Boakai in 2009,” she recollects.

Jebbeh now lives at a foster home and her parents have refused to see her. However, she has no sympathy for parents who give out their children into marriage at early age for whatever reasons. “I want the government to punish or jail parents who will force their girl children to get marry soon,”





in collaboration with civil society organizations, Liberian girls adopted a manifesto calling for the end of child marriage for submission to President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.

“Child marriage violates millions of girls’ rights, disrupts their education, jeopardizes their health, and denies them their childhood; limiting their opportunities. We want early marriage and the practice of our parents and guardians giving us to older men to end now, because this takes away all our opportunities to explore the world and puts heavy burdens on us,” they announced.

concerning sexual reproductive health; empowerment of adolescent girls to overcome fear and low self-esteem; and programmes and services to help girls – pregnant or mothers -- stay in school.

A report by UNFPA maintains that if current trends continue, the number of girl child marriages will increase dramatically over the next 10 years. According to *Marrying too Young: End Child Marriage*, released on the inaugural International Day of the Girl Child on 11 October, despite laws to prevent its practice, child marriage has remained mostly constant in

**A report by UNFPA maintains that if current trends continue, the number of girl child marriages will increase dramatically over the next 10 years.**

she says.

Though child marriage is against the law, the practice continues with parents often motivated by traditional beliefs or economic gains. Child marriage has several harmful effects on young girls who are not psychologically, emotionally and physically ready for married life. It often denies girls an education, and subjects them to discrimination, domestic violence and abuse. Complications of pregnancy and childbearing are the leading cause of death for girls between 15 and 19.

But now Liberian girls are calling for an end to the practice that deprives them of the chance to achieve their full potential.

At a one-day consultative forum on Child Marriage by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Ministry of Gender and Development

They also want stronger measures including the enforcement of existing law preventing parents from forcing their girl children into early marriage; or using them as sex commodities for financial benefits.

Among other key demands made by the girls include provision of safe spaces where girls can go to ask questions and get accurate answers

developing countries over the past decade.

“No social, cultural or religious rationale for child marriage can possibly justify the damage these marriages do to young girls and their potential. A girl should have the right to choose whom she marries and when,” says UNFPA Executive Director Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin. ■

Boys too are demanding an end to child marriage



# New Push to Combat Se



One of Liberia's many child rape victims with her toys

By Julie Agum

Participants of a national retreat aimed at finding a way forward to prevent sexual abuse of children in Liberia were clearly moved by the harrowing story of a 12-year-old survivor of rape at the hands of her uncle.

"I stopped being a child and started living in fear," said the anonymous

child speaking in a recorded interview.

"Day in, day out, night after night, the most unspeakable happened! My uncle would sneak into my room and rape me. He abused me repeatedly until I could no longer control my bladder and bowels. Oh, how ashamed and helpless I felt. ... I kept hoping my mother would save me that she would bring an end to my torture but she remained silent, frozen!"

The child's ordeal brought tears

to the eyes of the participants of an intensive two-day discussion resulting in a comprehensive prevention and response plan to combat sexual abuse of children in Liberia over the next three years.

Incidents of sexual-based violence and rape remain alarmingly high in Liberia with children being the main victims.

More than 60 per cent of victims are below the age of 12 and sometimes they are only a few months old, according to Madhumita Sarkar, Adviser for the Government of Liberia-UN Joint Programme on Sexual and Gender Based Violence. Over 3,500 incidents of gender-based sexual violence were reported in the last 20 months according to police statistics.

On average, 5 to 6 children and women are raped or suffer sexual violence every day in Liberia. Experts say this represents the tip of the iceberg since many incidents go unreported.

As noted by the 12-year old survivor who courageously shared her ordeal, there has been an entrenched culture of silence by Liberian families over incidents involving sexual abuse of children.

Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Rule of Law Louis Aucoin called for a united front against sexual abuse. He said this would give victims the confidence to speak out and also deter perpetrators.

The UN Envoy commended the retreat participants for their commitment to combating sexual abuse of children. He noted that the hard work of following up would now begin.

"The messages for the public outreach campaigns need to be adapted so that they are understandable to children. The criminal investigation procedures have to be adapted so that special needs and requirements of children are taken into account.



# Sexual Abuse of Children



Sachiko Kondo/World Bank

Children demonstrate against rape

“It is also important that information on progress is shared with others so that we motivate the whole society to take additional measures and go the extra mile to prevent sexual abuse of children,” Aucoin stressed.

Participants at the retreat agreed

them,” said Meima Sirleaf-Karneh, Assistant Minister for Research and Technical Services, Ministry of Gender and Development. She urged all the key stakeholders to ensure the recommendations become a reality.

Out of the two day meeting a set

medical, psychosocial, and legal needs of children in such circumstances, discouraging communities from taking the law into their own hands by settling sexual abuse cases outside the formal legal system, involving traditional and religious leaders in the debate, encouraging more dialogue between the Judiciary and traditional leaders.

The group also developed two important messages in Liberian English aimed at helping to discourage sexual abuse of children. These messages are to be promoted through various media. Very soon posters will go up saying “Stop doing man and women business to me, I am a child!” Around the country people will also see adverts saying: “Mama and Papa, rape is not a family matter. Report it!”

The retreat was organized and supported by the Government of Liberia, United Nations Gender Based Violence Joint Programme and UNICEF. ■

**On average, 5 to 6 children and women are raped or suffer sexual violence every day in Liberia. Experts say this represents the tip of the iceberg since many incidents go unreported.**

that a carefully planned, culturally sensitive strategy is needed to encourage women and children to bring perpetrators to justice.

“Our children are our future and we need to protect and provide for

of recommendations were formulated which included raising awareness in Liberian communities about the need to support and not blame children who are victims of sexual abuse, making provision for the special



Torbor Nyesuah, Assistant Minister of Health for Preventive Services, inaugurates the facility

# One-Stop-Shop for SGBV

By Romeo Togba

**A**s she looked at her newly-born son, a smile creased the face of 21-year-old Kaymah Teahneh [not her real name]. “I just can’t express how happy I am for my safe delivery,” a cheerful Kaymah said as she caressed the baby.

“Five years ago, when I went to give birth, the child did not make it as the person who performed the delivery was not a trained health worker,” Kaymah recounted.

But with the setting up of Liberia’s first ever One-Stop-Shop for Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) survivors, safe delivery is possible for women like Kaymah as the center

also offers free maternal health care services.

Located in West Point, Monrovia, the Star of the Sea Health Centre is a pilot project that provides survivors of SGBV with services such as clinical management of rape and other forms of SGBV. Awareness sessions on sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) including STIs, HIV/AIDS awareness,





the government of Liberia and the United Nations to address sexual and gender based violence and sexual exploitation and abuse cases through the implementation of both prevention and response measures.

"This marks an important step in our joint efforts to end gender based violence in our country,"

the category of "failed projects".

UNFPA Country Representative Esperance Fundira pledged the UN family's commitment to working with partners in addressing the issue of SGBV in the society.

"We remain committed to working with partners in bringing dignity to those affected by GBV. And we must

**The Head of Development Cooperation of the Swedish International Development Agency, Gisela Strand, reiterates her government's commitment to work with Liberia and other partners to address sexual and gender based violence in the country. She notes that getting feedback from the service users will be cardinal to the success of the project.**

said Assistant Health Minister for Preventive Services Tobor Nyesuah as he inaugurated the facility.

"We are convinced that the community outreach on sexual and reproductive health for adolescent girls and youth will help in our efforts to reduce maternal mortality rate," Nyesuah said, stressing the need to replicate the initiative in other parts of the country.

always put the people we serve at the center of whatever we do," Fundira points out. She is quick to stress that putting in place a system of monitoring is important to ensure the success of the project.

Funding for the project, over US\$ 39,000, was provided by the Swedish Government through the UNFPA.

"Getting feedback from the users on how they are treated, the type of care they receive, and maintaining their confidentiality, among others, will be an important feature of the success of this project."

A local non-governmental organization, Touching Humanity in Need of Kindness (THINK), is partnering with the Joint Programme on SGBV to provide services to users of the facility.

THINK's Rosana Schaack said ending GBV is an important step to improving the social wellbeing of women and girls in the society. "The fight against GBV should concern everyone as 60 per cent of the women in the country have suffered gender based violence in one form or another." ■

# GBV Survivors

community outreach on sexual and reproductive health for adolescent girls and youth as well as legal aid and law enforcement interventions also form part of the project.

With funding from the Swedish Development Agency (SIDA), the project became a reality through UNFPA under the Joint Programme on SGBV, a partnership between

The Ministry of Gender is also a key partner in the Joint Programme on SGBV. "For us at the Ministry of Gender, having a one stop-shop where survivors of GBV are being catered for, is a dream come true," says Deputy Gender Minister for Technical Services Annette Kiawu. She stressed the need for partners to remain supportive of the facility to save it from falling into



# “Separated” Refugee B

By Sulaiman Momodu

**C**oming from a family relying on meagre subsistence farming for a livelihood, Bomi Gueu D. Bertin was always determined to acquire education with the hope of one day changing his fortune. However, when conflict broke out in Côte d’Ivoire in 2002, the youngster’s secondary schooling was not only interrupted, but he was separated from his parents and ended up as a refugee in Liberia. He also

had to take care of his three younger siblings with whom he fled.

Recently though, Bertin had every reason to smile as he was conferred a bachelor’s degree in Public Administration and Political Science from the United Methodist University in Liberia. “My father and mother are peasant farmers. I was approaching 18 when we were separated from them in 2004 as we were not together when fighting broke. I was in Man while they were in Danane. I fled to Liberia with my sisters and we have been refugees since then,” he said. The

fresh graduate is among a few Ivorian refugees whose dream of a university education has come true through the assistance of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Liberia.

“Fleeing from a Francophone country to Anglophone, everything was new to me but my spirit continued to tell me that I will succeed,” Bertin narrated the challenge he had to overcome. After completing his secondary education in Liberia’s Nimba County with UNHCR’s assistance, Bertin boldly relocated to the capital Monrovia in pursuit of his





Refugee, but a proud graduate, too!

Sulaiman Momodu/UNHCR

university students undergoing studies thanks to UNHCR scholarship.

UNHCR Representative Cosmas Chanda has congratulated the refugee on his academic journey so far and his graduation. "It is always our desire to assist refugees and our delight to celebrate their successes. Depending

existing possibilities."

The UNHCR education assistance policy prioritizes primary schooling both for camp-based and urban refugees. Liberia, which hosts about 65,000 Ivorian refugees, has a free primary education policy. Refugees are encouraged to take advantage of

**UNHCR provides material assistance such as uniforms, shoes, books and bags to refugee children. Last academic year, 300 urban refugee children received this assistance. This year more than 200 primary and secondary school pupils have benefited.**

on the availability of funds, we will definitely assist other refugees to realize their dreams," he said.

Senior Protection Officer Anne-Elisabeth Ravetto noted that the graduation of an Ivorian refugee in Liberia is another example of the favourable asylum environment

it while UNHCR provides material assistance such as uniforms, shoes, books and bags to refugee children. Last academic year, 300 urban refugee children received this assistance. This year more than 200 primary and secondary school pupils have benefited.

# Bagging University Degree

university dreams. Over the years, in addition to the tuition and other related fees, the UN refugee agency assisted him with stipend every semester for books, transportation and accommodation.

Notwithstanding funding constraints, from 2008 till this year six refugees, including Bertin, have benefited from scholarships to attend different universities in Liberia. One of the students successfully completed his studies from the Cuttington University sometime last year. Currently, there are four Ivorian

Liberia has been ensuring to all those who are in need of international protection. "Graduating from University is an important step in everybody's life. Having managed to study while in exile and caring for his younger siblings is a real achievement. I do hope that his example will be followed by other youths in exile in Liberia" she noted. "I wish UNHCR could support more refugees to attend tertiary education in Liberia. I am calling on the humanitarian and development communities for more support as so far requests far exceed

UNHCR is also building the capacity of refugees to improve their livelihood. Last year 40 adult refugees were sponsored in various vocational and skill training institutions while the same number is being assisted this year.

Having earned a degree and looking forward to further studies in future, Bertin says his goal is to beat poverty and also contribute to helping people in need. "I inherited extreme poverty, but I am working to transform that to prosperity," he remarked, optimistically. ■



# UN Flights Help Thousands Returning Refugees

By Sulaiman Momodu

**D**ozens of Liberia-bound passengers arrived at the Kotoka International Airport in the Ghanaian capital, Accra, all set to say goodbye to the place many of them had for several years called their home. For many of these returning Liberian refugees, including children born and

brought up in Ghana, this would be the first time to travel by air. There is a mixture of excitement and sadness, especially among the children as they are leaving behind their friends, but there is also the eager anticipation of stepping foot on their native land.

“We are eager to see our country and to continue our education, as well as make new friends,” says 14-year-old Yatta, whose parents fled

to Ghana in 1990 as civil war broke out. “I am expecting Liberia to be beautiful just like Ghana,” she adds, smiling heartily.

At the airport, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission (LRRRC) personnel assist the refugees with check-in formalities. Soon they are all seated at the given boarding gate





Sulaiman Momodu/UNHCR

Returnees from Ghana board a UN Flight

# ands of

as they look outside and see their belongings being loaded on the UN plane they will shortly board. Some discuss their years in refuge at the Budumburam camp in Ghana, some kilometers outside Accra, while others talk about the reception they hope to receive from friends and loved ones they had not seen for years.

As the plane takes off some children scream at their first such experience. Some look down through the windows to see the distance below. After nearly two hours of flying, the plane touches down at Monrovia's Roberts International airport. It is an emotional atmosphere at the arrival

as loved ones hug the returnees. Some shed tears of joy.

For some years, this has been the trend of repatriation of Liberian refugees from Ghana. Thousands of Liberians have returned on the plane contracted by the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) flying with 80 Liberian refugees every Friday and 50 every Sunday depending on the availability of space.

UNMIL's assistance to the ongoing repatriation of refugees has been well appreciated by UNHCR personnel in Liberia, Ghana and Geneva. "Imagine what it will cost us to buy air tickets for hundreds of refugees. For this year for instance, more than 4,700 Liberian refugees have returned from Ghana including more than 90 per cent of whom returned by UNMIL's flight. We are very grateful to the Mission's

and partners would no more organize repatriation movement for Liberian refugees. So far this year, the UNHCR has facilitated the voluntary return of more than 20,000 Liberian refugees all of whom received repatriation and reintegration cash grant plus secondary transportation allowance totalling \$375 for each adult and \$ 275 for each child below 18. Since 2004, the UN refugee agency has facilitated the return of more than 146,000 Liberian refugees mainly from the West Africa sub-region. The Cessation Clause for Liberian refugees, which means Liberians are no longer considered refugees, came into effect on 1 July this year, but the UNHCR had continued to facilitate the return of thousands of refugees who had registered to return before that date.

UNHCR Representative Cosmas

**The UN refugee agency and partners are sensitizing refugees in countries of asylum to avail themselves of the opportunity to return as of 1 January 2013, UNHCR and partners would no more organize repatriation movement for Liberian refugees.**

leadership for this assistance," commends UNHCR Deputy Representative Robert Tibagwa.

Repatriation of Liberian refugees, which started in 2004, is finally coming to end on 31 December this year. Tibagwa also appreciates the opportunity to sometimes charter the UN plane at a very reasonable cost to repatriate refugees from other countries such as The Gambia from where 332 Liberian refugees have been repatriated this year.

The UN refugee agency and partners are sensitizing refugees in countries of asylum to avail themselves of the opportunity to return as of 1 January 2013, UNHCR

Chanda notes that UNHCR is also very thankful to the Mission for various supports such as the rehabilitation of roads to Ivorian refugee camps and ensuring security as Liberia currently hosts nearly 66,000 Ivorian refugees. "This is an excellent and remarkable example of cooperation between a peacekeeping mission and a UN agency."

Special Representative of the Secretary-General Karin Landgren, herself a former senior manager at UNHCR, says UNMIL will continue to support the repatriation of Liberian refugees. "I will say to UNHCR and all UN agencies that you can count on my strong support," she assures. ■



# Refugee Camps Conso

By Sulaiman Momodu

**C**onsolidation of camps hosting Ivorian refugees in Liberia continues with the Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission (LRRRC) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) commencing the relocation of more than 5,700 refugees from the Dougee Refugee Camp in Grand Gedeh County to other camps.

As **UN FOCUS** went to press, the relocation of refugees from Dougee Refugee Camp, located along the main highway from Monrovia to Grand Gedeh County capital Zwedru, had just begun with dozens of refugees relocating to the PTP Camp at the former Prime Timber Production site in the same Grand Gedeh County. Some refugees will be relocated to the Little Wlebo Refugee Camp in Maryland County.

"The consolidation of refugee camps was prompted by the reduced

number of Ivorian refugees in Liberia and in view of the high cost of running refugee camps. The initial plan was to close the Dougee Refugee Camp by the end of December this year contingent on capacity in receiving camps, road conditions and developments in Côte d'Ivoire," said UNHCR Deputy Representative Robert Tibagwa. The Dougee camp is now expected to close in 2013.

Prior to the relocation, the refugees were informed to choose between going to either PTP Camp or the Little





Camps hosting refugees

# olidated

Wlebo Camp. Earlier, Ivorian refugee leadership from the camp went on a “Go-and-See” visit to refugee camps in preparation for the relocation. The Little Wlebo camp in Maryland County can accommodate up to 20,000 refugees while the PTP camp has capacity for up to 25,000 refugees. There are improved services such as health, education, shelter, and water and sanitation in the camps where the refugees are relocating.

Dougee and five other refugee camps were established during the

peak of the Ivorian refugee emergency nearly two years ago with more than 220,000 Ivorians crossing into Liberia. The Ziah Refugee Camp was decommissioned in late June this year with more than 1,600 registered Ivorian refugees relocated to the PTP camp. Along with the decommissioning of refugee camps, relocation from 15 villages in Nimba County, where refugees were allowed to stay among

The Ivorian refugee population in Liberia stood at over 65,000 at the end of October, up from a previous low of 50,000 a few months ago as a result of new births as well as new refugees crossing over. “The increase in refugee population is contrary to previous planning estimate that about half of this figure would have remained in the country by the end of 2012 as a result of facilitated voluntary

**The Little Wlebo camp in Maryland County can accommodate up to 20,000 refugees while the PTP camp has capacity for up to 25,000 refugees. There are improved services such as health, education, shelter, and water and sanitation in the camps where the refugees are relocating.**

host communities during the height of the influx in late 2010 and 2011, is also in progress. In late October, three of such communities were closed and modest shelters the refugees occupied were handed over to local authorities. The communities included Karnplay, Larpea #1 and Larpea #2. So far, UNHCR and LRRRC have closed eleven of such villages.

As relocation of refugees continues, a small but steady number of new refugees are being recorded.

repatriation to Côte d’Ivoire. But that was impeded by the killing of seven peacekeepers in June this year,” UNHCR Representative Cosmas Chanda pointed out. He thanked the Government and people of Liberia for opening their doors and hearts to assist their Ivorian brothers and sisters. Thousands of refugees have indicated that they would be staying in Liberia for some time as they are still afraid of returning to their communities due to security concerns. ■

At a tender age these children have been uprooted from their homes







# New Programming to Boost

By Vanessa Curney

**T**he Country Programming Framework (CPF) jointly launched in early October by the Government of Liberia and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is the first of its kind in Liberia. It outlines the priority areas and expected results for Liberia's agriculture sector over specified periods: the first CPF spans from 2012-2015 though it will run every five years in future.

"I believe agriculture to be a fantastic source of employment and income, especially for women and youth," says FAO's Representative in Liberia, Jean-Alexandre Scaglia, describing the CPF as a development tool to strengthen the capacity of the

country's agriculture sector. With an annual budget of US\$ 10 million, the Framework will be closely reviewed annually by the UN and the Government.

"We are at the point when we Liberians are determining our own destiny," said Dr. Florence Chenoweth, Minister for Agriculture, at the launch of the CPF on 4 October. However, her ministry faces a challenging ascent: out of a national budget of US\$ 649 million, just over US\$5 million has been earmarked for agriculture. "Nonetheless we are going to do our best to move forward with what we have, supplemented with loans and help from our development partners," said the Minister.

Countries face various impediments to agricultural progress depending on

the differing geographical conditions. For example, there can be too little rain or too much in short sharp bursts, creating unique problems for farming. However, Liberia is blessed with rich natural resources and abundant rain as well as favourable agro-ecological conditions. Agricultural development in Liberia is "a question of knowledge, organization and responsibility, with support from the Government," according to Scaglia. He views capacity building as crucial.

"FAO is training young students in some universities, and taking them to the field to expose them to agriculture and new farming techniques. They are really active and see its importance; they view agriculture as a potentially very good area of business. We need to convince the upcoming generation



Liberia has abundant fertile and arable land

# Most Agriculture

that this is not an industry of the past. We are importing an unacceptable

told **UN FOCUS** in an interview. According to the FAO, agriculture

**A recent success story of vegetable farmers in Senewein Town, Grand Gedeh County, is a pointer to what benefits the CPF could bring in the future. The farmers recorded a remarkable increase in this year's harvest of pepper, bitter balls, eggplants and other crops through an FAO, European Union and Government of Liberia initiative.**

50 per cent of what we eat, when in fact we should be exporting," Scaglia

accounts for 61 per cent of GDP (2008) and is the primary source of livelihood

for two-thirds of Liberia's 3.5 million people. In Liberia agriculture comprises mainly small holder and subsistence farming, as well as cash crop plantations such as rubber, oil, palm, cocoa, sugarcane and coffee.

A recent success story of vegetable farmers in Senewein Town, Grand Gedeh County, is a pointer to what benefits the CPF could bring in the future. The farmers recorded a remarkable increase in this year's harvest of pepper, bitter balls, eggplants and other crops through an FAO, European Union and Government of Liberia initiative. "When the farmers produce, sell and see the physical cash, they are encouraged. So there is need for a consistent flow of support to them," said Nounou Sharty, one of the FAO-supported young people assigned to the farmers under the FAO/GoL youth empowerment programme.

Late this year, FAO will target another 2,000 households in vegetable gardening, as well as providing ongoing support in rice production to 5,000 households in Liberia. These initiatives come in the wake of FAO's recently published global 2012 report that says: "With almost 870 million people chronically undernourished in 2010-2012, the number of hungry people in the world remains unacceptably high." One in eight people worldwide still suffers from chronic hunger, says the report.

Scaglia emphasizes the national and partnership nature of the Country Programming Framework, which has taken its cues from the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) for Liberia, and Government policy documents and strategies such as the draft Poverty Reduction Strategy-Two (2012-2015) and Liberia Rising - Vision 2030. "We extend hands of appreciation to our partners and the donor community for their support over the years," he said. "FAO, as a long-term partner of the Government of Liberia, will work with all of you to attain food security... by increasing agriculture production while promoting improved natural resource management." ■





# Rural Women Embrace

By Moses M. Zangar, Jr.

**T**wenty-five rural women from diverse communities in Rivercess County were recently part of a week-long training to learn about modern contraception, optimal spacing of children, and other basic family planning concepts thanks to support from UN Women and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

The training is being piloted as part of a strategy to ensure that local residents are empowered to act on the knowledge they receive and integrate health practices into their daily lives. The Plan Parenthood Association of Liberia is the implementing partner.

"UN Women is currently running a holistic peace and security programme in Cestos which is not only family planning, but a full access to justice component linked

with economic empowerment," says Ghoma Karloweah, UN Women Program Officer.

UN Women-supported peace hut initiative undertakes socio-economic training and activities including tie-dyeing, weaving and cassava processing. The economic independence gained through these activities is expected to give the women more bargaining power in their homes and courage to report cases of domestic abuse. "The economic base of women is further enhanced through the establishment of Village Saving and Loan Associations (VSLAs) providing women with access to micro-credit to improve and expand their businesses," Karloweah said.

With support from UN Women, ChildrenSmile, a local NGO is providing literacy and vocational skills training such as baking, sewing, and fish seasoning and drying to compensate for the time spent in the

peace huts and to build the women's income base. Similar programmes are also benefiting residents of Grand Bassa, Grand Gedeh, Nimba, Gbarpolu, and Margibi Counties.

Women who attended the family planning training range in age from 24-60 years. Many of them are either working at home, farming and taking care of their children. Interactive activities were incorporated during teaching to keep the women engaged.

"My husband believes in traditional methods and doesn't want us to adopt modern family planning methods. I will either convince him or prevent unwanted pregnancies secretly," one participant whispered. For women in rural areas, injections that prevent pregnancies are more popular because they last for several months, reducing the need to travel more often to far away health centres.

There is resistance to the idea of contraception in rural communities





An educational session in progress

# Family Planning

as people fear it will lead to infertility. Cultural beliefs about the need for many children are strong, as many parents tend to rely on children for support during old age. In the minds

their sexual and reproductive rights, especially in rural areas. The high illiteracy rate among Liberian women has a negative impact on women's health. However, recent legislations,

**Many women in the rural villages of Liberia have not received an education beyond primary school. They tend to marry and start having children at a very young age without knowing anything about their own bodies, proper nutrition, and how to care for their newborn babies.**

of many rural dwellers, more children equal more socio-economic stability later in life.

Additionally, customary laws and practices often deny women and girls

including on rape and inheritance laws, are addressing some of these issues.

"Our rural women get married too early, give birth almost every year, and

have four to five children at a young age," says Regina Hodges, Medical Services Delivery Officer of the Plan Parenthood Association of Liberia.

Armed with booklets and communication training, Hodges and her colleague, Florence M. Kromah, conducted educational sessions with the women, dispelling falsehoods about family planning and preparing women in rural communities to lead better and healthier lives. The duo advised participants to adopt safe family planning methods.

"I thank UN Women, especially for the projects they are undertaking in Cestos City," says Oretha Y. Johnson, believing firmly that such education will improve not only the health of rural women, but the welfare of their families and their communities.

In a small village on the way to Cestos City, one woman who only identified herself as Sunday-mar said "Look at me. I am 39 years old and I have four children. I am already tired but here we have no access to family planning."

Hodges thinks the need for family planning commodities and services is increasing throughout the country in part because the number of women of reproductive age is growing. She said unintended pregnancies are widespread in rural communities, placing a burden on individuals, families, health systems, and socio-economic development.

Many women in the rural villages of Liberia have not received an education beyond primary school. They tend to marry and start having children at a very young age without knowing anything about their own bodies, proper nutrition, and how to care for their newborn babies.

The United Nations and the Government of Liberia have launched awareness campaigns to enable and encourage women to access sexual and reproductive health services. Last year, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf launched a five-year plan to reduce maternal and infant mortality in the country. The plan also aims to enhance family planning among the population. ■



A beneficiary of the new storage facilities

# Storage Facilities Encourage Farmers

By Augusta Pshorr

**"T**hank God we are now able to store our produce in a structure that protects them from the rain and sun," a beaming Annie Kruah says pointing to the stock pile of rice in the newly built warehouse in Karnplay, Nimba County.

A member of the Karnplay Cooperative, Kruah is full of praise for the intervention of the European Union sponsored United Nations Joint Programme on Food Security that has helped to boost the output of rural women and improve the wellbeing of the cooperative's members.

"With support from the UN we are now experiencing better yields in our harvest and with World Food Programme buying our produce from us, we are gaining better profits." Money generated from the sale of the produce has been positively impacting the lives of members of the cooperative in Karnplay. "Through the sales of our produce we were able to open our own accounts and we have also established a loan scheme," Kruah adds.

Several storage facilities built by UNDP under its EU funded UN Joint Food Programme were recently handed over through the Ministry of Agriculture in Samay, Sanoyea and Botota in Bong County, Karnplay, Gbeidin and Zayglay in Nimba County as well as Foya, Barkedu and

Voinjama in Lofa County.

Since the launch of the microfinance scheme established through the sale of their produce, life has taken an upward turn, confesses another member of the Karnplay cooperative. "The cooperative has enabled me to send my three children to school as a single parent."

The construction of the farm produce storage facilities was instigated by the food crisis that hit sub-Saharan Africa in 2009, according to UNDP's Project Manager for Community Based Recovery Programme. "These structures were built as part of efforts by the international community to respond to the food crisis in Liberia and other African countries," Salvator Nkurunziza pointed out. With funding from the European Union, the projects were taken on by the UN/Government of Liberia Joint Food Programme which includes UNDP, WFP and FAO.

The EU-funded programme has prioritized the construction of warehouses, hand dug wells, toilet blocks, and drying floors to selected communities. A total of 10 Warehouses have been constructed, at the cost of over US\$ 500,000 in Nimba, Bong and Lofa counties.

Each food storage warehouse has a rice mill and thresher, a de-stoning machine and a power tiller provided by FAO, which has conducted training in production, pest management, agro-business and management techniques. UNDP has also provided training on storage management, leadership and business, including book keeping and business planning. WFP purchases rice produced by the farmers from the Cooperatives through its Purchase for Progress (P4P) programme.

Currently the Cooperative groups are being supported towards increasing market performance through Village Savings Loan Associations. Some of these farmers-based organizations have had their capacities built through training in microfinance. ■



Vice President Joseph Boakai kicks off the road construction

# World Bank Supports Road Rehabilitation

By James S. King

**T**he World Bank in September approved US\$ 50 million to rehabilitate roads in Liberia. The amount is a credit from the International Development Association (IDA), the Bank's fund for poor countries. The Government of Liberia (GoL) too will contribute US\$ 72.8 million for the Liberia Road Asset Management Programme (LIBRAMP), a flagship transport project that seeks to address the country's road development challenges.

Jamal Saghir, World Bank's Director for Sustainable Development Department for Africa Region says the "multi-model transport plan" will provide the direction for creating a modern and effective transport system in major cities. "It will foster economic growth, social development and inclusion, as well as reduce negative impact on the environment," Saghir adds.

The deplorable state of Liberia's roads impedes easy conveyance of goods and services between rural communities -- where the bulk of

the country's domestic products are produced -- and Monrovia, the capital. Roads to be rehabilitated include the road connecting Eternal Love Winning Africa (ELWA) with Paynesville Red Light Community to the provincial city of Gbarnga as well as the road connecting Gbarnga with the border of Republic of Guinea.

"The road work between ELWA and Paynesville Red Light Communities in suburbs of Monrovia will relieve motorists of traffic delays by creating two uninterrupted lanes," said Kulwinder Singh Rao, Task Team Leader of the project.

As a flagship transport initiative in the region, LIBRAMP adopts an Output and Performance based Road Construction Contracting (OPRC) approach covering the full life cycle of constructed roads. Maintenance of the road corridor between Monrovia and the border with Guinea is expected to run for a period of ten years.

IDA established in 1960 helps the world's poorest countries by providing loans (called "credits") and grants for projects and programmes that boost economic growth and reduce poverty. IDA is one of the largest sources of

assistance for the world's 81 poorest countries, 39 of which are in Africa, and since 1960 IDA has supported development work in 108 countries.

In a related development, the Liberian government and the World Bank Group in late October launched a US\$ 28.55 million project called Integrated Public Financial Management Reform Project (IPFMRP) aimed at enhancing revenue mobilization and administration as well as to provide support to the government's financial reform programme.

World Bank Senior Operations Officer for Liberia, Coleen Littlejohn, said the Legislative enactment of the Performance Financial Management (PFM) law in 2009 is critical to the financial reform process in Liberia. She said concrete measures will be pursued to improve resource management in a way that develops Liberia's institutional, organizational and human capacities. African Development Bank (ADB) Resident Representative Margaret Kilo said the project will enhance public financial management in Liberia, and pledged ADB's continued support to the project.

Sebastian Muah of the Ministry of Finance said PFM is a priority for the government and one that ensures sustainable economic growth in Liberia. Muah said PFM was developed with the assistance of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The World Bank Group will provide \$5 million of the US\$28.55 million, Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) will provide US\$15.10 million, United States Aid for International Development (USAID) will provide US\$3.85 million and the African Development Bank (ADB) will provide the remaining 4.6 million. The World Bank Multi Donor Trust Fund will administer SIDA and USAID grants while ADB will coordinate disbursement of the funds in conjunction with relevant development partners. ■





Playground and daycare centre - one of 3 facilities setup for the villagers of Yanewoun.

## “We are happy, happy...”

By Augusta Pshorr

A chorus of “We are happy, happy, happy” resonated from the young and the old in the village of Yanewoun, in a forested area of Bong County, as a very short convoy of vehicles carrying a delegation from the Government of Liberia and the UNDP entered the village. A joint delegation had arrived to dedicate food and nutrition projects in their community.

“Today is a special day for us,” an elderly woman walking with the aid of a cane said as she headed to the scene of the turn over ceremony. The people of Yanewoun were for the first time ever being presented a market structure, warehouse, a daycare center and a playground.

The project, which also includes gender-sensitive latrine and a hand

pump, is led by the UNDP through its Community Based Recovery and Development Programme with funding from the Danish government.

Marketers now have a structure that protects them from the rain and the scorching sun, a warehouse to store their farm produce and other goods as well as a day-care centre and a playground for the children, whose mothers used to worry about the whereabouts of their children when they are busy selling their products.

“It never occurred to me that such a project would have ever become a reality in this area. But here we are seeing this becoming a reality,” Lorpū Sumo, the women’s leader in Yanewoun said of the DANIDA funded initiative.

The day-care centre will provide academic access to the children of the marketers. There is a playground also to help keep the kids within the

grounds of the market community instead of loitering away.

“We constructed the market along with a school and a playground so that while the women are selling, their children can be in school learning, while the playground is to also help ensure that the children remain within market community,” Salvator Nkurunziza of the UNDP said, adding “this project is empowering the women of this area. When you empower a woman, you empower a community and a nation.”

Nkurunziza expressed the hope that the facilities will help provide a platform for the women to seek avenues for economic empowerment. He said the construction of the hand pump was intended to help shorten the distances that the women cover to fetch water. The latrine will allow the people access to a hygienic facility.

Liberia’s Deputy Agriculture Minister for Research, Technical Services and Extension, Thomas Gbokie expressed the Government’s appreciation to the Danish government, its partners, and the UNDP for delivering what he called “worthwhile facilities” to the people of Yanewoun and Liberia at large.

“We are very pleased as a Government to have good friends who think well about us, especially our women,” Minister Gbokie said adding that projects such as the one in Yanewoun speak to a progressive period being experienced in a post-conflict country. “As we look at these facilities, they manifest that the rebuilding process is well on course,” Gbokie pointed out.

The cost of the project is put at over US\$99,000.

In June 2008, the Government of Liberia along with UNDP signed an agreement to develop a Joint Programme on Food Security and Nutrition. The programme, with a specific focus on women, seeks to improve women’s capacity through livelihood opportunities as well as the provision of basic infrastructure for livelihood activities in communities. ■



Group discussion by participant at the Climate Change Workshop

# Adapting to Climate Change

By Augusta Pshorr

**R**epresentatives from Liberia's Ministry of Agriculture, the Environment Protection Agency, tertiary institutions and civil society groups have kick-started a pilot project to incorporate climate change concerns into the development of the country's agriculture sector. "Enhancing Resilience to Climate Change by Mainstreaming Adaption Concerns into Agriculture Sector Development in Liberia" was launched at a two-day workshop held at the S.K.D Sports Complex in Monrovia in late August.

The pilot project is spearheaded by the Ministry of Agriculture with support from the United Nations

Development Programme Global Environment Facility (UNDP-GEF). It will be implemented in Bong and Grand Gedeh Counties.

UNDP Deputy Resident Representative for Programme Cleophas Torori noted that climate change poses serious threats to the agriculture sector. He cited studies that show Liberia as vulnerable to climate change, especially in relation to low-land rice production. "The good news is that the Government of Liberia has not lost sight of the dangers related to climate change" he said, reaffirming UNDP's commitment to remain engaged with the Liberian Government.

The workshop was designed to assist all partners fully understand and take ownership of the project as well

as detail the roles, support services and complementary responsibilities within the project's decision-making structures, including reporting and communication lines, and conflict resolution mechanisms.

The Deputy Minister for Technical Services at the Ministry of Agriculture, Dr. Sizi Subah, said that as a result of climate change in Liberia farmers have put the planting of rice above all other agriculture activities, adding that farmers need to form part of the new farming technology. "Climate change is a reality and should be the business of everyone," he stressed.

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is also a major partner and will work directly with farmers at demonstration sites that will be set up. FAO Country Representative Jean-Alexandre Scaglia referred to climate change as one of the biggest challenges presently facing the world. Noting that there are technical solutions to mitigate its effects, he recommended that the fight against climate change be directed at the community level, with the participation of farmers.

The five-year project will support ongoing efforts to revitalize Liberia's agriculture sector and ensure that adaptation to climate change is integrated into the process. The general objective of the project is to increase the resilience of poor, agricultural-dependent communities and reduce farmers' vulnerability by diversifying crop farming through the cultivation of soybeans, low-land rice and small ruminant rearing.

The total cost of the five-year project is US\$ 8 million constituting both in-kind and parallel funding. UNDP's support is around US\$ 2 million dollars cash of co-financing and US\$ 2.3 million grant from the GEF. Parallel funding is expected from the Government of Liberia, FAO, and civil society organizations, among others. This funding does not necessarily constitute actual cash, but rather interventions that are currently being made by these institutions working in the areas of climate change. ■



**Dr. Joshua D.B. Giddings, Vice President for Public Relations, Cuttington University, Bong County:** I find Article 27 (b) of the Liberian Constitution on Citizenship appalling in this age. It states "In order to preserve, foster and maintain the positive Liberian Culture, value and Character, only persons who are Negroes or of Negro descent shall qualify by birth or by naturalization to be citizens of Liberia". It does not only sound racist in tone but also archaic in this 21st Century when the world has become a global village through technology. It has outlived its usefulness and contributed nothing towards Liberia's development since 1847. It needs to be changed to allow people of all races to become citizens of Liberia. Such a reform will bring about rapid development to Liberia and minimize capital flight.



**Thomas Bureh, Member, National Independent Commission on Human Rights:** I would suggest amendments be done in the constitutional clauses on the tenures of the Office of the President of the Republic of Liberia from six to four years. The tenures of members of the Houses of Senate and Representatives should likewise be reduced from nine years to six years and six years to four years. We need to amend the portion of the constitution that denies dual citizenship to Liberians. Dual citizenship should be allowed Liberians who wish to take nationality of a second country.

# Liberian

## What Reforms Do You Wish to



**Counselor Ceaineh D. Clinton-Johnson, Assistant Professor of Human Rights Law: University of Liberia:** My comment basically is that our current constitution requires amendments. Since the constitution of the United States of America was written, it has undergone series of amendments to address emerging constitutional issues. I would recommend that we carefully look at our constitution and enact the constitutional provisions that mandate the National Legislature to pass law and see if some of those constitutional challenges we face will not be addressed. I don't support the arguments that call for redoing the constitution. I would rather suggest that we ask the members of the National Legislature to do those things they should have done since 1986 when the current constitution was produced. There are changes that I think we can do by amendment just like the Americans do. If we decide to undo the current constitution we will be setting bad precedents. Future generations would want to follow suit and it won't be good for the nation. I don't agree with the term 'reform' because the word reform implies different connotation. I would therefore recommend that we do amendments on irrelevant provisions in the constitution.



**Samuel F. Browne, Superintendent, Bomi County:** I support the constitutional requirements that call for a candidate obtaining 30 years of age for the Senate and 25 years for the House of Representatives, living in Liberia not less than one year before election, and being a taxpayer as stipulated in Article 30 of our constitution. However, I would like to see a constitution reform that requires college education, assets ownership by candidates (Representative or Senator) in constituents they intend to represent, and that the tenure for all legislators, (House of Representatives or Senate) shall serve equal term as the president and all other officials of government unless reelected.



**Paul Kareem Goah, IT Specialist, UNMIL, BOMI County:** Simple majority shall characterize election in the Republic. We have realized its cost saving effect from the 2011 parliamentary elections, and therefore having it applied for the presidential election would certainly save us millions and reduce the chaos we normally experience during campaigns in quest for victory for absolute majority. I am specifically citing Article 83(b), which requires second round voting for the presidency.



# ns Speak

## See in Liberia's Constitution?



**Terrence Sasay, Former President of the Press Union of Liberia:** One of the constitutional provisions that I think should be amended is the six year tenure clause of the Office of the President of the Republic of Liberia. The President shall have the constitutional right to two terms in office. The two term period is more than a decade. The issue about dual citizenship should be allowed. We now live in a global village where there are exchanges of knowledge and technology. If we disallow Liberians dual citizenship we would be undermining the development of Liberia. There are Liberians in the Diaspora with technical expertise that we need to develop Liberia. Should we deny them doing so only because they are citizens of another country?



**Dr. Zachariah Z. Gaye, Educator and Author:** I would like to see the election of superintendents, mayors and other key county officials. Let the people have an opportunity to be served by their officials who will be accountable to them. If those county officials are elected by the people, they will seek to serve their interest rather than the interest of the president.



**Samuel B. Cole, Director of Civic and Voter Education, National Elections Commission:** There are certain provisions in our constitution which as an election expert I would like to see amended. For example article 52 (c) of the Liberian Constitution states in order to qualify as a presidential candidate, one must have resided in Liberia 10 years prior to the holding of elections. That portion of our constitution is vague and must be amended. Once a person is a natural born citizen who meets set requirements must be given the right to contest the Office of President. The decision on who becomes president should be left with the voters. Article 56c also states that chiefs should be elected every six years but they can be removed from office by the President. When officials are elected by their people in their constituents I don't think it would be proper for the President to remove them from office. I think this portion of the constitution which gives the President the authority to remove elected officials from office should be amended. Articles 80 (c) and (e) call for members of the National Legislature to set the electoral threshold. I think this is contentious and is extra constitutional and should also be amended in my opinion.



**Kadalalah Kromah, Instructor of Physical Education & Director of Sports, University of Liberia:** I would like to see the tenure of Office of the President of the Republic of Liberia reduced from six years to four years. If a president cannot set the country's development agenda in first two years in office, obviously he or she could not do it in four years. I think two years are enough for a president to draw solid development plans. The current presidential tenure of six years indicates Liberia lacks competent people to lead the nation, and that I disagree with. The tenure of the Senators and Representatives must also be reduced from current nine years to six years and Representatives from six years to four years. The issue of citizenship is another critical one. A non Negro (black) person born, bred and schooled in Liberia, who has known no other culture but Liberian culture should be allowed citizenship but not allowed to ascend to the Office of President of the Republic of Liberia.



**Josephine Fatu Pedro, Student, Grand Bassa Community College:** There is a cluster of constitutional issues for consideration. However, I will speak directly to Article 27(b) which restricts Liberian citizenship to people of Negro descent. This provision promotes constitutional racism and discrimination. This article should be amended to open Liberian citizenship and land ownership to people of all races. Such amendment, in my view, would engender rapid development.

