



# AT WORK TOGETHER

## United Nations in Liberia

The Newsletter of the UN in Liberia

July 2008

Issue 1

In Liberia, the United Nations is represented by the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), as well as 16 specialized agencies, funds, programmes, and the World Bank. All UN programmes in Liberia are aligned with the national Poverty Reduction Strategy. Initiatives are underway in each of the Government's four pillars: enhancing national security; revitalizing the economy; strengthening governance and rule of law; and rehabilitating infrastructure and basic social services.

## Hike in refugee return from West Africa

UNHCR says that there has been a recent hike in the numbers of refugees returning to Liberia from other West African countries. Thousands of refugees have returned in recent months, both under an official programme initiated by the Government of Liberia and supported by the UN, as well as independently.

UNHCR itself has provided assistance to over 3,000 refugees, including children, to return from other West African countries between April and July 2008. Three Thousand three hundred and ten people from Ghana, 196 from Guinea, 170 from Nigeria and 8 from The Gambia have returned with UNHCR assistance in the three month period. About 12,000 refugees

from Ghana are expected to return by the end of the present phase of repatriation, due to end in October.



*Refugees arrive aboard a UN flight from Ghana*

The UN provides free transport facilities for registered refugees under the ongoing repatriation programme on UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) operated, and commercial flights. Repatriation grants of US\$100 for adults and US\$50 per child are paid to returning refugees to enable them to settle in.

The present phase of refugee return from Ghana, which commenced in April is being facilitated under a Tripartite Agreement signed between UNHCR and the governments of Liberia and Ghana. The agreement was negotiated and signed when over 75,000 Liberian refugees in Ghana sought assistance to return after the official UN final phase of repatriation ended in June

2007. The present repatriation programme is expected to be reviewed shortly, with the possibility of resuming land convoys to help refugees bring personal belongings left behind in Ghana.

More than 100,000 refugees, half of them from Guinea, were repatriated in the initial three-year UNHCR programme. Around 50,000 others returned to Liberia on their own.

While movements from Ghana have been steady, those from Nigeria have picked up more recently with 129 people arriving on commercial flights between the last week of June and the first week of July alone. More people presently living at the Oru camp for refugees in Nigeria are registering for voluntary repatriation, while those in Guinea have also expressed the desire to return.

Some 500,000 people are believed to have fled the country during the war.

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# Government announces preliminary results of 2008 population and housing census -*First in 24 years*

The Government of Liberia in June announced the preliminary results of the first population and housing census conducted in the country in 24 years. According to the provisional results, Liberia has a total population of 3,489,072 as of 20 March 2008.

The preliminary results document sets out the findings of the 2008 population and housing census under broad categories, providing national, county and district level data. The information is divided further into average household size, sex composition, population distribution across geographic subdivisions, population density, and some aspects of urbanization. Given that Liberia has an agriculture based economy, an 'agricultural module' was introduced in the census. This provides a sampling frame for use in the design and implementation of future agricultural surveys. A new National Sampling Frame was also developed for future surveys and census.

"The publication of the Preliminary Results and its associated National Sampling Frame are a key milestone towards rebuilding this country," said President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf during the launch of the report.

The final report of the previous national census in 1984 was never published, while the conflict in the country made it impossible to hold a census in 1994 or 2004, the commonly accepted once in ten years time-frame prescribed by the United Nations.

The 2008 census was supported mainly by the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), which provided most of the basics, including three international resident advisors to the Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services, funding of study tours to Sierra Leone and Kenya, a number of vehicles, cartographic equipment, training of GIS staff and funding for the census mapping exercise, planning and execution of the pilot census as well as printing of the census instruments.

The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) provided transport of enumeration materials to the county and some district headquarters, and ensured security for the entire operation. UNMIL Radio supported the publicity and awareness campaign in the lead up to the census. UNDP supported some of the training for census enumerators and UNICEF supported the Post Enumeration Survey. USAID also provided funding and transportation.

## Quick Facts

- Mean household size declined from 6.2 in 1984 to 5.1 in 2008, the most dramatic fall being recorded in River Cess County. This figure was exceeded in eight of the fifteen counties.
- Population distribution were highest in Montserrado, Nimba, Bong, Lofa, Grand Bassa and Margibi counties; accounting for 75.2 percent of the total. Three counties – Montserrado, Nimba and Bong – are home to 56 percent of the population.
- Grand Kru, River Cess, River Gee, Bomi and Gbarpolu counties collectively hold only 10 percent of the national count, each of them contributing less than 2.5 percent.
- Breakdown by sex: 1,764,555 males, 1,724,517 females.

## 'She Could be Your Mother, Niece, Sister or Daughter'

'She could be your mother, niece, sister or daughter' was the message on posters, billboards, and bumper stickers seen across the Liberian capital, Monrovia, in June. Another message read 'Real men don't rape'. The messages were used to announce the 'stop rape' musical concert, and hammer home the message that rape is not tolerated.



*A performer at the anti-rape concert*

Over 330 incidents of rape were reported across the country in the six months to June alone. Statistics show that many of the victims are girls between the age of five and 10. According to the Liberian National Police, rape is currently the most frequently reported serious crime in Liberia.

The 'stop rape' concert on 28 June marked the end of the first phase of a wider awareness programme by the Government, UN Mission in Liberia, international and local non-governmental organisations and community groups. This phase of the Stop Rape Campaign was launched in November 2007 and included various methods of spreading awareness, including organizing sporting events, road shows and screening of anti-rape documentaries in 10 of Liberia's 15 provincial capitals.

Vice-President Joseph N. Boakai had a strong message on behalf of the government, which he said is determined to stop the scourge.

“Our Government is headed by a woman. Women cannot be disrespected, molested, and embarrassed. Rape is no joke and we will do anything to stop it,” he said.

An estimated 20,000 people who crowded the Samuel K. Doe stadium got the message loud and clear, from all of the local and international musicians who performed, Vice-President Boakai, Ministers, UN officials, and other invitees.

Top Nigerian movie star Stephanie Okereke and well known musicians from Ghana, Sierra Leone and Liberia urged all Liberians to ‘Say No To Rape’ and ‘Report it’!



*Okereke performing at the anti-rape concert*

“Rape is a crime against humanity. It is a crime against a woman’s pride and dignity,” Okereke told the crowd.

Police say the number of rape victims could be higher as a large number of cases go unreported. Many incidents of rape are not reported owing to the social stigma on the victim, fear of reprisals, and in some instances, lack of knowledge of reporting mechanisms.

“People should not blame a rape victim but should support her in seeking the necessary medical and legal assistance. Report it, so that the security agencies and the justice system can deal with the matter,” urged UNMIL’s Deputy Special Representative for Rule of Law, Ms. Henrietta Mensa-Bonsu.

## Over 7,000 ex-combatants benefit from career guidance and vocational training project

Over seven thousand ex-combatants are presently taking part in a career guidance and vocational training project across all 15 counties of Liberia under the United Nations Development Programme’s (UNDP) Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (DDRR) programme. It targets the residual case load of ex-combatants who disarmed and demobilized in 2003/2004 and have not benefited from any of the previous projects under the UNDP administered Trust Fund or parallel programmes.



*Vocational training in motor mechanism*

“The aim of this UNDP project is to help re-integrate ex-combatants into mainstream and sustainable economic activities, by training them in the skills needed to secure jobs or set up their own businesses,” says UNDP Country Director, Dominic Sam.

The project is in line with the country programme developed by the Government of Liberia’s National Commission on Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (NCDDRR). Managerial and technical support is provided by UNDP and Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Recovery (RRR) unit of UNMIL. The Government of Norway is funding the project, costing just over US\$7 million.

The first component of this programme was completed between mid-February and April with a major publicity campaign throughout Liberia.

“The result was overwhelming. 18,000 people registered for the programme,” says Aibinu Aderemi Oluwole, project manager for UNDP.

The 4,614 male and 2,674 female candidates validated by the Commission initially underwent three weeks career guidance counselling at 31 referral centres across the country. Here, trained counsellors from the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) of Liberia provided counselling on career options for those enrolled in the course, based on previous experience, personal preferences and job opportunities in the counties.

Following this, trainees are presently being assisted in securing six to eight months on-the-job training opportunities with private enterprises that have expressed interest in the programme, or registering for vocational skills and apprenticeship training. Those opting for vocational training will be coached in a wide range of skills, including tailoring, masonry, plumbing, motor mechanism, cosmetology, baking, weaving of bamboo and rattan products, computer skills, or even agriculture.

Companies such as Arcelor-Mittal Steel, Liberia Agriculture Company and Equatorial Biofuel will help secure employment for some of the trainees in the Margibi and River Cess counties. Various other partner organisations and community groups will provide job opportunities for those in other counties with less private sector participation.

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## Liberia to benefit from UN Peacebuilding Fund

Several new projects aimed at building and cementing long term peace within, and between, communities across Liberia, are set to commence soon. They will be funded through the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF).

Liberia is also the first country to benefit from the Fund's 'second window', established to address immediate needs to prevent insecurity.



*Funding from the Peacebuilding Fund would also go toward the improvement of judicial services*

The United Nations Secretary-General in October 2007 approved a total of US\$15 million for Liberia. The UN and Government of Liberia jointly determined through a Priority Plan that funding would go toward projects that fall under three broad categories: fostering national reconciliation and conflict management; critical interventions to promote peace and resolve conflict; and strengthening state capacity for peace consolidation.

"It is essential that such interventions are promoted to ensure that the hard won peace takes root and benefits all Liberians," says Ellen Margarethe Løj, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General.

Proposals for seven projects are presently being finalized for submission to the Joint Steering Committee of the Liberian Peacebuilding Fund, co-chaired by Mr. Ambulai Johnson, Minister of Internal Affairs, and Jordan Ryan,

Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General and UN Resident Coordinator. The Joint Steering Committee also has representatives from four other Ministries, bilateral and multilateral partners, as well as NGOs and the private sector. Proposals in the pipeline include the introduction of peace education and human rights into the school curriculum in Liberia, agricultural training for ex-combatants, and improvement of judicial services.

Proposals are selected for funding based on their conflict mitigation activity, in line with the Priority Plan for Liberia. Once approved, funding is released to UN Agencies, who will ultimately work with local implementing partner agencies and complete projects within an 18 month period.

"These new peacebuilding projects offer a chance to make a difference in people's lives. Importantly, they aim to foster reconciliation and address squarely the threats to peace." says Jordan Ryan, Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General and UN Resident Representative.

So far, US\$96,000 has been released from the Liberia PBF in mid-June 2008 to provide fast track interventions to deal with land disputes that recently led to several deaths in Grand Bassa and Maryland counties. The two projects assist County Attorneys visit the remote areas where the incidents occurred, conduct investigations and prosecute those involved in the killings.

The Joint Steering Committee sees the Peacebuilding Fund in Liberia as an opportunity to implement targeted, tangible and catalytic interventions from which Liberia can learn, and use the lessons learned, in future programmes.

The role of the Peacebuilding Fund is to establish a crucial bridge between conflict and recovery at a time when other funding mechanisms may not yet be available, help address the most immediate out of the multiple challenges facing post-conflict countries, and minimize the risk of a relapse into conflict

## Feeding Centres provide lifeline to severely malnourished children



*A mother feeds her daughter at a UNICEF supported feeding centre*

One year old Ruth\* runs around a clinic in Brewerville, near the capital Monrovia. Despite looking half her age, Ruth is as energetic as any one-year old.

Three months ago, Ruth was hooked up to an intravenous drip in the same clinic and could hardly move her body. Severely malnourished and barely surviving the hours-long trip, she had been brought to the clinic from Todee, rural Montserrado by her mother.

"I was afraid she would die in my arms before I brought her to this referral centre," says her young mother Baidu Nah\*.

Ruth, like hundreds of other malnourished children survive if they are brought in time to similar clinics, known as Therapeutic Feeding Centres, run in some of the main hospitals across the

country. The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and World Food Programme (WFP) support seven such clinics in Bong, Bomi, Lofa, Montserrado, and Nimba counties.

Here, children are given professional care, provided with high energy biscuits, milk and other foods. UNICEF supports the centres by providing the high energy biscuits, milk, medical equipment and the required medicines, vehicles to support transport of patients and doctors or nurses, as well as fuel to run the essential generators. Mothers and other caregivers are also given rice and food supplements by WFP.

A study carried out in 2007 showed that there was a high level of malnutrition amongst children, with 39 percent of children under five being stunted. It also showed that 6.9 percent were wasted and 26.8 percent underweight.

"Very often the children are rushed to health clinics or hospitals when they are already severely wasted and in a critical state," says staff nurse Henrietta B. Howard.

Close to 3,000 children received some form of care at the centres in 2007, out of which over 700 were severely malnourished.

"We need to step up efforts to make sure the next generation of Liberians grow up healthy and well nourished. We need to start now," says Rozanne Chorlton, UNICEF Representative in Liberia.

The clinics are situated in health facilities run by Medicine Sans Frontiers (MSF-Belgium), Action Contre la Faim (ACF), Medical Emergency and Relief Cooperation International (MERCi), PMU-Interlife Liberia, AID for the Needy Development Program (ANDP), Phebe Hospital and International Rescue Committee.

\* Names have been changed

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## Mother and daughter learn to read and write

Bright morning sunshine filters through the lush forest cover as two year old Nunnoh\* skips alongside her mother down a winding, half paved road in Grand Cape Mount County. Nunnoh and her mother are making their way to the local school they both attend, set amidst a wide lawn and fruit trees.

"I am catching up on schooling I missed due to the war and taking care of my daughter," explains Bendu Arona, the 25 year old mother.

Nunnoh, her mother, and thousands of others like them, are able to attend school thanks to a Liberian Ministry of Education project supported by the World Food Programme (WFP).



*Thousands of school children benefit from the WFP school feeding programme*

"I have no independent means of income to feed, clothe and send my daughter to school. I would have been forced to drop out of school and look for work if I did not have this opportunity," says Bendu.

The project is being implemented in 2000 schools across the country, providing daily meals to all students and monthly take home rations for the older girls. The daily meals provide an incentive for students to remain in schools. Hundreds of children, mostly girls, either drop out of, or are forced to stop schooling to seek jobs and support families. The monthly take-home rations help compensate for

any perceived loss of income during the time young girls spend at school.

Thanks to the daily school meals, Bendu is able to devote time to completing her upper primary education without worrying about where the next meal will come from. Little Nunnoh does not seem to have a care in the world either, as she learns the basics in her kindergarten class in a separate building of the compound.

In the 2007/2008 academic year, WFP has supported the enrollment and retention of around 400,000 school children across all of the 15 counties in Liberia.

The school feeding programme provides healthy meals to students and helps empower girls who would otherwise have had no means to further their education. It supports the Government's effort to achieve universal primary schooling, reduce the gender differential, and the rural-urban gap in primary education.

\* name has been changed

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## UN Independent Expert on Human Rights commends progress in Liberia

The United Nations Independent Expert on Human Rights has commended Liberia on progress it has made on several fronts during the five years since the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement.

"There has been continual peace and security over the past five years and acceleration of progress on a number of human rights and development issues, including economic and social rights," says Charlotte Abaka, the Independent Expert.

She said other achievements that the country could be proud of included rehabilitation of infrastructure such as schools, health and judicial facilities, introduction of legislation toward setting up institutions such as the Independent National Commission on Human Rights, as well as the launch of the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) following a consultative process.



*The UN Independent expert on Human Rights called for the strengthening of policing, judiciary and correction sectors*

Abaka however expressed concern about the continued high incidents of rape and sexual violence, and rule of law amongst others, and urged the setting up and strengthening of the policing, judiciary and correction sectors.

"The government continues to demonstrate the political will to transform society and has supported poverty reduction schemes. The international community must support these efforts in a timely and effective manner," added Abaka.

She made the comments following her latest visit to Liberia between 6 and 20 July 2008. Her final report will be presented to the UN Human Rights Council in September.

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## Stronger efforts needed for more effective campaign against sexual exploitation and abuse – report

A recently released report is urging the Government, UN, and other I/NGOs to galvanize efforts in order to improve the effectiveness of the national campaign against sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA). It commends the Liberian government and humanitarian community in the country for the efforts to combat SEA, and says great strides have been made on awareness at all levels of society.

However, it says further efforts are needed to combat the 'culturally and socially deep rooted problem.'

"The findings show that the SEA awareness campaign is gradually moving towards its intended goals and objectives. Yet, campaign managers must galvanize further efforts towards improving the effectiveness of the campaign, as a prevention mechanism for SEA," urges the report.



*Women take part in a workshop raising awareness on sexual exploitation and abuse.*

The report was produced by the Gender Based Violence Task Force, comprising representatives from the Government, UN, as well as national and international non-governmental organizations. It served as an evaluation of the SEA campaign in Liberia, which was launched in December 2006.

The report also urges translation of awareness material into local dialects, enhancement of partnerships with community based women's organizations, and more activities and training in areas with a low level of knowledge of SEA issues.

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## Cassava farmers reap dividends in Nimba

A project by the United Nations is bringing basic technology and skills to several villages in Nimba, the second most populous county in Liberia. It is also helping hundreds of women reap rich dividends from adopting slight changes to how they grow and sell cassava, one of the biggest cash crops in the region. Five hundred female and twenty six male farmers, members of the Ganta Concern Women Group (GCWG) will benefit from this project in 11 villages and communities in the Ganta region of Nimba County.

The Ministries of Gender and Development, Agriculture and Internal Affairs, UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), World Bank, International Centre for Women Research (ICRW), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and UN Education and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) are working together with the GCWG to help transform small scale cassava production into a sustainable agro-business enterprise. It is part of the wider results-based initiatives funded by the World Bank in five other countries, and contributes to the national strategic objective of increasing women's economic empowerment.

Under the project, cassava will be grown in communal plots that have been dedicated for exclusive use of the GCWG members by the community. Previously, farmers grew cassava in individual plots and sold the tuber in raw form as soon as it was harvested, with marginal profits. This particular project involves the farmer organization in the adoption of improved methods of planting and harvesting of cassava, processing the tuber prior to sale, and training in basic literacy.

UNIFEM is implementing the project with local non-governmental organization Agriculture Relief Services (ARS). FAO provides the cassava cuttings, trains members of the organization in agro-processing and micro-enterprise development and management, as well as provides the farming tools and cassava processing machine that churns out a flour-like substance called Farina or Gari. UNESCO, together with the Adult Literacy Division of the Ministry of Education is teaching women to read, write and do basic arithmetic, the first and only form of education some have had. UNIFEM has already completed construction of the processing plant.

The UN agencies are also looking at helping the farmer organization identify markets for the produce.

Project implementation commenced in July 2007 by setting up and organizing the farmer association. The cassava cuttings were planted in March 2008 and the first harvest under the project is expected in March 2009.

It is estimated that the farmers will churn out at least 20 bags of Farina or Gari a day during the harvesting season, reducing dependency on imports. Liberia presently imports at least 100 metric tons of Gari meal every month.



*A woman works in a cassava plantation in Ganta, Nimba County*

## Snapshots

- The awards night for a UNDP organised competition on 'development reporting' for journalists took place on 25 July in Monrovia. The awards were given under the four categories of television, radio, print and photography. The winners were given the opportunity of working for prominent news organisations in Ghana, Kenya and South Africa.
- Four children were supported by UNICEF to attend the Giffoni Film Festival in Italy from 18 – 26 July 2008. The children were selected from amongst those who took part in the recent EYE See III photo project held in Liberia, and whose pictures are now being used as part of an international exhibition.
- A five day programme on Human Right Based Approach to Development was held from 4 to 8 August 2008 in Monrovia and Gbarnga (Bong county). The programme sought to raise awareness on identifying the main strategies, opportunities and challenges in applying a Human Rights-based Approach (HRBA) to programming. Contact Lucila Beato for more details at [beato@un.org](mailto:beato@un.org) or on mobile: 05319082
- The Executive Board of WFP in June approved a three-year development school feeding project for south-eastern Liberia to be implemented from September 2008 to August 2011. The US\$15 million project aims to encourage the enrollment, stabilize the attendance, and ensure the retention of 62,000 primary school children in Grand Kru, Grand Gedeh, River Gee, Sinoe and Maryland counties; and to reduce the gender gap in primary education in those areas.

## Staff updates

- **UNMIL Force Commander Lieutenant General Chikadibia Isaac Obiakor** relinquished duties on 17 July 2008. The Nigerian Lt.General served as Force Commander from January 2006 to July 2008. UNMIL's Deputy Force Commander **Major General Carl Modey**, will be the Acting Force Commander pending the appointment of a new Force Commander.
- **Mr. Cardinal Uwishaka** has appointed acting head of UNIFEM pending the appointment of a new Programme Manager.
- **Mr. Abdirahman Meygag**, Deputy Country Director of WFP, departs Liberia 16 August for a new assignment at WFP regional bureau in Kampala following a tour of duty lasting three and a half years. He is to be replaced by **Mr. Taban Lokonga**.

## Reports

- Impact of High Prices on Food Security in Liberia – Following a country assessment of the impact of high food prices, WFP will release a report in August detailing the extent to which high prices affect the food security of various demographic and livelihood groups. The report also identifies a number of response options, some of which are already being planned for implementation by the Government and its partners. Contact Claudia Ahpoe for more details at [claudia.ahpoe@wfp.org](mailto:claudia.ahpoe@wfp.org)
- Evaluation of the campaign on preventing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. For the full report, contact: Deddeh Kwekwe, Coordinator GBV Unit, Ministry of Gender and Development, [deddehkwekwe2004@yahoo.com](mailto:deddehkwekwe2004@yahoo.com) or on 06521443
- Liberia Demographic and Health Survey 2007 report launched 30 July 2008. Available at the Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services.
- The preliminary report of the 2008 Census. Available at the Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services.
- National Policy on Non-Governmental Organizations. For information contact the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs.

### Upcoming events

- 25-29 August - Career guidance workshop and graduation week for National Youth Volunteers
- 19 August - 5 year anniversary of the bombing of the UN office in Baghdad
- September 21 - International Day of Peace

For submissions to this newsletter, please contact the Communications Officer at the respective agency, or George Somerwill, Chair of the UN Communications Group - [Somerwill@un.org](mailto:Somerwill@un.org)  
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