



UNITED NATIONS  
LIBERIA



# LIBERIA A COUNTRY MOVING FORWARD

Thanking Niels Scott  
United Nations Resident Coordinator  
in Liberia 2021-2023



# INTRODUCTION

In January 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic was at its height and its consequences were being revealed, adding to Liberia's standing needs for development and social cohesion, thwarting peacebuilding efforts, and threatening progress on the rapidly-approaching Agenda 2030. A year later, the war in Ukraine sent a new wave of challenges around the world.

These back-to-back global challenges, coupled with the looming threats of climate change, demand new game rules for development. The changing world requires the United Nations to evolve and adapt its strategies to enhance a transformative agenda for the advancement of the people of Liberia.

It is at this critical juncture that Niels Scott arrived, carrying with him an invaluable toolbox of experience gained over more than 25 years of service in international cooperation, development coordination, humanitarian assistance, crisis management, and peacebuilding support acquired at the United Nations and other organizations.

Together, the United Nations Country Team in Liberia has risen to these challenges with tremendous vision and hard work, serving as a true all-weather friend and development ally to the Government and people of Liberia.

Famously, diplomats talk. Niels Scott also listens – and commands action. He has listened closely to the Government, to the United Nations Country Team – and especially its national staff – to civil society organizations and other stakeholders, and to everyday Liberians throughout the country. It is this listening that has supported some of the United Nations' most powerful work in Liberia during the past two years.

Niels Scott's term in Liberia has been a wonderful final chord in his remarkable career with the United Nations. Upon the occasion of his retirement, the United Nations Country Team, and the people of Liberia whom it serves, celebrate this exceptional diplomat with a few snapshots of his strong legacy in Liberia – and wish him the very best as he turns this new leaf in life.

United Nations Coordinator Team in Liberia,  
Monrovia, January 2023

“Liberia is a unique country, like no other than I know –with its history, the way it came into being. Liberia is a host of experiences that are common with the rest of Africa but it is also unique because they forged their own history.”

Niels Scott, United Nations Country Team Resident Coordinator



During the years 2021-2022, the United Nations Country Team in Liberia has accomplished several key initiatives and flagship programmes in partnership with the Government of Liberia, Development Partners, Civil Society Organizations, and a wide range of stakeholders. Some highlights include:

- The Accelerated Community Development Programme
- The Spotlight Initiative
- The At-Risk Youth Programme
- The Peace Building Fund portfolio
- Advancing the Sustainable Development Goals



Non-resident agencies



Key donor/development partners



# 1 THE ACCELERATED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

Nowhere is the importance of listening more clearly demonstrated than in the Accelerated Community Development Programme. On United Nations Day in October 2021, Liberian President Dr. George Manneh Weah challenged the UN in Liberia, asking it to deliver more, and more widely, to support the people of Liberia. The response came exactly one year later at United Nations Day of 2022, with the announcement and inauguration of the Accelerated Community Development Programme. “Mr. President, we listened to you very carefully, and we responded,” said Niels Scott.

The Accelerated Community Development Programme (ACDP) is a joint UN-Government programme to accelerate community development in some of the less developed areas of Liberia. This ambitious flagship programme is intended to help Liberians climb out of poverty, with a special focus on rural areas. It will operate under the auspices of the Office of the President of Liberia, with the UN putting up the overwhelming majority of the funds for the programme and UNDP as the main implementing partner.

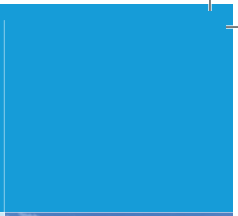
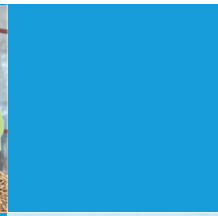
The Government aims to mobilize \$100 million for the first phase of the programme in 2022-2025 – for which the President has requested the Minister of Finance and Development Planning to work with the UNDP, World Bank, African Development Bank, IMF, and the rest of the international community to conclude financing. The Government of Liberia has already invested US\$ 3 million to show commitment and has pledged to work with the UN and partners to make the ACDP one of the largest investments in community development that the country has ever made.

At the heart of the ACDP is providing very practical support in the more remote and rural areas of Liberia to meet the needs of the communities, whether it's solar panels, water wells, roads for access – everything that people need in order to make progress in their lives. This will in turn support Liberia's national development priorities.

Households are the backbone of rural Liberia – people who work every day trying to develop the places they live, improve the agriculture, make sure their children benefit from a good education, seek healthcare. While extraordinarily resilient and hopeful, Liberia's rural households contend with extreme inequities requiring development investments now to carry them forward, and the ACDP will support development initiatives both now and in the future.



Just under half of Liberia's population lives in rural areas. Rural areas have a 71.6 per cent poverty rate, nearly twice as high as urban areas.



## A Lightbulb Moment and UN Reform

"The inauguration of the Accelerated Community Development Programme was a lightbulb moment. At that point, I thought yes, now we are working in tandem with the Government of Liberia to actually move into the development areas that are so central for Liberia.

The United Nations' relevance is defined by our ability to understand what's going on around us, respond to needs, and provide the appropriate support. If you look at Liberia, where sustainable development is so important, our reform is our ability to shape ourselves as the United Nations in-country in a way where our footprint is designed to support and not designed to simply trample

on what governments and people would want. This is the big difference in the reform: it is about having relevance, it is about analyzing and understanding the situation, but it is also about our ability to use our international network as an organization, and also the standards and the norms that we have to support the Government in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals that we all aspire to.

At the end of the day, it is not just about material resources or presence. It is about actually deploying the right sort of technical assistance that the country needs to move forward – and I think we're doing that."

Niels Scott, United Nations Country Team Resident Coordinator

# 2 SPOTLIGHT INITIATIVE

The global Spotlight Initiative is a United Nations initiative funded by the European Union to eliminate violence of all forms against women and girls. Aptly named, it shines a light on abhorrent violence taking place both behind closed doors and in plain view, often in the name cultural norms and practices.

Gender-based violence, especially sexual violence, is extremely high in Liberia. Perhaps one of the most egregious forms of violence against women and girls is female genital mutilation – or FGM. Despite some progress, as much as 60 per cent of the country’s women are survivors of this ruinous practice.

In recent years, the Government and key stakeholders are making attempts to curb FGM, hopefully laying the foundation for permanently ending the harmful practice. Yet banishing it and all violence against women and girls requires work across the board in awareness, education, legislation, and enforcement.

Spotlight Initiative launched in Liberia in 2019 amid these attempts, to do just this. Through UN Women, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and OHCHR – and in close coordination with the UN Resident Coordinator – the Initiative broadly works on legislative reforms, social norms influence and support to civil society and women’s movements contributing to the national efforts to end violence against women and girls.

In recent years, Spotlight Initiative has helped Liberian women and girls access a wide range of services in health, justice, protection, psychosocial and economic support. Importantly, the Initiative is working with traditional practitioners of FGM, also known as Zoes, to engage in socioeconomic livelihood projects, including climate-smart agriculture, soap-making, tailoring, catering, literacy, and village savings and loans associations, for generating income and achieving economic security as a substitute to practicing FGM for income.

## A few successes of Spotlight Initiative

 <p>Supported <b>222,562</b> women and girls to access services</p>	<p>Worked with <b>300+</b> Zoes on alternative livelihood skills</p> 	 <p>Constructed <b>4</b> vocational and heritage centres</p>
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## Spotlight Initiative – and the importance of gender equality

“Spotlight Initiative has rendered absolutely vividly clear that without the emancipation of women, without them playing their full role in society, in business, in politics, in everyday life, in their communities, everywhere- it’s really going to be difficult to have a balanced game going forward. We always think of gender equality being the right thing to do – and it absolutely is. But it is also the smart thing to do because it will contribute massively to the economy. Not just the informal economy that we see, but the substantial and formal economy of Liberia. But also in government, in local administration – it’s going to make such a difference. Good decisions are decisions that are based in reality – and people who live in reality are much better placed to make and take better

decisions, and those people invariably are women.

The Spotlight Initiative has done something else absolutely essential – it has highlighted the fact that violence against women absolutely cannot continue. It has shone the spotlight on issues that people realize that cannot just take place behind closed doors or in remote villages. This needs to be brought out in the open and addressed – and there must be no impunity for people who commit any type of violence, especially against women and girls. To its great merit, the Spotlight Initiative has helped the Government and the people shine the light on these darker things. Already now there has been a small but steady change in people’s attitudes.”

Niels Scott, United Nations Country Team Resident Coordinator

# 3 THIRD PRIORITY AT-RISK YOUTH PROGRAMME

Young people account for the overwhelming majority of Liberia's population, making them a critical demographic for the country's future as its main body of citizenry and workforce. Empowering young people and meeting their needs and expectations is vital.

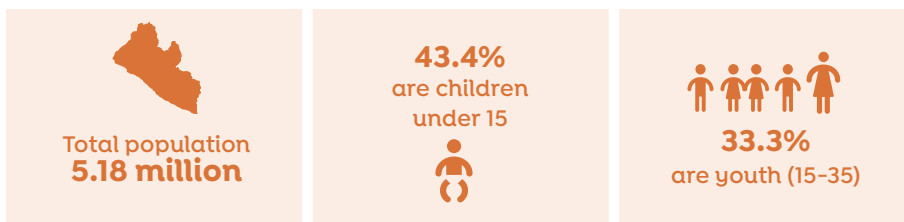
But the promise of this generation is at risk, threatened by many challenges, including intergenerational poverty and drug use - some of these the lingering effects of the civil wars. It is estimated that 2 out of 10 youth in Liberia are users of narcotic substances, living on the streets and resorting to a slew of negative behaviors to support the habit. To be the country's future, Liberia's youth need strong investment now.

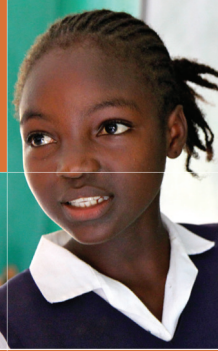
In mid-2022, the United Nations and the Government of Liberia affirmed their commitment to Liberia's youth with the launch of the At-Risk Youth Programme, which is geared towards rehabilitating, empowering and reintegration of at-risk youth into their communities as healthy, productive, and engaged citizens.

The United Nations and partners have earmarked US\$ 13.9 million for the first phase of the programme, set for 30 months. President Weah launched a funding drive, securing commitments from several key stakeholders, among them the Government itself, which pledged has pledged US\$ 1 million in contribution to the programme, designed to involve multi-year, national and international hybrid financing.

A high-level meeting hosted by Niels Scott, key government ministers and representatives of UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, and WHO moved to establish a steering committee with members of the Government, UN, development partners, civil society organizations, and - importantly - youth themselves. Together with a technical working group, they will oversee the development and implementation of the programme.

## A few key facts about Liberia





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“When I think of Liberia, I think of this huge potential. I think of the very large proportion of young people, who have very strong aspirations to a better future, and who ultimately will be the dynamo of Liberian society.”

United Nations Country Team Resident Coordinator Niels Scott

# 4 THE PEACE BUILDING FUND (PBF) AND RESOURCE MOBILIZATION

Improving social cohesion and national reconciliation in Liberia requires a long-term vision and commitment and a broad-based peacebuilding momentum. It also calls for a shift from a project-based approach to a more programmatic one that addresses the interdependence between income distribution, ethnic identity, economic development, and social conflict.

The United Nations Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) has been instrumental over the years in helping to lay the foundations of progress for peacebuilding in this respect and has achieved impact in mitigating land concession conflicts, national reconciliation and social cohesion, security sector reform, human rights, gender and women's empowerment. It has been crucial in promoting community-based healing and reconciliation through the Palava Hut Mechanism, the traditional restorative justice and accountability mechanism funded that is supported by UNDP as part of its Peace Building, Reconciliation, and Social Cohesion Programme.

When Niels Scott assumed office in January 2021, the PBF portfolio had a total investment of nearly US\$ 26.49 million that covered projects extending from 2017 to 2021. Within two years, Liberia's portfolio increased by 85 per cent – adding another approximately US\$ 22.4 million. Of the resources mobilized and committed, there was an increase allocation of the PBF Secretariat budget from US\$ 1.14 million in 2021 to US\$ 3.05 million by December 2022 – representing a 63 per cent increase that accommodates, among others, additional senior staffing capacity.

## Peace Building Fund portfolio





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“The United Nations has had a big contribution to the history of Liberia. But let’s not kid ourselves- Liberian people – especially Liberian women – forged the Liberia we have today and laid the foundation for its peace and the stability.”

Niels Scott, United Nations Country Team Resident Coordinator.



# LOOKING FORWARD

## Hopes for Liberia

“One of the most striking things I will miss about Liberia is the sunshine. Not that above – which is certainly nice to have – but the sunshine in people’s hearts and minds, their love of life and optimism. I know Liberia is going to have a great future and I really look forward to coming back here in five and ten years and seeing the difference that people will have made in their lives. And I think that phrase is important – because it’s the people who are going to be able to support that change.

I would like to come back for two reasons: one is to enjoy what Liberia has to offer, which is some of the most beautiful countryside in Africa and beyond, but also to see how people have developed and how people are enjoying this wonderful country and exploiting the resources in a way which benefits them – whether they live in the forest area or in towns- and are able to have a life which is good for them, where their children are enjoying the opportunities and youth starting to have development, jobs, or self-employment.

It won’t be quick. But I just have to look out the window and see the thousands of kilometers of seacoast and know that one day it is going to be fully exploited to the benefit of Liberians and that people have the lives that they aspire to and deserve to have.”

United Nations Country Team Resident Coordinator Niels Scott

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