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UNICEF Peer Ambassadors: A Key Strategy in Increasing Immunization Coverage in Hard-to-Reach Areas

Maa Musu is a mother living in Gbarpolu, the youngest and seventh most populous county in Liberia. With an estimated population of over a hundred thousand, Gbarpolu has five health districts and a significant number of children under the age of 9. Maa Musu's child was one of them.

Maa Musu's story is just one of the many success stories that came out of the **Parenting of Poorly Performing County Project** in Gbarpolu County. The project, which aimed to reduce the vaccine preventable diseases morbidity and mortality among children under 23 months, was implemented from October 2022 to January 2023 in partnership with the Ministry of Health and funding from the Global Alliance for vaccines and immunizations (GAVI), the Vaccine Alliance, and involved regular, quality outreach vaccination sessions in hard-to-reach areas.

One of the project's key strategies was the use of peer ambassadors or peer educators, who were identified and trained to provide information on immunization in community meetings and social gatherings. Maa Musu, a mother of a 15-month-old child, was one of the many caregivers who benefited from this approach.

At first, Maa Musu was hesitant to take her child to a vaccination site, and she often forgot about outreach session days. However, Celestina, her peer ambassador, was persistent in encouraging her and reminding her of the importance of vaccination. Through playful interactions and friendly reminders, Celestina was able to motivate Maa Musu to take her child for the remaining vaccines.

Thanks to Celestina's efforts and the support of the project, Maa Musu's child was able to complete his vaccination schedules. Maa Musu was grateful for the peer ambassador's help, and she expressed her appreciation for the project's efforts to improve immunization coverage in hard-to-reach areas.



Launch of Human Rights 75 Initiative

On Thursday, April 20, 2023, two Commissioners of the Liberia Independent National Commission on Human Rights (INCHR), Cllr. Pela Boker-Wilson and Atty. Patmillia Doe-Paivey, appeared on the OHCHR organized live phone in talk show **“Stand up for someone’s human rights today”** to discuss the official Launch of the [Human Rights 75 Initiative](#) in Liberia and the 2023 Africa Pre-Trial Detention Day commemoration.

The launch marks the beginning of the [Human Rights 75 Initiative](#) by Office of the High Commission of Human Rights Liberia under the leadership of the UN Resident Coordinator, which is a year-long UN global initiative by the [OHCHR Office](#) in Liberia commemorating the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and the 30th anniversary of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action.

The two Commissioners during the radio program, moderated by OHCHR Human Rights Officer, discussed the importance of the official launch and events expected to take place during the launch including remarks from the High Commissioner, official remarks from the UN Resident Coordinator formally launching the Liberia Human Rights 75 initiative, and tailored activities co-organised with the entire UN family under the leadership of the Office of the UN Resident Coordinator, in collaboration with the OHCHR Liberia Country Office. The guests also detailed activities expected to be carried out on April 25, 2023, including tour of the Monrovia Central Prison, Liberia’s most populated prison facility in commemoration of the 8th celebration and provided statistics on the current prison capacity throughout Liberia.



REBUILDING THE CARPENTRY PROFESSION IN LIBERIA

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Following years of civil war that devastated Liberia's education system, a new initiative is revitalizing the country's carpentry schools. The project, the **Youth Rising Project**, funded by the European Union and Sweden, implemented by UNIDO, aims to revive the carpentry industry and equip young Liberians with valuable skills.

At the Booker Washington Institute, a prominent vocational school in Liberia, carpentry instructor James Fallah is acquiring advanced joinery skills. To make new school chairs that are more ergonomic and durable, Fallah's training is part of a larger effort to upgrade carpentry skills across the country to enable Liberians build livelihoods and contribute to sustainable development while conserving the country's rich forest. Carpentry is an important field in Liberia, with wood being the main natural resource. However, decades of war and economic stagnation have left many carpenters without access to modern techniques or equipment. The **Youth Rising Project** will change that by providing training in advanced carpentry techniques and modernizing tools and equipment. In a bid to boost the capacity of the revived carpentry schools, 12 new carpenters, including two females, have spent 15 months in South Africa gaining a recognized qualification in the profession from the Furniture Technology Center in Cape Town. This achievement will help restore the schools' instructional capability to deliver the new carpentry courses and put into use the new machines and tools.

"Learning new techniques and gaining a recognized qualification in carpentry has been a life-changing experience for us," said Ms. Meettee Diazee. "We are excited to share our knowledge with the students and help them develop the skills they need to succeed in the carpentry industry in Liberia."



Jonathan Stewart: mobilizing youth's potential to play a critical role in Liberia's food security

Jonathan Stewart is the CEO and founder of Agro Tech Liberia, an organization that has become a leading voice on youth in agriculture in Liberia since its creation in 2017.

Their vision is that youth should not only consider agriculture as a profitable livelihood opportunity, but also to see that they have a key role to play in the future of food security in Liberia. The capacity built by FAO provided the youth with knowledge and skills of how to make their businesses responsible based on the Community on World Food Security Principles for responsible investment in agriculture and food systems (CFS-RAI). "Young agri-entrepreneurs were trained on the ten CFS-RAI Principles, and that gave them an idea on how to do business which is responsible with the welfare and well-being of people and the environment." At the same time, they learnt how to use the CFS-RAI Principles for their advocacy: They learned also how to use the CFS-RAI to "hold actors involved in agricultural investment accountable for their actions." Youth organizations were also trained to be able to work with other actors in agricultural value chains through inclusive business models. "This gave an opportunity to gain knowledge about the most relevant actors, mentors, and approaches in the agricultural sector with a view of making sure that youth get the most out of doing agricultural entrepreneurship."



UN Gender Theme Group Commits to Greater Alignment of Programs to Promote Gender Equality in Liberia

On Thursday, 6 April 2023, gender focal persons from UN agencies in Liberia ended a two-day Gender Theme Group (GTG) retreat at the Farmington Hotel in Margibi County with a commitment to step up efforts and activities to support gender-equality programmes for the advancement of national development.

The Acting Minister of Gender, Children and Social Protection, Honorable Alice Johnson Howard was in attendance throughout the duration of the retreat, a reflection of the strong partnership commitment between the Government of Liberia and the UN System, in working jointly to advance gender equality.

The main goal of the retreat was to assess what the UN GTG had accomplished in 2022, to identify challenges, and to earmark important priorities for 2023 based on what had been learnt from 2022 and prevailing global realities. Several relevant development plans, including the government's national development plan (Pro-Poor Agenda for Development and Prosperity), the National Gender Policy, and the UN Development Framework for Liberia, or UNSCDF, were taken into consideration during the retreat to create a more effective and robust roadmap for the GTG.

Addressing the forum, Ms. Christine N. Umutoni, the UN Resident Coordinator, underlined the “importance of effectively placing gender in development outcomes within the context of the GTG work because gender catapults everything”. She said: "As the UN, we should make sure that gender is well positioned in the larger plans of Liberia's development." She also asserted that gender mainstreaming was about both women and men, and that women's empowerment cannot occur without gender equality, which can only be attained with the help of individuals who are aware of the gender journey.

The UN Women Country Representative, Ms. Comfort Lamptey, noted that the GTG was an important functional platform within the UN Liberia family as “GTG advises the UN Country Team (UNCT) on how the UN can work on gender priorities in the country.” Ms. Lamptey said the GTG was well positioned to also advise the UNCT about supporting government in the implementation of its gender-sensitive development priorities.

Participants in the retreat underscored the importance of frequent collaboration, consultations, and interactions with government, civil society organizations, and the private sector, as well as advocating for increased resources to incorporate additional human rights principles, and to improving the alignment of GTG priorities with current UN and government development plans. These steps, they said, are necessary to support an inclusive, results-based gender programming in Liberia. A special call up was made to build stronger synergies between the GTG and other UN working groups including the UN Communications Group, UN Monitoring and Evaluation Group and UN Human Resources Group.



Young women graduate from the digital literacy skills training program

Forty-five young women from Bong County in the north-central part of Liberia graduated from the Totota Women's digital centre after completing a six-months digital literacy skills training program facilitated by UN Women in collaboration with Orange Foundation.

The graduation ceremony was held as part of the women's month celebrations under the global theme, **DigitALL: Innovation and Technology For Gender Equality** and the national theme, **Innovating With Technology To Promote Gender Equality**. Some graduates who testified that previously they had knowledge about computers before the training had the opportunity to demonstrate the acquired skills. They showcased how to send money using the Orange mobile money platform and also how to switch on a laptop.

Comfort Lamptey, UN Women Liberia Country Representative, applauded the graduates of the digital literacy program for embracing technology. "I am so happy and proud of what you have achieved. You can't think about doing anything productive today if you don't have the knowledge of computers. Digital technology is so key for everything. It's great to see you all embrace it," said Ms. Lamptey. She hoped the initiative could be expanded to different centers to show how women with knowledge of technology can improve their lives. "Now, because you know how to use digital skills, you can go on the computer and get information anywhere in the world about any subject and use it to improve yourselves. You can sell and be mobile money agents and make money. You can become technopreneurs. You can use these digital skills to promote peace. We are going towards elections. We want to make sure that there are peaceful elections in Liberia," urged Ms. Lamptey.

Sara Buchanan, Executive Director of Orange Foundation, highlighted that "it is now an emergency to ensure that women are learning how to use technology because nine out of 10 jobs require someone who knows how to use technology".

Guest speaker, Mr. Augustine Zabay, Principal of the E.J. Yancy High School, emphasized the need for computer education in this world. Members of the Totota Peace Hut witnessed the graduation ceremony.



UNCT Strategic Retreat 2023

The 2023 United Nations Country Team (UNCT) held its Strategic Retreat at Farmington Hotel from 26th to 29th April, under a theme '**United In Action To Support Liberia's Transformation**'.

To strengthen the UN Team and partnerships, the UN Country Team invited the Government of Liberia and key partners from the international community, donors, Private Sector and Civil Society Representatives to share their perspectives and brainstorm on key opportunities necessary for the transformation of Liberia. The Retreat afforded the UNCT a deeper reflection on practical and transformative strategic priorities for accelerated delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for Liberia, informed by Government of Liberia's Medium Term Plans ahead of the 2023 October Elections.

In her remarks, the UN Resident Coordinator, Ms. Christine Umutoni, noted that "the UNCT retreat is an opportunity to meet, and reflect on the work being done and accomplish some team building. She noted that delivering as One, "we all contribute to the Pro Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development (PAPD) and at such the UNCT needs to go beyond projects and think about the country itself". She further stressed that from discussions with communities, people want more action now, more presence of the UN in the field and more results. UN Resident Coordinator was confident that the Retreat would have strong recommendations to fast track delivery, improve partnerships and provide more results for the people of Liberia. Some key outcomes from the retreat highlighted the need for the UN to support the Government in the development of the successor to the current national development plan, the Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development (PAPD); The planned study by the Government **Drivers of Development** would support the national priorities, identify how to improve the business environment to promote the private sectors and develop programmes that invest more in communities to catalyze development.



Liberia's Political Parties Pledge Peaceful Elections in 2023

On 4 April, at the Farmington Hotel in Margibi, Liberia, leaders from 27 of 31 political parties signed the second Farmington River Declaration, an enhanced and comprehensive declaration designed to ensure a nonviolent electoral process. This builds on the foundation of the initial pledge signed in 2017.

The signature ceremony was led by the Liberia's National Elections Commission (NEC) and supported by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the United Nations (UN). His Excellency President George Weah attended the historical event and signed as the political leader and standard-bearer of his party. Representatives from the Government, Civil Society Groups, the Diplomatic Community and International Organizations Were also present at the high-level event.

The UN and ECOWAS signed the agreement as witnesses. On behalf of the United Nations, Ms. Giovanie Biha, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Acting Head of the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), signed the agreement. Dr. Omar Alieu Touray, President of the ECOWAS Commission, signed on behalf of ECOWAS.



UNOWAS DSRSG Visit to Liberia

The Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General of the United Nations Office to West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), Ms. Giovannie Biha, in April, paid a visit to Liberia, where she witnessed the signing of the Farmington River Declaration by political parties. Remarking at the signing, DSRSG Biha applauded Liberians for the achievement and called on all political parties and national actors to uphold this commitment.

During her visit, she also met with national government officials, civil society actors and international partners. Key meetings were held with the President of the Republic of Liberia, H.E. George Manneh Weah; Hon. Frank Musa Dean, Minister of Justice; the National Elections Commission, amongst others. The DSRSG also visited voter registration sites and interacted with registration officials and voters.



UN RC & UNOWAS DSRSG at Voter Registration site visit



DSRSG's visit to the Minister of Justice



DSRSG's meeting with the H.E George Weah & Govt. officials

Commemoration of 75th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

On April 24, 2023, the UN launched the commemoration of 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

“The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was a groundbreaking commitment made 75 years ago, and it is as relevant today as ever,” said Mr. Christian Mukosa, UN Human Rights Representative in Liberia. “Human Rights 75 is an opportunity for us to come together as a global community and reaffirm our commitment to promoting human rights for all. We aim to gather pledges and ideas through the consultative phases and high-level event to shape a transformative vision for human rights in the 21st century across the globe and in Liberia,” said the UN Resident Coordinator, Christine N. Umutoni.

Events and activities co-organised with the entire UN family under the Resident Coordinator have been scheduled for the whole year, under the auspices of the Government of Liberia, the Independent National Commission on Human Rights and Civil Society Organizations. These will include public outreach, including nationwide engagement by cities and individuals. In the spirit of the Call to Action for Human Rights, the UN system plans to deliver concrete progress on Human Rights. Honourable Frank Musah Dean Jr Minister of Justice and Attorney General of the Republic of Liberia is the Human Rights 75 Champion for Liberia.

Human Rights 75 promotes universality and honours the diversity, strengths, and achievements of the many communities striving to address today’s global challenges. It reminds us that human rights are non-negotiable and provides a foundation to solve our common challenges.



Celebrating 75 years of extraordinary- WHO's 75th Anniversary campaign launched in Liberia

The Vice President of Liberia, Madam Jewel Howard Taylor, on April 6th, launched the World Health Organization (WHO) 75th anniversary yearlong campaign, marking the WHO's 75th anniversary since its establishment in 1948.

The event started with a **Health for All** walk that saw hundreds of people from various walks of life come together in celebration of the milestones WHO has achieved in the past seven decades and specifically delineating the progress made in the health sector over the past 40 years of WHO's presence in Liberia. This was followed by an indoor event where a video statement from His Excellency Dr. George Manneh Weah, President of the Republic of Liberia was shared. In his statement the President congratulated Liberians and the WHO on its 75th anniversary, emphasizing that the WHO theme "Health for All" highlights health as a human right and envisions that all people have good health and live a life that is prosperous and sustainable. *"In the past year, the government launched a 10-year National Health Policy and its 5-year strategy alongside the package of essential services. These instruments have clearly defined government's vision and goal to ensure that every person in Liberia can access and enjoy the health care that they always need, wherever they are, without financial hardship"*, said Madam Taylor. Accepting her yearlong role as the WHO75 Champion for Liberia, she pledged her commitment as an advocate and lead voice for the campaign.

Reading the WHO Regional Director's statement, Dr. Clement Peter, WHO Representative for Liberia, noted that expanding access to essential health services and coverage produced positive results. Between 2011 and 2021, the number of new HIV infections and AIDS-related deaths decreased by 44% and 55%, respectively, across Africa. Between 2015 and 2021, the number of TB deaths in the region decreased by 26%. Likewise, between 2000 and 2019, the life expectancy in the African region increased by ten years per person. These are just a few of the many achievements attained in the past few years.



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